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ADAPTING BRADBURY: A CINEMA OF WONDER AND WARNING

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Abstract

“Adapting Bradbury: a Cinema of Wonder and Warning” is an examination of author Ray Bradbury’s work in performance media, with specific focus on three cinema adaptations. Each of these represents different genre and varying degrees of the author’s involvement in the adaptive process. A large number of Bradbury’s short stories and novels were originally conceived for performance, and he actually referred to himself as a “hybrid writer,” inviting us to think of his texts as already on the way to another medium or as containing elements of other media” (Touponce, ed. *Review* 9).

Throughout the thesis I seek to establish that Bradbury was inherently a cinematic and “performative” writer that tended to move his work in this direction because of an intuitive understanding that it would reach its fullest expression in performance. Also, that he had a unique sense of the potentialities of cinema, which in turn I will argue made him a singularly astute, if not the best adaptor of his own work.

In preparation for analysis of the films, the first three chapters will contain background information of experiences and influences that shaped the author’s distinctive style and work. A critical overview is presented and summary of scholarship to date. Bradbury’s general engagement with the film industry began early in his career and was extensive, so some attention will be given to the author’s earlier cross-media work apart from the films under analysis. As a member of the screenwriters’ guild, founder of the Screenwriter’s Film Society and a frequent guest lecturer at the UCLA film school, he developed and espoused his own ideas about the cinema in general and adaptive practice, which will be summarized. Furthermore, characteristic elements from Bradbury’s writing that hold promise for cinema adaptation will be highlighted.

Of necessity, an examination of the shared and unique characteristics of print and film and their respective possibilities of narration will be followed by a survey of adaptive theory, included insights from filmmakers and other writers in illustration of common adaptive practices. Finally, a “pluralist” approach is adopted as outlined by Linda Hutcheon embracing a sociological turn as the context of creation and reception of a text are taken into account, viewing adaptations as autonomous works that are their “own palimpsestic things.” That is, texts that are appropriated by particular individuals

subject to various conditions, artistic, commercial and cultural.

While not digressing into film theory I outline Leo Braudy's schema of "opened" and "closed" to describe an "attitude" a film takes toward both the animate and inanimate objects it contains and their "invisible potential." The visual treatments of material also support narrative techniques in creation of meaning and the open/closed approach highlights the dialectic of confinement seeking freedom or freedom submitting to degrees of confinement which is particularly appropriate for Bradbury's work. Following these theoretical guidelines and for fuller analysis of the film as an adapted work, each chapter analysis begins with examination of the film's source text(s), before an overview of production history, director, cast and crew before analysis of the film itself. Background analysis for *Fahrenheit 451* is extensive since there were "precursor" texts contributing to the novel. Considerable information on director François Truffaut is included to illuminate his motivation for the project, so unlike his others, and his personal aesthetics which mark the film. Bradbury's screenplay (1994) for an unproduced remake is visited at the end of the chapter. The chapter on *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* contrasts and compares Bradbury's prior teleplay, stage play and musical, and surveys the author's theatrical work and aesthetic before analyzing the film from Bradbury's screenplay. The chapter on *Something Wicked This Way Comes* explores the author's original screen treatment that predates the published novel, and common spiritual themes in Bradbury's work. A concluding chapter consolidates thesis assertions with supporting analysis of several of the author's other adaptations, namely John Huston's *Moby Dick* and episodes of *The Ray Bradbury Theater*, produced for Television.

Resumo

“Adaptando Bradbury: um Cinema de Maravilha e Aviso” é uma análise do trabalho do autor norte americano Ray Bradbury em media de performance, com foco específico em três adaptações para cinema. Cada uma delas representa diferentes gêneros e graus variados de envolvimento do autor no processo adaptativo. Um grande número de contos e romances de Bradbury foi originalmente concebido para performance, e ele realmente referiu-se a si mesmo como um “escritor híbrido,” convidando-nos a pensar nos seus textos como já a caminho da sua adaptação para teatro/cinema, ou como contendo elementos de outros media. (Touponce, ed. *Review* 9). Ao longo da tese, procuro concluir que Bradbury era inerentemente um escritor cinematográfico e “performativo” que tendia a mover seu trabalho nessa direção por causa do entendimento intuitivo de que o seu trabalho alcançaria a sua expressão mais completa em performance. Além disso, que ele tinha um sentido único das potencialidades do cinema, o que fez dele um singularmente astuto, se não o melhor adaptador do seu próprio trabalho.

Em preparação para a análise dos filmes, os três primeiros capítulos conterão informações básicas de experiências e influências que moldaram o estilo e o trabalho característicos do autor e uma revisão crítica da literatura sobre o autor. O envolvimento geral de Bradbury com a indústria cinematográfica começou no início de sua carreira e foi extenso. Por isso, alguma atenção será dada á adaptação de trabalho anterior do autor para outras formas de expressão artística, como a banda desenhada, rádio e cinema de animação, para além dos filmes em análise. Como membro da associação de guionistas, fundador da Screenwriter's Film Society e professor frequentemente convidado da escola de cinema da UCLA, ele desenvolveu e adotou suas próprias ideias sobre o cinema em geral e a prática adaptativa, que serão resumidas. Além disso, os elementos característicos da escrita de Bradbury que auguram a sua adaptação para o cinema serão destacados.

Serão analisadas as características únicas e compartilhadas do escrito e do filme e suas respectivas possibilidades de narração, seguido de um levantamento da teoria adaptativa, incluindo perspectivas de cineastas e outros escritores na ilustração das práticas adaptativas comuns. Finalmente, uma abordagem “pluralista,” tal como é delineada por

Linda Hutcheon, adotando uma abordagem sociológica à medida que o contexto de criação e recepção de um texto é levado em conta, vendo adaptações como obras autônomas que são suas “próprias coisas palimpsestes.” Isto é, textos que são apropriados por indivíduos particulares sujeitos a várias condições, artísticas, comerciais e culturais.

Embora não divagando da teoria do cinema, descrevo o esquema de “aberto” e “fechado” de Leo Braudy para descrever uma “atitude” que um filme toma em relação aos objetos animados e inanimados que ele contém e ao seu “potencial invisível.” O tratamento visual do material apoia técnicas narrativas na criação de significado e a abordagem aberta / fechada destaca a dialética do confinamento em busca de liberdade ou liberdade submetendo-se a graus de confinamento que é particularmente apropriado para o trabalho de Bradbury.

Seguindo essas diretrizes teóricas para uma análise mais completa do filme como um trabalho adaptado, a análise de cada capítulo começa com o exame do (s) texto (s) fonte do filme, antes de uma visão geral da história da produção, realizador, elenco e equipa técnico, e após a análise do filme. A análise de fundo para o *Fahrenheit 451* é extensa, pois havia textos “precursores” que contribuíram para o romance. Informações consideráveis sobre o diretor François Truffaut são incluídas para iluminar a sua motivação para o projeto, tão diferente de seus outros, e sua estética pessoal que marca o filme. O roteiro de Bradbury (1994) para um remake não produzido é visitado no final do capítulo. O capítulo sobre *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* contrasta e compara o telepointo anterior de Bradbury, peça teatral e musical, e analisa o trabalho teatral e a estética do autor antes de analisar o filme do roteiro de Bradbury. O capítulo sobre *Something Wicked This Way Comes* explora o tratamento de tela original do autor que antecede o romance publicado e temas espirituais comuns no trabalho de Bradbury. Um capítulo conclusivo consolida as afirmações da tese com a análise de suporte de várias outras adaptações do autor, a saber, *Moby Dick*, de John Huston, e episódios do *Ray Bradbury Theatre*, produzidos para a Televisão.

Introduction

I A HYBRID WRITER IN A MULTI-MEDIA AGE

Then through an open window blew the winds of night, and creatures, dark they were and golden-eyed; and calling to the Son of Kong they whispered `Something wicked this way comes!' And then, a sound of thunder! She rises! She rises! And from twenty thousand fathoms came the dragon, as if summoned by his master from the deeps; and the Man from Illinois held his sword above the crowd, the blue flame cracked and sparked and leapt into our bodies! then, `Farewell, my friends,' said he as on the dragon's back he mounted, `Live forever!' `Live forever!' Live forever...

From the poem, `Bradbury,' by JH Clues

This contemporary writer's tribute to Ray Bradbury, still creatively active until his death at age 91, strikes me as a token of esteem and acknowledgement of his influence. Other writers have been more straightforward and authoritative in their appreciation. Fellow genre writer and early Bradbury critic and chronicler, William F. Nolan states that: "I think it is safe to say that no other modern author, with the possible exception of Ernest Hemingway, has exerted a wider literary influence" (Touponce, ed. 5). Writing in 1981, Gary Wolfe declared that "Bradbury had earned a permanent place in the history of the American short story...for all its eclecticism and occasional stylistic excesses-perhaps even because of these-it stands as one of the most interesting and significant bodies of short fiction in American literature" (75). However, I chose the poetic tribute above because it encapsulates some important aspects of Bradbury's authorship. Aside from the fact that Bradbury has produced a great deal of poetry himself, this free verse is reminiscent of the oneric character of his work and is perhaps an attempt to summon some of the charm and transport one may experience reading Bradbury.

In books and articles, William F. Touponce has highlighted not only the surreal aspects of Bradbury's writing but his special talent for invoking types of reverie in his readers. He is able to summon and mix memory and imagination with such vividness that a reader may find himself awash in time as it has been lived. More than adept at drawing from the well of childhood and adolescent fears and joys, Bradbury is a supremely humanistic writer whose work has broad appeal in his native United States and

around the world. In an early book length study of the author's work, *Ray Bradbury* (1980), Wayne L. Johnson also speaks of the unique characteristics of the author's writing:

It is the experimental aspect of Bradbury's stories, the feeling that something has *happened* to the reader; this is perhaps their outstanding feature. The effect is achieved through the generation of strong sensory images, sensations of sight, touch or sound, which one tends to recall long after the characters or plot have been forgotten (5).

This seems unusual praise for someone who put pen to paper, more fitting for a filmmaker or performance artist of some kind. These critical observations on the qualities of Bradbury's style and its effect upon readers take a step in the direction of the type of analysis I wish to make in this thesis.

There is no shortage of Bradbury criticism, it can be traced back to an essay collection edited by fellow SF/fantasy writer William F. Nolan in 1952, *The Ray Bradbury Review*. These early critiques provided a base for criticism to come, as Henry Kutner writing in Nolan's *Review* noted the prevalence of a carnival or its equivalence as a predominant theme in Bradbury, as well as the author's unique spinning of different genres. By that time Bradbury's writing had already spanned several. Science fiction and fantasy works rarely received critical attention in the United States when Christopher Isherwood published his glowing review of *The Martian Chronicles* in 1950 in the nationally circulated magazine *Tomorrow*. He praised the writer for an "original" imagination, the unique power of his prose and humanism. After reading *The Martian Chronicles* the writer/philosopher Aldus Huxley¹ hailed Bradbury as a "poet." The first writer to escape the "science fiction ghetto" these hallmarks of his writing were recognized from the beginning, largely explaining his popularity as well as becoming a mainstay of Bradbury criticism.

Even those who are not particularly fond of his work generally distinguish and value his unique style, but few have followed the implications that the style, concerns and

¹ Huxley also understood adapting works for the screen and enjoyed considerable success in Hollywood in the 1940s.

traits of his work present for performance, particularly cinema. For “traits,” I’m broadly referring to Bradbury’s strong humanism. Ironically, this orientation which many science fiction genre critics find less appealing (i.e. less “science fictional”) makes the author even more amenable to film, the most resolutely humanistic of the visual arts. When writing science fiction Bradbury did not put his energies into elaborating extrapolated constructs, but instead focused on individuals and how they were affected by their novel surroundings. He was more interested in how technology, rather than “science” effected the individual and society. Bradbury was not as fascinated with “gadgets” and technology as he was with ideas. In a similar manner, the machinery of fantasy in his stories merely served as a backdrop for the author’s human portraits.

However, returning to the poetic epigraph, I chose it not only because it evokes some of Bradbury’s better known literary creations but also alludes to two extremely significant formative influences; his youthful, quasi-mystical encounter with a carnival performer who “knighted” him with a statically charged sword, and his life-long fascination with cinema by way of the “Son of Kong” reference. Carnival settings and themes are common in Bradbury’s writing and a critical touchstone, but the visual and performance arts have shaped his authorship more than most authors. More than a child of his times (1920s and 1930s were his formative years) Bradbury repeatedly referred to himself as “a child of the movies.” His immersion and involvement with a wide variety of entertainment media began in early childhood and not only helped shape him as a writer, but remained an integral part of his overall creative focus. A loquacious writer with a well established public persona, Bradbury spoke countless times about these influences and passions in his life and some critical work exists in this area. There is an unpublished dissertation by Mary Beth Petraski McConnell (1993) on two short-story adaptations for the cable television series *The Ray Bradbury Theater* (1985- 1992). I attempt something more wide ranging in the belief that a more thorough exploration and appreciation of Bradbury’s work in dramatic media, and his ideas concerning cinema and cinema adaptation would contribute to a better understanding of his authorship.

II BRADBURY RECOGNIZED “CINEMATIC STYLE” IN HIS WRITING

It is interesting to note that Bradbury has variously referred to the existence of a “cinematic style” in his writing as a result of his intense exposure and absorption of cinema and comics as a youth. In a 1998 interview he stated: “All of my work is photogenic. I’m a child of cinema. I grew up seeing thousands of films. That goes into your blood stream, and when you begin to write you write for the cinema automatically” (Marchi 178). In 1971, director Sam Peckinpah approached Bradbury about adapting his novel (originally written as a screen play in 1955) *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962) for the cinema, commenting that he could just “take the book and shove the pages into the camera” (Weller 305). Bradbury often cited the director’s remarks, adding:

if you look at the average page of any of my novels or short stories, it’s a shooting script. You can shoot the paragraphs—the close ups, the long shots, what have you. This has to do with my background and seeing films and collecting comic strips, because Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon, Tarzan—those are all storyboards for films, aren’t they? (Marchi 178)

However, Bradbury had a host of problems getting his teleplays produced for the landmark fantasy and science fiction anthology series *The Twilight Zone* in the 1950s. According to the program’s producer, Rod Serling, also a highly regarded film and television writer, “Ray Bradbury is a difficult guy to dramatize, because that which reads so beautifully on the page doesn’t fit in the mouth—it fits in the head” (Weller 255). In other words, I believe Bradbury has a point but is overstating the case. While I agree there is “cinematic potential” in much of his writing, it does not surrender itself automatically to the compressed and emotionally direct medium of film. Although a talented filmmaker may skilfully exploit the “multi-track” nature of cinema to adequately transpose virtually anything from page to screen, the distinctively poetic and metaphorical strands in Bradbury’s work pose a challenge for cinema adaptation. Thus, strategies and practices of adaptation are explored in this thesis since the aim is to spotlight Ray Bradbury as a “cinematic, performative” writer. Not merely a skilled writer, but one possessing a unique sense of the potentialities of cinema, which in turn I will argue makes him a singularly astute, if not the best adapter of his own work.

Some clarification is necessary and I shall begin with the terms “cinematic” and “performative.” Concerning the former, I find a statement Bradbury made in 1948 soon after he had “found his voice” as a writer and moving away from the pulp magazines, was rapidly establishing himself as a noteworthy, mainstream author:

I try to enable the reader to *see*. Ray Bradbury should never come between reader and story. I want the reader to be there. The writer’s personality or wit shouldn’t come into the narration of the story. Flavor, color, humor or slang should come through actions and dialogue of the characters, not from intruding asides from the author (Willems 5).

Most writers want the reader to “see;” but Bradbury’s intention to step aside in an attempt to put the reader “there,” inside the story, and his emphasis on narration through actions and dialogue of characters seems quite “cinematic” to me. That is, his work distinguishes him as a writer who would rather “show” than merely “tell.” He makes visible what is most significant in his stories. Moreover, these stories, whether they take place in a small town or on another planet are always human stories, dealing with a palpable tension between stasis and change, growing up or growing old or how to live the best we can in the present, the only reality we can ever hope to know. Indeed, aside from the humanistic concern, much of his writing has a kind of immediacy, a visual and emotional impact and reads like a film script. That is, brisk narrative studded with highly evocative images, yet economically expressed.

One may see film consciousness in the visual and aural qualities that mark Bradbury’s work. For example, this description of a parade and its effect on the adolescent protagonist in *The Miracles of Jamie* (1946):

The street was lined with people, as it was on the Arizona rodeo days in February. People sweated in intent layers, five deep for over a mile; the rhythm of feet came back in reflected cadence from two-story frame fronts. There were occasional glimpses of mirrored armies marching in the tall windows of the J.C. Penney Store or of the Morble Company. Each cadence was like a whip thud on the dusty asphalt, sharp and true, and the band music shot blood through Jamie’s miraculous veins (Bradbury, 2003 705)

Bradbury used a wide “sensorium” in his writing to create an effect and sound to compliment, rather than accompany or merely duplicate his prose. He often deploys a stream of images, sometimes loosely connected, to make a point, counterpoint or effect as filmmakers do; and overall, a carefully constructed image that does not constrict the imagination, intent to show more than he tells. Bradbury also tended to present single objects in a sort of cinematic montage, focusing in turn upon different surface aspects of the object in rapid succession as if passing over it with a camera. His rapid, fragmented description of the dinosaur in *A Sound of Thunder* (1952) is a case in point. Returning to the aural, when he uses dialect, it is in a colorful, direct manner, giving a sense of the actual sound of speech and usually the speaker’s own voice rather than the thoughts of an observer. Similarly, when he describes sounds they tend to transmit a vivid sense of heard reality. His “Irish stories” are among the best examples of this.

Never timid, it is of note that Bradbury engaged in a range of performance activities as a child and adolescent before dedicating himself to writing. I consider Bradbury a “performative” writer not only because of the frequent dialogical, dramatic nature of his stories but because of the way he is drawn to adapt his own texts for performance before a group(s) of spectators instead of a solitary reader. This further shaping of his written work is itself a type of performance involving the author, the text and the reader.

In the first edition of *The New Ray Bradbury Review* (2008), William F. Touponce reminds us that Bradbury refers to himself as a “hybrid writer, inviting us to think of his texts as already on the way to another medium or as containing elements of other media” (Touponce, ed. *Review* 9). Through extensive examination of manuscripts and archival material, Eller and Touponce (549) have justifiably characterized Bradbury’s creations as “works in progress.” That is, they passed through stages of development where even published works, not yet adapted for other media were sometimes expanded or altered from printing to printing. For instance, his Irish plays, collected in *The Anthem Sprinters* (1963) were originally written for the stage although he rewrote several of them as short stories (Indick 22). He fashioned the short story *I Sing the Body Electric* (1969) from an original teleplay because he felt it was poorly realized. Some of his best known work like *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962) and *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*

(1957) were first conceived and written for cinema and television, respectively, before going to print. Both stories finally became motion pictures with Bradbury adapting *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* for television, the stage and as a musical before it reached the big screen. The point is, much of his work was originally conceived for performance, and when not, Bradbury tended to move it in that direction. When he was not entirely satisfied with a work, it was often because he believed it could still gain or achieve fuller expression when adapted for performance. Granting me a telephone interview, he stated he took the greatest satisfaction in seeing his work body forth in performance. Bradbury disliked what he termed “pointless” art, and passionate about the play of ideas he sought their expression in a dramatic or even musical mode.

While all the adaptations examined in this work are “legitimate” with their own unique strengths and weaknesses, I will suggest that Bradbury had a sense of what makes for good cinema and may have been his own best adaptor. I will try to make this case using some of the author’s screen and teleplays, his ideas on film and drama as well as the comments and recommendations he made concerning his adapted works.

III THESIS STRUCTURE

In terms of structure, the first chapter will highlight Bradbury as a largely self-trained mass media artist, examining some of the influences and experiences that may have lent a cinematic slant to his writing and an overview of Bradbury criticism thus far. I will also briefly survey his earliest adaptations in radio and comic books. The next chapter will examine some of Bradbury’s views concerning the cinema and adaptation as well as his broader involvement with the industry. The following chapter will be overview of theoretical views concerning cinema adaptation where I will set forth the theory and methodology of analysis I find most appropriate for the study of Bradbury adaptation

Since I aim to build a case for Ray Bradbury’s work as well suited to adaptation and the author as a skilful adaptor of his own work, I will examine three films and their fictional progenitors each representing progressively more input from the author. Each of

these assessments will be a chapter in length. First, *Fahrenheit 451* (François Truffaut, 1966) where Bradbury's adaptive input was practically zero, followed by *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* (Stuart Gordon, 1998) where Bradbury's influence was very substantial, concluding with *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (Jack Clayton, 1983) where Bradbury had substantial influence on both the pre and post production phases of the film, possibly directing some post-production refilming. Additionally, the range of the author's talent and concerns can be illustrated by the fact that each film belongs to a distinctly different genre; science fiction, comedy and fantasy respectively. A final chapter will present an overview of some of the author's other adapted works, particularly his adaptation of *Moby Dick* for John Huston in 1956. The only case where he adapted, and very well, the work of another writer. Also, attention will be given to the cable television series, *The Ray Bradbury Theater* where the author had almost complete creative control for adapting his own stories. This final overview should provide a further context to highlight Bradbury's beliefs and practices concerning the art and structuring of cinematic narrative.

Each chapter on an adapted work will begin with examination of the source text(s). My approach will be hermeneutical, examining their contextual background, development, reception, authorial insights, comments, stated intentions and motivation. Never content merely to entertain, Bradbury always had points to make and he was nearly always forthcoming about these. Critical summary of the source texts will not be exhaustive but I will highlight their principal metaphors and themes, along with the inherent opportunities and difficulties to be negotiated for representation on film to shed light on the choices made by the filmmakers. Likewise, for the adaptations I believe the background and actual production history of these should be illuminated, as well as the particular talents and predilections of all those contributing to the finished film.

Chapter 1

A CINEMATIC CHILD OF HIS TIME

I INTRODUCTION

Forthcoming and loquacious, Bradbury often spoke about his inspiration and formative influences. These are well-known but in this first chapter I will include some background with observations to highlight Bradbury as a largely self-trained mass media era artist; highlighting key formative influences and experiences that may have lent a “cinematic” or performative slant to his writing. Then I will present an overview of Bradbury criticism dealing with his characteristic style and themes, with a view toward the affinities and difficulties his work typically has for the cinematic medium. In the last part of the chapter I will survey some of Bradbury’s earliest adaptive efforts and work in other media aside from feature film.

Although known primarily as a writer, Bradbury is unique because he has worked in every form of entertainment media as well as architecture, urban planning and design, yet his formal education ended with high school. With virtually no formal training one wonders how he became the creative dynamo he was from his early 20s until his death just shy of age 92 in 2012. One of his favourite metaphors for the writing process was: “You are the spectrum gathering all the white light of experience and in turn throwing your spectrum onto the page” (Aggelis 181). Concerning Ray Bradbury’s authorship, two such spectral bands of experience seem most important, his childhood in small town America and his adolescence and young adulthood in the burgeoning Los Angeles of the 1930s. The experiences and opportunities afforded him in each of these radically different spheres made him the kind of writer he became, as well as affording him the opportunity to become a writer in the first place.

Childhood in a small community afforded Bradbury the chance to witness up close and participate in various types of performance. The small town rituals of the traveling carnival, magic shows and community celebrations reverberate in his work. I only repeat these well known facts to remind the reader that these small town rituals are in essence, performance spectacles and highly participatory. The *gemeinschaft* of the

small town, its ties and values permeate much of his work and he has been recognized as an uncommon portraitist of life as lived in a small community. His short novel *Dandelion Wine* (1957), being his most poetic, least fantastic autobiographical fiction would be a good example. Insisting that one's past is among the most valuable assets a writer has, Bradbury drew on childhood remembrance, feelings and impressions for his fictions with great dexterity and vividness. In fact, he insisted that everything he had done was the result of what he was by the time he was 12 or 13 (Aggelis 172). In a 1977 article about the great Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini, whom Bradbury admired but feared was slipping; he articulated some of his creative philosophy:

Even as the older self must contain and illuminate the young without smothering it, so the younger self must blood and energize the intellect of the full grown man. But if the older mind is tired by cynicism, the blood is poisoned and the child that runs the gamut from heart to head and back again is hamstrung in midstride. (Bradbury, *Yestermorrow* 133)

This comment is near the heart of Bradbury's creative philosophy. When he speaks of "the child" in this case, running "from heart to head and back again" he is suggesting that an artist should work instinctively, maintaining an open, playful spirit to remain truly creative. He thought when an artist becomes overly self-conscious and begins to intellectualize he begins to "lie," begins to rationalize and ceases to work from his true self; the spark of passion and authenticity is lost. He put these, and similar ideas forward in his collection of essays *Zen and the Art of Writing* (1973). Indeed, numerous studies have shown the level of "creativity," basically the ability to form new and interesting combinations from existing things, or attributing new meanings to things by looking at the world in a radically different way, is often highest in childhood and steadily decreases as we pass through the educational institution (Boden 80). Aside from compulsory schooling, which he managed but found boring, Bradbury's education was largely self directed and fueled by various "passions" as he referred to them. He never abandoned those of childhood while acquiring many new ones throughout life.

In Bradbury's case especially, the early years shed precious light upon the man and his work. Although it severely strains credulity, Bradbury repeatedly claimed to have

total recall from birth². In fact, he seldom neglected to mention childhood experiences when discussing his vast reservoir of ideas or the general character of his authorship. At any rate, he exhibited a prodigious memory and capacity to juxtapose and mine meanings from a multitude of images and ideas assimilated from very early in his life. Moreover, nearly four hundred interviews spanning over sixty years and his public persona bear out the feverish intensity and deep immersion into life's wonder and complexities that Bradbury claimed had possessed him from earliest childhood. In his writings dealing with youth and remembrance we may still find and sense the intensity and wonder of that time expressed in a skillful and poetic manner reflected in the "younger self energizing the intellect," rather than youthful experience and trauma filtered through adult sensibilities; perhaps subtle, but there is a distinction. Indeed, he credits much of his success to a refusal to abandon his earliest loves and enthusiasms. This stubbornness coupled with a willful, cultivated optimism, the former helping sustain the latter and vice versa, largely fueled his creative imagination. Bradbury has variously stated that had he traded what he referred to as an essentially childlike spirit for the staid respectability and "common sense of adulthood³," his first story sale to Hollywood, an atmospheric piece about a lonely dinosaur summoned from the depths by the plaintive groan of a foghorn, would never have materialized.

Bradbury was a much more accessible and public figure than most writers and stood apart for his enthusiasm and optimism. However, that trademark optimism, admired by so many of his fans was other than what it appeared to be. The author never viewed himself as an "optimist," rather he was realistic enough to be "pessimistic" about some things while never abandoning hope. He said he did not believe in "simple optimism" but relied on what he termed "optimal behavior⁴." This was basically, as he put it getting his work done by writing every day and a constant pursuit of new and creative activities and careful attention to making the "right choices" practically on a

² He may have been born more highly developed at birth since he was born considerably later than expected.

³ In the sense of C.S. Lewis who said, "When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childish things and the desire to be very grownup" (cited in Waggoner 29).

⁴ He believed that only "optimal behavior" or "living each day to the top of your genetics" could foster useful optimism.

daily basis. He strongly held that one's life should not be limited through fear or hesitation but in light of the possible, constantly constructed through individual choices and effort to discover what one actually can or is able to do. He was fond of saying, "jump off the cliff and build your wings on the way down." It was through this attitude that he undertook so many different artistic endeavors even at financial risk or to his reputation as a writer. "Intensely curious about everything" was the global description of Bradbury given by his close friend and archivist of over 60 years, Dr. Donn Albright of the Pratt Institute of Art in New York. I believe that Bradbury's insistence on casting wide for inspiration, information and other habits of mind propelled his desire to venture into other media and learn the art of adaptation. Making the leap from his initial mastery of the short story to other forms of writing for other media was neither quick nor easy but he was determined from his youth onward.

II THE SMALL TOWN AND VISUAL INSPIRATION

Born in 1920, in Waukegan Illinois, a small city on the shore of Lake Michigan, his youth, while characterized by incredibly rapid change and economic instability remained tempered with optimism about the future. One may also conclude he benefited, at least in childhood, from being surrounded by a colorful, extended family in a small town environment. Generally speaking, his formative years coincided with the end of what has been referred to as "The Machine Age" and the dawning of the less optimistic, more anxious "Atomic Age." That is, while horse-drawn milk wagons were still part of his boyhood experience, jets, rockets, primitive computers and the splitting of the atom were beginning to cast their shadow on popular culture, filling many of the magazines⁵ and books that fueled Bradbury's fervent imagination. Contextually, there existed a kind of "futurism" in those days where anything still seemed possible. The buoyancy in his writing seems to reflect the resilience of a more hopeful era. Furthermore, his attachment to it may account for the curious overlap of time often encountered in his fiction,

⁵ Even the first stories appearing in the early 1930s about nuclear power generally avoided the angle of mass destruction in favor of a bold new frontier of limitless power mostly presenting interesting challenges in its safe production and use.

manifested by an adventurous, outward looking future anchored within a simpler, traditional past, mutually dependent, one framing the other.

Bradbury's extended family, which had their share of struggle and misfortune through the depression years, exerted a strong influence on his developing sensibilities as well. His father worked as a lineman for a power company and like Ray's older brother "Skip" and his uncles, were rugged, masculine types, physically and temperamentally different from Ray, who soon found himself saddled with thick eyeglasses and the nickname "shorty." Nevertheless, Bradbury's father maintained a patient and tolerant attitude toward his sensitive, hyper-imaginative younger son. Bradbury has described his parents as rather reserved and traditional and while he never enjoyed a close relationship with his father as a youth, he was impressed by his love of books and reading. Reading was important enough in the Bradbury household for his parents to begin teaching him to read very early using the newspaper comics. So it was word accompanied by image from the very beginning for Bradbury and he could read before he began school.

His imagination and love for the fantastic got a tremendous boost at age eight, when he found an abandoned copy of *Amazing Stories Quarterly* at his grandmother's boarding house next door. Succumbing first to the lure of the fantastic cover art⁶, he discovered science fiction. Bradbury vividly recalls this event as something like an epiphany. These early illustrations also awakened an interest in architecture and city planning that Bradbury held for the rest of his life. That same summer he encountered his uncle Bion's collection of books by Edgar Rice Burroughs. The *Tarzan* and Mars stories were more grist for the mill of his unbridled imagination. These initial discoveries shortly led him to more sophisticated SF/fantasy writers like Jules Verne, H.G. Wells and Aldous Huxley.

Also during the late 1920's, the action comics began to appear in the newspapers. Bradbury not only became an enthusiastic collector of these but like the "book people" in his novel, *Fahrenheit 451*, he began committing these picture driven scenarios to memory. His first attempts at creative writing at age 12 were mainly an attempt to continue these same stories. These were image driven narratives and his simple writings

⁶ The cover art was from Frank R. Paul, an exceptional illustrator whose work had a wide ranging influence, significant beyond the quality of the stories he illustrated.

were often accompanied by drawings. However, there was a price to be paid and a lesson to be learned in this. His obsession with such “childish things” like comic strips, particularly his favorite, the outer space adventure “Buck Rodgers,” brought him ridicule from his peers. Succumbing to this pressure, he arrived home one day and destroyed his entire comic strip collection. He felt such remorse that he soon began collecting the strips again. This was pivotal because in essence, Bradbury decided at nine years of age that it was better to believe in himself and follow his own desires and interests regardless of what others might think of him.

Each member of the family seems to have transmitted something positive and unique to the boy. However, Bradbury has repeatedly stated that the one who influenced him the most was his exuberant young aunt who lived next door. Accomplished in the visual arts⁷ she introduced him to classic fantasy at a tender age. Neva, only ten years his senior was more like an enthusiastic older sister than an aunt. She gave Ray his first book of fairy tales when he was six and began reading him the Oz books of L. Frank Baum, followed by *Alice in Wonderland*, the collected tales of Anderson and the brothers Grimm and even Edgar Allen Poe’s *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. It was usually Neva who took young Ray to the carnivals, fairs and stage plays which were to have such an impact upon his person and work.

His parents encouraged him to read the classic Greek, Roman and Norse myths. Their import appealed to him to so strongly that he appears to have deeply internalized them. The author frequently attested to this through his comments on the subject and the place of myth and metaphor in own writing. He largely credited these influences for making him “a teller of tales⁸” and one who could “speak in tongues;” that is, a writer of memorable and widely accessible stories. Of course, myths often hold religious or spiritual significance and are meant to express or contribute to systems of thought and values, and values or things of spiritual significance were usually highlighted in Bradbury’s stories. His parents encouraged him to visit the library and because of his love

⁷ Bradbury recalled his youthful fascination with aunt Neva’s neighboring apartment, an artistic clutter of everything from painting and sculpture to marionettes.

⁸ “Teller of tales” was the description Bradbury was most comfortable with, essentially seeing himself as an entertainer but with important points to make.

of reading, he began to spend Monday evenings at the public library and this ritual intensified through Bradbury's youth, affording him a much wider education than his mere 12 years of formal schooling and launching a life-long love affair with books and their authors. From early on he felt the books were the people who wrote them and a sort of mirror. He claimed that you become as you read and that in discovering the library he was discovering himself.

In a 2008 acceptance speech for the award of Distinguished Contribution to American Letters from the National Book Foundation, Bradbury reminded his listeners that in honoring him they were honoring the ghosts of a lot of their favorite writers. "I never made it to collage," he added, "but when I graduated from high school I spent 3 or 4 days a week there for 10 years and I graduated from the library when I was 28."⁹ A model autodidact, Ray Bradbury emerged as one of the leading advocates of books and literacy in the U.S. and abroad. In March of 2008, the 88 year old author held a telephone interview with the Egyptian Big Read conference, coordinated by the U.S. State Department and was honoured that his novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), in an Egyptian translation, was going into the great Library of Alexandria where the first great collection of books was burned in the 4th century C.E. In terms of authorship, Bradbury acknowledged the influence of canonical, late romantic writers, and his respect and affection for them led him not to borrow, but rather give life to the masters and their works overtly as characters in his own work. At times it seems the reader is listening in on an ongoing dialogue between the author and his "literary fathers." Indeed, he brought back some of these authors to inhabit several of his stories¹⁰ creating as it were, a platform where he and the reader may enter into dialogue with them. From Dickens to Hemingway to George Bernard Shaw, he has probably paid homage in his work to more writers than any other modern author.

Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that most of Bradbury's early artistic inspiration was intensely visual in nature. The illustrations from SF/fantasy magazines

⁹ http://www.raybradbury.com/awards_acceptance.html

¹⁰ Stories like "Any Friend of Nicholas Nickelby is a Friend of Mine," "G.B.S. Mark IV," "The Parrot Who Met Papa" are a few where he deals directly with deceased authors and there are many others where they are engaged with less directly.

and children's books, even the creations in his aunt Neva's studio, all these certainly had considerable bearing on the visual orientation or "cinematic" quality of Bradbury's storytelling, especially the comics, which are quite similar to that visual schematic of film drawn before shooting known as a storyboard. "When you look at something like *Prince Valiant*, you see camera angles in every panel" (Stevens Jr. 367). Bradbury considers "growing up" with the comics as being valuable to him when he began writing screen plays and recognizes the respective techniques of both these visual, narrative media through a dynamics of exchange. "I'm sure that Georges Méliès knew about Windsor McKay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland* cartoons and that McKay knew about Méliès films. These twin tributaries of creativity grew up at exactly the same time" (Stevens Jr. 367).

The visual orientation of Bradbury's writing may be coupled with the fact that he was a reasonably talented sketch artist and painter. Bradbury seems to think and create in visual terms. During adolescence when he was learning to write he was also drawing and started to paint. His early journals and letters are full of drawings and doodling,¹¹ some quite elaborate. Several of his drawings and pictorial concepts have appeared on the dust jackets and illustrations of his published work, as well as his manuscripts. Even more intriguing is the long-term publishing relationship Bradbury began with the late artist and illustrator, Joe Mugnaini. Here was an artist the author felt had the uncanny ability to realize his own "metaphoric visions" (Weist 76). In fact, in the early 1950's they planned to produce an illustrated book with no text based on Bradbury's ideas behind his novel *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962). This project never saw fruition, but was dramatically and visually articulated by the author as a screenplay *before* becoming a novel (Eller and Touponce 259). The dream-like, open-endedness of the author's creative processes would seem conducive to cross-media transpositions. Jerry Weist, who has published a "visual biography" of Bradbury showcasing his art work and that which has accompanied his stories, believes that: "Bradbury's paintings and cartoons possess great humor, sophistication, and a fluid, easy unselfconscious style. Like his writing, they reveal a magical mood, a sometimes-dark comedy, and an almost primitive innocence" (169).

¹¹ Some critical works such as those by Weist and Eller and Touponce, contain some of these to throw light on the creative process behind some of Bradbury's works.

III BRADBURY DISCOVERS THE CINEMA

Returning to formative influences, it should come as no surprise that it was the movies that impacted him the most, and his first experiences were of the medium at its “purest,” pictures in motion. The silent films lacked some of the resources that would soon become integral to film, but the dramatic, pictorial urgency of the silent era is difficult to match. One must remember that the “silents” were not really silent, they just did not talk. They usually had the excitement of live musical accompaniment, in some cases large orchestras and sound effects produced from behind the screen. The screens were considerably larger than today’s screens and the black and white or tinted film had a startling shimmer due to the fact that the backing of the actual film used silver¹². For instance, after seeing the D.W. Griffith epic *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915 president Wilson said: “It is like writing history with lightening” (Bogdanovich 40). In essence, this is a testimony to the transformative power of the moving image, issuing from an elegant assembly of clips that rhyme, allude and counterpoint. The silent cinema, especially for its period, was a more striking medium than many of us realize.

It was Bradbury’s mother Ester, who introduced the child to the magic of cinema at age three, taking him to see *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) soon followed by *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925) and *The Lost World* (1925). Bradbury said that his mother “took him to see everything,” but he has consistently singled out these first two films and their extraordinary star, Lon Chaney¹³, as exercising a peculiarly strong influence on him. One could hardly be indifferent to these potent stories especially as the lavish Hollywood spectacles they became. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, for instance, had a running time of two hours and thirteen minutes and budget approaching the then fantastic sum of a million dollars. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *The Phantom of the Opera* and other Chaney vehicles directed by Tod Browning¹⁴ such as *The Unholy Three*

¹² Most of these films no longer exist in their original form because they were later melted down to extract their silver.

¹³ Lon Chaney: *The Man and His Masks* was an unproduced “Halloween Special” written by Bradbury in 1964.

¹⁴ With a background in traveling carnivals, sideshows and circuses, Browning had specialist knowledge for films with these settings or dealing with illusions.

(1926) and *The Unknown* (1927) all dealt with disfigurement and human grotesquery but remained very human stories, unlike the “weird science” and supernatural beings that would soon dominate the fantastic cinema of the depression era. In fact, it was the romantic, rather than the monstrous elements, commonly manifested in the pathos of the freakish outsider’s quest for love and acceptance that most impressed young Bradbury, drawing from him a deeply emotional response:

The Hunchback appealed in some secret way to something inside me which made me feel at the age of three, impossible as it seems, that perhaps I was some sort of Hunchback myself. How this film could have evoked in a three-year-old sympathy I don’t know, except Chaney was so incredible at doing his portrayal and his lost love was so touching and immediate that my whole soul went forward at that young age and, it seems that in my small body, I could crouch down inside myself and become the Hunchback, but that’s what happened (Weller 28).

In this film and others of the epoch it was not uncommon to see a sympathetic antagonist or tragic creature and the lines between them often blurred. There were romantic ideals combined with an aesthetic of subtlety in the silent pictures where narrative suspense was usually built slowly and carefully. Bradbury’s writing and screenplays reflected these traits, especially the careful build up of suspense. These films left a mark on Bradbury, especially the Lon Chaney pictures with their prevalence of masks and carnival milieu that would surface later in his writing as he created a “dark carnival” of his own, and his fiction overall is noted for its sympathetic treatment of outsiders and “freaks.

In nearly every case, the face behind those movie masks was the remarkably malleable Lon Chaney. Chaney was in a class by himself in terms of his ability to transform himself and inhabit a lurid netherworld that thrilled audiences, and the theme of transformation would loom large in Bradbury’s work. Beyond his ability for physical contortions and hardship that his roles usually required, he was an extremely talented actor. Raised by deaf, mute parents Chaney developed a repertoire of facial and body tics and gestures to communicate with them. Perfect for the silent era, he was capable of expressing a variety of emotions without uttering a single word and was known for bringing a peculiar depth and sensitivity to each role he played. Chaney was also the

pioneer fantasy/horror “star” with an image perpetuated by his film studio and the popular press. Nevertheless, his popularity sprung neither from the “spell of personality” or as a studio created “commodity.” He preserved the unique aura of the person instead by maintaining the cult of secrecy, insisting “there is no Lon Chaney; I am the character I am creating. That is all” (Skall 71 -73). He was the first star to do this, and his self-negation and simultaneous ability to seemingly become anyone he willed carried special appeal for many, particularly young male spectators, including Bradbury who was repeatedly drawn to Chaney’s films¹⁵. Decades later his semi-autobiographical Hollywood mystery, *A Graveyard for Lunatics* (1990) contained a special homage to Chaney and his *Phantom of the Opera*. Bradbury’s works contain a great many references to films and filmmakers, including the obscure that only a film buff might recognize in stories like *The Prehistoric Producer*¹⁶(1962) and *Unterderseaboat Doktor* (1994).

The subject of “spectatorship” in the cinema, the ways in which people receive and derive pleasure from movies is as complex and multifaceted as the individuals who view them. But in childhood and early adolescence Ray Bradbury strongly identified with many of the oddities he saw on screen. His love of the movies, the stories they told and perhaps their way of telling them, bordered on the obsessive. After seeing the macabre mystery film *The Bat* in 1926 he had a black costume made similar to the title character’s and began calling himself “The Bat.” After seeing *King Kong* in 1933 he occasionally dressed in a gorilla suit. Bradbury would soon outgrow his fannish obsessions with the people who made the movies and his taste in film would broaden and refine greatly, but he never lost his fascination and admiration for the medium. He claimed to have seen every film ever made, some of them, like *King Kong*, dozens of times. Regardless, it is quite probable that he did see about every film released in the U.S. at least from age 14 to 28. During these formative years he claims to have viewed up to 14 films every week while frequenting the cinema at least 4 times a week.

¹⁵ Biographer Sam Weller tells of Bradbury aged nine, running away to see *The Phantom of the Opera* again in spite of severe pain presumed to be appendicitis. His father arrived and snatched him from the theater and the boy’s ailment soon vanished.

¹⁶ This humorous story was based on independent producer Robert L. Lippert who enjoyed reasonable low-budget success from the late 1940s to the end of the 1960s. Described by associates as a “happy go lucky pirate,” both Bradbury and his close friend Ray Harryhausen had difficult and disappointing dealings with him early in their careers.

Undoubtedly, such exposure to film added different models and memories to his vast reservoir of ideas, perhaps new ways of *seeing* manifested in his writing. In short, while Bradbury counts writers from Shakespeare to the late romantics as major literary influences, he remained open to every aspect of popular culture, unapologetically embracing and developing working relationships with much of it. In my view this makes him quintessentially modern in that he has absorbed from all media and produced or adapted works for virtually all media including stage musicals and cantatas. Like a good critic, he became educated through extensive exposure to the media panorama, thus developing taste and discretion, not to mention a large personal repertoire. He asserts that his Muse has grown “from an ever-roaming curiosity in all the arts, from bad radio to good theatre, from nursery rhymes to symphony, from jungle compound to Kafka’s *Castle*,” he asserts “there is basic excellence to be winnowed out, truths found, kept, savored, and used on some later day” (Bradbury, *Speaks* 42).

Aside from his fascination with movies, radio and comic strips, his small-town childhood allowed him to witness up close and participate in performance. Bradbury has spoken of two peak experiences in this respect. The second of these mentioned in the introductory chapter was where he met “Mr. Electrico” at a traveling carnival who spent time with the boy and gave him an inside glimpse of the carnival world. However, previously at age 8 he witnessed a series of performances by the famous magician Blackstone. He was captivated by this, and overwhelmed two years later when Blackstone returned and called him to the stage to assist. It was indescribably thrilling for him to be onstage before an attentive audience. It gave the rather awkward youth a sense of power, control and adulation that he had never experienced. The boy longed to become a magician¹⁷ and he worked at it, learning as many tricks as he could and occasionally performed in local social clubs and lodges (Mengeling 31-32). In a manner of speaking, he continued working at it as a writer. Along with the frequent carnival settings in his work, Bradbury scholars have noted a kind of magician’s “slight of hand” whereby he invests simple objects like a pencil, a piece of clothing or a walking stick with a special aura or life transforming magic, sometimes stemming from memory and imagination rather than the supernatural (Johnson 13).

¹⁷ He had the habit of performing magic tricks for his children as part of the bedtime ritual.

IV THE CITY AND FIRST PERFORMANCES EXPERIENCES

Between small town Illinois and Los Angeles the family relocated to Tucson, Arizona for just under a year. It was here that Bradbury began writing and had two important performance experiences. I think it is noteworthy that Bradbury was an avid fan of radio drama. Practically a lost art today, one should remember that radio drama was an aural, imagistic type of story-telling, employing vivid dialogue and episodic in nature. Bradbury did speak about how radio captivated him in childhood so we should not discount its influence on the aspiring writer. Bradbury had a media saturated childhood, impressed and influenced by stories of all kinds. During his formative years radio as an entertainment medium was flourishing and it provided Bradbury with his first “professional” media experience.

A persistent thirteen-year old Bradbury persuaded the managers of a local station to allow him to read the newspaper comics over the air. These were not only singular readings because the station occasionally put the comics into performance format with voiced characterizations and sound effects. This involvement was formative for the youth who was even more pleased to be paid in theater tickets. Also, while in Arizona he was urged to audition for his school’s Christmas operetta. Young Ray hesitated because he was afraid to sing but got the part and loved performing before a live audience. Finally, storing up future inspiration, he explored the desert landscape and nearly took up residence at the University of Arizona’s Museum of Natural History. The family moved back to Illinois briefly before moving a final time.

Given his enthusiasms for performance and the mass media, young Ray was delighted when his father moved the family to Los Angeles in 1934. As much as he regretted leaving his beloved aunt and the life he enjoyed in Illinois, he expressed reservations of what might have happened to him as a writer if the family had remained there. Through circumstance and good fortune his passion and determination were born in Waukegan, and affirmed in Tucson, but the move to Los Angeles would further strengthen these desires and make their realization possible. Decades later Bradbury would pen these words: “L.A., how do I love thee? Let me count the ways, or, perhaps, let me count one all-encompassing way. Los Angeles as incubator of forlorn talents. Let

me go back to 1934. Hand me my roller skates. With them I skated through life when I was 14” (Bradbury, *Speaks* 219). Although a major city, it was nothing like the sprawling metropolis of today. Free to travel around the city on roller skates he was able to meet many Hollywood stars, get their autographs and even have his picture taken with a few of them.

He also found a friend there of his same age who shared his enthusiasms and together they would haunt the gates of movie studios like Paramount, sometimes making a nuisance of themselves in their search for celebrities. He habitually crossed paths with George Burns, an actor and one of the most popular radio personalities of the day. The brash kid would bring Burns short scripts every week, and “he would read the scripts,” Bradbury recalls:

They were dreadful, and I was so blindly and madly in love with the film and radio business in Hollywood that I didn’t realize what a pest I was. George no doubt thought he could get me off his back by using my words for one of the 8 line vignettes he ...closed their broadcasts with. I wanted to live that special life forever. When the summer was over, I stopped my inner clock at 14 (Kelly 163).

By his own account, Bradbury’s teenage years at Los Angeles High School were somewhat awkward and painful, but not without consolation as he channeled his energies into writing and drama. He received encouragement from two teachers for his writing and poetry and was elated when chosen to write and direct his high school’s annual talent show. The show was such a success that it had an unprecedented repeat performance. Continually fascinated by the performing arts, Bradbury toyed with the idea of becoming an actor until his late teens. He even managed to finagle his way into budding film star Laraine Day’s theater group landing a small part in one of her plays, but his most valued contributions were small (often humorous) additions to the scripts. Bradbury’s long standing public persona and body of work show a performer by inclination who became a writer by choice, realizing that if he were to make a living as a performer of some kind-it would be through the written word.

It seems that around age fifteen Bradbury happened upon his first book about writing, Jack Woodford’s *Trial and Error*. Woodford was a journalist, novelist and a

number of his works reached the screen in the 1930s. His book caused a stir when published in 1933 because of its unvarnished insights into the publishing business and seems to have influenced many budding writers at the time including Robert A. Heinlein, one of Bradbury's mentors. Although I do not have an exact reference for this, Bradbury credited Woodford with saying the right things and saying them clearly, claiming that he stayed afloat and got his work done because of him. Woodford's book contained some interesting observations on writing including his claim that "characterization is an accident that flows out of dialogue and action¹⁸." This of course, is how character is usually drawn in the cinema. Later Bradbury would express an almost identical view in reference to the infrequent, "accidental" appearance of finely developed characters in his stories.

Another book that Bradbury recognized as important to his authorship was Dorothea Brande's *Becoming a Writer* (1934), which is still in print today. She emphasizes the importance of dreams and the subconscious for the writer's work. Her advice was to write quickly, passionately, trust the subconscious and not over think. Indeed, Bradbury's practice developed along these lines. Brande also stressed the importance of maintaining an open, innocent eye to the world and taking in vast amounts of art of all kinds (Eller and Touponce 7-8). Beginning in this early twenties Bradbury would use a word association process to find topics for his writing. After writing he would ask himself why he wrote that particular word or words, it was an open-ended, emotional approach¹⁹ and he would often end up writing short, imaginative pieces based on these word associations that sometimes led to a story. Sometimes he would even use images from newspapers or magazines to begin this process. Eller and Touponce draw an important distinction concerning Bradbury's use of the unconscious in his work:

For Bradbury, the unconscious must be approached with the "wise passiveness" of William Wordsworth or the Zen Buddhists. But although the sense of

¹⁸ https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/855360.Jack_Woodford

¹⁹ Around this time he also discovered the works of Thomas Wolf and valued his emotional, enthusiastic approach without a lot of pre-planning concerning plot. Bradbury saw this approach to writing as "throw up in the morning and clean up in the afternoon." That is, allow for the creative explosion then critically clean it up later and he admitted he sometimes worked that way

theatricality of the unconscious is strong in his work, his conception of it is not, evidently, the Freudian theater of the return of the repressed. For Bradbury, the unconscious is not so much the place of repression or castration, or lack, but of *flows* of desire. The writer's conscious sense of self-identity comes much later in the process of desiring (8).

Much of Bradbury's work has the vivid flavor of real events because he was just such a highly emotional, intuitive writer. He claimed that "real thinking," that is, associative thinking, usually occurred at the subconscious level and stated that much of the impetus for his writing comes from his "early morning theater" a kind of "show" running in his head projecting a barrage of sounds and images as potent and immediate as the cinema itself, as he explains in the introduction to *The Stories of Ray Bradbury* (1980):

In the years since (my childhood) I have learned to watch those metaphors drift in my subconscious in the relaxed hour before dawn, instructing me for my day's occupations. In that early morning theater, trapped between my ears, the old images of hunchback, phantom, dinosaur, world's fairs and ape men perambulate as they wish. I do not own them. They control and bid me jump to run and trap them with my typewriter before they sleep. (xiii)

This borderland between wakefulness and sleep known as the hypnagogic state, seemed in Bradbury's case, replete with images imbibed through the cinema. Both cinema and dreams are moving pictures originating in the mind and the disconnected, symbolic nature of dreams have caused many to link them to the free spatial-temporal movement and montage of cinema. So, regardless of how amenable his work may be for the screen, it was routinely highly visual in origin and inspiration.

Another important influence Bradbury cited over the years was W. Somerset Maugham's *The Summing Up*, that he encountered around its publication in 1938. Thoughtfully received, this book was very instructional and inspirational for Bradbury, as well as Lajos Egri's *How to Write a Play*, and Maren Elwood's *Characters Make Your Story*. These latter two he read in the early 1940s also had a strong influence on Bradbury's maturing dynamics as a writer (Eller, *Becoming* 59-64).

Although there is no indication that Bradbury ever encountered this little book it would not surprise me if he had. Published in 1940 during Bradbury's formative period when he was reading widely, it dovetails quite well with his own developing ideas on creativity. Still in print, James Webb Young's *A Technique for Producing Ideas* was a pioneering work aimed not at writers but primarily advertising men, and its techniques echo in more contemporary and extensive works like *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms* by Margaret A. Boden (1990). Young's insistence upon maintaining a lively interest in everything, constantly gathering specific and general information from far and wide, experimenting with novel combinations and unlikely juxtapositions as well as the essential role of the working of the subconscious, are extremely similar to Bradbury's ideas on creativity, particularly those expressed in his *Zen and the Art of Writing* (1973).

V BRADBURY'S EARLY MENTORS

As he was finishing high school he made a discovery that proved crucial for his artistic and personal development that he affectionately likened to joining a "church." He discovered a group of enthusiastic, like-minded people known as the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society where he found sorely needed understanding and guidance. It was certainly a case of being in the right place at the right time; the club had only recently come into existence when seventeen year old Ray Bradbury became one of the society's youngest and most active members. Soon he was contributing to its publication *Imagination* before briefly editing his own "Fanzine" *Futura Fantasia*. These amateur publications served as sort of a bridge to professional writing. His early contributions of illustrations, poetry and short stories, though unpolished had a touch of the irreverent humor and word play associated with his more mature work (Weist 17). Bradbury continued honing his skills by reading widely and through mentoring by older, more experienced members of the SF Club, many of whom were already established genre writers.

He directly benefited from association with several members, but credits Robert A. Heinlein with teaching him that all good stories deal primarily with human beings.

Henry Kuttner²⁰ taught him to cut the “purple” language and not blurt out his ideas before written elaboration²¹, and Leigh Brackett (later a noted screenwriter) he believed taught him “pure story writing,” how to pare his stories down and plot them well (Weller 108-9). In the SF society Bradbury learned to listen and accept criticism while “keeping his mouth shut,” which, in retrospect he considered quite significant (Weller 103). This less formal, collaborative atmosphere extended even to a forum between the club’s writers and their readers. For the neophyte Bradbury these experiences may have been useful preparation for the collaborative demands of the performance arts. At any rate, he navigated the winding path from fan to professional writer in a few short years through trial and error, persistence, advice and imitation until he found his own “voice” in the early 1940s.

Recalling the “pulp” magazines where Bradbury got his start, the late genre writer Jack Williamson (another of his early mentors) recalled them as “better schools for writers than universities, because they *required* expression of character, setting, and theme in well motivated action.” He saw the pulp tradition as “more oral than literary; the language was rhythmic, rich with figures of speech and the values were simple and sharply defined” (Clareson ed.1977 6). Therefore, neither diffuse nor restrained, Bradbury’s writing tends to display characteristics of his pulp beginnings with his work generally leaving a single strong impression and definite sense of direction. This may also be typical of short story writing in genera (the bulk of Bradbury’s literary output) where one composes in short concentrated bursts. However, his bold strokes seem to lend themselves to the creation of striking images; perhaps a hallmark of “cinematic writing.”

²⁰ Of his many mentors, Bradbury has cited Kuttner as the most influential of all, considering him a man full of ideas and a masterful fantasy/science fiction writer. Bradbury would write the introduction for his collected short stories in 1975.

²¹ Stephen King and other writers have mentioned this as an important lesson to learn. Evidently, just speaking about ideas before getting them down on paper is counterproductive and may subtract energy and spontaneity from a story.

VI CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Though he would soon place stories in mainstream magazines, his early sales were to the “pulp,” the inexpensive genre magazines of the day such as *Weird Tales*, *Astounding Science Fiction* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, however he published some detective stories as well. Ironically, for someone who would soon be responsible for popularizing the genre for a wider public, the science fiction editors began rejecting his stories for not being what they thought a science fiction story should be. So Bradbury’s famously contested, ambiguous relationship to the SF genre began at the outset of his career. This may be partially due to the fact that Bradbury stopped reading genre literature in his early 20s and was reading a broad field of literature, including the great women writers suggested by his mentor Henry Kuttner.

Bradbury stated that he learned something about style from female writers and that his writing benefited through exposure to their sensibilities. In fact, he went as far to say that men and women were “two different races,” that women have a different inherent “center” in themselves and that we “have to learn about the other half of the human race from people like Katherine Anne Porter, Willa Cather, Jessamyn West and Edith Wharton” (Hill 173). He appreciated important differences in their work stating they were more sensitive, see life differently than men do, and accept life much more openly. I find it significant that Bradbury began reading these writers early, as he was learning the writing craft, well before women’s literature gained the currency and academic attention it enjoys today. Bradbury’s extremely wide reading including the above and everything from fairy tales to Shakespeare may have contributed to the lyricism, strong humanism and independent playfulness in his work that rests uncomfortably with the more fixed ideas of any genre. While these characteristics have won him a wide international readership, he may not have received the full critical appreciation he deserves because his writing has been difficult for the critics to categorize. In their far-reaching work, Eller and Touponce concluded that “Bradbury carnivalizes each genre in which he writes.” Aside from science fiction, fantasy and detective stories he penned quite a number of

naturalistic stories as well, and he first gained recognition through some of these included in *The Best American Short Stories of 1946 and 1948*²².

Bradbury received his first critical accolades from novelist/critic Christopher Isherwood²³ in his review of *The Martian Chronicles* in 1950. By a chance encounter in a bookstore Bradbury passed his book to Isherwood personally, at the time SF/fantasy literature was generally not considered worthy of critical attention. Isherwood referred to Bradbury as a “poet-philosopher” and “a very great and unusual talent.” (“A Review of *The Martian Chronicles*,” *Tomorrow* 10: 56–58) Thus, Bradbury became the first writer to escape the “science fiction ghetto” and was instrumental in gaining a wider readership for science fiction through the quality of his prose and humanism. Nonetheless, as earlier, he did not fare too well with genre critics who were expecting a more rational, extrapolative type of science fiction writing. However, Bradbury was never primarily a science fiction writer. Aside from several short stories, he rightly insisted that *Fahrenheit 451* was the only science fiction book he ever wrote. He has always found more favor among those more attuned to fantasy.

In 1952, William F. Nolan self-published a booklet of criticism and reviews that included an article written by Bradbury. *The Ray Bradbury Review* was the first critical work to reach publication (limited to 1,200 copies) and covered the first decade of the author’s career from 1941 to 1951. An admirer and life-long friend, Nolan²⁴ would become a renowned writer himself and part of Bradbury’s circle of writing consultants. Writing is a notoriously solitary activity where usually little outside influence is exerted on a text aside from a writer’s editor. However, Bradbury continued to solicit feedback on his work from a small group of fellow writers, similar to his beginnings in the Los Angeles Science Fiction Club. Bradbury’s work remained uniquely his own but he remained open to the suggestions and criticism from this group which could be

²² Respectively, “The Big Black and White Game,” and “Powerhouse” which also won an O. Henry award in 1948.

²³ Isherwood was an important novelist with a number of screenwriting credits as well. His associate Gilbert Highet referred to Bradbury as a “visionary” rather than a science fiction writer in his introduction to *The Vintage Bradbury* (1965) story collection.

²⁴ Nolan would publish more Bradbury criticism in the years to come, notably *The Ray Bradbury Companion* 1975.

considered a kind of adaptive practice in itself, and certainly showed the author's propensity to consider his work in other forms.

In this first comprehensive assessment of Bradbury's early career, the carnival concepts in his writing were highlighted, and similarly how his stories upended genre expectations. For instance, aside from horrific elements Bradbury's weird tales often contained unforgettable, dream-like images that were in turn lyrical, sentimental and haunting. In this early period the bulk of his work fell into the category of "weird tales" and these were hardly typical not only because of style, but because they were usually conjured up through childhood experience or the aforementioned word association process. Respectively, "The Lake," and "The Wind" originated from these twin sources/methods and Nolan cites them as the first "Bradbury classics." The former was written in 1942 (published in 1944) and the author frequently referred to it as his first good story where he "found his voice" as a writer. It is hard to characterize, perhaps a kind of a nostalgic, child's ghost story told through dream-logic and reverie that was indeed based on a strange childhood experience. "The Wind" was a highly original story as well, that came about through his word association process. It was a paranoid tale where the protagonist is hunted and finally taken by a sentient current of wind.

The point is that Bradbury was writing a different kind of fantasy tale, resolutely human in the face of the supernatural where themes of loneliness, nostalgia, fears of aging and death and lost love often surfaced. Essentially, he eschewed the traditional mechanics and sources of fantasy for more contemporary elements and inspirations uniquely his own. Bradbury claimed that his work differed from other writers in that in spite of apparent time frames, his perspective was never really the past or future but grew from the present; "nowness" he called it. His intuitive appropriation of worldly and other worldly elements often gave his work a more surreal than horrific cast. His influence on other fantasy/horror writers, his contemporaries (like Nolan and Richard Matheson) and those that came later (like Stephen King) is undeniable and strong. George Clayton Johnson, one of Bradbury's younger contemporaries commented that by the late 1950s "Bradburian ideas were common property...We all stole from him. Bradbury was the seminal influence" (Weller 265). Overall, his fantasy works have received less negative criticism than his science fictional stories.

In her book surveying the field of fantasy and classifying it as a literary form, Diana Waggoner in *The Hills of Far Away* (1978) recognizes *The Martin Chronicles* as “Science Fantasy,” occupying “a border country between fantasy and science fiction, dressing up magic in scientific terms—or science in magical terms” (108) and says little else. However, with the story collection *The October Country* (1955) and especially *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962) in mind she states that:

The potential of horror fantasy has been best realized in the work of Ray Bradbury, who balances the conflicting demands of subcreation and horrification with remarkable skill and simplicity. ... In Bradbury, horror is as it should be: a means, rather than an end. ... the greatest fault of most horrific fantasies is that their authors revel in the horrors, even prefer them, while paying lip service that horrors ought to be destroyed. Bradbury loves to show us his evil creations, and is, (justly) proud of the imagination and inventiveness that went into them; but he does not love them (62).

While paying him a high compliment as a skilled writer, I believe Waggoner also recognizes and appreciates Bradbury’s restraint in subordinating the sensational and horrific to an ultimately humanistic, even constructive narrative, as do many others. Marvin E. Mengeling refers to Bradbury as a “singer of life” and Calvin Miller in “Ray Bradbury: Hope in a Doubtful Age” called him “an apostle of hope.” Miller, a protestant minister and published SF/fantasy writer, thought Bradbury was a “better, less silly” writer of science fiction eschewing the overworked aspects of the genre in favor of “real people and circumstances which, while only mildly scientific, soared far above what I expected from science fiction,” including an “an enthralling sense of cosmic spirituality” (Miller 93). This seems an apt summary of what many find appealing in Bradbury’s science fictional writing. Throughout their in depth study Eller and Touponce refer to the author’s work as “life affirming fictions,” and note that in spite of the gravity of some of the issues he deals with, he cannot, or will not, sustain a spirit of negativity or reach nihilistic conclusions

On the other hand, there are those less enthusiastic about his work. These criticisms range from those who find his style a bit too florid or his views too idealized or sentimental, that is, too irrational or not “science fictional” enough. Brian Curtis, in a

2005 article for the popular on-line magazine *Slate*, though ambivalent, might be of the latter category: “When the McCarthyite gloom of *Fahrenheit 451* fades, it’s the pulpy, childlike terrors that stick. Bradbury nudging characters into ingenious hells;” He also singled out the marvelously descriptive passage of the dinosaur’s appearance from the short story *A Sound of Thunder* (1952) marveling over the “precise, almost tender evocation of a dinosaur” and the strong, overall effect of the story in “a lean ten pages.” Overall, Curtis appreciates Bradbury but seems puzzled as to why some would seek to elevate his authorship beyond that of a clever entertainer, as he concludes his article like this:

It's within the confines of the short story that Bradbury's mind best articulates the strange relationship between childhood yearnings and the violence around us. That Bradbury should set these parables in a dystopian future or on Mars is what makes him distinct. Earth to the literary establishment: The pulp god lives! (<http://www.slate.com/id/2125476/>)

While refraining from the term “pulp” Harold Bloom seems to share this relatively limited appraisal of Bradbury when in the introduction to a 2001 collection of articles on *Fahrenheit 451* he concludes that: “Bradbury, though his work is of the surface, will survive as a moral fabulist” (2). On the other hand, many argue that Bradbury has suffered from oversimplified readings for years, but, as mentioned above, his most trenchant critics mainly fault him for “illogicality” and sentimentality which they believe has no place in speculative fiction. Brian Aldiss praises Bradbury for refurbishing science fiction while intimating that he does not belong there. “Ray Bradbury was the first to take all the props of SF and employ them as highly individual tools of expression for his own somewhat Teddy-bearish view of the universe” (257). He continues by listing Bradbury’s early short story collections (and *Fahrenheit 451*) and dismissing them with faint praise. “How enchanting those early books were at the time, how we needed them” (259). He seems to be making a case that science fiction is “respectable,” because it is highly rational and “mature”.

From the 1950s, science fiction writer and critic Damon Knight’s charges have reverberated, that although Bradbury “has a large following among science fiction readers, there is at least an equally large contingent of people who cannot stomach his

work at all; they say he has no respect for the medium; that he does not even trouble to make his scientific double-talk convincing; that-- worst crime of all—he fears and distrusts science” (quoted in Mengeling, “Machineries” 83). Or, Sam Lundwall who believes that for Bradbury, “everything new is bad...All of Bradbury’s works (are) utterly naïve and from a scientist’s point of view, crazy” (24). Genre criticism has not been overly kind to Bradbury, but I think we might locate some of Bradbury’s artistic success in the critical establishment’s failure to label him. In the 1960s as popular culture studies began making inroads at American universities, Bradbury’s works were among the first studied and still are. They soon filtered into secondary and even primary school curricula.

In 1973, the first book length work on Bradbury appeared, *Humanisto Del Futuro* (written by a Spaniard). In seeming disagreement with some of the contentions of that work, George Edgar Slusser published *The Bradbury Chronicles* in 1977. He believed the author’s work had been unjustly neglected by critics and saw it as part of a “deep current in American thought and letters” (60). Concentrating on the thematics of his work as a whole he saw the author’s thrust not to:

Utopia, but backward, toward some golden age or American Eden, a place of childhood innocence, toward lost harmony with nature. ... His stories are always anchored in a given soil, and his characters in a particular past. Not only is Bradbury no futurist; he is no abstract humanist either. His real task, simply stated, is that of portraitist—the chronicler of lives in isolation (4).

Whether in isolation, marginalized or not, Bradbury painted pictures of life as lived so it should not be surprising that he mentioned Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg Ohio* (1919) as an influential book, especially in relation to his group of stories making up *The Martian Chronicles* (1950). Anderson’s book presented a collection of individuals in their struggles to overcome feelings of loneliness and isolation in their small town setting. Slusser’s work was hardly the final word on Bradbury but he broke new ground with his astute observations. In the same vein, recent biographer Sam Weller remarked: “Although he moved from the Midwest for good at age thirteen, Ray Bradbury is a prairie writer. The prairie is his voice and moral compass” (13). Of course, the fabricated “Green Town” that appears in so many of his books and stories is a fictional makeover of the Illinois town where he spent his boyhood. But Bradbury is more than an accomplished

“provincial” writer, he has have been translated into more than thirty languages, striking cords with readers around the world. Like the Spanish book mentioned above, there are doubtless other non-English critical works which I am not aware of, likely in France, Russia or South America where he has been very popular.

1980 was a watershed year for Bradbury criticism seeing the publication of a book and a collection of essays in the “Writers of the 21st Century Series,” edited by Joseph D. Olander and Martin Harry Greenberg. In the essays, the author’s use of temporal paradox, his dual attractions for the past and the future and related issues of stasis and change were touched upon as well as elements pertaining to renewal, regeneration and the American Myth encountered in *The Martian Chronicles*.

In “The Frontier Myth in Ray Bradbury” Gary Wolf highlights Bradbury’s interest in technology (instead of science) and its impact on society through a historical paradigm, the exploration and settlement of Mars in *The Martian Chronicles*. Wolf highlighted how Bradbury’s work manifested two main themes of science fiction, the colonization of other worlds as the inevitable next step in the expansion of contemporary society, and the implicit idea that the energy expended in search of new frontiers might be better spent in improving social conditions in the present. Both of these notions are prevalent in Bradbury’s work apart from *The Martian Chronicles* as well.

Bradbury was a great proponent of the first theme not just for preservation of the race but as an opportunity for humanity to transform and better itself through a new Eden, a chance to begin again. However, he saw this as problematic since he was certain humanity would take its vices and prejudices with it into any new territory. The “first contact” episodes of *Chronicles* are just as tragic for the Martians as they were for the American Indians on the frontier, and the Earth colonists are never really able to start anew until the Earth has been destroyed in nuclear war. Only then are they obliged to build and truly adapt to their new environment with hope and a fresh perspective. Thus, neither human rationality nor technology could be counted on to save the race but emergence of a natural life principle was necessary to lead to regeneration. Among other things, Wolf made a persuasive argument that Bradbury’s work was influenced by the

views of the American frontier experience as famously outlined by Fredrick Jackson Turner²⁵

The place of religion in his science fantasies was also briefly discussed for the first time. Bradbury had a nominal Christian upbringing in the Baptist denomination of Protestantism. Although he never professed to be a Christian, there is a strong strain of spirituality running through his works, especially his poetry prompting Thomas Clareson to characterize Bradbury as basically a “Christian Mystic²⁶.” Indeed, Bradbury has said that he realized fairly late in life that he might have been a good minister. He always insisted that science and religion were not contradictory but twin pillars of understanding, religion being of particular value for questions that science cannot honestly answer. Stephen Dimeo was one of the first to examine religious themes and symbolism in Bradbury and along with others, perceived something akin to Transcendentalism in his prose and especially his poetry. Bradbury’s beliefs as expressed in his works and interviews give evidence of something more complex and I will approach the topic again in the chapter on *Something Wicked this Way Comes*.

The essay collection contained a welcome refutation of Bradbury’s supposedly anti-science and technology stance in “The Machineries of Joy and Despair: Bradbury’s Attitudes toward Science and Technology,” by Marvin E. Mengeling. Through a closer reading of a wider range of the author’s work and from personal interviews, Mengeling showed Bradbury’s attitude toward technology to be neither fearful nor disdainful, but ambivalent. He was not a fundamentalist in this respect but disliked machines that “dehumanize” or isolate people from meaningful contact with others or nature. In several of his stories there are houses that “speak” and do nearly everything for their owners. Bradbury did not seem to think it was healthy to be entirely liberated from mundane, everyday tasks. How technology is used and its effects concerned him more than technology itself and his work clearly shows this. At one point the author vented his frustration by saying:

²⁵ A historian noted for the “frontier thesis” stating that the moving western frontier shaped American democracy and character until about 1890.

²⁶ Particularly in view of some of the author’s poetry like *Christus Apollo* and *Christ, Old Student in a New School* and his 1977 article “The God in Science Fiction.”

If I have considered Bradbury's attitudes toward current machines to the brink of tedium, it is because in the past these attitudes have been oversimplified. I think by now we have seen enough to know that Bradbury is no reactionary, antimachine "nut" (98).

Mengeling's long, persuasive article seems to have put the nail in the coffin of this long running, short-sighted line of negative criticism. Although Bradbury had a website (maintained by someone else) he was not very keen on the internet, which he saw as a poor substitute for non-mediated human interaction. In an unpublished interview (around 2009) with Jonathan Eller he put things like this:

Someone has loaded a gun with bird shot, and fired it at us. Birdshot, or birdshit, if you will. So we are bombarded with cell phones and e-mails ... you have combinations of things that are beautiful, and things that are unnecessary. TV and the use of all of our toys, it fills our lives.

One might characterize Bradbury as "neo-Amish" a term coined by Donald G Kraybill for the increasing number of people who choose to selectively put limits on the use of technology in their life in favor of deeper personal relations and for the sake of their own, if you will, emotional/spiritual health.

There were two articles in the collection that concentrated mainly on style, Bradbury's use of metaphor, creation of atmosphere and his use of the arabesque technique to promote a sense of wonder and mystery. "If imagery is an index to able craftsmanship, of beauty, poetry of style, Bradbury qualifies as a master. In examining three works...we are left with well over three hundred graphically original figures of speech" (Pell 188). An article by Hazel Pierce placed some of his work in the Gothic tradition, with Edgar Allen Poe as the vital link between Bradbury and that tradition. Among his modern innovations were innocence in distress instead of the customary damsel in distress and characters that capture our attention through their believably. Similarly, Lahna Diskin contributed a chapter on children in Bradbury's works. Anyone even vaguely acquainted with his work will know of the privileged place children and their inner worlds occupy within it. According to biographer Sam Weller, while Bradbury refused to name a favorite among his works, his wife told him that the autobiographical

coming of age fiction *Dandelion Wine* (1957) was perhaps his favorite. Diskin writes that “In Bradbury’s canon, children are...agents who can transfigure and sometimes metamorphose persons, things and events. They are, in other words, apostles of enchantment” (131). The Bradburian concern with the spatiotemporal self also emerges in children, as they grow, interact and are contrasted with adults.

Aside from their overall quality, the essay collection was notable for the centrality of *The Martin Chronicles* (1950). Three of the ten articles were centered upon some aspect of *Chronicles* and another four extensively referenced it. Only one, Donald Watt’s “Burning Bright: Fahrenheit 451 as Symbolic Dystopia,” focused upon *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). We may see how the center of Bradbury criticism has somewhat shifted toward the latter in recent years as a collection of essays on that novel alone (including Watt’s) was printed in 2001 in the “Modern Critical Interpretations” series edited and introduced by Harold Bloom. A revised collection containing new essays appeared in 2010. Also in 2007, Eller and Touponce published *Match to Flame*, dealing with the genesis of *Fahrenheit 451* and Bradbury’s short stories of that epoch, tangential to its themes.

Also in 1980, Wayne L. Johnson published *Ray Bradbury*. In just under 150 pages, he managed a rather comprehensive thematic study, grouping works together under common elements and themes. Utilizing many interviews, his first chapters contained important biographic elements linking them to Bradbury’s authorship and characteristic style. He concludes with a short overview of Bradbury’s lesser-known work in the areas of film, plays, children’s books and poetry. His comments here were quite brief, but seem to represent some of the earliest critical interest in Bradbury’s cross-media work and would be followed by several book-length studies on the author.

Although his original plan was to examine Bradbury’s reception in France, William F. Touponce interpreted selected works through the reader response approach informed by French philosopher Gaston Bachelard and others. *Ray Bradbury and the Poetics of Reverie* (1984) explores the techniques Bradbury deploys to engage and awaken readers at a deep level, opening them to a world and deeply buried emotions and experiences from their own past. He highlights visual specificity through description and implication—the author’s prose conjures up memories and descriptions of places, things

and people that we know—the importance of Bradbury’s use of reverie—daydreams, asides, evocations of memory and imagination.

David Mogan’s *Ray Bradbury* (1986) contained the first significant examination of Bradbury’s then recent detective novel *Death is a Lonely Business* (1984), as well as a chapter surveying and defending the author’s critical reception. Joining a growing chorus of academic criticism he located Bradbury’s best work in connection to American mainstream writers of his era and to “earlier mythopoetic writers like Edgar Allen Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Mark Twain” (25). In terms of his science fiction works Mogan reminded us that:

He has never rejected science or technology. Rather, he affirms that in the alternately exhilarating and frightening delirium of future shock we must not lose contact with basic passions, with love and hate. Science fiction’s value is precisely that it combines both speculative thought and emotional impact, helping us to interpret changes in our environment as well as to recognize our own fears and desires (23).

His chapter on Bradbury’s work in other genres and media was significant. Utilizing interview material, Mogan presents an overview of Bradbury’s involvement in film and television projects from the 1950s into the early 1980s. Bradbury’s comments on many of these reveal a dynamic, visual imagination and we are left to wonder how much better some of these adaptations might have been realized if their author had been allowed more input. Mogan suggests this, concluding that “the screenplay of *Something Wicked This Way Comes* demonstrates that Bradbury can apply his screenwriting talents effectively to adapting his own fiction” (140).

In 1991, Ben P. Indick published “Ray Bradbury: Dramatist.” This slim volume merits attention as the first work to focus solely upon the author’s work as adapted for performance. Radio drama, plays and teleplays are covered and screenplays more extensively with the most thorough treatment going to Bradbury’s stage plays. A playwright and stated admirer of Bradbury, Indick’s perceptive analysis of the relative successes and failures of the author’s plays, and his habitual strengths and weaknesses as adapter of his own work, for the stage will be considered in later chapters.

In 2000, Robin Anne Reid, published *Ray Bradbury: A Critical Companion* in the series “Critical Companions for Contemporary Authors.” She moves chronologically forward in her critical overview of Bradbury’s work concluding that his continued popularity “cannot be explained by any genre designation or marketing label” and regards him as a major American writer. Her approach is different in that she selects several short story collections and novels (including more recent, less examined works) and after a summary discussion of plot, characters, settings and themes proceeds to give an alternative reading to each work according to a different, more contemporary approach. Showcased here are the universality and malleability of the author’s themes and their appeal demonstrated by the various ways they can be reasonably interpreted—in Bradbury there is something for every taste and theoretical orientation.

In 2002, veteran Bradbury scholar Marvin E. Mengeling released an interesting and very readable work, *Red Planet, Flaming Phoenix, Green Town: Some Early Bradbury Revisited*. As the title suggests he focuses upon the older, better known works but he approaches them from a vector including biographical, ancestral and psychological factors; speculating on how Bradbury evidently saw himself and his place within his family. Though he states it is not intended to be a psychological biography (xii) he does include lesser known background information that certainly have some pertinence to Bradbury’s authorship. Mengeling concludes by saying that Bradbury will probably not be “taken to the collective bosom of literary critics,” but that his “enduring and affectionate place in the public imagination” has earned him a place along with writers like H.G. Wells, Robert Lewis Stevenson, Lewis Carroll and Frank L. Baum (217).

Through the years Bradbury has released collections of non-fiction essays where he speaks of his authorship, inspiration, experiences and observations and he gave numerous interviews. A fine collection of interviews stretching over nearly fifty years were gathered and edited by Steven L. Aggelis in 2004 under the title of *Conversations with Ray Bradbury*. The following year Chicago based journalist Sam Weller came out with a biography, *The Bradbury Chronicles: the Life of Ray Bradbury*. With little comment or analysis, it’s an affectionate, accessible account of the author’s life that seems to cover the key events, revealing more of the author’s story inspirations and insights into factors behind his publishing history. Weller would later release three more

books containing interview material and reflections on how his work has influenced individual artists and popular culture as a whole.

In 2004, Jonathan R. Eller and William F. Touponce came out with *Ray Bradbury: The Life of Fiction*. Although they say little about the author's work in other media their coverage of his written work is surely the most comprehensive and scholarly to date. Through the most complete archival collection in existence they chart the amazingly complex ways in which Bradbury's stories developed and how the author himself moved "from the margins to the mainstream of American literary culture" (XV). They emphasized the prevalence of metaphor, myth and masks in the author's fiction and pointed out how he carnivalizes every genre he writes in and make a convincing case against over simplified readings of the author or dismissing him as merely a clever entertainer.

The presence of a carnival or an equivalent concept has been a mainstay of Bradbury criticism from the beginning, but Eller and Touponce extend and refine the concept according to Bakhtin's notion of "carnivalization." That is, "to designate the transportation of carnival images and themes into literature...Bahktin saw carnival as a form of life and carnivalization as a dialogic process of literary meaning deeply implicated with the ideological clashes of the day. We believe that this is how Bradbury conceives of it too. Quite apart from generic concerns, Bradbury's works manifest a preoccupation with desire and the unconscious (Freud) as well as the modern crisis of values (Nietzsche) and provide critiques—through carnivalization—of those notions" (3). Using textual criticism, publishing history and a modified form of analytical bibliography, they focused on carnivalization as the central focus of Bradbury's fiction.

Eller and Touponce founded The Center for Ray Bradbury Studies at Indiana University in 2007 and have amassed an impressive collection of works dedicated to the author as well as manuscripts and other archival material. In 2008 the center launched "The New Ray Bradbury Review," a yearly journal containing articles on various aspects of the author's work. The Journal is still being published on a yearly basis. In 2011 and 2014, Jonathan Eller published *Becoming Ray Bradbury* and *Ray Bradbury Unbound* respectively. Both volumes draw upon years of interviews, personal papers and private

collections to paint a detailed portrait of the evolution of the author and the origins and outcomes of his artistic endeavors over his lifetime.

In summary, as Mengling stated above, Bradbury will probably never be considered a “canonical” writer although he comes close. His novel length works that have attracted wide readership and critical attention are few and would be *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), *Dandelion Wine* (1957) and *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962). However, his body of work (and many say some of his best) is largely in the short story form, and those creative minds that work best in terms of short units rather than in terms of integrated novel length wholes have usually been at a critical disadvantage. Unlike books, short stories tend to fade rather quickly but the fact that his story collections remain in print with some stories going back over seventy years speak of his popularity and staying power. Similarly, there is what has been referred to as the “tyranny of the subject,” or the intricately constructed, psychologically complex character privileged by critics and many readers alike. Bradbury freely admits that complex character construction is not his strong suit; most are thinly veiled versions of himself. Furthermore, his emotional approach to writing goes against the more restrained, ironic approach favoured by high modernism that seeks to minimize authorial presence within a work. Highly idiosyncratic, Bradbury would always remain an outsider to established literary circles but his authorial identity coalesced partially through acceptance by a more open-minded West Coast based group, including filmmaker John Huston and rejection by the East Coast literary establishment. The antagonism of the latter was mutual with Bradbury referring to the Establishment as a group of “intellectual apes” eager to beat up on anyone who did not fit their standards. However, critical interest continues as his unexplored works and other aspects of Bradbury’s authorship continue to be examined. His three mystery/crime novels published between 1985 and 2002 have received some critical attention but emphasis seems to be shifting toward the author’s works in performance media. During his final years Bradbury continued to publish and released a new short collection *We’ll Always Have Paris* and a well received novella *Farewell Summer* (2009), a sequel to *Dandelion Wine* (1957), utilizing some of the material not included in the first novel. The same year *Falling Upward*, one of his “Irish” plays was staged in Los Angeles as well as a radio play, *Leviathan 99*. He continued to be

productive in a variety of media until the end of his career, especially adapting or writing original works for performance media during the last decade and a half before his death in the summer of 2012. During the latter part of his career, critical reviews in the popular press at least, like newspapers were nearly always favourable, even elegiac in tone in recognition of a distinguished career. In his final years he was the recipient of many prestigious awards such as The National Medal of Arts (United States 2004), a special citation by the Pulitzer Prize jury (2007) and the highest rank medal in the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres from France in the same year. From the critical overview it should be clear that the earliest negative criticisms came from genre critics who adhered to a more rigid definition of what they thought science fiction should be. Ironically, the quality and humanism of Bradbury's writing attracted a reading public which otherwise may never have discovered science fiction. Gary Wolf stated in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*: "In a popular genre where reputations, until recently, have been made through ingenious plotting and the exposition of scientific and technological ideas, Bradbury built an enormous reputation virtually on style alone" (8:62). While never really considering himself a SF writer, he nevertheless became one of the genre's most ardent proponents through nationally circulated essays such as "Why Science Fiction?" published in *The Nation* in 1953, stressing its importance as a literature of protest, idealism and open ideas going as far back as Rabelais. He valued its scope including "sociology, psychology and history, compounded and squared by time" (Nolan 82). Recognizing a prophetic element, Bradbury believed science fiction could prepare us for the future, offer warnings and make us more aware of the present and where it may be leading us:

Science fiction offers us the quickest route between these two points, a way of shorthand, to educate ourselves to our basic scientific and moral problems without resorting to pomp, preachment, or pushing, and remain entertaining withal. You can't reach people, and deal with fundamental issues of life and morality, without entertaining along the way (Nolan 83).

Unlike many post-war science fiction writers he was never a doomsayer claiming part of his task as a writer was "to show man his basic goodness, to dramatize his struggle up and away from this planet" (Nolan 83). In the same interview, Bradbury remarked that functioning in the field of science fiction was a "happy accident." From early exposure to

the pulps to more sophisticated works he claimed that he had not “grown out of it” but rather *into* (author’s italics) it, and that as his career progressed he took his science fictional ideas with him (Nolan 82). Somewhat to the chagrin of more technically oriented SF writers Bradbury’s enthusiasm and affability made him an unofficial spokesman for the space program during the 60s and 70s. He stretched the boundaries of the genre and was one of the first to tackle serious religious issues such as whether a benign alien life form can be said to have achieved Christian grace, *The Fire Balloons* (1951). His crucial role in broadening the audience for science fiction cannot be argued.

As previously mentioned he drew less criticism for his fantasy and “weird tales” and likewise can be credited with stretching that genre as well, updating 19th century Gothic fiction by setting his stories in contemporary surroundings and populating them with a different range of characters. Nevertheless, some found his characterizations, especially in these stories as “too cheerful and idealized” and found some of his narratives “overwritten.” In comparison to his peers writing similar kinds of stories, this criticism finds some justification. However, I disagree with the criticism he received for his overall treatment and confrontation of evil. What seemed too simplistic for some seems to me only more realistic. In these stories Bradbury basically vanquished evil through acceptance and good cheer but malevolence and horror had a complex, parasitic life of its own and never remained dead and buried for long. This will be discussed further in a later chapter, but in Bradbury, piquancy trumps pessimism. Resolution or redemption may be incomplete, but despair is a pretender, an impostor to be unmasked. However, in this cynical age I believe some critics have held this against him as well. In deference to the tragic and desperate as a higher form of art, they fail to appreciate Bradbury’s “life affirming fictions,” or how his work actively engages currents of thought floating around in modern culture.

Furthermore, in critical terms, one may detect a fundamental bias against fantasy in American fiction, certainly a critical one. In the American tradition, Bradbury rests in the L. Frank Baum stream; part of his work focusing upon children and a general sense of wonder, which is not valued by many contemporary critics. His frequent focus on children and “coming of age” is a common theme and since the late 60s has won him a

place in High School²⁷ and college curricula; perhaps another obstacle to his acceptance as a canonical writer. But there is more to his work than that of a “safe” writer for students to “cut their teeth on.” Indeed as Mengeling observed the author’s work remains in school curricula because “unlike so many other science fiction writers that once seemed relevant but now only quaint, Bradbury’s stories still connect with and speak to youthful readers of both genders” (ix), and currently he remains among the top dozen writers whose works are being taught in science fiction classes.

Moreover, the fantastic, outside the Gothic, is something of an alien form to the United States, a country “born late” and thus lacking the mythopoetic archetypes of great antiquity. It also seems to run counter to the American mindset, a country where pragmatism became a philosophy, so the American fantasist is at a double disadvantage. This may help explain the fact that many of Bradbury’s early supporters were British or British expatriates living in America like Christopher Isherwood. Bradbury’s peculiar type of fantastic writing led to popularity and critical respect outside the U.S. very early. By the late 1950s his work was highly regarded by many French critics for “a creative form of Surrealism” and would be ranked with the American literary masters there (Eller, *Unbound* 119) In South America they appreciated the Magic Realism²⁸ they perceived in his writing. Indeed, many Bradbury tales similarly placed magical beliefs on a par with science and blended history and legend, creating a world at once solid and slippery. He has been extremely popular in Russia where many saw the spirit of their traditional folk tales²⁹ reflected in his stories.

Yet none of the aforementioned drawbacks inherent to the American context for the creation and reception of fantasy hindered Bradbury. In fact, it is one of the areas where Bradbury shines, expertly crafting a distinctly modern, but humanistic mythology and adding vitality to the genre by rejecting the Gothic weight of guilt and punishment, in effect upsetting conventions and carnivalizing the ideas of Freud and Nietzsche. While a

²⁷ I believe I encountered an abridged version of one of Bradbury’s stories as early as the 2nd or 3rd grade.

²⁸ Although Bradbury did not like labels he was not uncomfortable with this one, and would occasionally refer to his writing as being of this vein.

²⁹ One of the earlier and repeated criticisms of Bradbury by the “hard” science fiction camp is that his stories read like Russian folk tales.

post-Freudian writer he frequently engaged these thinkers yet neither of them have any overweening authority in his work; rather he playfully scrutinized the tragic seriousness of some of their notions as Eller and Touponce point out. Avoiding the enclosed fantasy worlds created by earlier writers, he opted for more real, familiar, and present-day settings where ambiguously magical characters or elements would appear causing the reader to question accepted notions or view everyday reality from a different perspective.

As mentioned earlier, there seems to be something in Bradbury for every taste, or as he has stated, he has the ability to “speak in tongues.” He is difficult to classify but is an impressionistic and idiosyncratic writer whose blending of disparate technical and thematic elements, and powers of description animate a unique style. Listen to how one of Bradbury’s characters, Immanuel Brokaw, the unconventional psychiatrist from the short story, *The Man in the Rorschach Shirt* (1966) marvels over the effect his clothing has over others. “This shirt of mine ...The colors. The patterns. One thing to that man, another to the girl, a third to the boy. Zebras, goats, lightnings, Egyptian amulets...all different colors, all different pattern mixes...Ten billion glances, ten billion startled responses!” This story is a good example of the author’s “carnivalization,” for although it does not dismiss “the talking cure” it playfully turns the serious practices of traditional psychology on its head. The character’s wild canvass of a shirt could serve as a metaphor for Bradbury’s writing, noted for exercising a similarly immediate, peculiarly personal effect upon readers and likewise, eliciting a mixed chorus of critical responses.

Strong initial impressions should invite one to discover what may be operative beneath the surface of a work, and criticism has been moving in this direction although at this time his status as the only “science fiction” writer on the threshold of the canon, a writer who “almost makes it” is prevalent if not the norm. This is exemplified by Harold Bloom’s previously cited introduction to *Fahrenheit 451* in the “Modern Critical Interpretations” series. However Bloom is ambivalent as he recognizes the novel’s “prophetic elements” and continued “relevance” due to its “ironic ability to inhabit somewhat diverse periods” (Bloom 1-2). I find these comments highly significant and would apply them to the author’s larger body of work, justifying his continued popularity and ongoing critical interest.

VII BRADBURY'S EARLIEST ADAPTATIONS: AUDIO AND VISUAL

As stated at the outset of the chapter, I wanted to highlight Bradbury as a self-trained mass media artist. I believe this background or orientation facilitated his passage from being a writer to multi-media artist. Regardless of critical appraisals, it should be recognized that perhaps no other author has covered a wider range: over six-hundred short stories, novels, poems, stage plays, essays, reviews, memoirs, operas, musicals, screen and teleplays. Taken together, the sheer volume of Bradbury's work in other media may be unrivaled by any other 20th century writer. His writing, by himself or others has consistently been adapted and this began very early in his career. In this last section I offered a brief overview of some of these earlier works that although outside the primary focus of this thesis, may give further evidence of the performative and cinematic elements in his work.

His first adaptation came as he was beginning to gain recognition for his short stories. He adapted an unpublished manuscript into a short radio play, broadcast nationwide on January 2nd 1947 as "The Meadow." It was a nostalgic tale highlighting the necessity of imagination in a world becoming too rationalized and mundane; a theme frequently appearing in his earlier works. Essentially it is a two character play with an old watchman refusing to leave a large, outdoor Hollywood film set that was to be demolished. Unlike the later published short story, and perhaps to suit his sponsors, there is a happy ending where the studio head is persuaded to preserve the set as sort of a public park. Bradbury adapted his story for performance *before* it was printed and this pattern would be repeated in the future. Indeed, reading the printed story one can see how it was well suited for performance and probably gained from it. Its single abstract idea was dramatized through emotionally evocative, sometimes poetic and poignant dialogue. It was an auspicious beginning for the author's ventures into non-print media, winning a place in *The Greatest One Act Plays of 1947-48*³⁰. Moreover, the work had sufficient staying power to be included in an anthology of one act plays *Plays to Remember* (1967). The short story version was published in 1953.

³⁰ Ray Bradbury: Leading from the Heart/L.A. Stage Blog July 22, 2009.

In the early 1950s, before television overshadowed radio as a dramatic medium, several of Bradbury's stories were adapted by others for programs such as *Escape*, *Dimension X* and *X Minus 1*. He adapted a work for BBC radio in 1968 and two other works for The American Public Broadcasting System in 1976, but for the most part his presence on radio has been through adaptation by others. This includes a mid-1980s series of 13 half hour dramatizations, *Bradbury 13* for American Public Radio. Ben Indick judged them to be of "a style not dissimilar to those radio productions which Bradbury would have listened to as a child, decades earlier; they are perhaps indicative of the nostalgia which has always enriched his mind's eye" (10). An even greater number of Bradbury's works have been adapted for BBC radio as Phil Nichols observed:

Almost without exception, the Bradbury stories adapted for BBC radio between 1971 and 2007 have been effectively realized: sometimes faithful translations, sometimes moderately altered, but often creative reimaginings. This contrasts significantly with Bradbury's treatment in film and television (88).

While I do not entirely disagree with the last statement, it seems to me the quality of Bradbury's filmed works was influenced by the degree of involvement the author had with them; less in terms of fidelity to the source text but according to the author's adaptive vision.

In radio drama we hear the word (and accompanying sound effects) but it is the spoken word to be savoured, that exists to create images in the minds of listeners so here the richness of Bradbury's prose, even its occasional theatricality would not pose the same problems it might in film. Likewise, the strong visual quality of a text is a plus for radio that does not face the challenge of pictorial realization. We may also speculate that in a modest medium like radio drama, adaptors probably remain closer to the source text without the pressure to lengthen or embellish the stories for film length presentation. Nichols believes that Bradbury is well suited to radio adaptation because his descriptions tend to *evoke* rather than *depict*, (author's italics) but added that some writers were "drawn to the actual story or plot as much as to the descriptive flourishes" (79). Moreover, he observed that by the 1990s his stories had achieved "classic" status which led to repeated BBC adaptations of some of the same stories.

Bradbury entered the visual media through collaboration with EC Comics during the early 1950s. In 1951 the EC editors used four uncredited Bradbury stories as sources of ideas for their comic book titles. At the author's suggestion they later paid a modest "secondary rights" fee for these before entering into formal association. It is interesting to note that Bradbury anticipated the future in suggesting a "theme-based" comic book format, something resembling the comic-novel or graphic novel. This concept would not begin to be realized until the late 1960s, but recognizing the quality of Bradbury's stories and their transferability to the visual story telling format, great success was in store. Many of these adaptations have become classics of the genre and remain in print. One must credit the exceptional artistry of the adaptors for this but also the quality of the material they had to work with. Aside from the emotional reaction provoked by the stories, EC editor Al Feldstein found "delight in their plot, and in their mood and content" (Weist 111). The arresting imagery was there, they felt it was only necessary to express the point of these images in stories for the Ur language of comics. As Feldstein put it:

I felt that he was a "master artist" painting with lyrical syntax, masterful mind pictures. I marveled at his style, and I attempted with all my comic book format know-how and experience to capture his intimate storytelling talent in that form (Weist 111).

While suitable for comic adaptation they remained close to their source, Feldstein considered the stories uniquely and originally Bradbury's and felt no need to instill his own storytelling techniques in adaptation. Finally, I find the editor's comments on the "transferability" of Bradbury's works worth noting.

Bradbury has to be read to be fully appreciated. You have to form those wonderful pictures in your mind that he paints with his wonderful words. Some dramatic adaptations of his writings (not those that were written explicitly for their medium!) have, in my opinion, failed to some extent. They lack the unique literary element of the original prose (Weist 113).

These quotes concerning the radio and comic book adaptations suggest that only a minimum of adaptive creativity was necessary and support Bradbury's idea (developed in a later chapter) that his shorter work especially is best adapted "as is," since they are

organic wholes. Bradbury's work would enjoy extensive graphic adaptation in the coming years including *Fahrenheit 451* as graphic novel in 2009.

Bradbury took graphic adaptation a step further with his story *Icarus Montgolifer Wright* (1956). As the title suggests the story dealt with man's dream of flight. With the space program in full swing Bradbury, with the help of his artist friend and collaborator, Joseph Mugnaini adapted his story for what would become a short animated film in 1962. The narrative is essentially an astronaut's dream of the history of flight before his mission to the moon. Bradbury adapted the text of the story into a series of poetic verses to accompany the rather stark, figurative paintings used in this eighteen-minute feature. These were filmed in close ups, pans and circular shots that fade in and out from different angles. This conjunction of word and image had a powerful emotional and expressive effect. More than a cartoon, it is better likened to an experimentally animated poem³¹. This striking flow of image with phrase in narrative flow was nominated for the short subject Academy Award of 1962 and was screened at the White House. Bradbury intended it as a way of reaching people and transmitting enthusiasm for the space race through aesthetic seriousness, in a way that scientists and technocrats could not. Immediately after his first comic adaptations Bradbury would become a Hollywood writer, which is the subject of the next chapter.

³¹ Aside from Mugnaini, George Clayton Johnson, a junior writing colleague of Bradbury's had some input into the finished project. The film may be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lm5kylavY3Y>

Chapter 2

BRADBURY AND CINEMA

I INTRODUCTION

Ray Bradbury was a writer who worked extensively in other media and I think it would be useful to examine his views on the cinema, its nature and potential. I would like to present in summary form some of the characteristics of Bradbury's writing that may make it conducive to dramatic adaptation, as well as his behind the scenes involvement with the film industry that was quite significant. In this chapter I also want to survey some of Bradbury's early filmed works aside from the works in focus to give a fuller idea of his wider experience with the medium, and finally his own ideas on the adaptive process and his approach to it. It should become apparent that Bradbury's venture into other media sprang more from a desire to see his work gain fuller expression and release meanings that were only potential in the adapted texts. This activity mirrored Bradbury's extensive revisiting and revision of his written texts. Like others, he was certainly aware that adaption would allow his work to reach a wider audience but monetary gains were not his main concern. For instance, his theatre adaptations were most mostly money losing ventures, although he never tired of them, and he rejected the majority of very lucrative offers he received to write for the cinema adapting the work of others. Therefore, I think it would be interesting to view Bradbury's ideas and practice before surveying the theoretical insights into literary adaptation in the next chapter.

Many writers are indifferent or even dismissive of film as a popular art while eager to sell their work to the studios, after all that there is a great deal of money in that. The average screenplay for a feature film runs about 120 pages and will earn its author 100,000 dollars or more. A writer's work will almost certainly reach a much wider audience when filmed but it ceases to be the writer's property and even if an author adapts his own work (or writes an original screenplay) it will invariably be altered or rewritten, perhaps many times before it is filmed and a final cut is made. Therefore, few writers are very satisfied with adaptations of their work.

Even an accomplished writer will not automatically be successful in writing for the screen. For instance, F. Scott Fitzgerald labored in Hollywood during the 1930s with little success, finding it difficult to write for the image-based medium. Moreover, though he was well paid, he thought it was “hack” work since he felt obliged to write at a “lower level.” On the other hand, William Faulkner³² seems to have taken screenwriting seriously and as an interesting challenge collaborating on numerous films notably with director Howard Hawks on the classics *To Have and Have Not* (1944) and *The Big Sleep* (1946). However, he usually adapted the work of others or occasionally wrote originally for Television. His screen credits show that he most often collaborated with others on scripts especially in the area of dialogue, a useful talent for a writer who cares to venture into performance work. John Steinbeck had even more screen credits and often adapted his own work with success. Among other things, certain attitudes and aptitudes figure into the achievement of any writer that ventures into cinema. In terms of the attributes I have just mentioned, it seems Bradbury was well poised to learn this different form of writing.

Thank God I have these instincts that have taught me all my life to collect cartoons and to read poetry, because secretly, I knew, the poem would help me make images on screen. So when I write screenplays, they are economical. I learned how not to talk, to use the metaphors of the cinema to prove points (Mogan and Siegal, 121).

This allows us a glimpse into some of Bradbury’s views regarding cinema and screenwriting. Being a composite or comprehensive art he recognized aspects it shares with other art forms, and it is refreshing and perhaps unusual to hear a writer say he “learned how *not* to talk” and use “the metaphors of the cinema to prove points.” For example, his unproduced, (dated 1960) adaptation of his novel *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) contains only seven pages with dialogue out of the first fifty pages. “If I can find visual metaphors to act out the truths for me, to begin scenes and end them, then I do it” (Stephens Jr. 384). Bradbury loves the power of well placed words but uses them

³² Though I have not seen it, some years ago an unfinished screenplay of his for a Dracula film from the 1940s was discovered. It seems he was not adverse to any kind of assignment.

sparingly in film. Here it seems strategies of metaphor give way to systems of imagery with words/dialogue ideally sandwiched between the performative metaphors. Through reflection and experience, he developed insights uniquely his own, into the process of adaptation for the stage and cinema. I will examine his stage work later in the chapter devoted to *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*. Regarding the 7th art, biographer Sam Weller printed Bradbury's thoughts on the cinema's influence on his work:

When I talk of myself as being a child of my time, perhaps the biggest truth is that I am a cinematic child of my time, in that this influence has probably had a lot to do with the direction my writing has taken over the years, the type of writing I have done and the way I have expressed myself (28).

Bradbury made many similar statements about how strongly he was impressed by the movies, but here he specifically points to film as a wide-ranging influence on his writing. Of course the cinema influenced all 20th century writers to some degree, but none have been more forthcoming than Ray Bradbury, who seems to have learned part of his novelistic craft from critically watching a huge number of films. In light of this it may be worth noting the author's ideas about the medium, what he values in it, and his involvement with the industry before outlining his ideas on the adaptive process.

II INSIGHTS ON THE CINEMAS' POTENTIAL AND PURPOSE

In general, and consistent with the author's concern and sympathetic portrayal of the "other" and outsider, is Bradbury's appreciation of film's potential to raise awareness and build bridges of understanding and sympathy for groups and individuals. In fact, he rarely spoke at any length about film without mentioning this, occasionally referring to the cinematic apparatus as a kind of "empathy machine" with the power to change our customs and ways of looking at people and things. "Motion pictures are not machines – they're dreams. Mechanical dreams that are fabulous and change our lives and make us better, make us behave better" (Kunert 71). This view is of course shared by many and puts Bradbury in company with post-war, realist film theorists like Andre Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer who championed the humanistic potential of cinema. For them, the

higher purpose of film regardless of artifice or fantasy was to tell human stories delivering man from the void of the abstract and to remind us of our essential link to one another, nature, and the world we live in. In a similar way, Bradbury did not see the iconicity of film image and sound as enlisted to support an unyielding aesthetic of realism, but still believed film had a special quality to help us see life more clearly. He compared the medium to poetry and believed it also thrived on metaphor.

Bradbury's esteem for film is further expressed in a 1980 interview with Mogan and Siegel where he spoke more about film than writing. When the interviewers suggested that he seemed to ascribe to the notion that, "the impact and believability of a well-made scene can possibly be greater in film than in literature" (119), the author agreed unreservedly insisting that poetry and film are very close to each other, that "the pure moments in motion pictures are haiku, and the effect is immediate and transcendent" (119). As case in point, Bradbury referred to a sequence in *Lawrence of Arabia* (David Lean, 1962) that begins with neither dialogue nor music, sensibly positioning the spectator in the scene while building suspense and expectations. Against all odds, Lawrence backtracks to rescue a rider who has fallen off his camel in the desert; it is about seven minutes in length and largely silent. According to Bradbury, as the sequence progresses skillful use of the camera finally accompanied by some music and a bit of dialogue at the end when Lawrence has accomplished his task affects such a release of tension that the viewer may even feel the urge to laugh a little in relief. When Lawrence arrives, his camel, perhaps so relieved to be out of the desert and back to camp is running out of control and a youth has to come forth to put the situation in hand. This lends some humility to the essentially heroic sequence suggesting there is unnoticed poetry all around us. He believed the relationship between great poems and excellent screenplays lied in their dealing in compact images; that the right metaphor, the right image placed in a scene can replace four pages of dialogue (Bradbury 1996, 127).

In his writing, Bradbury often seemed intent to make certain philosophical points and did not always avoid occasionally long-winded, moralizing speeches from some of his characters. However, he did *not* see the dramatic structure in film as a verbal priority. Bradbury's screenplays and teleplays give ample proof of this and were always highly audio-visual in nature, including camera directions, shot compositions and sound cues,

though at times conceptually extravagant. He believed “the logic of events always gives way to the logic of the senses,” so he championed the image; subtle and carefully crafted, capitalizing on symbol and metaphor to allow the viewer’s imagination to “float free” (Mogan 140), rather than be constricted by the power and immediacy of images. These views seem consistent with Bradbury’s generally “readerly” writing style and the fact that his prose descriptions tend to create a tone and atmosphere which may strongly appeal to a reader’s memory and senses through conceptual apprehension similar to “reverie” as other commentators have observed.

A truism espoused by many Hollywood filmmakers affirms that while film may seek to make a point or send a message, it is best subordinated to character driven narrative. As one of the old Hollywood moguls said, “If I want to send a message, I’ll call Western Union.” Bradbury felt the same, disliking films or novels with a sermonizing tone, avoiding films that are “supposed to be good for me;” he saw such self-conscious efforts to “do good” as “fatal” to art (Kelly 159). While few would favor a “pointless” film, if there is such a thing; the best, most popular films usually make us “feel” something first and foremost. This was mirrored in Bradbury’s ideas about writing. He believed stories succeed, regardless of plot, when they cause a reader to react sympathetically with the characters and viewed the fiction writer as an “emotionalist” first. “A story is not successful through logic, or beautiful thinking, or by its appeal to the intellect, though these elements must be present. It succeeds in its appeal to the readers’ emotions” (Willems 6). The acclaimed science fiction writer Orson Scott Card approached the author’s work from a similar angle in a 1980 review³³ of *The Stories of Ray Bradbury*, where he wrote:

It is not the characters he expects you to identify with. Rather, he means to capture you in his own voice, expects you to see through his eyes. And his eyes see, not the cliché plot, but the whole meaning of the events; not the scenes of the individual people, but yourself and your own fears and your own family and the answers, at least, to the isolation that had seemed inevitable to you (5).

³³ *Washington Post Book World*; November 2, 1980.

I find Card's comments quite significant, especially coming from a writer of a different generation than Bradbury and one whose science fictional/fantasy works have another cast entirely. He seems to appreciate the author's work on a personal level. Filmmakers seek characters that an audience can identify with one way or another, and may succeed partially at best. However, if spectators may take reflection and personal meaning from the broader canvas of a narrative and its events this may be better still, and make the movie going experience more worthwhile. Bradbury excels in this kind of storytelling, and whether we care for a particular story or not we are rarely indifferent to it. Card seems to be saying that Bradbury is able to transcend even hackneyed plots to connect at a personal level and positively with his readers, a trait that not all writers have, and one that certainly holds promise for a popular art like cinema

A Los Angeles resident since adolescence, Bradbury developed long, lasting friendships with actors, directors and others in the industry, and thus developed an enormous respect for the monumental undertaking required in completing a motion picture. Through these personal and professional connections, he spent a considerable amount of time on film sets, witnessing first-hand how films were made and so he could speak with added authority. He had a lot to say about the movies, particularly in regard to how he thought they could be made better. Perhaps for this reason interviewers often asked him if he would like to direct a feature film. He thought he might be "luckier" than some in directing because he believed he had learned the screen form as a writer. However, he resisted the idea, doubting his own patience, stamina and whether he could work in collaboration with such a large number of creative people. He harbored the ambition to direct a short film for many years (Weller 290) and although this did not materialize, Bradbury did co-direct some of the reshoots for the troubled production of his 1962 novel of the same name, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (Jack Clayton, 1982) (Touponce ed. 181).

III VIEWS ON SCIENCE FICTION AND TERROR

Bradbury never lost his youthful fascination and admiration for the medium and voiced strong opinions in relation to fantastic cinema in particular. The sheer number of this kind of film may suggest they are inexpensive or “easy” to make and the mechanics of cinema certainly makes these films possible, but also their prevalence from the very birth of cinema to the present suggests a substantial portion of the public wants to see them. Bradbury believed that both science fiction and terror had a worthy role within cinema, and that while they may be “easy” to make, it is difficult to make good ones. Bradbury always saw promise in science fiction, in reference to present and future issues he called it the “fiction of ideas and the essential literature of our age” with a nearly unlimited range of subject matter that can be serious as well as entertaining.

He defined science fiction, quite simply as “the art of the possible...ideas that can work themselves out and become real and happen in the world,” (Unger 109) as opposed to fantasy which partakes of the supernatural and breaks the known laws of physics. While he did not labor the distinction between science fiction and fantasy, he did separate these from terror on the basis of whether the filmmaker seemed to be attempting to impart “the sense of wonder” of the former or the dread and sense of mortality inherent to the latter. It is difficult to discern if he actually favored one over the other; to him they both mattered.

Except for the work of friends, Bradbury admitted that he stopped reading science fiction and fantasy in young adulthood saying that it was “incestuous,” cautioning writers that “you should read in your own field only when you’re young.” He admired the humanistic science fiction of Robert A. Heinlein, an early mentor he claims dared him “to be human instead of mechanical” (Kelly 156-157) so naturally, Bradbury placed a premium on the “human” in science fiction film, the relationship between technology and man and his place in the cosmos.

However, his preoccupation with the film image was acute in science fiction because he thought this branch of the fantastic should be packaged in totally believable images. For Bradbury, many of the older science fiction films failed precisely because of poorly constructed images. For example, he preferred the old *Flash Gordon* stories in the

comic strips rather than on film because he found the drawings well executed and believable. However, he gave an approving nod to a few 1950s era science fiction films because although most of these lacked resources adequate to their ambitions, some of them displayed a great amount of imagination, ideas and a serious intent. He could appreciate the wizardry of the later films but was less impressed with their big-budget action/adventure formats if they lacked these qualities. Of necessity Bradbury saw good science fiction films as expensive undertakings requiring concentrated effort to “achieve atmosphere and build architectures” to be believable.

In a 1990 interview, he claimed that “we love science fiction because it’s architectural. All the big science fiction films of the last twenty years are architectural” (Couteau 134). He singled out *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, 1977) for their creations of massive ships which he likened to marvelous cities. It seems one of the things that captivated Bradbury in science fiction film was the creation of believable, habitable spaces; and if a fantastic space was somehow desirable to visit or dwell in (like the mother ship in *Close Encounters*), then better still. He used the term “architectural science fiction films” for those more elaborate films that could “rebuild our concepts of the future,” seeing them as “manifestations of the *words* of science fiction and the architecture of our dreams” (Bradbury, *Yestermorrow* 24). Moreover, he was enthusiastic about some of the more recent films that treated space exploration, and particularly the colonization of Mars in a serious and realistic manner. He believed science fiction reached its highest potential as a visual medium and fervently believed³⁴ that filmed stories could inspire individuals³⁵ and

³⁴ This was his hope behind his short film *Icarus Montgolifer Wright* (1962) referenced at the end of the previous chapter. Bradbury often spent time at high profile research centers like The Jet Propulsion Laboratory and the California Institute of Technology and marveled at how a large part of these scientists and technicians were first inspired by science fiction. Bradbury had a considerable role in popularizing the American space program during the 1960s and published 3 well regarded articles in the nationally circulated *Life* magazine during that period. He had the chance to meet most of the astronauts and discovered they shared much in common. A feature on the moon was officially designated “Dandelion Crater” in honor of his 1957 novel. Virtually all the early astronauts grew up as small-town, mid-western boys, ambitious dreamers as he was.

³⁵ Unfortunately, I have no exact reference for this but some years ago the Chinese government launched a massive program of printing and distributing illustrated science fiction stories for children, especially distributed to those outside the large cities in an attempt to stimulate their interest in science and technology. It would not be surprising if some of Bradbury’s stories were among them.

help revitalize the space program. Bradbury believed that care must be taken and money spent on the “atmospheres and architectures” in science fiction films so we may accept what they present as “a thing ... totally real, yet fantastic;” enough so we can have a base to build on in our minds anything the picture may be lacking. He was delighted with the “grotesque, heavy looking” (Mogen and Siegel 118) spaceships of Kubrick (and others) since they were entirely reasonable as vessels built in space to travel in that same vacuum. But was not against the artistic flourish of the whistling, streamlined vessels from *Star Wars*, they were not too stylized to spoil the illusion, but touch the story with “romance,” which he considered essential to pull or drive one to make a reality from a dream. Indeed, he did consider filmed science fiction more powerful than literature, “If it’s really good, it stays with you for a long time. I think it can change your life” (Mogen and Siegel 118-119). Bradbury said a great deal more about the genre of science fiction than about the films. However, he spoke more frequently and critically about films of the supernatural and horror genre. A repeated criticism (especially in terms of adaptation) was that most film directors and screenwriters misapprehend fantasy, an idea we shall return to later. In general, Bradbury was drawn to the type of fantasy/terror filmmaking that Val Lewton was known for. As producer, writer and head of RKO’s horror division, Lewton turned out a number of low budget, though stylish and sophisticated horror pictures during the 1940s, like *Cat People* (1942) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) both directed by Jacques Tourneur. Eschewing the classic monsters of the time, Lewton opted for ambiguity, subtle symbolism, mood and suspense. More often than not, his monsters lurked in the mind of the viewer and his films relied on shadows and sounds to carry scenes. Dealing with emotions and uncertainties he put very little that was shocking on screen preferring instead suggestion of the unseen and unknown.

In an essay published in 2005, only a few years before his death, Bradbury reiterated his life-long preference for the fantastic films that concentrate on metaphor and “dare to be subtle,” like Robert Wise’s *The Haunting* (1962) of which he said, “everything is shadow and lack of substance...you hear much and see nothing. It manages to cause a permanent curvature of your spine” (135). Although it belongs more to the science fiction genre, Bradbury’s comments about *It Came from Outer Space* (Jack Arnold, 1953), his first story credit for the movies, are enlightening. His screen treatment

indicated “that the invaders from another world should be hidden in shadow.” Perhaps since the film was in 3-D, the studio (Universal) felt it should give the audience a glimpse of the extraterrestrial, while an unconvinced Bradbury remarked that you could “cut the seven seconds from the film that destroyed the illusion, and wind up with a very nice picture indeed” (Bradbury, *Speaks* 135). While not unhappy with the finished film, he also thought more suspense could have been built visually in the empty desert setting. Years later when these issues were brought up in an interview to the film’s producer, William Alland, he concluded that Bradbury “may be right” (Weaver 22).

Turning to terror, as one might expect, he disliked the grotesque realism of the more modern “shockers.” He shared his opinions and vented his frustration in no uncertain terms in the essay “Death Warmed Over,” first printed in the January 1968 issue of *Playboy*. “We do, indeed, know the facts of murder, torture, sickness, greed and death. We do not have to have the facts repeated in crude detail” (Bradbury, “Death” 273). In the same essay he claimed “the horror film began to kill itself off when it began to explain itself. Fantasy, like the butterfly, cannot stand handling,” (Bradbury, “Death” 273) and he insisted that the resolution of these narratives must “transcend raw fact. The symbolic acts, not the minuscule details of the act, are everything...Fact without interpretation is but a glimpse into the elephants’ bone yard” (Bradbury, “Death” 274). Overall, his plea was for a fine balance between the rational and the dream or “transcending intuition” for the creation of these films

Beyond aesthetic concerns, Bradbury maintained a keen interest in films of terror and the supernatural because he thought they had an important purpose to serve that dovetailed into his general philosophy of what art can do for us. That is, pinpointing tensions, organizing and exhibiting them so they can be properly faced and understood. He believed the good horror films partook of philosophy, religion and the mystery of life creating a pictorial, dramatic representation of the unknowable so we may “make do” with death and destruction. He insisted the beautifully made horror film contains “a bit of magic” and a “formula:”

We have a stake, or we have a cross, or we have a Bible, we have some symbolic thing that we can use to do death in. Then, symbolically, we can release our tension in regard to the unknown. And a good horror film allows us, then, to

destroy death, and for a little while be on better terms with the unknown, just as a good parable in the Bible allows us to do the same thing. Or the good advice of a philosopher friend or a psychiatrist can help us do the same. We need varying attacks on these tensions on many levels (Harvey 12).

Of course he saw the existence of death and horror in our lives as real and serious, something that may produce anxiety that we must digest and rid ourselves of so we can proceed better in life. “We just can’t face nothingness,” he said, “We’ve got to make something of it. So we can hold death in our hands for a little while, or on our tongues, or in our eyes, and make do with it” (Berton 37). However, Bradbury disliked many horror comics and films because he believed they dealt with their subjects in a cavalier or careless manner and failed to relieve the tension they had built. He considered such works “uncreative.” He was certainly not against a comic or satirical touch for subjects that could become overly serious, but cared little for the tone of many contemporary films:

But, if you have a continual bombardment of making fun of a serious attempt to make do with life, then you’re in danger of winding up with nothing. And I’m afraid of this. I don’t know what the answer is except to go out and make better horror films (Berton 38).

I find it interesting that Bradbury’s ideas on terror and the grotesque in film rather closely mirror those of film theorist Siegfried Kracauer. In his discussion of the genre, Kracauer invoked the myth of Perseus and the Medusa. So horrible was the Medusa that looking upon her would paralyze man or beast, turning them to stone, but Perseus manages to behead her by observing her reflection in his polished shield. Kracauer likened the film screen to Perseus’ shield where the spectator may take in and incorporate into memory “the face of things too dreadful to be beheld in reality,” and thus “redeem horror from its invisibility behind the veils of panic and imagination” (305-306).

IV VIEWS ON MAINSTREAM CINEMA

From the mid 1950s onwards, Bradbury could no longer be considered an outsider; he was a Hollywood writer and many valued his opinions. He became a member of the screenwriters guild and beginning in the 1960s was an invited guest lecturer to film students at the University of California three or four times a year. His opinions ran the gamut from seeming a bit conservative to surprising in some ways. Bradbury strongly held to two characteristics he considered essential for good cinema: ideas and proper endings. Speaking to young filmmakers at the American Film Institute in 1969, Bradbury said he didn't think it important to be avant-garde.

That's a dead end. I think that ideas are everything. If you come up with a good idea, if you are thinking for yourself, if you are creating out of your own needs, then your work will automatically be avant-guard, then you are going to be doing something fresh and original (Stevens Jr. 374-375).

This is in tune with Bradbury's early advice to writers. That they should not "slant" their material because it is a sign that one is striving to copy someone and that writers should do their best for the story, not for the market. By "idea" Bradbury is referring to one of his recognized fortes, finding novel approaches to perhaps familiar, universal themes, something considered essential in the film industry. Without a strong core idea, Bradbury believed a story on paper or screen will lack a life of its own; have no movement or feeling and will not hold together in entirety or as a whole.

In the same AFI interview Bradbury deflated two critically acclaimed films considered avant-garde at the time: *Medium Cool* (Haskill Wexler, 1969) and *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969). He was neither repelled nor impressed with their radical, counter culture themes commenting that the former had some interesting cinematic elements and the latter he called "a travelogue with a dime-store philosophy" (Stevens 374) but was saved by the performance of Jack Nicholson. However, he found both films obvious and lacking in ideas. He had no interest in servicing directors either, as he thought Jean-Luc Godard was "bored with himself" with only "second-rate, sophomoric ideas," and he thought Antonioni was mostly the same. Unapologetically opinionated, he concluded that "either the story is there or it's not" (Stephens 377).

In film, ideas are largely developed through character and interaction which he thought was frequently lacking in post-war cinema. “You have to give us the moments of truth and take enough time with each of the characters so they become ricochet boards off which things happen” (Stephens 375). Likewise, he also believed in the aside. Something he saw coming from a writer “listening to his characters” and putting it down on paper. That is, opening a window on the dreams or internal working of a character so the audience may understand and care more about them even if this requires a brief pause in narrative flow. And it may be realized in a number of ways, either a character can “speak out their dream, dream them out at night or act them out in some way that’s special” (Mogan and Siegal 109-110).

Bradbury found fault with films (and stage drama) for being either “too obvious” and unimaginative or devoid of ideas. He didn’t like what he called “self-conscious” films with overt messages that try to be “good” for the viewer, but at the same time, he disliked films he saw as “pointless,” obviously he thought a balance needed to be found. As important as he believed the image to be, visual metaphors as a way of engaging an audience and so forth, he still believed a good screenplay was essential to a successful film. He thought that although a shooting script is only a blueprint for a film allowing latitude for minor change or improvisation, one cannot work satisfactorily from a faulty screenplay³⁶. He viewed many student films at the University of Southern California and thought this was most often their problem. Having read many screenplays, Bradbury thought that generally screenwriters do not put things in that should be there. He believed a director can help a writer, but to be a good screenwriter one needs to have a certain mastery of other forms of writing first, whether the short story, novel or even poetry (Stevens Jr. 383-384). He cautioned film students saying:

Don’t kid yourself about being a writer if you’re not. A lot of directors kid themselves that they’re writers. The two talents don’t necessarily come together.

In fact, in the history of films, you can’t name more than a handful of directors who were good screenwriters (Stevens Jr. 374).

³⁶ He believed this was the main problem with the adaptation of his story *In a Season of Calm Weather* for the film *The Picasso Summer* (Robert Sallin, 1969). The film’s earlier director jettisoned most of the script for a more improvisational approach.

He cited Billy Wilder as the great exception to this and to a lesser degree Francis Ford Coppola. Having worked with John Huston³⁷, he did not think he had any capacity to write at all.

Bradbury believed that budding filmmakers can learn more from seeing bad films than good ones because their weaknesses are immediately evident and so one can see what not to do. However, he thought great films were “mysterious.” “There is no way of solving it. Why does *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941) work? Well, it just does. It’s brilliant on every level, and there’s no way of putting your finger on any one thing that’s right. It’s just all right” (Stevens Jr.128). Perhaps he is expressing appreciation for how the various elements combine to make something greater than a whole or masterful creation of metaphor which he saw as so important. But at any rate, he allowed film students to shoot his short stories, saying:

Do it. But there’s one restriction I put on you. Shoot the whole story. Just read what I’ve done and line up the shots by the paragraph. All the paragraphs are shots. By the way the paragraph reads, you know whether it’s a close-up or a long shot (Stevens Jr. 131).

He believed these modest student films better than many of the big productions because they coherently followed his story.

It has been said that beyond entertainment or diversion, many cinema goers may be “seeking to make up for the gaps in their own experience, throwing themselves into a search for “lost time.” Or are seeking to fill a spiritual vacuum formed as a result of the specific conditions of modern existence: constant activity, curtailment of human contact, and the materialist bent of modern education” (Tarkovsky 82-83), or as Raymond Durgnat rather bluntly put it in *Films and Feelings* (1967):

For the masses, the cinema is dreams and nightmares, or it is nothing. It is an alternative life, experience freed from that “old devil consequences,” from the limitation of having one life to live. ...We live dangerously in safety. *We* are the immortal gods watching the screen characters live their anguished lifetime-in-90-

³⁷ Bradbury reminded the audience that all of Huston’s writing credits were either shared credits or controversial ones.

minute lives. Our immunity sets us free to participate “in the round.” Art doesn’t make the artist immortal, but it makes the audience *feel* immortal (135).

Ray Bradbury took a characteristically gentler approach, believing that since life is random and unfair, people go to the movies for glimmers of hope, reassurance and the pleasure of seeing poetic justice. Film critics like Leo Braudy have observed that cinematic texts tend to “fragment” after viewing, with people remembering certain parts or aspects (like the soundtrack) of a film while most of it quickly fades from memory. Attuned to this kind of thinking, and perhaps typical of someone who worked most often in the compact short story form, Bradbury believed that the conclusion of a film was all important, significantly elevating or diminishing the entire work. “People come to films drowned in reality, leaving behind heart failures, failed marriages, bad jobs, mean bosses, and future sickness. What they need is not happy endings, but proper endings” (*Speaks* 25).

Bradbury keenly felt a sense of “incompleteness” or “injustice” with the endings of many films. In early 1957, Bradbury was brought on board the writing staff of the independent production company of Harold Hecht, James Hill and Burt Lancaster³⁸ where he worked with others on the development of many film scripts. Although he did not work directly on this picture, after a screening of *Sweet Smell of Success* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1957) he raised some objections. Mainly, he insisted that the ending was wrong because the film’s monstrous protagonist was not sufficiently punished. Bradbury went unheeded and the film, for whatever reasons and in spite of an all-star cast did poorly at the box office. Bradbury collaborated on the screenplay of that film and urged that the actions of the unsavoury character “Falco” played by Tony Curtis “were gratuitously predatory ... and that it should be toned down” (Eller, *Unbound* 107). In the released version they were, perhaps reflecting Bradbury’s viewpoint.

His preoccupation with endings made him something of a revisionist critic when he wrote reviews which he did with some frequency. In the case of *Rosemary’s Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968) he thought the film “missed the chance after billions of years to heal the wound between Heaven and Hell, good and evil,” (*Speaks* 26) and the *Los*

³⁸ Lancaster, of course was a film star, Hill was a writer/producer and Hecht was a successful producer.

Angeles Times published Bradbury's own ending. Indeed, his critiques of films were occasionally published by the *Los Angeles Times*. He considered *Network* (Sidney Lumet, 1975) a fine film but penned an ingenious alternative ending which he sent with "apologies" to the director. It is interesting to note that Bradbury and legendary film critic Pauline Kael were called for a screening of the popular film *Rocky* (John Avildsen, 1976) and when asked as to whether the boxer protagonist should win or lose his fight, Bradbury recalled they replied almost in unison that it did not matter because the protagonist had behaved incredibly well (Bradbury, *Speaks* 26). He did not like profanity or blood in the movies and his adaptations never contained them, not even when his characters could very easily curse or become violent.

One might conclude that Bradbury believed that good cinema needed to obey certain moral guidelines; not because the world and life worked that way but because ideally, it should. I think it is beyond dispute that like any accomplished artist, Bradbury had a finely attuned awareness of human nature and the world we live in but he unashamedly assumed his brand of optimism and sentiment in the face of criticism. Bradbury opened one of his poems, "We Have Our Arts So We Won't Die of Truth" printed in *Zen and the Art of Writing* (1996 edition) like this: "Know only the Real? Fall dead. So Nietzsche said. We have our Arts so we won't die of the Truth. The World is too much with us" (173). Bradbury did not hold an exulted view of what the arts might "do" for us ultimately, but appreciated their value in giving us the power to confront life through a borrowed awareness and prevent us from falling victim to pessimism. Typically in Bradbury if we have "truth," revealed only by scientific reason, seeing too much, too clearly, it often leads to madness and paralysis, a negation of all values. He believed, like Nietzsche, that art should mask the intolerable facts of life, to reveal them in a manageable form.

V INVOLVEMENT WITH THE INDUSTRY

While Bradbury was on staff at the Hecht-Hill-Lancaster production company in 1957-8, he was assigned to adapt a recent novel by BBC film critic Roger Manvell, *The*

Dreamers. It concerned a few people in a small English village who share the same dream that returns, becoming progressively more nightmarish and making them progressively ill until one of them dies. The main action is a search for who is “projecting” this nightmare and helping the victims purge the evil that still resides in them. Bradbury found it a fascinating tale and spent a lot of creative energy in preparing it for the cinema. The source text revealed most of the key information at the beginning so it was a creative challenge for him to restructure the novel in cinematic terms. He essentially “rewrote” the novel delaying the release of information to build a suspense framework. He went on to write a treatment and then two drafts of a screenplay but it was never produced.

In 1957 the British writer Graham Green³⁹ was struck by one of Bradbury’s stories “And the Rock Cried Out,” brought it to the attention of acclaimed director Sir Carol Reed who contacted Bradbury about expanding the story for film adaptation. At around 7,000 words it is one of the author’s longer short stories and one of his best. It deals with an American couple stranded in coastal Central America just after a nuclear war has devastated the Northern Hemisphere. The couple find themselves in harsh servitude and under threat by the locals through resentment for centuries of white colonial exploitation and the annihilating war they have triggered. There is a great deal of suspense and an undercurrent of violence throughout and the story ends with the couple finally choosing to face the final vengeance of a mob, wishing to be seen and known as individuals instead of scapegoats.

Bradbury kept his source text intact while extending the screenplay to a draft of 180 pages, along the way developing more complex interaction between the couple and a variety of characters with differing attitudes from what had been for the most part a faceless mob. These characters control most of the rest of the action and the couple. As signs of atomic fallout are reaching the area, finally this couple along with a few other stranded Americans, head north to uncertainty in a small boat. Jonathan R. Eller quotes the last part of the screenplay where they set sail and the wife asks her husband, “Do

³⁹ Indeed, Green promoted Bradbury persuading his Scandinavian publishers to bring out the first Swedish editions of Bradbury’s work—*Fahrenheit 451* and *The October Country* (Eller, *Unbound* 114).

prayers work?” “Men work,” he replies. “And when they work very hard, *very* hard and well, it’s the same thing as prayer” (Eller, *Unbound* 113).

Although Reed remained enthusiastic about the script and advised Bradbury on it; it was never filmed. Many factors were involved not the least of which was Nevil Shute’s *On The Beach* (Stanley Kramer, 1959), a film with a similar theme that was being developed at the same time. Eller considers *The Rock Cried Out* to be “one of Bradbury’s most significant stillborn creations (*Unbound* 130). Its racial and post-colonial themes are still with us and with the popularity of holocaust themed films, perhaps it will make it to the screen in some form. Various producers have shown interest in it over the years.

Around this time in 1958, Bradbury was introduced to Rod Serling who was intending to develop a dark fantasy television series. Serling was an award winning television writer specializing in dramatic realism but after speaking to him, Bradbury thought he was out of his element with fantasy. Bradbury loaned Serling a load of books, including a couple of his own and suggested he read them to get an idea of what his show should be about. *The Twilight Zone* debuted in 1959 and ran until 1964 in half hour formats and was quite successful.

There were aborted attempts to produce some of Bradbury’s stories for the series but only one was filmed, the original screenplay *I Sing the Body Electric* about a nurturing grandmother who is revealed to be a robot but that key discovery was left out of the episode. Needless to say Bradbury was extremely disappointed. Serling’s series carried a lot of echoes, if not some plagiarism of Bradbury’s work but nothing much came of this. Serling’s main writers were all associated with Bradbury and as one of them, George Clayton Johnson cited in the previous chapter stated he was “the seminal influence” by that time, so similarities to Bradbury’s work in some *The Twilight Zone* episodes should not be surprising.

The author had important experiences at the MGM Studios where he secured a contract in 1960 for a detailed outline or screen treatment of *The Martian Chronicles*. Here was a chance for him to adapt his own work for a feature film and he believed he benefited from the effort, learning more about characterization than he had as a story writer. Nevertheless, the studio heads were not satisfied, finding his condensed 100-page draft beautiful and poetic but not sufficiently structured to be a screenplay or a

treatment. The producers appreciated his descriptions and dialogue but felt there was a lot still missing, mainly in terms of structure; how the work could actually be mounted for the screen (Eller, *Unbound* 170). The source text was episodic to begin with so perhaps this failure was not a surprise.

However, the months he spent at MGM were serendipitous because he was enlisted for collaboration on the studio's *King of Kings* (Nicholas Ray, 1961). He was tasked with adapting a sequence of voice-over narrative bridges from the New Testament Gospels (Eller, *Unbound* 172). This provided him a glimpse into post-production editing and accompaniment with acclaimed composer Miklós Rósa on the background soundtrack for the narration pieces. He felt privileged to be part of, and witness aspects of the filmmaking process that most writers rarely see. Bradbury was of course drawn to the creative aspects of project development and suggested a brief sequence following Pilate's decision with Jesus and Barabbas exchanging glances, one of them on the way to crucifixion and the other to freedom. This may have been a movingly effective scene but was not realized.

The filmmakers later came to him because they could not devise an ending for their religious epic. Bradbury found inspiration for his ending in the book of *John* where "the last supper" of the resurrected Christ comes about after the last supper with the Disciples. Although the scene he describes is not Biblically accurate it reads in an emotionally powerful way.

Christ resurrected appears after the crucifixion, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He stands by a spread of white-hot coals on which fish are baking. He tells Simon-who-is-called-Peter and the other disciples, "to take of these fish and feed thy brethren, and take my message and go throughout all the nations of the world, preaching forgiveness of sin." Then, in the half-light before dawn, Christ lifts his hand above the fire, and we see the mark where the nail had gone in, the stigmata that would never heal. Blood from Christ's palm drips down upon the white coals. Thus, he proves his identity. He then leaves them, and in my script, I had Christ walk along the shore of Galilee toward the horizon. Now, when anyone walks toward the horizon, he seems to ascend, because all land rises at a distance. So Christ walks away along the shore until he is a small mote, far, far away, and they can see him no

more. Then, as the sun rises upon the ancient world, the disciples leave the ashes of the bed of coals to scatter into sparks, and with the taste of the real and final and true last supper upon their mouths, they go away. In my ending, I had the camera drift high above in a crane shot, watching the disciples as they move away, some going north, some south, some to the east, some to the west, to tell the world what needed to be told about one man. The camera would see all their footprints, circling in all directions, like the spokes of an immense wheel, then the footprints would blow away out of the sand into the winds of morning. It is a new day (Eller, *Unbound* 173-174).

The ashes and sparks of the fire scatter just as the disciples themselves scatter and the wind erases their footprints. Bradbury's ending contains very few words while embracing a series of powerful images that I believe give elegant testimony to the writer's sense of cinema. I think it not an exaggeration to describe his scene as majestic, containing gravity yet warmth and appropriately earnest. The conceptual extravagance of the scene may have been responsible for the studio's decision not to use it. However, the film incorporated the voiceover narration of the life of Christ Bradbury was asked to write, recited by Orson Welles.

Aside from becoming a member of the screen writers' guild, writing reviews and lecturing to film students he had a lot of other behind the scene involvement with the film industry, namely co-founding the Screen Writer's Film Society in 1961. While some of Bradbury's ideas about film in the previous section may seem a bit conservative his ambitions for the society were anything but. They arranged twice-monthly screenings and began with more than 500 members. They screened a mixture of new foreign release and American films plus older classics that at the time usually only appeared on late-night television. Bradbury selected some experimental films as well like *The Balcony* (Joseph Strick, 1963), *The Trial* (Orson Welles, 1962) and *The Testament of Orpheus* (Jean Couteau, 1960) that raised some objections. Nonetheless, Bradbury and co-founder, film historian Arthur Knight issued a coda for the society in the spring of 1963: "These selections, while studded with more conventional films, suggest the fundamental aims of the Society—to broaden the writer's awareness of what is happening in the world of motion pictures" (Eller, *Unbound* 196). Bradbury's pattern of trying new things would be

maintained in the society in the coming years making it a vital force within and beyond the Hollywood industry. Bradbury's Screen Writer's Film Society shortly led to the founding of Director's Guild and Actor's Guild film societies, deepening the impact of his pioneering venture.

Obviously, Bradbury had a sturdy confidence in his own artistic discernment, and as a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, on at least one occasion he was on the academy's panel of judges for documentary film. As one may surmise from what I have chosen to mention in this section, he was consulted by filmmakers and invited to pre-public screenings on numerous occasions over the years. This indicates that in the Hollywood community, he was recognized as an artist of considerable judgment; someone with a degree of cinematic sensibility and taste. Furthermore, it is significant that Bradbury formed film societies not only for writers, but actors and directors. He was well aware of the distinct elements and talents required to make a motion picture successful and grasped the collaborative nature of filmmaking. He encouraged students to develop their own ideas for the screen but did not hesitate to suggest outside material, believing that most of them would have to depend on it for inspiration at least. "That seems to be one of the truths of film writing. This has been true over the years in every country. Some of the greatest films have come from novels, short stories and plays. It seems to be the natural thing" (Stevens Jr. 374). While Bradbury may be stating a rather obvious point, it does reveal an uninhibited and positive attitude towards adaptation. Certainly it was the "natural thing" for Bradbury to take his stories a step further, crafting them for the stage and screen.

VI EARLY CINEMA AND TELEVISION ADAPTATIONS

Bradbury's unproduced screen and teleplays during the 1950s were numerous, probably exceeding 25 in number. Some of these did not progress beyond the "treatment" stage while others were well elaborated for filming. Around 1958 Bradbury came close to

having a pilot episode produced for his proposed series, “Report From Space⁴⁰.” This series would rely on his stories from *The Martian Chronicles*, and *The Illustrated Man* but the 1959 premieres of the series *Men Into Space* and *The Twilight Zone*, deferred his chances for a television series until the 1980s. Several of his works, published and unpublished, were adapted for radio or television by others during this time. I will only survey a few of the author’s noteworthy 1950s adaptations. I will discuss his adaptation of Melville’s *Moby Dick* for John Huston in the conclusion. Bradbury sometimes referred to screenwriting as the “3rd phase” of his career, in reference to his initial short story work followed by the novel. He had attempted to adapt his work for the stage in the mid 1950s but would not begin to tackle the stage until the 1960s

Bradbury’s first teleplay came about when he was approached by the producers of the television anthology series *Jane Wyman Presents* for an original, romantic story. Bradbury delivered by combining two carnival story lines for “The Marked Bullet” that aired in 1956. The story included the element of the common circus illusion of a person catching a bullet with their teeth. The real bullet would be clenched in the teeth of the performer while an assistant fired an exploding wax bullet from a gun, supposedly the real bullet caught by the performer. Bradbury also included this trick he had witnessed as a child in his later novel *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (1962).

In the late 1950s Bradbury had a fine working relationship with Alfred Hitchcock and adapted seven of his short stories for his TV series. These adaptations were generally filmed as the author had fashioned them. It appears that Hitchcock and Bradbury shared much in terms of storytelling, particularly an emphasis on building suspense. The series’ producer, Norman Lloyd, praised Bradbury saying his strength as a screenwriter, “above all, was a great sense of story—of plot—which is not given to many” (Weller 237). One of Bradbury’s hour-long adaptations, *The Life Work of Juan Diaz*, a peculiar story concerning a poor family in Mexico, interweaves suspense, pathos and humor. In this expansive adaptation, as was often the case, Bradbury kept all the scenes from the

⁴⁰ Even before this the CBS network had been considering a 30 minute anthology series entitled “The Ray Bradbury Showcase.” While recently cable television has become a force, the 1950s and early 60s were known as the “golden age” for Television drama.

original story with only minor changes while adding key scenes and moments. *The Alfred Hitchcock Presents Companion* named it as one of the series' finest episodes⁴¹.

An overview of Bradbury's other filmed works would take us back to 1953, when two important SF/fantasy films were released with his imprint on them. Both films were influential in establishing the emerging genre of science fiction film; in this case, two of the most characteristic sub-genres of the 50s, the giant monster and the alien invasion picture. The former, *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (Eugene Lourié, 1953) bears some similarity to his story by the same name (later retitled "The Fog Horn") published in the mainstream magazine *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1951. According to Bradbury, he was called by Warner Brothers Studio to see if he was interested in working with his friend, special effects technician Ray Harryhausen on a monster film. After reading the script Bradbury pointed out its similarity to the concept of his story and the studio soon agreed to buy the rights. He did not think it was plagiarism but that somehow one of their scenarists had come across these ideas indirectly. Indeed, it would have been enough to see the full-page color illustration accompanying Bradbury's story to inspire the treatment that reached the studio's producers.

Aside from the title, only the scene of an awakened dinosaur attacking a lighthouse links it to the story. Bradbury's text is a moody, atmospheric piece metaphorically dealing with loneliness and unrequited love. This story also assumes importance for catching the attention of filmmaker John Huston who would soon be looking for someone to adapt Melville's *Moby Dick*. *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*, for what it is, a rather formulaic monster on the loose picture, it is not bad, but David Mogan (135) prints Bradbury's ideas (which I will not reproduce here) that would have returned to the beast its metaphorical dimensions and restored the pathos to the story. Nonetheless, some sympathy for the hapless creature is generated through its animation by Harryhausen, especially its dramatic death scene where it is caged within a burning amusement park roller coaster. It is quite possible that Bradbury did influence some of the visual look of the film through his close friend Ray Harryhausen (Weist 168). The two of them had conceived of a short film with a dinosaur since their days together in the Los Angeles Science Fiction Club.

⁴¹ <http://www.bradburymedia.co.uk/>

Bradbury was becoming known in Hollywood by this time and his influence upon the superior *It Came from Outer Space* (Jack Arnold, 1953) was direct and central. Among the over three-hundred science fiction/fantasy films released in the U.S. during the first blooming of the genre from 1950-1962, critics select about the same 10 films as genuine classics and *It Came From Outer Space* makes all the lists⁴². It was original and ground breaking in many ways and Bradbury's involvement was such that he could have gotten co-screenwriting credit, but he was just a novice then. His first attempt at writing for the screen demonstrated an instinctive grasp of the medium. The studio already had a concept for the film but Bradbury thought he had a better idea. He did two detailed treatments and the studio chose his version over theirs. Bradbury then completed an extensive screen treatment well in excess of one hundred pages and this was given a final touch by experienced screenwriter Harry Essex. As Bradbury has variously commented it was an important step in learning the art of writing for the screen. It was not an adaptation, but an original story and textual comparisons have made it "clear that Essex developed his screenplay around Bradbury's compelling scene descriptions, action sequences, characterizations and dialogue" (Albright, ed. 28). It was quite a remarkably accomplished piece of work since "treatments" by nature are usually rudimentary and suggestive.

Bradbury uses suggestive cues throughout the first draft and retains them...But he also explicitly directs camera shots through precise descriptions of camera angles and shot composition. As both a story and film, *It Came From Outer Space* depends upon illusion and subtle distortion of image, and in many shots Bradbury also describes the reflective or distorted images he wants audiences to see and the sounds he wants audiences to hear. These camera directions and sound cues bring Bradbury's themes to the forefront, and highlight the eerie sense of otherness that became a hallmark of this film. At key moments, Bradbury turns the camera around to make the audience "see" what the aliens see as they move through the

⁴² I had seen nearly all of these films on TV when I was a kid but had always missed *It Came From Outer Space*. When I did manage to see it late one night at age 17 when most of my youthful enthusiasm had dried up, I was immediately drawn in and captivated by it. It remains perhaps my favorite sf/fantasy film from that era of filmmaking.

desert and as they assume the identities of isolated humans encountered near the crash site (Albright ed. 29).

I have included this rather lengthy quote because I believe it illustrates Bradbury's instinctive command of cinematic story telling. He not only uses the camera in novel and brisk movement but includes the execution of particular shots and effects as well as dealing with sound. The narrative itself carries themes from the author's Mars stories, like the projection of fear onto the alien and the strategies of masking and metamorphosis used by the aliens.

Much of the film's dialogue bears Bradbury's poetic touch. For instance, the protagonist's meditations on the many ways the desert can kill while he is out there searching for the aliens. Also there is the poetic meditation of the telephone lineman⁴³ about the "tricks" the desert can play upon us commenting on strange sounds he has picked up in the telephone lines. His little soliloquy is delivered with enough brevity and naturalness to significantly add to the narrative's progression. There is also the sheriff's observation of 92° as "the temperature when more murders are committed than any other. Higher and it's too hot to move, a little cooler and people don't get so irritable." Entirely in keeping with the hysteria⁴⁴ that is about to boil over into violence at any moment. Bradbury would use the "92°" observation in a later short story. Finally, protagonist John Putnam pleads for tolerance of radical difference—essentially just because something looks dangerous or repulsive does not mean that it actually is he insists. This was a common thread in Bradbury's writings, and a spider⁴⁵ (that the sheriff purposefully crushes) serves as a visual metaphor to Putnam's direct appeal.

⁴³ Bradbury's father worked for years as a lineman in Los Angeles.

⁴⁴ The film was released at the height of the McCarthy Era.

⁴⁵ "A Matter of Taste" was an unpublished story written by Bradbury a few months before Universal Studios invited him to write for the film. His earlier story also dealt with "first contact" where a "gentle host species of giant arachnids cannot understand the primal loathing expressed by the earth crew that has just arrived on their planet.... The narrator's race is telepathic; he can read emotions, but cannot understand the human words he dutifully records in his web tapestry for posterity. ...The humans use technology to master the arachnid tongue, and realize that their hosts are truly open to friendship—yet the Earth crew cannot overcome primal fears, and avert their eyes when they speak to the narrator in person" (Eller, "Web of Fear" 32-34).

Through a deep mineshaft, Putnam, (an amateur astronomer) finally encounters the aliens repairing their ship and he pleads with them to stay a little longer while he tries to hold off an angry mob, but the aliens have had quite enough of Earth and waste no time in rocketing back to the stars and other worlds in hope these will be more hospitable than ours. Screenwriter Harry Essex's ending softened Putnam's conclusion about his final encounter, "there will be other nights other stars; they'll be back." Bradbury's screen treatment indicated that they wouldn't be back; at least for a long time, as Putnam who sought them out agonizes over his own suspicion and readiness to resort to violence.

VII CINEMATIC POTENTIAL IN BRADBURY'S WRITING

Thus far, through quotes and citations I have highlighted elements in Bradbury's work that show promise for cinematic adaptation, but I would like to refocus on these in summary before concluding with the author's insights into the adaptive process. For the most part, Bradbury believed his work was conducive to cinema and he was not alone in this opinion. Recent biographer Sam Weller noted a cinematic cast to Bradbury's style encapsulated as a "keen sense of story and grasp of quick narrative movement." Furthermore, he sees Bradbury's compact ideas as akin to the simplified "high concept" around which films are usually constructed, while also noting the metaphorical, "cinematically visual" nature of his writing.

To illustrate the cinematic potential of Bradbury's metaphor, I would cite two passages from one of his better known short stories, *The Beggar on O'Connell Bridge* (1961): "Then I heard shoe leather flinting the cobbles in sparks. The men came running, fireflies sprinkling the bricks under their hobnailed shoes. Mouths opened on smiles like old pianos" (Bradbury, *Stories* 62). Metaphorical, but neither ethereal, static nor "language bound," this is an example of visual thinking offering both images and concepts well within possibilities of cinematic realization. In the same story he deals with a mundane piece of equipment in a memorable way:

The elevator, which had haunted its untidy shaft for a hundred years, came wafting skyward, dragging its ungodly chains and dread intestines after. The door exhaled open. The lift groaned as if we had trod its stomach. In a great protestation of ennui, the ghost sank back towards earth, us in it (Bradbury, *Stories* 61).

It is not just an old elevator; Bradbury has given the thing a kind of life with an accompanying aura or atmosphere, and the iconicity of cinema can, and often seeks to impart a fuller significance to inanimate objects. Well within the bounds of realism, the object and its movement as depicted by Bradbury have not been distorted, merely fragmented; described and imaged as it might be experienced. Through montage and sound, a filmmaker could show and suggest quite a lot through this simple elevator ride as detailed by Bradbury. His metaphors may not always be easy or practical to capture on film but they seem to richly present life as it happens to us, and filmmakers look to create figures without fixing them in clichés.

I would add the author's ever present humanism as a contributing factor to the cinematic or performative direction of his writing. Cinema rarely deals in abstraction. More than modern painting, sculpture and even stage drama, it has resisted abstraction to remain primarily, a humanistic, popular art form, just as Bradbury's stories that aside from embracing the fantastic, remain very "human" stories. Death and the unknown often shadow his stories but more frequently they deal with human adaptation and transformation, themes well suited to the visual medium of cinema. Moreover, the fact that his writing strikes a chord with such a range of readers internationally has to be a plus. The author frequently remarked that his popularity stemmed largely from the fact that he "spoke in tongues," the metaphorical, mythopoetic features in his writing making him accessible to a wide spectrum of people. Indeed, translated into more than 30 languages, his work has been filmed and adapted for the stage around the globe, especially in Russia and Eastern Europe.

Bradbury's writing was not known for great psychological depth or complexity of character, yet drama and sentiment were rarely lacking since he preferred to portray people attempting to discover and live life as best they can, often in hostile circumstances. Bradbury saw these exploitative, existential elements not only as desirable, but of essence to both film and literature. "Both books and films communicate

“dreams,” which can expand our sense of what is desirable and possible...different as they are, both the theater of the mind and the screen can project images that show not just what we are, but what we might be” (Mogen 140-141). Bradbury excelled at finding novel approaches to rather familiar, universal themes, something essential in the film industry. Once again the mythopoetic aspect of his writing, its “fertility” in terms of identification and emotional power, and insistence upon casting the quandaries of the technical, post-modern world in very human terms help bridge the gap between page and screen.

A case can be made that Bradbury had “an ear for dialogue.” His constant love of theater and drama has arguably made him more attentive to dialogue which other writers less invested in drama may find more foreign. Moreover, the author sometimes boasted about his prodigious memory and it would seem that he derived some of the dialogue in his writing from what people had actually said in his hearing over the years. I am particularly referring to the numerous instances of short, naturalistic exchanges in his stories. One can read these exchanges aloud and they usually sound “right” not only coming from the characters, but in accord with natural colloquial speech in general. Bradbury largely deploys what we may refer to as “aural literature.” There is a lyrical, even musical quality to much of his prose and he does not shy away from using “traditional poetic devices such as repeated stress patterns, alliteration and internal rhymes” (Johnson 6). His “ear” for distinctive speech patterns and sharp or colourful dialogue, are highly evident in his Irish stories and plays.

In other words, much of his writing begs to be *heard* or acted out. The short story *Murder Without Crime* has its estranged lovers exchange choice parts of the Old Testament poetic book *Song of Solomon*. What seemed a bit indulgent and artificial in print (poetry is best recited and heard) came off as finely nuanced and more believable in *performance* for the televised version of the story. The same could be said for many of the stories Bradbury adapted for the cable series “The Ray Bradbury Theater.” But there is also a great deal of brisk, memorable dialogue in Bradbury’s works that drive his plots forward. This bodes well for cinema and the three adaptations in the following chapters (especially *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*) retain a large amount of dialogue from their

source texts. Finally, Bradbury's habit of careful revision and editing of his written work, trimming it down for maximum impact certainly boost its surface potential for cinema.

VIII BRADBURY ON ADAPTATION

Unlike many writers, Bradbury was neither dismissive of film nor cinematic adaptations. He never considered film to be somehow "inferior" to writing and his respect and involvement with adaptive practice led him to some interesting insights into adapting works for the screen. He did not adhere to the reductive ideas of so many on the subject that see adaption as a just cutting and "rendering down," although these are usually part of the process. He did not necessarily see adaptation as Bluestone did, as a sort of "destruction" and recreation of the source text but likened it to surgery where you learn "how to cut it so you don't kill or hurt it in any way" (Bradbury, *Zen* 125). He viewed adaption as a "wonderful game" and intellectual challenge" and believed a good director can find a way to bring descriptive and metaphorical language to the screen in "objective corollary."

Like most voices on the subject, he believed that stories harbour differing degrees of cinematic potential manifested primarily in character, dialogue and pace of action. Bradbury was fond of recounting how in the late 1950s he tried to get the film studios interested in a then little known author: Ian Fleming. The first James Bond film premiered a little later, in 1962, but Bradbury may have been one of the first to see the adaptive potential of Fleming's work for the cinema.

Concerning screen writing, Bradbury vacillated between saying that it was rather easy (referring mainly to his own works) to saying it was harder than it looked. Generally, he held to the latter opinion and always advised would be screen writers to learn all the other forms of writing first, insisting that "screenplays are not writing. They're a fake form of writing. It's a lot of dialogue and very little atmosphere. Very little description. Very little character work. It's very dangerous and you'll never learn to write" (Marchi 181). This was the path Bradbury followed. He wanted to be involved in film but recalled a "healthy fear" of Hollywood and did not seriously entertain the idea of

writing for film or TV until he was in his 30s, that is, after he had become a recognized master of the short story and produced a successful novel.

I believe Bradbury's screenplays give evidence of this maturity as a writer in their coherence and detail. They are quite descriptive and he managed to impart a mood or atmosphere even within that spare form of writing. Finally, his screen writing orientation was primarily visual and kinetic; he approached the task as if writing a silent motion picture and then added dialogue, "when I write a screenplay, I put in everything to help the director, the actor and myself. It's hard to become excellent as a screenwriter because it's such a difficult medium. There are so many things that can go wrong" (Stephens Jr. 383). I think these last comments are particularly illuminating because he does claim that it is a difficult medium to write for with the realization that a screenplay is only as successful as the finished film that comes from it. So many things *can* go wrong from page to performance and it is interesting that Bradbury writes with awareness of this and the others involved, adding things "to help the director and actor.

While fond of adapting his own work Bradbury avoided adapting the work of others. In fact, he did this only on two occasions, *Moby Dick* for John Huston in 1956 and a 30 minute teleplay, *The Faith of Aaron Menefee* (based on a story by Stanley Ellin) for Alfred Hitchcock in 1962. For his skillful handling of Melville, Bradbury was recognized through a raft of proposals to write screenplays. Prestige productions such as *Good Morning, Miss Dove*; *Anatomy of a Murder*; *Les Diaboliques*; *Friendly Persuasion*; *The Man with the Golden Arm*; and even Hitchcock's *The Birds*, all of which he refused for two reasons. Screen writing was extremely lucrative, but he preferred writing his own novels and short stories and he found adapting others difficult and time consuming. And partly, as he observed, "no one ever remembers screenwriters" (Weller 234).

Concerning adaptations his views encompassed a peculiar respect for the source text and its author. He advocated an "emotional re-creation" rather than "rethinking" and destruction of the text. For this task he believed if there were similarities in the two writer's natures it could be of great help because "as impossible as it seems ... the screenwriter sets out to masquerade for a few months in the flesh, and look out the eyes of some author" (Bradbury, *Speaks* 18). Therefore, he thought the adapter should know the source text intimately, to the point of it "getting into the bloodstream" so that the

adapter may “approximate” the author. As such, one might characterize Bradbury’s views on adaptation as organic and performative.

He did not believe in slavish fidelity, but a model where the adapter seeks to “collaborate” with the original author to make changes, provide back story, fill in gaps or shift emphasis and perhaps chronologically reorganizing narrative events while keeping the essentials of a story intact. As a case in point, Bradbury spoke of his collaboration on the adaptation of probably his most famous short story, “A Sound of Thunder” (1952). It concerns a group of time travelers out to hunt dinosaurs who are warned not to fall off a path laid to prevent them from inadvertently crushing wildlife, which might change time and history. One of the panicked hunters falls and crushes a butterfly with his heel, which radically alters the present time they must return to. Having difficulty completing the script, the director suggested taking the butterfly out of the story. Bradbury protested that the butterfly was indispensable so it remained in (Bradbury, *Speaks* 11).

The 2006 film (Peter Hyams) was a rather unsatisfying adaptation pleasing neither audiences nor critics. Roger Ebert, one of the more generous critics, cited the film’s “clunky special effects” and “half-baked screenplay,” concluding he could “appreciate the film but not endorse it.” Most reviews were much harsher, and the film only earned a fraction of its eighty-million dollar budget. But the butterfly, a poignant central metaphor on paper, certainly gained an even greater charge as realized on film. Bradbury was not always unhappy with his work as adapted by others but was often frustrated by the omission of what he considered key elements:

People come to you and they say, “Boy we love your work. We love this and we want to buy it and we want to use it.” Then as soon as they buy it, the teeth come out. You become not the father of the work, but the stepfather. All of a sudden, you’re an outsider, a villain. I have often said to these people, “Look I’ll do the script free for you if you’ll shoot my mistakes instead of yours. My mistakes are better (Stephens 381).

This alludes to the idea that Bradbury may be the best adapter of his works, as well as a belief that there is something essential in a source text that if lost, will certainly damage an adaptation. The author’s abiding interest in drama and romance has driven him to grapple long and hard with the technical and theoretical problems involved in

cross media presentation. He would learn, just as he mastered the short story and the other forms of dramatic writing. Beyond the imagistic quality of his writing he also created a definite mood or emotional tone, that he considered more or less essential to a particular work, and that an outside adapter may miss.

This illustrates what I see as the organic, performative model of adaptation Bradbury espoused. In effect, when he adapted his own texts Bradbury became his own palimpsest as he extracts ideas, brief passages and metaphors from his other writings. This self-referential quality is typical of his dramatic adaptations, but he chooses material carefully, further developing ideas while reshaping them for utterance and dialogue. The author would return to his source text(s) only to write fresh. In a 2006 telephone interview he told me there was no “fun” in merely transposing what he had already written, but said he would “pass over” the source text lightly “like a fish fertilizing its eggs,” allowing the text, and particularly its characters to speak to him afresh. In the next chapter dealing with adaptive theory, I believe there are echoes of some of Bradbury’s ideas.

In conclusion, I believe there is considerable justification in Bradbury’s self-appraisal as a “hybrid” or “cinematic” writer; this latter term he often used in reference to the visual nature of his work and its remarkably fluid migration across media. While Bradbury preferred to adapt his own work he did not ascribe to the notion that he has *always* suffered when adapted by others, his continued appreciation of Truffaut’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) in which he took no part is an example. On the other hand, I am impressed by Bradbury’s own cinematic and dramatic sensibilities and he had a special affinity for the stage, and stage productions have often served as a kind of a “bridge” to filmed adaptations, as expansion or experimental variation on the source text as will be shown in the following chapters.

Chapter 3

ADAPTIVE THEORY AND PRACTICE

I INTRODUCTION

This chapter will touch upon a number of theoretical issues since cross media adaptations require a layered reading. In examining the source texts behind the films, and in some cases, intermediate dramatic texts (screen and teleplays, stage plays) I will be employing a pluralist approach utilizing insights from various areas including the branch of performance theory more implicated with representation and signification. While adaptations have the right to stand alone as autonomous works and can be interpreted and valued as such, I choose to study Bradbury's filmed narratives as adaptations instead of purely autonomous works. Therefore, the prior incarnations of each text will be examined as carefully as possible not on the basis of a search for "fidelity" to an original but to illuminate its palimpsest nature and to see how it evolved under different conditions and the visions of various artists, including Bradbury.

Although ostensibly speaking of the author in the writing process, I believe Richard Poirier's observations apply well to the process of cinema adaptation.

Performance is an exercise of power, a very curious one. Curious because it is at first so furiously self-consultive, so even narcissistic, and later so eager for publicity, love and historical dimension. Out of an accumulation of secretive acts emerges at last a form that presumes to compete with reality itself for control of the minds exposed to it" (87).

In view of this I would characterize Bradbury as a "performative writer," not only because he is drawn to adapt his work for performance before a group(s) of spectators instead of a solitary reader, but his further shaping of his written work is itself a type of performance. By definition performance behavior is not free and easy, it is "known or practised behaviour," often referred to as "twice-behaved behaviour," or "restored behaviour." We can consider every textual adaptation as a performance of sorts between

text, author and spectator/reader. “Performative,” also because of what he seeks to achieve with his words, not content just to make a reader “see,” but to transmit an “experience” using a “sensorium” to create worlds for the reader which would explain his desire to take his work a step further in performance.

This “accumulation of acts” Poirier mentioned can refer to the process of filmmaking since it is a product of thousands of discrete choices and contains traces of all the questions asked by the filmmakers. I will be examining adapted works as both product and process of creation and reception. Adaptation always involves migration from the context of creation to the adapter’s context of reception, and I will seek to be attentive to this aspect of the process. Every film involves a transcoding from one sign system to another, but adaptations as “repetition without replication,” (Hutcheon 7) are also quintessentially palimpsest in nature, influenced by numerous factors and texts aside from their source text. Analysis of films adapted from prior sources requires us to address certain questions that can lead us to a theory and methodology appropriate to understanding these works as adaptations. First, I would like to examine some basic “whys and “hows” of adaptive practice and then the shared and unique characteristics of the two media and their respective possibilities of narrative before surveying theory.

Adaptive study strikes the very heart of cinema, its nature, history and evolution. From the earliest days of filmmaking novels and short stories have served as a fertile source of screen narrative, in large part because film studios and production companies have always had “story departments” that constantly scan written material for possible film scenarios. A number of things can be behind the recourse to pre-elaborated stories. It may stem from a lack of confidence in the creative abilities of screen writers as existing plots and characters can be appropriated and altered for another medium.

Obviously, it may signal an attempt to capitalize upon the notoriety or prestige of already known works. However, this is not always the case because obscure and less esteemed works are also adapted. Perhaps this is because the filmmakers don’t run the same risks in adapting a classic or well known text shadowed by audience expectations. How will an audience receive their work as a derivation that is not derivative, or in the eyes of some not sufficiently “faithful” to the adapted text? Will the adaptation be viewed as somehow “lowering” or “vulgarizing its source? These are risks many filmmakers are

willing to take, walking the fine line between preserving elements of a source text they believe have made it worth revisiting, while reinterpreting it for the screen. Many filmmakers would affirm that a text is not worth adapting if there isn't something new to say about the work. Adaptations are so prevalent that they are hard to avoid but difficult to assess in terms of their relationship to a prior text. Numerous statistics attest to the prevalence of adaptation with Dudley Andrew claiming that "well over half of all commercial films have come from literary originals" (98) and that percentage increases dramatically for award-winning films and made for TV productions (Hutcheon 4).

Obviously, Western culture has a long history of retelling familiar stories in new forms but why are filmic adaptations so routinely disparaged? Aside from the aforementioned issues of thwarted expectations, lack of "fidelity" and "vulgarization" of their source, some point to hierarchical ideas such as the superiority of literature merely because it is an older art form or somehow demands greater cognition. Robert Stam suggests it may be partially due to the Western mind set as manifested in iconophobia (a suspicion of the visual) and logophilia (love of the word as sacred) (5-6). Moreover, adaptations are sometimes belittled for being "secondary" or derivative, ideas which collide with the Romantic valuation of original creation or the individual creative genius that elaborates a work. These are only a few of the objections that may cloud the theoretical status and analytical interest of adaptations.

More positively, some critics today view the phenomenon through an organic lens. Works "evolve" to survive changing times and environments, the tastes and demands of new media. Taking inspiration from the fascinating film *Adaptation* (Spike Jonze, 2002) Robert Stam compares adaptations to hybrid forms which can help their source text survive (3). Along the same lines, Linda Hutcheon believes that "sometimes, like biological adaptation, cultural adaptation involves migration to favourable conditions: stories travel to different cultures and different media. In short, stories adapt just as they are adapted" (31). Works announced as adaptations involve, variation, repetition and modification on a theme - successful adaptations also "exploit their cultural environment to their own advantage" (167). Evolution also seems an apt analogue for adaptation since we have learned that it is a convoluted process, rarely progressing in a straight line but often moving "sideways" or occasionally spiralling into dead ends.

Indeed, stories as written may have a “shelf life” and need to be altered to appeal to subsequent generations.

The stature of an adapted text as a prior work and cultural artefact comes into play as well as the intentions of the adaptor which may be as varied as the adaptors themselves. The celebrated director Robert Wise commented upon his numerous and diverse adaptations, saying that what attracted him and his screenwriters “was simply the quality of the storytelling” which he believed was “something movies and books should have in common” (Tibbets and Welsh: Vii). In practice, Wise recognized that “some screenwriters are better at original work while others are better at adapting material by someone else” (ibid Viii). Whatever implication this has for adaptive practice, it suggests a different dynamics for working from a pre-established text versus original material. Actually, awards are routinely given for best “original screenplay” and “adapted screenplay.” Wise usually tried to remain as close to his source as possible while Alfred Hitchcock, who likened film to the more compacted short story form, chose to read a book only once before making a film.

Metaphorically, Wise’s position resembles “translation,” seeking equivalences and letting the story concept set the style and tone, while Hitchcock’s is more of an “auteurist position” more grounded in “performance” or interpretation rather than translation. That is, a work strongly filtered through a director’s predilections and concerns, Hitchcock’s adaptations always bore the “signature” of the director regardless of the subject. On the other hand, Wise was sometimes criticized for not leaving a consistent stamp on his work, his style changing from film to film according to the story he was working with. He believed in “putting the spirit of each story first and my (sic) own approach second.” However, even those who champion “faithful” adaptations give no clear formula of how to implement them or how to evaluate the procedure’s success or failure.

Filmmakers, of course, are drawn to good stories and may seek the professional challenge or opportunity to tell a story as it is or from another angle, update, critique or even subvert it. Social or political motives may be present and there are many possible intentions but there must be something about the source text to summon the enormous commitment needed to make a film. Every adaptation and adaptor is unique so no single formula is likely to be devised.

II FILM AND LITERATURE

Despite the incontestably unique properties and effects of books and films they share “story telling” or narrative in common, although narrative is received and experienced differently in the two media. An obvious difference between film and literature concerns the control of the reader’s temporal interaction with the narrative world. In film and in drama too, the reader/spectator has no control over how long he is involved with an image or scene, so literature seems to offer us greater freedom. When reading we can put the book down when we want and return to it, reread a passage or pause to think. Because a printed text moves from the verbal sign to the reader’s construction of meaning, the imagination is less restrained by the written word than by the forceful immediacy of moving pictures. However, in this respect, film can be immensely effective because of the total control the filmmaker has over the images presented, dictating what will be seen, when, how and in what context. Analogous to an author’s choice of words and tone, a filmmaker will use the camera to interpret a scene rather than merely record. Part of the experience of reading a novel is a matter of imagined images and sounds, something a writer must work hard and self-consciously to achieve. However, the actual images and sounds film presents to the spectator must also move beyond the obvious to engage the imagination or they may become dull or uninteresting. Also, a literary work is the product of a single author. Sometimes an imaginative editor may be involved but a written work is largely the creative vision of a single individual while a film is highly collaborative in nature. These essential differences alone have tremendous import for the process of adaptation.

A powerful and still evolving medium, motion pictures, regardless of how they are recorded or reproduced have benefited from being the latest in a line of development which many, like Kenneth Burke, would trace back to the most ancient ritual drama. For as long as humans have been rational, speaking creatures, rituals and stories have been used to entertain, inform or aid memory (72-74). Likewise, film editor Walter Murch sees the cinema experience as a “recreation of the ancient practice of theatrical renewal and bonding in modern terms.” He also notes that since the recorded images of a film are always the same but summon different responses in the mind of each viewer, it becomes

“a fusion of the permanency of literature with the spontaneity of theatre” (144). Some of Marshall McLuhan’s ruminations dovetail into adaptation; he believed that the content of a new medium is always an old medium. So, just as narrative sprang from oral tales, movies borrow from literature and television from film (1964 vii). It is only natural then that the cinema would largely embrace the primal art of the storyteller, and it has resources unavailable to the novel. Making use of the word based arts and those which reach us primarily through other means it can literally include other arts or metaphorically evoke them by imitating their procedures.

For instance, in composition, films are not unlike sculpture. Technology has allowed them to become holographic, projecting the illusion of three-dimensionality, but even without it they can create a density of image through vivid, depth photography and sound. Films are also like music. Not only do they make extensive use of music for dramatic purposes, but in their flow and editing create a rhythm and possess something akin to tonal structure. Like dance, they celebrate freedom of movement through space and time with purpose and grace. Like painting, they are aesthetic compositions of volumes, shapes, colors and light; a personal canvas for creative filmmakers. Like architecture, they enclose human experiences within structures which also add meaning to the life they surround. Like theatre, film is a visual and aural art, involving the temporal sequencing of human actions in constructions of a dramatic nature. We may add to the list Bradbury’s view that film mirrors poetry in effect through its ability to deal with strong, compact images and metaphor. Finally, “adaptations can take advantage of this multiplicity by amplifying artistic references, as when Pasolini, in *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (1964), drew not only on the Bible itself but also on the various forms of painting and music which the Bible inspired” (Stam 24).

However, while outlining its composite or “multi-track” nature, I am only highlighting things I believe a serious evaluation of film should take into account. What makes cinema unique is the way it combines all these diverse elements for a unitary purpose, and I have yet to touch upon the manipulations of time and space permitted by photography. However, I am *not* trying to characterize cinema as a composite art, but rather a comprehensive one which makes it an excellent medium for adaptation. Besides novels and short stories, it has adapted poetry, newspaper stories, popular music etc.

Hardly anything seems beyond its scope. Cinema is comprehensive, not only in terms of resources, style and subject matter but in its effect upon the viewer which, as philosopher Stanley Cavell observes makes it unique among the other arts due to its *sheer power* (164), or as Collin McGuinn has recently elaborated:

...it is the *form* in which the story comes to us that enthrals us. It is the fact that it

is a story *on film* that creates the special power of cinema, not simply being a story told in some medium or other. If it were just the latter, then we might well prefer to stay home and read a book—which would be easier and cheaper. But what we crave, when we itch to see a film is the particular nature of the cinematic experience—which includes but is not exhausted by, the embedded narrative itself (8).

Is it possible then for a cinema adaptation to add something of a non-technical nature, perhaps furthering or adding another dimension to its source text? Bradbury believed this to be true for his works and wrote many of them with performance in mind.

While the reading experience is intensely private, even reflective in nature, it should be noted that “cinematic experience,” even shared in public, carries an unusual degree of the private since it solicits the spectator’s undivided attention. In fact, McGuinn and others speculate that the quality of mental engagement films call from us is not inferior to that of literature because “movies and the mind are *suited* to one another, mutually adapted” (5). Tracing his ideas back to the concept of “seeing as” from Ludwig Wittgenstein, McGuinn characterizes cinema as a medium that one does not “look at” like sculpture or painting, but “looks into and through” like a window or a body of water, toward something else, a world beyond our own. In other words, we look *through* images on screen to the objects “embedded” in them and beyond.

Similar ideas date back at least to Harvard psychologist, Hugo Munsterberg’s *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (1916) where he located the basis of cinema in the mind of man; the technological “body” of the apparatus being animated through psycho-social forces—man’s natural craving for information, education and entertainment. He believed cinema mirrored the agility of memory and imagination through the resources of editing which can distort time and create flashbacks or dream scenes. Like dreams he saw the unique storytelling capacity of film in overcoming the forms and limitations of the

outer world and adjusting events to the forms of the inner world, allowing the filmmaker to confer on appearances whatever spatial, temporal and causal relations he chooses.

From a semiotic point of view, Christian Metz observed that cinema “tells us continuous stories; it “says” things that could also be conveyed in the language of words; yet it says them differently. There is a reason for the possibility as well as for the necessity of adaptations” (44). Novelist Virginia Woolf writing in 1926, scorned cinema as a “parasite” of literature but also recognized its special potential: “cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotions that have so far failed to find expression” in words (Braudy and Cohen, 309). In view of comments such as these, and the inherent richness of the medium, I think it is short-sighted to denigrate filmic adaptations as embodying an inferior form of cognition.

Storytelling is a kind of performance and this aspect comes strongly into play when we consider the marvelous communicative properties of gestures and the human face. These and especially the latter are capable of conveying concepts which are not easily expressed in words such as inner experiences and non-rational emotions that would remain otherwise vague or unexpressed on paper. In narrative, visual expressions also create the conditions for new experiences to come into being. Indeed, not all thought is verbal, so it is logical to assume that the cinematic image chain could be at least suggestive of what goes through the human mind. For instance, because of the close up, characters can be *seen* to think at the subtlest levels thus allowing us a peculiar dimension of interaction. Thus, like literature, film is able to present subjectivity. Films take place between the world of words and the world of images and can render phenomena on the border of the spoken and non-spoken, presenting the extraverbal aspects of discursive exchange.

Even in terms of verbal narration cinema has an interesting range of options. For instance, Martin Scorsese’s adaptation of Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence* (1993) may serve as an example where “voice-over” narration went beyond a first-person narrator and became a means of conveying the novelist’s voice, thus reconstructing the social atmosphere of New York during the period of the story (1870s) and reminding the viewer of the social tenor of the times through the omniscient authority of the author (Tibbets and Welsh xvii). Tangential to the “word vs. image” debate, Voice-

over narration is anathema to some theorists as a literary device for unimaginative filmmakers. But it has evolved to become more suggestive and subtle than merely a means of conveying expositional information.

An example relevant to this thesis would be the adaptation of Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (Jack Clayton, 1983) where the opening voice over narrator is identified as the film's juvenile protagonist, now grown. Too brief to be intrusive, it lends eye witness veracity to a powerful, adolescent experience now recalled from an adult's perspective. Voice over commentary can be effectively used by filmmakers in a variety of ways and four classes have been delineated: "*voice-off* (heard and seen), *interior monologue* (not heard by others even when the character is on screen with them), *acousmêtre* (heard but not seen) and *voice-over* (neither heard nor seen by other characters)" (Fleishman 75). Words are the stock and trade of the writer but the spatio-temporal aspect of film can lend a richly nuanced meaning to them while avoiding audio-video pleonasm.

Comparison with other arts call attention to the multiplicity of signifiers available to the cinema and is thus relevant to adaptation study, but being infinitely more flexible in terms of space and movement, the consensual view is that cinema shares more in common with literature for a number of reasons. For instance, both forms offer their practitioners the extraordinary freedom to "take what they want of what is offered by the real world and arrange it in sequence" (Tarkovsky 60).

According to Leo Braudy, their similarity lies in the fact that they are "less limited by the hard surface of things" (31). Siegfried Kracauer observed that film "tends to render life in its fullness," and "aspires to endlessness" like the novel. Likewise, he believed cinema does not "exhaust" its subject matter but exposes it, the filmmaker throwing us back on the model and making us want to know more about it. Recognizing its capacity for "inwardness" he concluded that, "the differences between the formal properties of film and novel are only differences of degree" (232-236). Moreover, both media tell stories, illuminate characters and draw upon myth and other narrative forms. Dudley Andrew highlights the specificity of the two signifying systems.

Generally film is found to work from perception toward signification, from external facts to interior motivations and consequences, from the givenness of a world

to the meaning of a story cut out from that world. Literary fiction works oppositely. It begins with signs (graphemes and words), building to propositions that attempt to develop perception. As a product of human language, it naturally treats human motivations and values, seeking to throw them out onto the external world, elaborating a world out of a story (Naremore 32).

In essence, a novel seeks to elaborate a world out of a story while a film elaborates a story out of a world. There are other inherent differences that lead to an automatic divergence in adaptations. For example, much of a novel does not represent action suitable for picturization. Likewise, novels are usually too diffuse and dramatically restrained, lacking the bold strokes that can lead to striking images on screen; an introspective literary style is difficult to sustain in film. Furthermore, a novel may include a wide range of actions and still find unity in its theme. But a film is less able to prosper with a far-flung or episodic structure; it requires unity of action and not just theme.

Frank McConnel, a scholar concerned with forms of storytelling and their transmission of myths and archetypes put forth this interesting distinction between film and literary narrative:

Writing, beginning with a technology at once highly associative and highly personal, strives toward the fulfilment of its own projected reality in an ideally objective, depersonalized world, while film, beginning with a technology at once highly objective and highly depersonalized, strives toward the fulfilment of its own projected reality in an ideally associative, personal world (5).

Literature presents us with the perception of the individual, an isolated consciousness and out of that consciousness we have to construct the social and physical world the character inhabits. People and things are photographed and become projections through film. Film objectifies, as Cavell observes, things and objects become projections in film. People become things and we have to construct the selfhood of a character inhabiting the objective world film so overwhelmingly gives us. But characters are essential to both media through recognition, alignment and allegiance, however filmmakers seem more concerned with presenting a central character an audience may identify with which can be problematic in some adaptations. Each medium has its own challenges of articulation which gives rise to particular problems. For example, literary

characters are formed by the language used to describe them allowing a reader to construct a personalized vision of them, therefore a concrete externalization of them is often unsatisfying for spectators who are familiar with the source text.

On the other hand, cinema can uniquely humanize inanimate objects and dynamize/humanize the relations between inanimate and human characters. Filmed narrative has a peculiar levelling effect in contrast to literature. That is, cinematography does not ontologically favour a person over the rest of nature and it may sensitize us to the possibilities which lie dormant in the latter. On stage, one is surrounded by props, but on film by objects which can be natural enemies or allies of the human character. For instance, moving beyond “slapstick,” the cinema finally gave us the man at odds with a world of machines and things type of comedy. Film has gone a long way in developing, mixing and giving already existing genres concrete visual and aural form-- the Western being one of the best examples, and has served to revitalize and popularize lesser known or esteemed genres (e.g. science fiction/fantasy, hard-boiled crime stories).

Highlighting media differences, Brian McFarlane cites an unnamed writer’s comment: “Film is a multi-sensory communal experience emphasizing immediacy, whereas literature is a mono-sensory experience that is more conducive to reflection” (11). The communal and immediate versus the solitary and reflective are very different experiences. However, McFarlane believes that their key similarity, what is transferable/adaptable to both is narrative. He makes a distinction between what can be “transferred;” “narrative elements amenable to display in film, and “adaptation” for the other novelistic elements which must find different filmic equivalencies, “if such equivalencies are sought or are available at all” (13). Narrativity became not only the strongest link between the two media but the primary reason for the cinema’s popularity. Although film and literature narrate stories differently, they both use imagery for vividness and significance. Literature seeks to make the significant visible while film seeks to make the visible significant.

Adaptors naturally look to the potential for visual realization of a story and projects are occasionally shelved when a text is considered “unfilmable.” It is very interesting how some of these problematic stories are eventually filmed. Problems may be circumvented by technology, but also by other means. More than ever with today’s

technology, a film may be “spectacle” in a way a novel, even a great novel, cannot. But it is interesting to note how filmmakers throughout the history of cinema recognize the need of a film to be *protected* by a good story. It would seem that cinema would ignore the “novelistic” facet of narrative at its peril. Leo Braudy comments on the tendency of films to “fragment” once the context of film has been removed, comparing the film frame to the frame of a painting which gives value to its elements by establishing relationship and concentration (35). Film may reach us in a variety of ways. Spectators may retain (or not) various things from the films they see: images or music, but also lines of dialogue and the characters who speak them. It is noteworthy that these last two “novelistic” aspects are perhaps what give films a “life” outside the theater and individual conscious. They propel filmed sequels and assume a mythic stature transcending the base of people who have actually seen the films.

III SIMILARITIES OF STYLE AND PURPOSE

While working through different means, the goals of the writer and filmmaker are often similar. Joseph Conrad’s statement of novelistic intention from *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), to make the reader hear, feel and, above all to “make one see,” by the powers of the written word, is often cited in this regard and juxtaposed with an almost identical statement made by film pioneer D.W. Griffith less than 20 years later. Although the way visual and mental images are produced and received in the two media are certainly different, it is generally accepted that conceptual images evoked by verbal stimuli can scarcely be distinguished in the end from those evoked by visual stimuli. “The stimuli, whether they be the signs of language or the sense data of the physical world, lose their spatial characteristics and become components of the total ensemble which is consciousness” (Bluestone 47). Signifiers not only identify a signified but elicit a chain reaction of other relations in the service of elaborating a fictional world so imagery functions equivalently in novels and films. Finally, it is interesting to reflect upon what we actually remember from books and films. In film, it is usually a movement or an action supported by a sound or an image, rarely the spoken word alone or theme. In

books, words perhaps, but the images or emotions those words create in us seem more prevalent still.

Conrad's and Griffith's statements are also used to support the idea that popular cinema was prodded into being by stylistic tendencies common in Victorian novelists. These tendencies were essentially recourse to restricted consciousness by minimizing authorial mediation and limiting the point of view through which actions and objects are observed. They sought to avoid explanation in favour of dramatization, producing a story where the reader *sees* everything and is *told* nothing. As if using a camera they often decomposed a scene by altering the point of view and focus of an object by fragmenting it (Richardson 17-20). Bradbury often used this technique, notably in his classic short story *A Sound of Thunder* (1952) when he described the dinosaur of his story, piece by piece as though through a collection of photographs. The early director and film theorist Sergei Eisenstein believed that film learned most of its narrative techniques from the prose novel, especially Dickens and pointed out how Griffith, much enamoured of Dickens, appropriated the author's "cinematic techniques."

While believing the Dickens-Griffith link somewhat overstated, Brian McFarlane insists that if film did not grow out of the late nineteenth century novel, it grew *towards* it and that film initially replaced the novel in terms of popularity through the application of techniques practised by writers toward end of the 19th century (5-13). With the advent of sound, the movies, the legitimate theatre, and the book publishing industry were moving closer together, and Hollywood was absorbing every kind of artistic talent and establishing itself as the very emblem of modernity. Nevertheless, the cinema found the "readerly" nineteenth century texts more amenable to adaptation than the "writerly" modernist novelists like Proust and Joyce; the cinema would tackle such as these later (Naremore 4-7).

As cinema developed during the first quarter of the twentieth century, a complex "dynamic of exchange" between the media began. Nearly all the writers contributing essays to Keith Cohen's *Writing in a Film Age* (1991), declared that film technique - temporal distortion, radical shifting of perspective and montage, were the most immediate means by which cinema had affected their writing (20-23). An earlier example could be John Dos Passos' *USA* trilogy where he utilized experimental techniques

organizing his texts in the form of a montage shortly after meeting Eisenstein and reading Soviet theories of montage (Naremore 5). Many modern novelists seem to have taken on techniques stemming from the film editing process and spatio-temporal nature of film. Already in the late 1940s, André Bazin noted that a great number of short stories were being “written with a double purpose in view, namely with an eye on Hollywood adaptation” (54). Reciprocal influence and basic connections seem beyond dispute but how then, should we analyze film adaptations as films and in what relation to their source text?

IV EARLY OBSERVATIONS AND COMMON PRACTICE

André Bazin, in “Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest”, dismissed notions of inherent superiority of the source text, observing that “All things considered, it is possible to imagine that we are moving toward a reign of adaptation in which the notion of the unity of the work of art, if not the very notion of the author himself, will be destroyed” (Bazin 28). This is a remarkable statement, especially for 1948. Bazin made some of the earliest and most intriguing statements on adaptation, although he neither formulated a “theory” nor was prescriptive in terms of practice, we have undoubtedly entered this “reign of adaptation” he spoke of.

Bazin raised central issues, foreshadowing some of the views of contemporary theorists like Robert Stam and Linda Hutcheon particularly in his refusal to denigrate adaptations, seeing them as a legitimate outgrowth and sometimes allowing a work to achieve fuller expression. Multiple versions of stories in fact do (co)exist laterally so literary adaptations, more prevalent than ever, should not be seen as secondary and inferior by nature. Bazin strikes a remarkably modern stance in justifying the practice by insisting “the adapted work to a certain extent exists apart from what is wrongly called its “style,” in a confusion of this term with the word *form*,” and saw cinema running a “relay race with drama and the novel,” reinforcing, rather than replacing them and believed that true aesthetic differences lied not among the arts, but within the genres themselves (Naremore 25-26).

Bazin intimated that not all adaptation is “successful,” as *cinema*, and while “fidelity” to the source does not automatically spell success or failure, he had a preference for it. He believed that filmmakers had “everything to gain from fidelity” drawing on more complex characters and “a firmness of treatment and subtlety to which we are not accustomed on the screen” (66). Yet apart from questions of fidelity he saw adaptations as “aesthetically justified” works that exist on their own apart from any consideration of form. He viewed adaptations in terms of modes of consumption believing the “digest phenomenon” resided less in the condensation and simplification of works than in making them more accessible to a larger public, and railed against elitist ideas where classical modes of cultural communication simultaneously “defend culture while secreting it behind high walls.”

Moreover, Bazin recognized the importance of the intentions of the adaptor and believed that most adaptors work more with the audience in mind instead of from formalist aesthetics or a preoccupation with the nature of the “cinematic.” Adapter intention for the audience can be useful for understanding the interpretative and creative dimensions of an adaptation. He defended adaptations as an “established feature of the history of art” (56) and credited them with aiding in the creation of national or cultural mythology. Bazin claimed that even a “poor” or shallow adaptation could never harm its source text and usually, judging by book sales, stimulated interest in its source. This can be advantageous for more obscure, unheralded texts such as *Red Alert* (Peter George, 1958), which served as the inspiration for Stanley Kubrick’s classic film *Dr Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), as well as more complex, critically acclaimed texts such as *War and Peace*, *Moby Dick* and Jane Austin’s novels, perhaps less “accessible” to the general public, most often read or taught in university courses.

Adaptations may have a particular appeal as adaptations in terms of remembrance and recognition along with the variation and surprise they embody, or as Hutcheon remarks, “the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise” (4). Brian McFarlane speaks of a general desire among the public to see valued texts “body forth” in dramatic expression on screen, while inevitably many viewers are disappointed because what they see is not *their* film but someone else’s interpretation. An interesting

example is the recently released mega-production *Noah* (Darren Aronofsky, 2014), based upon narrative found in the book of *Genesis* in the Bible. Due to negative reactions expressed by test audiences and reservations by religious groups, all the film's marketing materials were carefully altered: "The film is inspired by the story of Noah. While artistic license has been taken, we believe that this film is true to the essence, values and integrity of a story that is a cornerstone of faith for millions of people worldwide. The biblical story of Noah can be found in the book of Genesis⁴⁶."

Granted, the source text or "inspiration" for the film lifts it out of the mundane, but I cite it as illustrative of problems adaptations often face. Here the inherent "doubleness" in the process of adaptation comes into focus as the filmmakers, working in the shadow of their source are at pains to deflect criticism for lack of "fidelity" by invoking "artistic license" while still affirming their film is "true to the essence, values and integrity" of its parent text. However, while a text exhibits the cited characteristics, they may be rather subjective and hard to pin down, making "fidelity" even more elusive.

Adaptations have often been evaluated in terms of proximity to the "spirit" of the original. Coming close to what is known as fidelity criticism, the "spirit" of a text generally mirrors its standard critical appraisal, which may not do full justice to a source text and even less to the adapted film. In *Noah*, the original is being held up as a worthy source or goal that the adapter seeks in some sense to reconstruct. Typically, while an adaptation may alter a story drastically, there is usually *something* in the source text that the filmmaker aspires to transmit or reproduce. In this case, the director mentioned themes of "hope, second chances and family," which he sees as being in line with the themes of the Biblical story. Authorial intent cannot be the sole arbiter or guarantee of the meaning and value of a work of art, but adapter's intentions are potentially relevant to an audience's interpretation. "They are often recoverable and their traces are visible in a text" (Hutcheon 107).

Aronofsky was also attracted to the spectacular visuals inherent in the story. The media communicate in different ways and the camera's immediacy and affinity for action, for capturing crowds of people in motion and presenting a rich visual field, is also part of the equation. Kracauer (50-53) saw stories with open and revelatory themes and functions

⁴⁶ <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/rough-seas-noah-darren-aronofsky-679315>

as uniquely suited to the cinema and indeed, they were key elements in the work of several early filmmakers, especially Russian director Sergei Eisenstein in the depiction of the “heroic masses” common in his films. The strong sensory nature of film has ensured that it will remain to some degree, a “cinema of attractions,” even if the “attraction” is in the human form of some “star.” People are sensitive to forms of beauty, including as Susan Sontag put it, “the aesthetics of destruction, with the peculiar beauties found in wreaking havoc,” (119) and want to behold intriguing, dazzling images on screen. After all, vision trumps the other senses.

Cinema adaptation usually embraces the “surgical art” of subtraction and contraction of its source. However, working from a rather slim text without much detail, writer/director Aronofsky needed to greatly expand concepts and create backstory for coherence, more believable and motivated characters. In this respect, the director stated an intention to “smash expectations of who Noah is,” which naturally generated some controversy along with what some have seen as a fixation on modern-day problems like overpopulation and environmental degradation. The environmental slant is likely to be well-received by many and is typical of how adapters often try to “update” an old story to make it more “relevant” to the present. But the overall point is that adapters are first interpreters then creators, appropriating another’s story and filtering it through their own sensibility, talents and interests. In *Noah*, the more prevalent strategy of digest and search for equivalencies was subordinate to extrapolation, amplification and critique while also paying homage to the humanistic elements of the story. As pointed out by Bazin, adapters must work with an appreciation for the commercial apparatus and audience, treating another’s work with a degree of respect while making it their own.

Before moving on to theory I would like to conclude with a summary of common adaptive practices. As illustrated in *Noah* there may be a change in the tone of story elements for reasons of update, but modification often occurs to accommodate popular taste or for moral or censorship reasons. Subversive or “dangerous” novels are often toned down in the adaptation process with adapters minimizing one aspect of their source text while expanding another for compensation; such as, sexual innuendo for sexual activity or violent language for violent actions. A good example would be Stanley Kubrick’s 1962 adaptive caution in filming Vladimir Nabokov’s erotic and irreverent

Lolita. In their popular form, films are often imbued with more conventional morality than their source text and tend to compress a universal problem through dramatizing it into a personal difficulty. An adaptation may carry a different message, a different atmosphere, distort the original's characters, twist or blunt its points. Some see merit in a triumph of poetic justice and a story that was something of a tragedy may be fitted with a happy ending, like David Lean's *Great Expectations* (1947).

Some believe an obscure story property may be easier to work with than starting from scratch, but there is no reason to believe the old cliché that poor, shallow novels somehow make better adaptations because they are treated with less reverence. We must remember that at the most basic level, an adapter must extract (or create) a viable premise, clear story line, strong roles for actors and actresses and an action filled plot where things actually happen and are not just spoken or thought about. For even a short novel a process of "condensation" and selection takes place since a screen narrative must move at a faster pace than most novels and anything that slows down the action is usually cut. Descriptions (save for visual) are usually cut, as well as minor characters and episodes. Dialogue is usually tightened and minor characters that may be hard to dramatize for lack of interaction, concreteness, or emotional content may be omitted (or merged), as well as incidents extraneous to the plot. Furthermore, larger problems or concepts are often condensed, symbolically as it were, into a single character; hence mythic associations are often more readily implied in film.

An adapter will search for and preserve the most "valuable" plot elements while omitting anything extraneous. For example, when Bradbury adapted *Moby Dick* he left out the long passages on the whaling industry and excised the character "Fedallah" while giving a few of that character's occultish premonitions to another character, "Elijah." In terms of dialogue, film tends to be less poetic and more realistic. For his screenplay, Bradbury saw Fedallah as "too much...the occult straw that breaks the whale's back" (Indick 38). Bazin believed this type of judicious condensation or "digest phenomenon" was essential to the filmic mode of expression and was in effect "as if the aesthetic fat, differently emulsified, were better tolerated by the consumer's mind" (26).

One may argue that adaptation aids some stories because plots often become more powerful when condensed and concentrated, e.g. Kubrick's adaptation of Thackeray's

sprawling picaresque into *Barry Lyndon* (1974). Linda Hutcheon (36-37) quotes novelist Zadie Smith's response to the television adaptation of her lengthy novel *White Teeth* (2000):

...A cut had been made; a motivation inserted, and an artistic clarity is the result. The moment I saw *It*, I gasped—this section of the novel would have been so improved had I thought of the same strategy...In a novel, one scrabbles in the dirt for motivation or stretches for decorative language to hide the lack of it. In film, no such disguise will be tolerated by the viewer. When we watch a man do something on screen, our guts much more than our brains will tell us the truth of the gesture. It cannot be fudged (Hutcheon 10).

This is significant because Smith not only points out an essential distinction between the two media but admits that film can fill in gaps and thus improve a written work overall. Bradbury believed this was the case with his theatre adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451* where the mind and motivation of the oppositional character of the fire chief were more sharply defined, as well as in Bradbury's unproduced screenplay of the novel where its future, dystopic society became more fully realized. Returning to the obligatory cutting and condensation required in adaptations, these operations should not be seen as merely passive exercises but creative in themselves; and more so when they necessitate further creation and incorporation of scenes to close gaps opened by ellipses or to fortify the drama. In some cases it can be analogous to how a writer may add "bridging chapters" or a framing story to make a book out of a series of similarly themed short stories; or it can be more complicated still, altering the tone or direction of a narrative.

V ADAPTATION EQUALS PERFORMANCE

At the beginning of the chapter, I alluded (with Bradbury particularly in mind) to the production of narrative as constituting a kind of performance involving the author, the text and the reader. While one may argue with this, it must essentially be the case for an adapter working with a view to either live or recorded performance. Books are paper and

ink; filmmaking involves flesh and blood actors and working more directly with feelings and perceptions. This is a challenge for an adapter. For instance, he has to be aware of what an actor can and cannot communicate emotionally. A silent look may not be enough to transmit a multi-layered message while on the contrary a character should not be given a long speech to convey what is already apparent to the viewer. A writer constructs a character through exposition, description and interaction and a reader has no apparent reason to question the abilities and specificities of an unseen character as constituted and presented on paper. It is more complicated however, in live media where a character is actually seen and constructed in time and space through the interactive performance of an actor within the specifics of story and setting. As such, audiences will connect (or not) to any movie actor affectively.

This aspect of the filmic equation has proven difficult to assimilate into critical discourse but as Frank McConnell put it, (much of) “the profundity and truth of film experience is due to the presence of the actors-those strange simulacra of personality caught midway between classic dramaturgy and sheer exhibitionism, whose charades of identity motivate our first and most precious interest in the narrative film” (1975 181). Once again, adaptation is performance, and in a literal sense actors bring to life a screenplay but they may assume a special adaptive role via returning to the adapted text for background or inspiration. This is often the case when charged with adapting a well known text or character and they sometimes succeed in bringing nuanced interpretations to characters that their initial creators never envisaged (Hutcheon 81-82)

Richard Dyer defines performance as “what the performer does in addition to the actions/functions she or he performs in the plot and the lines she or he is given to say. Performance is how the action/function is done, how the lines are said” (479). This idea of *how* the lines are said, known as “delivery,” is extremely important. Even scripted speech mirrors everyday interpersonal communication and most stars have more or less distinctive ways of speaking and interaction. Dyer equates acting style with “image”:

A star will have a particular performance style that through its familiarity will inform the performances she or he gives in any particular film. The specific repertoire of gestures, intonations, and so on that a star establishes over a number of

films carries the meaning of her or his image just as much as the “inert” element of appearance, the particular sound of her/his voice or dress style” (480-481).

Thus, a sort of iconic meaning often accompanies a star, so casting may be an art in itself and close to characterization. Regardless of the expertise of a performer, an audience must “see and believe” that a performer could actually be the character being played; occasionally “miscasting” is cited as handicapping a film.

Adaptation requires performance, a great deal of it. Depending upon the kind of picture and talents involved, individual contributions vary and sometimes overlap, making determination of “authorship” highly problematic, but there is consensus concerning the most influential tasks in the actual making of any film. Textbooks spell this out clearly, nearly always highlighting the same seven posts. The director and actors are of course, important, as is the writer whose role in adaption will be discussed shortly. The other key collaborators will be taken into account and examined later in the films under analysis.

The common practice of adaptive condensation may require finely nuanced and textured characters from novels to be radically rewritten and they may suffer because of it. In the passage from the abstract to the concrete, choices have to be made and adapters may shift nationalities, locals, character’s ages and genders but this is not always detrimental; in fact, it may be seen as an opportunity. In adapting the Michael Creighton novel *The Andromeda Strain* (1971) director Robert Wise followed script writer Nelson Gidding’s advice making one of the original four male scientists into a feisty, middle-aged woman which, he observed, created a different, more interesting balance among the scientists, with the female character “turning out to be the most interesting character of the four” (Tibbetts and Welsh ix).

VI REALISM AND STRUCTURE

In film, laws of verisimilitude are often relaxed, but coherence on screen is usually considered indispensable. Therefore, the novelistic tendency for progress in roughly linear fashion through accumulation of detail along a cause and effect chain is

usually amplified in the movies, with every scene either advancing the narrative in some way or telling us something about the characters. Cinematic adaptation tends to favor the explicit over the implicit and usually tries to avoid confusion by lending on-screen events coherence or providing explanatory information in adjoining scenes. Viewing requires a more unbroken stream of attention and is more rigorously controlled than reading time. As in literature, cinematic time does not necessarily have to be linear, flashbacks and flash forwards are standard cinema techniques and audiences expect them, but the story must hold together and filmmakers use forms of repetition to keep their narrative centered and moving forward. Filmmakers routinely speak of the “rule of three,” that is, the number of times an important plot element should be repeated. Key narrative elements are commonly “repeated” or alluded to in different ways during a film for the sake of audience comprehension. These practices flow from the compacted and more highly structured nature of screen narrative.

The linearity and gradual accretion of information associated with the reading process gives way to the spatiality of film with each frame providing information of visual complexity in addition to the input of aural and verbal signifiers. Theoretically, this gives the director less control over the specific meanings created in the *mise-en-scène*. However, editing, camera shots and movements direct the spectator’s attention and can isolate some element, granting it meaning according to filmmaker intention. This extends to narration. “Unlike literary point of view, filmic point of view is usually quite precise and literal. We can “look” with a character, for example, or the director or actor can look directly at us, in a way unavailable to the literary author or character” (Stam 39). While narration in film usually approximates the third-person with camera movement to represent the point of view of a variety of characters at different moments, intimacy and distance and access to a character’s knowledge and consciousness can be controlled through camera shots, *mise-en-scène*, music etc. to a large degree.

A film may be an adaptation from a previous source, or born of an original idea or even a mental image, but this raw material must be fashioned into a narrative of sorts which implies words. For their sizeable contribution and especially if “the film is located in the script” or the writer is famous, from time to time he or she (e.g. David Mamet) is recognized as “author” of a film. One thing is for certain, when a project is being

considered for filming the fundamental problems surround the script must be satisfactory in the eyes of a number of individuals before things are set in motion. This probably accounts for the common Hollywood practice of using the talents of more than one writer in the final preparation of a script. Writer-filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini recognized the screenplay as “a structure that wants to be another structure,” and suggests that it, rather than the novel opens onto boundless space since it is a written notation of graphic space that will materialize only as the film is shot (191-8). Similarly, Marguerite Duras comments upon the curious nature of the screenplay:

When I make films, I write; I write about the image, about what it should represent, about my doubts concerning its nature. I write about the meaning it should have. The choice of image that is then made is a consequence of this writing of the film is cinema. Theoretically, a script is written for something that comes after. But not a text. At least with me, it's quite the contrary (101-2).

In other words, a curious, hybrid type of writing is at the base of cinema; without it the actor can't act and the director can't direct. Often studios and even writers themselves like to begin from a one sentence summary usually referred to as the “high concept,” which may be nothing more than a topic and a question or a simple statement. For example, Ray Bradbury summarized his story treatment for what became *It Came from Outer Space* (Jack Arnold, 1953) with “Just because something looks dangerous doesn't mean it is dangerous.” It is interesting to note that early in his career, Bradbury claimed to have used a similar technique for writing his short stories.

The process is variable but the actual writing is usually broken down into three stages. First there is an outline composed of scenes not usually more than a paragraph in length. The point is to elaborate a schematic of the dramatic structure of the story. Then a treatment of thirty or more pages is prepared where the mood of the story and its characters are outlined in more depth. The treatment contains basic dialogue and some stage directions. From this, a script is written further developing character, dialogue, dramatization, structure, clarity and an overall style. The so called story values, the narrative appeal of the movie are crafted at this stage. There is finally a written breakdown of the story into its individual shots, often accompanied with technical

instructions for the director and his or her staff during production, known as a shooting script. The process remains basically the same for an original or adapted work.

Both celebrated screen writer William Goldman and current screen writing guru Robert McKee use architectural metaphors insisting that screenplays are first and foremost “structure” and must be carefully built; e.g., Goldman insists that “above all, a screen play is structure.” Goldman and McKee refer to a key narrative element they call the *spine*. The former sees it as the “absolutely crucial” element that affords the piece its specialness, and believes the adapter must locate and protect the spine “to the death” (196). McKee maintains a similar view but sees the spine as primarily located in the protagonist and defines it as:

the deep desire in and effort by the protagonist to restore the balance of life. It’s the primary unifying force that holds all the other elements together. For no matter what happens on the surface of the story, each scene, image and word is ultimately an aspect of the spine, relating, casually or thematically, to the core of desire and action” (194-5).

Bradbury spoke of something similar but didn’t use the term “spine.” He spoke of metaphors-find “the big metaphor first; all the rest will rise to follow” (*Speaks* 20). The gold coin nailed to the mast of Ahab’s ship was what got him through the monumental task of adapting Melville’s *Moby Dick* (John Huston, 1956). He called it a “largish symbol” that “embodies all the seamen want, along with what Ahab insanely desires above all” (*Speaks* 20). Indeed, most screenwriters when speaking of the task of adaptation express similar views and goals, whether they are attempting to retain the thrust and flavor of the original or seeking to recreate and sustain an established mood. Bradbury cautioned young writers against writing for the movies before they “learned to write.” He was aware that the screenplay is a unique type of writing, largely consisting of visual scenes that convey narrative through the chronology of sights and sounds.

As opposed to writing, screenplays do not exist as a form of public art. Screenplays are built to live and die in service of the film. They serve as a blueprint for performance; for the actors and the recording eye of the camera. However, even the shooting script is only a guide to performance and the director and actors may be re-

writing it with each on-set decision, with or without another screenwriter being hired. An adapted screenplay is legally considered *an original screenplay* and the sole property of the screenwriter, (Hutcheon 87) however the film production holds true authorship by taking the text to the next step of performance. Shooting scripts of well known films have been published, usually as supplements to magazines like *Sight and Sound*, and in comparing them one can get a sense of the gap between script and film, adaptation is indeed performance.

Complicating matters further, screenplays are rarely ever the work of a single author, multiple participation and rewrites are the norm. Working in the netherworld of development where time can expand definitely, there is much less risk and turmoil in changing writers. According to Bradbury and others, several ideas channeled through several writers instead of a more singular vision presents particular problems for adapting a prior work. Bradbury expressed much frustration with the proposed remake of *Fahrenheit 451* which underwent at least seven rewrites until the author's death in 2012⁴⁷. Still more discouraging in this respect for Bradbury was the adaptation of *Something Wicked This Way Comes* which will be examined later.

VII THE CURRENTS OF THEORY

I would like to briefly survey the various orientations within adaptation theory before outlining the approach I will use. Although André Bazin's comments have been well received and later theorists have built upon them, he never attempted anything resembling a theory. George Bluestone is credited with the first systematic exposition of adaptation in *Novels into Film* (1957). He dealt with the contents of literary and cinematic form highlighting the fundamental differences between the ways images are produced and received in the two media. His basic tenet was that each medium is unique, which shapes conventions and limitations of representation available to that medium. This was positive in that it excluded "superiority" of one text over another since each medium is viewed as independent and autonomous. Thus, it didn't denigrate film in favor

⁴⁷The 2018 cable TV version is a mixed bag—at least demonstrative of the fertility of the source text.

of literature and a film could be appreciated and valued as a film instead of a bowdlerized version of a book. His views contained a strong emphasis upon what each medium can do and do best in comparison to other media. Bluestone devoted most of the first half of his book to this line of inquiry and correctly pointed out that literature and film “reach out to us with separate histories, different raw materials and psychological influences.” However, nowadays many believe that there is little beyond the reach of film (as indicated in the first part of this chapter) and adaptation studies have advanced from notions of “what literature can do and films can’t” to more comprehensive and sophisticated analyses of adaptations.

Bluestone believed the two media were so different that he dispensed with links between an adaptation and its source text claiming that they intersect at the shooting script but lose all resemblance once the film is completed. He viewed perfect correlation as impossible due to the inherent differences between media, thus the filmmaker is not so much an adaptor as a new author. Bluestone favored “fidelity,” but understood that this concept was based on essentialist arguments viewing the novel as the “norm” and having “a separable content which may be detached and reproduced as a snapshot does a kitten” (5). Probably the biggest point of disagreement with Bluestone today is with this rejection of a separable content in a work of art that can be detached and reproduced in another medium through approximate signifiers. Strictly following Bluestone’s reasoning leads to the conclusion that adaptation is an impossibility.

His approach falls under the heading of “Medium Specific” which essentially leads to a “destructivist” position on adaptation. Film does not convert the novel but it must treat it as raw material, a paraphrase. Because Bluestone believed that a novel’s language is inseparable from its theme, the adaptor who may not have even read the adapted text, “works with a kind of paraphrase of the novel.” That is, with a collection of “characters and incidents which have somehow detached themselves from language and, like the heroes of folk legends, have achieved a mythic life of their own” (62). An adaptation is unable to reproduce the textual characteristics of its source because these arise from the verbal form of the written text. But in reality adapted texts do exist (e.g. translation of texts from one language to another) so we must admit the possibility that similar meanings can be constructed across media, adaptations happen. Bluestone was

aware of this, and backing off from rigid technological determinism claimed that shared conventions of literature and film are determined by audience expectations which opens the door to a broader social-commercial appraisal of adaptation.

Later writers tried to overcome the contradictions between theory and filmmaking practice embodied in medium specificity through comparison of texts. The Comparative Approach recognizes fundamental differences between media while allowing for the possibility of a “faithful” adaptation and sought not to evaluate one text in relation to the other, but establish the *kind* of relationship a film may bear to the novel it was based on. It relies on a methodology of narrative and semiotic analysis for comparison between texts attuned to the profusion of factors that make up a narrative text and cause one text to differ from another. It “relies on a metaphor of performance. It too involves questions of textual fidelity, but it emphasizes difference rather than similarity, individual styles rather than formal systems” (Naremore 8).

Film and literature are viewed as separate “languages” or “signifying systems.” The pictorial, multitrack nature of film accounts for it being considered a “language” only in a looser sense as a communicative medium but affirms sufficient correspondence between the two to permit comparative theorists to focus on the process of adaptation and to explain equivalence or failures of equivalence between novel and film. As Dudley Andrew summarizes:

Narrative codes always function at the level of implication or connotation. Hence they are potentially comparable in a novel and film. The story can be the same if the narrative units (characters, events, motivations, consequences, context, viewpoint, imagery and so on) are produced equally in two works.... The analysis of adaptation must point to the achievement of equivalent narrative units in the absolutely different semiotic systems of film and language. Narrative itself is a system available to both and derivable from both. If a novel’s story is judged in some way comparable to its filmic adaptation, the strictly separate but equivalent processes of implication that produced the narrative units of the story through words and audiovisual signs, respectively, must be studied (34).

The comparative approach distances itself from medium specificity and embraces the notion that the same story can be told in different media. It recognizes inherent differences between media, but views them as dictated more by convention than technology. It focuses upon the huge variety of signifying conventions that exist with the awareness that some may be more predominant or better suited to one medium rather than another; that is, more readily accepted by a reader/spectator as expressing meaning. This approach led to a more sophisticated analysis of discourse with attention to “tone”, the manner in which a story is told, and considered “the total visual and aural configuration of a film (camera position and movement, lighting, editing and music, as well as cultural and semiotic material) as background, analogous to the novelist’s devices of description or metaphoric and tonal language in prose fiction” (Klein and Parker 4).

VIII CATEGORIZING ADAPTATIONS

In line with their broader analysis and to address the perennial issue of fidelity, comparative theorists devised a systematic categorization of adaption. According to Robert Stam, “Fidelity discourse asks important questions about the filmic recreation of the setting, plot, characters, themes and the style of the novel. ...the notion of fidelity gains its power from our sense that (a) some adaptations are indeed better than others, and (b) some adaptations fail to “realize” or substantiate what we most appreciated in the source novels” (14). When discussing adaptations, fidelity will nearly always cast a shadow. Comparative theorists, seeking to destabilize the preoccupation with fidelity, for greater objectivity, and in a spirit of fairness to the adapter, sought to ascertain the general relation of an adaptation to its source text through the adaptive strategies chosen and the implicit intention of the adapter. In doing so they recognized and affirmed the artistic value of works deliberately deviating from their source, and those offering a critique or a more original work extracting very little from the novel. They affirmed that there may be many motivations behind an adaptation aside from fidelity. Three categories were generally delineated. Dudley Andrew uses the headings “borrowing, intersection and transformation” (*Adaptation* 30-34)

Other writers deploy similar triads using different names but all recognize those works where the adapter “has transposed as much as possible from the novel and has also attempted to find filmic equivalents for the untransferable elements” (Cardwell 59). These elements are subjective aspects, such as tone, values, rhythm and imagery, aspects present in a text but which cannot be communicated mechanically. This striving for fidelity is “intersection” in Andrew’s terminology and was a mode first championed and described by André Bazin who interpreted it as a refraction of the original; the work illuminated by the cinema but not “opening up” to being cinematized. Well cognizant of media differences, Bazin thought fidelity should not be pursued slavishly, but believed it a worthy endeavor that could be achieved through the creative use of semantic equivalents. In this respect, he saw the ever present snow in Delannoy’s *Symphonie Pastorale* as a “moral coefficient” for André Gide’s conspicuous simple past tenses (68).

Another interesting example was Robert Bresson’s *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951) which he considered not *better* than the book but “more”, including “all the novel has to offer plus, in addition, its refraction in the cinema” (143), from which it gained the “power to stir the emotions, rather than the intelligence, at the highest level of sensitivity” (125). Thus, Bazin did not view adaptation only in terms of “loss,” but justified it by recognizing that cinema could add new valences to a previous work. In contrast to the more common mode of “borrowing,” Andrew saw “intersection” as a type of adaptation where “an original is allowed its life, its own life in the cinema,” and therefore analysis should “tend to the specificity of the original within the specificity of the cinema” (*Concepts* 30). In practice, most adaptations of classic novels aim for fidelity or attempt to give the impression of being faithful, expecting the audience “to enjoy basking in a certain pre-established presence and to call up new or especially powerful aspects of a cherished work” (Andrew, *Concepts* 30).

By far the most frequently used mode of adaptation is “borrowing,” where the filmmaker more or less extensively appropriates material or ideas from an earlier work. *The Book of Eli* (the Hughes brothers, 2010) comes to mind with its theme of a post-apocalyptic library and protagonist who preserves a no longer existing book by committing it to memory. It really is not an adaptation of any particular work and is not foregrounded as such; but it draws core ideas from the science fiction classics *A Canticle*

for *Liebowitz* (Frank Miller, 1960) and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). Another interesting example would be *Forbidden Planet* (Fred M. Wilcox, 1956). In terms of character and plot, it is very similar to Shakespeare's play "The Tempest." But set on another planet complete with a robot, a fantastic monster and the super machines left behind by an alien race, the producers felt no need (or were afraid) to credit Shakespeare. Neither of these were announced adaptations, but they did "pay homage" to core ideas from previous works. This also raises the question of reception. Regardless of whether a film is an adaptation or not, it is only received as an adaptation by spectators who are familiar with the adapted text, therefore generating a different set of expectations or criticisms.

On the other hand, more than a few films and TV programs have run into legal problems for being unacknowledged adaptations. Bradbury's works were often "copied" especially for television, and he did win a case in the 1960s against a British TV production that more or less duplicated *Fahrenheit 451* and so the program was never aired. But such cases are complicated as Linda Hutcheon reminds us: "in the eyes of the law, adaptation is a "derivative work"—that is, one based on one or more preexisting works, but "recast, transformed" (17 USC §101). ... What precisely is "recast" and "transformed"? In law ideas themselves cannot be copyrighted; only their expression can be defended in court" (9).

Andrew comments upon an approach to borrowing: "to study this mode of adaptation the analyst needs to probe the source of power in the original by examining the use made of it in adaptation (30). This leads to questions of whether the original's power has been fully tapped or if there is a disjunction of concerns and styles between the period of the original and the present. Metaphors for this kind of adaptation could be biological (or agricultural); transplanting or grafting, indicating previous life before being transferred for other purposes. There is often a generality and wide appeal in adapted works that may call us to venture into the realm of myth and archetype. These works may be successful not because of fidelity to their source but because of their fertility, its generality through wide and varied appeal. Many believe mythic associations are more readily implied in film because myths present strong images or pictures, thus film accommodates them better. Andrew makes a valid point by saying "this direction of study

will always elevate film by demonstrating its participation in a cultural enterprise whose value is outside film” (Andrew, *Adaptation* 16).

The third category moves still further from its source and is known as “Transformation” or “Analogy.” This approach regards the source text as merely raw material, an inspiration of sorts for a new work taken from an existing work. An example of this would be *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (Eugène Lourié, 1953) According to Ray Bradbury the studio “just bought the story for the right to use my name.” There is only one brief sequence in the film (a dinosaur attacks a lighthouse) from Bradbury’s classic short story *The Foghorn* published in the *Saturday Evening Post* magazine that was accompanied by a spectacular full page illustration of the aforementioned scene. Another example would be Robert Wise’s classic science fiction film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951). Wise’s version was inspired by a mental image (a flying saucer appears out of the blue and lands in Washington D.C.) which materialized in the head of producer Julian Blaustein. The image was suggested, but not explicit to Harry Bates’ short story “Farewell to the Master” (Landon 15). The story was obtained less for its content than for what it suggested. The saucer landing sequence made striking cinema and script writer Edmund H. North built his narrative using only a few elements taken from Bates’ story (Warren vol. I 25) and added subtitle religious parallels (hardly uncommon in SF) giving the story’s alien emissary a resemblance to Christ.

Both the short story and the earlier screenplay were cited in the credits of the 2009 remake of the film illustrating the palimpsest nature of many adaptations. This brings us into the territory of the remake, and there have been recent announcements for remakes of four of Bradbury’s films. By definition, a remake is a cinema specific mode of adaptation where a pre-existing film is retooled or creatively reanimated so that it may speak to a new audience, epoch or explore its source from another angle. Aside from the “fertility” of the source text, temporal changes in cinematic conventions are usually a factor in remakes and stylistically, Scott Derrickson’s color film bears no trace of the semi-documentary, somewhat “film noir” style of Robert Wise’s 1951 “original.” Furthermore, the focus of the latest version was an environmental one instead of the Cold War fears of nuclear war.

In summary, Categorization did move adaptation studies forward and helped negate some of the cultural baggage that adaptations usually carry in favor of judgments based on virtues of the film itself, but as Sarah Cardwell points out, the approach “is methodologically flawed by circularity and vagueness” (61). Obviously, it requires the narrative analysis of source text and film to ascertain the level of equivalence. If sufficient equivalencies are found to propose an aim of fidelity, then analysis becomes a matter of further comparison to reveal the ways in which the film has failed to live up to the book, which most theorists oppose. If the aim of a film is considered to be other than fidelity, then this approach has little to offer beyond comparison of the elements the two works have in common. Even a detailed semiotic deconstruction of an adaptation runs the risk of atomizing the text to the detriment of appreciation of the text as a complete artwork.

There are other drawbacks to the comparative approach, some unintentional or stemming from misappropriation. Once the approach accepts that texts may converge it runs the danger of creating expectations for convergence wherever it is possible, and adaptive analysis runs the risk of becoming a collection of “losses” from the original. A surprising number of critical writers still take a prescriptive attitude towards adaptive changes. They assume fidelity as a responsibility of adapters, frowning on certain changes as “wanton” or “arbitrary” without trying to see how these express the vision of the adapter or adapted version as a whole. Moreover, categorization may lead to preference for one type of adaptation over another. Faithful adaptations may be seen as unimaginative or unnecessary while analogy is favored by some as bolder, with no impediment to being regarded as an original art work. The more common type of adaption, commentary where only a few elements are appropriated, may be seen as a violation or infringement on another work. Cardwell sees these attitudes as subjective responses to adaptation with the common denominator that “these writers feel that the best adaptations are the ones that leave the sacred book well alone” (63).

The comparative method implicitly postulates the superiority of the “original” written text through the valorization of traditional literary elements due to its reliance upon concepts extracted from narrative theory and its focus on the process of adaptation. Textual similarities are valued over differences between the two texts and purely

cinematic elements are ignored resulting in film adaptations remaining imprisoned within a literary framework.

IX A PLURALIST APPROACH

Stemming from dissatisfaction Dudley Andrew suggested many years ago that adaptation studies should take a “sociological turn.” This acknowledges that adaptations have a socio-historical and institutional context and intertextual factors may also be in play. Every era of filmmaking is marked by prevailing cinematic practices and styles as well as other intertextual elements such as cultural preoccupations and pressures. All these influence the process of how a novel is transposed to film. Adaptations as films bear relation to other films, texts and generic conventions. They cannot be entirely separated from their social and institutional contexts.

In this spirit I find Linda Hutcheon’s theory of adaption most comprehensive and satisfactory. She outlines a general theory of adaptation in culture and clearly defines adaptation as a “deliberate, announced and extended revisitation of prior works.” She regards the process as inherently intertextual, and to understand such a work one must be aware of the prior or adapted text as well as the adapting text. There is always a minimum of these two texts, although other texts may be involved and she sees adaptation(s) and source text in a sort of parity, insisting that multiple versions of a text exist “laterally, not vertically.” “An adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing” (9). Hutcheon’s approach is both humanistic and sociological in awareness that works are both created and received by people forming an experiential context permitting examination of the *politics* of intertextuality.

To understand adaptations as *adaptations*, she suggests a series of questions be asked for each work of adaptation: “what?” interrogates the actual forms an adaption takes; “who?” and “why?” direct attention to the adapters as interpreters and creators with intentionality; “how?” focuses on audience reception and engagement with remediated stories; and where? and when? Dealing with how stories change as they “travel” across cultures and time. That is, from their context of creation to the adaptation’s context of

reception. Hutcheon also shifts focus from particular, individual media by emphasizing three broader “modes of engagement,” we have with stories: telling, showing and interacting, and how they must vary across media and how each calls forth a different “mental act” from its audience which an adapter must take into account when transcoding. The move from the “telling” mode to “showing” in terms of performance will be my concern here.

I will use Hutcheon’s framework to structure my analysis, examining adaptations as adaptations, autonomous works that are their “own palimpsestic things.” The adapted text has its own particular context just as the adaptive process does not take place in a vacuum either. It is appropriated by particular individuals subject to various conditions, artistic, commercial and cultural. All these factors should be taken into consideration. The prior incarnations of a text will be examined as carefully as possible not on the basis of a search for “fidelity” but to illuminate the palimpsest nature of the text and to see how it evolved under various conditions and the visions of various artists. This is particularly appropriate for an author like Ray Bradbury whose texts rarely remained static but evolved by the author’s own hand, usually toward performance of some kind, before they were adapted for the cinema. As previously mentioned, four (of five) of Bradbury’s films are scheduled to be remade. I think this attests to the richness, fertility and “adaptogenic” nature of his texts. It appears there are filmmakers who believe there is “more to say” in relation to these texts and are willing to take the creative and financial risk to do so. Therefore, let us carefully examine Bradbury adaptations thus far and let us hear from the adaptors (including Bradbury), their personal reasons, the restraints they worked under and how they chose to interpret Bradbury for the cinema. It is through these interpretations that adaptors also reveal a position taken on the adapted text.

Chapter 4

FAHRENHEIT 451: WITHER THE LITERATE SOCIETY? READING, INDEPENDENT THOUGHT AND AN AUTHENTIC SELF.

I INTRODUCTION

Among the works examined here, *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* and *Fahrenheit 451* stand as polar opposites, yet clearly embody the sensibilities of their singular author. The former represents cinema of wonder, a satisfying and edifying fantasy, while *Fahrenheit 451* is cinema of somber warning. Startling when it appeared over 60 years ago, it remains unsettling and difficult to dismiss today because its vision of the future is uncomfortably close to the actual present in many respects and one suspects it could become even more so in the future. According to Bradbury, it was his only true science fiction novel⁴⁸ in which he extrapolated societal trends and existing technologies to a mind numbing, authoritarian future of hollow spectacle and terrifying banality.

While one may find elements that seem to belong more to the shadowy terrain of fantasy, there is really nothing in the story that we could comfortably conclude *could not* come to pass respecting the known laws of the universe. In generic terms one could say that the story is more dystopian⁴⁹ than routine science fiction, because technology (so key to science fiction) is not the focus, but serves as an enabler of concepts and tendencies the author saw existing at the time of writing taken to a logical extreme.

Concerning an authoritarian future, where books are banned and burned, *Fahrenheit 451* has been in print continuously since its publication in October of 1953 and translated into several languages. It has been called “one of the most universally recognized books of the 20th century” (Eller and Touponce 186), and generally considered “one of the best American books of the postwar era” (Mogan 111). It stands out in the Bradbury cannon for a number of other reasons too. It was the author’s first

⁴⁸ Many of his short stories are science fiction but his novels were generally more fantastic in nature.

⁴⁹ The dystopian novel can be a clever act of rebellion. If technology is about making us more efficient and happier; the dystopian novel serves to remind us how important and deeply human it is to be lazy and unhappy.

novel length work and represents his first attempt to adapt one of his works for the stage⁵⁰ (1955). Years later, it would be the first (and for many the best) of the author's works adapted for the screen. Expanded from an earlier tale, it revisits and more fully explores a number of issues in Bradbury's postwar work. Certainly it can be considered the culmination of the author's previous stories dealing with censorship; but also unquestioning conformity and other social issues America faced during the Cold War years. Because it was an earth bound satirical work, it attracted wider critical attention than *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), or other works marketed as science fiction or fantasy. Although not uniformly well received, some critics found it overly bitter against present day culture and technologies⁵¹, reviews were generally positive at its release. Don Guzman writing for the Los Angeles Times remarked:

Bradbury has more than ideas, and that is what sets him apart from most writers who try to be original. He is fantastic, and human. He never looks at anything with a jaded eye; he is a storyteller every minute of the time, and he is definitely his own kind of storyteller. For a man of words, Bradbury has always been a most visual storyteller – visual in his passions, visual in his metaphors⁵².

Titled "Storyteller of the Future Also a Social Critic" the reviewer was impressed with how Bradbury managed his strong critique through the "storyteller's art" attesting to the plausibility of its themes presented in human terms. He struck a rare balance relying neither on subtlety nor suggestion while avoiding the heavy handedness or hyperbole often found in satirical critiques. Aside from Bradbury's humanism, it is noteworthy that the critic highlighted the visual quality of his writing.

Orville Prescott writing for the *New York Times* shortly after the book's release remarked:

⁵⁰ His friend, the celebrated actor/director Charles Laughton, gently informed him the play was terrible so Bradbury never attempted to produce it, and it would be years before he again attempted to write for the stage. However, he mounted a successful stage production of *Fahrenheit 451* in 1979.

⁵¹ Primarily in a follow up review in *the New York Times*, *New York Herald Tribune* and *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine.

⁵² Don Guzman. "Storyteller of Future Also a Social Critic." Los Angeles Times, 25 October 1953, D7.

Mr. Bradbury's account of this insane world, which bears many alarming resemblances to our own, is fascinating.... Some of his tricks are startling and ingenious. But his basic message is a plea for direct, personal experience rather than perpetual, synthetic entertainment; for individual thought, action and responsibility; for the great tradition of independent thinking and artistic achievement symbolized in books (Weller 208).

Prescott's appraisal parallels the intention of the author as variously stated along the years. *Fahrenheit 451* would steadily grow in stature becoming a staple of high school and college classrooms beginning in the late 1960s. It has enjoyed critical and popular success winning several awards over the years beginning with the American Academy of Arts and Letters award in literature in 1954, the year following its publication⁵³. Rivalled only by *The Martian Chronicles*, it remains among the most widely read of Bradbury's longer works and has generated the most critical analysis and discussion, often praised for its lyrical intensity and its prescience

In introduction to an essay collection on the work, Harold Bloom commented upon the book's "ironic ability to inhabit somewhat diverse periods," claiming that while a product of the Cold War of the 1950s, "it prophesized aspects of the 1960s and has not lost its relevance as I consider it in the year 2000." (Bloom ed.1) Many would agree that its "relevance" has only increased since then. Writing in the mid-60s, Mark Hillegas described it as "the archetypal anti-utopia of the new era in which we live" (158). Kingsley Amis compared it favorably to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948) as "inferior in power, but superior in consciousness and objectivity" and praised the book as "the most skillfully drawn of all science fiction's conformist hells" (95-96). *Fahrenheit451* depicts a world of icy alienation and entrapment for sure, but in comparison to other works of its kind, its agents of repression are milder. The "firemen" in the book serve a reductive and demagogic ideology, a form of totalitarianism enabled through a "tyranny of the majority," a term the writer occasionally used when asked about the book in interviews and in reference to contemporary societal trends.

⁵³ In the spring of that same year *Fahrenheit 451* appeared in three installments beginning with the 2nd edition of *Playboy* magazine.

They are the “true believers” who according to Eric Hoffer have an “unbounded contempt for history;” and have refashioned it to buttress their ideology. In the case of the fireman in *Fahrenheit 451*, it is as if they had always started fires instead of putting them out.

The fully assimilated individual does not see himself and others as human beings...To a man utterly without a sense of belonging, mere life is all that matters. It is the only reality in an eternity of nothingness, and he clings to it with shameless despair...The effacement of individual separateness must be thorough...Above all, he must never feel alone. (Must always be watched by the group.) The individual is absorbed into the collective (Hoffer 60-61).

Published in 1951, shortly before *Fahrenheit 451*, Hoffer’s book analyzed the psychology behind totalitarian systems and extremist cultural movements. The above characterizes the world of *Fahrenheit 451* quite well. People are certainly monitored and never feel alone through the all invasive electronic mediation of television. Moreover, Hoffer noted the appeal of radical assimilation into a collective.

In order to be assimilated into a collective medium a person has to be stripped of his individual distinctness. He has to be deprived of free choice and independent judgment. Many of his natural bents and impulses have to be suppressed or blunted. All these are acts of diminution. The elements which are apparently added—faith, hope, pride, confidence—are negative in origin. The exultation of the true believer does not flow from reserves of strength and wisdom but from a sense of deliverance: he has been delivered from the meaningless burdens of an autonomous existence (117).

The false solace found by those who “live” and defend the system in *Fahrenheit 451* falls into this paradigm of “exultation” or at least bland contentment, through “diminution” where positive “additions” are actually “negative” in origin. This reverberates throughout the narrative even reflected in the character Clarisse’s evaluation of the unimaginative, useless exercises in school which she sees as designed just to occupy and tire students so they have no time or energy to think or desire other things. The society seems at risk of losing its “fictive language” or imagination, the capacity to

imagine things that do not exist—from art to love to law—and then bring them to life. The state-controlled Television is omnipresent, but there are no theaters, cinema or art galleries of any kind in Bradbury's futuristic society.

Fire captain Beatty fits the profile of a “failed romantic” who falls into cynicism and nihilism. Several commentators have seen shades of this but perhaps the captain's evolution through his voiced disaffection runs deeper than that, resembling those Hoffer described as “spoiled” individuals.

They see their lives and the present as spoiled beyond remedy and they are ready to waste and wreck both: hence their recklessness and their will to chaos and anarchy. They also crave to dissolve their spoiled, meaningless selves in some soul-stirring spectacular communal undertaking—hence their proclivity for united action. They are among the early recruits of revolutions (30).

Outwardly, the captain cannot be characterized as reckless, with a “will to chaos and anarchy.” After all, he is defending a stifling, authoritarian order but its senselessness reveals something rather arbitrary and full of intrigue without sound reason behind it. Captain Beatty speaks of the present society as though he were more or less part of its founding or an early acolyte and we do not fully know the violence and disruptions behind its establishment, even if it came about gradually. However, the import of the citation conforms to the captain's desire to be part of the communal spectacle of burning books and touches upon his submerged suicidal tendencies and affinity for the destruction and violence used to maintain the social order. There seems something more sinister and strident to the captain's character than one originating from a failed romantic and Bradbury's expanded character of captain Beatty in his 1994 screenplay move him in this direction.

However, Bradbury was a speculative writer who never believed in anything resembling an Orwellian future. He commented in 1979: “We have knocked Big Brother into the next century. With luck, and if we keep our eye on the ballot box and our chameleon politicians, he may never recover” (Bradbury, *Speaks* 161). “We will survive our worst attempts to hurt ourselves,” he declared while insisting, “I am a *preventer* of futures, not a predictor of them” (Dorif 99). I find such statements significant in terms of authorial intention and mindset. With *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury was not merely aiming

to concoct a riveting story but serious social criticism in the midst of what he saw as complacency, conformity and unreasoned fear. His warning was “that tyranny and thought control always come under the guise of fulfilling ideas, whether they be those of Fascism, Communism or the American Dream” (Mogan 107). He didn’t subscribe to the notion of American innocence that assumes that totalitarianism could never happen there. He believed political passivity bred by a culture of illusion can be exploited by demagogues presenting themselves as saviors to a submissive population. Bradbury was genuinely troubled by certain trends and tendencies he saw in the society of the day, some of which affected him directly. Perhaps for this reason he was more sensitive, or more keenly aware of currents like covert censorship driven by minority pressure, which reminds us of today’s political correctness.

On the surface, *Fahrenheit 451* would seem occupied with the issue of censorship, this was once the standard critique and hardly surprising given the period of its publication, the McCarthy “witch-hunts” for Communist “subversion” in the U.S. However, this is merely one of a host of preoccupations reverberating throughout the text. While properly science fiction, it is a very humanistic tale only sketching a future society through the thoughts, words and actions of its protagonist and the handful of people with whom he interacts. Bradbury’s hypothetical society is presented more through suggestive detail and symbolism than in bold relief. Interest centers less on the fictional society than on the book’s characters and their existential problems which appear directly, as well as through arguments, discussions and indeed, a few polemic speeches. The narrative follows the protagonist’s growing awareness accompanied by increasing disengagement, first with his role in society and then with that society itself. The protagonist’s “field of consciousness supplies the ground of the action, indeed even becomes the central issue within that action” (Seed 83). *Fahrenheit 451* is primarily the story of one man, the fireman Guy Montag and his existential search to find the origin of his unhappiness, to find a voice to speak his mind and somehow build an authentic self.

What few futuristic devices there are, are easily extrapolated from existing technology, being either incidental or fully subservient to the character driven plot. For instance, in the early part of the book technicians arrive at Montag’s home to treat his wife, Mildred, who is unconscious from an attempted suicide. The futuristic, automatic

machine they use is mainly described through the sickness of the patient it treats but cannot cure. The machine used to pump the stomach, variously described as a “black cobra” and a “suction snake” operates with cursory precision:

Did it drink of the darkness? Did it suck out all the poisons accumulated with the years? ... It had an Eye. The impersonal operator of the machine could, by wearing a special optical helmet, gaze into the soul of the person he was pumping out. What did the Eye see? He did not say. He saw but did not see what the eye saw. The entire operation was not unlike the digging of a trench in one’s yard (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 114).

Mildred is serviced like a machine; stomach pumped, blood changed – but we are left with the impression of how deep the “darkness and poison” is, the utopian machines cannot remove it; they can save lives but do not make people any happier. The focus is neither on the machine nor procedure, but the passage is filled with abject imagery, articulating the spiritual desolation and general disassociation from life of the people inhabiting this world that is supported and sustained by, but not brought into being by technology. Technology represents neither the problem nor solution in *Fahrenheit 451*, it merely facilitates an unexamined, “too easy” life. Technology is an enabler not a determinant, people are still in control and can make decisions in relation to its use.

Taking place in an unspecified city (possibly in the American Mid-West) and seemingly not too distant future may account for many story elements having become less science fictional over time, including Bradbury’s extrapolation of a number of current technologies including touch pad entry locks, home viewing systems, stereo headphones and disturbingly pervasive video surveillance. He also foresaw reality TV, the babble of 24-hour cable news, random killing in the streets, mass sedation by television and tranquilizers. He did not see global religious warfare coming, only fanaticism, obedience and conformity. Henry David Thoreau believed that most men lived lives of “quiet desperation,” in *Fahrenheit 451* it is more a life of aimless distraction where people indulge in various forms of self-destructive behavior and random violence. Essentially, the vague totalitarianism of the story came about through the small-mindedness of the common people, ironically resulting in one of the most basic community institutions, the fire department, being enlisted to enforce conformity, in

satiric reversal of its normal function. Finally, “the novel’s sarcasm is directed not at specific government institutions but at anti-intellectualism and cramped materialism posing as social philosophy, justifying book burning in the service of a degraded democratic ideal” (Mogan 105). As variously stated by Bradbury, science fiction is “the fiction of the moralist” and *Fahrenheit 451* is about as far as he went in using science fiction for social criticism.

II CONTEXT OF WRITING

While praised for its “ability to inhabit diverse periods,” and its “relevance” to the present, *Fahrenheit 451* is still a cultural document from the Cold War. A brief discussion of the times and the author’s reactions and opinions from that period may lead to greater appreciation of the novel and Bradbury’s thoughts and motivations behind writing it.

The novel reached the public during a troubled and suspicious period in American history, indeed much of the world appeared to be in something resembling a crisis of conscience. The Nazi book burnings were a recent memory and had affected Bradbury deeply through newsreels during his adolescence. “When Hitler burned a book I felt it as keenly, please forgive me, as burning a human, for in the sum of history they are one and the same flesh” (Mogan 107). Bradbury also mentioned his youthful awareness of the burning of the great library in ancient Alexandria which further impressed upon him the vulnerability of books to censure and destruction. Similar, contemporary occurrences convinced Bradbury of the cyclical nature of oppressive censure. That is, it was a danger or evil that would never be eradicated, so vigilance was required. Traces of the cyclical nature of man’s history, his blunders and attempts to start anew are voiced in *Fahrenheit 451*, particularly through reference to the legend of the Phoenix. In a coda he added to the book in 1979 he speaks of the reoccurring struggle against censorship, particularly the pressure brought to bear by minority groups of all kinds. His solution was simply neither to listen, nor give in to them.

Returning to the period of authorship, Hitler was gone, but Stalin was still head of an aggressive Soviet Union, repressing dissidents and minorities alike in an attempt to

fully standardize his version of an ideal society. Bradbury understood that they weren't just burning books behind the scenes but their authors as well. The German novelist-playwright Lion Feuchtwanger observed that social events and interactions in Stalinist society were all "as similar as drops of water," especially the scripted enthusiasm surrounding public speeches. Such grotesqueries hardly went unnoticed by satirical writers such as Bradbury. But closer to home, liberty and self-expression were severely taxed by the communist "witch hunts" instigated by Senator Joseph McCarthy and were in full swing when *Fahrenheit 451* was written. Thus, "climate of fear" is not an inappropriate term to describe the period. In a 1993 interview about the book Bradbury stated: "I wrote it in 1953. I was angry at (Senator Joseph) McCarthy ... I was angry about the blacklisting and the Hollywood 10. I was a \$100-a-week screenwriter, but I wasn't scared-I was angry" (Green 146).

It is hard to imagine today how bad things really were in the U.S. Reputations and careers were badly sullied or ruined in the artistic community. Many people in the entertainment industry were "black-listed," deprived of their livelihoods because no one would hire them as suspected Communists or Communist sympathizers. Occurring in 1947, slightly before senator McCarthy gained prominence, the so called "Hollywood 10" was merely one of the highest profile and most egregious incidents of the era where a number of screenwriters and a couple of directors were cited for contempt of Congress and black-listed for refusing to answer questions from the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Things only got worse as Bradbury contemplated writing *Fahrenheit 451*. Soon, the atmosphere had become so thick that even children's comic books fell under scrutiny for their purportedly harmful or subversive effect on readers. Bradbury caught some of the fallout from this as EC Comics were then adapting some of his earlier horror tales. He stood his ground here as well, allowing EC a virtual free hand in illustrating and adapting his stories, many of which stand as masterpieces in the genre.

Bradbury's frustration with the cultural politics of the day was soon vented in his non-fictional "Letter to the Republican Party," printed at the writer's expense, in the Hollywood trade magazine *Daily Variety* in November of 1952. It is a verbal blast from someone clearly fed up with the way things had become and unafraid of the consequences of dissent. "I have seen too much fear in a country that has no right to be

afraid,” he complained. “I have seen too many campaigns...won on the issue of fear itself, and not on the facts.” He concluded by pleading “in the name of all that is right and good and fair, let us send McCarthy and his friends back to Salem and the seventeenth century⁵⁴.” Bradbury remembered it as an act of conscious but this gave little comfort to his Hollywood agent who believed he would never work in Hollywood again. The fact that fellow artists were among those who suffered the most angered Bradbury and he knew some of the victims personally⁵⁵.

In a 2002 interview he commented that he had known a lot of “well meaning people” who were temporarily involved with Communism although none of them were “diehards” (Aggelis 197). Although Bradbury was politically left leaning at the time, he was not (unlike George Orwell) a politically motivated writer. His concerns and philosophy extended well beyond political lines, to things no political party could lay sole claim to championing or combating. In the cited interview, he spoke of his youthful involvement with a utopian group known as Technocracy Incorporated— “wonderful ideas and plans but completely impractical,” he recalled. However, he claimed the reason he left the group after only one year was that he felt it was taking on a dogmatic, totalizing world view he could not share. He recalled seeing members standing and practically giving a Fascist salute as one of their speakers entered a meeting hall. Of course this was the late 1930s and only 19 at the time, Bradbury rarely spoke of these experiences but they left an impression on him. They seem to have soured him on political organizations.

He rarely spoke of politics and especially in later years, considered himself an “Independent” on the grounds that “anyone who *belongs* to one party or another has ceased to think for himself” (Aggelis 198). The point I want to make is that Bradbury’s work was essentially apolitical. His critiques centered on the individual in

⁵⁴ Bradbury is referring to the infamous witch trials of Salem, Massachusetts of 1692-93 where 20 people were put to death. He claimed that one of his ancestors was among the accused.

⁵⁵ The wife of famed cinematographer James Wong Howe was a suspect and the couple was under surveillance. This inspired Bradbury’s unpublished story “The Cricket on the Hearth” that alludes to government surveillance in people’s homes. In fact, a few years ago due to the Federal Freedom of Information Act, it was discovered that Bradbury was under Federal Bureau of Investigation scrutiny for the better part of 1959 as a possible Communist sympathizer. It appears to have been a rather thorough investigation into his past including house surveillance but concluded there was no evidence that he had ever been a member of the Communist Party (Weller, 252-253).

society and he strongly favored personal, intellectual freedom and respect for individual differences. Some of his more accomplished short stories before *Fahrenheit 451* dealing with black and Hispanic minorities (long before it became fashionable) clearly showed this⁵⁶. If he manifested a political view in his work, it was one of balance, integration and reconciliation; first, individuals to themselves and then to each other.

Bradbury reacted to the social climate surrounding *Fahrenheit 451* as a humanist not as a proponent of any political ideology or utopian vision, although he never abandoned his basic optimism. He was among many who considered the unhindered expression of the artist of utmost importance. More than just an issue of free speech, he viewed the artist's vocation as important, offering an interpretative representation of the individual and society to anyone who chose to pay attention. He believed in the humanistic potential of art to break down barriers, ease prejudice and build bridges since he believed "well-executed" or at least "entertaining" art could, through its indirect approach, penetrate emotional and intellectual prejudices. Aside from art's ability to cast us back on ourselves for a searching decision, Bradbury believed that the artist can help define new values. These sensibilities find abundant expression in *Fahrenheit 451*, where books seem to be calculated traps for meditation for the story's protagonist.

The 1950s were a period of intense rationalization and conformity so one needs not wonder why Bradbury saw modern culture as a concerted war on the imagination, a theme that appeared in his works prior to *Fahrenheit 451* and the McCarthy period. In the case of comics and children's books, the author saw such repression and censure as leading to a lack of spontaneity, creativity and imagination that was particularly abhorrent to him. His earlier story "Usher II" (1950), also tangential to *Fahrenheit 451*, deals very pointedly with this through construction of a future where all imaginative works considered "disturbing" (for example Poe), have been burned in the "Great Fire" because as Stendal, the story's protagonist put it: "there was always a minority afraid of something, and a great majority afraid of the dark, afraid of the future,

⁵⁶ Among these were early naturalistic stories like "I See You Never" (1947) a tender portrait of a Mexican immigrant about to be deported and "The Big Black and White Game" (1945) about an interracial baseball anthologized in *Best American Short Stories of 1946*.

afraid of the past, afraid of the present, afraid of themselves and shadows of themselves”(Bradbury, *Stories* 670).

In *Fahrenheit 451*, the character who awakens the protagonist to his sorry state and starts him on his quest is Clarisse, who is just shy of 17. Not exactly a child but positively child-like; seemingly the only happy, well-adjusted character in the story because she has somehow avoided being shaped by her sterile society. She is not afraid of others or of being herself. The spokesman for the status quo, fire chief Beatty, considers her aberrant and dangerous because “she (does not) want to know *how* a thing (is) done, but *why*” (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 23). Her perspective is held up as one of the ideals of the novel. If children are censured for imagination what kind of adults would they become? Stunted and easily manipulated was the author’s fear.

Largely because of *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury became one of the highest profile advocates for reading and general literacy of the information age. His main criticism of the education system, and he was very vocal about this, was that children were not being taught to read early enough, or given sufficiently diverse material to stimulate their natural curiosity and reasoning powers. A common theme in Bradbury’s work is the importance of the ability to dream and imagine, not just for the outcast or for mere escapism but as a survival tool for us all. He believed imagination and dreaming allow us to deal with an imperfect present by riding us of life-destroying negativity and opening us to the possibilities life has to offer. To starve the imaginative, dreaming poles of children⁵⁷ (or adults) was to cripple life’s potential. His stories assert that existential problems cannot be solved through technical or rational thinking alone.

For example, in *Fahrenheit 451* reading is presented as a very imaginative as well as intellectual exercise for Montag who craves humanistic knowledge. The life transformation books ignite in him extends well beyond the rational and intellectual, awakening emotions and sensations that allow the protagonist to take bold action and achieve understanding. Foremost among the works Montag encounters are Matthew Arnold’s satirical poem *Dover Beach*, Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* and from The

⁵⁷ Bradbury did see a need for caution in exposing children to certain forms of art (namely films) not appropriate for a tender age, but such cases were rare and he did not think children should be overprotected but allowed to see “the pores in the face of life.”

Bible, *Ecclesiastes* and *The Book of Revelation*. These texts offer a lot to think about and although highly symbolic, Montag recognizes the pessimism of the former ones and the cryptic hope offered by the latter. Taking them all in, he becomes not necessarily a “spiritual” but a “spirited” being. This, Bradbury seems to indicate, is what reading can and should do for us.

In literary terms, *Fahrenheit 451* has illustrious company arriving near the end of a period, as Brian Aldis saw it, (1945-53) of extreme interest in “an authoritarian society” during which both George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* and *1984* were written, as well as *The Space Merchants* (1953) by Fredrick Pohl and C.M. Kornbluth, *Player Piano* (1952) by Kurt Vonnegut and Evelyn Waugh’s *Love Among the Ruins* (1953) among others. David Mogan sees similarities with Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1931) through a “reductionist, materialist image of human nature and human culture reinforced through mass media entertainment” (107). There are these similarities with Bradbury’s text but the respective narratives are quite different⁵⁸.

The point should be made that although Bradbury was hardly alone in the concerns he expressed in *Fahrenheit 451*, he expressed them differently and his novel bears more similarities to his own earlier works on these themes than to outside works. *Fahrenheit 451* touched upon nearly all the themes and preoccupations found in the aforementioned works but differed in its humanistic, rather than fatalistic tone. For instance, at the end of the book after the expected nuclear war has brought final destruction of society, Bradbury’s transformed protagonist and a handful of “book people” humbly contemplate the task of salvaging what is left and building anew with resurrectional optimism. Also, Bradbury’s dystopia emerged more from the “bottom up,” instead of from the “top down.” That is, it came into being through citizens’ desire for easy gratification, a general decline of thought and mass media manipulation instead of totalitarian imposition. As Faber, one of the characters who becomes a mentor to Montag explained, after a while “people stopped reading on their own.” *Fahrenheit 451* essentially differs from its contemporaries in placing the blame mainly on the majority of

⁵⁸ Bradbury became personally acquainted with Huxley a short time before writing *Fahrenheit 451* and had read *Brave New World* during his formative period as a writer while in his early 20s. He recalled that he “tried to be like him (Huxley) including science and aesthetics and anthropology and archaeology and all those things, which of course I couldn’t do” (Weller 174).

individuals who opted for extreme simplification and conformity, relinquishing legitimate responsibility for their own intellects and choices.

A telling commentary on the socio-historic context can be found in a letter to Bradbury concerning *Fahrenheit 451*, from publisher Ian Ballantine which further illuminates its reception and the times:

It is an irony of our time that some of the most important things that are happening to us are not talked about because people are afraid, and I think that FAHRENHEIT and every other non-conformist book faces the obstacle of fear. On the other hand, the very importance of the subject of FAHRENHEIT makes the book, of all of your books the one that I find has been generally read by the people I see. I think it has made a tremendous impression on those people who are not afraid, and it has added greatly to the respect people feel for you. (Ballantine to Bradbury, Apr. 7, 1954, personal papers; in Eller and Touponce 165).

It was a topical work in that it opened the way for people to talk about the social climate and politics of the times. The “tremendous impression on those people who are not afraid,” seems to indicate that it had a galvanizing force on many, and that these found a range of issues in the book worthy of discussion.

There is yet another important, but easy to overlook contextual factor behind *Fahrenheit 451*: the precipitous rise of television. Invented in the mid 1920s, and perfected soon thereafter, it was used to good propaganda effect by Hitler in the Berlin Olympics of 1936, but remained a novelty until after the war when it rapidly became a cultural fixture. A large part of the McCarthy hearings and HUAC investigations were broadcast live on television, powerfully impacting the public, stirring and evoking raw emotions and projections. Bradbury and others also vilified TV for effectively killing programmed radio and damaging the film industry. They had their doubts about this new media and its effect on older forms of media that exercised different effects on spectators. For instance, without the immediacy of moving pictures, radio called forth a more pensive, imaginative response while going to the movies required one to leave home and become part of an anonymous group thus making it something of a social event, automatically adding a peculiar level of separation and distance between a spectator and what is being viewed.

On the other hand, TV, perhaps because it enters our home and resides there like a piece of furniture, (soon referred to as the “electronic hearth”) it automatically carries an aura of “truth” and realism that the cinema does not. This almost coercive power is strongly alluded to in Bradbury’s novel where television screens cover the entire walls of homes and are in 3-D. Television was also alarming in the way it brought a new level of advertizing into the home which is also referenced in the story. Radio and film are not mentioned in the nightmare world of *Fahrenheit 451* but television is central as a controlling, narcotizing force. Bradbury was appreciative and very open to art and media of all kinds, but was never very fond of TV. From early on he considered it a purveyor of clichés, banalities and negativity; a medium that continually repeats our mistakes and failures through the local news. He considered it habit forming and as something we need to frequently take a break from at the very least. Today we take TV for granted, but when Bradbury was writing his novel it was still new, but a juggernaut and many wondered what it would become and where it would lead.

III PRECURSOR TEXTS

One could compare the text of *Fahrenheit 451* to a deep, thriving lake because it was fed by many sparkling tributaries. It is a compact novel but brimming with ideas, symbols and metaphors. Bradbury was able to maintain the feverish pace and intensity usually found in his short fiction in part because he had previously produced a number of short stories touching on *Fahrenheit 451*’s themes.

After his first story collection *Dark Carnival* was published in May of 1947, Bradbury began moving in a more philosophical, allegorical direction. *Fahrenheit 451* emerged from a continuation and refinement of earlier thoughts and concerns expressed in various short stories. In this respect, Bradbury biographer Sam Weller, quotes the author’s mention of “five ladyfinger firecrackers” which led to the “explosion” of *Fahrenheit 451*. “The Bonfire,” “Bright Phoenix,” “The Exiles,” “Usher II,” and “The Pedestrian,” were all social satires dealing with “themes of censorship, banned books,

book burning, the power of the individual, or the salvation of art from the clutches of those who would destroy it” (199).

Also, the short stories *The Smile* and *The Murderer* (1952 and 1953) are thematically tangential to *Fahrenheit 451* as well as the societal premise of *Pillar of Fire* (1948). It was here that Bradbury first gave expression to the intimate, almost organic link between people and books that would emerge in his later novel. Through a supernatural turn William Lantry is resurrected from the dead into an antiseptic society which has censored out of existence most of the “disturbing” imaginative writers of the past, leaving Lantry’s memories as the only repository for writers of the darkly fantastic. In a similar manner, Bradbury’s later novel presents a whole society in denial of unpleasant feelings and emotionally stifled to the point of psychosis. In his introduction to *Pillar of Fire and Other Plays* (1975) Bradbury illuminates the link between this “sympathetic madman” from the earlier story and his later fighter for imaginative freedom Guy Montag:

This story, this character, this play, I see now were rehearsals for my later novel and film *Fahrenheit 451*. If Montag is a burner of books who wakens to reading and becomes obsessed with saving mind-as-printed-upon-matter, then Lantry is the books themselves, he is the thing to be saved. In an ideal world he and Montag would have met, set up shop and lived happily ever after: library and saver of libraries, book and reader, idea and flesh to preserve the idea (x).

In the author’s words it couldn’t be clearer, books represent “mind (or self) as printed upon matter.” He seems to have arrived at the master metaphor of *Fahrenheit 451*, “books as people,” through his previous works. One of the larger questions Bradbury presents to us is in *Fahrenheit 451* is how may we may best store knowledge, data and memories? As the book and movie show, analog storage can be wiped out by fire. But if we choose to rely on digital storage as we do today, we are vulnerable among other things, to solar and cosmic storms that could destroy our data base and thus our civilization. There is no doubt that Bradbury argues for the literary imagination as essential to our humanity but the things that books record must enter into us to some degree or they are useless. Once outside the city, Montag in the closing pages of *Fahrenheit 451*, reflects on his desire to take in the world directly and through the printed

page, “And none of it will be me when it goes in, after a while it’ll all gather together inside and it’ll be me” (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 162). However, Bradbury has continually cited *The Pedestrian*⁵⁹(1951), a tale unconcerned with censorship, as a chief precursor to *Fahrenheit 451*. In this highly anthologized work, most quotidian and social activities have become “deviant” because they were willfully abandoned by a future society captivated by television to the exclusion of virtually all else.

Also worth mentioning is *The Concrete Mixer* (1949), a humorous satire concerning a Martian invasion of earth which deals with the debilitating effects of mass culture including advertizing. Of all things, the illegal Earth books, copies of “*Wonder Stories, Scientific Tales, Fantastic Stories*” and the like cause the Martian Etil Vyre to question the wisdom of launching an invasion of Earth. “They cannot fail,” he insists, “they will repel each invasion, no matter how well organized. Their youth of reading just such fiction as this has given them a faith we cannot equal” (Bradbury, *Illustrated Man* 192-193). Foregrounding the vitality of a free imagination, here too the forbidden literature is confiscated and burned, but as the Martians arrive they learn they have more to fear from American culture and attitudes than weaponry. Etil wonders if the warm welcome by the Earthmen is some kind of plot to “inundate us with banality, destroy our sensibilities” (Bradbury, *Illustrated Man* 200). When he asks a friendly woman if there is more to life than going to movies and buying things, the woman accuses him of talking like a “Communist.” Etil writes home to his wife:

There are blond robots with pink rubber bodies, real but somehow unreal, alive but somehow automatic in all responses, living in caves all of their lives. ...Their eyes are fixed and motionless from an endless time of staring at picture screens. The only muscles they have occur in their jaws from their ceaseless chewing of gum. And it is not only these, my dear Tylla, but the entire civilization into which we have been dropped like a shovelful of seeds into a large concrete mixer. Nothing of us will survive. We will not be killed by the gun but by the glad-hand. We will not be destroyed by the rocket but by the automobile (Bradbury, *Illustrated Man* 204).

⁵⁹ Bradbury often recounted the incident that inspired this story. He and a friend were stopped by a policeman because he thought it suspicious they were out walking so late at night. I will return to Bradbury’s TV adaptation of this story in the conclusion.

Of course, these “blonde robots” that live in “caves” spending vast amounts of time “staring at picture screens,” are the prototype of Mildred in *Fahrenheit 451*. Etil soon meets a filmmaker anxious to make a fatuous film about the invasion with all kinds of merchandizing tied in, “a special Martian doll at thirty bucks a throw,” and “that whole nice new market. Think of all the depilatories and gum and shoeshine we can sell to you Martians” (Bradbury, *Illustrated Man* 208). Through this story Bradbury not only parodies science fiction conventions but critiques American capitalist consumer culture as well. His later vision in *Fahrenheit 451* is only more pointed for its absence of satirical humor.

Eller and Touponce cite an earlier, unpublished work, *Where Ignorant Armies Clash by Night* dating from 1947, as containing similar themes of a hero disillusioned with his work and his subsequent search for new values. The story also contains a reading of Matthew Arnold’s poem “Dover Beach” as does *Fahrenheit 451* (167).

However, a 25,000 word novella “The Fireman” printed in the February 1951 issue of *Galaxy* magazine would be the template for the later work. Two years later Bradbury essentially doubled this text in a nine-day burst of creative activity in the basement of the UCLA library on a rented typewriter. On his breaks Bradbury would wander the library, browsing the books that would fuel his inspiration. Working from the “The Fireman” he increased the role of cultural criticism in *Fahrenheit 451* by expanding the roles of the three characters, Captain Beatty, Faber and Granger that engage the protagonist in critical discussions. These interactions enlarged the emotional scope of the action and proceeded rapidly, without the lengthier development usually found in utopian novels where the protagonist is also by turns enlightened or deceived through character interaction. Bradbury raised questions in *Fahrenheit 451* and described events in such a way as to engage the reader, leaving space for speculation and the filling in of gaps (Eller and Touponce 176-180).

I feared for refiring the book and rebaking the characters, I am a passionate, not intellectual writer which means that my characters must plunge on ahead of me to live the story. If my intellect caught up with me too swiftly, the whole adventure might mire down in self-doubt and endless mind play (Weller 205).

His freshness of approach allowed him to preserve the narrative pace while permitting *Fahrenheit 451* to emerge as a balanced, fine tuned rumination on issues that Bradbury had been dealing with for some time.

IV THEMES AND METAPHORS

I have already touched upon many of these and it is not my intention to critique the book in detail but only outline key elements that an adapter might consider. Typical of Bradbury, the text contains a great deal of metaphorical language. One suspects these could be alternately challenging and inspirational for an adapter. In general, the author's metaphors in *Fahrenheit 451* are strong but economical; not excessive to the point of distraction as Bradbury has occasionally been accused of in other texts.

As already mentioned, the themes are numerous and François Truffaut referenced most of them in his film, even one of the minor ones like nostalgia for relaxed social interaction. In his film this was casually illustrated by an incidental discovery of a rocking chair (a true oddity in the diegetic world) in a musty cellar. Clarisse enthusiastically explains what it is and that it hearkened back to the days when people would sit outside in the evenings to casually converse with family, friends and neighbors. In a fine touch by the director, Clarisse and Montag pause momentarily to marvel at this humble piece of furniture, a case of the ordinary made strange.

The wealth of textual criticism on *Fahrenheit 451* that exists today was not available to Truffaut in the early 1960s so we may discount any such academic/critical influence on Truffaut's interpretation of the work. A perceptive artist, Truffaut was a great lover of literature and a writer himself, who we may assume held the source text in esteem since he originally asked Bradbury to adapt the screenplay. Although Bradbury declined to adapt his book and never visited the film set, they certainly conversed about it and his adaptation with Bradbury receiving still photographs and progress reports from the director during the early stages of filming. While Bradbury had no formal role in the adaptive process, Truffaut's version remained close to the source text, which pleased the

author. According to his biographers, Truffaut was concerned to “do justice to the book;” all the more reason to examine the source text that the director had to work with.

As previously stated, *Fahrenheit 451* was written during one of the most anxious periods of the Cold War, but its broader social criticism and celebration of the powers of literacy and imagination, causes it to far exceed the “horizon of expectations” for a work bracketed by its era. The book’s themes are so wide-ranging and of such contemporary import that it is hardly surprising that it catapulted Bradbury into one of the chief advocates for books and reading of the “information age.” Indeed, there have been several recent books and an endless stream of articles warning that technology, especially “virtual realities,” is threatening to dominate our lives and weaken our humanity. Among the more recent, *Alone Together* (2011), MIT professor Sherry Turkle makes the case that under the illusion of allowing us to communicate better, technology is actually isolating us from the real world, and that interactions in a cyber-reality are a poor imitation for the world we live in. Bradbury was making similar observations decades before this book was published, and the film foregrounds this through Mildred’s obsession with her virtual “family” on her wall-sized television screens.

Turkle is hardly alone in her concern that digital technologies may be provoking peculiar pathologies, obsessions and attenuation of civility. For instance, a recent study comes to mind pointing to the alarming rate at which parents are losing their patience, yelling at or even striking their children because they interrupt them while they are texting on their cell phones. In 2009, Pulitzer Prize winning author Chris Hedges published *Empire of Illusion: the End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle*. He cites the television dominated world of *Fahrenheit 451* while making a scathing critique of “reality television” stating, “Life, Bradbury understood, once it was packaged and filmed, became the most compelling form of entertainment” (29). That is, life more manufactured than real, a false, comforting spectacle like the endless police chases and apprehension of criminals people spend time watching in *Fahrenheit 451*, including a fabrication of Montag’s pursuit and execution by the authorities which he himself views from a safe distance.

The Internet has been a great boon in many ways and the younger generation can hardly imagine a world without it. However, it has destroyed industries and filled the

world with cheap, accessible pornography⁶⁰ as well as a growing number of people “addicted” to the Net. This kind of social critique and debate is not new and will continue, but irrespective of any posture on these issues, is there any doubt that things like “selfies,” social media and “video challenges” are precipitating a society inundated with the “me, myself and I”? If anything, Truffaut’s film captures the neurotic narcissism and fabricated spectacle of Bradbury’s novel even more pointedly than the source text. These and many other themes of the novel were clearly conducive to cinematic representation and imaginatively expressed on film as we shall see later.

Bradbury insisted over the years that his main target in *Fahrenheit 451* was mass culture rather than censorship and his text makes this abundantly clear. His critique reflected the elite cultural view of the postwar period, where a standardized “Culture Industry” and the penetration of advertizing and marketing techniques into every sphere of society were seen as eroding independent thinking by means of a culture that satiated less cerebral, more physical desires, as well as a preoccupation with self. With appropriate irony, David Cochran notes that Bradbury was comfortable making his “criticism in the guise of a science fiction novel, one of the most debased forms of mass culture and the literary establishment’s equivalent to exile in Siberia” (56). However, Bradbury’s critique is not against popular forms of culture per se, but the “mass society” that narrows down the range of materials available and limits the imagination. Likewise, fire Chief Beatty explains to Montag that society works better when people are all the same, achieved through universalizing standards and the reduction of values and culture to a “paste pudding norm.”

Such ideas as these, espoused by Beatty throughout the text may remind one of Hegelian notions of collective consciousness or a “*Geist*.” Either Beatty’s all-embracing “paste pudding norm” comes out of their conception of the common “mind” or would serve conformity to it. There is certainly a sweep away from the disharmonious conception of men as individuals in opposition to others toward something in which one is other than a person. If the society of *Fahrenheit 451* puts into practice anything like a theory of self-identity it seems to present a conception of one’s self as little more than a

⁶⁰ Hedges’ book has a lot of disturbing things to say about this and its detrimental effects on human relationships.

member of a family or community, like Montag's initial contentment to be part of the brotherhood of firemen or especially his wife, Mildred's obsession with her interactive TV family.

Textually, a skeletal synopsis of this fairly brief narrative should highlight its relentless pace and focus. It constructs an atmosphere of alienation and entrapment as it focuses upon the awakenings and actions of a future fireman who realizes he is not happy and decides to start reading some of the books it is his job to burn. Though books and reading are not represented as a solution for life's problems, they affect a great change in the protagonist Guy Montag who wakes up to a meaningful life through the power of literacy and gains the ability to speak his mind. His developing individuality and freedom of thought soon lead him to become an outcast and criminal before fleeing to join a group of dissidents who live outside the city. By committing the banned books to memory, the group hopes to someday reintroduce literacy and independent thought into their withered, mass-media saturated society. It is a society they consider "shot through," or irredeemable. They are not revolutionaries or even idealists in the traditional sense but are waiting for what they see as the inevitable destruction or collapse of society so they may have a part in rebuilding it.

There is no easy optimism here, but neither is there the pessimism or personal helplessness found in most other dystopian fictions such as Orwell's *1984*. Bradbury ends on a note of hope based upon the notion of the cyclical nature of history, which asserts that no civilization survives permanently but something new, perhaps a little wiser and better can arise from the ashes of the old. Montag's awakening and development were well realized in Truffaut's film while remaining close to the source narrative. However, the director opted for a more poetic, less literal ending once Montag fled the city and united with the "book people".

V AN ADAPTIVE VIEW

Aside from the popularity and recognition of the text, what is there to attract a filmmaker? In terms of the problems and opportunities the text might present for the

cinema, one problem would be representation of the “mechanical hound.” This was a small, implacable robot used by the state to track down and terminate dissidents by lethal injection. A shadowy threat, it plays a small part in the narrative although it makes Montag’s final escape from the city more difficult. However, it is not directly connected to reading or burning, and probably for technical (in 1966) and budgetary reasons as well, Truffaut did not include it in the film.

Naturally, the recurrent spectacle of fire, at once hypnotically beautiful and destructive was seized upon by Truffaut and his cinematographer Nicolas Roeg to great effect, as was the actual destruction of books. The unexpected emergence of fire is also a recurrent visual motif in Truffaut’s films. As hinted at above, some of the book’s themes seemingly gained power and significance as they were filmed, while Bradbury’s master metaphor of “books as people” (and finally people as books) presented more of a challenge for the realism of film. The director did not shy away from this metaphor and some critics measure the ultimate success (or failure) of the film upon the director’s poetic handling of this theme.

Certainly, the moderate length, overall structure and pace of the novel, particularly its relentless, linear progression and three part structure (Bradbury divided it into 3 titled parts) would seem conducive to cinema. Also it had an action based plot providing the director with opportunities for visual storytelling which he aspired to as true to cinema. There is also a considerable amount of dialogue and debate, much of it quite good and the director trimmed and used a lot of it directly from the book. Truffaut retained the basic plot outline and characters (save one) in the screen adaptation. Focusing on a single male character, the novel is structured like a three-act play, essentially comprising an awakening and rebellion, leading to a search, a final resolution and revaluation of values. This kind of storyline is quite common, well suited to the cinematic (or any dramatic) medium. Within the three subtitled parts of the book Bradbury inserted a few textual blank spaces, further subdividing these sections, and these frequent breaks (blank spaces) also correspond quite naturally to visually conceived scenes⁶¹.

⁶¹ As stated in the introduction some of Bradbury’s short stories were originally written as performative texts. *Fahrenheit 451* was not, but its framework still conforms to a cinematic or dramatic arrangement.

Bradbury's continual use of symbols, "burning as constructive energy and burning as apocalyptic catastrophe" (Watt 22) and Montag's hands used to express an uneasy evolution of self, which "his conscious can scarcely recognize," (McGiveron 106) carry the visual power of suggestion and narrative cohesion that filmmakers try to create. Indeed, Truffaut's film made use of these symbols much as Bradbury's text did. Naturally, some of the rich metaphorical language characteristic of the author, particularly related to books was a challenge. Personified, books are lyrically savored for how they feel and smell and linked to flights of imagination and freedom; scattered and burned they are "flapping, pigeon-winged" or "blackened butterflies." However, the novel favors performative adaptation by developing its themes and observations mainly through the dramatic mode of character interaction and development. Therefore, narrative analysis may follow the trajectory of the principal character, fireman Guy Montag.

The opening section begins with a statement in the passive voice, "it was a pleasure to burn," and proceeds through the perspective of fireman Guy Montag a poet among pyromaniacs, his hands directing a symphony of burning, and kerosene was nothing but perfume to him. The hose he holds is compared to a "great python spitting its venomous kerosene upon the world...and his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charcoal ruins of history" (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 3). He is gleefully incinerating a house full of books which "die" like birds on the porch and lawn. These books that contain the memory of the past and are a unique and individual reflection of the personalities that wrote them, are symbols of all that Montag's society cannot tolerate, everything that cannot be reduced to the thinkable in terms of mass norms. The image of things being blackened and turned dark, (the wind, Montag's face) predominate in this opening section. Later, in the firehouse Montag would "wink at himself, a minstrel man, burnt-corked in the mirror" (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 4).

This introduces the idea of the society of empty spectacle in which they live, as well as Montag's basic thoughtlessness as an agent of the state in such a society. His face is further described as being gripped by a "fiery smile" that "never went away" and he blithely leaves for home "thinking little at all about nothing in particular" (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 4). Bradbury swiftly and economically constructs the essence of his main

character without him uttering a word. His actions and expressions help establish an overarching attitude for the character painting a portrait well suited to cinematic representation. Furthermore, Montag is the most fully developed character of the text and his point of view predominates throughout, so narrative focalization remains clear and progressive.

For the most part, the other characters may be evenly divided into those on the side of the system or the opposition and whether they recognize or assume it, those tied into the system are suicidal. Montag lies between these characters in polar opposition and is constantly obliged to move one direction or another. “The men are the intellectual and didactic forces at work on Montag, while the women are the intuitive and experimental forces. Beatty articulates the system’s point of view, but Mildred lives it. Faber articulates the opposition’s point of view while Clarisse lives it” (Watt 23). Since the main characters fall conveniently into two pairs of similar individuals, “compression,” is facilitated. This is a common adaptive strategy where a character may be omitted while transferring some of his/her key traits or narrative functions to a similar character. Clearly the (mostly feminine) “intuitive and experimental” forces wield an equally strong influence on Montag as the masculine forces. This is illustrated through his thoughts and emotions that are often described in the text.

In fact, it is the free-spirited, questioning Clarisse who is the catalyst for Montag’s awakening. In view of her greatly expanded role in the filmic text it may be constructive to return to her as Bradbury presented her in his narrative. Her “whiteness,” and freshness contrasts with the dark, smoldering world of the fireman. As previously mentioned, children and their psychic worlds figure prominently in Bradbury’s fiction and often acutely influence the adults within their orbit. Clarisse is not exactly a child (she is 17) she is on the cusp of womanhood yet very childlike in her inquisitive and open outlook on life. Similar to other child-adult interaction (e.g. “A Season of Disbelief”) in the author’s stories, she artlessly disarms or rather “unmasks” Montag with simple, direct questions which he cannot answer and finds troubling. As first described she appeared “fixed to a sliding walk, letting the motion of the wind and the leaves carry her forward,” and her gaze passed “over everything with tireless curiosity” (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 5*). Clarisse is constantly defined in terms of the natural and is largely characterized by her

pleasure and involvement with nature and natural discourse with people. Her house is brightly lit and her family rarely watches their viewing screens but indulge in intelligent, good-natured conversation. Aside from “awakening” Montag to observe and question life, Clarisse serves another important function. She sees something of value, a unique but submerged humanity in Montag which she reflects back to him:

You’re not like the others. I’ve seen a few; I *know*. When I talk, you look at me. When I said something about the moon, you looked at the moon, last night. The others would never do that. The others would walk off and leave me talking. Or threaten me...that’s why I think it’s so strange you’re a fireman. It just doesn’t seem right for you somehow (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 23-4).

No one else does as much for Montag and it alerts the reader to the potential for transformation lying within this bland and stolid character. Montag’s casual meetings and talks with Clarisse are brief because she soon disappears from the narrative. This muted, but curiously affective male-female relationship was seized upon to good effect by Truffaut. In the narrative, one is led to assume that Clarisse has been killed by the violent and bored teenagers that rampage through town at high speed in their automobiles. This is one of the troubling behaviors she describes to Montag, another being the dull, artificial nature of school. “Schooling is meant to exhaust the young so that they are tame, but the frustration felt by the young is then expressed by their “fun” outside the school which always turns to violence. Communication gives way to games of beating up people, destroying things and playing games like chicken” (Zipes 129). Throughout the book we glimpse a society that is narcissistic and nihilistic, full of acts of random violence which is underplayed in adaptation in favor of sterility with a mere undercurrent of violence which does not erupt until the climax of the film. It is interesting to note that in a screenplay for the recently proposed remake of *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury emphasized this random violence making it a significant part of the screen narrative, the main culprits being bored teenagers in automobiles⁶².

⁶² The author’s inclusion of random, particularly teenage violence in his screenplay was perhaps influenced by contemporary events like drive-by shootings in his hometown of Los Angeles. If so, it is another instance of the actual catching up with Bradbury’s fictional world.

Bradbury's narrative soon introduces Montag's wife, Mildred, (renamed Linda in the film) whom he discovers in a drug induced coma in the bedroom. This is such a common occurrence that there are roving teams of technicians equipped with machines to pump the stomach and replace people's drug tainted blood which they do in a casual, unfeeling manner. When Mildred awakes the next morning unable to confront what had happened or what might be behind this desperate behavior, it gives Montag serious pause. Mildred is a deathly creature who when not plugged in to her wall-size TV or radio, takes the car outside of town and at a dangerous rate of speed tries to hit rabbits and dogs which make her feel "really fine." She couldn't be drawn in sharper contrast to Clarisse, but is an abject character that evokes more pity than disgust. She never develops the existential need to create an authentic self as Montag does and his newly acquired habit of reading is frightening to her. Nevertheless, Montag never ceases to treat her with consideration out of sympathy and in hope that she might change. She ends up reporting Montag to the authorities for his books and leaves home mumbling about how she will miss her electronic "family" projected on the parlor walls. Portrayals of complex relationships and women were the director's forte and Bradbury's narrative provided him with two unconventional female characters and relationships which he did not hesitate to exploit, as well as Montag's superior Beatty.

Montag's true nemesis, Fire Captain Beatty is a more cunning, dangerous character whose authority is strengthened by falsification of history and facts. He feeds Montag a number of false facts about the history of the firemen's profession and other historical events that have been rewritten by the state. Moreover, like the Devil as portrayed in the Gospels, Beatty is able to use "scripture" for his own purposes. Because he had read some books (and can quote them) before becoming a fireman, he is thus in a privileged position to refute their value in a convincing manner.

He also bears some similarity to a character identified as "the cynic" in C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce* (1945). In this allegorical tale the protagonist finds himself in a state of limbo or purgatory where he encounters a series of luminous "spirits" and other "ghosts" like him. The "spirits" try to persuade him to repent, believe and journey toward the sunrise to come into "reality" and "joy evermore," while most of the "ghosts" choose to return to the depressing "Gray Town." The reasons and excuses of the "ghosts" are

uniformly flimsy and self-deceptive save for “the cynic” who argues that heaven is merely a trick to “make us behave” supported by false “pie in the sky” rhetoric and that there is nothing to strive for. “The cynic’s” bitter, but reasoned nihilism waylays the protagonist, nearly stopping his journey. Likewise, Beatty is Montag’s only genuine threat, admitting he had read books but that they only led to confusion and discontentment by awakening questions and unattainable aspiration, and that finally he could not accept any of them because they disagreed with each other⁶³. He espouses a broader philosophy too; reductive and twisted as it is, it is consistent.

Detecting Montag’s existential angst he tries to win him back, by explaining how society has become as it is, the important role the firemen play in it and why this is all for the best. Such dysfunction and lack of communication is foisted upon the whole society in an attempt to maintain bland contentment. As fire chief Beatty explains to Montag:

So bring on your clubs and parties, your acrobats and magicians, your daredevils, jet cars, motorcycle helicopters, your sex and heroin, more of everything to do with automatic reflex. If the drama is bad, if the film says nothing, if the play is hollow, sting me with the theremin, loudly. I’ll think I’m responding to the play, when it’s only a tactile reaction to vibration. But I don’t care. I just like solid entertainment (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 61).

In explaining how society evolved to its present state Beatty singles out a process that started around the Civil War-photography, followed by radio and television, “things began to have *mass*,” he explained, “And because they had mass they became simpler” (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 63). The pace of life became more rapid and everything at all thought provoking became condensed and finally censored out of existence. Beatty’s speech is aligned with Bradbury’s insistence that *Fahrenheit 451* was mainly a critique of mass culture and its effects.

Later, Faber a former English professor who becomes Montag’s mentor explains more fully that books and print media died out mainly because people ceased to read on their own. *Fahrenheit 451* places the blame for its dread future squarely on the apathy of

⁶³ William F. Touponce cogently pinpoints Beatty’s condition as an advanced state of nihilism culminating in his submerged desire for death. Montag is afflicted with the same “sickness” but manages to pass through to health.

the people. Mass culture had come to produce a society which offers one little to live for and degrades life itself. Social responsibility and political debate are entirely absent as an awakened Montag reflects:

Jesus God...Every hour so many damn things in the sky! How in hell did those bombers get up there every second of our lives! Why doesn't someone want to talk about it? We've started and won two atomic wars since 1960. Is it because we're having so much fun at home that we've forgotten the world? Is it because we're so rich and the rest of the world's so poor and we just don't care if they are? I've heard rumors; the world is starving, but we're well fed. Is it true, the world works hard and we play? Is that why we're hated so much? (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 83).

No longer indifferent, Montag's critique of American consumerism (and politics) shows a developing awareness and concern for the wider world, a sign that his own internal sterility is ending. The existential need to create an authentic self is what books come to symbolize for Montag. In books he finds a depth of solitude and contact with the thoughts of other minds, which gives him pleasure and astonishment, but which in turn creates a growing sense of unease (not unhappiness) at his own predicament: a fireman whose job it is to burn books and suppress individuality finds that his own identity is shallow and false, and without any connection to history. Truffaut was careful to bring out all these aspects of Montag's character in his film.

Finally, Bradbury was aware that it would be impossible to sustain a technological society like that in *Fahrenheit* without some form of written communication. Simple writings do exist according to the Captain Beatty in terms of technical manuals, "confessionals" and other stories of the shortest, most banal type. It is another minor facet of the narrative that Truffaut incorporates to good effect. For instance, early on we see Montag in bed "reading" what we assume is a newspaper although it turns out to be a series of captionless, comic book like drawings of the most rudimentary sort.

VI THE DIRECTOR

One of the most celebrated directors of the post-war era, François Truffaut had a career of 29 years from 1954 – 1983 directing a total of 24 films, three of which were shorts. More than any of the directors pertinent to this study, he was known as a stylist, shaping each project according to a personal vision, and he generally had the independence necessary to carry it out. Truffaut's independence was based on the fact that from the beginning he was able, through the financial help of his father-in law to establish his own production company *Les Films du Carrosse* so he could be solely in charge of the artistic side of production. For the most part, throughout his career he occupied the key roles of director, producer and screenwriter. And because *Fahrenheit 451* displays to some degree, *all* of the director's proclivities, both personal and artistic, I believe the following overview of the director and his working philosophy are in order. Most of the critical attention *Fahrenheit 451* has received has been due to its being part of the oeuvre of this renowned, French director rather than as an adaptation of a highly acclaimed novel. For his Bradbury adaptation he served as director and co-screenwriter.

By way of introduction, it may be enlightening to observe what the author and adapting "auteur" had in common which were quite significant. Both men were very personal, idiosyncratic artists whose work frequently contained autobiographical elements, especially related to childhood and coming of age. Much of their most highly regarded work foreground children or adolescents. Five, or just over a fifth of Truffaut's films fall into this category. However, while Bradbury's work dealing with childhood verged on the idyllic or was bitter-sweet, Truffaut's had a more tragic tone mirroring the director's own neglected childhood and descent into petty crime. Bradbury was often criticized for excess sentimentality but Truffaut, while perhaps more of an ironist than Bradbury, was occasionally charged with displaying a "bourgeois sentimentality." Also, we may characterize both men, for lack of a better term, as popular artists. That is, aside from the presence of abstract ideas or philosophies, there was a very humanistic side to their work, a sort of emotional universality or familiarity which allowed them to transcend borders, appealing to a wide demographic. This trait probably helped Truffaut

to make an adaption that Bradbury considered a “gift” believing it “preserved the soul of the original⁶⁴” (de Baecque and Toubiana 220).

For Truffaut, ideas were less interesting than the people who created them and one of his favorite themes was the tension between the “permanent and temporary” in the reign of emotions and relationships (Ingram and Duncan 143). All these themes figure prominently in Bradbury’s work, permeated with reflections on abstract time and how we live and remember it. Truffaut was a cinema impresario⁶⁵ in the tradition of Orson Welles, but a warmer and more earthbound auteur, and from that large group of French filmmakers that emerged alongside him, Truffaut’s signature achievement was the international success of his films.

Both Bradbury and Truffaut were essentially autodidacts, educating themselves in literature and film and benefiting from a series of mentors. The most important for Truffaut appear to have been the celebrated journalist/film critic André Bazin and directors Max Ophuls and Roberto Rosellini. Bazin’s writings on cinema became very influential, especially after his untimely death in 1958. He entered Truffaut’s life in his late teens and was nothing less than a surrogate father as Truffaut summarily stated in *Cahiers du cinema* immediately after his death.

Bazin helped me make the leap from film buff to critic, to director. I blushed with pride in the midst of a discussion when he agreed with me, but I felt even greater pleasure in being contradicted by him. He was the Just Man by whom one likes to be judged and, for me, a father whose very reprimands were sweet, like the marks of an affectionate interest I had been deprived of in childhood (de Baecque and Toubiana 130).

Bazin was really the first to challenge the dominant “Formalist” theory of cinema which strongly emphasized semiotic manipulation through manipulation of montage. He was an admirer of the French director Jean Renoir and the post-war Italian neo-realists,

⁶⁴ Overall, Bradbury remained positive about the film, although he became less enthusiastic over the years faulting inclusion of the mechanical hound and the portrayal of Clarisse as a woman instead of an adolescent.

⁶⁵ Bradbury, always a showman at heart was very entrepreneurial in relation to his artistic production.

thus he favored a more naturalistic, humanistic cinema. Truffaut was strongly influenced by Renoir's ideas and in spite of their differences Truffaut strived to create an "intimate cinema, in touch with life," or revealing the extraordinary quality of ordinary situations, somewhat akin to the "found story" as described by Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer. This stems from film's ability to *record* and *reveal* something at the same time in less rigidly composed narratives which leave "gaps into which environmental life may stream" (Kracauer 255-56).

Turning from criticism and theory to the actual practice of filmmaking, Truffaut admired Max Ophuls, interviewed him, and they became close friends and had extensive conversations about cinema. Ophuls was sufficiently impressed with the young man to hire him as an assistant trainee for his next film, *Lola Montès* (1955). Unfortunately, the contract was annulled because of union opposition but this did not prevent Truffaut from spending a week on the set at the director's request. Ophuls encouraged him expressing a belief that he would become "someone important in the creative end of motion pictures" (de Baecque and Toubiana 93) and that he would transition smoothly from criticism to filmmaking. Truffaut spent two hectic years as Roberto Rossellini's assistant mainly collecting research material, writing screen treatments, scouting locations and contacting vast numbers of people. None of these projects came to fruition for the mercurial director including a collaboration which Truffaut was to direct-*La Peur de Paris* (Fear of Paris). According to his biographers, "His experience with Rossellini, though outwardly fruitless, played a crucial role in Truffaut's life; it taught him resourcefulness, cunning with producers, and, above all, how to go from project to project, as dictated by imagination and financial opportunity" (de Baecque and Toubiana 97). In Truffaut's work, perhaps the most obvious debt to Rossellini (and neo-realism in general) is found in his use of non or inexperienced actors, camera mobility and use of the long take, as well as preference for real world locations rather than studio sets. Additionally, his cinema showcased the theme of rebellion to rigid social authority, another common theme in Bradbury's work.

Bradbury's formative experience in the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society was paralleled by Truffaut's association with a group of young cinefiels (many of whom would also become filmmakers) who frequented the Paris cinemateques. The group saw

and discussed thousands of films. In this way, Truffaut could be considered a forerunner of that group of young American directors of the 1970s e.g. Stephen Spielberg, Martin Scorsese, George Lucas and Peter Bogdanovitch (and later, Quentin Tarantino) that used to be identified as members of “the film generation” because they had grown up compulsively watching movies, assimilating genre conventions and shot selections that would become the raw material of their own work.

Truffaut’s aesthetic was influenced by exposure to a somewhat different group of films, some of which he helped canonize through his criticism. He was schooled on a large number of French and German as well as American films including a large number of silent films. He was a great admirer of the “silents” (as was Bradbury) where the story must be told in pictures and the audience must attentively participate in narrative construction; a “secret” he called lost with the advent of sound. Truffaut and several others from his film obsessed group would hone their cinematic knowledge further as critics writing for *Cahiers du Cinema* helping to make it the most influential cinema publication of the time. His critical work obliged Truffaut to pay special attention to the way stories were told, apprehend structure and rationalize his like or dislike of films that in turn, provided a platform for him to articulate his personal aesthetics of filmmaking which we shall examine shortly.

Above all, Bradbury and Truffaut shared a great love of books from an early age which was certainly a factor in the latter’s choice to adapt *Fahrenheit 451*. Truffaut’s love for books finds frequent expression in his films⁶⁶ and was such that had he not become a director, he would have been pleased to be a writer. Though a journalist of some repute before becoming a filmmaking, the publishing of his book on Alfred Hitchcock, long after embarking on a filmmaking career, was the fulfillment of a longstanding desire for literary authorship. Truffaut searched out and collected books, old and new, and like Bradbury, was eclectic in taste loving the classics (especially Balzac and Proust) as well as the “hard-boiled” American crime fiction from the likes of David Goodis and Cornell Woolrich and he adapted films from both of these noir authors. Reflecting his interest in the human and interpersonal, Truffaut valued these genre writers for their psychological

⁶⁶ For example, his Dr. Itard teaching young Victor to read in *The Wild Child* (1970) and Antoine Dionel’s love of Balzac in *The 400 Blows* (1959).

portraits of motivational complexity, vice and weakness. Indeed, Truffaut's correspondence to close friends like Helen Scott is often fascinating for the deep, shrewd insight into human nature it reveals.

Truffaut's influence as critic and informal theorist is recognized as rivaling his filmmaking career in importance. His first critical articles appeared in the spring of 1950 and by 1957 when he dedicated himself to filmmaking he had published over 500 for the magazine *Arts*, and 200 for *Cahiers du Cinéma*. He actually changed the way films were viewed and analyzed. He and his colleagues at *Cahiers* essentially began the practice of seeking out directors and interviewing them for insights into their work. Furthermore, he reviewed and praised more modest, low budget films and their directors that had been generally ignored by critics. Truffaut and other *Cahiers* critics lionized certain big talents that they felt were creatively alive or consistently cinematic (Renoir, Hitchcock, Hawks) and trumpeted new Hollywood rebels like Nicholas Ray and Robert Aldrich. But, less positively, they also made news and secured careers by condemning previous generations of French filmmakers to the rubbish heap.

At the center of this was a long article published in *Cahiers* in January 1954. In "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema" Truffaut railed against what he called "the cinema of quality" which he saw as artificial, anti-natural and spoiled by literary dialogue. Thus, he excoriated the current crop of screen writers and the notion that they were the true authors of the film, along with many directors. He also referred to a type of unappealing film pejoratively as "our father's cinema;" that is, plodding and excessively reliant on studio filming, straining for a psychological realism which was neither real nor psychological.

Theoretically, Truffaut's contribution followed on Alexandre Astruc's 1948 article "le caméra-stylo" which advocated filmmaking as a more personal creative act akin to writing. Truffaut's "author theory" compared the director to the writer of a play or book – as the creative center and coordinator of the multiple labors behind a film and as such should incorporate "his vision of the world" into the film. This theory was championed on the other side of the Atlantic by Andrew Sarris in his 1962 essay, "Notes on the Auteur Theory," and later in his highly influential book *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968* (1968) and has remained influential ever since. For Truffaut, an

auteur was always a director whose talent was defined by the way he handled *Mise-en-scène*. He saw this as the essence of film itself and its beauty, the way a director chooses to organize and photograph the objects and people in his narrative. He saw this as meaningful both aesthetically and morally. He believed that the way a director chose to organize and shoot his filmic world was also a portrait of the director who should reveal himself emotionally on film.

These ideas were influential to what came to be known as the “New Wave” which Truffaut consolidated (some would say launched) with his first feature length film, *The 400 Blows* in 1959. The film was so invigorating that it won an Oscar nomination for its script and was awarded the Director’s Prize at the Cannes festival, which ironically Truffaut had been banned from attending the previous year due to his caustic remarks about the French film industry. The English title of Truffaut’s first triumph is a literal translation from its French title, *Les Quatre Cents Coups* but is idiomatic French for “raising merry hell,” alluding to the troubled youth at the center of the film. It embodied much of what would become emblematic of “New Wave” style and technique and created expectations for the type of film the public would come to expect from Truffaut; namely a film focused upon human passions and relationships, engagingly acted and exploring a wide range of emotions. His second film, *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960) was loosely based on the David Goodis noir novel *Down There*, clearly showing his debt to American B-movies and pulp fiction. It garnered some critical acclaim but was not overly popular with audiences probably because it was such an audacious “mixture of romance, comedy, melodrama and tragedy genres, as well as a crime picture” (Weigand 73).

His third film *Jules and Jim* (1962) focused upon an unconventional love triangle and was an enormous hit. It was also adapted from a rather obscure novel of the same name by Henri-Pierre Rochè, but filmed in a lively and inventive style. Once again dealing with complex emotions, passion and obsessions, it strongly manifested two themes that would be dominant in the director’s work: the evolution and decay of a romantic relationship and the previously mentioned desire for the permanent when life seems to offer only the temporary or provisional.

The term “New Wave” was coined in a 1957 article from *L’express* entitled “Report on Today’s Youth” and dealt with society in general but was quickly applied to

the fresh, youthful force emerging in French cinema, decidedly contemporary in subject matter and unafraid to break with stylistic tradition. Truffaut and his contemporaries had an ambiguous relation with U.S. cinema which they admired—they venerated “B” and genre pictures but wanted to create a French cinema that would reflect French values and especially show France as it currently was. To accomplish this many of Truffaut’s films were more episodic than linear in nature, yet he sought to maintain a balanced tension between narrative structure and a cinematic telling of a story. He wanted to tell “human” stories and be understood, thus he shunned some of the more radical experiments with narrative time practised by contemporaries Alain Resnais and Jean-Luc Godard. “Truffaut was a director who dealt with emotions and saw intellectualism as almost a defect (much like Bradbury). He used all the cinematographic techniques available to great effect but was rarely an innovator, sometimes appearing quite misogynistic and politically incorrect” (Weigand 76). The least radical of the “New wave” filmmakers, he would bring a looser, less formal technique, bringing freshness to even more conventional dramas; a rebel who frequently joined the ranks of the commercial filmmakers he spurned. His long time translator and collaborator Helen Scott demurred on the idea of Truffaut being “The greatest director in the world”, but believed him to be “the most respected and loved in the world” (Ingram and Duncan 21).

The “New Wave,” which was never an organized movement but rather a loose association of directors who happened to unite to discuss and write about cinema at a certain time, was characterized by rapid shooting, young actors, contemporary characters, real locations, natural lighting, small crews and a whiff of improvisation, perhaps coming through their more relaxed attitude towards their actors. New Wave films tended to be about the language of cinema and film genres. New Wave directors had a high degree of cine-literacy, so film homage and genre mixing⁶⁷ were hallmarks of the style, as were visually arresting jump-cuts, hand held camera work, an improvised jazz score, quirky or irreverent humor, dialogue spoken directly to the camera and abrupt changes of pace and mood.

⁶⁷ Truffaut’s *Fahrenheit 451* was something of a mix between the science fiction and suspense genres.

Along with these “modern” techniques they occasionally used classic silent techniques such as intertitles and irises. Although Truffaut was less “experimental” than some of the other New Wave directors, for him, the way of telling a story was as important, or more so than the story itself. As previously mentioned he was influenced by and had a great respect for the power of silent cinema—he felt that the duty of film was to tell a story in moving images, to take advantage of the things that specifically make cinema different from drama or literature—moving the spectator in space and time, which cannot be done in any other art form in quite the same way. His narrative repertoire included the technique of foreshadowing future events and highlighting tensions through objects or inexplicable actions. His was not the very “obvious” cinema of classic Hollywood, yet like Hitchcock, he was intent upon holding the active attention of the spectator in the service of construction of meaning.

We may glimpse Truffaut’s views on adaptation as first expressed in his essay “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema” (1954) where he criticized films that were too devoted to psychological realism at the expense of fidelity to their source material. “Talent, to be sure is not a function of fidelity, but I consider an adaptation of value only when written by *a man of cinema*,” and he reproached a number of filmmakers as “essentially literary men, contemptuous of the cinema by underestimating it.” He felt that many had “made the works they adapt insipid, for *equivalence* is always with us, whether in the form of treason or timidity.” His long time collaborator Suzanne Schiffman remarked that she “always had the impression that he said as much about himself in his adaptations as in his original scenarios” (Ingram and Duncan 9). In general, as writer/director Truffaut would adapt from his source texts what he personally could relate to; experiences, characters, ideas and attitudes that reflected his personal universe.

In his *Fahrenheit 451* shooting diary, (21 June, 1966) he wrote: “My films, like those of a lot of filmmakers, are conceived from the idea of a blend, from the desire to take “the mixture as before” and blend the ingredients together in fresh quantities: Listen wouldn’t it be interesting to tell that kind of story but to treat it in a different way from the usual one?” In the same journal entry he said, “now, on the screen you will see only what was in our two heads, Bradbury’s brand of lunacy and then mine, and whether they have blended together well” (Weist 138-9). He affirmed that the shooting script was

about 60% from Bradbury's work and 40% his own invention. "Ray Bradbury comes to my aid, providing me with the strong situations I need in order to escape from the documentary" (Ingram and Duncan 85). In a pre-production letter to Helen Scott he remarked, "I think that after *Fahrenheit 451*, I'll give up adaptations in favour of original screenplays, which are unquestionably easier to do!"(de Baecque and Toubiana 219). While he did not give up on adaptations this statement surely reflects the difficulty he had obtaining a shooting script from Bradbury's work and perhaps the general respect he had for the source texts he adapted.

The case of *Fahrenheit 451* seems to support this. Truffaut rejected the request for a book on the making of the film for fear it would subtract from the original or create confusion, but suggested that Bradbury's novel⁶⁸ could be reissued including a few production stills from the film. He arranged for each member of the audience at its Paris premiere to receive a copy of the book, a gesture his biographers believe made the film appear all the more stilted and outmoded to critics, who were expecting something less academic from one of the masters of the New Wave (de Baecque and Toubiana 221). Bradbury was well pleased with Truffaut's work (a true rarity among adapted authors) even recommending him for further adaptations,⁶⁹ but Truffaut responded that he felt he had not done justice to Bradbury's book. Keeping all this in mind, we may examine the pre-production process and the actual shooting of the film to reveal more concerning the interplay of intention, circumstance and accident in the adaptation process. Also, in the next section, I would like to comment upon the final selection of actors and crew for the production of the film.

⁶⁸ The 2002 DVD issue from the French mk2 editions includes a copy of the book.

⁶⁹ After the release of *Fahrenheit*, Bradbury sent Truffaut a copy of his unproduced screenplay for *The Martin Chronicles* and also for *The Picasso Summer*. Truffaut did not like the script of the latter thinking it quite inferior to Bradbury's short story. The film, directed by Robert Sallin in 1969, was a dismal failure and never achieved mainstream release.

VII PRE-PRODUCTION, CASTING AND CREW

Fahrenheit 451 was a true departure for Truffaut since it was his first film made in a foreign language, (English) outside of France and in color. He never made another English language film. The larger scale of production was also difficult for Truffaut who had only worked with small crews and budgets. It was a costly, tortuously slow and complicated process to bring it to the screen and was indifferently received by the critics and public alike. Expectation can be a terrible obstacle to film appreciation. *Fahrenheit 451* was too pedestrian to please most science fiction fans and also frustrated the director's fans who were expecting a more personalist, perhaps emotionally charged film from a director who stated in 1957 that "the film of tomorrow will be an act of love."

According to his biographers, Antoine de Baecque and Serge Toubiana, Truffaut first heard of Bradbury's novel at a Sunday dinner in August of 1960. One of the guests, producer Raoul Lévy, told the story of the book which enthralled Truffaut who then asked who the author was and for a copy of the book. If the film appears less a work of science fiction than the book, it should be noted that Truffaut was not interested in science fiction. His attraction for the project was likely his own passionate love for books and the book's blending of cultural analysis and a defense of literature. However, it should be noted that the "politically uncommitted" Truffaut was then embroiled in a censorship battle over his public stance toward the French colonial war in Algeria. Essentially, he and the other signers of the "Manifesto of the 121" were in danger of being blacklisted. Indeed the terms, "witch-hunt" and "French McCarthyism" appeared in some French newspapers and Truffaut was called upon to testify to the police. Fortunately, under mounting national and international pressure the government relented and the blacklist was abolished. But Truffaut had taken a stand and had a brush with censorship. In a letter to a close friend he wrote: "A country that can say "yes" to (president) de Gaulle is a country that doesn't give a damn whether culture disappears or not..." (de Baecque and Serge Toubiana 167).

Because *Fahrenheit 451* was a departure from Truffaut's usual subject matter, we may assume it carried strong personal appeal for him, especially since its realization required a great deal of persistence, determination and effort. From the beginning, the

problems centered upon obtaining the rights to Bradbury's story, the cost involved in shooting a futuristic science fiction tale and the casting of the actors. Knowing it to be an expensive project, Truffaut first sought a co-producer in Raoul Lévy and then decided on a joint French-American production through his American distributor Astor Films. He was now contemplating making the film in the U.S. with Paul Newman in the lead role.

In February of 1962 Truffaut wrote Bradbury and they met the following month in New York in the office of Don Congdon, the writer's agent. Bradbury was not keen on the idea of a screen adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451*, but preferred an adaptation of one of his stories from *The Martian Chronicles* instead. Behind Bradbury's reluctance may have been his own unsuccessful attempt to adapt *Fahrenheit 451* for the stage, or the fact that he had written an unproduced screenplay of *The Martian Chronicles* for MGM a year earlier. At any rate, collaboration on *Chronicles* was offered with the contingency that *Fahrenheit* could be sold for production if the work on *Chronicles* went well. In spite of Truffaut's interpreter Helen Scott being present for negotiations, Truffaut thought he was in a position to buy *Fahrenheit 451* when Bradbury was only offering collaboration on an adaptation of *Martian Chronicles*. In a letter to Bradbury in April, Truffaut tried to explain his motivations:

To do a good job on a film taken from several of your short stories, a big effort would have to be made, in preproduction, scouting futuristic locations, ultramodern costumes and props, so that later I might be less inspired for *Fahrenheit*. Also, I shoot only one feature film every eighteen months, this would put *Fahrenheit* off till 1964, and I think it would be too late by then, even for the producers of the film—since Gagarin (soviet cosmonaut, first manned space mission, 1961), the same films can't be made. It's very important for *Fahrenheit* to be the first European science-fiction film. Hence I think we should negotiate the rights to *Fahrenheit* with Mr. Don Congdon immediately and work together this summer, at dates convenient to you, in conceiving a film which we could begin to shoot at the end of the year (de Baecque and Serge Toubiana 130).

Aside from his affinity for *Fahrenheit 451*, Truffaut's other points are well taken. Perhaps ironically, after manned orbital space flight became a reality, science fiction pictures dealing with space travel fell off drastically. Filmmakers may have felt

constrained because spaceships and artificial satellites were no longer confined to the realm of the imagination. Film historian Bill Warren notes that “in 1958, just after the space boom started, there were 16 English-language films that dealt in some way with space travel; in 1962 there were three” (vol. II xix). Also in terms of cost, the earth-bound *Fahrenheit 451* would appear to be less ambitious to mount than a picture set on another planet. Moreover, the two previous space extravaganzas, *This Island Earth* (Joseph Newman, 1955) and *Forbidden Planet* (Fred Wilcox, 1956) were only marginally profitable, especially discouraging in consideration of the inordinate time and resources expended by their studios (Universal-International and MGM, respectively) to make them. Thus, the genre had remained largely in the hands of exploitation producers whose cheap, sensational films were at least profitable.

However, as the decade drew to a close a new trend began to emerge typified by films like *On the Beach* (Stanley Kramer, 1959) and *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (Henry Levin, 1959). These were relatively ambitious pictures with stars made to appeal to a wider, more mature audience. Truffaut was surely aware of this trend which was gaining momentum when he was looking to adapt *Fahrenheit 451*. The genre was diversifying, getting away from the bug-eyed monsters of the 1950s by returning to the masters, old and new, of written SF⁷⁰. Thus, the films of 1960s blurred the edges between SF and other cinematic genres and attracted big-name filmmakers like Hitchcock, Kubrick, Losey, Lumet, Godard, Frankenheimer, Schaffner and Sturges.

Truffaut would enter this “new wave” of science fiction cinema but later than he had wished. Finally, although a number of science fiction pictures had been produced in Great Britain since the mid-1950s, the Continent’s fantastic output had been limited to horror and Gothic subjects⁷¹. Therefore, we may count Truffaut’s desire to produce

⁷⁰ Although never entirely out of fashion, Verne and Welles were enjoying renewed popularity. These newer “masters” aside from Bradbury, included John Wyndham and Arthur C. Clarke. Works by Harlan Ellison, Richard Matheson and Philip K. Dick were soon being adapted as well, often for anthology TV programs before reaching the big screen.

⁷¹ Two rather juvenile Italian space operas by director Antonio Margheriti were released in 1960 and 1961. Then, Chris Marker came out with the short, (28 minute) time-travel film *La Jetée* (1962). Composed mainly of still photographs, it bears some similarity to the “New Wave” science fiction stories that began to appear in the early 60s. Truffaut’s *Cahiers* colleague, Jean-Luc Godard, released *Alphaville* (1965) one year before *Fahrenheit 451*. Also a dystopic future, it featured a computer controlled, attenuated humanity. However, it is a pastiche of pulp traditions from detective fiction and SF including allusions to comic books

Fahrenheit 451 as the “first European science-fiction film” as a legitimate motivation and an indication of his esteem for the work and not just rhetoric to persuade Bradbury.

Without hesitating to mention his unproduced stage play, Bradbury responded that “I feel I would be the wrong person to try to adapt it to the screen. I am very tired, very exhausted, on this novel, and would do you a disservice if I accepted the commission to write it for you in screenplay form. Therefore, I suggest you arrange to buy the rights from my agent Don Congdon and hire another writer to do the screen play” (de Baecoque and Toubiana 192). It is of course fascinating to think what might have resulted from a Bradbury-Truffaut collaboration, but Bradbury was probably right about the timing as far as his participation was concerned. It would be many years (1979) before Bradbury would manage to stage his play after expanding the part of fire chief Beatty, articulating the character’s motivations. Bradbury did go on to write a 118-page screenplay in 1994 which we may visit later

Through their association, Bradbury and Truffaut did become friends⁷²and corresponded regularly, with the director keeping the author apprised of his progress throughout, even sending him production stills. However, Bradbury never visited the film set and other than approval and encouragement, their correspondence does not indicate that Bradbury made suggestions or had any input on Truffaut’s film while being made. Bradbury’s involvement does not appear to extend beyond the source text, the rights of which Truffaut purchased for \$40,000 on July 19, 1962.

This was a significant sum for a small company like Les Filmes de Carrosse, but as consolation it appeared the film would now be in French so Truffaut gave up the idea of casting Paul Newman and sought Jean-Paul Belmondo for the part of Montag. The actor was unavailable until spring of the following year and the project got bogged down in the writing process for several months. Jean Gault who had written *Jules and Jim* took up the project first, followed by Marcel Moussy. Dissatisfied, Truffaut began work on a third version with Jean-Louis Richard. Richard was not a screenwriter but a trained actor.

and even cartoons. So perhaps, *Fahrenheit 451* was the first “serious” science fiction film produced on the Continent

⁷² Bradbury humorously mentions Truffaut’s 1960 visit to him in Los Angeles in his essay “Free Pass at Heaven’s Gate” (*Speaks*).

Nevertheless, they seemed to creatively complement one another and worked well together. The screenplay was finished in March of 1963 and after reading the novel, Charles Aznavour agreed to the lead role. Henry Deutschmeister, a reliable producer who usually co-produced films with Dino de Laurentis agreed to provide two-thirds of the budget, now estimated at three million francs. Locations were scouted in Italy, the south of France and the Paris suburbs and Truffaut was envisioning the diminutive Aznavour as “rather strong, I think, and better than in the novel” (de Baecoque and Toubiana 193). Truffaut was even beginning to mobilize his film company when for some unknown reason he had second thoughts about Aznavour in the role of Montag.

Unfortunately, Deutschmeister failed to find financing in France or abroad. In a letter to Helen Scott, Truffaut noted that people were reluctant to risk money on science-fiction which they saw as an American genre anyway (de Baecoque and Toubiana 194). Truffaut was not taken aback by this turn of events, in fact, he was expecting it. In a letter to Helen Scott, he said he was not “demoralized” and would put the project off while seeking “a small-scale American producer.” Truffaut then chose to make a fourth revision of the screenplay with long-time collaborator Claude de Givray. Finishing in the fall of 1963 it would still be two years before filming would start.

In the meantime, he completed another film *La Peu Doce* (*The Soft Skin*, 1964). Like *Jules and Jim* it observes another love triangle but this time a more traditional one ending in the estranged wife publically shooting her husband. The film received little praise in France but was quite popular in the Scandinavian countries, Germany, England, Canada and Japan. More importantly, he was working on a book about director Alfred Hitchcock based on extensive personal interviews. The book concentrated a great deal on Hitchcock’s technique and Truffaut went to great length to illustrate it, endlessly pouring over Hitchcock’s films for stills to develop and print until he came to know by heart each sequence Hitchcock had shot over the years.

Truffaut did attempt some humor in *Fahrenheit 451* especially toward the end, but the story as filmed does not appear more violent than the book. Truffaut never cared for physical violence and his oeuvre shows this. In the same letter, revealing his hopes and intentions, he did make an “optimistic forecast” for the film saying. “Books are solid, visible and tangible objects; everyone knows them, everyone has them, buys them, lends

and borrows them. Therefore everyone is capable of being moved by a film that shows books burning *in extreme close-up*” (Truffaut’s emphasis). This was an example of what Truffaut referred to as “privileged moments” which he sought to emphasize for impact in each of his films.

In late 1963 two independent American producers, Eugene Archer and Lewis Allen⁷³ took interest in *Fahrenheit 451*. Archer encouraged Truffaut by writing: “More than anything the industry needs the example of a really brilliant film made in a wholly personal and artistic way for a moderate cost. It could be a decisive factor in starting a new trend, away from the super spectacles with costs of millions of dollars, towards the kind of personal cinema that you, Jean-Luc (Godard) and André Bazin—and I, in my own way—have always tried to encourage” (de Baecoque and Toubiana 213). Lewis Allen made good on this vision by buying the rights to Bradbury’s novel (\$34,000) and the adaptation by Truffaut and his screenwriters for \$30,000. This was unexpected and welcome not only because Allen proved to be efficient, lining up Paul Newman (Truffaut’s preference among Hollywood actors with box office appeal) to star, but as Truffaut would admit the money kept his film company afloat.

He began to believe in an American version of the film and had the script translated (a kind of adaptation) into English and retitled it “Phoenix” (de Baecoque and Toubiana 215). He believed that Helen Scott saw “eye to eye” with him on the screenplay and asked her to translate it while expressing some prescient anxiety about it.

Fahrenheit is one of those films that everyone will see differently and want to tamper with and change: not enough science fiction or too much science fiction, too weird or not enough, not sufficiently a love story or too much of a love story, in short the only way I can have peace in such a situation is to tell everyone to go to hell. If you can think of another way, let me know” (de Baecoque and Toubiana 215).

However, fearing for his independence, Truffaut expressed some reservations about *Fahrenheit 451* becoming a costly film with a costly star. Nonetheless, Seattle,

⁷³ The producer’s function is extremely variable but generally boils down to finance, contracting personnel and coordinating materials for a film. Always a businessman, the producer’s creative input runs from practically nil to being the virtual artistic creator of a film. Allen seems to have been an extremely efficient producer who also had some creative input on the project. Allen produced the acclaimed *Lord of the Flies* (1963, Peter Brook) and several other films along the years but was more involved with Broadway plays.

Toronto and Philadelphia were being scouted for futuristic looking scenery and shooting with Paul Newman was scheduled for July of 1964.

In the meantime, some technical problems had to be settled. The film was to be in color and Truffaut had no experience with color so producer Allen suggested photographer Richard Avedon as an advisor. Truffaut categorically refused: “I don’t like the idea of cinema being a plastic art; I prefer to think of it as a dynamic art. And color is dynamic, thus naturally filmable” (de Baecoque and Toubiana 214). This was wise on Truffaut’s part since he was able to secure the services of Nicholas Roeg as director of photography. Though Roeg would later become more famous as a director he had done 2nd unit filming on David Lean’s *Laurence of Arabia* and was recognized for his innovative use of color in Roger Corman’s *Masque of the Red Death* (1964). The stylish, dream-like quality of his photography for this low-budget picture invited comparison to Bergman and art cinema in general. Even the harshest critics of *Fahrenheit 451* recognized that it was expertly filmed bring vividly to life some of Bradbury’s metaphors, especially through the intense fire engine reds in sharp contrast to the blandness of the film’s setting.

Music-making is the least comprehensible of the arts; and the greatest challenge for film composition is creation of a truly expressionistic score for a straightforward narrative. One whose melodies neither coerce nor pander to our pathos, but instead reveal the lament, immaterial and non-visual meanings that film cannot access. In other words, the composer’s task is to create music to maximize the audience’s interaction with the image. This is especially pertinent for adaptation of a metaphor laden text like *Fahrenheit 451*. Truffaut hardly went wrong by approaching composer Bernard Herrmann who had worked for Welles and Hitchcock for their film scores

Herrmann was arguably one of the most influential film composers of the 20th century and certainly one of the most inventive. One of his achievements was the development of an idiom tailored to suit fantasy and science –fiction screen plays as they became more common from the 1950s onward⁷⁴. Some of his success here was probably

⁷⁴ Among these: the highly innovative and effective score for the 1951 Robert Wise classic *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (1958, Nathan Juran); the Jules Verne adaptations *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1959, Henry Levin) and *Mysterious Island* (1961, Cy Endfield) The latter two scores

due to his use of rare or unorthodox instruments and embrace of modernism as opposed to the techniques of classical music still prevalent in film scores. Herrmann cannot be easily pigeon-holed, but his work was more the “mood treatment” approach rather than synchronization which followed action. He opted for a lyric approach to character and scene enhancement rather than the melody approach. He has been called a natural dramatist whose work moved along a romantic flow of expression (Wrobel 2008). Like Truffaut, and quite unlike other film composers, he was insistent upon maintaining creative control and musical interpretation of scenes. In fact, Herrmann was available to work with Truffaut because of his rupture from Hitchcock over a desired pop score for *Torn Curtain* (1966) which Herrmann was unwilling to provide. In the opinion of many, including French director Claude Chabrol, his music has been the deciding factor behind the success of Hitchcock’s greatest films (Mervyn Cooke 28-29). If *Fahrenheit 451* sometimes approaches levels of Hitchcockian suspense Herrmann’s score deserves some of the credit.

It is no surprise that a great admirer of Hitchcock would highly value Herrmann. Truffaut owned every one of his records and involved Herrmann in discussions of his project from the pre-production phase. Essentially, Truffaut expressed a desire that his futuristic vision be accompanied by music of clarity and almost neo-classical simplicity, opting for a dramatic sound track in a traditional, rather than futuristic style (Ingram and Duncan 85). Herrmann who felt music to be “the communicating link between screen and audience” fulfilled Truffaut’s wishes in an inventive way. The director later wrote Herrmann a letter to thank him for “humanizing my picture” (Mervyn Cooke 28-31).

However, casting complications began once again when Paul Newman dropped out of the project. According to producer Lewis Allen, Newman saw the picture differently than he and Truffaut. He saw it as a political and social document and wanted these aspects emphasized. Though he had strong convictions, Truffaut did not see the film as a political statement. He now became enthusiastic about the young, English actor he had seen in Peter Ustinov’s *Billy Budd*. Terrance Stamp liked the script and accepted the role of Montag but would be unavailable for several months due to a commitment to

were nothing short of fabulous, perfectly complementing the then state of the art special effects of Ray Harryhausen.

make *The Collector* for William Wyler. Truffaut secured Oscar Werner to play the part of the captain of the fire brigade and had contacted Jane Fonda and Julie Christie for the parts of Clarisse and Montag's wife now called Linda. Allen struck a deal for an estimated \$900,000⁷⁵ in partnership with MCA, Universal Studios' European subsidiary.

Things seemed set for filming in the London area in the spring of 1965, but there would be yet another reversal of fortune. While the motivations behind this remain unclear, producer Lewis Allen came up with the idea of dropping Jane Fonda and having Julie Christie play both female roles. At any rate, Truffaut liked the idea explaining to the now unhappy Terrance Stamp that: "Using Julie Christie to play both Linda and Clarisse finally allows me to solve the eternal problem of the thankless part versus the glamorous part, show two aspects of the same woman, and also prove visually that for most men, wife and mistress are the same" (de Baecoque and Toubiana 216). Stamp was convinced that Christie and Truffaut were stealing his show and shrinking his part. No amount of persuasion on the part of Truffaut could get Stamp to change his mind, he left the project.

With time running short a compromise decision was taken by Allen and Truffaut in asking Oscar Werner to assume the role of Montag. He accepted though the change made him ill at ease. The casting of fire chief Beatty was constrained by the British Actor's Equity who insisted upon a British actor since Stamp had dropped out. Truffaut, who had wanted the gruff, American actor Sterling Hayden for the part knew he must acquiesce or face union pressure. He betrayed his general dislike of English actors by saying it did not make any difference who he hired because "in any case they all have a crooked face and a theatrical accent" (de Baecoque and Toubiana 216). Two days before shooting was to begin, he hired the soft spoken Irish actor Cyril Cusack for the part. He did bring a kind of gentleness to the part and his understated playing contributed to a certain ambiguity partially contained in the role as written that left one to wonder, is he a force to be reckoned with, a dim witted martinet or a doddering old man. How dangerous is he?

⁷⁵ This was a reasonable budget for a Hollywood film shot in Europe at the time. American production had become so expensive that from the late 50s onward, the major studios increasingly sought to film outside the U.S

At one point, Truffaut wrote to his assistant/translator Helen Scott that he thought the only reason the picture would get made was because of its two stars. As a performance medium, all the qualities an actor brings to a part, including the less tangible, influencing how, or from what motivation a role is played have tremendous bearing on the overall effect and signification in a film. With Oscar Werner playing the part, Montag could be hardly anything but a morose hero. This suited the film's overall subtlety and its emotionally subdued characters. As an empty vessel that suddenly has his horizons violently opened, Warner is credible. He does not seem however, to transmit the same passion of the literary character. Nonetheless, the narrative is well served through the theater trained actor's natural low key intensity manifested as simmering discontent and frustration, later erupting into violence and open rebellion.

Truffaut cast the German actor Anton Diffring⁷⁶ in the minor role of Fabian, another fireman working with Montag. In a way, Fabian is equivalent to the mechanical hound of the source text. Indeed, he "dogs" Montag, attentive to his every move, later purposely spying on him. Already familiar to audiences for playing evil Nazis and mad scientists, Diffring's sharp features and cold, blue-eyed gaze made him effective in this role. He is essentially a largely silent, unpredictable menace who keeps the audience guessing about his next move and how he might implicate the protagonist.

Both Werner and Christie were recognized stars by this time, with Christie, due to her recent role in the popular *Doctor Jivago* (1965, David Lean) even more so. An attractive, petite woman with sensitive blue eyes, a determined jaw and expressive face, she was well suited for the dual role of Linda and Clarisse. Throughout her career she excelled at playing women who were durable, yet breakable, passionate yet remote as she did in *Fahrenheit 451*.

From the time of its inception to realization, Truffaut wrote/directed another film and published his book on Alfred Hitchcock; if his enthusiasm and energies for *Fahrenheit 451* had dissipated by the time of filming, it is perhaps understandable.

⁷⁶ Commentators have noted that both the hero and villain of *Fahrenheit 451* are Germanic. It has been suggested that Truffaut cast Diffring to make the obvious Germaness of Werner seem less arch in the English setting, but we rarely hear Diffring speak.

Baecoque and Toubiana pen what seems a reasonable summary of the arduous pre-production process:

Fahrenheit had exhausted Truffaut even before he had gotten around to making the film. He had been nurturing the project for four years, through four different versions of the script with four different screenwriters. At least half a dozen producers had shown interest in it, and about twenty actors had been considered.

Now that he would finally be making the film he seemed indifferent, nearly passive, as though inwardly drained and crushed by the excessive weight of production. Truffaut liked to say, and liked to have his screen characters say, that love stories have a beginning, middle and an end. In many ways, the same could be said of films: *Fahrenheit 451* seemed to have outlived its life span before being made (217).

VIII SHOOTING

In spite of the fine cast and crew, the actual shooting was long and arduous, not at all to Truffaut's liking. He recalled only a few good days in a shoot that lasted three and a half months. In the diary he kept during shooting at the request of Jean-Louis Comolli editor in chief of *Cahiers du Cinema*, he called *Fahrenheit* "the saddest and most difficult" filmmaking experience he had had to date. Aside from observations recorded in his diary, there is that of Phillippe Labro a reporter for *France-Soir* who spent several days on the London set of the film. "It was the first I saw Truffaut on a set, he looked puzzled, wondering if he was right to make this film. He seemed like a stranger on the set, as though the film were at the mercy of some other, completely undefined entity, which was the foreign language" (de Baecoque and Toubiana 218).

In fact, according to Truffaut's assistant Suzanne Schiffman, Truffaut refused to speak English on the set. We may assume the bi-lingual Schiffman, whom Truffaut referred to as the "omniskilled assistant" (de Baecoque and Toubiana 150) had considerable knowledge of filmmaking since she assisted Truffaut on various films but on

Fahrenheit 451, “Schiffman⁷⁷ was completely integrated into Truffaut’s creative process—there wasn’t a single idea, a single line of dialogue, a single detail that was not discussed with her before he tried it out on film” (de Baecoque and Toubiana 217). Truffaut’s translator Helen Scott⁷⁸ was present and appears to have contributed as well, giving the director feedback on performance since Truffaut’s English was so weak he was not always able to judge. This must have been a terrible frustration for a director who had a reputation for extracting fine performances from actors and who was confident enough to encourage his actors to improvise.

The Pinewood studio setting carried advantages and disadvantages. It was well equipped, regulated and had many highly competent technicians but there were also union rules that irritated Truffaut. Expressing his discomfort in a letter to Patrice Hovald at Les Films du Carrosse, he called the film “insufficiently prepared” and moving too slowly. He also feared the film was turning out to be “slightly too English for my taste” (de Baecoque and Toubiana 218). Worse still was the tense relationship between Truffaut and star Oscar Werner. They had worked well together a few years earlier on *Jules and Jim* but since then Werner had enjoyed great success in 1965 in Stanley Kramer’s *Ship of Fools* and *The Spy who Came in from the Cold* (Martin Ritt). Which Truffaut believed contributed to a difficult, prima donna attitude on his part where he constantly challenged the director’s decisions. The problems centered upon the very different conceptions of Montag the two men had. According to his diary entries, Werner wanted to play Montag as a hero against Truffaut’s well known antiheroic bias. Truffaut was also unhappy with the way Werner wanted to play against the leading ladies. In his journal entry of March 11th 1966, Truffaut alludes to how he had envisioned character interaction.

In my mind, and to fight against the conventional, Linda and Clarisse are two women who are almost identical, and I asked Julie not to play the two parts differently. For me it was to be the same with Montag, who would have behaved gently and simply with both women. A man of the theater before everything, Oscar

⁷⁷ After *Fahrenheit*, Schiffman became more of a creative assistant for Truffaut in terms of writing (several times nominated for awards) and as assistant/2nd unit director.

⁷⁸ Scott and editor David Ruskin are cited for additional dialogue by The Internet Move Database although uncredited on the film.

Werner would not accept that, and played for contrast. Having played Linda's husband violently, he wants to play the suitor to Clarisse, and doesn't realize the wrong he is doing to the characters; odious at home with his books, outside sweet and charming with his initiator. In any case, he can't win the secret battle that has set us against one another, for in the editing I shall cut to Julie (either as Clarisse or Linda) each time it's necessary to get rid of too strong a gesture, too forced a smile, too grim a face (Weist 129-30).

How these characterizations differed from the source text will be discussed later but it suffices to illustrate the director's intentions and how he was at odds with his star, making an already difficult shoot more uncertain. Werner remained uncooperative even turning up near the end of the filming with his hair cut short in the back obliging Truffaut to film him only facing the camera, or wearing a cap and so he had to use his stand-in when filming from the back. On the contrary, Truffaut found Julie Christie easy and agreeable to work with, (she was fluent in French) but overall it was a difficult, problematic shoot for Truffaut in nearly every aspect and he was relieved to finish.

IX THE FILM: GENERAL COMMENTS

Before more detailed narrative analysis, a few general observations are in order. As initially stated, Truffaut's film was not warmly received by the critics (or audiences). Repeated criticism decried the characters as cold and lifeless, the film as humorless and realization of the people memorizing books in order to save them as either unconvincing or absurd. The first two charges can be refuted⁷⁹ by attentive viewing and by keeping in mind the kind of story world Truffaut sought to create; a rather cold, impersonal one, perhaps a more challenging task than establishing a naturalistic one. The film suggests throughout that the absence of books leads to an attenuated humanity, diminished thought, memory, conversation and sense of time which overshadow the traces of humor and emotion nonetheless present in the film. The habitual criticisms of the community of "book people" at the ending need to be taken more seriously.

⁷⁹ Tom Whalen does this well in "The Consequences of Passivity," *Literature Film Quarterly*, 2007; 35 (3).

However, in that final sequence I see an attempt by the director to break free from the closed, controlled world typical of Hitchcock to a more “open” schema using the camera more as an exploratory tool, lending a more manageable sense of freedom and discovery to the story world. This was a style of filmmaking more characteristic of the director that he seemed more comfortable with. The above concepts of “open” and “closed” films elaborated by Leo Braudy in *The World in a Frame: What we See in Films* (1977) deal with how films present the visible world, how they are confined and relationally defined. Without digressing into film theory, I should, however, present Braudy’s key ideas because I will refer to them throughout the thesis.

Braudy uses the terms “opened” and “closed” to describe an “attitude” a film takes toward both the animate and inanimate objects it contains and their “invisible potential.” That potential of objects to create a world stems from the potential of the technique used to create meaning. Our eyes may wander over the images presented to us on screen but we see them as they are *directed* toward us in various contexts and perspectives. Thus, opened and closed basically describe the highly important visual treatments of material which also support narrative techniques in creation of meaning.

Respectively similar to realist and formalist ideas, they go considerably further in articulation and synthesis of these classic theories, via a *descriptive* approach. It is appealing since it leaves aside value judgements regarding what is or is not a “cinematic” subject and which formative technique automatically leads to good or bad cinema, insisting that “the open and the closed film are part of a historical aesthetic continuity, not antagonists but collaborators in the way films have changed our way of looking at the world” (Braudy 46). The schema recognizes a need for balance, insisting that the visual style of a film should not distract from the words and situations of a story neither by being overly elaborate nor inferior to its script. Braudy’s emphasis upon word-image interplay and plot-style affinity seems especially accurate in light of the flow and immediacy of cinema representation and highly appropriate for analysis of literary adaptation.

Metaphorically, Braudy compares the closed film to a picture frame, a sort of self-contained world existing within the frame of the screen. The open film on the other hand, is more like a window “opening a privileged view on a world of which other views are

possible” (Braudy 49). Thus, an open film does not exhaust the meaning of what it contains and in general it imbibes less of the cynical and fatalistic attitude of the closed film remaining more optimistic and humanistic. Braudy believes that “the formal force of most important films since the late 1950s has been in the intensity of *open* and *closed*, the crossing of the barrier between film and the world,” (Braudy 103) commonly manifested in the dialectic of confinement seeking freedom or freedom submitting to degrees of confinement. As the narrative progresses “confinement seeking freedom” becomes a precise description of *Fahrenheit 451*, but it remains a perfect exemplar of Braudy’s idea of the “closed” film, which I shall briefly outline.

Potentially more static and pictorial, Braudy believes the older, closed form was “the perfected product of the silent-film period” (94). A purer, more schematic form than the open, he sees it employed more often in the spy film, intrigues and crime stories, citing the films of Fritz Lang and Alfred Hitchcock as paradigmatic. Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958) immediately comes to mind. Closed films are usually characterized by a higher degree of omniscience and claustrophobia where the director has created his own space, a fatalistic, though understandable world, usually malevolent and virtually impossible to escape. As such, narratives are usually tight, symmetrical and rarely digress. One may detect an adherence to a theatrical notion called “Checkov’s gun.” That is, there are no extraneous details or accidents, everything is relevant, used and has a place in the story. *Fahrenheit 451* fully follows this formula. Even minor details and minor characters have meaning and emerge two times or more in progressive significance.

In closed style films like *Fahrenheit 451*, the expressionistic, novelistic and architectural orientation of the visuals serves the story perfectly. Architecture looms large in the closed film and is often freighted with symbolic meaning. For instance, during the opening credits of *Vertigo* spiralling graphics are used and even superimposed over the eye of the heroine. They reoccur throughout, culminating toward the end in a treacherous spiral staircase twisting back on itself; mirroring the hopeless obsessions of its doomed characters. Something similar is at work in *Fahrenheit 451* with its opening of a maze of rooftop antennas. Architecture in the closed film may be impressive but it is rarely people friendly, usually indicative of entrapment, corruption or futility and Truffaut’s film strongly transmits this.

The general distinctions of opened and closed style have bearing upon acting and characterization, and contextual relation within social myth and reality as well. A typically theme of the closed film gives us a protagonist (like Montag) trapped by circumstance, alienated by technology and surrounded by a sinister modern (or future) world. The camera in the closed film often imposes a strict point of view, seemingly that of one character or a threatening presence of some kind. Common tropes include entrapment or the guest betrayed. Closed films may present dangerous and forbidden views in a voyeuristic way, implicating the audience in unsavory or illicit activities, linking them to the obsessions and inner compulsions of their characters.

Indeed, *Fahrenheit 451* strongly implicates the spectator with the illicit activity of saving books and reading them. Frequently suspenseful, films using closed conventions may be penetrating to the point of discomfort since their representational style may serve to implicate the viewer in the weaknesses and vices they expose. “The aesthetic motion in a closed film can be described as a burrowing inward, an exploration of inner space, an effort to get as far as possible into the invisible heart of things, where all connections are clear” (Braudy 65). In films of this nature, limits and barriers come from within, are hard to escape and paranoid points of view are common as unseen forces are mapped and explored. Made during Truffaut’s “Hitchcock period⁸⁰” *Fahrenheit 451*’s closed style is hardly surprising including its “transfer of identities” between Montag and Clairisse (Insdorf 54), Bernard Herrmann’s suspenseful score and Montag going from pursuer to pursued, a favorite Hitchcock plot development.

X TITLES SEQUENCE

Truffaut devised a totally original and appropriate credits sequence to introduce a world virtually devoid of print media. The principal credits are delivered orally by an unseen narrator against a background of still pictures of the aforementioned rooftop antennas. As each credit is delivered the camera zooms in on a different antenna, the

⁸⁰ Considered to be 3 films, *Fahrenheit 451* came in the middle, after *The Soft Skin* (1964) and before *Mississippi Mermaid* (1968).

whole frame bathed in a single color ranging from pink to blue. It is a cold and alienating effect, heightened by the absence of music to create a mood. It is an extremely artificial, stylized presentation of the world as we know it, devoid of natural sounds and movement except for the jarring forward thrust of the camera. Thus, from the very beginning it defamiliarizes the familiar upending the expectations of the spectator. The montage of television antennae and the spoken credits simultaneously suggest a world dominated by broadcast television and a society where people are forbidden to read. Credit sequences may be mundane or attention getting, but the spectator is free to search the credits as they appear which carries with it a sense of anticipation, if not pleasure. Here we are being force fed through the image/narration with the maze of antennae exercising an effect not unlike the rapidly criss-crossing lines from the opening of Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959) which adumbrate a cinematically "closed world" and sense of entrapment that characterize *Fahrenheit 451*.

XI OPENING SEQUENCE

The novelty continues as the film opens to uneasy scenes of firemen sliding down a pole, scrambling to their truck and speeding off backed by a strident Bernard Herrmann score. This staccato string arrangement is punctuated by the xylophone and glockenspiel and is quite loud, "carrying the action" as the camera follows the speeding fire truck. This effect is somewhat reminiscent of the spirited score accompanying the fox hunting scene in the then recent *Tom Jones* (Tony Richardson, 1963). But in this case, especially because of the long absence of dialogue, the music creates and sustains a mood, seemingly of anxious disorientation, rather than merely accompanying the action. In such instances loud music often serves to heighten attention in preparation for dramatic moments of dialogue, but there is no dialogue following. Thus we remain in a state of suspense that finds only weak release at the end of the sequence through a merely perfunctory exchange of words. Truffaut uses all the resources of cinema to maintain a level of suspense from the very beginning and throughout the film.

The repeated score accompanying the firemen also serves to highlight the habitual, routine nature of their work. Mervyn Cooke describes it as a “mechanical march accompanying the shots of the futuristic fire engine as its crew heads impassively off to burn yet more books. Instead of the anxious, exciting music we might expect to accompany such an image, we hear clinical precision, with a quirky xylophone melody, almost childlike in its naivety” (28). It is a truly strange and original score, unlike anything in the cinema up to that time. Cooke’s description seems especially apt for his perceptions of “impassivity” on the part of the firemen and “childlike naivety” which adumbrates the surprisingly childish behavior of the firemen soon displayed in the firehouse. In *Fahrenheit 451* the state is shown not only to impede free thought and judgment, but infantilize the populace; this latter theme in particular will be developed throughout the film. Truffaut’s overall presentation of the firemen goes a long way toward representing a state of affairs that is profoundly “off,” an unthinking, deeply dysfunctional society. For instance, actual fireman with their over-size, bright yellow coats and broad-brimmed helmets are somewhat cheerful, if not comforting in appearance. However, *Fahrenheit 451*’s firemen in their tight-fitting uniforms and helmets of the deepest black are intimidating. They look more like special operations soldiers than anything else

From the speeding firemen the camera soon cuts to the “hunted.” In this case, a man alone in an apartment who casually begins eating an apple when the telephone rings and he is warned to flee by a woman’s voice. Only the briefest warning is given and Truffaut underscores its startling impact by drawing closer to the threatened man in a series of four jump cuts (Hitchcock was also fond of this technique). He manages to escape moments before the fire truck arrives heralded by the increasing volume of its siren. As he hurries off, the man hesitates but refuses to discard his apple, and this rather obvious symbol of forbidden knowledge also serves to identify the same man (who does not speak) at the end of the film where he is shown as part of the company of “book people.” As constructed, this scene alerts us to a kind of organized resistance network, lurking in the shadows.

The arrival of the firemen gains subtle power as they disembark as sort of a mob but in tune with the sound of their own footsteps, they soon fall into a uniform cadence or

march which becomes ominous, further marking them more as soldiers or police than firemen. Their impromptu march is indicative of individual conformity to the state which they serve and this seems to be the main theme of this opening sequence. Meanwhile, the eldest of the group, soon to be revealed as their captain, remains in the truck looking on with what can only be described as sinister delight. Seated high on the truck, there are several medium cuts to him establishing his oversight of the situation. The camera favors one man as the group enters and begins to search the apartment. This same man spies a copy of *Don Quixote* in an overhead light fixture as soon as that light is turned on. There is a bit of pathos in the fireman retrieving *Don Quixote*⁸¹, a title we automatically and attentively read in this cold, anonymous, environment where not a word has been spoken.

Another fireman casually picks up an apple and begins to eat it when this man who has discovered the book and seems to be in the lead violently slaps it out of his hand. The camera momentarily focuses on the face of the fireman who has just been slapped as he contemptuously spits out the piece of apple remaining in his mouth. This character is later identified as Fabian, whose angry visage signals a rivalry with seeds for vengeance stemming from this brief, wordless conflict. Thus, Montag (the lead fireman) already appears to have an enemy inside his own organization and throughout the sequence the camera cuts several times to Fabian suspiciously watching him. Herrmann's score remains intense but becomes more minimal, one of rising and falling scales indicative of anxiety and anticipation during the book search, culminating in a crescendo flourish of instruments with emergence of ominous minor tones when the books are finally destroyed.

Other books are discovered including (perhaps ironically) a major stash behind the TV. They are bagged like garbage and thrown off the balcony in slow motion, marking the brute handling and destruction of the books as one of Truffaut's "privileged moments." In a perceptive article written shortly after the film's release, George Bluestone, while calling the book burning scenes "among the best in the film," still declared that Truffaut's attempt to personify books was a "conceptual mistake that no

⁸¹ Of course, the Don's books were burned to remove their influence on his imagination and according to Bradbury, the knight in paper armor on the famous Joseph Mugnaini paperback cover of *Fahrenheit 451* was inspired by the *Don Quixote* character.

amount of ingenuity could correct” (5). This has been one of the main points of contention concerning the film and of course, Bradbury’s metaphor of books as a peculiar human embodiment with a special humanizing power is at the center of his text.

Nevertheless, I cannot agree with Bluestone’s assessment of failure. Inanimate objects they may be, but books are often cherished and there is violence being done to them. A vague sense of discomfort is created when they spill out of the bag upon hitting the pavement below in slow motion. Covers fly open, pages are mangled and bindings splinter—one could almost imagine a trickle of blood flowing from these broken books. Truffaut approximates books as living things by showing them crash to the hard pavement, and later their pages curling into black ash when burned. I think it not inconceivable to give an impression of life and create some empathy for objects by showing them suffer violence or damage. That is, one way to give a semblance of life to an object may be through “killing” it. The emphatic manner of filming gave the books splintering on the pavement a greater effect than seeing them subsequently burnt. In this respect, I find another diary entry of interest:

I have noticed only today that letting books fall out of the frame doesn’t work- I have to follow their fall right to the ground. In this film, books are characters, and to break into their flight is tantamount to leaving an actor’s head out of the picture. I’ve felt from the start that several shots of this kind in the film didn’t come off and now I know why (Weist 127).

Successful or not, Truffaut was trying to capture the master metaphor of Bradbury’s text on film. When the film was released, America was concerned with race riots so burning was a viscerally powerful theme, but Truffaut was certainly mindful of the problem of how to personify books in a visual medium concerned with surfaces and appearances. He could play upon the emotions and attitudes stirred by showing human violence, thoughtlessness and consumption by fire, and he attempted it progressively through three separate burning scenes, bringing us ever closer to the books as they are burned.

In this initial burning, the broken books are piled onto a small portable table, and our point of view is that of the small crowd that passively gathers in a circle to watch.

The fire spewing from the muzzle of the flame-thrower was filmed in close up and from several angles. The whistling, brilliant orange flames assumed a life and power apart from their ability to consume books. Truffaut chose not to emphasize the burning of books in close-up at the outset, rather he animated book and fire by emphasizing them separately in his photography.

The ill-fated books remain anonymous except for the one a small child picks up and begins to leaf through. Prompted by the cold glare of Fabian, a man who might be the boy's father reluctantly snatches it away. The man seems a bit reluctant to throw the child's book on the pyre arousing suspicion that he might be sympathetic to the resistance. During the shot/reverse reaction shots focusing on this man and Fabian we also detect some anxious looks from the onlookers behind them. Their gaze seems to shift back and forth between the two men in anticipation of an outcome; a minor detail adding to the general unease of the scene. Then, the lead fireman about to be identified as Montag, is helped into his gloves and protective gear⁸² as a flame thrower is handed to him and he incinerates the books. There is a perfunctural, ceremonial quality to this in the way the scene is presented. Through the overall somberness of the proceedings and the sad passivity of those present, it seems more like an execution or funeral than a public entertainment or spectacle as Bradbury's text initially presents these public burnings.

Truffaut's film links books to children in a way Bradbury's text does not. Shortly after the scene where the child innocently takes a book from the pile that is to be burned, Truffaut shows another child looking down on the book burning from a rectangular window similar to the rectangular visor on Montag's helmet as he first uses his flame thrower. This rapid juxtaposition may foreground Montag's impending growth in selfhood from his current infantilized state and the blithe innocence with which he goes about his work. In a later scene the captain is shown taking a tiny book from a baby in a park. Later still, when the firemen discover an old woman's library Montag happens upon a book of fairy tales which he casually begins to read before it is destroyed. There is an emotional force in seeing children deprived and Truffaut could be obviating the particular necessity of books to nourish a child's imagination and sense of self; books as

⁸² When Montag dons his protective gear he does it in reverse motion. A technique Truffaut had used in his earlier short *Les Mistons* (1957) derived from Cocteau (Whalen 187).

companions or surrogate parents perhaps. As a neglected child Truffaut sought refuge very early in books.

As the opening sequence draws to a close, the fire chief calls Montag by name and asks about the books he has just burnt and Montag's answer shows him to be totally disinterested in them. If snatching a book from the hands of a child was not enough to illustrate the position of the state regarding books, the fire chief calls the practice of keeping books "perverse" (adding a moral layer to the infraction) and wonders aloud why people even try to hide books. The captain, further transmitting a crafty and distant air addresses his questions to Montag in the 3rd person, finally asking him what he does on his day off. "Not much, mow the grass," he replies and the chief then asks, "what if the law forbids it?" The chief is amused and pleased by Montag's response of "then watch it grow, sir" and as if he has just passed a test of some kind, the chief hints that Montag is being considered for promotion. For the first time Montag's very passive face shows a hint of emotion and a wan smile while a suspicious Fabian looks on.

In Bradbury's text, fire captain Beatty was a spokesman and apologist for the state and was concerned with keeping a wavering Montag within the fold. Though not entirely absent, this is downplayed in the film where Beatty's role is more to test Montag, subjecting him to frequent theoretical hypotheses like the one above, designed to reinforce automatic, conditioned responses or illicit fear. Suspicion and paranoia are pervasive and through the captain's probing, we wonder if the state does not recognize crimes of intent or what amount to thought crimes. Later, the occasional glimpses of TV programming that we see, as well as the publicly displayed red boxes where people may anonymously denounce neighbors, co-workers or family simply by depositing the accused's picture in the collection receptical well illustrate occupation by a repressive, controlling state.

By showing the fireman in action Truffaut also set the stage for an atmosphere of "occupation and resistance" as the man who was tipped off becomes a fugitive and his books are confiscated and burned in the street for a jaded group of people to watch. The book alludes to such things but Truffaut magnified and objectified them. Obviously, themes of occupation and resistance, collaboration and betrayal are well suited to the dramatic medium providing a better framework for the kind of suspense that Truffaut

sought to create. Adaptations bear influences from their context of reception and being filmed only twenty years after the end of World War II, memories of Nazi occupied France may have come into play. The director's correspondence and diary indicate that the film was written with the Occupation and Resistance constantly in mind. According to Truffaut, his conception had much in common with Jean Renoir's *This Land is Mine* (1943), where a mild mannered school teacher in a German occupied town finds himself torn between collaboration⁸³ and resistance. During filming, Truffaut envisioned Montag "in the position of the character of the Gestapo who would like to get interested in the Resistance without it really upsetting his life" (Weist 126). This seemingly subtle difference in the conception of Montag signals a significant divergence from Bradbury's narrative; however, it is consistent with Truffaut's interpretation of the story and his relationship with Clarisse. From the initial interaction between Montag, the captain and Fabian we see not only rigid authoritarianism, but paranoia and intrigue lurking below the surface.

Stylistically, the opening sequence (6:25 minutes) marks *Fahrenheit 451* as perhaps Truffaut's most purely cinematic film, where he discarded his frequent over-reliance on voice-over to carry underwritten scenes for more purely cinematic forms of interpretation. Even the later readings from the forbidden books are kept to a minimum and Montag's developing obsession is shown more in his behavior than the words he speaks.

In this fast paced opening, which may also be considered homage to the silent films that the director admired, a considerable amount of information is relayed through a variety of shots and techniques (jump cuts, slow motion, crane shots etc...). With its tightly framed images, voiceless human expressions and figures carrying the weight of dialogue, the opening sequence may be off putting to some for its unconventionality but it is nonetheless powerful and elegantly straightforward. In terms of characterization, the somber atmosphere of ennui and few spoken words set the tone of interaction for the rest of the picture. Moreover, in a similar manner to the opening of Bradbury's narrative, the character of Montag is skillfully drawn and contextualized with great economy. However,

⁸³ In Renoir's film the protagonist meekly cooperates when ordered to rip pages out of the children's history books because they are offensive to the Germans.

while Bradbury describes Montag as a fireman who actually enjoys his job in a thoughtless way, Montag is shown here as merely dedicated and proficient. His expression is emotionless as he is shown suiting up and actually burning the books. Montag shows merely a spark of life with the captain's talk of a promotion but otherwise is as bland and thoughtless in his work as Bradbury painted him in his introduction.

XII MONTAG MEETS CLARISSE

With the departure of the firemen the sequence ends by dissolve (tinted red) and fades in to a medium shot of a monorail, where following Bradbury's narrative order, Montag meets Clarisse on his way home. On board the monorail which adds (at least when the film was made) a slightly futuristic touch, we are again treated to well executed silent exposition. Truffaut's camera isolates Montag and Clarisse separately, yet they are close enough for her to observe Montag. The director "defines" them both as individuals against the background of the other passengers. Again, words are unnecessary to highlight the uncomfortable, claustrophobic nature of the scene. This is achieved through composition and especially the odd behavior of the people on the train.

Passengers are shown absently caressing themselves or clothing. An older woman is shown rapturously snuggling against the fur lapels of her coat like a child with her security blanket and in a pure manifestation of narcissism a young girl kisses her own reflection in a window. This supports the captain's subsequent statement that we "all must be alike" or mirror images of each other, further illustrating a society where people never seem to have any real contact with a world outside themselves. Aside from absent-minded narcissistic behavior there are also exchanged gazes and suggestive actions (boy for girl) that seem to point to a certain coarseness in people, which Bradbury's text suggests is another consequence of the absence literacy. Finally, we see a man in the background apparently swallowing pills, an allusion to the addiction Montag's wife Linda will shortly be shown to have. Later, there is another train scene where passengers exhibit the same neurotic behavior and a scene in a park with a solitary man embracing himself. Bradbury's text alludes to a whole society turned inward on itself and emotionally stifled

to the point of psychosis. Truffaut visually creates and transmits these concepts with subtle dexterity throughout the film

Returning to Montag and Clarisse who we see for the first time, they wordlessly stand out from the other passengers as being sufficiently alive to feel emotion. This is greatly enhanced by the score we now hear. Verbal description of music may be inexact and inadequate, but its effect is definite and powerful. The scene is set to a subdued, yet lyrical string arrangement; at first melancholic then gradually shifting in tone, simultaneous to Clarisse's evolving gaze of Montag, to a melody suggestive of tenderness or possibly romance. This "romance theme" fades out as Clarisse approaches Montag to speak. We will hear the beginning of the theme again at other points in the narrative but the romantic score is not allowed crescendo or release, but only makes its full statement at the conclusion of the film.

In the source text Clarisse and Montag meet alone as pedestrians and through lavish description Bradbury sets Clarisse apart as natural and inviolate, a gentle, white dove in a smoke blackened world. The human face has been hailed as potentially the most expressive element of cinema—it is something we look at to look *through* and *into* the thoughts and emotions of a character.

Through close-ups, Truffaut creates a powerful correlative to Bradbury's description⁸⁴ of Clarisse as we see her *and* Montag as he is reflected through her eyes and expressions. Within the somnambulistic train carriage the young woman stands apart for her air of vitality and sensitivity and indeed seems capable of "refracting a person's light back to them with an incredible power of identification" (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 11). Montag receives a reaffirmation of his existence through her gaze as she is the only one on the train that pays attention to him. And her gazes, especially as accompanied by the score, run a suggestive range from curiosity to sympathy to pity. With short hair and clothes resembling a school girl's uniform Julie Christie's Clarisse, is a little older and seemingly less innocent than in the source text, yet manifests the same artless, free spirited conversation. However, her empathetic glances on the train guard against us thinking that she is shallow or frivolous.

⁸⁴ As previously noted, Truffaut was fond of "writing with the camera, like a writer uses his pen". This is one of several instances where he was able to approximate Bradbury's richly metaphorical, prose.

Montag, on the other hand, stands out with a face etched in absolute but directionless despair. He is marked as someone adrift—not really in contact with the outside world of people and things, yet not entirely closed into himself either. The silence is broken when Clarisse finally approaches Montag saying she thinks they are neighbors because they make the same trip almost every day and that they should talk. She asks a disinterested Montag for permission to talk and he answers nervously: “No, no. Go ahead talk. I can’t promise to think of anything to answer, though.” Even more significant than Clarisse’s request for permission to talk is Montag’s response, indicating that thinking and conversation are foreign to him. It is more the response of an automaton than merely a shy or socially awkward person.

He remains uncomfortable as Clarisse continues the conversation once they leave the train for home. A veritable well of words she refers to herself as “light in the head” a figure of speech that Montag slowly repeats not seeming to understand until Clarisse throws a few synonyms at him, in effect displaying her literacy and the joy of self-expression. We see a gleam of curiosity and attraction coming from Montag for Clarisse’s facility of expression and the words themselves. While some of the dialogue is taken verbatim from the book⁸⁵, the exchange turns more to books and he explains to Clarisse that his emblem of 451 is the temperature at which book paper begins to burn. During their conversation he takes the position that books are “so much rubbish” and their only attraction for some people is that they are forbidden. The only words he has any facility using are the “party line” of the fireman and these fall into the conversation rather stiffly. He explains that they are forbidden because they make people unhappy, “they disturb people and make them anti-social.” There is real irony here because Montag is essentially anti-social and visibly unhappy although he burns books. Clarisse continues to subject Montag to a barrage of questions essentially condensed from their first meeting in the book, including her doubts about the history of the fireman’s function that Montag receives with shocked incredulity, but he continues answering her questions rather mechanically. However, she shares her concern about an interview she had at the school where she is a teacher trainee.

⁸⁵ Montag is even more solemn in their interaction here than as presented in the source text.

She is worried because she thinks she gave the “wrong” answers. This foreshadows her future dismissal. Montag tells her he had an interview of sorts that day which he did not feel well about either. This is surprising since captain Beatty was apparently well pleased with the responses to his questions. Why did Montag say this? Was he trying to create solidarity with Clarisse or make her feel better, or was he uneasy about his automatic responses to the captain and his work? They are momentarily silenced by the thunderous sound of an unseen aircraft, an oblique reference to the society’s war posture looming throughout the book with “a sky full of jets.” The sequence ends the same way as in the book when Clarisse playfully asks Montag if he is happy, then runs off leaving him to ponder *aloud* this question that has obviously disturbed him.

XIII MONTAG AND LINDA

We shortly see how unhappy Montag is with his wife and how different their thinking is, further illustrating the depth of his alienation. Alienation indeed, for juxtaposed to Clarisse, his wife and even captain Beatty, we begin to wonder if Montag fits in anywhere. Truffaut changed the narrative order with this scene. Where the book gave us Montag’s thoughts and reveries awakened by Clarisse just before finding his wife comatose—we first see the sad banality of Montag’s home life with Linda, and his obvious irritation and resistance to the televised programs that Linda feeds on which could be taken as another motivation for his exploration of books.

The spectator is left to wonder if Montag’s unresponsiveness to Linda’s mode of being has just been heightened by his encounter with Clarisse, but at any rate, the disjunction between the couple comes into sharp relief (for Montag and the spectator). There is a shock in having seen the two of women, automaton wife and spirited teacher played by the same actress distinguished only by different hair styles and dress. A point of the dual role may be that Clarisse is the woman Linda should have become if she had rebelled. Indeed, Truffaut saw the two women as almost identical and asked Julie Christie not to play them differently.

At home, Montag finds Linda oblivious to all but the TV which is playing a self-defense program for women. She brushes off Montag's concern that she has been taking too many pills when he finds a nearly empty bottle and Montag's good news of impending promotion hardly seems to register at first. The anticipated raise in salary would allow them to move to a larger house which Montag suggests, but Linda would rather have another wall screen instead saying it would be "like having your family grow out all around you." While they both go to the kitchen the camera momentarily focuses upon the TV which is now giving a news report on operations against "enemies of the public peace:"

Today's figure for operations in urban areas alone account for the elimination of a total of 2,750 pounds of conventional editions; 826 first editions, and 17 pounds of manuscripts were also destroyed. 23 anti-social elements were detained pending re-education.

Books are not only forbidden but they are the "enemy." This cold, clinical snatch of exposition delivered unblinkingly by the mannequin-like announcer is not unlike the body counts given on the news during the Vietnam War at that time. Once again the existence of an opposition within a militarized state and the aggressive role that state plays in subjugation of its citizens are affirmed; only this time from the state's point of view. The reference to manuscripts suggests that some people may still be writing or copying books which can no longer be printed.

Clarisse refers to the announcer as "cousin" and wonders aloud why Montag does not like any of her TV "cousins." This of course, sets Montag apart as one who may awaken to real life. In this way the narrative already allows us to see the difference Clarisse perceives in Montag and will plainly express later. This "electronic family" is obviously the focus of Linda's attention and she hurries to the TV to play her part in a "family" drama. She feels good to be part of this collective family that in essence is the state.

What is presented is interactive media of the most rudimentary sort. A host appears on screen inviting viewers to "come and play" as if speaking to a young child. The drug assisted hypnotic relation Linda has with the wall screen does not deviate from Bradbury's description but gains power through being shown, especially because Montag

is persuaded to sit with her like a bored husband trying to take in his wife's favorite soap opera. The most banal two-person dialogue⁸⁶ takes place with the actors occasionally pausing to stare into the camera and ask Linda what she thinks. The responses solicited are no more complicated than "yes" or "no" and a buzzer goes off alerting Linda to her first answer. She hesitates and the scripted drama continues smoothly without her participation. On the next occasion she answers "yes, absolutely" and the two players stare into the camera, praising her for her "correct" answer saying that she is just "fantastic." This sequence draws a sharp distinction between Linda who is totally absorbed in this banal fantasy and Montag who wonders why Linda was so excited about it⁸⁷.

This scene underscores Montag's attempt to understand his wife in spite of the great distance between them. In close up we can appreciate the delicate beauty of the actress and her befuddled "participation" in the three minute "TV drama." The direct camera address to Linda by one of the TV players, by zoomed in close up is almost too comic to be taken seriously, yet as presented, neither humor nor satire seem to be elicited. We understand that this is Linda's world.

Later, when the couple is in bed, we see the grandiose image Linda's "participation" in the teleplay has given her. She says she thinks she could have been an actress, and mentioned receiving a personal letter requesting her participation to which Montag blandly replies, "Yes, you and the 200,000 other Lindas in the country." The scene ends with an upset Linda taking more pills and in denial saying "even if it's true you didn't have to tell me." She puts in her earphones and turns her attention to the small bedside TV where we see a cosmetics commercial of a whole-face mask being peeled off. This may be symbolic of the veneer of their married life peeled away to reveal what has been lurking behind Montag's impassive mask. The fact that he realizes he is unhappy. This is a clever realization of the source text where Clarisse has awakened him to "the

⁸⁶ The dialogue hardly has a scrap of humanity to it. It is more a simple math problem where a solution is sought to find adequate seating for guests at a dinner party.

⁸⁷ Some critics have commented on this as well. Linda's wall screen TV is not 3-D and hardly remarkable today, yet with the apparent lack of more stimulating amusement and the drug addled state of people like Linda, we need not wonder.

true state of affairs” and runs off with his “mask of happiness” (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 12).

XIV THE FIREHOUSE

The source text does not dwell on the firehouse, save for its strangest occupant used to hunt down enemies of the state:

The Mechanical Hound slept but did not sleep, lived but did not live in its gently humming, gently vibrating, softly illuminated kennel back in a dark corner of the firehouse. The dim light of one in the morning, the moonlight from the open sky framed through the great window, touched the faintly trembling beast. Light flickered on bits of ruby glass and on sensitive capillary hairs in the nylon-brushed nostrils of the creature that quivered gently, gently, its eight legs spidered under it on rubber padded paws (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 24)

When bored with playing cards the firemen⁸⁸ would turn lose small animals and program the Hound’s infallible chemical sensors to hunt them down, wagering on which of the animals it would seize and inject with poison first. In the source text Montag had grown tired of these cruel games and became anxious about the Hound’s threatening reaction to him. The captain allayed his fears reminding him that it was merely a programmable machine, but jokingly asked if Montag had “a guilty conscience about something” (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 27).

Although there is no mechanical Hound to threaten him, Truffaut still presents Montag’s falling out of sync with his surroundings and its machinery after he begins to read. For instance, the touch-pad entry lock to his house no longer responds to his touch and significantly, he abandons the firemen’s brass pole, or rather the pole abandons him. It is an automated device and earlier we had seen Montag slide *up* it, so when he uses the

⁸⁸ In the source text the firemen are all (except for Montag) heavy smokers especially captain Beatty who is nearly always encircled by smoke from his pipe. He also has the nervous habit of repeatedly striking his (inexhaustible) lighter just to watch its flame. Bradbury links their obsession to pyromania, their desire to burn and turn things black. In the film, only Linda and her friends smoke perhaps symbolic of their compulsiveness and addictions.

stairs it arouses the captain's suspicion—"something wrong between you and the pole, Montag?"

For the most part, Truffaut's film, like the source text moves at a rapid pace and is dense with meaning. The firehouse sequence is certainly not an exception. We have already seen the firemen at work, but without repetitive exposition it drives home the nature of Montag's world and the organization of the firemen who maintain it. We get a dose of captain Beatty's philosophy for the first time and the peculiar relation the characters have to time; their curious disregard and misapprehension of it.

Accompanied by its leitmotif, the fire truck arrives at the station and as he disembarks and enters a few of Montag's colleagues offer spare congratulation on his being considered for promotion, while Fabian, looks on more suspiciously than ever. The firehouse sequence begins in earnest when Montag enters a classroom where an instructor is arbitrarily changing the seating of a cadet, scolding him as if he were a child. The instructor gives Montag a chest thumping salute (which he less enthusiastically returns) before turning the class over to him. Then he begins to instruct the class on how to ferret out hidden books, apparently his area of expertise⁸⁹. Two cadets are called to see the captain and moments later, Montag is also summoned. These frequent intercom calls are extremely loud and disruptive adding to the sense of distraction and useless motion of the firehouse. Before Montag leaves the class he orders them to practice hiding the classroom books (dummies with blank pages) telling them they must first learn to hide books before they will become proficient at finding them, rather like a child's game of "hide and seek".

While waiting in a hallway to see the captain, we see Montag listening to an anxious conversation between the two cadets in a seeming attempt to coordinate their accounts of something. We catch only bits and pieces of this and it serves as another testament to the intrigue and paranoia of the firehouse. From what little we hear, it points to the possibility of them being "readers" or resistance members too.

Now we get a full (and uncomfortable) sense of the crushing blandness of the station-- bare, brick walls, no decoration whatsoever. Truffaut's camera briefly pans to

⁸⁹ This comes in handy later when he offers to help the resistance. He is able to discover an important hidden document for them, made to fit inside a round vase and later hides books in a toaster in his home. He demonstrates both of these strategies to the students.

show it as claustrophobic and cold in the extreme, nothing but walls, narrow corridors, closed doors and dim, closed windows. The overall closed style of the film, the world narrowly squeezed and confined by the camera frame, serves to emphasize Montag's increasing desperation, particularly through Truffaut's visual emphasis throughout the film on small compartments, hiding places, closed doors and openings. The whole environment speaks of entrapment.

Captain Beatty appears and motions the two cadets to his office as he approaches Montag and incongruously asks, "what time is it"? After Montag checks his watch to inform him, he says that (referring to the waiting cadets) "this will take about five minutes." It should be noted there are no visible clocks in the firehouse or anywhere else in *Fahrenheit 451*. But still, why is the captain so casually unaware of the time and why does it appear an arbitrary, almost meaningless construct to him and everyone else? Later Beatty asks Montag how long he has been a fireman and he has difficulty answering as to the years he has spent in service. Linda gives Montag a gift (for his impending promotion) but cannot remember why and then says it does not matter. Neither can she recall when or where she and Montag first met. The captain has other glaring episodes of forgetfulness but this is just the tip of the iceberg of a deeper malady. The narrative suggests the lack of awareness of clock time and more disturbingly, organic time. That is, time as lived and remembered seems absent, stemming from people's virtual lifestyle where their days are filled with meaningless activity leaving them little time to think or anything meaningful to think about. Time should be a source of openings and possibilities but not in this fictive world. Thinking is discouraged anyway, but without books people are cut off from history, global and personal, and have little sense of connection or time's passing.

Commenting upon the passage of time, Pascal thought it suited our nature very well not only because it "heals griefs and quarrels," but because its perpetual flow washes away the desperate ennui people suffer when they feel themselves imprisoned in the present. The characters in the story appear to have no real sense of time and certainly no connection with the past (personal or historical), so they remain *imprisoned* in a meaningless present. They seem unable to appreciate or appropriate their past and present as means to the future. Our brain uses memory to anticipate the future, and time is not

neutral because it is tied to deep emotions and sense of identity; we know who we are because we remember our past, we identify ourselves with who we were in the past. But it appears that experientially, time hardly exists for them. Philosopher Henri Bergson linked human evolution and development to consciousness and the intuitive perception of experience and the flow of inner time. This metaphysical *Élan Vital* as he called it, seems completely absent in the world of *Fahrenheit 451*. Time, in which we actually “live and move and have our being,” gradually gains significance for Montag *only* once he starts to read (and think).

Reference to time and memory appear occasionally throughout Bradbury’s narrative but only assume importance (in a big way) when Montag escapes the city and makes contact with the Earth, so to speak, and the book people. One can read *Fahrenheit 451* almost in its entirety and barely glimpse the aberration of time as it effects people in the story. However, Truffaut makes it abundantly clear throughout the film, and it gains greater significance and impact in performance than in the book. Many films have played with time in all its aspects and manifestations, but I cannot recall any other film dealing with time⁹⁰ as people recall and experience it in a consistently “normal” earthly setting in *quite* the same way. Although subtle, there is a poignant sadness to it all that is hard to escape.

The camera brings Montag (and us) near the captain’s office where we hear shouting and he appears to be chasing the cadets around his desk and throwing things at them. It is audibly indistinct and visually too, since we view the spectacle through the distorted glass of the office. There is no apparent explanation for the infraction or for such an outburst and its very arbitrariness is off putting, manifesting the childishness and absurdity of the firehouse. The two cadets are shown exiting like whipped dogs and captain Beatty now smiles and cocks his head to one side in a friendly manner as he approaches Montag with more out of place questions. He asks Montag if he likes sports and mentions a series of them and Montag, mustering as much enthusiasm as he is able answers in the affirmative. The captain is pleased and declares, “then increase the *dosage*,

⁹⁰ *Dark City* (Alex Proyas, 1998) and some segments of Tim Burton’s *Big Fish* (2003) come to mind but the former is revealed to take place in outer space complete with telekinetic aliens and the latter is essentially a fairy tale told in flash backs while *Fahrenheit 451* deals with people living in an earth-bound future and the narrative unfolds chronologically in the space of a few weeks.

more sport for everyone. It strengthens the group spirit. Organize the fun; keep them busy and you keep them happy. Am I right?" The captain's speech needs little explanation. His use of the term "dosage" is significant and may refer to either placation or tranquilization, the effect depending on the character of the individual receiving the "dosage." Overall, it might be characterized as a more sinister version of the "bread and circuses" approach to governance. When people are not lost inside their "telescreens" (with the aid of drugs) then sport and games can distract them, perhaps giving them a mild sense of personal achievement and easy contentment making them easier to control; or there is non-stop activity as a means of tiring them out. Clarisse in the source text complained that there was so much sport and games in school that they did not have the time or energy to think or do much else.

The captain now appears to have taken Montag into his confidence. Finally seated in the captain's office, a visibly uneasy Montag answers a few more, now reasonable questions pertaining to promotion which the captain assures him he will approve. Montag is now perspiring lightly and there is a brief insert shot of him nervously pulling his sleeve down to cover his hand. In the source text, there is considerable exposition concerning Montag's physical condition as an outward sign of his growing inward rebellion, which seems to be the case here. In the book, it is a feeling of sickness, actually a sign of rebellion and revulsion that as described, starts in his hands before moving up through his arms and shoulders. Eventually he has a brief sick spell and takes to his bed. Truffaut omits this but later shows Montag passing out in the captain's office where he is trying to secretly access information on the disappearance of Clarisse, but Beatty accepts his explanation and lets the incident pass.

In line with his philosophy, which we will hear more of later, the captain remarks that the quality he likes most about Montag is that "he says very little." Near the end of their interview he tells Montag to remind him to give him his "personal medallion," stamped in his image of course. He finally asks Montag to bring him six more pictures for their files. We are shown these primitive, black and white photos that resemble police "mug shots" The firehouse sequence has shown the absurdity and futility of the society and a further glimpse into how it is controlled. There is little further exposition of the story world; it is no longer necessary. Appropriately, Truffaut ends the sequence by irising

in on one of the photos of the back of Montag's head. The rest of the narrative focuses on his development.

XV LINDA IS COMATOSE

From the closing iris, the director cuts to Montag entering his home where he finds Linda unconscious. He does not panic but shows a concern any normal person would and calls for help. Emergency services link him to "poison control" and they calmly ask which pills Linda has taken and they can only be identified by color and number. It is all routine and he is told to wait for the medics. In the middle of his call he must break away to turn off⁹¹ the "televisor." Mirroring Linda's condition, its blank screen is emitting a high pitched whine as if it were a hospital heart monitor signaling cardiac arrest. One could even speculate that there is some kind of physical link between her and her televisor. Montag's subsequent rejection *by* the house's touch pad entry and the fireman's pole adds to speculation that there may be some kind of sympathetic link between people and the machines they use.

Help arrives in the form of two men that to Montag's consternation identify themselves as "technicians" not doctors. The sequence plays out much as Bradbury had described it in the source text including most of the dialogue. However, we do not see the machine they use as Montag is ushered into the next room, and the men are not chain smoking as in the source text which might have put it over the top in performance. Nevertheless, the sequence gains power from the way it is filmed. The men in their short-sleeved, shiny, white plastic suits seem more like butchers or fish sellers than medical technicians. This impression is supported by their somewhat rustic physical appearances, and their rude manner of accented speech; one is obviously "cockney" while the other has a Northern Irish brogue. They are casual, even flippant about their work. As they depart they briefly assure Montag that all is well while the "cockney" pauses to give his short, coarse hair a few casual strokes with his pocket comb without the aid of a mirror. It is just

⁹¹ Appropriately, Montag is the only one to turn off a TV in the narrative and does so three times.

another manifestation of the prevalent narcissism of the society, this time verging on humor.

In the source text, immediately after the mild shock (or awakening) Montag experiences from meeting Clarisse, he gets an even bigger shock in finding his wife comatose. Then, Bradbury's exposition shocks the reader even further through Montag's confused and desperate inner monologue culminating in "I don't know anything anymore." Truffaut approximates this by showing us a dejected Montag, not fully seated but doubled up in the corner of a darkened room while through a partially open door we glimpse the technicians clumsily going about their chore to some muted laughter and innuendo. The camera fully shifts to a crumpled Montag on the right of the frame while a close up of his anguished face is superimposed in the center. This is accompanied by a sad, anxious score that builds to crescendo then slowly releases and fades out as Montag's face is momentarily held in freeze frame, before he leaves his dark corner to join his wife.

The technicians inform Montag that Linda is just sleeping now and slyly suggest he do the same because in the morning "she'll be good as new—and hungry... for a lot of things." In the morning he wakes up to a buzz of activity in the kitchen. Linda is indeed hungry and animated; too much to listen to Montag who wants to talk about what had happened. Linda either cannot remember or face up to it but she gives him a present, an old fashioned straight razor. His face etched in despair, Montag studies the open blade while Linda exits for a bath; they appear miles apart. In front of a mirror she beholds herself and begins caressing her shoulder and turning her head toward the camera assumes an amorous gaze, also seen as reflected in the mirror. It seems her narcissistic mirror gazing and caressing of her own body has brought this about instead of desire for her distraught husband toying with a razor blade in the kitchen. Montag comes looking for her and she playfully ambushes him from behind using a judo move she learned on TV to pull him into the bedroom. It is playful and Truffaut underscores this by a momentary replay of the initial frames of their embrace. They arrive at their bed in slow motion and both look genuinely happy. It is something of a relief for the spectator to

behold such a scene and one might expect a reconciliation of sorts. At the very least, it shows Linda is not an entirely hopeless case⁹².

XVI INTERLUDE

Next, Montag is seen riding the train to work while Clarisse studies him at a distance and we hear her unspoken question: do you ever read the books you burn? Meanwhile the canker is on the rose of the apparently vivified relationship between Linda and Montag. We see Linda, rapt and glassy eyed in front of her televisor. It shows a policeman in the street who grabs a youth and forcibly cuts his hair⁹³, while the announcer says: “Just goes to show that law enforcement can be fun” as a laughing crowd is shown around the youth. This is the only laughter in the entire film. If this is a recruitment advert, it is rather disturbing and if meant as entertainment, sadder still. It shows that the firemen are not just out to burn books but to enforce the status quo. Linda now has to pull herself away from her TV viewing and open the door for Montag. For some reason the touch pad entry is not working and we soon see why as he goes to the bathroom and places a few books he has smuggled home in a pouch into a ventilator shaft that is shown to already contain a couple of books. It seems this is not the first instance of Montag secretly bringing books home, and we are prepared to see the compulsive book collector become the obsessive reader. The scene fades to black.

⁹² Linda’s emergency aid episode was painful to bear, but is Montag now thinking she should have her stomach pumped and her blood replaced more often?

⁹³ This aggressive haircut probably carried double resonance in 1966. First, for the many spectators who remembered the Nazi occupation where public haircuts like this were reserved for collaborators, especially women. Secondly, for a great number of parents and teenagers; long hair had come into fashion for teenagers by this time to the stern consternation of many parents.

XVII MONTAG READS

Almost universally praised, even by those who did not appreciate the film as a whole, the semiotically rich and sensitively photographed reading sequence is at the heart of the narrative. Beginning from a fade in from black, Truffaut stages the act of reading in five shots, two-minutes and twenty-three seconds, further developing Bradbury's master metaphor of books as unique embodiment of human mind and spirit. Instead of seeing them abused and destroyed, we now see a book lovingly caressed and lingered over. We have already been given glimpses into the troubled soul of the protagonist but for the first time we see Montag experiencing a private moment of a different kind. He is not just reacting to dire events outside himself, but *interacting* by choice with something he desires to explore and allow to enter his consciousness.

We hear a soothing melody as Montag stealthily leaves a sleeping Linda in bed while retrieving a hidden book. He pulls a chair up to the glowing wall screen and opens a copy of *The Personal History of David Copperfield*. In medium shot we see him, book in hand begin to read aloud very slowly, making no discrimination between the title and publisher reference. Reading is a familiar activity for us all, but as presented now it is very strange and becomes more so as we hear his halting, accented speech. We are beholding a man entering into a child-like mode of existential discovery, emphasized by his momentary pause and moving his head back slightly when he reads the name of the author, which he voices differently in appreciation that there is a man behind the book. He later explains his reading obsession to Linda in this way, saying that behind each book there is a man and that is what interests him. The simple act of reading is made to seem strange but desirable, given a wondrous air as well.

Nevertheless, Truffaut did not choose to plunge into the interior of the character, but rather focuses upon the printed word as being read. In successive shots we are drawn closer into Montag's experience of reading and the text itself. The sequence, especially the initial part, seems to emphasize the individualized and "different" experience of reading in opposition to the electronically produced, mass media images that dominate the story world. Here, the representations constructed from reading seem more similar to interaction with another human being. The careful, deliberate nature of the sequence (and

book chosen) well illustrates that books may be recorded speech, thoughts and emotions; narratives of self or others, but radically different from electronic media in origin and effects.

The camera soon puts us in a position of reader over Montag's shoulder, and then closer still as he touches the title of the first chapter with his index finger, the book now taking up the entire frame. Written words have been absent during the entire film and their impact only grows as the camera draws in close enough for us to see their typeset impressions on the page. The spectator naturally feels the urge to read along with the protagonist. As filmed, the scene gives us the sensation of being taken *inside* the written medium. The camera follows Montag's finger as it tracks across the opening sentences until finally in extreme close up the camera ceases to be static and slowly follows the motion of the reader's finger (and eyes) to each word as he takes it in at his own pace until the end of the first paragraph.

The text is highlighted more than the reader, gaining significance through being graphically presented *and* carefully read, by a protagonist whose growth is mirrored by what it contains:

I am born. Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anyone else these pages must show. To begin my life at the beginning, I was born on a Friday at 12 o'clock at night, the clock began to strike and I began to cry simultaneously...

In a manner of speaking, Montag is "born" through an encounter with the written word. His outward circumstances remain dire, but he becomes attuned to his own existence through reading and ventures forth to regain his life as something within him awakens. The text Montag has encountered shows how the written word can connect us to personal history and existential choice. Significantly, it references clock time and organic time. In the text, a self-narrating present is reaching back in trying to understand a lived past in a particular context while looking to an open future. It is not an exaggeration to say that the text embodies the urge to narrate, to make meaning of one's life and surroundings and the story teller's destiny. Montag is on a road he cannot turn back from with changes immediately following.

XVIII SECOND INTERLUDE

There is a white out and fade in to a children's play ground. Firemen enter led by the captain. Fabian is shown carelessly rummaging through people's things and performs a careful body search of a pregnant woman. The captain spies a tiny book held by a baby in a stroller which brings to mind Montag's child-like reading the night before; "I am born. "The captain takes it from the child who reaches for it. He looks at it before confiscating it and shakes a disapproving finger at the baby, an utterly silly gesture demonstrating his rigid attitude. Furthermore, it would indicate that the captain is the kind of person who exults in anti-humanistic destruction⁹⁴ for its own sake. He takes pleasure in seeing things blotted out and consumed by fire. A half frame wipe highlights Montag half-heartedly searching a man wearing a bulky coat. He waves him on almost immediately, indicating his growing disenchantment with his work. In full shot and profile we cannot discern, but the man with the bulky coat (for hiding books?) appears to be the one who reluctantly took a book from a child placing it again with the others to be burned at the first book burning, supporting our suspicion that there may be an active resistance.

The next sequence is again silent as we see Montag leaving home for work with Clarisse and an older woman watching him. Throughout the film, the camera often follows Montag's movements whether he is being watched, followed or just going from place to place, keeping a naturalistic focus on him while supporting a sense of his entrapment. In general, the progression of Montag's inner turmoil finds expression in an almost constant sense of movement, a bit reminiscent of Hitchcock's focus on Montgomery Clift's nervous energy in *I Confess* (1953). The women follow at a distance and are finally shown discretely observing him on the train when Clarisse decides to disembark⁹⁵.

⁹⁴ Who would have thought at that time, but now he puts one in mind of the Islamic fundamentalists who destroy world heritage sites and museum pieces simply because they run counter to their stringent world view.

⁹⁵ As she departs we notice a large spiral design on the door panel behind her reminiscent of the leitmotif from Hitchcock's *Psycho*.

XIX INFORMER OR INFORMAN

The next scene opens with a troubled Clarisse trying to compose herself before ascending a flight of stairs to cross paths with Montag as she has obviously planned. Is she perhaps testing Montag? Casual greetings are exchanged but she signals her distress and a now solicitous Montag suggests they sit down to talk, assuring her that he has plenty of time to arrive at work. A merely functional remark, nonetheless it is the first instance where “time” assumes any meaning for him. Outdoors, they descend another flight of stairs and pass through narrow corridors to a small café, it is all very non-descript and maze-like. Fabian who happens to be passing below, takes silent notice of them then hurries along. Seated in the café Montag tells Clarisse he had seen her the day before while on the fire truck for a call. Clarisse says it reminds her of something, obviously straining to remember something she had read— “a girl who used to wait for a soldier by barbaric-gate.” She tells a concerned Montag that she has been dismissed from her job. No reason given, just like the teacher before her who did not fit with the program or co-workers. She mentions being shunned by the other teachers because she did not always abide by the timetable and tried to make her classes “fun.” Montag suggests, with an uncharacteristic air of certainty, that she was terminated by her colleagues instead of the school analyst because she was different.

More conscious and attuned to his surroundings than before, Montag continues to “narrate” the world for Clarisse. Through the café window, they witness a nervous man circling a bright red box isolated in the middle of a patio below. Montag explains that it is the “information box” and sets forth with clairvoyant accuracy the situation as it transpires while Clarisse looks on with wonder. Once she understands that the “information box” is for anonymous collection of accusations made by citizens against other citizens she refers to the man as an “informer” while Montag corrects her saying that he is an “informant.” The terms are similar but not quite the same. The former carries a negative connotation of betrayal while the latter is neutrally used to describe someone who supplies data. For someone in Montag’s position the man is an “informant” but has this subtle linguistic distinction been aided by his growing literacy? At any rate, Montag’s complacency is over as he vents his disgust to Clarisse about this arbitrary means of

making people “disappear.” When the man finally slips the paper in the box he asserts that “now he’s gotten rid of a nosy neighbor, or his brother-in-law or his mother-why not?” He understands better than Clarisse the significance of what they have just witnessed and does not hesitate in denouncing it.

Montag’s passivity further evaporates as he tries to persuade Clarisse to return to the school to seek a reason for her dismissal. Finally, he takes action by accompanying her at her request. Pretending to be his wife, she phones in sick for Montag which leads to perhaps the most absurd scene of the entire film. We cut to the captain’s office where he has just taken the call, and he turns to Fabian who is bemusedly standing by with a large, toy fire truck, complete with clanging bell in his hands. When the captain interrupts Fabian’s apparent child-like reverie, informing him that Montag is sick he acts surprised, but neglects to mention he has just seen him at the café. The captain then dismisses him, sternly saying “until the meeting” as they engage in a bizarre, forearm grasping handshake⁹⁶, before Fabian (seeming more like the Gestapo now) stiffly exits. Verbal description cannot adequately transmit the preposterousness of the scene, partially due to the utmost seriousness with which it is played. But the intrigue seems endless and suggests the captain is perhaps a more cunning adversary than he appears.

XX MONTAG REVEALS HIMSELF

At the school we are presented lifeless, narrow corridors with rows of student’s uniform jackets hanging on the walls and the annoying drone of children reciting multiplication tables. The effect is worse than the silence which occurs when a small child appears that Clarisse recognizes as one of her students. He stops to look at her for a moment before turning to run like a scared animal. Montag tries to reassure Clarisse by saying that maybe his uniform has frightened the child and holds back as she continues down the corridor calling the child by name this time, as he reappears only to flee from her again. The chorus of multiplication tables begins again as Clarisse tries to restrain

⁹⁶ A bit sinister and funny at the same time, the handshake is like that of a secret organization or a street gang.

herself but breaks down, sobbingly deeply. As she had feared her students have been turned against her.

Montag takes her to an elevator to leave the school, when a blind is momentarily lifted from a narrow office window revealing Fabian in feminine wig and glasses observing the situation. It is almost comical and another case of “doubling” in the film. A moment later, a small bag (ostensibly containing Clarisse’s things) propelled by an invisible hand, comes gliding down the corridor. The sequence is not just a further testament to the sterility of the society, but also illustrates how individuals that do not “fit in” are treated as non-entities. In the elevator Montag tries to comfort Clarisse saying that through his expected promotion he can help her. Drawing away from him, a shattered Clarisse now expresses the difference she had always recognized in him saying it makes no sense how someone like him could have become a fireman. Interestingly, Montag invokes memory and personal interaction to preface his admission that he has begun reading. He asks Clarisse if she remembers her question to him from their first meeting, if he ever reads any of the books he burns and calmly declares that the night before he had read one. While he is speaking the camera cuts to a high angle close up, sympathetically looking down on Montag, allowing us to behold him as a new kind of man and then *slowly* dissolves the image, fading in to the train taking him home.

XXI MONTAG CONFRONTS LINDA

Once again Montag has left Linda in bed while he secretly reads. Linda awakens to see Montag in the next room at a table surrounded by books including a dictionary. He seems like a student preparing for exams. Linda then finds the compartment where he has been hiding books and as these (accidentally) crash to the floor an angry Montag arrives and an aggressive exchange ensues. Linda calmly confesses that she does not want these “things” in the house and they frighten her. Montag violently draws an arm back across his shoulder as if he is ready to strike Linda as he stoops to pick up the books. “You spend your whole life in front of that family on the wall, he declares with disgust, “these books are my family. Leave them alone.” During this full shot exchange Linda is

reflected by the mirror she is standing in profile to. In light of the dialogue it may emphasize the “personal reflection” she receives from her electronic “family” or that she is only a reflection of the woman Montag first met. Linda fails to recall when and where they met when Montag asks her and he emphatically, explains that “behind each book there is a man. And that is what interests me, so go back to bed.” Linda says that she cannot sleep and Montag reminds her that she has pills for that as the scene abruptly fades to black.

Linda does not seem to understand any of this but does not display Montag’s hostility. He sends her back to bed as if she were a child and expresses no concern over her (justifiably) distressed state. Short of physical violence, which his coiled arm signaled as a possibility, Montag could not have treated her more harshly. This, even more than a subsequent sequence where Montag confronts Linda and her friends, illustrates Truffaut’s concern over Oscar Werner’s playing opposite Linda compared to Clarisse⁹⁷. It is also a significant departure from the source text where an annoyed and frustrated Montag still sees his wife as “a little lost girl on a plateau where there used to be trees sitting in the center of the “living room” (Bradbury, 1953:44; author’s quotation marks). He has hopes of somehow making their marriage work and when he comes forth with the books he has been hiding, it is she who reacts violently. While hardly a sympathetic character, Montag still has sad musings about her by the end of the story, imagining her buried in the rubble of war.

The expanded role of Clarisse takes some of the focus from Linda; this is not exceptional. However, Linda is essentially more sympathetic than she was in the source text while Montag is much harsher and less patient with her; he seems to give up on her too easily and too soon. Montag never entertains the idea of sharing books with his wife in the film as he does in the source text. As he begins to read his dissatisfaction grows as does his impatience and revulsion to Linda and her lifestyle. While this is not illogical, Montag’s encounter with books might have provided him with a bit more humanistic understanding for his wife who cannot comprehend what is happening to him. Later when Linda pleads with him to get rid of the books, threatening to leave him if he does not, Montag casually demurs saying he cannot really decide; there is no attempted dialogue or

⁹⁷ See director’s diary quoted on page 154.

rapprochement. Linda is never presented as an enemy and Montag does not see her that way. However, once he begins to read he sees her as a nuisance, and then practically a non-entity like the school authorities had made of Clarisse.

XXII AN ALIENATED FIREMAN

After the abrupt fade to black ending of Montag's confrontation with Clarisse, there is a brief scene where Montag, still at home, is shown reading aloud an obscure dictionary entry in a somnambulistic state. It well illustrates his obsession for reading of any kind and lends continuity to the next scenes where we see a distracted, probably sleepy, Montag arrive at the firehouse the next morning. The camera gives us a full frontal view of the protagonist approaching the station, his gate more relaxed and less rigid than before, although he appears preoccupied. As he approaches, a tense score momentarily erupts alerting us to the difficulties ahead.

The street is wet this time, an added effect complimenting the dim light and dreary atmosphere characteristic of most of the outdoor scenes. Trees, when they are seen are bare, almost skeletal in appearance too. I have already mentioned the vulgar aesthetics of the buildings in the story world, reflecting a spiritless, state commissioned modernism. Truffaut goes farther still in his depiction of this unimaginative, claustrophobic world. Missing from the film are people out in the street, gardeners in their yards, and any panoramic shots that showcase open vistas (at least until the very end of the narrative). Adding to this atmosphere is the "smallness" of the story world which we appreciate as Montag approaches the firehouse, which is just a garage painted red. The rest of the story takes place in and around a few houses. Even the monorail train that people commute on delivers its passengers down a ramp into desolate country.

At the station, Montag first encounters Fabian who sarcastically expresses surprise at Montag's arrival, saying he thought he was on sick leave but must have been mistaken. There is an obvious air of superiority, almost condescension to Fabian's remarks colored by his exaggerated British pronunciation. Furthermore, there is a hint of childishness to it, like a proud schoolboy taunting a classmate who has failed a test or

something. The firemen's pole no longer works for Montag and he furtively uses the stairs hoping to escape notice. The alarm sounds and Truffaut emphasizes the frantic action through a series of rapid cuts and insert shots between bells, flashing lights and the firemen as they prepare and rush to the truck. Montag seems out of place and is conspicuous⁹⁸ for almost forgetting his helmet and being the last man on board the truck as it speeds off, this time accompanied by a less elaborate version of its musical leitmotif. Passing under a bridge a small child above enthusiastically exclaims to his mother that "there's going to be a fire". This may be a nod to the source text's referral of the firemen's work as anticipated public spectacle.

They arrive at an old Tudor style house on the edge of town and while a fireman fumbles with a ring of keys, Fabian calmly pushes the door open and enters first which makes us suspect that he might have had prior knowledge of the situation. As the search progresses, Fabian is shown gratuitously breaking windows and items in the house and seems more confident and more in charge than Montag, who is the last to enter with the captain and ordered to stay below while the others search upstairs. An old woman emerges (the same one that followed Montag along with Clarisse earlier) and contemptuously looks down on the static firemen from her open stairway⁹⁹. She laughs heartily and descends saying, "Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, that by God's grace shall never be put out¹⁰⁰." Montag is alarmed that someone is still present saying that the police had not done their job. Another fireman mentions that the family had been arrested that morning and the old woman must have been out. When asked where the books are, she calmly replies "if you didn't know, you wouldn't be here." She is pushed aside as the captain and his men rush upstairs; Montag is ordered to

⁹⁸ As mentioned earlier, the captain notices, as Montag finally boards the truck that he has not used the pole and gives him a rather long, quizzical stare.

⁹⁹ There is a similar scene in Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar* (1954) where Joan Crawford looks down on a mob confronting her. The panning shot from the woman's point of view even takes in a wagon wheel type chandelier reminiscent of the one in the earlier Western film.

¹⁰⁰This is from the source text, only there captain Beatty later explains the reference to Montag. Bishops Ridley and Latimer were burned for heresy at Oxford in 1555, for scriptural interpretations of the Christian faith in opposition to church dogma at the time. Considered martyrs by the Reformed and Anglican churches they were burned, essentially for their devotion to a book.

stay below. The woman looks long and hard at Montag now at her side. He shows no recognition of her as Fabian pauses on the stairway to glare down on the two of them.

XXIII A LIBRARY IS BURNED

The captain is now in his element as he directs the mayhem; books are flying everywhere and crashing to the floor below. The captain calls Montag up to share in his triumph—“They knew of a secret library in high places, only once have I seen so many books together and I was just an ordinary fireman at the time, wasn’t even qualified to use the flamethrower...it’s all ours Montag.” They are now in an attic library with thousands of books. A passive Montag who seems to be in a mild state of shock, silently takes in the captain’s reductionist philosophy. “Listen to me Montag: at least once a fireman itches to know, just itches to know what’s in the books –but take my word for it, there’s nothing there-the books have nothing to say,” as he scrapes a shelf-load to the floor. The captain is voicing his personal dislike and disillusionment with books and his implicit knowledge of them, which appears to be considerable. The captain’s nihilistic, suicidal nature surfaces here for in recognizing many of the books he is about to destroy, it seems he is driven to eradicate their trace within himself. Much of what he says during the sequence is condensed from Bradbury’s text.

He continues his speech, all the while showing his contempt by roughly handling or knocking books from their shelves. “These are all novels (we now see classic titles) about people who never existed, makes people unhappy with their own lives-makes them want to live in other ways they can never really be.” To him books are only a source of frustration and unhappiness. He rails on about a shelf of philosophy; “confusion, one says we have free will another says we don’t; I’m right and all the others are idiots, one man shouting down the other’s throat-let’s get rid of it. This gibberish is enough to drive a man mad.” He reduces philosophy to mere fashion like clothing, ideas come and go. Why must we live with all these contradictions, confusing treatments of questions and problems when it is just easier to burn them; this is the captain’s solution.

He seems perfectly aware that literature's contradictions can be supremely upsetting and that purity cannot stand human contradiction and for him, fire is the purifying agent. He dismisses biography as "useless stories of the dead;" autobiography is even worse, "my life, my memoirs, my private reflections...then write for variety to be different and look down on all others," he says displaying his anti-individualism and jealousy. "Here's one" he continues (we don't see title) "he had the critics on his side." He then takes a different tact insisting that books are disruptive in society because they may be considered offensive. "Robinson Crusoe-the blacks didn't like that because of his man Friday; Neitzsche-the Jews didn't like him; a book on lung cancer, the smokers and cigarette companies didn't like it; if it doesn't give piece of mind, we burn it...it's no good we must be all alike--We must burn the books Montag—all the books," as he holds out a copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*¹⁰¹. An ignorant society is a safe one seems to be part of his argument too.

In a dramatic flourish the captain has accusing writers of everything from arrogance to contradiction. His implication of literacy as an elitist pursuit ("we must all be alike") and tacit invocation of "political correctness" might fall on a few sympathetic ears, but his critique receives no rebuttal from a sheepish Montag who reaches behind his back to hide a book in his coat. The captain does not see this but Fabian, peering from between a row of books does.

Montag certainly appreciates books and he seems to be becoming a more fully aware human being under their influence, but he does not come to their defense. He does not explain why books are important, why they matter. In the source text he is able to call into question (although not verbally) the captain's assumptions through the instruction of the character of Faber, a retired literature professor, who secretly reads and speaks to Montag through a tiny earpiece he wears.

As previously mentioned, Faber is completely absent from the film, although Clarisse assumes a part of his function. On the one hand, Truffaut was probably wise in excising this old "sage" from his film. He probably would have slowed narrative pace and his polemical speeches could heavily freight the film, detracting from a desirable

¹⁰¹ Of course this book *did* precipitate a lot of evil doing and indirectly lead to the burning of a lot of books.

semblance of spontaneity and naturalness. However, without him, there is no one to forcefully defend books. This task is dispersed among Clarisse, Montag and to a lesser extent the “book woman” and leader of the “book people” that we meet at the end of the narrative. Their defense is one more subtle and “existential” than a logical imperative.

In Bradbury’s text, Faber made a cogent defense of literacy¹⁰² while serving to dispel an overly idealized or sentimental view of books. In fact, on first meeting Montag he refers to him as a “hopeless romantic.” He asserts that books do not necessarily make us wise but show us for the fools we may be, and much of the value of a good book lies in its stark presentation of human reality; life in its grandiosity and meanness, painting pictures of both the desirable and undesirable. He does see books as valuable for their embodiment of human thought and consciousness, neither as completely real — rather should they let the real enter into the reader. Faber even wisely suggests that electronic media *could* bear quality¹⁰³ and do for us what good books and print media aim to do, but sees this as unlikely in the society they are living in. His pessimism is further based upon a lack of leisure where there is no time to properly think about things beyond one’s self, and his conviction that books can never be of any value unless individuals “have the right to carry out actions based on” (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 85*) what is found in books. Truffaut was not unaware of this and some of these points are implicit in the film narrative through word and action. Nonetheless, Truffaut’s defense of literature is more subtle and poetic, and when straightforward, sometimes fails to convince as we shall see later.

The order is received that the books and the house must be destroyed together but the old woman refuses to leave. “I want to die as I’ve lived—these books spoke to me,” she declares. She remains defiant as the books are doused with a stream of blue kerosene and Fabian is ordered to count to ten as an ultimatum. When he reaches nine she takes it as a departure to mockingly begin reciting the multiplication tables (as we heard in Clarisse’s school). The captain now has the flame thrower and is ready to use it when the

¹⁰² He tells Montag of the fable of Hercules and Antaeus, the wrestler who had great strength while his feet remained on the ground but was easily defeated when held in midair by Hercules, concluding “If there isn’t something in that legend for us today, in this city, in our time, then I am completely insane (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 83*). Like this fable, the source text emphasized that books connect us to life and the earth we live on.

¹⁰³ The fact that Faber does not outrightly condemn electronic media is often passed over in critical readings.

woman produces a box of matches. There is a lack of logic, but not symbolism to the following. Since all has been thoroughly soaked with kerosene what is the difference if ignited by the captain's flame thrower, or the woman's match? Indeed, the scene serves to show a more diabolical side to the captain and the system he represents. He is ready not only to "kill" books but a person for clinging to them. Would a fire more organically set by a match be less controllable than one coming from the muzzle of a gun? In a manner of speaking, yes. What matters is the woman's exercise of will and choice instead of submission to the state's edicts and her words and recognition of Montag give reason to believe that she at least suspects her martyrdom would have an effect on someone like him. The captain orders everyone out but Montag is reluctant to leave even though he cannot help her as the house goes up in flames.

This second burning scene is lavishly filmed. Tight editing, camera placement and shots allow the spectator to feel the agony of books curling up inside of orange flames. The camera brings us close to the books and we are able to read dozens of titles as the books are being sprayed and then consumed. The books have the appearance of having been used, most are paperbacks and they are in several languages. They range from "classics" and children's books to some "subversive" titles that were for a time banned to anodyne material including magazines and crossword puzzles.

The obvious point is that reading is a very personal choice, eclectic and omnivorous according to individual desire and taste¹⁰⁴. From the serious to the whimsical, it's difficult to be indifferent to destruction of such a collection, and the spectator's own tastes and prejudices may be revealed. The safe distance between spectator and destruction of books has been erased. Would anyone not recognize at least one book they have enjoyed being burned and not try hard to save it? On the other hand, there might be others we would not mind seeing burned or not care about at all. Nevertheless, the folly of those who would destroy them all for everyone would probably give rise to an inner feeling of protest in nearly everyone.

Just before the conflagration begins the camera lingers on a book of Salvador Dali's art, its pages invisibly and rapidly turned by a breeze. Its presentation of his

¹⁰⁴ In his journal Truffaut expressed that the books featured in the film had no deliberate meaning, but his intention was to film them as objects (Weist 138).

fantastic art, a testimony to the flights of imagination books may give us. The old woman in slow motion in the midst of the flames with hands raised has an almost ecstatic look on her face before she collapses¹⁰⁵. Immediately after, the camera cuts to an illustration among the ashes just before it is consumed. It appears to be a female saint, perhaps an image of Joan of Ark. Montag seems to be the only one (besides the woman) who feels anything as he hesitates and is the last to leave. The power of the fire is emphasized by shots from the top of the stairs of the flames roaring up the stairs and engulfing the camera/spectator. We are confronted with the insatiable, consuming nature of fire-the books and person go up together; they are one and the same. The scene accompanied by a score alternatively tense and hypnotic speaks for itself. Although the woman made no direct defense of books, she chose to sacrifice herself rather than live without them.

XXIV TV COUSINS VS. BOOKS

This is an important sequence and while considerably condensed from the source text, Montag is only a little less declamatory but just as angry. Truffaut adds texture and meaning to the sequence in interesting ways. The scene abruptly shifts from the flames to Linda's television which momentarily fills the frame before the camera pulls back to show that Linda is entertaining three friends. This female "cousin" whom we have seen before, is an attractive woman, broad-shouldered, and regally seated in a large, high-backed, leather chair, a somewhat imposing and seductive presence. "Finally," she says, "do remember (thrusting her finger at the camera) to tolerate your friend's friends, however alien and peculiar they may seem to you." Of course, to "tolerate" speaks of open-mindedness and civility, and today, in many quarters seems to have become the cardinal virtue or "value." But in broad terms, "tolerance" raises the questions of just who is supposed to tolerate whom, and just what it is that needs to be tolerated. It is odd that the TV "cousin" limits this broad-mindedness to "your friend's friends." This is a society where "all must be the same" so what might these individual differences be that one is

¹⁰⁵ Also from his shooting diary, Truffaut expressed admiration for the actress who was required to do the fire scene six times because of technical difficulties. He also chose her because she was small and rotund, "against the convention of the dignified, valiant lady with the beautiful, ravaged face" (Weist 126).

urged to tolerate? People's rampant narcissism probably magnifies what small "differences" exist, but at any rate, if the government makes "tolerance" a slogan, it may suffice for many who gain a sense of self-satisfaction by accepting the *illusion* that they are actually being tolerant when their society is anything but.

The conversation we hear shifts to the TV cousin's appearance and that she may be pregnant, which one of the women calls "irresponsible" but the others say it is preferable to letting the race die out. Clearly, none of them want to be bothered with children although one thinks it might be fun because "sometimes children grow up to look like you." We now hear the cousin ending her speech with some rather violent imagery, "smother malice, strangle violence, suppress prejudice... be tolerant today." Without changing expression or tone of voice she now delivers a cosmetic add with the same sense of seriousness. Montag enters without greeting anyone and hides more books. He shows no desire to join the group and in a corner of another room he pensively begins playing with the flame from his lighter. Is he thinking this is a fire I can control? Linda goes to him and tries to get Montag to join the party but he declines.

Some moments later, perhaps motivated by a televised report of more government action against subversives, Montag turns off the small bedside TV and joins the ladies in the living room, causing a stir by shutting off their television. He suggests they should just talk (he obviously needs to) and mentions the desperate act of the old woman who chose to die rather than be separated from her books and they cannot conceive of anyone making such a sacrifice. However, he silences them by declaring he had been present and witnessed it. He does not disguise his anger or disgust with their attitudes and lifestyles, calling them all "a bunch of zombies," who "aren't living, just passing time." Two of the women's husbands have been called up for military "training exercises" and they are completely indifferent to it. Montag thinks they should be concerned about another impending war but that it does not matter to them, partly because as Montag points out, they do not know their husbands anyway so it would mean little to them if they were killed. Evidently men are commonly called for military duty, ostensibly for rapidly fought wars but no genuine news or information is given. The women insist that it is just routine and anyway, "it's always somebody else's husband that dies in a war." They have known men to die from accidents or suicides but never in a war. We are left to wonder about so

many accidental deaths and suicides. Are they really that? The broader socio-political environment comes into focus here. As captain Beatty explains in the source text: "If you don't want a man unhappy politically, don't give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet, give him none. Let him forget there is such a thing as war" (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 61*).

Montag has been very harsh with these women and shocks them further by producing his copy of *David Copperfield* and begins reading to them the scene of Dora's death. The reactions of these women (three as opposed to two in the source text) are very telling: one is overcome by emotion and begins to cry. Another is visibly upset and the third woman, who draws near to hold her hand, is not moved in the least. This woman is angry that Montag has forced them to listen to "this rubbish." Her attitude is similar to that of captain Beatty, poetry and literature are bad for people and to be avoided at all costs. While not moved to tears, the woman "in the middle" objected because she didn't want to be bothered saying she saw no need for "more trouble and sadness in the world." The other woman who cannot stop crying, has a hard time explaining her inner state, and finally says she had just forgotten "those feelings." The party is over as Linda opines: "They won't come back. I'll be all alone. I won't be popular anymore. They won't use me in the Family anymore." As shallow and artificial as she is, her feelings are painfully human; she does not want to be alone.

Linda's crying friend, Clara, illustrates how reading can awaken (or keep alive) deep emotion and memory. Try to imagine a world without books, newspapers, magazines or any kind of meaningful recorded discourse. Without any of these things how can people like Linda and Clara that reveal a submerged humanity, become aware of and try to meet their existential needs or construct anything meaningful of their lives? What possibilities are open to them? It is tragic and perhaps the most pathos laden sequence of the film.

If Truffaut does not illustrate why books and literacy are important as clearly as Faber does in the source text, then he certainly drives home how empty life can be without them. Furthermore, we see more clearly how Truffaut's adaption of *Fahrenheit 451* squarely fits into the tradition of science fiction cinema. From the lowliest B-films of the 1950s to recent mega productions like the *Matrix* series; emotion and feelings (even

unpleasant ones) are presented as essential in making us truly human, setting us apart. Although not a “depersonalization” narrative in the traditional sense, the film certainly deals with the issue and in a more naturalistic way than most science fiction narratives. That is, it *Fahrenheit 451* seems to suggest that the worst fate is not death or obliteration but an irreparable loss of one’s humanity. The sequence ends with Montag carrying a load of books to a table explaining to Linda that he has got to read; “I’ve got to catch up with the remembrance of the past.” Perhaps his words indicate he is now reading Proust’s famous novel, but at any rate it is a further reference to his growing fascination with the meaning of time and memory and the power of literature to bring neglected states of mind to light, and to convert passive knowledge into active. The scene fades to black.

XXV A NIGHTMARE

The scene fades in from black with a few curious points of light at the top left corner of the frame, that appear to be outside illumination filtering into the house. These static lights make us aware of the slow, downward right drift of the camera as a gradual brightening of the scene reveals Montag in fitful sleep. Truffaut never gives us access to Montag’s thoughts via internal monologue and this dream sequence is a better and cinematic way to allow the viewer to “enter” Montag’s chaotic, tortured mind. His dream first reveals the empty hall of Clarisse’s school, then the monorail moving, bathed in deep red and we find ourselves in the old woman’s house the floor covered with the books that were burned. We see a book hovering in mid-air above these like a bird. This echoes Bradbury’s metaphor from the opening of his narrative of “flapping, pigeon-winged books (that) died on the porch and lawn of the house” (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 3). Instead of the old woman we see Clarisse standing in for her, striking the match to her books and collapsing in the fire in slow motion. The camera now focuses on Montag’s face, his eyes open having awakened from the dream. In another Hitchcockian touch like in *Vertigo*, Montag’s subconscious seems to piece together the link between the book woman and Clarisse.

The scene quickly dissolves from Montag to an equivalent close up of Clarisse in bed, hinting at a psychic link between them. A siren is soon heard and a voice behind the door identified as her uncle urges her to escape, which she does through the roof while the uncle stalls the firemen below. This instance of self-sacrifice is of course reminiscent of similar incidents among the resistance during the war. The relief the spectator feels in seeing Clarisse escape is punctuated by the expansive, star-filled night sky we see her climb into. Although brief, it makes an impression because it offers the only glimpse of natural beauty, truly open space and freedom we have seen thus far. Clarisse's scene ends with points of light in the darkness just as Montag's scene began with similar points of light.

XXVI MONTAG SEARCHES

The next sequence opens to the daytime sky, the camera lowering to an establishing shot of Montag's house. Some sympathy is mined for a concerned Linda as she seems to be seeking to stabilize the deteriorating situation. She solicits her detached husband's opinion on rearrangement of the furniture and new curtains, but the change she obviously desires is for him to abandon his books. She comments that he has not been sleeping well and thinking he may be ill suggests he not go in to work. Montag says he must because he is considering leaving his job soon and when Linda asks about his promotion, he tiredly states, "that was before." Now pressed about the books he says he will dispose of them after he has read them but Linda bears down, saying she will leave him if he does not dispose of them now. She finally insists that he choose between the books and her but Montag, distant and self-absorbed, defers the decision saying he does not know how to answer her.

He is next seen outside a boarded up house, the same one we have seen Clarisse enter earlier, and he asks a neighbor about the people that lived there. In zombie-like fashion the neighbor says "they took them away," although she is not able (or unwilling) to answer Montag as to whether it was the police or firemen. Displaying her general lack of awareness, "they do that, you know" she continues, and the close-up of the blankness

of the woman's face punctuates her pauses before she concludes that they "weren't like us. They were special." Her tone is rather neutral, but certainly not positive as she directs Montag's attention to the rooftop antennas of the neighboring houses. When the camera finally arrives at the house in question we see that it has none, "see... nothing" she says.

Montag is next seen nearing the fire station while up ahead the captain¹⁰⁶, also in the street, takes aside one of the passing recruits and begins bullying him about some minor detail of dress. Montag takes this as an opportunity to break into the captain's office in search of information about the raid on the house. A fair amount of suspense is developed through the cross-cutting of Montag searching the captain's office and the captain shown on his way there. The captain finally arrives and catches Montag going through his files and suspense gives way to exposition as he accepts Montag's explanation, assuming that he is only anxious to close the case so he can be given the house of the detainees. As in the source text, the firemen are evidently given preference in such cases, perhaps an added motivation for their job. The captain shows Montag the file he has just received containing the photographs of the last night's detainees and indeed among them is the older man with the heavy coat we have seen twice earlier, now identified as the uncle of Clarisse who is still at large.

In line with his troubled psychological state Montag briefly collapses, prefaced by the director filming the captain's last few words to Montag in slow motion. Montag regains composure and the captain rather slyly reminds him to report if he happens to see the fugitive Clarisse and the camera lingers on his quizzical expression as Montag makes a hurried exit. Although Montag has deferred a decision between Linda and the books, it would seem ideally he would prefer to keep them both but he will not part with his books. Likewise the sequence has shown him purposefully active for the first time in trying to discover the fate of Clarisse and her family. He risked breaking into the captain's office and there may be no turning back now.

¹⁰⁶ There seems to be an irony in this as the last of the captain's rebukes is "remember, don't you have a head"? Moments later a fireman hands him a file and the captain calls him a "good man" and asks how long he has been a fireman, again mentioning his personal medallion, which the fireman hesitantly reports the captain has already given him.

XXVII MONTAG AND CLARISSE JOIN FORCES

We see a shaken Montag now outside the firehouse and he passes the red, information box as the scene shifts to his house where Linda is shown exiting. There is a cut and simultaneous wipe revealing an iron fence behind Linda as she is next shown descending a flight of steps and puts an envelope inside the information box. She does this without hesitation but as she walks on she puts on sunglasses to hide the distress on her face. Aside from advancing the narrative, because of the way it was filmed, Linda's movement through an impersonal, constricting cityscape, this brief sequence speaks eloquently of entrapment and the sad interiority in which Linda dwells.

The next scene opens to the monorail where Clarisse exits and Montag, hiding behind a pylon accosts her. Aware that she is a fugitive she still tells him it is "terribly important" for her to return home. The romantic score we heard on their initial meeting on the train begins again but does not reach its climax. A cut takes us to her house and Clarisse admits that she is frightened and asks Montag to stay with her as they enter the cellar. She explains she must find and destroy a list of addresses, friends of her uncle. The record reveals who they are and where they are hiding. In the clutter of the cellar, Clarisse almost despairs but Montag who asserts "it was my job," has no trouble finding the hidden documents. Sparking his lighter, he now uses fire in a controlled way, not to destroy but ultimately to preserve the lives of those recorded on the papers.

Clarisse now confesses that their last meeting was not an accident. She was following him because she thought he could help them. In turn, Montag said he realized (his dream) there was a connection between her and the old woman killed in the fire. Providing a further allusion to the resistance and occupation theme, Clarisse responds that the old woman was afraid she might talk and give them away. With admirable lucidity, Montag confesses, "Yes; and what did I do? I got into a little trouble this morning and I fainted like a little school girl...But I can't be a fireman anymore." Montag is not offering to join the Resistance merely stating he can no longer be a part of the system. The sequence thus far has been very good and natural, but the exposition that follows becomes a bit strained.

Clarisse says they must go away and describes a route out of town leading to where “the book people” live. Confused, Montag says “the good people?” His question opens the door for the following exposition from Clarisse, as she responds “the book, the book people, haven’t you heard of them?” It is a little strange that as part of the strong arm of the State, Montag seems not to have heard of these dissident communities. Clarisse describes them with a utopian smile, as people who have separated themselves into small groups in the hills and countryside, living peaceably and doing nothing that is forbidden. Montag asks why she refers to them as “book people” if they do nothing against the law and she cuts to the heart of the matter: “they are books, each of them commits a book to memory and they *become* that book. Occasionally they are arrested and must live cautiously” she continues, “because the secret they carry is the most precious secret in the world. Without them all human knowledge would pass away.” Given the repressive society of the story world, no explanation is needed for people choosing to live apart from it. However, no compelling defense of books is given. The “secret” they carry has no explanation beyond the particular book each individual would choose to memorize and the idea that “all human knowledge would pass away” without them does not hold up very well, it comes off as an idealized generalization. It is perhaps the only line of dialogue that seems contrived and unconvincing in this overall carefully crafted narrative.

Montag, with the calmness of someone who has finally resolved a dilemma, is not ready to go with her saying that until recently he had been burning books and “perhaps time.” As in the source text, he plans to plant a book in the house of all the firemen and denounce them so the system will collapse. “We’ve got to burn out the pyromaniacs,” he declares. It is a plan that will never be realized of course and we wonder if the character as played in the film would have enough passion to even attempt it. A siren sounds and they decide to leave separately and Montag says they will see each other again, although Clarisse sadly responds “no we shan’t¹⁰⁷.” Next, a full shot outside the house shows them facing each other while emphasizing the physical space between them. Presented as a

¹⁰⁷The use of “shan’t” instead of “won’t” adds to the artificiality of the exchange. Not that the former is incorrect or not still used in some quarters, it just does not reflect the way people usually speak—perhaps more so today than in 1966.

separation that is likely to be permanent, Montag now agrees with Clarisse saying: “no we shan’t,” and they go their separate ways. The scene is credible, although a bit melodramatic.

Their physical distance maintained throughout the sequence, guards against the idea of romantic love while not foreclosing the potential for an intellectual or spiritual union, leaving the viewer to wonder if it will be allowed to blossom. As mentioned before, the romantic/sad score accompanying their meetings has not been allowed climax or release here either; another reason to anticipate what is likely to follow. Truffaut insisted on portraying their relationship this way with great discretion in spite of the expanded role he gave Clarisse. In doing so, he did not deviate from the essence of their relationship in Bradbury’s text. Although caring little for the genera, Truffaut seemed to know that romance is usually problematic in science fiction. If it is allowed a prominent place, the narrative emphasis shifts automatically and considerably.

As other commentators have remarked *Fahrenheit 451* transfers the love and desire among people as commonly presented in film, to love of books and the particular freedom they may impart. Though cloaked, it is nonetheless an interesting defense of books. This is not without irony if “love of books” somewhat replaces interpersonal love, but this does not seem to be the case and remains an open question to consider when we observe the community of the book people later on. On the other hand, “love” and desire among the people of the story world are presented as degraded ideals and little more than biological necessity (like sleeping or eating) that must occasionally be satisfied,¹⁰⁸ so can literacy be anything other than beneficial?

Truffaut maintains interest and builds towards climax by cutting from Montag and Clarisse’s parting to Montag’s house and a close up of Linda once again mirror gazing and caressing herself. It seems both women are leaving Montag’s life at the same time but one wonders if Linda could ever be in love with anyone as much as she appears to be with herself. She is shown packing her things including a large picture of herself and shrieks in fright as if she had seen a big spider, when a hidden book falls from

¹⁰⁸ I would remind the reader of the artificial/synthetic origins of Linda’s amorous episode, the rude leering between boys and girls shown on the train, the conversation among Linda’s friends concerning marriage and children and the overall antiseptic nature of personal relations presented in the narrative.

behind the picture. This scene goes a long way in erasing the possible sympathy or pity we have had for her character. Soon we will see her leaving for the last time when Montag arrives at the house with the firemen and emphasizing her betrayal she tells him she just could not bear it any longer and the camera shows her back as she walks away.

XXVIII MONTAG'S FARWELL TO ARMS

Montag is now seen nervously pacing back and forth at the fire station. We have seen him nervous or ill at ease through most of the film but not like this. His energy and resolve find expression in the resignation he offers the captain when he appears. In contrast to the stiff, military formality of Montag's self-dismissal, the captain begs him to stay for one last call telling him that he must not let him down like that in front of the men. They go out on another call and we see the rising tension on Montag's face as they enter his neighborhood and stop at his house. Fabian emits a brief laugh of recognition and it becomes apparent that he and the captain had known or suspected all along. The captain cheerfully instructs Montag to show them what they are looking for mocking Montag's earlier instructions to his students: "to know how to find one must first know how to hide, right Montag? I like a man who knows his work" he continues while Montag retrieves books and throws them into a pile. The others find books as well and we see that Montag has accumulated a large and varied library.

The captain insists that Montag do the burning and with flamethrower in hand, manages his first openly rebellious act. To the captain's consternation, he first incinerates the bed he and Linda had shared and then the television which explodes. Finally Montag, his face set like stone, fires the pile of books as the captain ridicules him for thinking he could find happiness in print. Ironically, he says that Montag "must learn to think a bit," and about how "these recipients for happiness disagree." If, as the captain believes, books aim for a kind of happiness or completeness while being full of contradictions, then how like people they really are. "Let that heap of contradictions burn itself out. It is we who are working for man's happiness." Thus, the captain plainly states his justification for the fireman's profession viewing the destruction of books as an act of "sweet reason."

Additionally, the captain's pyromania and fascination with annihilation come into sharp relief as he removes his gloves and warms his hands over the fire.

He waxes poetic about fire wondering aloud "what draws us to it whether we are young or old" and calls burning "beautiful," savoring how the burning pages curl up like "flower petals or butterflies; luminous and black." Indeed, the close up of burning here seems even more poignant and charged prefaced by the captain's words and we can read more titles (most familiar) blackened than in the old woman's house. In that sequence, her death carried a great deal of force, here all emphasis falls upon the "death" of the books. Particularly effective is a close up of Henry Miller's *Plexus*, page after page curling into black ash accompanied by the urgent, plaintive Bernard Hermann score. Much of what the captain says; his taunting, condemnation of books and justification of burning are condensed from the source text but grouped together here for dramatic effect. Especially, the captain's poetic words on the fascination of fire (lifted from the source text) coming immediately before the close up of the books burning. The camera finally takes us into the pages through extreme close up like during Montag's earlier reading scene, only now we race to read the words filling the frame as they are consumed by flame.

Addressing a speechless Montag, the captain concludes, "nothing to say—that's real wisdom." Fabian whispers to him that Montag is hiding a book. He extracts it from Montag's coat, insisting it must be burned and that Montag is under arrest. No longer impassive, Montag wrests the book away from him as the captain aims his pistol, leaving him no choice but to incinerate the captain. After the first blast of flame there is a close up of the captain gently whispering Montag's name. The tone is not of terror or alarm but ambiguous enough to be in line with a death wish, made more plausible coming after the captain's twisted reasoning on "happiness" and meditations on the destructive beauty of fire. In the source text Montag came to this same realization that the captain had a death wish after the fact.

In Bradbury's text Montag is less silent and the captain is more verbally and physically aggressive overall, even striking Montag who declares "we never burned *right* (author's italic) before blasting the captain. The sequence is more restrained in Truffaut's direction and effective in that Montag who has been chafing under the captain

is finally pushed into action. Although he commits murder, we may surmise that Montag has finally “burned right” by incinerating his former life, including his tormentor and representative of the system, not to mention his marriage bed and the television. In the previous burning in the old woman’s house, she chose to die *with* her books rather than live without them. In essence, Montag has made the same choice. He refuses to live without books (the book he saves is soon revealed as Poe’s *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*) and by his actions has brought the society’s death penalty upon himself and must flee.

Next we see Montag running across a field past the border of the monorail and he begins “shedding” his old identity by throwing off his helmet. There is a cut to a car with a loudspeaker on an empty street denouncing Montag for murder, ordering people to come out and stand at the door of their houses. This is an odd request and scene as we see people emerge from a row of identical houses attached to one another. This is presented in long shot from above as the camera pulls back and shows us Montag watching before he descends a narrow stairway; the cinematography has put us in the place of the fugitive. Through a series of cuts and overhead shots we remain with Montag as he makes his way through a maze of streets, confronted everywhere with TV screens with his image. Crossing another field and coming to a river he seems to have escaped the city when a strange sound is heard and we see four black spots, flying in formation they rise from the lower left-hand corner of the frame. Montag covers himself in a small boat as these, black spots are revealed to be flying policemen. With what appear to be motors in each hand, the full shot of them is extremely unconvincing. They are obviously suspended on wires which become partly visible. Fortunately this scene is just a few seconds in duration. After the extreme care taken with the other effects, the fire scenes in particular, it is puzzling that Truffaut inserted such a poorly executed shot. It is brief; perhaps it was not important to him beyond illustrating the fact that Montag is still being followed. When they are gone, he paddles across the river and a series of cuts and dissolves emphasizing the passage of time show him finding and following railway tracks until he comes to the end of the line. This last part of his escape has been accompanied by rather somber orchestral music.

XXIX THE BOOK PEOPLE

Montag has followed the path Clarisse described to him coming to the abandoned train car, from which a man exits and heartily greets him, saying they know about him and have been expecting him. The man who introduces himself only as *The Journal of Henri Brulard* by Stendhal, seems to be the informal leader of the group and on his small TV shows Montag the live broadcast of his pursuit and execution in the street by machine gun fire from a helicopter. The victim's face was not clearly shown but "the show must go on, anybody will do to provide them with their climax," he says offering Montag new clothes proclaiming "you're dead, you may as well shed your old skin." It is merely one final reference to the false "society of spectacle," catering to the public's apparently short attention span while showing it to be something of a death cult as well. Officially considered dead, Montag may no longer be searched for.

This man who assumes some of the functions of "Granger," the leader of the book people in the source text, takes Montag around the camp explaining that they "are scattered all over, tramps outwardly, but inside libraries. It wasn't planned—it just happened." The settlement appears to be a relaxed and friendly group including at least a couple of adolescents and a child. We also see an eccentric in a bowler hat and tie drinking from a flask. Truffaut tries to lighten the mood by injecting a little humor, through a pair of identical twins who identify themselves as volumes one and two of Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice*, and *The Prince* by Machiavelli, is a ragged man who good naturedly insists that you "can't judge a book by its cover." There is a man industriously chopping wood identified as *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan who ate his book after memorizing it instead of customarily burning it. The man with the apple we saw at the beginning is present and Clarisse shows up and her platonic relationship with Montag appears to continue, nothing more. They appear to be a happier, more accessible group than Bradbury's disgruntled professors who had a sense of mission. Overall, this group

carries a less serious message¹⁰⁹. *The Journal of Henri Brulard* further explains the community to Montag:

It just so happened that a man here, a man there loved some book and rather than lose it, he learned it and we came together. We're a minority of undesirables crying out in the wilderness. But it won't always be so. One day we shall be called on to recite what we've learned and then books will be printed again and when the next age of darkness comes those who come after us will do as we have done.

The cyclical nature of tyranny and the note of an eternal hope residing in the human spirit from the source text find definite expression here, it is a fine paraphrase of Granger's much longer discourse in the book. His low key exposition answers the “how and why” of the community’s existence but his defense of books and what they can mean for human life is less than compelling. If we accept that it is the *experience of books* rather than obsession with books themselves that make a difference in life; that is, bringing an awareness of self and the world around us, if not necessarily making one happier or more satisfied but at least imparting interest and vitality to life, then nothing further needs to be said.

These ideas are well developed in Bradbury’s text and Truffaut does not shy away from affirming that literacy is all important for development of the individual and society; he only does so in a less pointed manner. The book people in the source text recapitulate the value of literacy by putting forward a number of things worth preserving that go missing when people are not allowed to read: interpersonal connections, memory, hope, individual and family continuity and a relation to the earth we live on. Bradbury’s book people are rather heroic in the seriousness of their intentions, although they maintain a selfless, humble quality – “just dust jackets for books, nothing more” (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 119). Their seriousness comes in part from awareness that war will shortly put an end to things and they believe they can help rebuild society. This current is absent from Truffaut’s adaptation, and he had often expressed his dislike of portraying the openly heroic in his films, opting more for the flawed and subtle in human behavior.

¹⁰⁹ The book people, referenced by title in Bradbury’s text are more like a canon of Western literature, including principal philosophical and religious texts, while Truffaut’s book people are more unconventional.

Truffaut found it difficult to adhere to Bradbury's moral simplicity and according to his filming diary, increasingly saw the narrative as a fairy tale or poetic parable. Truffaut's book people are not revolutionaries out to salvage and rebuild society but a group of eccentrics enjoying an alternative, back to nature lifestyle. One gets the impression that the refreshing humanity and community we see in them comes as much from their rejection of their stifling society as from an embrace of literacy. Nearly every commentator has noted the rather mechanical nature of the book people, reciting themselves to themselves and others. The books will survive, as long as memory serves but literature as a living art form seems dead with them. One of the more poignant scenes shows a child to be memorizing incorrectly his dying book's (perhaps grandfather) book. Memory will fail just as surely as the paper the books have been recorded on will.

As mentioned earlier, the style of filming, befitting the sequence, shifts to an "open" style, emphasizing space, freedom and the natural world through long takes and panning shots in sharp contrast to what has come before. There is no longer a sense of entrapment, but still an impression of limitation or the world in suspension suggested by scenes of a frozen lake and the falling snow in the last scenes. While there is a spirit of freedom a feeling of futility also persists especially at the end as we see these "book people" walking back and forth in front of the camera reciting¹¹⁰ their books in zombie-like fashion, their only function to be living memory banks for books. Many (including Bradbury) have found the ending beautiful and poetic, perhaps so. But what it lacks is more affirmation of the tentative optimism and faith of the book's conclusion.

XXX CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Critics have noted that *Fahrenheit 451* seldom makes anyone's list of favorite films; in fact many find themselves depressed by it. I think this may be in part because a lot of what we see strikes too close to home. The ending, while beautiful and poetic, offers closure with only glimmers of hope and is hardly energizing or resolute in the sense of more typical Hollywood fare. However, it also seems to be a film that

¹¹⁰ One man is shown reciting using an old fashion walkie-talkie device to some unseen listener.

“improves” on repeat viewings. Indeed, the text is rich enough for new nuances of meaning to emerge and appreciation of detail on repeated viewings. It is a nuanced film exploring the decline of reading in technological culture, creating compelling metaphors for the loss of self, connectedness and a sense of time’s passing. As improbable as the narrative world may be, the human dilemmas at its center are still relevant. For any adaptation we might ask the question as to whether the film makes sense if you have not read the book. Is it coherent, does it make its point, does it stand on its own? I believe the answer to these questions would be yes. Truffaut treated the source text with care as something worthy of careful explication while making the film his own. If the film does not offer as trenchant a defense of books as Bradbury’s text, it still defends literacy in subtle, unflinching ways.

In many ways the source text gained from being dramatized. The film managed to achieve sophisticated aesthetic value through narrative clarity and visuals. Although many seem to disagree, I believe the metaphor of books as living things was well realized, especially through their brutal handling and destruction. Several of Bradbury’s themes, like the indirect suicide of captain Beatty and the narcissistic nature of the society became more explicit or enjoyed further development through performance. Like the book, the film presented a very conceivable alternative reality where the spectator does not experience distancing coming from elaborate special effects or outer space. There were absurd moments but not sufficiently so to be funny. Distancing for sure, but not enough to keep us from relating what we see to the world and absurdities we know and experience to some degree in life. Subtle in shadings and emotions, Truffaut managed to capture the soul and essence of Bradbury’s book.

XXXI BRADBURY’S ADAPTIVE VISION

I have been fortunate to obtain a copy of Ray Bradbury’s screenplay of *Fahrenheit 451* dating from 1994. Since that time it has passed through numerous rewrites by Bradbury and others, recently by Frank Darabont, but it has been on hold or “pre-production hell” for several years. It will be interesting to see what elements of

Bradbury's screenplay a future remake might contain, if any. The *Fahrenheit 451* text is a dense text full of ideas and situations that a future adapter could chose to develop and emphasize in a number of ways. What follows is the first sequence of Bradbury's 118 page script.

FADE IN: A city at night. By helicopter we move over seemingly empty buildings, which are dark save in window after window, blue illuminations flicker, TVs behind each pane, and no other lights, no lamps, only blue color and moving shadows as ...

THE HELICOPTER skims the rooftops above, a million spider shapes, the arachnid antennae on every house, every apartment, every hotel.

At a distance we spy a small light which becomes a small fire which grows larger as we zoom down on a burning home. The rooftop is already ablaze but below, on the second floor, the windows are open and firebirds leap into the air. Which is to say burning books, with their wings aflame.

We follow the trajectory of several fiery objects and when they hit the grass we ZOOM IN on them and we see, wind-whipped, pages of novels, title pages, WAR AND PEACE, HEART OF DARKNESS; LITTLE DORRIT, etc.

And the CAMERA MOVES over the books as they thud and land, until the lawn is covered with these smoking, fiery winged things and the CAMERA PULLS BACK to look at the entire house and books spilling out the windows, followed by flames and the CAMERA PULLS BACK again to see firemen squirting what should be water at the house but we see the "water" take fire as it hits and the flames run back down the liquid toward the hose. It is kerosene. The FIREMEN are CAUSING the fire, not putting it out.

And the CAMERA turns swiftly to find MONTAG, his flame-thrower gouting fire as his lips whisper:

MONTAG

There is a thing about burning...

So fine...so...beautiful...and yet...

He stares

THE CAMERA moves over the fluttering, burning pages.

MONTAG

...but still...

A last flood of books.

The FIREMEN thrust up a final fount of burning liquid.

As does MONTAG and...

WHAM! The building falls flat down, roof on roof on floor...BAM!

The gust of fiery sparks and smoke whiff about the FIREMEN

And about MONTAG, his face minstrel-black from the smoke.

SERIES OF QUICK DISSOLVES as bulldozers skim and push the ashes into dump trucks...

As MONTAG, CLOSE UP, grimed-faced, watches.

And the land is flattened by steamrollers.

As Montag watches.

The fragments of books are swiftly siphoned into hoses and discharged into firework shell casings.

The FIREMEN step back.

MONTAG nods.

And fuses are lit.

And WHAM! The fireworks blow off and up.

And the ashes of books, the leaflets, explode in midair in great fiery architectures.

And snow down, a flake of Tolstoy here, a flake of Dickens there, and in between a word, sentence, a title.

The sky is full of fire and dying words.

And the FIREMEN stare up.

One half-burned book page flutters down.

MONTAG watches it turn in the wind until:

It lands like some strange and obedient winged thing on the back of his out stretched glove.

His eyes flex.

CLOSEUP we see the words of a familiar poem, no more than a line, something from ROBERT FROST or DONNE.

Swiftly curious, MONTAG puts his other glove over the forbidden scrap, closes his fist to wad it up.

He glances around.

The FIREMEN are busy loading more cannons to fire literature up in the sky.

Montag uses his left hand to shove the paper fragment into his right glove.

More cannon fire as MONTAG buttons his glove.

THE FIRE CHIEF, nearby, slides his eyes. Has he seen?

MONTAG fires off a final cannon.

The sky fills with flaming, self-consuming words.

And the audience of citizens around the city, looking up, stunned with the spectacle, whisper in awe.

And CLARISSE MCLELLAN, sixteen, watches from the edge of the crowd.

As the firework snows die in the sky.

CLOSEUP of MONTAG'S soot-grimed face.

DISSOLVE into same CLOSEUP in shower, as the cool rain in the firehouse bath washes away the mask of soot.

I think this nearly silent opening sequence well illustrates Bradbury's talent as a screen writer, a marvelous, visual blueprint introducing the three main characters of the narrative at the outset. Bradbury's tacit approval of Truffaut's adaption is evident in his

reuniting Montag and Clarisse at the end, although he restores her to age 16 bringing another dynamic to their relationship since she is more provocative. The aspect of destruction as public spectacle is emphasized especially in the opening. The screenplay (like Truffaut's film) brings more detail to Montag and Mildred's relationship at home, showing Mildred's obsession with her TV family in greater detail.

The mechanical hound is well realized and Bradbury even includes a scene where we see it being assembled in a factory. It carries more weight in the screenplay assuming symbolic significance. The disaffected, violent youth mentioned in the novel are realized in the screenplay, appearing from time to time as an unpredictable danger. As described, they put one in mind of the youth of *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971), he once refers to them as "night beast kids." Faber has a more subdued role in the screenplay and Granger, the leader of the book people in the novel is absent. However, the final scenes where Montag reaches the book people and is reunited with Clarisse are less elaborated, an anticlimactic in the screenplay draft I have.

Overall, the biggest change from the source text is the increased role of fire captain Beatty. He is more fully defined as a frustrated or "spoiled" individual (or romantic) who engages Montag more forcefully since the screenplay is more emphatic about how he had once turned to books only to be frustrated in his search. In Bradbury's screenplay, he is shown to have a large library which he never reads and a completely automated house that "speaks" to him so he does not feel his loneliness too keenly. The screenplay is very well elaborated cinematically and appears to contain more drama or "feeling" than Truffaut's film. *Fahrenheit 451* is a rich text, and we continue to wait for another cinema adaptation¹¹¹.

¹¹¹ Postscript. The 2018 remake of *Fahrenheit 451* for cable TV by Ramin Bahrani departed significantly from the previous textual incarnations but further developed the character and motivations of fire chief Beatty as Bradbury had envisioned. The film was not enthusiastically received, however I suspect it will become better appreciated over time.

Chapter 5

ONE SIZE FITS ALL: WEARING THE WONDERFUL ICE CREAM SUIT

“Are we not fine?” He wondered. “All the same size,
All the same dream—the suit. So each of us will look
beautiful at least one night a week, eh?”

I INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As a film, *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* (Stuart Gordon, 1998) is rather obscure. It had a very limited theatrical release and was one of the Disney studio’s first direct to video releases. However, it stands out as one of Ray Bradbury’s better short stories written toward the end of his most productive period (1946-1962) and the same year the author (1957) published his “autobiographical” novel *Dandelion Wine*. Like the novel, *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* was also inspired by some interesting personal memories and experiences that Bradbury recounted many times. Leaving aside social satire and critique, he neither strains to make philosophical points nor advocates a world view, rather the story highlights some of the author’s cherished humanistic ideas in a simple story well told. The text, especially as it evolved across media, manifested Bradbury’s comedic talent and poetic bent in its celebration of hope and the joys of living.

The story falls into the category of Bradbury’s ethnic stories, those populated by Irish or Mexican characters. George Slusser noted that “the Irish stories tend to be humorous, the Mexican ones a somber baroque” (Slusser 6) and although all of these deal with poor people, they do not put forward pleas for change or solutions to socio-economic problems. Rather, they celebrate the power to abide in spite of difficulties and focus on men who strongly share a concern for basic values such as family, friends, their land or place. *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* inverts this pattern by presenting a humorous, instead of somber Mexican story (although the characters are immigrants living in Los Angeles) while conforming to the aforementioned characteristics of the author’s ethnic stories. Bradbury witnessed the ability of these people to adapt and live

decently through tough times, probably with keener appreciation due to his family's own struggles during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Anthologized several times and included in four of Bradbury's short story collections, the story first appeared as "The Magic White Suit," in an October, 1958 edition of *Saturday Evening Post* and as "Ice Cream Suit" in the British magazine *Argosy* the following spring. Ray Bradbury had earlier christened this work "Wonderful Ice Cream Suit" as a thirty minute teleplay dated April of 1957. The oldest draft ¹¹² of the story predates the teleplay by an undetermined amount of time, perhaps a few months or a few weeks. We may assume then that it was conceived as a short story, although Bradbury must have immediately recognized its dramatic potential, since it reached print and television almost simultaneously. The first draft, titled "The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit," is a twenty-five page typescript, containing about seventy-five percent of the printed narrative and is largely dialogue and incident with relatively few descriptive passages pertaining to setting or mood; it reads like a screenplay. The teleplay was aired on the anthology series *Rendezvous* in November of 1958 and the story, from here on known as "The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit" (TWICS) was included in the author's well-received short story collection *A Medicine for Melancholy* first printed in February of 1959.

It was an auspicious beginning for a work that would shortly become one of Bradbury's most successful theater pieces (1965) (Mogen142), a musical, and finally a 1998 film. Although Bradbury has consistently voiced a positive opinion of François Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451*, he claimed *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* as his favorite cinema adaptation (Klein 186) and it's easy to see why. It is a case of Bradbury adapting Bradbury. The film, while eliding and condensing a few sections of the detailed, ninety-four page screenplay otherwise follows the author's visual/dramatic blueprint virtually to the letter. The film might be viewed as the culmination of a work in progress for forty years since it is "based on" the story, the play and even incorporates material from the later musical. In terms of the fluid development of Bradbury's fiction and his desire for

¹¹²I must thank Professor Donn Albright of the Pratt Institute, New York City, archivist and close friend of Ray Bradbury for over 60 years for graciously allowing access to original, unpublished drafts of the author's work as it has spanned several media over the years.

crossing over into dramatic media the “Ice Cream Suit” wears well indeed.

Bradbury often spoke of the inspiration behind his stories and revealed twin sources of inspiration for the story. During World War II he was living with his family in the declining coastal community of Venice, California, but spent considerable time in central Los Angeles¹¹³ at the home of a friend, Grant Beach. Beach lived with his mother who owned a large tenement building next door inhabited mostly by Hispanics¹¹⁴. Bradbury took inspiration from observing this community—even using some of the names of the neighborhood people for the characters in his story. He also spoke of being impressed by the sight of young ladies¹¹⁵ casting their once worn, white formal dresses from a rooftop to bring luck to the younger girls waiting below. In his introduction to the play in *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit and other plays for today, tomorrow and beyond tomorrow* (1972) he alluded to the tenement, revealing the sense of kinship he felt with the immigrants.

I grew up with many boys of mixed Mexican-American blood. My best friend in high school was a boy named Eddie Barrera. When I was twenty-one I lived in and around a tenement...where for five years I saw my friends coming and going from Mexico City, Laredo and Juarez. Their poverty and mine were identical. I saw what a suit could mean to them. I saw them share clothes as I did with my father and brother (xiii).

Good clothing, as well as money were scarce in the Bradbury household and never taken for granted. Indeed, for his high school graduation he wore his uncles’ best suit, complete with the bullet hole made by the robber who had recently killed him. Such was his primary inspiration, but Bradbury and Beach took an adventuresome car trip deep into Mexico in 1945 and many of the sights and experiences he had there naturally found an outlet in some of his stories. Analogous to Halloween, and “All Saints Day,” he found

¹¹³ This was the Boyle Heights neighborhood where the film was partially shot.

¹¹⁴ The tenants of the building provided inspiration for other Latino stories such as “En La Noche” and “I See You Never” He based the character of Fannie Florianna, an over-weight, reclusive opera singer in his 1985 mystery novel *Death Is a Lonely Business* on one of the tenants of the building.

¹¹⁵ In some accounts he referred to these girls as Filipina but they may have been celebrating their “quinceañera,” a coming of age party originating in Mexico, for girls reaching their 15th birthday.

the elaborate festival honoring the deceased, “Dia de Los Mortos,” a carnivalesque mixture of revelry and morbidity unforgettable and the prominent references to skeletons in “The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit” (TWICS) might stem from this. Also, the skeleton¹¹⁶ may be something we are barely aware of, yet it is a part of us “hidden” inside, like the potentialities waiting to emerge in the characters once they are clothed with the marvelous suit. Referring to them as “skeletons” before wearing the suit emphasizes their minimal, incomplete natures as well as their similarities since we are all the same under the skin.

II NARRATIVE THEMES

Bradbury’s familiarity and affinity for Latin culture as he came to know it in his native Los Angeles and elsewhere, is evident in this story and others like *En La Noche* and *I See You Never*, an early success printed in *The New Yorker* magazine and anthologized in *Best American Short Stories* of 1948. In several of his essays and articles he voiced appreciation for the relaxed kind of “convivio” fostered by more humanistic urban spaces. “Can’t we imitate the Latins who have enough sense to make a town plaza work for them”? (*Yestermorrow* 31) Moreover an informal kind of banding together (the characters in the story meet on the street) to form a community is essential and life affirming for the characters and a centerpiece of the story.

Moreover, coming to believe in oneself through someone else believing in and encouraging us is a central strand of the story and a very intense personal matter for Bradbury. In a letter to his friend Bernard Berenson, written less than a year before TWICS we see this sentiment strongly:

Here, too it seems to be a creative truth, that so often a single person believing in us and telling us we *can* succeed helps us over barriers. We go on with the strength of ten. The power of friendship, the power of love, how rarely we consider

¹¹⁶ Bradbury published a short story in 1945 called “Skeleton” a “weird tale” concerning a contest between a man and his hidden bones.

it, how rarely we realize the interior mountains it can blast apart and shake to nothing (Eller *Unbound* 86).

In particular, he was referring to the encouragement (Eller, *Unbound* 86) to write his first stage play, and the kind words from Charles Laughton that relieved the trauma of this first failed attempt to write a play based on *Fahrenheit 451* some months earlier in 1955. Coming to believe in oneself through the support of others is the “magic” in TWICS and more than just an abstract idea for Bradbury, it was deeply held and experienced. I believe these events are significant, coming so close to the writing of TWICS. Another likely influence, though Bradbury never acknowledged it, may be Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (1838). It exercised considerable influence upon many 19th century American writers like Herman Melville, whose epic novel *Moby Dick*, Bradbury wrestled for several months to adapt a screen play only a couple years prior to writing TWICS. Basically, Latin for “the tailor, retailored” *Sartor Resartus* is a discursive, poetic collection of philosophical musings loosely connected to the importance of one’s clothing. It is considered an early transcendentalist work because in its imaginary “philosophy of clothes” it argues that meaning can be extracted from phenomena as cultures adapt and reconstruct themselves, through altering faith systems, power structures and fashions. It has been termed a “Poiooumenon,” that is, a type of metafiction in which the story is about the process of creation, and emphasizes freedom of the will to reject evil, construct meaning and one’s self, illustrated through passages like the following:

Matter exists only spiritually, and to represent some Idea, and body it forth. Hence Clothes, as despicable as we think them, are so unspeakably significant. Clothes, from the King's mantle downwards, are emblematic, not of want only, but of a manifold cunning Victory over Want... Nay, if you consider it, what is Man himself, and his whole terrestrial Life, but an Emblem; a Clothing or visible Garment for that divine ME of his, cast hither, like a light-particle, down from Heaven? ... his Body and the Cloth are the site and materials whereon and whereby his beautified edifice, of a Person, is

to be built. (book I, ch. XI <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1051/1051-h/1051-h.htm#link2HCH0005>).

Finally, with his later assertion that “the fearful Unbelief is unbelief in yourself,” the kinship between Carlyle’s work and the thrust of Bradbury’s text become clear, perhaps explaining why it is referenced by the well-spoken character Villanazul in every version of the story except the film.

If it echoes in Bradbury’s narrative, it is most evident in the musical. When the men are ready to buy the suit, Villanazul mentions “the honorable Carlyle” and “his wondrous *Sartor Resartus*...his philosophy of suits.” Pronouncing the unusual title carefully a second time for the benefit of his comrades, he continues by saying, “It is that we, with our souls, our hearts, our imaginations, must clothe ourselves (Bradbury’s emphasis) ... We must from the eye of the living hurricane, cut and sew to put on a suit made from our lives, our loves.” His words foreshadow what is to come in Bradbury’s narrative, the peculiar affiliation between suit and wearer, how it realizes the various objects of desire of its wearers, and moreover affects their person.

Briefly summarized, the narrative takes place in one city neighborhood, covering a late afternoon and evening. It concerns six, poor, young Latinos living in East Los Angeles who all wish for different things. An associate of this rather disparate circle, Gomez, persuades them to pool their last dollars to buy an attractive white suit which they can then share allowing them to look “beautiful” at least one night a week. The narrative describes the hyper-real appearance of the suit giving the men reason to believe it has a special aura and power. Supposedly one of a kind, as they take brief turns wearing it things begin to change. Their desires begin to find fulfillment, their “better selves” shine through and with some risk, discomfort and sacrifice along the way they become a close-knit group. Exceeding their expectation, the evening becomes a special celebration and the suit is compared to “a parade.” However, an element of existential pathos slips in as the men realize that the marvelous evening and comradeship they have come to share may be fleeting and difficult to maintain.

The story is both typical and atypical of Bradbury’s work. As one may expect, it is a warm, upbeat, occasionally comic story dealing with changing outlooks on life and

existential transformation. The process of finding and making community to sustain oneself and overcome difficult circumstance is another common Bradbury theme that finds expression. Central to the work is the importance of having and pursuing a dream of some sort; as Bradbury put it “We have to romance ourselves into living. We have to have a dream of some sort, somewhere to go” (Mogan 141). Indeed, the characters only wake up to life and move forward when they embrace their dreams. Even the lowliest member of the group who really had no particular wish at the beginning, in the company of the others, finds a life affirming desire which he would be willing to sacrifice to keep. And finally there is the ambiguously fantastic element of the suit. On the other hand, the story stands out for its strength in what is usually perceived as a Bradbury weakness – character development. Longer than most of his short stories, in the space of about six thousand words, he presents and develops six distinct characters. Its dependence upon strong characterization through dialogue, interaction and incident made it a natural for the stage and screen. As much as any story he has written it is a character study.

In this respect it bears some similarity to a later story dealing with another community of men, *The Machineries of Joy* (1962). This story centers upon the personality conflicts and differences of opinion that arise among a group of priests concerning space exploration and the possibility of encountering new life. Like TWICS it has something of an ethnic flavor, foregrounding character and temperament -- pitting two more conservative Irish-born priests against a less traditional and flamboyant Italian priest, Father Vittorini. It also showcases language through this eloquent priest as TWICS does through the character Villanazul. More than mere conflict resolution, the reconciliation and understanding affected among the priests that restores and strengthens their communion are not unlike what occurs among the young Latino men in TWICS. Their communion goes beyond bonds of ethnicity or “the friendship of the poor,” which Villanazul, the philosopher of the group characterizes as “true friendship.” The brotherhood of the “Ice Cream Suit” is deep, mysterious and all but sacred.

In the suit wearing ritual one can see a fine example of a recognized sociological phenomenon. The peculiar social bond they share is similar to anthropologist Victor Turner’s modality of *communitas*. It is an interesting description of a universal human phenomenon found in groups as divergent as religious orders or motorcycle gangs, where

the same ground feeling underlines a group's ideas and actions. Ritual may be involved but is not essential for what Turner terms "spontaneous communitas,"— a sudden feeling of group solidarity that strikes with a random power akin to lightening. If absent, ritual and structure will enter at some point as measures to standardize and preserve the rare sense of unity experienced. Communitas in TWICS is more remarkable because it arises unexpectedly, not because of the joint purchase of the suit or wearing ritual (which should have been a source of endless conflict) but in spite of their differences and egoism which the suit somehow overrides. Turner describes this solidarity as a "direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities" (1969:47). He likens it to a divine grace, having something of the magical or "numinous" for all involved. Indeed, the suit seems to emit a celestial glow and the first man to wear it "looks like a saint" to his comrades. In *Liminality and Communitas*, Turner speaks about the "rites of passage" that often allow "communitas" to come into being as unique.

It is...a blend of lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship. We are presented in such rites, with a "moment in and out of time," and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties (80).

I believe this is a rather close description of what takes place in this group of outsiders who take turns to wear the white suit and develop ties on several levels. Their special comradeship is a core element of the narrative in all its versions and is particularly pronounced in the film where acceptance and affirmation of individuality is shown to be the cement of unity through performance.

It is noteworthy that both TWICS and *The Machineries of Joy* present communities of men bonded neither under arms nor in competition. Through dialogue and interaction Bradbury "humanizes" them; drawing real and sympathetic individuals and presenting a plurality of voices within each of these groups or subcultures, priests and Latino immigrants, who are often stereotyped or portrayed less favorably. Aside from the pleasure afforded by the respective narratives and their enchanting prose, they offer thoughtful, though oblique critiques of organized religion and the immigrant

experience—spheres some would say are not entirely dissimilar. The priests in “Machineries,” in their “fellowship of the poor” come to realize that faith is more enduring and malleable, not something that “will shatter when we break the sound barrier or melt and leave you nothing in the fire of a rocket blast¹¹⁷.” Even the most recalcitrant of the group realizes that wherever the future leads, “It’s the Lord’s space and the Lord’s worlds *in space* ... we must not try to take our cathedrals with us, when all we need is an overnight case” (Bradbury, *Machineries* 11).

The success and redemption of the young men in TWICS, while it is that, also subtly interrogates the more traditional, material notions of immigrant success in America, just as the other story takes religious dogma to task while affirming the impulse of faith. Finally, the men in both stories constitute communities of faith straining against a tide of uncertainty and each group has their respective sacraments. To wear the white suit is like putting on “the new man” or partaking of a mystical body. Yet, a sacrament is not magic but merely a symbol of something greater than self entered into through faith. Aside from what the men have vested in the suit, as a cherished and shared object it symbolically interprets the relationship between hope, fear and desire in their lives. The reoccurring metaphors of “a suit of armor” and the bullfighter’s “suit of lights” speak of struggle and conquest but aforementioned spiritual allusions are also present. Neither group (especially the brotherhood of the “secular sacrament” of the suit) will function unless its individuals can override certain stubborn, selfish impulses for the sake of the group and they learn to trust one another and truly come together through sharing it.

III THE SUIT THAT WEARS THE MAN

The characters of the story embark on a journey of self-discovery and spiritual renewal driven by the suit¹¹⁸, so we might ponder the nature of this quasi-mystical object

¹¹⁷ Bradbury had read a copy of Pope Pius XII’s *Guide for Living*, an anthology of the Pope’s addresses where he expressed optimism in discovering “new truths and new knowledge” through breaking our earthly bonds.

¹¹⁸ Although dissimilar in plot and style, *The Man in the White Suit* (Alexander MacKendrick, 1951) does concern the invention of a lustrous white suit that will neither soil nor wear out. Thus, running afoul of the

at the center of their experience and community. As the wearable centerpiece of this modern fable it is indeed an inspired object and “acts” more like a character than an object. More than a simple vehicle of wish fulfillment, it practically “thinks,” fitting each individual perfectly in terms of his needs. In fact, like a wise and sympathetic friend, it can divine and meet the real needs of each man better than any of them could alone. It is as if the suit “knows” each man better than he knows himself. It does everything but speak, and in the musical, Manulo claims “the suit speaks (Bradbury’s emphasis) for me.” In his case it supplied courage and self-control, and different things for the others. More than a charm, the suit “performs” properly according to any situation. Near the end of the narrative after all have worn it—Martinez reflects on how the suit seems to retain and transmit the essence of all its wearers.

He stood a moment longer by the suit which could save all the ways they sat or stood or walked. This suit which could move fast and nervous like Gomez or slow and thoughtful like Villanazul or drift like Dominguez, who never touched ground, who always found a wind to take him somewhere. This suit which belonged to them but which also owned them all. This suit that was—what? A parade. (Bradbury, *Melancholy* 49)

The men view the suit as something more sophisticated than a charm; it’s still an object, but not entirely an inanimate one. It becomes something of a performance instrument on the back of each of its wearers. The character development in and subsequent to the first draft focuses upon the suit as an instrument for joint performance unique to each individual. While we may consider performance broadly, in terms of “repeated behavior” and general social interaction, most of the characters in TWICS actually find themselves engaged in public performance, either to entertain or influence their beholders. Another reason the narrative was so readily adapted to performance was because it is concerned with an innate, if you will, desire to perform. The joyous behavior on display may be less spontaneous than it appears, being the embodiment of the men’s dreams rehearsed in their minds. The suit is the instrument that liberates these dreams.

In the published story, Bradbury retained all the descriptions and metaphors for industrialists and labor unions, its inventor learns it is not the suit, but the man that wears it that is most important.

the suit's whiteness and special aura from the first draft, further elaborating on it as one would build outward from an energizing center. As usual for Bradbury, his descriptions touched upon a vivid sensorium to draw the reader into the narrative. For instance, he compares the white suit to "bottled milk in tenement halls at dawn" and "a winter cloud all alone in the moonlit sky late at night" (Bradbury *Melancholy* 35). Nourishing and celestial it proves to be; but the story, as opposed to the draft expands on these recording the suit's presence as experienced by others. It becomes something "even the blind can see," "a white-hot light that burns its way through ice," and "a great whiteness (that) filled the night below." The suit has the power to hypnotize or command attention of the beholder just as it transforms the wearer. But inserted into an essentially naturalistic narrative, one wonders if the magic of the eponymous suit doesn't exist more in the minds of its users serving as a confidence-builder, a catalyst to release pent up potentialities. The suit directs the destiny of each wearer through a measure of each man's active, though tenuous cooperation. Marvelous things happen when they're wearing it but the "magic" of the suit may ultimately originate in the person wearing it. Of course, this is the appeal of Bradbury's typical kind of magic which does not rely on the supernatural at all, but rather on the ability of certain people or things to awaken, stimulate or expand the imagination; to alter attitudes and points of view. For example, there are the innocently exasperating neighborhood children whom Lana Diskin calls "apostles of enchantment," that inadvertently turn Mrs. Benson's world right side up in "A Season of Disbelief." There is the ex-psychiatrist in "The Man in the Rorschach Shirt" who calmly exercises healthful effects on unwitting strangers through conversation prompted by the crazy patterns on his shirt. Although not a magical device the protagonist realized that he and the shirt work mysteriously well together and apart from the traditional practice of psychology.

Near the beginning of TWICS there is a brief exchange between two characters which sets the stage for the surprises to come. Gomez, still a stranger to Martinez, corners him on the street and begins measuring him for the suit. A frightened Martinez believes he is being measured by a madman for a coffin but Gomez assures him that it is "not for death but to give new life, rebirth" which the suit somehow puts in motion. Discussing the suit as a "magical" object Wayne L. Johnson remarks:

The connection with science fiction is subtle, yet here is a manufactured object which can change the shape of the future. But the suit is possessed of magical qualities, too, for it can fulfill wishes. ...each man acknowledges the appeal the suit has for the others, and in so doing, invests the suit with a kind of objective power. It may be said that the suit wears the man just as much as the man the suit. The ice cream suit is probably Bradbury's most well-rounded magical device (24).

It does seem to possess some kind of uncanny power, but does believing make it so? We can't help but wonder about "the phosphorescent, the miraculously white-fired ghost with the incredible lapels, the precise stitching, the neat buttonholes," (*Melancholy* 34) an enchantment for the senses. The first man to wear it in the stage and screen versions notes that it feels, sounds and smells clean, but also, "listen, how easily it whispers," Villanazul adds. It seems to make things happen and keep disaster at bay as well since (in all versions of the story) the suit and one of its wearers, emerge from a bar fight and a car accident unscathed. The tension Bradbury creates between fantasy and reality is never fully resolved here and is one of his preferred methods to convey his visions and interests to his readers.

IV THE EVOLVING NARRATIVE

Having outlined the core themes of the work I would like to trace its general development, additions, subtractions and shifts of emphasis as the text migrated across media. Although the suit remains at the heart of the narrative, variations appear mainly in degree of character development and consolidation and the somewhat shifting plot emphases that follow.

Comparison of the first draft with the printed story reveals a confident writer following his instincts. The first draft stands as a complete story becoming more detailed and sure as it moves forward. The printed story contains no significant deletions or altered phrases, only a few additions and the movement of one short speech describing the nearly mystical bonds the suit is creating within the group, from the middle to the end, perhaps giving the story a more satisfying conclusion. The "British version"

published shortly after the American, is identical except for a few concessions to British English, for instance converting pounds to stone in the weighing sequence. Of the four performance versions, the teleplay and the musical differ more from the short story. The teleplay, while closely resembling the first draft in compressed form, seems further obliged to emphasize the experience of one character over the others. The musical, a lengthier, even more collaborative effort, expands in all directions, adding a couple important elements which were carried over into the film. There are significant differences as well as similarities between the play and the film, but both revert to the first draft by scaling back the published story's romantic encounter.

The published story begins like the first draft with idle, young, Latinos Martinez, Villanazul and Vamanos commiserating near a pool hall. It is a fine summer season in a humble neighborhood at a time when Los Angeles still had street cars. However, both the Villanazul and Martinez characters were considerably developed from draft to print. They speak more, the former articulating the poetic and mysterious qualities of the suit and the latter more about its effects on the wearers. Martinez, described as "the youngest and most sweetly sad of the three" becomes an early focalizer and more central throughout the narrative as Bradbury adds an early paragraph describing the group's alienation through his eyes:

As he observed the world it moved very close and then drifted away and then came close again. People, brushing by were suddenly across the street. Buildings five miles away suddenly leaned over him. But most of the time everything-people, cars and buildings-swayed way out on the edge of the world and could not be touched. On this quiet, warm summer evening, Martinez' face was cold (Bradbury, *Melancholy* 27).

More than outsiders, these men are out of touch with the world and the life surrounding them as if suspended in a kind of limbo, waiting, hoping for something to happen. Their marginal state is reinforced by subsequently describing them as "invisible," "not seen or heard." Martinez has been desperately trying to attract the attention of a neighborhood girl for whom "He did not exist. He was nothing" (Bradbury, *Melancholy* 28). Villanazul who was described as "a philosopher" in the first draft becomes "a man who shouted books out loud in his room but spoke only in whispers on the street." The

printed story elaborates his motivation as a desire to go to the plaza and speak among the businessmen gathered there, but he lacks confidence and believes he is too poor and poorly dressed. Perhaps cementing their status as near ciphers, Gomez the de facto leader of the group, speaks of them as “skeletons” in need of being clothed “for life.” Indeed, Dominguez would later sum up his suit wearing experience by shouting, “I live, I live!”

Skeletons may also embody an idea of sameness or a common humanity under the skin to be recognized as a basis for unity. Certainly a skeleton is a minimum structure that needs to be built on and clothed. It is their common poverty, the size of their skeletons and a minimum of trust in each other that are the conditions for sharing one suit among six men—something Martinez feared could go terribly wrong. Significantly, Vamanos, the last and most disreputable member of the group to wear and nearly destroy the suit “twitched, trying to make his skeleton comfortable where all their skeletons had recently been” (Bradbury, *Melancholy* 40). Yet the suit does not “abandon” him, but works all the more miraculously in his case. At any rate, the group motivation revealed and transferred from the first draft comes from seeing another Latino dressed in a fine white suit enjoying the company of a woman on each arm. Martinez sizes things up exclaiming, “I wouldn’t need money if I *looked* o.k.,” so they agree to follow Gomez’s scheme.

Gomez who seems to be a pool hustler in the short story, (in the first draft and teleplay) but not in the play or film but rather a man who lives by his wits, takes the three men from the opening scene to the pool hall to meet the last two members of the group, Manulo and Dominguez. The former drinks, but plays the guitar and sings sweetly while Dominguez is described as “a devil for women.” These less vocal, less central characters are essentially compressed into one in subsequent versions, becoming Manulo in the musical and Dominguez in the film. The draft summarizes both their adventures in a total of four lines, but the short story has each recount his experience in the suit which for them works more like medicine than a tonic. Manulo heads straight for a bar but does not drink. The suit makes him feel better than wine ever did so he ends up going to a local café to play and sing four songs. Dominguez attracts more attention from the ladies than usual but realizes he no longer wants to go with “six or eight,” but just one—even to marry. “This suit is dangerous!” (Bradbury, *Melancholy* 40) he exclaims, but like his colleague, he recognizes that the suit *makes him* “live.”

The other four characters run through the adaptations with their character traits intact with small variations leading to rather more consistent, and distinct characterization in the musical and film versions. Arguably, the narrative in performance as stage play, musical and film necessitated more consistent and sharply defined characterization. For example, the ditch-digger Vamanos, the “unshaved” one, both “dirty and eager” becomes a full-fledged vagabond in the 1990 musical, remains so in the film and comes to incarnate nearly all the bad habits within the group including the absent Manulo’s penchant for alcohol.

In the musical, Vamanos suffers marginalization more acutely even after helping pay for the suit, becoming an outsider among outsiders. Throughout most of the musical his companions try to “pretend that he doesn’t exist.” Ironic since the others, especially Villanazul and Martinez, are depicted as neither seen nor heard by the world at large as the narrative begins, they’re all skeletal. In the musical Villanazul makes a speech as they prepare to buy the suit. He says that before they wear “this real suit” ... “we must prove ourselves worthy,” so that “we truly fit the gift of the suit” (“Suit” libretto,36). Nothing like this is found in the other versions but is in keeping with Bradbury’s philosophy variously expressed in interviews that life is a gift that we should become worthy to receive. It might be argued that the group’s progressively improving attitudes and behavior toward Vamanos serve as a barometer of their “worthiness” as well as the mysterious effects from sharing the suit. Villanazule, a little older and more educated than the others, is the only member of the group both appreciated *and* trusted by all. With this character, Bradbury found a vehicle (and sounding board) for his poetry. Beautiful phrases and metaphors drop from his lips quite naturally and his colleagues occasionally ask him to repeat himself because they think he “talks fine.” He’s also something of a problem solver since he, against Gomez’s reluctance, arranges a schedule agreeable to all for each man to wear the suit. In all versions of the story he acts the part of Gomez’s conscience-cautioning him and voicing the fear that once Gomez has donned the suit he may not return. In the story he puts himself between the suited Vamanos and the bully assaulting him in a bar, effectively taking physical punishment for his comrade. In the dramatic versions it is Gomez who puts himself in harm’s way for Vamanos, an action more consistent with the enhanced leadership role he assumes in these later adaptations

of the story. In a sort of trade off, Villanazul's function as "conscience and spirit" is somewhat enhanced in the dramatic versions and his concern for the others is more actively voiced. He tells Gomez and Vamanos to "go with God" as they venture out with the suit and his concern for the former verges on brooding. When the suited Dominguez provokes an eruption of song and dance in the street he gently restrains the clumsy Vamanos from joining them saying, "It's Dominguez' parade." His philosophical bent veers more toward the political in musical and film. However, instead of offering the rhetoric of Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus," "his philosophy of suits," he offers timely, practical and inspiring words to the plaza crowd, a refreshing breeze compared to the local politician who stands on a soapbox "erupting banalities."

The most significant changes and narrative addition from first draft to published story center upon the shy and insecure Martinez. The story adds a budding romance as the suit helps Martinez make a connection with a girl he has seen and desired but who has not noticed him. This beautiful, but nearsighted girl puts her glasses on to look down from her balcony on the white-suited figure and they exchange smiles. From this understated beginning Martinez passes by her apartment again toward the end of the narrative when they tentatively exchange gentle words and make a date. Celia Obregón admits that she has seen little since she is reluctant to wear her glasses but the "great whiteness" of the suit caught her eye allowing her to behold Martinez' wonderful smile and happy face. She tells Martinez that it is not just the suit, she saw many men in it and all different and that he does not need the suit to come calling on her. Martinez confesses, "I will need the suit for a little while. A month, six months, a year. I am uncertain. I am fearful of many things. I am young." (Bradbury, *Melancholy* 49) Celia's understanding reply is: "that is as it should be."

Overall it's a nicely written passage showing how two strangers may genuinely connect in a brief space of time. However, it serves to dispel any notion of the suit having special power. This naturalistic turn may have been added by Bradbury to aid acceptance in a mainstream publication, or it may be seen as merely elaborating the theme of confident selfhood derived from making common cause with others. At any rate, Martinez's expanded discourse with Celia remains entirely consistent with his character. Naturally, the musical version undermines the "magic" of the suit in favor of romance

too, with Martinez serenading Celia (with Manulo's help) and singing a duet with her. Both the play and film include, but compress the Martinez-Celia encounter without stifling the possibility that the suit may indeed be endowed with a bit of magic. In fact, the insecure Martinez would like to believe it is a talisman since in all versions he stands under Celia's balcony, superstitiously closing his eyes to ask the suit to bring her out to her balcony and it finally works.

Charmed or not, from the first draft onward, it is Martinez who best articulates the marvelous unifying and confidence building effect the suit has. He always returns to the group after wearing the suit so dumbfounded that he wonders who he is. He believes the old Martinez is gone and a new and improved model is in his place. His experience again focalizes what is actually occurring in the group:

Yes, he thought, yes, it's the suit, yes, it had to do with the suit and them all together in that store on this fine Saturday night and then here, laughing and more drunk without drinking...as the night ran on and each slipped on the pants and held, toppling, to the others and, balanced, let the feeling get bigger and warmer and finer as each man departed and the next took his place until now here stood Martinez all splendid and white as one who gives orders and the world grows quiet and moves aside. (Bradbury, *Melancholy* 138-39)

In the dramatic versions, this narration, not significantly altered, is delivered by Martinez in the presence of his comrades. This expression of unity is extended poetically in the following "mirror scene" (performed more imaginatively in the film) where Martinez views multiple images of himself and his friends at his side reflected in a triptych of borrowed mirrors.

Now, in the shimmering mirror, Martinez saw the enormity of this thing they were living together and his eyes grew wet. The others blinked, Martinez touched the mirrors. They shifted. He saw a thousand, a million white-armored Martinez's march off into eternity, reflected, re-reflected, forever, indomitable, and unending (Ray Bradbury, *Melancholy* 39).

In the performance versions this becomes a more emphatic and inclusive scene as each man takes pleasure in contemplating himself in their group reflection and Villanazul

makes a poetic flourish similar to the citation above, but mentioning all his comrades by name. In the draft Martinez speaks after looking into the mirror, equating wearing the suit to “becoming” his comrades, endowed with each of their special talents. Vamanos had yet to wear the suit but Martinez believed that he would become “strong in the arms” like him after he wore it. In the printed versions Bradbury had Martinez’ deliver this speech at the end of the narrative to drive home this point after each man had actually had a turn wearing the suit. Essentially speaking for the group once again, Martinez’s enthusiasm turns wistful toward the end as he realizes the uniqueness of their situation and that someday they might be rich enough to buy their own suits and then things would never be the same. The narrative concludes with this ironic observation and curious nostalgia for the passing present.

V THE TELEPLAY

As already cited, the teleplay was the first trans-media adaptation of the work written even before the short story was published and aired only a few months after. Though I have not seen this version, (the teleplay may no longer exist) the script clearly shows an author at ease with the medium and that Bradbury had not envisioned TWICS as a stage-bound television production. His script dated April 15 to 23, 1957, is well conceptualized for the camera with Bradbury describing the composition of shots, including performance notes and a variety of specific camera angles and types of cutting.

Keen to keep things moving and transmit a sense of near simultaneous events in different places, he favors the dissolve instead of more abrupt cutting or the fade-out followed by fade-in, the conventional cinema ellipsis. In other words, this brief, early teleplay demonstrates performative, compositional and “grammatical” awareness of cinematic technique. Furthermore, his adaption is linearly coherent and detailed to the point of including notes on the soundtrack and music cues. The only element he seems to have left entirely to the production company was the players’ attire. By this time he had gained experience as a screenwriter having adapted *Moby Dick* for John Huston and two of his works for television on “Alfred Hitchcock Presents”.

Textually, it would appear that Bradbury adapted the teleplay from his first draft because it transposes a section from the draft intact that he significantly altered for the printed story. Nevertheless, this transfer seems more appropriate for performance since the section's dialogue is broken down into a shorter, more rapid and heated exchange among three members of the group. I am referring to one of the final scenes where Vamanos (now with the more familiar name of Rodriguez) finally gets his turn to wear the suit. His weary friends oblige him to bathe and then invent rules for him to follow while wearing the suit, to which Rodriguez resists rather more strenuously than in the printed story. Prior, there are several, brief exterior scenes of the others wearing the suit, and interior scenes are accelerated through numerous cuts, fades and dissolves. Bradbury was obviously concerned with making the narrative fit the thirty minute format since the last page of the typescript contains four separate notes indicating either compressions or deletions through strategically placed dissolves. His notes indicated cutting a scene between a motorist and policeman as "unnecessary" and "slowing the pace," as well as dispensing with the first seventeen lines of page 29 of the "original script." Unfortunately, my copy of the teleplay ends at page seventeen when Rodriguez goes out wearing the suit, which leads me to believe that what I have is essentially a rewritten lead up to the centerpiece of Rodriguez on the town. Gomez wears the suit first and his episode, comprised of making a couple of fine pool shots and being noticed by some women on the street is the most detailed. The other suit wearing sequences are extremely brief, coming in rapid fire montage sequences one after another. Once we build up to Rodriguez' turn we expect mischief. The script includes his practical joke (gaining an all important sound effect through performance) of ripping a handkerchief once he is out the door to make his friends think he has already torn the suit, but ends there. I can only assume that the remaining minutes of the teleplay are taken up with his shenanigans and rescue. For example, in the teleplay he is plainly warned to stay away from "punch-drunk fighters in bars," and is identified as a new arrival from a little town in Mexico versus the others who have been in the city for years and "know how to act." Overall, the teleplay may have given the story a more visually comic slant in keeping with the prevalence of the comic antics on TV in the 1950s.

The script seems to maintain a brisk rhythm but much of the poetry and sentiment of the story seem absent from the teleplay. Appropriate for film, the spoken portions of the drama are somewhat shortened, more dialogic yet more quotidian than in the other versions. Although, Gomez says “andale” once, the dialogue is deracinated from “the barrio,” less marked as the kind of speech we might expect from Latino immigrants, more “American” in tone and shorn of story references to the Mexican myth of Quetzalcoatl or the local “Guadalajara Refriteria.” Thus, some of the atmosphere and vivid heard sense of reality seems absent from the teleplay. For example, there is no talk of smiles and measuring the skeletons behind them when the men come to buy the suit. Instead, Gomez addresses the haberdashers in plainer English saying, “We’re all the same size! We’ll all try it on! All for one, one for all, like the book said! Lead the way!”

There is no time for a love interest for Martinez. He’s briefly pictured dancing with “a filmy senorita...holding her far out so she cannot touch the suit. Eyes closed, he dreams.” Nonetheless, Bradbury does not neglect highlighting the special community stemming from the ritual of sharing the suit. In mid-story (another first draft similarity) he allows Martinez his speech about “becoming” his comrades when he wears the suit. Thus, the brotherhood of the suit and its testing through the mischief maker Rodriguez (Vamanos) are the twin threads which run through all versions of the narrative. The teleplay was the first and “sparest” performance version but Bradbury would restore elements of the source text and expand in several directions in subsequent performance versions.

VI BRADBURY AND THE STAGE

I wrote plays as a young man. These plays, unproduced, were so bad that I promised myself never to write again for the stage until later in life, after I’d learned to write all the other ways first and best...the short story, the novel called. I answered. I plunged into writing. Years passed. I went to hundreds of plays. I loved them. But still I held off from ever writing Act I, Scene I, again (Bradbury, *Suit and Other Plays* 13).

This was a “promise” the author found hard to keep because while Bradbury’s attraction to the performing arts is well known, he holds the theater in special esteem. It is a medium which afforded him some of his earliest creative experiences and for which he claimed “my love is constant.” Furthermore, it is an important part of Bradbury’s authorship and his adaptation of TWICS as a stage play and later as a musical are relevant for understanding of the text’s final incarnation as a film. From the 1960s onward, Bradbury adapted a large number of his works for the stage, including *all* the films discussed in this thesis. In fact, before he sold his first stories, he was involved in dramatic writing in high school then immediately after this, in a local amateur theater company. Although (modest) success on the stage was elusive and many years away, he was *already* writing dramatic pieces while in the process of finding his “voice” as a short story writer.

His love of the stage is fully expressed in a letter to his editor after the successful production of three one-act plays Bradbury adapted for *The World of Ray Bradbury* in Los Angeles in 1964:

This is where I have belonged since I was ten. It took a long time and a very long way around from doing magic tricks then, and appearing in amateur theatricals, to a night like last night when you say to yourself, I really belong. This theater is as much my body and flesh as my own body and flesh are. How fortunate to be one of those who really knows his place, finds it, and tries to tend it well and make it vital (Eller, *Unbound* 234).

In his introduction to the *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit and other plays for today, tomorrow and beyond tomorrow* (1972), Bradbury began his introduction by declaring:

I began with the theater and I shall probably end with it. I have not, up to now, made a penny, nickel or dime at it, but my love is constant and, in best cliché fashion, its own reward (Bradbury, Viii).

Thus, Bradbury reaffirmed his devotion to the theater years after his initial success and subsequent to significant critical and financial setbacks. With the exception of *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*, Bradbury’s theatrical work never garnered great praise

and was mostly confined to small venues in the Los Angeles area where he enjoyed a modicum of success. While not celebrated as a playwright he evolved and learned from his experiences and refined his own philosophy and style of theater which merits our attention, if for no other reason, because it was such a focus of his creative energies. When I interviewed Bradbury by telephone in December of 2006 I sensed his greatest delight when I asked how he felt about seeing his work performed on stage or film. Essentially, Bradbury considered performance as both culmination and validation of his work, and his decades of theater activity were neither for notoriety nor monetary gains but genuine love of the medium. One of the reasons Bradbury's literary output began to decline from the 1960s was because of his devotion to adapting his work for stage and screen. As Bradbury predicted, he did "end in the theater," opening his last play about a year before his death in 2012. "2016"¹¹⁹ was his final version of the verse operetta written in the mid 1950s at the urging of his friend and mentor, the noted actor/director Charles Laughton. Bradbury's work in the theater had come full circle.

Laughton, who admired Bradbury's lyrical prose and emotional intensity, suggested the project to encourage the writer after his initial failure of adapting *Fahrenheit 451*. Laughton and producer Paul Gregory had asked Bradbury to adapt *Fahrenheit* but later had to break the news to the author (after five drafts) that the story as adapted would not play well on stage. For the play, Bradbury expanded the character of fire chief Beatty, but according to Jonathan Eller who has viewed the original drafts of the play, "these new passages would have intrigued readers, but would have left a dramatic audience cold" (Eller, *Unbound* 70). In spite of the disappointment, Bradbury would comment that returning to his text for adaptive purposes caused him to think more closely about characterization which he thought beneficial to him as a writer.

However, it appears this added depth of characterization did not make the central players compellingly "real" or tragic for dramatic presentation while slowing the proceedings and diminishing other characters important for the narrative. Thus, evident from the beginning, his main challenge as a playwright was channeling ideas and poetic language into realistically crafted characters. Therefore, in spite of his earlier mastery of

¹¹⁹ Eller quotes Bradbury's description of the play as "a one act science fiction farce about an elderly couple who buy robot duplicates of themselves as gifts for their fiftieth wedding anniversary" (86).

the short story followed by successful novels, radio, screen and teleplays, live theater remained frustratingly elusive. Bradbury acknowledged that each form of writing has its unique set of challenges and rewards and he learned stagecraft as all else, through a process of trial and error and the advice of a mentor or two.

Undaunted, perhaps encouraged by various successful teleplays (including *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* and adaptations for Alfred Hitchcock) Bradbury responded to “the ghost of Ireland whispering in his ear.” The vivid memories of the unique people and situations he had encountered there during the difficult months spent writing the *Moby Dick* screenplay came flooding back. Thus, a series of “Irish plays” collected as *The Anthem Sprinters* “were born in a yelping litter.” Bradbury vetted three of these one-act plays through readings by veteran actors in 1959 and they proved to be entertaining.

Of all his published plays these were originals instead of adaptations and although unable to produce them for several years he rewrote and published some of them as short stories. Not without similarities to *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*, these are earthy, humorous stories populated with interesting characters, attuned to “magical thinking.” Perhaps nowhere does Bradbury demonstrate his ear (and memory) for colorful speech patterns than in his Irish stories. If dramatic writing strives to create the illusion of continuous speech and assert it as a direct conduit to being or character, then his Irish plays are certainly not without merit. Listen to this autobiographical exchange between author and customs inspector upon arrival to the “Emerald Isle” circa 1954 in *Green Shadows White Whale* (1992)

Why all the riot to get out of Erie, you ask? Well, if you got your choice Saturday night of, one, seeing a 1931 Greta Garbo fillum at the joyous cinema; or, two, making water off the poet’s statue near Gate Theatre; or, three, throwing yourself in the River Liffey for entertainment, with the happy thought of drowning upmost, you might as well get out of Ireland, which people have done at the rate of a mod a day since Lincoln was shot. The population has dropped from eight million to less than three. One more potato famine or heavy fog that lasts long enough for everyone to pack up and tiptoe across the channel to disguise themselves as Philadelphia police, and Ireland is a desert. You’ve told me *nothing* about Ireland I don’t already *know*. I hesitated. “I hope I haven’t offended you.”

It's been a pleasure hearing your mind! Now, this book you'll be writing. It's ... pornographic?"

"I will not study the sex habits of the Irish, no. "Pity. They are in dire need. Well, there's Dublin straight on! Good luck, lad!" (7)

Finally, an offer was made to produce the three one-acts as a single play for Broadway, but this never materialized since merging them and adding extraneous characters in the process diluted the overall effect. However, they were later staged in their original form and published for wider use. From the experience Bradbury learned that "in any work of art...at a certain point, you must leave it alone. That means you leave the flaws in it. You leave the badness in with the goodness, even in writing a play" (Eller, *Unbound* 155).

Beginning around 1953, Bradbury had formed many friendships and contacts in the Hollywood community and also at The University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) where he was later asked to give occasional lectures. Actor/producer John Housman brought some of Bradbury's one-act plays to UCLA for the 1961-62 season¹²⁰. After seeing his work in performance the author sought out a local theater company¹²¹ to produce more shows. Bradbury was greatly impressed with the company director Charles Rome Smith's handling of his initial adaptation of *The Pedestrian*. This marked the beginning of a long collaboration with Smith, and Bradbury decided to form his own theater company in 1963.

Bradbury, never averse to risk became his own producer, becoming one of the few playwrights in American theater to finance his own plays. He thought it better to risk his own money to gain artistic freedom and not have to worry about losing someone else's money and believed an author must trust his own intuitive judgment and taste (Bradbury, *Pillar X*). Aside from his love of the medium and desire to see his work dramatized,

¹²⁰ Further encouragement may have come through production of his first professional stage play, an adaptation of his radio play *The Meadow*, at a small theater in Hollywood in 1960; followed by a nomination by the Writer's Guild of America for the Television-Radio Writers' Award for "The Jail," an original story produced for television and broadcast on the *Alcoa Theater*. At this time he also founded the Screen Writer's Film Society.

¹²¹ He secured a rent free contract from Lucille Ball for the Desilu Playhouse in 1962 using the resident acting company and director Charles Rome Smith (Eller, *Unbound* 208).

Bradbury has cited three factors behind his persistence in writing for the stage. First, he began receiving requests from high schools and community theater groups to adapt his stories for local stage performance. He habitually granted these requests and was further gratified by numerous follow-up letters announcing their enthusiastic receptions and the sheer joy of adapting and performing his works¹²². Bradbury began to wonder if he was missing something. Secondly, he felt a sense of mission; he was dissatisfied with the status quo. He disliked the avant-garde and contemporary realism left him cold. He sought a theater of “poetry and ideas” and tales for the space age “dramatizing man’s conflicts with his machines and his hidden self” (Eller, *Unbound* 234).

The aforementioned director Charles Rome Smith contributed much to realizing Bradbury’s work on stage, in fact Bradbury dedicated the three play collection published in *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* (1972) to him. However, his greatest mentor was Charles Laughton whom he described as the “capstone” of all his theatrical influences. He enriched Bradbury’s understanding of the plays of Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw, and he credited Laughton with teaching him about language all over again insisting that “he gave me courage to get back into the theater eventually and do plays rich in words and images and ideas and asides” (Touponce ed. 109). He claimed to have learned from Laughton how to stay with the character and dare to do the “aside,” which he described as a delicate technique of slowing or stopping the plot for a moment to get the audience to care more about a character, creating a moment for him to stand out by briefly illuminating his dreams. This technique would become prominent in Bradbury’s theater. He also learned from Laughton the value of having an observer on set to critique direction, a practice Bradbury adopted with his own productions. Laughton also encouraged him to give free range to his imagination and poetic voice while compressing his fiction for the stage and how “the free spirit of language” combined with good acting and directing minimized the need for sets.

Bradbury held this last piece of advice dear after “overproducing” his two-act Irish play *The Anthem Sprinters*, as recounted in his introduction to *Pillar of Fire and Other Plays* (1975), “Don’t spend money; spend imagination. There is no reason to

¹²² Bradbury cites this correspondence and later the royalties he received from his published plays as proof of the popularity and “stageability” of his drama.

overdress or overproduce these texts” (Bradbury, ix). In a later interview he said, “The stage shows us things, and that constricts us, and doesn’t allow us to float free. But at the same time, we’re using words, spoken to allow the imagination to float free with words” (Touponce ed. 118). Bradbury’s philosophy of the stage was based on material simplicity while seeking to reproduce the “sensorium” effect common to his prose—he imaginatively used sound, music, light, dance and even mime to make his stories as vivid as possible within the limitations of the stage.

The most improbable tales can be made believable, if your reader, through his senses, feels certain that he stands in the middle of events. He cannot refuse then to participate. The logic of events always gives way to the logic of the senses (Bradbury, *Zen* 138).

His philosophy of writing found a natural outlet in drama. While avoiding production extravagance, his imagination found expression in clever stagecraft and he summarized his approach as a combination of Laughton’s ideas and Blackstone the Magician’s techniques. His extensive use of sound and light cues and back projections to implement swiftly changing scenes seem especially suited to his characters immersed in their dreams and reveries. Many of Bradbury’s texts are “mood pieces” where physical description, choice of words and his metaphors evoke strong feeling, so stagecraft was essential to aid characterization.

His production notes for staging *The Veldt*, one of his first adapted plays, shows his determination to break “the fourth wall.” It was a one act play with “forty-two sound cues and as many or more light cues” emanating from the four corners of the auditorium. Believing the average scrim (painted backdrop) to be an “irritating obstruction” coming between the actors and audience, he opted for “bright threads and twines” simulating a deeper, less obstructed space (Bradbury, *Suit and Other Plays* xiv). An ardent admirer of the poetic lilt of Shakespeare and the ironic wit and social consciousness of George Bernard Shaw, the theater Bradbury aspired to was neither abstract nor one of Brechtian detachment, but sought the emotional involvement people have in their own lives. Any estrangement experienced by a spectator, Bradbury would like to come through their rethinking an issue by encountering it through a series of new perspectives.

Because of the limitations of space and what the stage can actually show us, he

sought the free float of imagination through words, convinced that in the medium of live performance, “a well-written, well-spoken line creates more images than all the movies of the world.... One word is worth a thousand pictures” (Bradbury, *Suit and other Plays* xiv). Bradbury spoke of the beauty of words in the awareness that words carry (or are) images themselves. Finally, he favors a dramatic model of tension seeking a “proper end” in release and relaxation. Not necessarily happy endings but “proper endings” where if there is not a just, obvious, closure to the drama, the spectator can still arrive at one. Bradbury abhorred the “pointlessness” he considered all too common in contemporary drama. “Tell me no pointless Jokes. I will laugh at your refusal to allow me to laugh. Build me no tension toward tears and refuse me my lamentations. I will go find me better wailing walls. Do not clench my fists for me and hide the target. I might strike you instead. Above all, sicken me not unless you show me the way to the ship’s rail” (Bradbury, *Zen* 117).

I would add to these general comments on Bradbury’s theatrical work to emphasize that the author’s work has “life” not *just* because it evolves through complex methods of composition and revision sometimes over decades, but because Bradbury desires to bring it to life through dramatic presentation. His method was to return to a text without preconceptions allowing his subconscious to offer “new truths and new surprises,” particularly through “letting the characters have their heads” (Touponce ed.107); that is, to further elaborate themselves and their story interaction. This approach to dramatic adaptation, so well suited to a character based text like *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*, has also lead him to work with many less drama friendly works like *The Pedestrian* (play 1966, teleplay 1989).

The Pedestrian is still in print and this intriguing, often anthologized short story is essentially a moody, atmosphere laden inner monologue concerning the late-night reveries and sensations experienced by a solitary man walking through a deserted city while its citizenry are hypnotically glued to their television sets. Without innate drama, the story nonetheless has some “poetry and ideas” which Bradbury thinks should characterize the theater. In this case he merely added another character to facilitate dialogue and heightened incident. He has often chosen to mix elements from different stories for the sake of dramatic presentation. A fine example would be the interweaving

of his short stories *Gotcha!* And *The Laurel and Hardy Love Affair* for *Gotcha!* for a 1985 episode of “The Ray Bradbury Theater.” His hybrid teleplay was a visually (and aurally) striking, highly unusual and potent commentary on gender difference and role-playing in a soured love affair and was arguably richer than either of its source texts.

Bradbury’s Pandemonium Theater Company staged its first show, *The World of Ray Bradbury* in Los Angeles in 1964. Here he stepped back from his Irish plays in favor of three somber, cautionary tales of the future: “The Pedestrian,” “The Veld” and “To the Chicago Abyss.” The show received excellent reviews and ran for twenty weeks. He followed with a twenty-four week run of *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* and this success helped him find a backer for an off-Broadway run of the original three plays for the spring of 1965; here Bradbury met with disaster¹²³. The New York critics, perhaps more perceptive and demanding, uniformly panned the show. Howard Taubman, writing in *The New York Times* of October 10, 1965, found the plays “not primarily theatrical” but more like “lectures delivered with stark, linear pictures, supported by an assortment of familiar and eerie sound-effects.” Likewise, other critics found the characters and dialogue to be lacking reality. Ben Indick, who admired Bradbury’s work, nevertheless pinpointed his weakness in that he is driven to “make certain philosophical points” and in doing so, the ideas “may dominate his characters and detract from their individual reality” (Indick 22). In his introduction for *Pillar of Fire and Other Plays*, Bradbury betrays this potential weakness:

What you have in most of my stories and plays then is rarely a highly individualized character (I blunder into these on occasion) but ideas grown super outsize: ideas that seize people and change them forever. So, I should imagine, in order to do my plays at all, you must become the Idea, the Idea that destroys, or the Idea that prevails (Bradbury, *Suit* xi).

Indick points out that it is immensely more difficult for an audience to identify with “ideas” rather than the characters we see in front of us. Dramatic writing brings the challenge to write plays that embody ideas, rather than vehicles that merely celebrate

¹²³ Bradbury points to the factors of “inferior casting, and a dreary theater in a bad section of The Bowery, plus a newspaper strike” (Bradbury, *Suit*: vii) as contributing factors, as well as his backer Claude Giroux for closing too soon before performance problems could be worked out.

them. In other words, Bradbury's desire for a theater of "ideas and poetry" runs the risk of the "poetic" becoming stilted, overly sentimental dialogue. In his notes for his published plays he also displayed the tendency to reduce a character to an emotion in suggesting how a character should be played. While it could be helpful, this emotional distillation (e.g. pure paranoia) is related to the transmission of "ideas" and not directly related to dramatic evolution or character interaction. Perhaps characterization should not be subordinated to an idea or emotional effect in this way. Transmission of "ideas" may become heavy-handed or didactic, depending on rhetoric and stagecraft.

Strong characters and technique are all important and when Bradbury allowed his humanism to take the lead his stage work was more successful. *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* falls into this category with warm, realistic characters that exist for their own sake. The "ideas and poetry" are there, but come through lively character interaction, development and humor. His fantastic premise comes to life through likable characters one can identify with. Within the limited criticism (academic and media) Bradbury's drama has received *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*, is universally considered his best stage work.

VII THE WONDERFUL ICE CREAM SUIT ON STAGE

Among Bradbury's first one-act plays, *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*, along with *A Medicine for Melancholy* and *The Pedestrian* were staged at the Desilu Gower Studios in Hollywood, California in June of 1963. From February, 1965 *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* enjoyed a twenty-six week run at a more prominent Los Angeles venue accompanied by *A Device Out of Time* and *The Day It Rained Forever*. TWICS appears to have run longer and in more venues than any of his other plays and is probably still being staged somewhere. Over the years it has played off Broadway, Chicago, Philadelphia, numerous smaller cities and possibly the Soviet Union—its message of sharing goods and comradeship would have fit well with the Communist ideology

The Los Angeles production at Bradbury's own Pandemonium Theater provided an early opportunity for award winning actor F. Murray Abraham. The Chicago

production of the early 1970s gave Joe Mantega his first major role. He went on to reprise the role of Gomez in the film directed by the same man who directed the Chicago play, Stuart Gordon. The version I will be quoting was published¹²⁴ in 1972 together with *The Veldt* and *To The Chicago Abyss*. I have not seen the play, but having read it carefully enough to translate it into Portuguese (with the author's permission) I have no doubt that it is one of Bradbury's best theater pieces¹²⁵.

Of course, there is no way we can evaluate performance from the printed page, but we can at least see how Bradbury envisioned his play from the script and production notes. Actually, Bradbury's production notes alone testify well to how he refined actions and dialogue for the stage. They are vivid and virtually as pleasurable to read as the author's prose because they transmit a palpable mood of joy and playfulness. An articulate and abundant blueprint they are still concise, without an unnecessary word therefore not betraying insecurity on the author's part. They are mainly kinetic and visual cues, the "atmosphere" created through the script and notes seem to obviate the need to be "prescriptive" in terms of performance. In other words, his notes show confidence in his own intuition and that the performance will go as he has envisioned it and because the dialogue and characterization speak for themselves. Though I do not want to be tedious, analysis necessitates describing some key scenes in detail, exemplary of Bradbury's ability to imaginatively construct visual metaphors appropriate for performance.

The first scene essentially duplicates the dialogue between Martinez, Villanazul and Vamanos from the short story but employs an interesting opening. A stranger walks across the stage, puffs on a cigarette and throws it over his shoulder leaving an arc of fire as he exits. Villanazule described now as a "dreamer-philosopher whose movements are still quick and practical," retrieves the cigarette holding it high in front of the others and exclaims: "A meteor falls from space! It leaves a path of fire in the dark. It lands among us. It changes our lives." The cigarette is shared among the three of them and they gently exhale together. This opening verse builds anticipation for the magic that is to come and

¹²⁴ It appears to be identical to the typewritten copy of the play used by Bradbury's Los Angeles company including a brief production note and stage directions.

¹²⁵ Essentially all criticism referencing the work cite it as such, often quoting theatrical reviews in support. The fact that it has been staged in so many big city venues would also attest to this.

the way the cigarette is picked up and shared, visually relays information concerning the poverty, friendship *and* individual characters of the men on stage. Before long Gomez appears in a sort of a “speak of the devil” way and the narrative and pace naturally shift. More than just a brisk tempo, the narrative constantly builds expectations and then delivers surprises. The visual handling of the suit is a good example.

There is some comic misunderstanding at the clothing store. No longer on display, the men enter one after another prowling the store searching for *their* suit. The nervous haberdashers think they are going to be robbed only to find that they finally have some business. The owner, “like a pontiff,” leads the gang to a small booth where the suit is hidden. A curtain is pulled and the suit is seen only as reflected light in the men’s faces which rather startles the shops proprietors who wonder if these young men have somehow instilled some kind of magic in the suit. Later it is arranged on its dummy in the near darkness of Gomez’ apartment before being illuminated from above. Thus, expectancy has been built and the audience beholds the suit fully for the first time only when the men do, ostensibly sharing in their wonder. Sometimes the men converse and vest the suit in blackout while other times they appear on stage fully dressed to keep things moving at a good pace. The visual presentation of the suit progressing in stages closely parallels the story as well as the comments the men make about it, an example of the many instances where the story was “made for performance” just as it was written.

Compared to the earlier teleplay, Bradbury chose to reincorporate, apparently heighten, through word and music, the ethnic flavor of the original story restoring all the plot elements such as Martinez’s romance and adding another component, a variation on the “mirror scene.” An obvious elaboration of the theme of comradeship it also serves to motivate action. Gomez, the first to wear the suit, is now sorry that he has sold the only mirror he had in his tiny apartment. Villanazul enthusiastically declares that they *do* have a mirror, and that it is all of them. Gomez exclaims that he can see himself reflected in their eyes and faces as they stand together. This harkens back to how they first viewed the suit together in the shop and animates Gomez.

As mentioned earlier, Bradbury restored all the short story elements to his play and Gomez’s trepidation vanishes as his friends gently order him out. Now, he goes forth to conquer, and conquer he does as he steps away into a spotlight and a woman’s voice

calls from the darkness. Bradbury describes the scene: “In a spotlight, hanging upon the air is a long, semitransparent scarf hung floating, provocative, light, soft, beautiful” (Bradbury, *Suit* 30). With just enough variation to heighten interest, the scene is repeated several times, with Gomez responding to a couple of the off-stage voices by name before he “reaps” and drapes about a dozen scarves over his arms as he exits the stage. Gomez’s initial combination of hesitation, fear and braggadocio, suits Bradbury’s metaphor of a “bullfighter in his suit of lights” as he is urged out to the street by his friends and the metaphor is extended as he flourishes the scarves of his “conquests” over his arm like a bullfighter’s cape. In typical Bradbury fashion, it serves as a poetic and rather gentle metaphor for the earthy business of seduction, which is what this character mainly desires. Similarly, the would-be troubadour Manulo, becomes like “The Pied Piper” once the suit is on his back. His slow, gentle guitar playing becomes “a little louder, a little faster, luring from the shadows, with the whiteness of the suit and the playing of his music, the shapes of women” (Bradbury, *Suit* 32) who materialize and fall into his arms as he strikes a final triumphant cord. For his turn, Dominguez emerges from the darkness and accompanied by fast music dances briefly in the spotlight before whirling to a stop and striking a pose. One imagines this vigorous Flamenco speaks more eloquently of the dreams of this pool shark and obsessive womanizer than words, of which he is given few. All the suit wearing episodes employ audio/visual signs to create memorable metaphors through performance.

Appropriately, the character whose wish corresponds most directly to a public performance, the poet-philosopher Villanazul, enters a practically empty space simply marked as “THE PLAZA.” He shares the stage with no one as he strolls to the front of a heard, but unseen crowd and ascends a small soapbox for his moment in the spotlight. Bradbury has this shy, unassuming, older man move across the stage “like a fish in his proper element, bathed in the free flow of words” (Bradbury, *Suit* 33). Alone, all attention is on him and before he utters a word the effect of the suit is evident as “With a single proud but benevolent nod, Villanazul tunes down the murmur another decibel. With one smile he brings absolute silence. He waits a heartbeat and then:” (Bradbury, *Suit* 33) he begins his speech on *Sartor Resartus* and the scene fades to darkness as we hear the audience gasp in admiration. Smoothly sequenced in terms of audience perception, it is

essentially identical to the event as depicted in the short story. However, it is perhaps the only “suit episode” that doesn’t immediately stand out as more richly evocative than its narrative (or teleplay) counterpart.

In the former, the wordsmith Villanazul recounts his experience to his friends so vividly that the reader is invited to see him moving through the plaza crowd just as “a white-hot light burns its way through ice” and “feel” his relief as his “very small” voice grows louder and more confident. Perhaps it is the absence of his movement through an actual crowd on stage, the crowd is made palpable in the short story, that (seems to) lessen the effect. But a character taking an empty stage in spotlight, influencing an unseen, but heard crowd might be just as powerful in performance as the prose narrative of this episode. Certainly the spectator’s imagination is engaged through what is unseen but implied in this scene just as the reader is through word images. The way it is written, a lone character in movement and silent hesitation appear to be an instance of Bradbury’s “aside” where the audience may gaze momentarily into the heart and soul of a character.

While we must not forget the unique aspect of human presence in stage performance, it is still a matter of the spectator peering at the stage from a fixed vantage point who must willingly transform the witnessed physical reality into a kind of abstraction, transposing the characters into the imaginary world they are meant to inhabit. In theater, nothing *is*; everything *represents*. This is the peculiar bargain between stage and spectator and a key aspect to be negotiated by those who would stage a play. Bradbury’s basic philosophy of “material simplicity,” and using language, audio/visual effects and “asides” seem particularly sound in a play like this which attempts to draw half a dozen distinct characters in about forty-five minutes. There are no indications of extravagant staging to either distract or artificially enhance the characters. The characters exist for the sake of their dreams and to a degree, one another. They bicker and disagree like young men would but realize they are sharing something special which may not last. In Bradbury’s play there are not any philosophical intrusions through windy speeches or complicated staging to detract from the reality of these characters. Perhaps the final two “suit episodes” best illustrate how Bradbury used this realistic philosophy to his advantage while managing to avoid some pitfalls.

In the play Martinez, instead of just dancing with “a filmy senhora, holding her at arm’s length, eyes closed and dreaming,” (as in the teleplay) actually connects with the lovely neighborhood girl who has never noticed him until he is clothed in the magic suit. The play, like the story, reveals Martinez’s “dream” early on as his motivation to surrender his last dollars for Gomez’s scheme. His dream is fulfilled, but the restored exchange between Martinez and Celia Obregon is condensed and “lightened.” Poetic or portentous language always runs the risk of sounding stilted in performance, subtracting from the reality of the actors as we perceive them, and these characters are common people.

In print their romantic dialogue “worked” partially because the poetic exchange was balanced by verbally erasing the potential magic of the suit. I will not reproduce the dialogue from the play, but it reads more realistically and has a certain “wit” about it that the story version lacks. If there is a touch of “Romeo and Juliet” to this scene as he speaks from below to a lady perched on a balcony, the principals seem to speak with a lightly comic self-awareness. It seems that here for performance, Bradbury has exchanged poetry for subtle wit and humor, and opted to retain a hint of magic instead of extinguishing it. Perhaps it is “cinema interference” on my part (the sequence is practically identical in the film), but I can sense a light comic break in the scenario as beauty connects with her suitor only when she comes to her balcony a second time, and briefly puts on a big pair of horn-rimmed glasses to focus in on him before self-consciously removing them before they speak.

Bradbury enthusiastically approved an innovation devised by his director, Charles Rome Smith, for the fight scene toward the end of the story--slow motion. It doesn’t get any more cinematic than that, and certainly a gamble in live theater, but it must have worked since Bradbury *chose* to include it in the published play. Simply slowing down the action (and dialogue) for the key scene where Vamanos is rescued by his comrades allows the spectator to better savor the humor and spirit of the situation as Gomez takes a punch on Vamanos’ behalf so that Villanazul (always the idea man) can put the bully on the floor by breaking a chair over his head.

Considering its brevity, *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* is a rich and entertaining text which required little alteration for the stage. One may argue that much of Bradbury’s

work finds fuller, more developed expression in performance, but this text because it is character and dialogue based, also gains greater coherence—seeing and hearing the performance version is less confusing than reading the text and keeping track of who is speaking. It shouldn't be surprising that Bradbury turned it into a musical and finally a film incorporating the better elements from all its earlier incarnations.

VIII THE MUSICAL

The play bears great similarity to the film so I may reference it when analyzing the film. The musical however, is another matter and a more difficult kind of performance text to critique through a reading. It was another step forward in the evolution of the theatrical text introducing elements that found their way into the film. It is interesting to note that while music (and dance) appeared in Bradbury's later theater productions, he envisioned TWICS as a musical as early as 1966 immediately after first staging it. In fact, he was planning on adapting it as a feature film musical enlisting the popular Latin flavored Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass¹²⁶ to help develop the project. This was not realized but Bradbury did bring it to the stage in 1990 with music and lyrics by José Feliciano. This aided the eventual filming because Roy Disney Jr., soon to become a chief executive of Disney Studios saw the play and musical on several occasions and thus became favorable to producing it as a film

Running the risk of sounding pretentious or too elaborate, self-conscious prose may be as distracting as straight exposition on stage which stops the action. With the musical format Bradbury found more acceptable expression for the thoughts and feelings of his characters and a way of making his "asides," meant to highlight the dreams of his characters. His use of music, often in recitative style where the singer adopts rhythms of ordinary speech serves his poetic intent well, becoming a more acceptable equivalent to the classic soliloquy. Various in the musical TWICS, it seems to be a bridge to cover and concentrate action, foreshadow conflict and build expectation. At any rate, his music

¹²⁶ Alpert and his group were reaching the peak years of their popularity and did not feel comfortable in the film environment (Eller, *Unbound* 252).

and dance are fully integrated and advance the narrative. As such, TWICS and Bradbury's musicals in general, can be considered "book musicals" where music and dance are dramatically integrated to evoke genuine emotions other than laughter and serve the narrative. And Bradbury uses a lot of music in TWICS; eleven different numbers, more than half of them are choreographed, including three vigorous dance numbers. Equal importance seemed to be given to the music when compared to the dialogue, stage movement and other elements.

The musical is an expansion and intensification of the play. Stretched to 113 pages the text is divided into two-acts, easily doubling the length of the original with more drama, humor and pathos including a treatment of the immigrant theme that is entirely absent from the play. The musical uses virtually all of the previous theatrical text and restores some exposition from the short story. The characters uniformly receive more backstory, exposition and development. There is more banter among the players including ad-libs in Spanish, greater voiced antagonism and suspicion and more humor as the players make jokes at each other's expense and comic observations. The characters seem more lifelike as a result. The essence or voice of each character is individually expressed in song and also the plot is advanced by musical exposition. Music emphasizes the important element of camaraderie on the occasions when they sing together; they may sing different lines of the same song expressing their individuality but harmony is never broken.

The musical opens with the same three idle characters, Villanazul, Martinez and Vamanos and includes the cigarette toss from the opening of the play, their sharing it and Villanazul's speech taking it as an omen that change will happen in their lives. Their near vagrant status and Martinez's desire for the girl he has only seen at a distance are amplified through song. Vamanos becomes a more real and sympathetic character through his added backstory and plainly expressed desire to be part of the group, even before sharing the suit comes into play. Overall, he remains something of a clown, a drifting, happy idiot, yet with flashes of wit and insight. For instance, He chides his companions, "Mr. know-everything-and-do nothing! And Mr. sit here while it is over there. There is a big world in the plaza, Villanazule. Go get it. There is life in that

tenement, Martinez. Run over! All I ask is, you two, wherever you go, take me with you!”

There are significant changes in the clothing shop scene where the two old haberdashers sing (and dance) about the “good old days” before the men arrive to buy the suit. We get to know something about the store owners rather than them merely being a comic foil for the group. The men celebrate their plan by singing a song about sharing the suit, “Para –Ti, Para-Me.” After their purchase they sing “One White Suit” individually in parts with all joining in for the chorus. These two songs celebrate both the communal and individual aspects of the group’s venture and serve as leitmotifs. We hear refrains of these songs later and near the end of the play. The first song is one of several partly sung in Spanish. Bradbury heightened the overall Hispanic flavor of the work in the musical including a “dance promenade” between acts celebrating the immigrant desire for acceptance and a better life:

...We’re not asking for any pity we’ll take work that you turn down. Hey, patron! I need food upon my table. Hey, Senora! I want schooling for my niños! Ah, Senor—that’s all my dreams are made of, what are you afraid of? It’s only me! L.A. Where we will stay. We love L.A.!

There is another immigrant themed “song,” rather like a long (a page and a half) poem indicated as “recited to music” by poet/philosopher Villanazul when he speaks in the plaza. Entitled “There’s No Water In The River,” it was almost surely penned by Bradbury judging from the use of metaphor and characteristic Bradbury phrases like “Live Forever”! The song/poem is an allusion to the Los Angeles River, dry for most of the year, dividing the more affluent sections of the city from the immigrant “barrios.” Essentially, it speaks of attitude and effort as necessary to leave the barrio to strive for more: “...But I got to cross that river somehow, so I’ll get my share...Sure I know it’s got no water but it’s deep that river bed, so I’m going to swim the river cause the river’s in my head.” Properly inserted into the narrative it reads like a clever piece of verse writing. In turns serious and whimsical, its optimistic spirit and content fit into Bradbury’s philosophy of persistence, hard work, risk and self-reliance as a path to success. Of course, Bradbury and his family were white Americans but were also “immigrants” to the city in the depth of the Great Depression and passed through some of

the same hardships experienced by the Latino immigrants. Recognition of the immigrant experience was the most significant addition to the musical which raises consideration of ethnic representation which I will save for the film commentary.

Martinez is still the emotional focalizer of the group and he, instead of Gomez is the first to don the suit, given the line of “put me in a store window, I don’t deserve to go out.” This humble remark is more in line with the tentative nature of this character than for Gomez, who recited it in the play as the first to wear the suit. A connection between Martinez and the girl he has admired from afar (Celia) has already been implied but here, their encounter is split into two parts. He takes Manulo with him to her balcony for a guitar serenade but when she appears he shyly backs away as she sings a brief romantic song. Still unconnected but more confident because of the suit, he is accosted by three different women and engages in three separate styles of dance finishing with a traditional Flamenco before they pull him backstage asking him to marry them. He quickly emerges from backstage hands lifted in victory and takes a bow before returning to Gomez’s apartment where he sings the same song as Celia has sung to relate his experience to his friends. An interesting way to link the pair who have not yet connected with each other. Near the end of the narrative Martinez, again in the suit goes to Celia’s house and they finally exchange a few words and make a date. Martinez’s doubt and insecurity seem heightened here but their exchange is similar to that found in the short story where Celia explains it was more his smiling face than the suit that attracted her.

After Martinez it is Gomez’s turn. The others, particularly Villanazul, harbor suspicions that he may run away with the suit and the audience has near certainty that he has a bus ticket. After he leaves wearing the suit, this proves true and furthermore he is shown collecting a fist full of money from a cock fighting match. Now on his way to the station he is singing about “a dream... a vision I have seen” of a new life in another city, El Paso. An unseen chorus responds “don’t go.” This is repeated several times in response to his protest as if he is wrestling with his conscience manifested by the chorus. The chorus finally repeats his words from the measuring and weighing sequence when they initially became a group because of their physical similarities. The chorus mentions his comrades by name, and some of their measurements to which he retorts “all you skeletons! Shut up!” before he runs off stage. Back at his apartment the others engage in

some anxious and comic banter about what it is like waiting for Gomez. The marvelous suit is emphasized as his return is heralded by its brilliance shining through a partial scrim on the apartment door.

Villanazul has had his turn in the plaza and his recitation of “There’s no water in the river” provide motivation for the thunderous applause and shouts of “bravo” he receives off stage. Now it is Manulo’s turn to wear the suit. A more active player in the musical, he is shown to be a denizen of the pool hall, a womanizer, a fine guitar player and a heavy drinker. After he vests the suit the lights come up on him in a front with an AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) sign. He is surrounded by a small group, encouraging and congratulating him and one of them leaves his card reminding him he can call him day or night. They exit to leave him alone for his moment in the spotlight. In similar fashion to the play he remarks “it was the suit that gave me such courage. I stood up. I spoke...The suit speaks for me!” He sings a song that speaks of the pain and loneliness that had characterized his life only to conclude that he feels good and will now “try to live.” Maunlo’s episode is the most realistic of the group since it deals with a real problem, and as written and staged is meant to carry real meaning. The suit merely helped him to do what only he could do for himself; a decision has been taken and a journey begun. When he returns, the focus shifts from the problem of the individual to the group since it is now Vamanos’ turn.

The limitations of the stage are still present and the final comic episode is not greatly expanded from the play except for “Ten Quidado Vamenos” which the group sings in parts to drive home their fear of his likely spoiling of the suit. Of course Vamanos heads directly to a disreputable bar as his comrades feared and they must go there to intervene. From this point on, events essentially transpire as they do in the play and film. However, the bar sequence has been expanded and appears to be the most elaborately staged part of the play. The nature of the bar is not in doubt when the bar’s owner, a large Latino lady sings a song about her reckless establishment.

Without negating the positive comments I made at the outset, I would add that *perhaps* one or two of the songs seem overly sentimental but it is impossible to know from only a reading. Overall, I believe the text benefited from the added character development and interaction. We may not entirely discount the possible “magic” of the

suit especially when Gomez wears it, although its supernatural qualities are downplayed. The whimsical nature of the play is “redeemed” by the more serious moments afforded by Manulo and Villanazul’s episodes. Particularly, I think the latter's immigrant themed verse far superior to the earlier reference to Carlyle's philosophy of suits. Bradbury took a chance by adding these serious moments and socio/political commentary. They seem sufficiently subtle and positive enough, but how well they fit into the performance narrative as a whole is a matter of conjecture. At any rate, and I believe this to be significant, the eventual producer of the film was not put off by the musical¹²⁷ and willing to allow Bradbury a free hand in writing the screenplay.

IX THE FILM: PRODUCTION BACKGROUND

As so often the case in motion pictures, it was a long and winding journey before production began. In interviews as far back as 1980 Bradbury expressed there was interest by Disney Studios in the project, but previous experience with film production had made him wary. At one point, Bradbury’s friend, Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini was preparing to make the film in Rome with impoverished Italian characters but this project did not come to fruition. Most of this background information comes from the online blog of Stuart Gordon, largely responsible for keeping the project alive while running the gauntlet of studio bureaucracy to eventually direct the film. It was Gordon who contacted Bradbury about adapting *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* for the cinema in the mid 1990s. Gordon had an office at Disney at the time and was enjoying some favor there because of his original screenplay for the 1989 hit *Honey, I Shrunk The Kids*¹²⁸. The writer/director’s relationship with the company dated back to the early 1980s when he was hired to help design “Spaceship Earth,” an 18 story structure serving as centerpiece and exposition at Walt Disney World’s Epcot Center.

¹²⁷ Bradbury was quoted in an issue of *The Hollywood Sentinel* that Disney wanted to film the stage production.

¹²⁸ Gordon is best known as writer/director of a series of modest-budgeted science fiction and particularly horror pictures such as the adaption of Edgar Allen Poe’s *The Pit and the Pendulum* (1991) and H.P. Lovecraft adaptations of *Re-Animator* (1985) and *From Beyond* (1986). His horror films were witty and baroque with *Re-Animator* becoming a “cult” classic, mixing the grotesque with the humorous.

Previously, Gordon had enjoyed success as the founding artistic director of The Organic Theater Company. The Chicago based company, considered “venturesome, innovative, energetic and improvisational” was an influential force in the city’s theater scene during the 1970s, scoring hits with productions like Davis Mamet’s *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*. Gordon’s brother brought TWICS to his attention and their production of it was another hit that they took on the road. Bradbury attended a performance in Los Angeles at the UCLA Theater and enthusiastically declared it the best production he had seen¹²⁹. This was a high compliment since he had produced it himself and seen other versions of it. Following the resurgence of Disney animation with a string of hit movies in the 1990s, the studio conceived an animated version of TWICS. It was in development for a year and a number of conceptual drawings of the characters¹³⁰ and backgrounds had been made when a decision was taken that the narrative seemed too slight and the project was put on hold.

Gordon pushed the idea of a feature film and met with Disney’s product placement department in hopes of raising additional funding or at the very least, free products through product placement in the film as a sort of advertising; a common Hollywood practice. Nothing was offered and Gordon was informed that none of the corporations they were dealing with would have anything to do with *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*. He argued that the Latino market was huge and that they were avid consumers like everyone else but they countered by saying the film’s characters were “losers,” people who live in the ghetto and that no one wanted their products associated with such people. Gordon pointed out they were “losers that become winners” and that the film was about “friendship, sharing and turning your life around,” but his appeal fell on deaf ears and Gordon sensed racist attitudes.

Similarly, after the film was released the director recalled talking to an award group that recognized Latino films and was amazed that *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*

¹²⁹ Gordon recalled an enthusiastic Bradbury mounted the stage at the end and asked to wear the suit and actually stripped down to his underwear to do so. And as the director joked, “once you’ve seen a man in his boxers, then you’re friends forever.” They maintained occasional correspondence after that before the film project was seriously discussed.

¹³⁰ It would be a fascination to see some of the drawings and conceptions of these characters for animation, unfortunately these drawings no longer seem to be in existence.

was completely ignored. The organization informed him that they did not want to show films with Latinos living on the street or struggling. Although this is closer to reality for most Latinos, that is not how they wanted them portrayed. They wanted to show them as doctors and lawyers and were even concerned that the characters in TWICS were speaking with accents. Perhaps these attitudes have changed since 1998, but this raises the issue of representation of ethnicity which merits some attention especially since it has been a source of some criticism of the film.

Genre considerations come into play here. *If* one sees unflattering stereotypes in TWICS it is only in keeping with the broad, comedic approach of the film and not to be taken seriously. *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* doesn't try to disguise itself as a realist film but uses a touch of fantasy to paint an affectionate portrait of positive values among basically likable characters. Moreover, the film as a musical, (it has just one music/dance number) has its slight realism further overshadowed by this implausible musical number whose playfulness and imagination makes superficial allusions to the culture of the "other" but these are joyfully positive instead of negative.

The narrative does proceed with a spirit of levity and possibility but within a stylized ethnic ghetto. This is also unrealistic because in a multicultural society, especially a poor area of a large city, all communities are implicated with one another and subjected to permeable boundaries of identity. But group identity is not an issue, the film deals with universal themes in an ethnic setting. The characters appear to inhabit a landscape of community and ritual but pressures of assimilation to the larger society, or censure for lack of assimilation are completely absent because universal values are in play – community, personal fulfillment and expression. Interestingly enough, community is not presented as a utopian ideal but as a necessary base for the flourishing of individuality, self-expression and even "success" as variously defined.

The characters are Latinos because Bradbury's narrative was inspired by Mexican-Americans, and it is also easier to imagine the depicted camaraderie among Hispanics than among more individualized Angelos. Outward ethnic markings may be predetermined but inner ethnic values are self-ascribed and no monolithic notion of the Latino is presented. The image is less important than the literal or figurative voice speaking "through" the image and the five, male characters differ considerably. Bradbury

clearly meant the story as an affectionate ode to that community he had observed and felt a kinship with in his early adulthood. He understood and admired their camaraderie, resilience and hope despite everyday hardships. The poverty of the characters is of the noble kind where people unite to help each other, sharing a desire to survive and succeed.

The awards group Gordon referred to may have been displaying “biological insiderism” taking a proprietary interest in how their group may be portrayed by outsiders, or believing that only “members” of their group have “the right” to represent it. This sensibility, buttressed by people like Edward Said who cautioned against “simplistic misreading” and “cynical misappropriations” of groups by those on the outside should not be dismissed, but such criticism seems misplaced in the case of *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*. Moreover, Bradbury told of attending screenings in places like Santa Fe, New Mexico where overwhelmingly Latino audiences were extremely pleased with the film, mirroring the enthusiastic attitudes of those that actually starred in it, all of whom were Latinos¹³¹.

Returning to the travails of production, once again Gordon, this time accompanied by Bradbury (wearing a white suit), met with one of Disney’s chief executives who rudely dismissed the project¹³². Finally, Roy Disney, a personal friend of Bradbury and a fan of the play, stepped in and approved the project becoming co-producer along with Gordon. However, the studio production office stipulated that the budget not exceed five million and that the film go straight to video¹³³ instead of general theatrical release. However, since it was “a small picture,” studio interference was practically nil with Gordon and Bradbury given almost total freedom in realizing the project. Director Gordon brought in the actors and crew he preferred, many of whom he had worked with before and Bradbury was tasked with adapting the screenplay.

¹³¹ Except Joe Montega, an Italian American, who played Gomez.

¹³² As described by Gordon in his blog it is rather humorous. Bradbury mentioned that the last time he had been inside the studio he had had lunch with Walt, to which the executive dryly responded, “Walt’s dead.” Bradbury commented positively on recent studio successes but the executive retorted, “You only have to lie to your mother,” and Bradbury immediately responded, “well, sometimes you feel like you’re in a room full of mothers.” The meeting stopped right there and Gordon had little hope of having his “cheerful, little comedy” produced.

¹³³ It was the studio’s first, original, live-action feature to bypass theaters and open on cassette.

Gordon had usually written the pictures he had directed so he should have an insider's appreciation screenwriting. He was amazed at the detail of Bradbury's work, commenting that while most scripts are broken down into scenes, "Ray's script was more like poetry, describing everything so beautifully that you felt you were watching the finished film." In citing this I would remind the reader of the central idea of this thesis: that Bradbury is a writer with exceptional cinematic sensibility and an excellent (perhaps the best) adapter of his own work. The director recalled that he made a few suggestions and Bradbury patiently listened but finally said, "Stuart, I'm the tailor who made this suit and I think I know where every button should go. Leave it to me." The script I have, dated April 15, 1997 is entirely Bradbury's work but with a hand written note from Gordon to Bradbury where the director says that he added some of the dialogue from the play and omitted "the fire hose routine" because he wanted to try a different approach. This was probably part of the "chase scene" toward the end which reads very comically as intricate slapstick but was filmed in a more simplified manner, probably due to budget or technical limitations. Otherwise, what Bradbury submitted, while not being a final "shooting script" was just short of that and was followed very closely.

X CAST, CREW AND FILMING

The picture was largely filmed on location in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles where a young Bradbury had found inspiration for his story in the late 1940s. The director recalled that during the 1998 filming, there were still mariachis and taco trucks there, making cast and crew feel they were living in the area where the story took place. By all accounts it was a relaxed, convivial filming experience. Actor Edward James Olmos said it was the most fun he had ever had making a film¹³⁴. While no one in the cast was considered a major star, they were all known actors with a solid body of work behind them. Olmos in particular, as an important cast member on *Miami Vice*, one of the most popular TV series of the 1980s and *Stand and Deliver* (Ramón Menéndez, 1988) a biographical picture about a Latino teacher who inspires and disciplines his

¹³⁴ About Bradbury, Olmos asserted, "I love the man. A truly gifted genius."

tough, drop out prone students¹³⁵. These roles were certainly a departure from those usually played by Latino actors – Olmos was always deadly serious, highly competent and authoritative in both the TV series and film. He seemed to have become something of a role model for Latinos and a Los Angeles street mural of Olmos made the cover of the July 11th 1988 issue of *Time* magazine with the caption: “Magnifico! Hispanic culture breaks out of the barrio.” Gordon was ready to cast Olmos as the poet/philosopher Villanazul, but the actor asked to play completely against type. He wanted the role of Vamanos, a character the director was searching for a comedian to play. Olmos played the part extremely well and with the same high enthusiasm displayed by the other performers. Critics occasionally point to a performance where an actor is not only immersed in a role but actually seems to be enjoying it too. This would certainly be the case with Olmos and Joe Mantega too.

Clifton Collins Jr. and Joe Mantega were enthralled by having Bradbury on the set. Mantega, reprising his role of Gomez from the 1973 stage production recalled it as one of the “major touchstones of my career” and referred to his association with Ray Bradbury during filming as “one of the most shining aspects of my career”¹³⁶ (Weller 213-214). It seems that Mantega’s previous experience and the favorable filming conditions led to the actor’s complete immersion in the part. It has been observed that a stage role exists more independently than the actor—he assumes the role, putting it on like a garment playing out the story from beginning to end. On stage, the audience is always aware of the actor’s impersonation, but within the film frame without the limits of the proscenium, character may be defined more precisely through word, action and subtle mannerisms. Film acting can become less performing a role than creating a kind of life recorded by the camera that may fill and transcend characterization using the actor’s personality as a sort of armature or base to build on. Thus, film acting can facilitate and preserve a performance superior to the script and it is difficult to imagine anyone better inhabiting the character of Gomez than Joe Mantega.

¹³⁵ Olmos had been nominated for best actor Oscar and golden globe for his performances.

¹³⁶ Years later he co-produced a documentary about the life and creative process of the author using filmed interviews made only a couple of years before his death. The hour and thirty-five minute *Live Forever: The Ray Bradbury Odyssey* directed by Michael O’Kelly was released in 2013.

A familiar face with many film and TV credits dating back to the late 1960s Gregory Sierra had rarely been afforded such an estimable part as Villanazul, the poet/philosopher, spiritual leader of the group. Sierra plays the part of Villanazul with admirable range, forcefully when necessary but always with honest charm and conviction.

Esai Morales was well cast as the virile, would be troubadour Dominguez. Perhaps his most notable credit until the filming of *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* was *La Bamba* (Luis Valdez, 1987). The film was nominated for the best picture Oscar and in a co-starring role his character was nonetheless more interesting and developed than this biographical picture's protagonist. Many critics thought the young actor deserved a nomination or more recognition for his performance. As Dominguez, Morales executes a "performance" within a performance in the musical/dance sequence and does quite well. *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* is an entirely character driven film and none of the meager criticism it has received faulted performance. On the contrary, performances have been viewed as a strong point even by those less enthusiastic about the film.

Rounding out the cast were Sid Caesar and Howard Morris, briefly appearing as the elderly haberdashers who sell the men the eponymous suit. They were among the most popular comedians from the "golden age" of television in the 1950s and 60s. Gordon remarked that Bradbury took a proprietary interest in the performance of his script but he (and Gordon) were so amused by the slight improvisations and ad libs of these old professionals that they kept their performances intact for the final cut of the film.

The costume, production and lighting designers all did a fine job of putting together a suitable inner-city environment but with some bright color schemes transmitting an aura of magical expectation. Character costumes were elegantly simple and served to better define the particular charm and failings of each character. It was useful for the wardrobe to "speak" for them, especially in a film seeking to differentiate and develop five main characters in a scant running time of seventy-seven minutes, leaving little time for anything like backstory. Cameraman and director of photography Mac Ahlberg had a gaffer build a special ring light that gave the suit, because of its material, a special glowing effect on film. This was achieved through a week of trial and

error testing. The music and choreography were imaginatively created as well as the unique title sequence which we will examine shortly. By all accounts, and a true rarity, the production proceeded smoothly without personal or creative friction.

XI GENERAL COMMENTS, STYLE AND GENRE

The film stands out for focusing upon all Latino characters and is the most unique of “buddy films.” That is, without homoerotic undertones it presents five men bound together neither by family, work or professionalism but genuine friendship and having a dream. These men are able to talk about their hopes and work cooperatively to achieve them while addressing their fears and acting to triumph over them. Moreover, there is no objectionable language¹³⁷, coarse jokes, sex or violence in the film. The highly informative Internet Movie Database classifies *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* using the terms “comedy, family, fantasy” in that order, a good general classification of the film.

The “community” aspect of the narrative is consistently well illustrated in the way the characters are presented and the screen time given to each. This is carried through even to the “democratic” credits at the end where still shots of *all* the characters accompany their names and each is given equal screen time. A brief, encore, sequence from the narrative *after* the credits is very telling in this respect too. In the narrative, care is given so no single viewpoint dominates and all five men have essentially equal time on film and none of them is really marginalized or subservient, included just to support the others.

For example, Dominguez, who is the least vocal of the group is “compensated” through a musical/dance number and he is given a few poetic lines that belonged to Villanazul in the stage versions. Each are given their special moments when wearing the suit-otherwise they are filmed as a group and in genuine dialogue, all making relevant contributions to the overall narrative. Apart from a few time saving jump cuts, the film appears to progress in real, chronological time obeying laws of cause and effect, occupying one afternoon and evening. Unusual for adaptation, the cinematic text was not

¹³⁷ Bradbury was pleased that he could tell his story without “vulgarity or swearing” especially considering that the narrative deals with five young men.

significantly compressed or expanded from its source(s) so the film moves at a smooth, but rapid pace. A strong sense of place and time are created through this continual action somewhat counterbalancing the fantastic element of the narrative.

The film's thrust is entirely on characters and not on the "world" they inhabit, although they are bounded within their rather cheerful ethnic ghetto. The simplicity of the sets does nothing to distract from the characters, rather serving to highlight them. Given the limited space where narrative action occurs and the material poverty of the characters, it would seem appropriate for the "closed" style of film, but this is not really the case. It may seem closed for taking place in a self-contained world, but it is a space created for telling a very particular story and we have a sense of "life" outside of each frame. Unlike *Fahrenheit 451*, the story neither arises from, nor is it determined by its environment. In *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* the surroundings and architecture are incidental to the characters and there is no sense of them being trapped in a hostile, mechanistic world. On the contrary, the air is filled with magic and romance and a sense that anything can happen if one so desires. The frame is like a window on a vibrant world filled with potential ready to enter the scene. The viewer comes to anticipate camera movement to reveal incidental action and new elements of this world throughout the course of the narrative. Also, typical of the open style, the film showcases other arts: street paintings, music, singing and dancing. It appears to be a vibrant enclave ready to burst its boundaries. While the narrative environment may seem resistant to letting other things in, it is straining to burst forth itself.

Although adapted from the stage, it is "bigger" than a filmed play—a lot of the action takes place outdoors, in the street and the characters never appear too constrained by their surroundings. Character improvisation and adaptation to their surroundings always seem present. A variety of camera perspectives and imaginative cutting "open up" the narrative. Frequently the men are filmed in wide, open spaces like city squares, parks or the rooftop of Gomez's tenement. On several instances they are framed in medium-shot beginning at ground level with the camera backing away and tilting up to a full body shot making them appear to loom large or dominate their contexts. Also, the suit wearing ritual appears to give the men a certain control of their environment where they wield influence over people, things and situations. The movement from a "closed" to "open"

world so prevalent in much of Bradbury's work is in high relief in TWICS. The spirit soars and limitations are transcended; nothing of true value seems impossible to attain. Overall, the film has the old fashioned "can do" spirit of a depression era musical with a tone reminiscent of "A Mid-Summer Night's Dream".

Music and comedy are integral to the *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* narrative. Music in some form is nearly always present but is never intrusive. We briefly see and hear a mariachi band on the street several times. On other occasions soft music is heard as if wafting through open windows onto the street¹³⁸. The Spanish-flavored soundtrack is synchronized to the narrative, varied and goes a long way in creating and sustaining a shifting tone, usually celebratory and expectant but at other times subdued or romantic. The music usually serves the traditional function of accompanying the narrative and heightening emotion, but it also helps interpret the story and emotional development of the characters. The musical dance number even presents an idea or two and the songs we hear are usually sung in both Spanish and English. The soundtrack and diegetic music we hear are not entirely separable, especially during the dance sequence. For instance, initiating that sequence we see and hear a guitar being played but it is soon accompanied by other obviously non-diegetic instruments before the scene shifts to be supported by the mariachi band we come to see in the street. This mixture is unusual in films and serves to stress the importance and omnipresence of music to the narrative space.

In spite of its incongruence to naturalistic narrative, dance as movement in rhythm can be seen as the essence of cinema. In *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*, we see bodies stripped of their material bounds, individuals united to their essential natures becoming centers of consciousness on display like weightless vehicles of free motion. The choreographed dance seems more spontaneous and emotional, less technically precise and calculated than what is usually seen in musicals. It is not included to display technical prowess, but spontaneity, joy and exuberance. Aside from being a character driven narrative, the vigorous movement, general levity and spirited nature of the story make it well suited to popular cinema. One imagines the stage to be a little constraining for the story as presented here.

¹³⁸ That is, we often hear music that is likely part of the ambient sound of the street making it diegetic, although it is not "source music" because we cannot see where it is coming from.

While the music and dance have a strong ethnic flavor the film's humor does not.

That is, it does not traffic in the typical kind of Hollywood ethnic humor with an assimilationist impulse where undesirable characteristics of immigrant groups are identified or assigned and then lampooned as among the group's inelastic traits they must rid themselves of. Ethnic stereotypes are not paraded for laughter but rather situations of surprise, confusion and hysteria provide humor. The physical or slapstick humor, without becoming cartoonish, maintains the proper level of mayhem because when people fall or are hit, they are obviously not really injured and no one is ever truly at risk.

However, some of the humor is character driven, originating from the inappropriate and unsavory behavior of the vagabond character Vamanos, and the others' attempts to accommodate or protect him. Indeed, "The Tramp" was one of the cinema's earliest and most enduring, non-ethnic comic types, an outcast who has to pay for his refusal to conform to societal norms. This fits the Bergsonian model of comedy where people (or things) are laughable in proportion to maladjustment, inapt, inept or childish responses, including acting out impulses we repress as adults—the things children do including the indecencies. However, the mirth created in TWICS does not correspond to Bergson's idea of feelings of "superiority" over the other to provoke laughter. Without a hint of cruelty, the laughter evoked is of the kindly and indulgent variety. It is more a matter of exaggeration where situations are imagined and unreal enough so that instead of taking things seriously we can relax and laugh. Yet, things are *real* enough that our laughter can come from a sense of sympathy and familiarity with some of the character's predicaments and reactions.

XII THE FILM: TITLE AND OPENING SEQUENCES

A titles sequence may be a mundane introduction to a film or a great deal more. Awards are given for imaginative titles and *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* was nominated for at least one¹³⁹. The lively animation of the main titles carries the audience from the

¹³⁹ The sequence was designed by Robert Dawson and Aleksandra Korejwo who manipulated colored salt using a condor feather obtained from the Warsaw zoo. It received an Annie Award (1998) nomination for "outstanding achievement in an animated interstitial promotion, production or title sequence." It was rushed to the prestigious Sundance Film Festival without the animated title sequence where nevertheless it

real world to a special place. We are ushered into a colorful, fantastic and upbeat world through music and kaleidoscopic animation. Varied like an operatic overture, it establishes a mood and prepares the spectator for what is to come, signaling genre (musical/fantasy) and introducing principal motifs that foreshadow story events. The energetic opening number sung by Nydia Rojas is partly in Spanish, its shifting tempo accompanied by the rapidly changing images of salt animation adds to the narrational character of the titles sequence. Mexican in flavor, the designs are reminiscent of Diego Rivera murals only more playful and romantic; and indeed, street art does play a part in the narrative that follows.

The director took some liberties with the opening exposition, perhaps to its betterment. Bradbury's script opens as night is falling on the barrio and the feeling of "another lonely Saturday night" pervades the atmosphere. Martinez is trying to get the attention of the neighborhood girl he is attracted to. After failing at this, he has the chance meeting with Gomez in the street who informs him of his plan and they go to the bar where the other characters are gathered. But here cinematic resources allow Gordon to create a more comic, upbeat tone, with rapid, sharply defined character presentation while essentially keeping Bradbury's dialogue intact.

The title sequence ends with a fade out to white and a fade in to a cityscape seen in daylight from above and accompanied by gentle guitar. The helicopter-mounted camera moves rapidly toward the massive buildings of downtown Los Angeles gliding over interchanges and spillways and beyond, passing over rooftops and finally down to the neighborhood streets of Boyle Heights. In this way it mirrors the opening of *West Side Story* (Robert Wise, 1961) but Gordon's camera is not exactly invisible. Its movement begins from a fade in from white and at first accompanied by a gentle sound like a rushing wind before a gentle guitar comes in as the camera takes us to its destination and ends with a quick fade out and in to white again. This suggests the whiteness of the magic suit but we could have been on the whispering flight of an angel. The sense of presence or a "watcher" behind these aerial shots is only increased as the players are rapidly singled out in situations outlining their character. The next shot opens at street level,

received a standing ovation. At the Fantasporto Festival (1998) it was nominated for "International Film Award for Best Film."

focusing for a moment on a Mexican themed street mural prominently featuring The Statue of Liberty. The camera quickly moves us along streets to find Dominguez playing his guitar and attempting to attract the attention of two young ladies passing by. He even joins in singing a line along with the gentle soundtrack praising the charms of east L.A. Hearing a piece of the soundtrack briefly sung by a character in a completely unselfconscious manner has the curious effect of *inserting* us into the story world. Of course, Dominguez does not attract any attention at all from the lovely ladies and we share in his frustration as he steps forward into to a close up.

Next, more street murals are seen as the camera travels again and cuts to a park statue, appearing to be that of an Old World explorer, before coming to rest on Villanazul perched on a soapbox. This character is also passionately (and bi-lingually) seeking a hearing. However, worse than going unnoticed he finally gains the attention of a woman carrying bags of groceries who only stops for a moment to scowl at him before walking on.

Now there is a cut to Martinez at the window of his apartment as he beholds the girl of his dreams on a neighboring balcony. He is talking to himself, “smile, wave loco” trying in vain to get her attention. Hoping to catch her in the street, he quickly exits only to have his landlord¹⁴⁰ appear, lock his door and take his key—“two months, no rent-goodbye, Martinez, adios.” Already, in the space of less than five minutes we have been given an essential introduction to three of the five main characters. They have been well contextualized in terms of their environment and we have been given a glimpse of their dreams and frustrations, arousing a little sympathy and curiosity for these men, all essentially unheard and unseen in the crowded city.

Now in the street, Martinez has lost sight of the girl but becomes aware of a suspicious character following him and it quickly escalates into a chase. He tosses away his wallet and his would be attacker stoops to pick it up but then continues after him until he turns into a dead end alley. A brief overhead shot allows us to appreciate Martinez’s entrapment followed by a medium shot of the youth turning to confront his adversary.

¹⁴⁰ In keeping with the familiar atmosphere of filming, landlord (Pedro Gonzalez Gonzalez) in his last film appearance was the real life father of Martinez (Clifton Collins Jr.) who is billed in the film as Clifton Gonzalez Gonzalez.

Lighting additionally enhances the menace and suspense of the sequence. The red hue originating from the bricks of the alley prison is brightly intensified while the black figure of the pursuer in deep shadow slowly approaches illuminated by light from the main street coming through the alley opening in the background. Filtering in from the main street, this light has a definite blue tint making the exit seem more unreal and distant although freedom cannot be more than several paces away.

Now, the surprises begin as this man lurking in the shadow throws back the wallet saying that he doesn't want his money but *him* as he dangles a small, looped rope casting a silhouette in the form of a hangman's noose above the cornered Martinez. Stepping suddenly into the light we see it is just a tape measure that he explains is for "measuring people's skeletons" and he goes into a measuring frenzy of the frightened and confused youth who asks if he's being measured for a coffin. Introducing himself as Gomez, he assures him he is being measured for "new life, rebirth" and congratulates him for being the "right size." It is a rather humorous sequence and perhaps a perfect example of philosopher Immanuel Kant's idea about the cause of laughter being a sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing.

Proven harmless for the moment, Gomez excitedly informs the flummoxed youth that he has a plan and that Martinez is going to come and live with him; not a bad offer for someone who has just been shut out of his apartment. Gomez leaves him no time to consider the offer and takes him running to the bar where the others have casually gathered. If all this is not sufficiently surreal, we see cans flying out of a garbage dumpster outside the bar as they approach. After they enter, the camera focuses on a comically dirty and disheveled man poking his head out of the trash heap. This grinning, mischievous vagabond blowing smoke from a stub of a cigar and laughing like a jolly madman will complete the group. Vamanos, as he is known, is even more "invisible" than the others. Gomez may be a lunatic or a fast-talking con-man but now appears to be a leader in need of followers and a schemer yet to hatch a successful plan. We would not be surprised if he and Vamanos, these lastly introduced "loose cannons" turn out to be the ones who most jeopardize the communal enterprise of the white suit. With great dexterity and using a variety of technique provoking various emotional effects like suspense and humor, a unique context and set of characters have been established at a delirious pace.

There is more to discover about the characters but we already know the necessary minimum.

XIII COMRADES IN A BARRIO OF MIRACLES

The bar sequence brings all the characters together for the first time. The fact that these men are hardly alike, not all honourable or trustworthy and do not necessarily complement each other in terms of personal traits come into sharp relief. This sequence is mainly expository focusing on the formation of their pact leading to the inciting incident of the purchase of the suit. As they interact, we get to know these men better and appreciate an emerging group dynamic. This is supported by taking into account how they are dressed, now that we finally see them in full detail. With Gomez's recruitment of Martinez an air of anticipation and excitement develops. An enthusiastic Gomez touts his find of another of the "right size" as a "miracle" and perhaps it is something like that too for the homeless Martinez who has just been "adopted." "Miracle" is the key word of this sequence. They all strain to believe in one and each of them hopefully utters that word at least once.

The action in the bar begins with Dominguez calling for quiet as he attempts one last pool shot. His success with such an improbable shot is perhaps another minor miracle and the others, cheering his success seem to take it as a good omen for the group's plans. The ball is rolling so to speak, and momentum is building but it is Gomez's enthusiasm that moves things forward. After reminding the others of the "miracle" of them all having the same measurements, he insists they stand together. Joining them, Gomez calls for *Vamos* to come and lay a pool cue across their heads to prove they are all the same height which the befuddled vagabond does in good slapstick manner. Obviously, the group does not have much use for him.

The pool hall sequence is another instance where the director used Bradbury's dialogue and descriptive staging with hardly any deviation since they communicate and advance the narrative precisely. Now in close up, the cue lays evenly on their heads and "Gomez slides his eyes in close up to try to see if what he hopes is true." "Does it? Do

you feel? Do you see?" he exclaims, and as Bradbury further elaborated in the screenplay: "they all sidle their eyes, sensing with the tops of their heads." Indeed, they sense this "miracle" from the "tops of their heads" and in this linear embrace Gomez leads them a few steps forward before he suggests they "become fancy" and kick together like a chorus line while the cue remains miraculously in place. The camera focuses on joyful faces and movement in unison while the soundtrack briefly adds an old-fashioned rock-n-roll tune. Bradbury's notes describe Vamanos, dancing with them to one side of the frame as "feeling intuitively there is something grand to come," and that is how the scene plays.

Beyond the playfulness it is an important moment, as significant as singing together in a church choir or demonstrating in a political rally; they are entering into a special kind of unity or "communitas." Now as a group, they rush to the scales and befitting their poverty weigh themselves using only one coin, each staying in place until the next person steps on the scales before stepping off. They are nearly the same weight, it is another "miracle" although Villanazul interjects "no, it's Gomez," emphasizing his leadership in this venture. The group has stepped aside now to discuss their next move while "invisible" Vamanos takes a turn at the scales alone. However, mounting it without the weight of a comrade to hold the needle in place he sees it drop to zero and some humor is mined from his anxious facial expressions. It should be noted that farcical acting is a difficult style of performance requiring intense comic exaggeration and can become tiresome and mechanical if the performer is not able to preserve the humanity of the character. Olmos as Vamanos (and Mantega as Gomez) are able to do this throughout the film.

Building on the excitement and eager to seal the deal, Gomez continues to "sell" the scheme; "all the same size, all the same dream," he excitedly concludes. Dream(s) is another oft repeated word, especially by Gomez who hopes to find realization in "looking fine at least one night a week." But what are the real dreams of these men and what potentialities can we perceive in them?

Judging from what we have seen, when not trying to woo women on the street with his guitar, Dominguez must spend a lot of time in the bar playing pool. He is by far the most traditionally masculine of the group with thick, well combed hair and a broad,

carefully trimmed mustache. Also the least vocal, his character is expressed more through activities such as playing pool, playing the guitar well, singing and dancing—maybe with help from the suit of course. He is dressed in heavy, cowboy-style boots, and a sleeveless t-shirt, revealing well developed arms and is the only one to show no hesitation in contributing his share (twenty dollars) to buy the white suit. He never appears to be a leader but seems the least risk averse.

Villanazul was briefly shown alongside the pool table at the beginning of the sequence with eyes closed speaking under his breath as if trying to memorize or choose something from the book he has in hand--“Lenin or Marx.” Despite his poetic bent, he demonstrates a good, practical sense of things. But could he be a minority radical that lacks true conviction rather than a hearing or a mode for its release? He has already been indicated to have a facility with words and he has ideas, but are these fresh ideas? A little older than the others, like Gomez he rather stands out for the way he is dressed. He wears John Lennon style wire-framed glasses, the emblematic leather sandals, a red bandanna tied around his neck and Ché Guevara style red beret.

Since Martinez is new to the group, Gomez has to persuade him to part with his last twenty dollars promising the suit will make him “beautiful.” His response is an instance where Gordon restored dialogue from the play: “I haven’t been beautiful for years. There’s this girl...” This fuller response delivered in close up more fully suggests his shyness and insecurity. He appears to be an amiable and sensitive looking youth and his interaction with the group until now has been limited to short responses and tentative questions. We wonder what may lie dormant in this apparently introverted personality.

Since stepping out of the shadows in the alley, Gomez has done a lot of talking; fast, persuasive and enthusiastic. He is certainly an initiator and organizer; the others recognize him as such with a mixture of admiration and trepidation. For instance, after he has collected everyone’s money, Villanazul voices unease by asking if he is planning to take the bus to El Paso when it is his turn to wear the suit. He acts hurt at such a suggestion but Villanazul presses the point by reminding him of two previous ventures that were money losing debacles. Gomez’s overall appearance would certainly confirm our wariness. His black hair is slicked back, his heavy eyebrows hover over somewhat squinted, calculating eyes, he wears a small gold chain around his neck and is always

balancing a stub of a toothpick in his mouth. He sports two-tone, leather shoes, bright blue slacks, and a bright red t-shirt under a dark blue blazer. However, Joe Montega's lively performance, plus the likable, somewhat vulnerable nature he brings to the role prevents Gomez from descending into caricature.

A final "miracle" occurs in discovering that Vamanos is also the "right size," has more than twenty dollars to spare and desires nothing more than to be part of the group. His vagabond appearance and actions alone are comic. Vamanos is so dirty and disheveled that Edward James Olmos is completely unrecognizable in the part. The actor remarked that he wanted to project a character who had hit rock bottom but was not feeling sorry for himself, walked the streets boldly, completely unconcerned about how people saw him¹⁴¹. Like this, Olmos' character is more comic than pathetic and interesting to follow. Loud, rude and unpredictable, Vamanos' dreams until now were probably little more than day to day survival, so what kind of strain might this outsider among outsiders put on the group?

XIV THAT'S A SUIT!

The next sequences take place in the clothing store and Gomez's apartment and focus on the suit as a special object. When they arrive the suit is no longer in the store window and the men enter singularly, one after another to prowl the shop in search of the suit without saying a word. The two elderly haberdashers think they are going to be robbed and one of them hides his wallet. There is a sense of suspense and release to this sequence as Vamanos is the last to make a somewhat comic entrance to the shop and the owners manage to put him out immediately, telling him there is a bathroom at the gas station down the street. With considerable commotion the men enter now as a group and the panicked owner surrenders his wallet to Gomez who hands it back, once again refusing to be distracted by money in his quest for the suit. The owners are relieved to discover the men have not come to rob them but to purchase a suit, and just as they were

¹⁴¹ His appearance was the result of several hours between, hair, wardrobe and makeup departments. The actor went as far as scouring neighborhood trash cans to gauge people's reaction to his character. He was seen as a real street person.

going out of business. They are overjoyed. More miracles it would seem but the biggest is yet to come when the proprietors jauntily take them back to where the suit is hidden in a booth. A chorus of “me” comes in response to the question of who the suit is for. “All,” the dismayed owner replies and Martinez adds, “All for one! One for all!” which pleases the gang. Their camaraderie seems to be growing although, for the time being, *Vamos* still appears to suffer some marginalization.

The curtain is finally pulled and the magic of the suit fills the frame although we don’t actually see it yet, only a shimmering light reflected in the faces of its beholders. The camera focuses first on the stunned reaction of the two haberdashers. Their choreographed “looks” and movements allow us to share in their surprise. After all it was their suit, but something seems to have transformed it. We suspect that these men who most desire it have instilled it with something out of the ordinary. The sense of wonder (and light) becomes even more intense as reflected in close up of the five men beholding this object of their desire now at close range. Overall, the suit is never more magical or otherworldly than when presented here, still unseen by the camera. There is a gentle ending to the scene as one of the proprietors wonders if they are setting a dangerous business precedent by selling one suit to five people. But his partner reflectively concludes, “Did you ever see a hundred dollar suit make so many people so happy.” These final lines certainly are more effective in performance than in the printed story and fit well with Bradbury’s depression era inspiration of shared clothing and people helping one another out.

But the magic does not commence in earnest until the suit rests on its dummy in Gomez’s apartment. It is now twilight, and boxed up, the men happily carry it through the streets. A bus with an El Paso destination sign passes by and Villanazul, casts a suspicious glance at a shame faced Gomez. Complicating matters, when they arrive Gomez must kick in his apartment door since his landlord has changed the lock and *Vamos*, bringing up the rear with the dummy takes a fall in the hallway, breaking the magic of the moment. They are relieved to be rid of him when he suggests a party and goes off to “borrow” some wine. The others enter while Gomez holds back and has a word with Martinez. There is brief exposition here as Gomez summarized the men he has chosen, one speaks well, one plays a fine guitar and Martinez he says, “washes behind his

ears,” but Vamanos is something else. Gomez’s proprietary interest in *their* suit becomes evident and the way he voices his imagined fears to Martinez about Vamanos is comically histrionic without being too loud.

In the dim light of the apartment we have a partial view of the suit on its dummy in silhouette for the first time from behind with the men cautiously crowding near from the front. No longer shining but shrouded in mystery the atmosphere becomes heavy with anticipation and hope that now in their possession, it will still be as marvelous as when they beheld it in the store. The next shots are a series of close ups of the men gathered around the suit counting down five anxious seconds before Gomez pulls the light-string.

We see their faces illuminated but in a gentler light than before. “It’s even better, in your place, with your light bulb,” Martinez whispers. Lavishing metaphors of its whiteness, they are gathered around the suit speaking if it were a person asleep before they step aside for the camera to reveal a softly luminous white suit in full frame.

The cinematic build up to the unveiling of the suit moves from presenting it at its most ethereal before bringing it down to earth in Gomez’s humble apartment. At first unseen, it exists through exaggerated lighting and facial expressions before descending to a more earthly kind of marvelous. Illuminated from above by a single light, it is again reflected in the faces of its owners who now seek to capture it in words and personification. The cinema needs to make things visible and we come to see the suit as the men do, realized through its step by step exposition as an object imbued with a special aura and mystery. Finally when we see it fully presented by the camera, it is unusual but not other worldly. Whether springing from the belief and desire of its owners or from another source, expectations have been carefully built and we view the suit, henceforth spoken of as if possessing a life of some kind, with curious potential. Henceforth this is how the men speak of it, their comments express a sense of awe and respect for this garment they will share.

The group’s suit inspired reverie is broken by Vamanos’ return in party mode, blowing smoke from a cigar with a bottle in hand. Immediately falling under the spell of the suit, he wonders aloud who will be the first to wear it. He lunges for it and is restrained by the others while Gomez writhing with mixed feelings, wants no one to wear it; “it’s got to rest,” he insists. Villanazul stills the commotion by suggesting a wearing

schedule of one hour for each of them on this first night and they enthusiastically agree to this. Afterwards, it will be one night a week and they will draw straws for the other two days. He places Vamanos last on the schedule and he protests but Martinez smooths things over by telling him his after midnight time slot is the best. Already the group is beginning to function in a balanced manner.

XV DOMINGUEZ'S PARADE

Dominguez is first and the camera focuses on him in a low-level medium shot as he tentatively reaches down to touch the suit as if it were the Holy Grail. As he touches the shoulder we hear the sound of rushing wind as in the opening traveling shots and we see the effect as his hair is gently blown back before the scene ends in a white out. Next, there is quick series of insert shots: fastening a sleeve, buttoning the shirt, adjusting the collar and tie, then he is seen in full shot being helped into the jacket by his friends. They wax poetic on how clean the suit smells and “sweetly whispers” as it moves. Vamanos thinks he looks like a saint and when he takes an assertive step forward the group in awe says “olé.” Being the most self-confident of the group, he pauses at the open door and addresses his friends, “Listen to all those women out there...waiting,” before they excitedly urge him out. In Bradbury’s screenplay, the next sequence amounting to about half a page has Dominguez first go to a pawn shop to reclaim his guitar. The pawnbroker dazzled by the suit hands it over freely. This would be out of continuity with the director’s opening where Dominguez was shown playing his guitar on the street. But at any rate, it seems a wise omission since it might send an exaggerated message about the “power” of the suit. Thus, the “magic” of the suit remains throughout an open-ended question. The pawnshop would have also slowed narrative pace. Its rapid pace, moreover its rhythm or time-thrust within frames is a strong point of the film, and finally the following sequence is all about rhythm. As Dominguez enters a tenement building, Bradbury's screenplay proceeds with marvelous detail, precisely charting movement and effects in time and space including the lighting effects, a timed unlatching of doors in the building hallway and even sideways glances cast by the actors.

A well choreographed dance sequence is about to begin where Dominguez in “Pied Piper” fashion lures a group of women from a tenement building to dance in the street. The sequence begins with an overhead shot showing Dominguez’s shadow entering the frame first, followed by a full, low-angle shot of him in front of the building which he studies before “assaulting” it with a gentle guitar chord. He enters playing, ascends the stairs and a light is seen from inside the rooms coming through the space between the doors and the floor as he passes in the hallway. Soon doors open and it seems none of the ladies can resist. He leads them out of the building into the street in a conga line, recruiting more at street level as he plays and sings in English and Spanish.

Rick Altman notes that musicals, regardless of their semantic materials tend to “relate the energy of music making to the joy of coupling, the strength of community and the pleasure of entertainment” (Stamm and Miller 185). All these elements are certainly present; particularly a call to community, sheer pleasure and also a breaking of bonds and division. Dancing in the street playfully, what could be more carnivalesque? In this large group of dancers there are three or four that stand out.

First, is a bored housewife shown washing dishes while her beer-sipping husband sits hypnotized in front of the TV. Her husband does not even notice as she is the first to leave her apartment and join Dominguez in the hall, seductively slipping the dishwasher’s rubber cloves from her hands as enticingly as a burlesque dancer would. The music from the white suited figure brings instant transformation and this woman represents a release from drudgery. Next, we see a pretty, young girl holding a bouquet of flowers. Her parents standing behind her looking very content, but she is not, as she shoves the bouquet back to the young man (boyfriend?) standing in front of her and leaves to join the party that is forming. This looks like a breakdown of hierarchy and customs. Then, a teenage girl is shown helping her elderly grandmother do her knitting. She is holding the yarn one minute then she is gone with the grandmother in pursuit. There is a multi-ethnic moment as Dominguez descending the stairs passes by a black girl on the telephone who swoons and joins the group.

A conga line has formed and arrives at the square and breaks into groups of higher spirited more individual dance; a girl in the street catches the rhythm and is ready to break away and has to be restrained by her boyfriend. Dominguez and a small group do

some simple steps together and then without his guitar, he briefly partners with three of the dancers in turn. The gray-haired grandma comes to his side and succumbs, removing her black shawl and suggestively dances shaking her hips. We see the teenage girl, liberated from a boring evening with grandma, engage in some acrobatic dance. Finally, there is an overhead view of the scene from the perspective of Dominguez's colleagues watching and cheering from the apartment window. The clumsy Vamanos wants to join the party but Villanazule reminds him that "it's Dominguez's parade" and he concurs and enjoys the scene. More and more they seem like a peaceful set of brothers, respectful of individual differences yet strongly supportive and without jealous rivalry.

Dominguez performs and gets noticed, a successful entertainer, but what about his playfulness with women? This was also a playful variation of the "charming rogue womanizer" in that he was followed by ALL the women—young and old, married and single. What is in play is not so much sex as sensuality, joy and celebration by these women who seemed to be locked in or imprisoned by social roles and expectations. Thus, what might be viewed as sexist through the irresistible power of the male becomes more "feminist." As in Carnival celebration, all participate equally bringing a blurring and erasing of roles. After this impromptu street parade Dominguez returns to his friends looking satisfied and tired, without saying a word to them except, "who's next?"

XVI VILLANAZUL CROSSES THE RIVER

Villanazul backs off shyly and we see his friend's hands excitedly reaching after him to help him off with his clothes, but "not the beret," he insists. There is a soft fade to white that marks the transition between each suit wearing sequence then we see him fully dressed. His refusal to part with the beret shows his stubborn individuality and radical political/social stance, nonetheless he now seems reticent, "put me in a store window, I don't deserve to go out," he says. Perhaps as encouragement, Martinez tells him how good he looks and that he ought to see himself but they have no mirror. There can be no true mirror gazing yet where the seer becomes the seen, rather something less narcissistic will be presented. Villanazul, says they do have a mirror and asks his friends to stand

close. He laughs with delight claiming that he can see himself reflected in their eyes and we have a close up from his perspective of his friend's eyes and smiling faces, with Vamanos further away but leaning in. It would seem Villanazul needs encouragement of this kind for he pauses at the open door and plaintively asks, "What do I say?" This is troubling since up until now he has shown a talent for making lyrical statements which his colleagues even urge him to repeat.

The next sequence culminating in a public square or park was simplified and Villanazul's speech shortened by the director who elected to use a little cinematic magic realism to emphasize parts of the speech and give it greater overall impact. In sharp contrast to the previous dance number, the pace becomes deliberate and we see a troubled Villanazul walking alone across a bridge when he pauses and opines that he has no words. However, he looks down at the trickle of water below and "yes...oh yes," he utters and strides on with determination while the echoes of an unseen political rally we have begun to hear become clearer.

Bradbury's script describes the politician's words as "boilerplate" and elaborates no further. What the film allows us to hear is boilerplate indeed, but with a purpose. It stands in sharp contrast and serves as counterpoint to what Villanazul has to say to the same crowd. As Villanazul comes nearer there are cross cuts to the politician standing on a box speaking through a megaphone. It is simple "nativeist" talk about the "barrio" where they have "all they need, un polho in every pot." But he continues, "we all know there are really two cities, our beloved este Los Angeles, and that vast city of tall buildings on the other side of the river," but then he concludes saying "there is no other place than the barrio," where he proudly proclaims he was born and where he will be content to stay until he dies.

The camera follows close behind Villanazul as he moves and the crowd swiftly parts for him to arrive at the orator's box. We may conclude that it is the suit that allows him to slice through the crowd with such ease and he looks impressive moving through them in sharp contrast to their casual dress. The next scene also speaks to the power of the suit and is reminiscent of a scene from a very different film, *Ben Hur* (William Wyler, 1959). There the protagonist is fainting; dying it appears, from lack of water as he is being marched by a brutal Roman guard. A figure we do not see clearly but is

semiotically suggested to be Christ, gives water to the stricken man and when the guard, whip in hand, turns to see the man's "savior," the guard silently wilts, almost visibly shrinks in shame before our eyes and is silent. In Bradbury's screenplay Villanazul arrives and "the orator looks down as into the very sun itself." With the slightest nod from Villanazul his confidence evaporates and he silently steps down.

When Villanazul ascends the box to speak, eyes closed, the crowd cheers before he can say a word. Is it the suit speaking for him? After a moment, perhaps content that the first orator has been silenced the crowd starts to turn away. Villanazul, launches into his speech capturing their attention. "Got to swim across that river...when I get across. What then?" The camera cuts to Villanazul, now in broad daylight, in full shot walking in the dry riverbed, as he continues in this perspective, "There's no water in that river...but the river's in my head." A series of cuts alternate between Villanazul addressing the crowd, their reaction and different angles of him walking and delivering parts of his speech in the dry riverbed. Finally, just before he reaches the end of his address, he is shown speaking directly to the camera, then leading a large group over a bridge toward the downtown. Villanazul concludes his speech in the park to thunderous cheers and showers of confetti from a crowd he has just lead in a fantasy montage sequence, as a gentle fade to white ends his special moment.

When Villanazul ascended the box to speak, the camera closed in and slowly tilted up to give us a full, sustained view of the man in the eye-catching suit. The other speaker had stepped down and the crowd applauded before hearing a word so it would seem the suit helped Villanazul get a hearing, but he had to do the talking and it had nothing to do with the old radicalism of Lenin or Marx which he was earlier identified with. His ideas were "fresh" not overtly political but radical in the individual sense. His appearance in the suit alone was no more substantial than the superficial words of the orator he replaced and the crowd was turning to leave before Villanazul found something to say. It is doubtful that the suit somehow made him a better speaker, we have heard his poetic words before and what he said to the crowd seemed genuinely his, totally in line with his own situation, desire and the theme of the narrative. He urged the crowd to believe in themselves and step forward to be seen and heard in upscale West Los Angeles. The politician never looked or sounded more false when he invited the people to come to

his office to ask questions, adding he would answer “from my heart.” There is no doubt that Villanazul spoke from his heart.

During Villanazul’s speech the abrupt cutting, momentarily placing him in completely different spaces well emphasizes and illustrates his words, while the scene is still anchored in “reality” by cutting back to him speaking to the crowd and showing their reactions. It is a more effective strategy than concentrating on the speaker and the crowd alone and consistent with the narrative thrust. The cuts suggest a transcendence of self, in attitude and action showing movement instead of typical static speech making. This belief in self and boldness to move forward are presented as desirable and attainable, if only through a little encouragement from our friends and perhaps a better suit of clothes.

Regarding deviations from the script I am using, which are very few, I would remind the reader that it is not a final, shooting script. The director’s hand written notes anticipated further collaboration with Bradbury so the omissions and changes in the filmed version of the script could stem as much from Bradbury as the director. At any rate, this sequence in particular shows it to be a “worthy” adaptation, using cinematic technique to advantage and adding new twists while combining elements from *all* previous source texts in an imaginative and constructive manner. Villanazul’s speech needed the medium of film for its fullest expression.

From the park, we see a fade in from white to a medium shot of Villanazul at the door of Gomez’s apartment. That angelic breeze from nowhere that accompanies the suit at times gently blows some of the confetti from his suit as he rejoins his friends. Interestingly he removes his beret momentarily for the first time, allowing more confetti to fall at his feet. Looking overwhelmed with surprise yet delighted, the poet/philosopher is again without words and there is a long pause before we hear “who’s next?” The pace picks up again through the most rapid dressing scene where through the still open door we see Martinez, already partially undressed run into the frame. The door closes and a moment later he exits fully dressed. Of course we know where he is headed.

XVII LOOKING FOR JOSÉ MARTINEZ

This is the shortest suit-wearing episode and perhaps the most important part of Martinez's story is revealed when he has rejoined his friends. Here, Bradbury's dialogue and detailed description of the action run just under six pages and are filmed *exactly* as written. For example, Martinez is now seen in the street and the sequence begins with camera direction and blocking:

The camera runs with him, ahead of him, behind him accelerating his pace...Until he jolts to a halt and lifts his gaze up the side of the building. The camera, his eyes find where the beautiful young woman should be. He gasps. The window is empty! ... Martinez looks down and gives order to his attire. "Okay, suit. Bring her to the window." ...He mutters, eyes closed, opens them, gestures like a magician. Nothing in the window. Shaking his head, he is about to turn away when he stops, looking up a final time, and his eyes flare. There is the smallest motion in the shadows behind the window. Martinez whispers feverishly. Yes! (a beat) Si! (a beat) Yes!

I risk the tedium of quotation to give an idea of how precisely Bradbury had elaborated the sequence. There is little need for further description other than to comment on the variation of the shot, reverse-shot technique the director uses to photograph the two characters. Celia Obregon, the object of Martinez's interest is viewed at varying distances but always centered. However, the natural vertical and horizontal lines of the street where Martinez is standing are forced into unstable diagonals suggesting imbalance, tension and transition for the character as viewed. Moreover, the camera looks down on him from above in a closer shot than Celia's perspective would permit. The camera looks almost directly down on him. Celia is viewed naturalistically, but Martinez is viewed from a more artificial perspective making him appear vulnerable and less significant. This mirrors his insecurity further shown in the superstitious way he wishes for the powers of the suit to bring Celia to the window. He speaks to the suit, and what follows appears that the suit is somehow acting upon the visible world in response to its wearer speaking. Martinez is the only one who makes a particular request of the suit

while all the others openly anticipate what might happen when they wear the suit, they never “ask it” to do anything for them except make them look good.

For this encounter Bradbury used the dialogue (and monologue) from his play, wisely cutting some of it avoiding the unreal stiltedness of spoken poetry. Therefore, he still leaves the impression that Celia’s interest was awakened by the man wearing the suit and his smile. He doesn’t need the suit to come calling again. This trimming of dialogue is better suited for the more naturalistic medium of film without entirely negating the possibility of the suit containing a little magic. However, the main point of interest is when they exchange *and* repeat each other’s names as they make a date for next week as their scene together closes. When he leaves, a delighted Martinez visibly “thanks” the suit for this good fortune, patting the sleeves and brushing the lapels. The camera perspective shifts immediately to a ground level full-shot, naturalistically situating him in joyous freedom as he spins, jumps, shouts and crows like a rooster. The magic he has attributed to the suit takes a realistic turn as he returns to his colleagues, and although finally noticed by the girl of his dreams he has gotten even more than he bargained for.

He has been named by Celia, his full name -- José Martinez (the only member of the group to have a full name) but after being named, he no longer recognizes himself as he has been. He enters the apartment in triumph carrying himself in a bold manner exclaiming, “I’m looking for José Martinez!” Villanazul, addresses him as “José” asserting, “you are Martinez.” He replies, “No, no, Martinez is gone. In his place...who knows.” Vamanos says, “He’s drunk!” but Martinez responds to this, addressing them all saying:

With the suit! With life! Us all together. Tonight. Laughing! And getting in and out of the coat, the pants, again, again, and us feeling more drunk, without drinking, eh? And here I am, so tall, so pure, like one who gives orders and the whole world grows quiet and moves aside. Martinez, where is he?

He has discovered, as the others seem to later, that the “magic” of the suit lies in the “*communitas*” it has fostered through their sharing it. Moreover, it is bringing out the vibrant individuality latent in each of them, but unrealized before the suit brought them together. Each shines individually because they are together. Wearing the suit not only helped Martinez get noticed by the girl of his dreams, but it has given him something

more essential and lasting—genuine self-confidence. Martinez probably experiences the greatest transformation of any of them from wearing the suit.

The only deviation from this section of Bradbury's screenplay comes in the "mirror scene." Instead of Villanazul adjusting "a three-way mirror" they behold themselves in a makeshift creation by Vamanos. From among the junk he has collected and carts around, he has constructed a kind of mosaic "mirror" from reflective pieces of metal and glass fragments. Just as the suit made Martinez visible to Celia and she repeated his name back to him, the mirror gives him his reflection but only together with his friends as they crowd around. The fragmented nature of the mirror creates an effect where all are reflected together and separately at the same time. The muse visits Villanazul again as he says, "So... see...There, a thousand, a million Gomezes, Dominguezes, Martinezes, Vamenoses (he chimes in) ... march off in white armor, away down the line, reflected, again and again, indomitable, forever!" The others ask him to say it again, but perhaps feeling the gravity of the moment, he finds he cannot speak. His lyrical interpretation of what they actually see drives home how the suit brings out each one's individuality so they may come together as a group. The marginalization of Vamanos has also been disappearing making the group more complete. Who's next? Martinez whispers. They all shout Gomez as he throws his jacket in the air; fade to white.

XVIII GO, GOMEZ GO

Fade in to a fully dressed and very content looking Gomez, but still with his toothpick, a sign of his craftiness and desire to be a big man. The atmosphere has gone from celebration to mourning as Gomez whirls around and asks the others how he looks. There is an insert shot of a bus ticket cradled in the palm of his hand. The others do not see this but feel the end may be near as the camera pans from Gomez's perspective, to rest upon each anxious face in the room. He seems guilt ridden and at the door says "goodbye...I mean... see you later." Particularly stricken is Villanazul; and further strengthening the notion that he is Gomez's conscience, puts his hand lightly over Gomez's heart imploring him to "Go, with God," and the camera pans to show each of

the others murmur the same. Gomez gently removes his friend's hand from his chest and slips out the door followed by another view of sad, pensive faces¹⁴². The camera cuts to Gomez in the street below the apartment and over his shoulder high above, the faces of his friends stare down at him and it makes him squirm. He is alone in the street, the mariachi band standing nearby is silent, but we hear a gentle, sad soundtrack.

This sequence is an example of how using all the tools of cinema, the director is able to drastically shift tone and mood from scene to scene. It is noteworthy that we accept these abrupt changes as a natural part of the story, fully stemming from character and situation. These shifts never seem forced or artificial and we do not get the feeling we are being manipulated.

What follows is a remarkably well executed and imaginative scene unlike any I can recall seeing in the movies. It is not uncommon for paintings or posters to “accuse” or “attack” a character through what they represent, a pointing finger, or a hearty laugh for instance, but an interesting variation is about to occur. Moving along the deserted streets, ostensibly on the way to the bus terminal his only “company” are the various street murals depicting characters and scenes belonging to Latino culture and history. He pauses under a large mural containing four Latin faces that transform into the likeness of the men he is about to betray. As the camera shifts from one face to the other Gomez hears the cautioning whispers of each of his comrades in turn-- “remember your friends... Gomez; go with God.” Is part of the suit's tailored magic for Gomez an arousal of auditory and visual hallucinations, or does the suit somehow amplify his inner struggle of conscience? Covering his ears does not stop the reverberations in his head and he runs off and we next see a very upset Gomez at the station about to board a bus.

Surrounded by people with the simple dress and air of Mexican immigrants including women with small children or babies in their arms, Gomez stands out in the white suit and appears to be struggling mightily as steps into the bus. A cut to the other side of the bus allows us to hear the door close and when it pulls away no one is there. He must have left, but in a case of the camera's transcendence of physical space mirroring the kind of personal transcendence the suit brings about, the next cut shows Gomez at the

¹⁴²There is a close up of a meditative, actually on the verge of tears, Villanazul who after a moment utters, “God.” He really seems to have assumed a desperate attitude.

door of his apartment to the relief and surprise of his friends. Uncharacteristically subdued, and in complete honesty he surrenders the bus ticket, saying he “found it” and suggests someone turn it in so with the money maybe they can buy “a nice vanilla hat to go with the suit.” Gomez is finally humble and not sure how the gang is going to react. Dominguez snatches the ticket from his hand and with a disgusted look passes it to Martinez, and finally to Villanazul, who takes a long look at it before shaking his head and beginning to laugh. The one most suspicious of him all along, Gomez’s “conscience” Villanazul, through laughter has giving the others permission to forgive (and maybe trust) Gomez. They all cheer, pat him on the shoulder and shake his hand. A transformation has taken place as he goes from blushed with shame to new joy.

Gomez is the only one to give up a dream (besides the price of a bus ticket) while wearing the suit, but because of it he is beginning to experience a truer fulfillment of his dreams. Gomez has come to understand the suit is not meant to be worn by one person alone. Forgiveness is not always easy to give or receive but Gomez has accepted it fully and as personal affirmation. It was especially transformative because Gomez did not assume their forgiveness. Therefore, he is freer to exercise his implicit leadership of the group, somewhat balanced by Villanazul. Moving to another place with that suit would probably have benefited him somehow, but sacrifice is essential for leadership. Gomez represents the theme of harmony born of sacrifice—no El Paso, and he later takes a beating for one of his friends, so in overcoming his selfishness he is prepared for something nobler later. However the spell is broken again since it is finally Vamanos’ turn.

XIX THE RED ROOSTER

If Gomez was a loose cannon, then Vamanos is anthrax. The other four *could* find an excuse to keep him from wearing the suit and hold him back as they did in the beginning, but they are all honorable now and there is a sense that if the magic is to continue, it must be shared equally. In spite of the shifts and reversals of mood and pace along the various suit-wearing episodes, yet in good cinematic fashion, the narrative

trajectory has been rising to this point. With *Vamos*, we have been expecting a little mayhem and broad comedy and we surely get it. However, as Raymond Durnat observed: “Comedy, having an aura of irresponsibility, and being “tactfully tactless,” if it is to exist at all, can often claim a freedom in some ways greater than that of “serious” drama” (*Crazy Mirror* 30). Indeed, silly as some of the following incidents are, they provide a base for some real poignancy and seriousness that could hardly materialize without a little clowning. Comedy “redeemed” through casting a light on serious values or feelings usually carries the bite of satire which works through ridicule and a sense of “superiority.” I think it admirable to forego the sting of satire while highlighting values within comedy as broad and good natured as found in *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*. Finally, any effort to describe the broad humor in the following sequences must fall woefully short of its actual effects when played out on screen. Nonetheless, some exposition is warranted because the narrative benefits from imaginative, well-executed, fast paced action and comedy.

Gomez’s terrified reaction to the very idea of passing on the suit he is still wearing to the filthy *Vamos*, bottle and cigar in hand, is comic. “Fire-eater! Pig! You didn’t wash. Or even shave! Compadres (as the camera shifts to the open door of a dingy bathroom) the bath.” *Vamos* thinks it will be his death and burial and leads them all on a merry chase around the apartment until they catch him and peel off his clothes. As they are ready to hurl him into the tub, Gomez asks when he last took a bath. “1991,” he replies— “no, 1989.” We see the men going to work on him in silhouette on the bathroom wall as he protests, “No, hey, that brush. My hair! My armpits, no! My hearing is destroyed. What’s that? A razor! Cut my throat, it’s quicker!” The next scene is of muddy water draining out of the bathtub¹⁴³.

After this baptism by immersion, *Vamos* is “reborn” in the suit. Standing with his back to the camera we see the others over his shoulder, amazed beyond words. Turning to behold himself in the mirror his expression passes from incredulity to contentment. Again it is up to Villanazul to capture the moment in words:

¹⁴³ On the occasions I have viewed the film with other people, this scene has never failed to provoke laughter.

He of whom it is said that when Vamenos walks by, avalanches itch on mountaintops, flea-maddened dogs dance on their muddy paws, and locomotives belch forth their blackest soots to be lifted in flags to salute him. Ah, Vamenos! The world sizzles with flies. And here you are, a huge, fresh-frosted cake!

Vamanos is anxious to leave but Gomez hands a pad and pencil to Villanazul to write down the rules for wearing the suit. They all chime in with their rules but last, and foremost, he is not to go near The Red Rooster Café. A moment after he slips out the door a loud tearing sound is heard. They open the door to see him standing there with a cloth in hand that he rips again. Vamanos laughs, “if you could see your faces,” he says before running off. From the window the gang watch him causing a minor accident when crossing the street and already breaking “the rules” he picks up and begins puffing on a cigar he found in the gutter. He is going in the direction of The Red Rooster. Villanazul wants to buy back Vamenos’ part of the suit but they hardly have a dollar between them.

The next shot is a cut to the nervous men in the street in front of The Red Rooster. It’s a rough place and the bouncer throws a man into the street in front of them as they enter. The café is packed with people dancing to raucous music. In the center of it all, smiling at the universe and dancing madly with three young girls and with a taco, glass of wine and cigar is Vamanos. The towering Ruby Escardillo with the jealous boyfriend that he was warned to stay away from soon enters to dance with Vamanos who almost panics because of her size. Bradbury’s script describes the scene as it was filmed: “She collides with him. The wine spills further. The cigar showers sparks all about. Ruby takes a bite of the taco and crushes Vamanos so his head vanishes in her bosom.” The gang sees that she is crushing Vamanos *and* the suit. The music stops as Ruby’s massive boyfriend “Toro” appears. In a moment Gomez leads the group to defuse the situation with the manic energy you would see in an old Marx Brothers comedy. One of them takes away the cigar, and another the wine and taco while Gomez steps in to dance Ruby away from the terrified Vamanos.

Toro moves in and takes hold of Vamanos and the action goes into slow motion. Gomez steps in and asks Toro not to hit Vamanos but him, which he does—twice. The others throw themselves at the giant in an effort to subdue him and it takes on the air of a kinetic ballet before Villanazul breaks a chair over Toro’s head and he goes down,

miraculously turning Vamanos loose without tearing the suit. In slow motion the incident takes on a dream-like quality while it allows the viewer to better appreciate the struggle and the punishing blows Gomez's takes. They rush him outside and it would seem the crisis has passed until he hears the siren call of a woman across the street. Vamanos, realizing he has still got five minutes of "suit time" leaves his enraged friends to pursue the lady who thinks he "looks so good in that suit." While he is crossing the street Toro appears in a car complete with a pair of horns attached to the front and tries to run him down. In every suit wearing episode, each of them (except Martinez) keeps a personal accessory: Domingues, his guitar; Villanazul, his beret; Gomes, his toothpick. Now we see Vamenos on the run in his dirty tennis shoes. Swinging on the pole of a street light he escapes Toro and his female admirer in surprise and awe says "olé." There is a brief cut to the mariachi band who strike up the call of the bull fight. Vamanos now swings his jacket like a cape as Toro makes another pass. Vamanos is presented from ground level, the camera tilting up to show him with arms spread outward in victory. Before he can join his friends Toro appears again unexpectedly and Vamanos (in slow motion) jumps up, balancing on the car before flipping off the back and landing in a heap of empty boxes and trash. Not sure if he's alive or dead, Vamanos is concerned about the suit, which has worked its "magic" in saving him from a beating and now a hit and run.

The suit is in perfect condition but an ambulance is on the way and thinking fast, Vamanos has his friends help him out of the suit for fear the paramedics will cut it off of him. Indeed, they do cut his pants to reveal a broken leg but he has exchanged clothes with Martinez just in time. At a loss for an explanation, Vamanos tells the paramedics he fell "chasing a woman" and the gang is proud of his quick thinking and fine lie in the moment. They cart him to the ambulance and he asks if they are mad (angry), haltingly asking if "he can still be in the gang?" They do not know how to answer and he starts making promises to give up smoking, stay away from The Red Rooster and even give up women. Making an effort toward reconciliation Villanazul utters, "Who's mad?" Then, Martinez, approaches and gently tells Vamanos not to promise anything. Villanazul decides to go with him in the ambulance and the others follow with Gomez last and finally ordering Martinez to get out of the street and get the suit home. The camera lingers on Martinez for a moment alone in the street, so content to be in the suit again.

All the manic slapstick has served to illustrate the obvious. The suit, it would seem is indestructible as long as the men value it and each other. Wearing the suit did not change Vamanos, it just made him more “Vamanos” than ever, but he has found a dream he is willing to sacrifice for in being part of “the gang.” Moreover, Vamanos has been the one to unite the group in action of self sacrifice instead of the pursuit of their individual dreams. The group has become more fully united through the strain Vamanos put on them. They not only took a risk on his behalf but extended forgiveness and acceptance through Martinez’s words of “don’t promise anything” and then accompanying him to the hospital.

XX IT WILL NEVER BE THE SAME

The final sequence begins and ends with the suit. There is a close up of it being ironed, “There, cleaned and pressed. White as a gardenia. Sharp as a razor,” Gomez concludes. The camera backs up for a full shot of the scene on Gomez’s roof which he offers to his friends suggesting they all sleep. The roof is appropriate for the final cinematographic plan taking in the suit and the group together. The men are all present with the suit at their center just as when they first brought it to Gomez’s apartment. However, in these final scenes, the roof transmits a sense of freedom, unexplored space and especially expanded vision because of the horizons it offers. Like the suit, the roof belongs to no single individual nor is it exclusively inhabited by anyone. Concerning the open/closed paradigm, the film world has never seemed more “open” in every sense. The final scenes speak for themselves. Martinez, still standing, reflects on how his life has changed since seven o’clock—now he has friends, a place to stay and clothes. The camera passes over each man in turn as he speaks, “When I wear this suit I know I will run the world like Gomez. Play the guitar like Dominguez. Talk fine like Villanazul. Run fast...like Vamanos. So tonight I am Gomez, Dominguez, Villanazul and Vamanos, everyone.” Gomez asks if he is going to sleep, but a pensive Martinez adds. “I was just thinking. If we ever get rich, it’ll be kind of sad. Then we’ll all have suits and there won’t be no more nights like tonight. It’ll break up the old gang...it...it’ll never be the

same...after that.” The camera passes over the reclining men’s faces as the words sink in. After a moment, Gomez repeats Martinez’s last words uttering “after that,” carefully, without a rising or descending intonation. His echo is not just an agreement, but suggests that they will probably never “get rich,” but already carries an air of nostalgia for the passing moment, recognizing that things will probably never be the same anyway. Notable is the fact that a poor character has just stated that it would be sad if he, or his friends got rich. I have never heard a line even remotely like this delivered by a poor character in any film.

The camera drifts up and away to take in the scene of the sleeping men with the suit on its dummy in their center. A gentle, sad Mexican song plays using a male chorus. The camera comes in for a close shot of the suit. The technique lends a certain dignity to the suit enabling us to see it with the same magic the men have imbued it with, and it is an appropriate ending because without the suit there would be no narrative, or at least a very different one. After final credits rolled to the music of the dance scene and before a final fade to white, the film ends by repeating an earlier shot, a little longer now, of Villanazul leading a large group across a bridge towards the towers of downtown Los Angeles.

XXI CLOSING COMMENTS

In summary, the perceptive detail of Bradbury’s screenplay shows an uncommon cinematic sense, which director Stuart Gordon recognized as out of the ordinary. Most of Bradbury’s script was filmed in the same detailed manner in which he wrote it. The film certainly benefited from the co-participation of Bradbury and Gordon, each of whom had previously staged the story. As an adaptation and aside from any questions of “fidelity” it could be considered successful since it contained the “repetition without replication” that would be welcomed by a spectator familiar with the source text, and was truly “cinematic,” not just filmed theater. The film allowed its source(s) to “body forth” in fine fashion. That is, the film combined elements from all the previous incarnations of the text with imaginative aural, visual presentation and good performances. For a spectator unfamiliar with the source text(s) it would stand out, at the very least for its novelty.

As Bazin observed, we are living in a “reign of adaptation,” with fantastic texts in particular open to being reimagined. Think of Jack Finney’s 1954 novella “The Body Snatchers” already filmed four times since 1956 each with a varying take on its source text. Anything is possible, but apart from a very radical alteration, it is difficult to envision a more satisfying adaptation of its source text than Gordon and Bradbury’s *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*. As typical of much of Bradbury’s work it was simple enough to please a child while still being entertaining and edifying for adults. In one of the few critiques in print, Mike Resnick speaks of Bradbury and *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*:

I knew that he was a master of sentiment, and of terror, and of the evocation of childhood, and of wonder—but until I saw this movie, I never knew that he (or anyone) could produce such out-and-out totally unselfconscious charm. You are captivated a minute or two into the film, and you never want it to end, though it ends at exactly the right moment on exactly the right line (Mark Morris ed., 184).

I fully agree. Indeed it is a captivating film drawing the spectator in from the opening moments while briskly running to a fine conclusion without a misstep or a dull moment. Aside from showing Bradbury’s artistic range, the narrative gives ample proof of his ability to touch upon humanistic values and moral points with subtle dexterity through comedy and character interaction. Nothing is heavy handed and the little “speeches” we do get seem realistic enough, being emotionally based on the experience of the characters.

Resnick (and others) praised the movie’s soundtrack, thinking it merited a CD release. As I stated earlier, the soundtrack had great variety and while never obtrusive, contributed greatly to the overall effect of the film. It mixed seamlessly with the “source music” that we see and hear on the street which only made the narrative space seem more real and alive. Stuart Gordon’s creative filming did more than “open up” the narrative, but gave it a touch of the appropriate magic while keeping it grounded in a neighborhood reality.

The late comedian Groucho Marx commented: “There are all kinds of humor. Some is derisive, some sympathetic, and some merely whimsical. That is just what makes comedy so much harder to create than drama; people laugh in many different ways, and they cry only in one” (Eastman 336). I would add that comedy is difficult to create in film

since it should emerge from context without seeming “forced” or “staged.” Humor comes from being “in fun,” those that receive it should ideally do so in the same spirit, so humor's values are similar to those possessed by play. Even the term “joke,” like “comic” and “ludicrous,” if traced to their sources are more closely related to high spirits rather than humor. “High spirits” were manifest in the pace and enthusiasm with which the film was played and the viewer could enter into this. Also, if comedy is a dislocation of drama, then its spirit depends upon the dramatic values that underpin this incongruity. *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* has the story values to engage us while giving us the permission and freedom to laugh. Admittedly, some of its humor is “broad” but it succeeds without vulgarity or cruelty; many films aiming for “comedy” miss the mark entirely.

However, the limited critical attention it received was not uniformly positive. The trade paper, *The Hollywood Reporter* viewed it unfavorably as a “very broad, rather hokey exercise in slapstick whimsy (it) was produced with videocassette release in mind, and heavy Disney promotion will sell a few tapes. But the pic’s lukewarm appeal for both kids and adults renders theatrical release unwise.” In general release against “bigger”, mainstream films it may not have fared well but this does not diminish the value of the film or its uniqueness.

On the other hand, writing for *The New York Times*, Peter M. Nichols while recognizing most direct to video films as “fodder” thought that *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* stood out. “Despite some unfavorable advance rumblings, this gentle adaptation of the story by Ray Bradbury is a keeper, catching the fantasist's lyrical twists and turns with sublime good humor.” Being a direct to video release the film did not gain a great deal of attention but the overwhelming majority of criticism it has received, mostly posted on line is favorable. It is a well made film that deserves a wider audience¹⁴⁴. Although, there have been many excellent animated features in recent years that are truly “family fare,” delighting children and adults alike, *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* stands apart for presenting real human characters in a real life setting which one may identify with.

Especially during the latter part of his career, Ray Bradbury was often asked how

¹⁴⁴For example on the popular website “Rotten Tomatoes” TWICS garnered an 80% “fresh” rating, only 2 percentage points below that of *Fahrenheit 451*.

he managed to maintain his optimism in spite of the darker, tragic aspects of the human experience he often explored. He routinely responded that he did not believe in optimism, rather “optimal behavior.” One could hardly cite a better example of this than the characters of *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*.

Chapter 6

BEHOLD THE DARK CARNIVAL: SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES

“There are smiles and there are smiles. Learn to tell the dark variety from the light...and men do love sin well, how they love it, never doubt, in all shapes, sizes, colors and smells...For being good is a fearful occupation; men strain at it and sometimes break in two.” Ray Bradbury, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*

“The best way to drive out the Devil, if he will not yield to texts of Scripture, is to jeer and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn.” Martin Luther

I INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Published in 1962, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* was actually Bradbury’s first full-length novel. Although it bears similarity to the “weird tales” he was writing in the 1940s, his unpublished 1948 short story “The Black Ferris” was the seed for the later novel. This earlier story provided the pivotal point of the later novel where the boys discover the evil of a traveling carnival and become the hunted ones. Bradbury would publish five more novel length works, *Green Shadows*, *White Whale*¹⁴⁵(1992), a trilogy of detective fiction *Death is a Lonely Business* (1985), *A Graveyard for Lunatics* (1991), *Let’s All Kill Constance* (2003) and *Farwell Summer* (2006), a “sequel” to *Dandelion Wine* utilizing the remaining pieces of the draft novel from which the *Dandelion Wine* stories had been taken a half-century earlier. At present (2017), *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (SWTWC) has been his last novel to receive extended critical attention and wide, continuing readership. SWTWC is considered one of the major, novel length works forming a base upon which the author’s reputation rests. Darkly poetic, it is recognized as a key text within the horror/fantasy genre, and since its release as a major motion picture by the Disney Studios in 1983 it has received the most lavish treatment of any of

¹⁴⁵ This work contained several previously published short stories mainly stemming from the author’s time in Ireland writing the screenplay for *Moby Dick* (John Houston, 1956). The detective novels contained autobiographical experiences from his early years as struggling writer in Los Angeles from the late 1930s to early 50s.

Bradbury's filmed works to date¹⁴⁶. Interestingly, it evolved through plans for a graphic novel before becoming a screenplay and finally a book. While neither his best known, nor most acclaimed novel, Stephen King considered it his best and Eller and Touponce regard it "the most filmic of his major fictions" (Eller and Touponce 256) and perhaps the central work of his authorship.

It was Bradbury's last major work harkening back to the kind of stories he published in his first collection, *Dark Carnival* (1947), which Stephen King praised as *The Dubliners* of American fantasy fiction. *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, its title lifted from the over-the-cauldron murmurings of the witches in act IV of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, contains a considerable amount of hyperbole and repetition for emphasis, typical of children (Mengeling138) and thus a case of style contributing to meaning since most of the tale is told through the point of view of two young boys. Likewise, its bursts of poetic concentration seem to serve less for visualization in a literal sense than to *evoke* an aura of magic that surrounds the boys. David Mogen observed that SWTWC belongs to a rarely-seen genre, "autobiographical fantasy (or fantastical autobiography)" (112). However, the book cuts across genres, by turns a coming of age tale, a fable and a dark fantasy that at times dips into pure horror¹⁴⁷.

After the well received publication of *Dandelion Wine* in 1957, Bradbury's editors were expecting the remaining *Summer Morning*, *Summer Night* stories to finally emerge as his next novel, a continuation of *Dandelion Wine* in the same locale of Green Town and set in the following year, 1929. They expected this narrative to leave out many of the nostalgic and sentimental elements of the previous work and this did occur, but in a different kind of novel distinct from the *Summer Morning*, *Summer Night* stories. It does take place in Green Town and Bradbury seems to have moved the time line ahead a little and the sunny, carefree summer days have ended and the darker days are definitely

¹⁴⁶ Based on his short story of the same name, the poorly received *A Sound of Thunder* (Peter Hyams, 2005) had a larger budget but not relative to *SWTWC*'s early 1980s budget.

¹⁴⁷ I would cite H.P. Lovecraft's rather thorough definition of "horror:" "A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space" (15). This is a near perfect description of the terror that stalks *SWTWC*.

approaching. The story is bathed in darkness and much of the action takes place at night. From the ever-threatening, stormy skies to the names of the main characters, Jim Nightshade, Will Halloway (evoking Halloween) and of course, Mr. Dark, darkness in some form is always lurking.

Some have observed that what Dickens did for Christmas with *A Christmas Carol*, Bradbury has done for Halloween with SWTWC. That is, producing a work infused with the spirit of the holiday. Now is not the time to delve into detail of the narrative themes but casting light on it in relation to his earlier Green Town work also focusing on two boys, *Dandelion Wine* (DW) may be constructive. While the former work is more episodic and closely autobiographical, the latter is more fantastic, linear, and details more incidents with much fuller character development and conflict, including conflict among all the characters who come into battle against the Dark Carnival. The “coming of age” issue is dealt with but there is nothing smooth and lyrical about it as presented in DW. The passage from innocence to experience runs a serious risk of being corrupted by the “invasion” of maleficent forces from outside the community. This represents a big difference, and Will and Jim can be said to have aged prematurely in the novel because the horror of the carnival forces them to grow up fast to deal with its deceptions. In this dense narrative Bradbury did well to present struggle clearly at all levels, within and between characters. There is added realism and dramatic development as they must come to grips with themselves before they eventually stand together against powerful outside forces.

The outside entry of malevolent forces into Green Town is typical of a horror narrative. The evil was not dormant in the town waiting to be awakened or invited by a careless act, rather something wicked *did* come, and they discovered it had passed through town decades earlier too. But contrary to the powerlessness and doom usually experienced by protagonists in that kind of tale, Bradbury veers in the direction of fantasy, allowing his fallible protagonists appropriation of some wonders too, or as Charles observes “sometimes good has weapons and evil none.” The tale is not couched in traditional fairy tale form but contains a fair dose of folk expressions and beliefs, notably the “Dust Witch’s” incantation invoking the dragonfly as “the devil’s darning

needle” that may sew up the lips (and eyes) of the boys, and the idea that the last sight of a lightning victim will be somehow engraved upon his/her eye.

Further anchoring the tale in more contemporary landscape are the supernaturalized elements and characters from a familiar, traveling carnival sideshow. The carnival’s entertaining diversions and curiosities assume sinister, life-threatening proportions and Bradbury chooses to present this terrifying transition through the relative innocence and wide-eyed wonder of childhood. Their nascent journey to adulthood has not yet eroded all the natural virtues the boys have; innocence being cardinal among them. At least they stand outside the vanity, fatalism and preoccupations that allow some of the town’s adults to fall victim to the carnival’s false allures. In both the novel and film, only the adult(s) with the fortitude to adopt something like a guileless, childlike trust are able to take a stand against the dark forces the carnival brings. For example, near the end of the narrative the boys are surprised that Will’s father, Charles, accepts what they have learned about the carnival because they “are only boys,” but he says that is the reason why he believes them.

There is nothing like the “warfare” or mutual antagonism between the youth and adults one finds in DW. Children are not seen as a “separate race” in SWTCS but adulthood seems to signal a loss of capacities to attend to and follow sensations, or an ability to perceive the world keenly and openly. Although a hard won wisdom that youth need to hear still belong to adults, adulthood represents a loss in terms of vitality and outlook that may cause them to fall into “childish” vanities and frivolities. Bradbury suggests that adults should retain a certain “childlike” outlook on life instead of making unrealistic, childish demands of life stemming from self-absorption. That is, it seems if adults can remain a little childlike, they are less likely to become childish.

For example, in DW, Mrs. Bentley is an older widow who through the artless but brutally frank prompting of the neighborhood children makes a radical break with the past, discarding and burning all her old mementos so she can begin living in “the eternal present,” finally sharing friendship and ice cream with the children. They tease her and they laugh together about her being an “old lady” who was *never* a little girl like them—not even “a million years ago.” It’s a charming and edifying episode. Then there is

Colonel Freeleigh,¹⁴⁸ a paradigm of richly contented old age. A cheerful, wonderful storyteller, this hundred-year old man is a “time machine” for the boys of DW. His stories attune them to the parade of life all around and Doug, the older boy of the story learns from the Colonel to take in and savor every moment and everything life brings with heightened awareness, straining to never forget a thing.

In terms of the older characters in SWTCS there is Miss Foley. Although she is still active, working as the boys’ school teacher, she is not able to deal satisfactorily with her age and is characterized as rigid and unable to adapt. This inability, perpetuated by her vanity and preoccupation with outward appearance allows her to fall victim to the carnival. At the center of the narrative is Will’s father, Charles Halloway, well into middle age and struggling with regret, longing and the prospect of getting older. He is hardly at peace and enjoying any of life’s memories unlike Colonel Freeleigh. Neither is his coming to terms with his age and the passage of time in any way similar to the relatively quick and smooth process experienced by Mrs. Bentley. Nevertheless, his hard-fought battle, and that is how it is presented, yields precious fruit. Indeed, Charles seems to be the character that changes the most, settling serious personal issues. Thus, the insights revealed about aging and life in SWTWC are much wider ranging and more profound than those in DW.

For instance, through his characters Bradbury presents meditation on the ironic tendencies of being in a hurry to grow up, then fighting growing old and yearnings for things that can never be. While no answers completely satisfy, Bradbury suggests a keen appreciation for the moment and acceptance of the inevitable passage of time as well as strategies of memory stabilized through love and loyalty. This contemplation of time and memory is not foreign to DW but *Something Wicked This Way Comes* engages these issues in a more profound and realistic manner, also containing serious meditation on the nature of good and evil and the paradox of how evil attracts the good.

Throughout the narrative appear polarities of “light and dark,” the “half good and half bad” or “the summer” and “autumn” found in people. While presented as an unsettling fact, the narrative suggests that recognition should bring acceptance instead of

¹⁴⁸ This character was inspired by Bradbury’s close friend and mentor, the renowned Renaissance art historian and attribution expert Bernard Berenson.

unhealthy obsession that can lead to paralysis. This is where the danger lies, but choices rightly made may lead one forward. *SWTWC* offers clues to how life might be lived yet without pretending to offer easy solutions.

Common to both texts are characters that look back with too much longing or are impatient for the future in detriment to the present. But *SWTWC* compares and contrasts the circumstances and desires of the children and adults to create a more in-depth exploration of childhood *and* the aging process that moves it far beyond the somewhat sentimental coming of age story that *DW* essentially is. As in many of the author's works, *SWTWC* takes a stand against isolated individualism, the dangers of being "unconnected." It insists that important private discoveries await us at all stages of life and that we should reserve laughter as a weapon against what is exclusively serious in life. Likewise, in recognizing "the fool" that exists in all of us, we will be better able to affirm and enjoy life. In both works Bradbury emphasizes the extreme importance of how we view and interpret figures and events in the world, which thus determine their ultimate influence over us. For the most part, Bradbury suggests figures, objects and events wield the power over us that we attribute or instill in them. However, in *SWTWC* this concept assumes a life and death importance.

Critical appraisal of the novel seems to have grown considerably over the years, with Stephen King's unqualified endorsement as an example, but its initial reception was mixed. Jonathan R. Eller, states that British critics were divided about Bradbury's departure from science fiction and cites Kingsley Amis' appraisal that "Deprived now of the discipline of science fiction and its pressures toward reality and reason, Mr. Bradbury has plunged bald-headed into a kind of California Gothic, with echoes of James Purdy and the Dylan Thomas' "The Map of Love" (Eller *Unbound* 193). On the other side of the Atlantic, some of Bradbury's peers in the genre like Charles Beaumont and William F. Nolan were uncomfortable with Bradbury's approach to the presence of evil. The way he chose to dispatch it did not seem convincing to them. Generally, those who viewed it within the narrower confines of the traditional horror genre were not well satisfied¹⁴⁹.

¹⁴⁹ These criticisms are emblematic of those that followed the author throughout his career. His refusal to ultimately bow to the tragic and negative led some to conclude his views were too idealized or "teddy bearish" while regardless of the genre he was writing in, he always managed to enrich it by turning expectations on their heads

However Gilbert Highet wrote a favorable review for the Book-of-the Month Club and Anthony Boucher writing for the *New York Herald Tribune* had a fuller appreciation of the unique scope of the novel, calling it “superb as pure fantasy fiction” (Eller and Touponce 285). David Mogan cites a negative *New York Times*¹⁵⁰ review by Orville Prescott who was a fan of Bradbury’s science fiction but found SWTWC “a bore,” overburdened by “purple prose” and insignificant in terms of the eternal conflict of good and evil. On the other hand, latter-day critics such as Gary K. Wolf had a more balanced opinion. While seeing it as “suffering from an artificially inflated style and barely controlled wealth of imagery and incident,” he thought it “generated power by sheer wealth of invention¹⁵¹.” Ray Johnson thought it was a fine showcase for the writer’s particular talents resulting in “a thoroughly polished work of entertainment” (104).

It is significant that the bulk of the negative criticism came from those like Amis and Prescott who appreciated Bradbury’s peculiar brand of science fiction but did not care for this work of fantasy. Their comments lead one to suspect they may have had some antipathy toward fantasy in general which brings to mind C.S. Lewis’ remarks that those who are not disposed to appreciate or understand the genre should refrain from criticizing it. However, some more attuned to the fantastic took issue with Bradbury’s mode of dispatching evil through good spirits and laughter, but in context it was only a hard earned victory in a never-ending war. SWTWC was realistic in the sense that evil was not set up as a straw man to be knocked over by exceedingly wise heroes or appropriation of a talisman channeling stronger magic. Many fantasy writers attempt to lend a moral aura to a tale detracting from it in artificiality, but Bradbury’s work was infused with it from the beginning. Moreover, he avoided preachy moralism using realistically fallible characters to show that moral imperatives demand certain kinds of courageous behavior; valid in the real world or a fantastic setting.

I find Wolf’s comments made more in terms of literary creation and style more constructive in critical terms. Although more invested in science fiction, he betrays no bias against fantasy or limiting notions of what fantasy should be like. An “inflated style”

¹⁵⁰ September 19th, 1962 in *Books of the Times*.

¹⁵¹ *Twentieth Century American Science Fiction Writers*: “Ray Bradbury,” 8:72-3.

and “barely controlled wealth of incident and imagery” may be legitimate criticisms but relative to the sense of wonder we expect to find in fantasy in the stream of Frank L. Baum, America’s first unabashed fantasist, this is not necessarily a serious flaw. Bradbury can be placed in this tradition not only for his use of Native American motifs and choosing children as focalizers, but also the hint of humor and greater confidence displayed in dealing with the impossible. I find Wolf’s belief that the work “gained power by sheer wealth of invention” more significant for a type of writing that thrives on invention and imagination. In a way Bradbury dealt with his mythopoetic materials originating from his own childhood experiences neither to debunk, nor analyze them but to give them new life while tying them to emotional truth. I believe Bradbury found the golden mean between stressing an underlying message and reveling in fantastic invention. He was more of an explorer of the possibilities of the marvelous than merely an exploiter of the same. The reaction of European publishers and critics favor the same reaction. *Something Wicked This Way Comes* rapidly gained a wide readership and was translated into French as early as 1966 (or before). It has been published in Portuguese and has surely been translated into Spanish and a host of other languages. It has directly influenced horror and fantasy authors like Stephen King and Neil Gaiman, and has repeatedly been referenced in popular culture and music.

II QUESTIONS OF GENRE

I have already mentioned that *Something Wicked This Way Comes* crosses several genres but I would seek to characterize it further, first by saying what it is not. It is not, strictly speaking, a Christian allegory as some have seen it. The supernatural beings here do not yield to symbols like the cross, the Bible, or even what is contained therein. The Scriptures have no effect on them and they are vanquished through other means. There is an exploration of the nature of good and evil in personal, even cosmic terms but “good and evil are transvalued by the book; it is not evil, but the inner phantasmagoria of fear that evil instills in people and feeds on, that is the focus of Bradbury’s thematics” (Eller and Touponce 284). There are elements like the fortune-telling Dust Witch that may feed

into superstition and a fear of “fate” and subjection to chance, and one may detect Jungian ideas in the “dark and light” halves emphasized in individual characters; one may also see Mr. Dark as a kind of “shadow” father, especially for Jim. But there is more to it than notions of movement toward “integrated” personality and the novel has no truck with Freudian notions of guilt.

The operative elements are obsession and the dynamics of temptation, revolving around the gullibility to accept false promises and desire for instant gratification of suppressed dreams. In large part, an aberration or manipulation of time comes into play where people desire to go back to recapture lost youth, or as in Jim’s case, pass forward to an imagined adulthood freeing him from an uncomfortable adolescence. As Mrs. Bentley observed in *Dandelion Wine*, “time hypnotizes” and characters’ fail to realize that their desperate desires may only come about through a kind of temporal displacement that would not bring contentment but cut them off from the vital connections they already have in life. Worst still, time stops for anyone entrapped by the carnival; victims fall into a miserable stasis (they are described as wax figures), exaggerated caricatures, intensified accumulations of their latent obsessions.

Stephen King did not see SWTWC as a nightmarish allegory¹⁵² or simplistic fairy story and because it eventually narrows down to the struggle for a single soul, chose to call it “a moral horror tale” (329) which seems reasonable. He appreciated the fact that Bradbury effectively interconnected the small-town American boyhood motif with ideas related to what Irving Malin termed “the New American Gothic.”¹⁵³ Here the universal forces collide in a microcosm like small, self-contained Green Town. Also the Gothic house (in this case the carnival) functions as a place of “confining narcissism,” where people grow inward (or become paralyzed) instead of outward because of a growing

¹⁵² There is nothing inherently wrong with allegory—it is a lot like adaptive practice, telling the same old stories in different ways. SWTWC certainly has been taken as allegory. I once came across a quite detailed exposition on the Internet of the book/film broken down for church youth group use. I think King’s adapted mini-series *The Stand* (Mick Garris, 1994) is highly allegorical, with the few thousand survivors of a “super flu” divided into “the sheep and goats” with a “Mr. Flag” actually a demon (who wants to bear a son) leading the bad guys and old, Bible spouting “Mother Abigail” guiding the good ones through dreams and visions. It is much more allegorical than SWTWC.

¹⁵³ Malin published *New American Gothic* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1962) and King cites an article where the concept is applied, “Waiting for the End: Shirley Jackson’s *The Sundial*, published in *Critique: studies in modern fiction*, vol.XIX, no. 3, 1978.

obsession with one's own problems. These obsessively inward looking people are the ones most at risk of entrapment by Cooger and Dark's Carnival.

Likewise the "bad place" of the older Gothic, usually seen by critics as the womb, has become a place giving rise to abnormal interest in or fear of the self; namely manifested through mirrors or any reflective surface. *Something Wicked This Way Comes* as novel and film contains a lot of mirror gazing that gets people into trouble, trapped or nearly so. This is what occurs to Miss Foley obsessively beholding her reflection at home and then in the mirror maze at the carnival. Brooding young Jim is almost "trapped" by the same mirror maze and for Charles, a series of reflections of a progressively older self, could very well have been the end for him. SWTWC fits well into the "New American Gothic" written in the early 1960s just as it was beginning to take shape. Moreover, it certainly fits into the great majority of post-war stories of terror that present normal, everyday people forced to stand their ground and fight malevolent forces in quotidian settings; better still Charles' triumph is an example of a victory of the weak over the strong.

III SPIRITUAL THEMES IN BRADBURY'S WORK

In an address near the end of his life (2006) at a church affiliated university¹⁵⁴ in California, an interviewer from the journalism faculty somewhat tentatively brought up the spiritual threads in the author's work. Bradbury actually laughed, quickly affirming that they were there because these are the same threads that make up the fabric of life. "It's about celebration," he continued "to life! as the Jews say." We quite often encounter spiritual themes in mythopoetic fantasy and science fiction works, Bradbury was familiar with many writers in this vein and at least one (or two) of them may have had an

¹⁵⁴ This was Point Loma Nazarene University outside San Diego. The Nazarene Church is a rather small denomination in the U.S. but has a considerable presence in some African and Asia countries and Brazil. It is what may be called a "high commitment" church with strong Biblical teaching and an active laity, and emphasis on higher education. I know it well since I was once a part of it. Their universities have turned out a number of successful and influential people, among them national radio commentator and best-selling author, James Dobson, at least one assistant secretary of the Navy and former Colorado senator Gary Hart, who distanced himself from his church background when making a serious run for the presidency in the mid 1980s. Hart and I even had one of the same theology professors.

influence on SWTWC, but I will discuss this later. I do not want to spend time in speculation but spiritual themes loom large in *Something Wicked This Way Comes* so it seems appropriate to touch on some of the author's thoughts about our place in relation to "the supreme being," which he did believe in, and prominent spiritual themes elaborated in selected, prior works which I will get to in a moment.

At the outset I want to make clear that Bradbury never identified himself as a Christian, although he did attend a Baptist church occasionally with his family when he was a child. If he were placed in the "Christian camp," so to speak, he would have wasted no time in tunneling his way out. He was attracted to aspects of different religions and regarding this he was fond of saying, "I'll take a little bit of this, some of that and maybe some of those," in fact, he said exactly this in his cited university address followed by affirmation of his belief in Darwin, Lamarck, (animals "wishing" themselves into new forms), and the book of Genesis, because "nothing is *proven*," he emphasized¹⁵⁵.

He amused his audience by recounting a writing assignment for the Smithsonian Institute that responded with 28 pages of criticism for his 30 page presentation. "What's wrong?" he asked and they said for one thing, you say the universe is 12 instead of 14 billion years old. "Prove it," he said, drawing laughs from the crowd. He reiterated the general theory that life emerged spontaneously out of the "primordial soup" of inanimate minerals and organic chemicals when struck by lightning "It just happened... now that's really a scientific explanation, isn't it? How come, how come? Well hell, just give me some lightning and I'll go make my own life¹⁵⁶. There's room to believe it all because you are the inheritors of a miraculous world".

He said he told the Smithsonian that what was wrong with their planetarium was that they were boring people, "teaching when they should be preaching." Now the audience was riveted when he passionately continued, insisting:

¹⁵⁵ All of Bradbury's quoted remarks are from the university interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UU51N2s3B78> (retrieved 24/7/16) and similar remarks can be found in various other interviews.

¹⁵⁶ Bradbury scepticism was more in tune with modern science that he may have realized. The origin of life is the Achilles heel of evolution. See Michael Denton's *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*; Adler & Adler, 1986. Or other recent books that deal with the same subject.

There's no use having a universe, billions of stars and a planet Earth—if there's no one to see it. You're here to celebrate. That's your business. God cries out to be saved and we are here to witness the miracles. You're going to be alive once. You're not coming back—you have one chance to *pay back*. Think about it You *owe* the universe—the burden of proof is in your lap and you've got to pay back—I demand it! If you're a cynic, I can't do anything for you, but if you do that you're going to have a good life.

Returning to his remarks about animals “wishing” themselves into other forms, and God crying out to be saved, the latter may be an echo from Nikos Kazantzakas'¹⁵⁷*The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises* that Bradbury had read around 1960. Kazantzakas' ideas were something of an elaboration and expansion of Bergson's concept of *Élan Vital* (as were animals “wishing” themselves into other forms) that I have mentioned in the chapter on *Fahrenheit 451*. However, Bradbury had come to an intuitive understanding of these ideas and they found expression in his prize-winning short story *Powerhouse* in 1947. Bergson's writings had an influence on Bradbury's thinking but as Jonathan R. Eller points out there were certain elements of *The Saviors of God* that Bradbury could not accept. “The language of the Bible echoed in Bradbury's stories and screenwriting, and he would always privilege the universal concept of Love as the greatest of all virtues even as his settled beliefs led him elsewhere. Love was the central concept instilled in his Midwest Baptist upbringing, and it would be the last word spoken as he was laid to rest” (*Unbound* 180-181).

I wish to return to Bradbury's ideas that we were put here to “celebrate” and “pay back” as “witnesses” to the marvel of the universe and that for this, the “burden of proof is in our laps.” It brings to mind an element of ancient Judaism. That is, for whatever reasons there may have been, God created us to acknowledge and worship Him and be witness to his mighty acts of creation and as many believe, in history as well. When a branch of Judaism evolved into Christianity with the coming of Jesus, Christian theologians refined these ideas based on Jesus' own teachings into the understanding that

¹⁵⁷ His Greek Orthodox fellowship moved to ex-communicate him but they never did. He said they wanted to give him a curse but he wanted to give them a blessing and his conscious was clear. He was best known for his novels *Zorba the Greek*, made into a 1964 film of the same name, by Michael Cacoyannis and *The Last Temptation* adapted in 1988 by Martin Scorsese as *The Last Temptation of Christ*.

God did not create us out of His need. He was not “lonely” since there is perfect unity and wholeness in the Trinity. Roughly, the idea follows that God creates because it is His nature to do so, just as an artist feels the need to express himself through his work. And that God created us out of His central attribute—Love. And that ultimately as expressions and objects of His love He hopes that we as created beings with free will, choose rightly. That is “get with the program,” so to speak, acknowledge Him, seek to know Him and celebrate this life He has given us mainly through loving others. In spite of Bradbury’s unorthodoxy, this still seems to be rather close to his ideas.

Bradbury was no Pantheist¹⁵⁸ as expressed in some Eastern religions, although one might detect notes of Transcendentalism, but he was never a moral relativist. For him evil existed, it was not merely an illusion and thus, seeking to make (and act) on right moral choices was always important to him and we see this *so* clearly in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Consequences of choice are inescapable and we must always choose. In his understanding of the “dark carnival” Charles Halloway comes to the conclusion that the worst thing about it is that “from them you get nothing for something. They make you empty promises” (198). In the spirit of St. Augustine, (*Confessions* 7:71) “I did not know that evil is nothing but the removal of good until finally no good remains” This is what the carnival does to its victims, it removes all the “good” from them until nothing remains. They become unreasoning “freaks” more like wax figures than humans. These people are not bad; they have normal, legitimate desires, unbridled or excessive, but they are not different from us. St Augustine in chapter 8 of his *Confessions* eloquently pinpoints “sin” in all its forms, as against God in that “we corrupt and pervert our own nature” and asked that He free us “of the chains we have forged for ourselves” (77). Aside from his lofty spiritual meditations Augustine was no frightened hermit in a monk’s cell, his will outstretched his performance and he was long (perhaps always) something of a divided man not reaching a settled peace with God until he was about

¹⁵⁸ Pantheism is the belief that God is not distinct from His creation but that everything we see composes an all encompassing god. Transcendentalism is a philosophy that arose in early 19th century America (Ralph Waldo Emerson was its great proponent) that stressed the inherent goodness of people and nature and that people are best when “self-reliant” and independent of previous masters and teachers. It emphasizes subjective intuition over objective empiricism and is similar to today’s ideas of “spiritual competency” espoused in some circles which eschews traditional spiritual writings and authority in favor of highly personal belief and application.

thirty-three (a ripe middle age for people in his day) perhaps not so different from Charles Halloway, “wrestling myself, two falls out of three...I found you can’t wait to become perfect, you got to go out fall down and get up with everybody else”(134). No need to delve into extensive citation or comparison here because Charles comes to *exactly* the same conclusions as Augustine and he pities those falling victim to Mr. Dark’s carnival because he can grab hold of the chains they have forged for themselves.

Touching on the spiritual threads in the author’s work, I begin with a story I have referenced in the previous chapter, *The Machineries of Joy*, dealing with a group of priests, quite different from one another but living in community and one of them is trying to come to terms with his irritation over his colleague’s fascination with the novelty of space travel, and his late night television vigils to follow it. “The rocket was getting ready, and Father Brian shut his eyes for a moment:

Forgive me, Jesus, he thought, forgive an old man his prides, and forgive Vittorini his spites, and help me understand what I see here tonight, and let me stay awake if need be, in good humor, until dawn, and let the thing go well, going up and coming down, and think of the man in that contraption, Jesus, *think* of and be with him. And help me, God, when the summer is young, for, sure as fate on the Fourth of July evening there will be Vittorini and the kids from around the block, on the rectory lawn, lighting skyrockets. All of them watching the sky, like the morn of the redemption, and help me, O Lord, to be as those children before the great night of time and void where you abide. And help me to walk forward, Lord to light the next rocket Independence Night, and stand with the Latin father, my face suffused with that same look of the delighted child in the face of the burning glories you put near hand and bid us savor. He opened his eyes (Bradbury, *Stories of 737-738*).

I have included this rather long citation mainly because I think it speaks for itself and I have never encountered anything like it in modern fiction. Bradbury’s priest utters the words “Jesus”, “Lord” and “God” several times in a heartfelt, conversational manner; he seems to *know* who he is speaking to. Prayer has been defined so many ways, but I like it explained as “the movement of our mind, heart and soul in which we confess our belief in God and his goodness. We ask him to manifest that goodness in answer to our

petitions¹⁵⁹.” We may note the structure of Father Brian’s prayer—he starts by asking forgiveness for himself (and his brother), then he asks for strength followed by a petition for the man in the rocket, before finally asking God to make him like a child before the glory of creation. It seems like a model prayer to me. Again, late in life, Bradbury commented that he might have been a good priest or minister. Perhaps that was justified; in 2001 he published *A Chapbook for Burnt-out Priests, Rabbis and Ministers*, containing poetry, fiction and essays.

Another of his short stories from 1949, *The Man*, was an interesting variation on the “take me to your leader” theme of extraterrestrial encounters. “The first rocket expedition to planet forty-three, in Star System Three¹⁶⁰” arrives and is hardly noticed by the inhabitants. A scout reports, “Captain, listen. Something big happened yesterday in that city. It’s so big, so important, that we’re second-rate—second fiddle. I’ve got to sit down.” He continues saying that a man had arrived, “healed the sick comforted the poor. He fought hypocrisy and dirty politics and sat among the people, talking, through the day”(Bradbury, *Stories* 262-263). The captain did not believe any of this thinking perhaps his rival explorer had arrived and would be back next week “to consolidate his miracles and beat us out in our contracts.” A reasonable assumption until he discovers that the two other exploration rockets had been caught in a cosmic storm and crash-landed.

Through a “universal translator” the captain speaks to the mayor of the city who tells him of the marvelous things that had happened and that “The Man” was gone and he had no idea where. The angry captain reaching for his gun called the mayor a “liar” and demanded to know where the man was. The mayor replied, “You’re very tired. You’ve traveled a long way and belong to a tired people who’ve been without faith a long time, and you want to believe so much that you’re interfering with yourself. You’ll only make it harder if you kill. You’ll never find him that way” (Bradbury, *Stories* 269).

Most of the crew decides to stay behind while the captain blasts off in search of “The Man” which the mayor lamented he would never find, perhaps on his trail but

¹⁵⁹ I copied this definition a long time ago and unfortunately I cannot cite the author, but I think it came from a Catholic priest.

¹⁶⁰ Bradbury’s use of “three” twice might have been a backhand reference to the Trinity. He also had a tendency to divide his longer works into 3 parts.

always arriving late. The mayor's counsel to the captain cuts to the heart of the story; a tired race, without faith, interfering with itself in quest of that faith, which is already accessible to any and all.

A better known story, included in *The Martian Chronicles* was *The Fire Balloons* (1950). Two priests head off to the new Martian colonies. Father Peregrine had written a little book: "The Problem of Sin on Other Worlds" and he was seen as "not too dogmatic for the task, a quick flexible man." His superiors thought Mars might be in need of a "good cleansing" since sin must have accumulated because it was twice the age of Earth. As they arrive the father prays, "Lord, we thank Thee for the journey through your rooms. And, Lord, we have reached a new land, so we must have new eyes. ... And there will be new sins, for which we ask the gift of better and firmer and purer hearts" (Bradbury, *Stories* 181). We like this open-minded, no-nonsense priest who briefly offers thanks and a petition to be equipped for the daunting task at hand.

Indeed, the settlers tell them there are two races left on Mars the one being pretty much dead¹⁶¹ with a few in hiding. The other—not quite human, luminous globes of light living up in the hills that act intelligently but the settlers do not think the priests would care because "they are not men." They set off in search of them, hoping to build them a "church" of some kind in fact, and there is a good deal of interesting theological dialogue between the two priests during their journey. Finally, it is a mysterious encounter, "blue fire balloons" come and go and seem to be sentient and Father Peregrine finally risks jumping off a cliff to draw their attention and they surround, and deposit him gently on the ground. These beings finally speak, explaining that they are "the Old Ones" who have evolved into pure spirit.

We wish to tell you that we appreciate your building this place for us, but we have no need of it for each of us is a temple unto himself and needs no place wherein to cleanse himself...And so we suggest that you take the parts of your temple into your new cites and there cleanse others. For rest assured, we are happy and at peace (Bradbury, *Stories* 192).

¹⁶¹ In *The Martian Chronicles* the Martians had all been exterminated by the childhood disease of chicken pox (varicella) brought from earth by one of the early explorers, sort of like what happened to the Native Americans in first contact with the Europeans.

It is basically “go away and don’t bother us” stated in the kindest terms. The concept of highly evolved, pure and peaceful aliens was not new to science fiction even when Bradbury wrote the story in 1950, but it is unique for its conspicuous religious introspection. As they return to their own kind, the more restless Father Stone concludes:

The way I see it there’s a truth on every planet. All parts of the Big Truth. On a certain day they’ll all fit together like the pieces of a jigsaw. This has been a shaking experience. I’ll never doubt again, Father Peregrine. For this truth here is as true as earth’s Truth, and they lie side by side. And we’ll go on to other worlds, adding the sum of the parts of the Truth until one day the whole Total will stand before us like the light of a new day (Bradbury, *Stories* 192-193).

It is interesting that Father Stone “will never doubt again” after encountering intelligent life on another planet that has no need of a church¹⁶². *The Fire Balloons* is an exposition of a great deal of Bradbury’s beliefs. These Martians never knew anything like sin, and the doctrine of “original sin” was one Bradbury was never very accepting of. The idea of finding other “truths” is in line with his attraction to other spiritual creeds, philosophies and his basic optimism that all people of good will can, and should stand together regardless.

Bradbury returns to Earth with *The Miracles of Jamie* (1946) and this one is a heart-breaker. The story begins like this: “Jamie Winters worked his first miracle in the morning. The second, third and various others came later in the day. But the first miracle was most important. It was always the same: “Make Mother well. Put color in her cheeks. Don’t let mom be sick no more.” The narrative continues with how in the last month Jamie felt “his power flow over him like cool, certain water.” He had even looked at the color pictures of Jesus in the family Bible, compared it to his own reflection in the bathroom mirror and “shook all over. There it *was*” (Bradbury, *Stories* 704).

¹⁶² During the famous UFO “flap” of the 1970s (even then president Jimmy Carter confessed to having seen a UFO and promised to open the government’s secret files to the public but never did), the world famous evangelist and author Billy Graham said he saw no reason why the vast universe could not contain intelligent life, and that if they needed redemption then Christ would come to them in *whatever* form appropriate to them. And furthermore, maybe we were the only intelligent beings in the universe in rebellion against our Creator; problem children then indeed. Graham’s view was similar to that of C. S. Lewis in his science fiction trilogy where there were intelligent beings that were not separated from their Creator by rebellion. I’m sure Bradbury would have appreciated such speculation.

This seventh grader was quite a good student, pretty good at sports, he had plenty of friends and was something of a leader; head of the school parade that won a prize. Moreover, the pretty girl he liked seemed to like him too. He even felt he could show the big school bully “where he belonged in the world” but he held off on a confrontation until the day this ruffian insisted on carrying his girls’ books instead of him. She tried to make peace, each could carry a couple books—but the bully insisted “all or nothing.” Jamie launched into action and took a thorough beating. At home he said to his dad that “it didn’t work” and his dad wondered what he meant. Then Jamie thought, yes, he had meant to lose the fight. “Wouldn’t Ingrid love him all the more for having fought and lost just for her...it was just a reversed miracle; that was all” (Bradbury, *Stories* 708).

However, his mom was not getting any better. Walking home from school one day he was tempted to wish that if he could reach the next telephone pole before a car went by then his mom would get better. A car went by and he vowed to make it to a gate before another car passed. He started running but a car passed again in a cloud of dust and now he was upset saying “I take it back, I take it back, what I said, I didn’t mean it.” At home the doctor was leaving and he was at the bedside when his father grasping her wrists said she was dead. “Inside the walls of Jericho that was Jamie’s mind, a thought went screaming about in one last drive of power: Yes, she’s dead, all right, so she is dead, so what if she is dead? Bring her back to life again, yes make her alive again, Lazarus, come forth, Lazarus, Lazarus, come forth from the tomb, Lazarus, come forth” (Bradbury *Stories* 710). Jamie must have been babbling because his dad “glared at him in ancient horror” and struck him across the mouth. He was still a good student, but Jamie lost his old assurance at school and his classmates wondered what had happened to him. “They did not know that Jamie had given up his role. He could not tell them. They did not know what they had lost.”

Whether Jamie lost his faith or not, we do not know; although the tone of the story makes that seem less likely¹⁶³. He just “lost the role” he had given himself and certainly grew up quite a bit because of it. How many people of faith (or even superstition) wonder if they might have some kind of special favor or power from “the

¹⁶³ Even this abundant citation, does not begin to do justice to the richness of this small gem of a story

man upstairs”? I cited this story for its uniqueness and to give a further idea of the wide range of spiritual themes in Bradbury’s stories.

Moreover, in recognition of a general loss of spirituality, in a remarkably bold lecture given at Colorado College in 2007, Camille Paglia pleaded for educational reform to put the study of comparative religion at the center of the university curriculum. She confessed that she had felt the same “exasperation of her generation with the moralism and prudery of organized religion” but thought that a renaissance of the American fine arts lied through religion. This professed atheist delivered what amounts to one of the finest apologias for the value of retaining religious knowledge and belief I have ever come across.

Knowledge of the Bible, one of the West’s founding texts, is dangerously waning among aspiring young artists and writers. ... Great art can be made out of love for religion as well as rebellion against it. But a totally secularized society with contempt for religion sinks into materialism and self-absorption and gradually goes slack, without leaving an artistic legacy.

She continued by executing a superb, detailed summary of how religious belief and practice had not only spawned great art of all kinds but had also nourished and strengthened the life of the country in virtually all aspects. She noted that “through its defiance of medieval religious authority, Protestantism helped produce modern individualism. Yet, Protestant church services also promoted community and social cohesion.” She mourned a loss of religious symbolism claiming that it impoverished the cultural environment for young people and mentioned that her interest in the arts was kindled in childhood by “the gorgeous stained-glass windows and theatrical statuary” of her baptismal church in New York and hoped America’s rising Hispanic population would restore “the great imagistic style of Latin Catholicism.” She urged progressives to “start recognizing the spiritual poverty of contemporary secular humanism and reexamine the way that liberalism too often now, automatically defines human aspirations and human happiness in reductively economic terms.”

She concluded that The New Age movement to which she claims she belongs, in spite of its multicultural attraction to world religions “has failed thus far to produce important work in the visual arts.” One may debate this, but she is certainly correct in

stating that “the search for spiritual meaning has been registered in *popular culture*...through science fiction, as in ... (the) six-film *Star Wars* saga, with its evocative master myth of the “Force.” But technology for its own sake is never enough. It will always require supplementation through cultivation in the arts.”

Returning to Bradbury’s story, maybe we do “belong to a tired people who’ve been without faith a long time, and (we) want to believe so much” that we’re interfering with ourselves, and the general direction we seem headed, makes me wonder how we may ever be able to recover it. Many believe in something bigger than ourselves and some writers have a compulsion to create from these ideas and feelings, to make sense of what they feel and share it with a reader. The best writers compel us to think and consider important things. In some cases, it is the spiritual search that leaves the lasting impression, not only of the author but of ourselves and our place in the world and it is here we may connect, and then for the reader/writer, it becomes not only a meeting of the minds, but our spirits. “Humanism” always, but spiritual ponderings and longings are so intimately *and* positively woven into Bradbury’s work that I believe it stands as one of the reasons for his wide and enduring popularity. And *Something Wicked This Way Comes* is one of the best examples of this.

IV THE EVOLVING TEXT

Bradbury recounted the story behind *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, its first incarnation as a screen treatment, its subsequent development into a novel and the travails of bringing it to the screen many times. He remarked that nearly 28 years passed from inception to film premiere and that the text developed as a consequence of his ever widening circle of Hollywood contacts, specifically because he thought it would be interesting to work with one of these filmmaker friends.

In April of 1952 Bradbury and his wife were struck by a lithograph they saw in the display window of a small art gallery in Venice, California. Inside they saw a much larger version of this, a rich, vibrant painting of a Victorian haunted house that overwhelmed him, but alongside it there was another painting which he experienced as a

“metaphoric vision.” “This second painting depicted a uniquely designed train traveling high upon a trestle. Passengers rode inside and atop the train as it roared through a fantasy landscape. The track behind the train was broken, and the track before it led nowhere”¹⁶⁴ (Weist 74). It hearkened back to story ideas he was working on at the time so he contacted the painter, Joe Mugnaini¹⁶⁵ Bradbury soon bought the paintings and they worked together for a time on concepts for a novel-in-pictures under the working title of “The Dark Carnival” growing out of *The Black Ferris*. This was a story Bradbury held out from his first short story collection *Dark Carnival* (1947), although he published it in 1948 in the magazine *Weird Tales*. The novel-in-pictures book never reached fruition, mainly because of the author’s work on *Fahrenheit 451* and then the *Moby Dick* screenplay. Nonetheless, Bradbury’s encounter with Mugnaini’s paintings refocused earlier inspirations and his work with the painter “marked the crucial shift in the evolution of the central metaphor” (Eller, *Becoming* 251) of *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. That is, the magical Ferris wheel from the earlier story became the fantastic merry-go-round that enabled the carnival owner to become older or younger by changing its direction.

From this novel-in-pictures project Bradbury developed a 50 page screen treatment in December of 1954 that was soon picked up by producer Samuel Goldwyn Jr. and adapted as a teleplay by Mel Dinelli that aired locally in Los Angeles on *Starlight Summer Theater* and later nationally on NBC’s *Sneak Previews* in 1956. The core concepts of the later, published work (and film) were already present in Bradbury’s work before being adapted by Dinelli. Two small town boys are fascinated by a strange carnival and discover that by riding a carousel backwards, one of the owners can transform himself into an evil child who preys upon the town’s inhabitants until the boys catch him again on the carousel and jam the machinery forwards until the owner dies of old age. The text expanded into a keener meditation on the nature of good and evil in the broader sense, the mixture of these in each of us, choice, regret, growing up and growing

¹⁶⁴ The train as first seen coming into town at a distance by the boys in the film is *very similar* to the Mugnaini painting.

¹⁶⁵The painter became a close, life-long friend of Bradbury whose work was often adorned by Mugnaini’s illustrations. Bradbury thought he had an uncanny ability to pictorially render the author’s prose concepts.

older. “Bradbury now extended the story from one night’s terror into a week of revelations as the boys, encouraged by the town library’s custodian, discover how the carnival returns like a plague every few generations to enthrall the weak and solitary, enslaving their souls within the ever-expanding tattoos of the co-owner. Evil is finally defeated, but only just” (Eller, *Unbound* 58).

His friend Gene Kelly invited Bradbury and his wife to the 1955 screening of *Invitation to Dance* in which Kelly starred and directed. Something of an experimental film, they were fascinated by its beauty and the way he told the story through three different types of dance and mime without recourse to words¹⁶⁶. Certainly, Bradbury’s orientation toward performance may be seen in his appreciation of this kind of narrative which was lost on the film-going public in general at the time. It appears that the opening circus segment of Kelly’s dance and mime film caused him to return to his evolving *Dark Carnival* concepts and turn it into a screen treatment in hope of collaborating with Kelly on a film project. The story involved a mysterious carnival that enslaved rather than entertained.

This was the essence of the now 80 page screen treatment that Bradbury gave to Gene Kelly in late 1955, who was quite impressed and would have been happy to direct it. The weak reception of *Invitation to Dance* could not have helped matters and unfortunately Kelly was unable to find backing in Hollywood or in Europe. Undaunted, Bradbury would work toward fashioning his screen treatment into a novel, passing through “a first-person draft, “Jamie and Me” with a Huck Finn-Tom Sawyer blend of narrative structure until the end of 1959 when he transformed the story one last time into a third person narrative of Jim Nightshade and Will Halloway set in Green Town” (Eller, *Unbound* 144). The earlier “Jamie and Me” contained almost 100 pages of first person narrative in Will’s voice and “forms a smooth bridge with the screenplay material and what (in a longer form) would become the final novel” (Eller and Touponce 272).

These authors state that partially due to the suggestions of editor Don Congdon, in Bradbury’s third and final draft of the book he more carefully delineated the boys, giving Jim Halloway more consistency in words and actions that show him to be the boy who

¹⁶⁶ Decades later Bradbury staged one of his longer short stories *Frost and Fire* in essentially the same way, using dance and mime only.

naturally gravitates toward traditional patterns of interaction and family life. The other boy, Jim Nightshade “was stabilized as a fatherless boy living next door with his mother, drawn to the darker mysteries of life and impatient to grow up” (Eller and Touponce 272). Bradbury also eliminated the character of Mr. Ellis, the wise, custodian of the local library subsuming his function into Charles Halloway, Will’s father now the custodian of the library and protective of both boys. However, Jim, now being fatherless helps explain his irresistible attraction to the carnival, allowing Mr. Dark to emerge as a possible, but untrustworthy father figure for Jim. These changes magnified the importance Will’s father who also became more believable with common human frailties including fear and worry. All these elements figured into the film, and I will later visit Bradbury’s 1959 screen treatment for the interest it holds for the narrative on film.

SWTWC was certainly a darker, more fantastic work than *Dandelion Wine*, his other work set in fictional “Green Town” which he published while still developing *Something Wicked*. In spite of the differences between the two works one should keep in mind that for SWTWC he also sifted the ambiguities of life, death and aging through the filter of his nostalgic memories of Waukegan, Illinois where he spent most of the first fourteen years of his life. The book is distinguished for its rich prose and fine dialogic exchanges that though occasionally poetic are still sufficiently realistic, and the explosion of metaphor in *Something Wicked* is as intense as can be found in Bradbury’s fiction. Take for example, the description of Mr. Cooger after being spun into an impossible old age by the carousel: “The man was cold as an albino frog. He smelled of moon swamps and old Egyptian bandages. He was something found in museums, wrapped in nicotine linens, sealed in glass” (Bradbury, *Something Wicked* 105).

Images of storm, wind and lightning come at the beginning and persist until the end. Richly ambiguous in SWTWC, they may symbolize the chaotic existence of evil, or may momentarily/accidentally come to our aid and thus serve the good. Robin Anne Reid (84) notes two other clusters of images, “light and dark” beginning with the boys strongly marked physical appearances, the possibly deceptive nature of smiles and extending to the mysterious dread the night may bring for the psyche as well as the hope and safety of daybreak, not to mention the traditional spiritual associations of light and dark. Finally there is water; water in its reflective aspect linked to mirrors and the negative passage of

time. Also, water as ice symbolizes time which will always kill us; the solidity of ice representing a temporal stasis which we should avoid. By the summer of 1960 having settled on the title *Something Wicked This Way Comes* the text had risen to a 425 page typescript, then the final draft in early 1962 fell from 380 pages to 340, comprising fifty-four chapters and around 70,000 words. Like *Fahrenheit 451*, Bradbury divided the narrative into three sections: “Arrivals”, “Pursuits” and the final, shorter “Departures.”

Jonathan R. Eller notes influences on *Something Wicked This Way Comes* that have mostly escaped the notice of other commentators. He cites Bradbury’s friend; author, critic and genre editor Anthony Boucher’s comment that “the novel evoked the moods of Charles Williams, a mythopoetic fantasist and close friend of both C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkein. Bradbury had in fact read and been greatly affected by William’s masterpiece, *Descent into Hell*¹⁶⁷(1936). The narcissism and chillingly casual disregard for humanity that emerges in Williams is reflected in Bradbury’s carnival masters, Cooger and Dark” (Eller, *Unbound* 193). The second of these was the immensely popular radio show *Vic and Sade*. These were fifteen minute shows (perhaps 3,000 of them) nationally broadcast from Chicago from 1934 to 1946. They were quintessential sketches of small town American family life during the Depression and war years that Bradbury, now transplanted in Los Angeles cherished a great deal. It helped keep him anchored to childhood memories and he cited it as an influence on his “thought and career as a writer” and when the show finished he wrote a letter to the program’s writer, thanking him “for having given back to all of us some certain portion of our lives, our adolescences, our fathers, and mothers, in a shape where we could recognize and be greatly amused by them” (Eller, *Unbound* 82). Years later Bradbury would realize how much Will’s father, the hero of the book had been unconsciously modeled after his own father. Bradbury had a good enough relationship with his father growing up but it was rather a challenge for the elder Bradbury to understand the hothouse imagination and enthusiasms of young

¹⁶⁷ In the book one of the main characters becomes entrapped in a destructive relationship with a succubus due to his selfishness. Bradbury was also an admirer of Lewis’ *The Screwtape Letters* (1945) where a “junior devil” tries through deceit and seduction to capture the soul of a troubled young man, but Bradbury’s work bears little similarity to the “devil eat devil” story world of that book other than highlighting consequences of unavoidable choices in the face of subtle, attractive temptations. However, I see a possible parallel between a character from Lewis’ story and the antagonist of *SWTWC* that I will explore later.

Ray and the two only became close in later years. Also, like Charles Halloway, Bradbury's father was a quiet, decent man without much formal education but cherished books and reading.

At the outset, the boys are described as being thirteen years¹⁶⁸, eleven months and twenty-four days old and can hardly wait to be fourteen. Will was born one minute before midnight, October thirtieth and Jim one minute *after* midnight, October thirty-first, Halloween. The two are more like brothers than best friends and go places, running together. The narrative even seems to indicate that they can intuit each other's thoughts. They are next door neighbors and it is a fraternal relationship for sure but not without some typically boyish rivalry. Will sometimes chafes at Jim being a minute older than him and glimmers of grudging admiration for Jim's abandon and boldness are apparent at times. They couldn't be closer, nonetheless Will sometimes fears that the impetuous Jim will "ditch¹⁶⁹" or abandon him. The symbolism here is writ large and Bradbury spells it out owning them as "the two halves of myself. They are two halves of all of us. The light half and the dark half. The dark half is murderous and the light half creates out of that murder to escape it. We must get accustomed to the darkness in ourselves and get it out into the open in order to survive" (*Fantastic Films*, #34, July, 1983:15). This statement may reveal something of the author's creative process, but Jim Nightshade, while restless and reckless is never presented as "murderous".

The enigmatic "Mr. Electrico," the eccentric traveling carnival performer who befriended and inspired the twelve-year-old Bradbury certainly influenced his creation of the "Tom Fury" character. Through this probably shell-shocked veteran of the First World War, who confessed to being a defrocked Presbyterian minister, Bradbury had an "in" to the carnival and its workings; meeting the carnival people, particularly its "freaks" that appear in his later narratives. But his early obsession with cinema is also apparent, Bradbury saw *Something Wicked This Way Comes* as a summation of his early fascination

¹⁶⁸ It is perhaps significant that the boys are 13, the age of reason where in both Judaism and Christianity a child is considered old enough to take responsibility for his own soul.

¹⁶⁹ This was what Bradbury's older brother "Skip" would do to, infuriating him. They were quite dissimilar, "Skip" and "Shorty" (the nickname his father used for the bespectacled Ray as a boy. Skip was quite a bit older and an athlete who nearly made it into the ranks of professional football.

of loving Lon Chaney and the magicians and grotesques he played in the films of the 1920s. He said it was about his childhood when:

I fell in love with magicians, carnivals and circuses as a boy and the most magical thing for me was to run down to the train station early in the morning with my brother and welcome in the latest carnival or circus. Help them put up the tents, feel the elephants, meet Mr. Electrico, meet the illustrated man and the dwarfs. I got to know everyone and what they represented, without me knowing it, the mystery of life coming and going on the train early in the morning. These people represent the life that's all around you. Some people who never grew up, some people who are afraid to grow up, some people who are afraid to grow old, some people are more afraid of death than others. So actually my novel is about all of life (*Fantastic Films*, #34, July, 1983:15).

However, it should be noted that even as a child, Bradbury was not blind to the seedy, unsavory aspects of the travelling shows, their appeal to escapism in its baser forms and the minor turbulence they left in their wake. In an earlier interview with David Mogan, Bradbury spoke of the early terror he had experienced riding the carousel and that it got “locked into *Something Wicked*” for that reason, and recalled the smell from the lion house as “of something primitive and dangerous.” Circuses¹⁷⁰ carried a different kind of emotional charge and memory but he was quite blunt in his appraisal of the travelling carnivals.

Only when you're older do you get some of the sexual overtones of carnivals. All these people are kinky and strange and unhappy wanderers of the earth. Now that's not quite true of circus people...but carnivals—they're seedy, fleabag things that live off the edges of people's lives, off cheap thrills (125).

That is a rather exact description of the carnival in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, only the supernatural element was needed to be added for it to become a larger meditation on life. He told Stephen King that in *Something Wicked This Way Comes* he said “everything, just about, that I would ever want to say about my younger self and how

¹⁷⁰ The circus environment always comes off better in Bradbury's stories when it appears as opposed to the carnival which moves toward the decadent and abject.

I felt about that terrifying thing: Life, and that other terror: Death, and the exhilaration of both” (King 327), so at least in personal terms, it may be considered the key text of Bradbury’s authorship. In fact, it may have been his favorite.

Interestingly, Bradbury prefaced the 1999 Avon hardback edition of the book with three telling citations. The last of these from the character “Stubb” in *Moby Dick*, “I know not all that may be coming, but be it what it will, I’ll go to it laughing.” Mirth and laughter are so important in his book. His second quote is from the Bible: “They sleep not, except they have done mischief; And their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness, And drink the wine of violence” (Proverbs 4:16-17). Indeed, Charles Halloway speaks of the carnival “people” saying, “The stuff of nightmare is their plain bread. They butter it with pain...and thrive for centuries” (Bradbury, *Something Wicked* 199). They represent a kind of evil, Biblical in scope that hardly knows a beginning or an end, the dark carnival “gorges on fear and pain” as long as there are people with “the excruciating agony of guilt, the scream from real or imagined wounds” (Bradbury, *Something Wicked* 200-201). However, Bradbury’s opening quote is “Man is in love, and loves what vanishes,” from W.B. Yeats. If this does not allude to the nostalgia of youth, it perhaps indicates awareness of the passage of time and the journey we all make from innocence to experience.

The novel is written in a limited omniscient, third person point of view which allows the narrative to unfold from the point of view of several characters, however it is mainly told through Will and to a lesser extent Jim. The book presents a myth of childhood, but no “helicopter parenting” here. Without overly strict limits the boys are able to do just about anything they want and enjoy the freedom and excitement of it all. For instance, Charles is aware that Will sneaks out late at night sometimes to prowl around with Jim, but it is no problem for him. However, and aside from the supernatural peril that enters in, this healthy, happy childhood is plagued by some serious rough spots.

Jim really suffers from having an absent father and itches to grow up, and Will has an absent father of sorts too, and father and son never really connect and reconcile until later in the story. Moreover, Will becomes worried about Jim and doesn’t know how to “save him,” he worries about his father too and wishes he knew how to make him happy. Will begins to see the bad in the world and wonders if *he* is really “good” and if

being good would be enough to save him when he's "around bad people and there is no one else good around for miles." His father is not fully able to satisfy him in these things and maybe is not the "hero" his son needs him to be, at least not until the final crisis.

We may make a myth of childhood *ourselves* but the novel reminds us it might not have been as great as selective memory presents it. Miss Foley, the carnival's first victim is transformed into a small child (a different fate in the film) but tumbling back into childhood is not presented as desirable in any way, rather childhood is shown to be a time where at best, no one understands us. Miss Foley's transformation makes her an adult trapped in a child's body¹⁷¹ that also gives us pause to think what it would be like to have to pass through the adjustments and traumas of childhood again. No, contrary to *Dandelion Wine*, and aside from its obvious charms, SWTWC presents childhood as a more realistically challenging time that we would not necessarily want to revisit.

V SYNOPSIS AND THEMES

Something Wicked This Way Comes is a densely packed novel and a brief synopsis might be helpful before venturing into Bradbury's screen treatment and the film. The three texts bear interesting similarities and differences. Like the film, the opening chapters of the book present a rich autumn setting in small town America around 1930 although economic hardship is not part of the picture. The major characters and conflicts are introduced with Charles Halloway feeling himself to be an "old man," too old to be Will's father and a bit envious of the boys' youth and energy. Tom Fury, a lightning rod salesman wanders into town ahead of an impending storm and sells a lightning rod to Jim for "protection." His arrival seems to be a harbinger of strange things to come. Charles sees a man (Cooger) putting up advertisement in town for "Cooger & Dark's Pandemonium Shadow Show." Among their promised exhibits is "the most beautiful woman in the world" in a block of ice. Charles' encounter with Cooger is rather unsettling and he gets an uneasy feeling about the carnival and does not say anything

¹⁷¹His 1952 short story "The Playground" elaborates on this theme where an adult is transported back to childhood and has to helplessly suffer the indignities (and outright terror) of being bullied again.

about its coming, even when his son anxiously enquires about it. In the meantime Tom Fury catches sight of the “woman” in a block of ice and mysteriously disappears.

The carnival arrives in a most unusual way in the dead of night. The boys hear the music and climb down from their windows to investigate. Running to a meadow just outside of town they watch the train from a distance come to a stop and the carnival silently assembled in the dark. As described, the entire scene is palpably odd. Unnerved by this they return home and Will hears his father come home from the library where he often goes at night when he is depressed and cannot sleep. It is three o'clock in the morning.

The next day the nature of the carnival becomes apparent to the boys as they spend their entire Saturday there. Although all appears normal at first, they meet Miss Foley, their 7th grade teacher who has a child, a visiting nephew with her. When she enters the mirror maze she becomes terrified and confused and Will has to rescue her. Will would like to leave but Jim's curiosity is awakened and although he agrees to stay out of the mirror maze, insists they come back after dark. Toward the end of the day Jim *does* enter the maze and Will has to rescue him as well. As they decide to leave they trip over a bag of lightning rods belonging to Tom Fury but he is nowhere to be seen. This strengthens their resolve to come back at night after closing to investigate; only now they are a little frightened.

At his point, about a quarter of the way into the narrative the fantastic elements of the carnival are clearly manifest as they meet the sinister Mr. Dark. Returning to the empty carnival at night, everything seems normal until the boys enter a tent where they see a large merry-go-round with an out of order sign posted on it. The boys climb aboard but their joyous reverie is interrupted when out of nowhere a large man appears from behind and lifts them off the ride, suspending them in mid-air. Another man enters and asks his assistant to put the boys down and calmly begins to speak to them. Mr. Dark has made his entrance and the dark carnival begins in earnest:

...tall as a lamp post. His pale face, lunar pockmarks denting it, cast light on those who stood below. His vest was the color of fresh blood. His eyebrows, hair, his suit were licorice black, and the sunset yellow gem which stared from the tie pin thrust in his cravat was the same unblinking shade and bright crystal as his eyes. But

in this instant, and with utter clearness, it was the suit that fascinated Will. For it seemed woven of boar-bramble, clock-spring hair, bristle and a sort of ever-glistening dark hemp. The suit caught light and stirred like a bed of black tweed-thorns, interminably itching, covering the man's long body so it seemed he should excruciate, cry out and tear the clothes free. Yet there he stood, moon clam, inhabiting his itch-weed suit and watching Jim's mouth with his yellow eyes. He never looked once at Will (Bradbury, *Something Wicked* 74).

Touponce and Eller observe that Mr. Dark's description, particularly his formal, uncomfortable "hair suit" and grave, serious manner suggest an excruciating aesthetic ideal, or rather a parody of it—a carnival that feeds on guilt and regret leads well into the idea that it is laughter and mirth that may later defeat it (Touponce and Eller 294-296).

The strangeness continues as Dark through slight-of-hand presents the boys with the carnival's card which magically changes color before their eyes. It reads: *Our specialty: to examine, oil, polish and repair Death-Watch Beetles*. Jim rummages through his pockets, presents Mr. Dark with a dead insect and exclaims, "Fix *this*." Dark laughs and says he will and extending his hand, rolls up his sleeve to reveal a riot of brightly colored tattoos and Latin scrolls. Will, excitedly cries out that he must be the Tattooed Man! But Jim, studying the stranger said "No, The Illustrated Man. There's a difference" (Bradbury, *Something Wicked* 75). Jim seems bewitched by this strange man who asks their names but Jim hesitates and gives a false name, "smiling to show it was a lie" and the text states that Mr. Dark also smiled back indicating that he knew the boy was not being truthful. Dark begins to seem predatory, and now pulls up his sleeves to reveal more tattoos that exercise something like a hypnotic effect on Jim, as he offers the boys free tickets to come back and ride the merry-go-round when it is fixed. It's a richly cinematic scene but not inferior to the one that follows.

As Jim snatches the tickets, the boys hurry off but are curious when they see Cooger and Dark busying themselves with the merry-go-round. They have climbed a tree and are looking in on an amazing sight. Dark now has the machinery in operation with Cooger perched on it but it is running backwards. As the machine accelerates they notice that Cooger is changing, shrinking into a small child that Dark sends off toward town. They can hardly believe what they have seen but follow the boy to Miss Foley's street.

They see shadows in her window and their suspicions are confirmed when they pay her a visit and recognize the little red-haired boy she refers to as her nephew Robert, as the “man/child” from the carnival. It is a chilling sequence because of the sinister way the child is described and seems to recognize them though he says nothing. The boys have no idea how they might warn Miss Foley who soon accuses the boys of trying to rob her because she later sees them in the yard with her valuables that “Robert” has scattered there before he attracts attention by breaking a window and running off.

The boys decide to run after “Robert” and catch up with him on the merry-go-round at the carnival. It is late at night, they are alone and they are afraid he will ride forwards, (as he is doing) become an adult again and perhaps kill them. The boys struggle at the controls, jam it forward and “Robert” is rapidly spun into a fantastic old age and falls to the ground. The boys leave to call the police and an ambulance and when they arrive and take them back to the scene, one of the most frightening sequences of the novel occurs. At the carnival they find that the freaks, under the direction of Mr. Dark, have strapped Cooger’s nearly lifeless body into a fake electric chair that he claims is merely a new carnival attraction. Dark insisted the boys had merely seen a rehearsal of this new trick and become frightened victims of imagination as boys are apt to. To make matters worse the wizened figure in the chair reaches out with his statically charged sword and “knights¹⁷²” them thus, “I dub thee ... asses and foolsssss...Mr. Sickly...and Mr. Pale...! A sssshort...sad life...for you both!” (Bradbury, *Something Wicked* 118). Among the gathered freaks the boys catch a glimpse of a dwarf they think might be the missing Tom Fury. Suspense and peril is being built for the boys because neither the police nor their parents believe them, and their credibility has suffered further because Miss Foley has accused them of trying to rob her. Added to this they now live in fear of the carnival freaks they are convinced must surely view them as a threat.

Many of the overarching themes of the book have already been touched on and closer examination of these may best come in light of their filmic presentation. Bradbury’s previously cited statements provide a brief summation of his themes: “the two halves of us all,” the light and dark, getting these into the open and dealing with them. He

¹⁷² This is highly significant for the author. It is an exact reversal of the “blessing” bestowed upon the astounded 12-yr.old Bradbury with the tap of Mr. Electrio’s charged sword—“Live forever”.

saw the novel as being “about all of life,” growing up, growing older, forms of fear and regret. And of course evil, not just in the fantastic person of Mr. Dark and his carnival, but in the very real ways we may all experience it.

One way or another, evil brings suffering and may call to mind the old conundrum, why do bad things happen to good people? Likewise, why do the wicked so often seem to prosper? Mr. Dark and his carnival are germane to both of these observations. Pondering this we might find some satisfaction by recognizing that life is not static, the wheel turns and we can expect the good or better to come just the same as the bad. Perhaps the larger question which Bradbury clearly addresses in the book is one of happiness. Bradbury seems to suggest happiness and contentment may lie entirely with us, not through passive acceptance and waiting for “the pie in the sky” but right now, through choice and attitude¹⁷³. The father – son relationship is also a central theme and midway through the narrative Charles and his boy have their first serious discussion about the nature of good, bad and happiness. In terms of harm, Charles tells his son that “Good is no guarantee for your body. It’s mainly for peace of mind” (134) and when Will asks him if *he* is a good person, he responds that “to him and his mother he tries” and believes that he is mostly “all right.”

Then when his son asks why *he* isn’t happy, a tough question really, Charles responds smartly with another question. “Since when did you think being good meant being happy? ... Since now learn otherwise” (135). What follows is rather long and involved, but is neither a sermon nor a lecture. It comes entirely from the father’s experience and it is not entirely a monologue either since the passage wisely reveals some of Will’s unspoken thoughts aside from his words which reinforce him as a sensitive, caring youth which his father is pleased to recognize. Toward the end of their talk Charles admits that he is probably a little sad by nature, a man who admits to having morally wrestled with himself most of his days. When Will asks him what *doesn’t* make him sad Charles says, “One thing. Death...Death makes everything else sad. But death itself only scares. If there wasn’t death, all the other things wouldn’t get tainted” (137). If by this

¹⁷³ I would remind the reader of an earlier citation of Bradbury’s credo of not clinging to “optimism” but optimal behavior; there is a big difference.

Charles is hinting at “fear” as the greatest enemy, it would be in line with his final approach and solution to the carnival.

When their talk ends, Charles told his son he should go back to his room the same way he came out; by climbing up the rungs he had placed under the ivy trellis. Will manages to talk his dad into climbing up after him and when they arrive and sit on the open window together the world seems to be spinning well on its axis once again. Understanding and lines of genuine communication are firmly in place and to his father Will is showing signs of growing up well. Will asks his father not to go to the carnival and Charles says, “Strange, that’s what I was going to tell you” (137). Charles is not sure about the nature of the altercation at Miss Foley’s but he does not believe Will is a thief. Will has not told him what he knows about the carnival yet, but now he seems ready to, and his father would seem ready to listen. Coming in the middle of the narrative, it is a pivotal episode that marks the beginning of understanding and reconciliation between father and son.

The following night, the boy’s apprehension about the carnival freaks searching them out finds justification in the form of a balloon piloted by the blind, Dust Witch sailing over their houses. First, Will awakens to find someone has removed the lightning rod from Jim’s house and the balloon heralds its arrival by first casting a moon shadow over the boy’s houses. Once again Bradbury proves himself to be a champion of metaphorical prose, and here he is dealing with the auditory, bringing the reader into the scene by describing sounds that we would hardly think exist. He poses the question of what sort of noise a balloon adrift would make— “none” he says but:

No, not quite. It noises itself, it sloughs, like the wind billowing your curtains all white as breaths of foam. Or it makes a sound like the stars turning over in your sleep. Or it announces itself like moonrise and moonset. The last is best: like the moon sailing the universal depths, so rides a balloon (Bradbury, *Something Wicked* 140-141).

Without Tom Fury’s lightning rod, Jim’s house has been located and the boys see the Witch release a ballast sack that leaves a wide silver mark (like a gigantic snail trail) on Jim’s roof extending down the side of the house. Quick thinking Will washes it off with a garden hose. His mother below closes a window, thinking it is raining. For good

measure, Will takes his bow and arrows to the street, the balloon follows him and he is able to pierce the balloon with one of his arrows. It is about four o'clock in the morning when the episode ends and the next chapter only reads: "Nothing much else happened, all the rest of the night" (Bradbury, *Something Wicked* 153).

The next day, the boys go to the police station to meet Miss Foley, but she has awakened early and goes to the carnival for a free ride. On their way to the carnival they find a little girl, alone and crying under a tree. Will thinks he recognizes her as Miss Foley but Jim doesn't believe it. They go to Miss Foley's house to find her gone and on the way back are nearly trapped by a parade from the carnival which they are anxious to avoid. They return to try to help the little girl but she is not there and Will starts to think that Miss Foley has given Mr. Dark their true first names. The boys are next hiding from the carnival parade under the grating of a storm drain when Charles, unaware that they are there, walks over to observe the parade and Mr. Dark comes up to him enquiring the names and whereabouts of two boys selected to receive prizes. Of course these are Will and Jim whose faces Dark has tattooed on the palms of each hand and Charles, very nervously claims to recognize the boys but gives false names. Mr. Dark, fists clenched in anger accuses Charles of lying. He knew their first names were Will and Jim, but did not know their last names. Obviously, a tense encounter and Mr. Dark asks Charles his name as he is leaving. Charles gives him his full name without hesitation, tells him he works at the library and suggests he come visit him. Dark says he surely will. The stage is now set for confrontation.

Unseen, the boys have witnessed the scene between Charles and Mr. Dark. By invitation they go to the library where Charles has been researching the occult, witchcraft and possessions. He has also been searching through old newspaper clippings and found records of a carnival owned by a Cooger & Dark that had periodically passed through the area in 1846, 1860, 1888 and 1910 and there were always strange and tragic occurrences accompanying these passages. For the first time Will and Jim tell Charles everything strange that has happened to them including what they have seen. Charles pieces together a theory that the carnival is made of a different species of "humans." Powerful but not all powerful, that seem to prey upon the lonely and unconnected people they encounter. He

further speculates that these beings live off the anguish and frustrated desires of people, enticing their victims with false promises.

A pivotal confrontation occurs when Dark comes to the library as Charles orders the boys to hide. Charles refuses to give the boys full names or reveal where they are, even though Dark offers him his youth again in exchange. Charles has a choice and is steadfast even when Dark grasps and crushes his hand. He searches for the boys calling to them, promising Jim a free ride on the merry-go-round and partnership in the carnival, but falsely says he has used it to spin Will's mother into extreme old age. He finds their hiding place and leads them out after the Dust Witch has cast a spell on them leaving them blind, deaf and mute. As ordered, the Dust Witch remains behind to stop Charles' heart. While kneeling beside him mumbling her incantations and "tickling the air" with her fingers, Charles senses the absurdity of the situation and begins to laugh. This drives the Witch away actually crippling her. It seems that by accident, Charles has discovered a weapon against the carnival.

There is fast and furious action in the last chapters and Dark plans to spin Jim forward and make him his partner, but spin Will back to infancy to become a plaything for a dwarf. These frightening prospects await the boys who have now been placed in the carnival waxworks while Dark orchestrates the last show of the carnival—"the bullet trick" where (unknown to the spectators) a wax bullet that dissolves in smoke is fired at a figure on stage who has a real bullet clenched in her teeth to substitute what has been fired. Charles arrives, volunteers and manages to carve a smile design in the bullet the Dust Witch will clench in her teeth as well as the wax one he will fire from the rifle. When Charles fires, the Witch collapses apparently killed by his inscribed smile. The Witch is carried off as Dark explains that she has merely fainted but the show is over. As the crowd leaves he outs the lights, but with the Dust Witch destroyed Will is fully released from her spell, Jim only partially. Will joins his father to rescue Jim in the mirror maze where Charles must confront images of himself as an old man, but with encouragement from his son is able to laugh and the mirror maze shatters. In the ensuing melee before the freaks can get the chair holding Cooger to the carousel, they drop it and he shatters to dust and rags

Mr. Dark tries one last ruse to escape, pretending to be a little lost child. Charles finds it strange that this child is fearful of him and surmises that it is Mr. Dark. Dark claims he cannot harm him but Charles, refusing to give in to fear holds him close and the child Dark expires. They see his tattoos fade away as the dazed carnival people, sensing freedom run into the night, only the skeleton man scoops up Dark's desiccated body and hurries away. Meanwhile a dazed Jim is beginning to take a spin on the merry-go-round when Will pulls him off and he falls to the ground seemingly dead. Will is ready to break into tears but his father sternly warns him that is just what Dark would want, so they force themselves to dance, sing and laugh and then Jim revives. The carnival tents have collapsed and the three of them experience a passing temptation for the magic carousel but Charles destroys its controls, insisting that if they indulge their fantasies here it would never end and they might end up becoming "masters of the carnival" themselves. Charles cautions they have to watch for the rest of their lives implying that such evil can never be destroyed so easily by such as them. The boys run home and Charles, now feeling that he is not old but just a middle aged man runs along with them.

Needless to say, it's a richly detailed and well constructed story, if overwritten¹⁷⁴ in places but fully deserving of its continued readership and classic standing within the genre. In his appraisal, Stephen King remarked that it is "one of those books about childhood that adults should take down once in a while...not just to give to their children, but in order to touch base again themselves with childhood's brighter perspectives and darker dreams" (338). I whole heartedly agree.

VI BRADBURY'S SCREEN TREATMENT

I want to remind the reader that this material from the unproduced screen treatment *pre-dates* the published novel. It contains things that would not be included in either the novel or later film. Other elements would remain in either altered or amplified form. The screen treatment represents Bradbury's earliest, complete conceptualization of the narrative of *Something Wicked This Way Comes*.

¹⁷⁴ This was a general criticism of the book, even by those with an overall favorable view.

The 1959 treatment¹⁷⁵ I have should not be substantially different from the one Bradbury gave to Gene Kelly in late 1955; that one was eighty pages, this one eighty-six. It is not a film script but a highly developed “treatment” (Bradbury labeled it as such) to serve as a model for a screenplay, which it is almost detailed enough to be. It contains scene breaks, camera instructions, shot descriptions, several rather meticulous descriptions of scene action including character blocking and movement, notes on feeling and motivation, as well as a great deal of dialogue. It bears greater similarity to the book than the film does. Things were expanded (occasionally shortened) or added, but the book obviously “grew out” of the screen treatment. The major characters (aside from Cooger and Dark) are different, in name only from the book and film. I will use the characters’ final narrative designations to avoid confusion.

Jim has an absent father, although less is made of it here. He even asks his mom if she is ever going to get married again. He says that next baseball season when he pitches he will need a good catcher. Jim’s mother responds tentatively but she is so insignificant that she does not really achieve character status.

Both the book and film subsume the “Mr. Ellis” character of the treatment into a more richly developed Charles Halloway, benefitting the latter narrative substantially. Among some of the favorable aspects of the treatment for filming are its suitable length, strong narrative coherence and linear development, and the fact that although it would not have been an inexpensive picture to mount, *none* of its effects or scenes would have been beyond a filmmaker’s capacity to actually realize, even in 1959. However, besides “Mr. Ellis”, other possible weakness might be found in some of the dialogue between the boys. Sometimes it goes on for too long and seems a little too clever and sophisticated for boys their age. Similar dialogue passes to Will’s father Charles in the book. In spite of its economic length it delves into a lot of detailed description of the carnival freaks that is horrific, if not repulsive at times, however this might work well in a film remake, since the intensity of cinematic horror has increased exponentially in recent years. The final pages (about 5) from around the time of the demise of the Dust Witch contain clearly structured action and a definite ending, but have almost no dialogue and are rather

¹⁷⁵ This, as well as the other manuscripts I have obtained from the Ray Bradbury Studies Center at the University of Indiana are photocopies from originals from the Albright collection.

sketchy compared to the rest of the text. The treatment ending shows some significant variations from the later texts but the final narrative resolution is about the same in substance.

It is still “Cooger and Dark’s Carnival” but in the treatment, Cooger’s partner speaks as “The Illustrated Man,” a crafty, malevolent figure for sure but the scant physical description of him leaves the impression of a gaunt, “weedy” character with less of the suave, understated menace Mr. Dark carries in the book and especially the film. When the boys are hiding from the parade and he confronts (instead of Will’s father) “Mr. Ellis”, his inquiries about the boys ventures into over the top theatrics, reminding one more of the mad captain Ahab from Bradbury’s *Moby Dick* adaptation, written just five years earlier. The eccentric lightening rod salesman Tom Fury is completely absent from the treatment, which is a pity.

Instead of the crisp autumn weather and impending storm of the later forms of the text it is unseasonably mild and Charles thinks that it’s not right to feel spring coming when he knows it’s really autumn. I think later texts are an improvement on this unseasonable weather, although Bradbury uses it here as a foreshadowing device for the disruption that is to come. Minus the amputee barman Ed, the carnival’s other victims Mr. Crosetti, Mr. Tetley (known only as the tobacco shop owner) and Miss Foley are all introduced early and given enough exposition so we have an approximate understanding of their characters. Like in the book, Mr. Crosetti sheds a tear of nostalgia for the distant music of the carnival and smell of candy in the air.

Early on, Charles meets Cooger nailing up posters for the carnival. He extends an invitation to Charles giving him a card and they engage in a casual conversation about what the carnival has to offer. Cooger mentions their fortune teller who can tell anyone their past, present and future. Charles is taken aback at Cooger’s words about the future, “you don’t predict if, you promise it” he wonders aloud; “we not only promise it, we guarantee it,” Cooger says as Bradbury indicates that the camera close in on his last words. Their conversation gives the narrative a realistic turn while at the same time leaving Charles apprehensive about the coming show. At home, Charles’ wife muses about the strange weather, labeling it “a nervous wind, warm then cold, loud then still. It’s like the beginning or the end of something wonderful, all evening I couldn’t decide if

I was sixteen or sixty.” Not exactly a foreboding, but a foreshadowing of the definite temporal distortions the carnival brings with it.

Just as in the book, the boys always seem to be running somewhere. They witness Cooger’s transformation into a small boy and follow him to Miss Foley’s house. However when they enter Will blurts out what they have seen while Jim tries to defuse the situation by saying that he was only joking. Miss Foley gently scolds Will for “trying to scare an old lady.” When they leave, they hang around for a few moments until “boy Cooger” comes out and they scuffle with him and run away so Miss Foley thinks maybe the boys had come to rob her.

At any rate and following the novel, the boys follow him back to the carnival and accidentally jam the merry-go-round into fast forward leaving Cooger on the ground as an impossibly old man, while the boys leave to telephone for help. I was impressed with these sequences in the treatment, scenes consisting of well ordered, precisely described action, and they were actually less confusing than in the book. The authorities arrive and accompany the boys back to the carnival and here Bradbury thrills us with a detailed description of the proceedings with a nervous Illustrated Man surrounded by the other freaks explaining away the withered figure of Cooger in the chair as “Mr. Electrico” rehearsing his new act. The withered figure reaches out his statically charged sword pronouncing his dubious “blessing” on the boys. The sequence is extremely well realized on paper for filming but after they leave Bradbury delineated an additional scene¹⁷⁶ I believe merits reproducing here:

As the cars vanish, the CAMERA moves back toward the tents again, where, once inside the sideshow tent-flap, in the dark, the figures of the freaks are moving toward the ELECTRIC CHAIR, listening, listening, watching, coming closer, as the old man, Mr. Electrico, murmurs and murmurs in the dark. We cannot distinguish the words that fall in sparkles and motes from his numbed lips, but his one eye opened and blazing, gives import to the message, and plan he outlines as the others come into a tighter circle to listen. The CAMERA moves in like an eavesdropper for a

¹⁷⁶ As an adult I’ve rarely been frightened by anything I’ve read or even seen for that matter, but after the build up to this scene, I must admit that reading it alone late at night, *actually* disturbed me.

moment, and then pulls away out into darkness as the humming fades and the voices fade. DISSOLVE

Yes, we have a horrific figure in near darkness, his body illuminated by a faint electric glow and issuing sparks while uttering diabolic plans we can only imagine to a huddled company of freaks! Is this the creation of a cinematic writer or am I overly enthusiastic? It's all there. It would seem any minimally competent filmmaker could make a terrific scene out of this just the way Bradbury wrote it. I would not disagree with what some filmmakers have said about the difficulty of adapting Bradbury's rich prose for performance, but I think here is a case (one of a great number) where words are not problematic for such an evocatively sketched scene.

However, inclusion of such a scene as this in the film would have probably diluted the narrative in subtracting from Mr. Dark, but in the treatment it is effective and builds more suspense and terror for the boys since they are definitely at risk from a still potent Cooger. We have come to the point where the boys are the only ones that know the evil of the carnival. The authorities will not believe them and Will's father is given some extended, although entirely reasonable dialogue with his wife about the boys being on to something that is more than meets the eye. However, this puts Charles well behind the narrative curve since the spectators are now well beyond his tentative speculations. Making his character weaker still is the fact that he is absent from the first key confrontation with the Illustrated Man (Mr. Dark), and his stand-in "Mr. Ellis" is a bit clownish in his speech and manner.

Before this critical scene there is much discussion between the boys about the evil nature of the carnival, especially the merry-go-round and Jim betrays his temptation to take a spin on it to become older and bigger. It is still the same night that this has all transpired and the boys decide they have no choice but to go back to the police. When they are about to enter the station they realize that Miss Foley and Will's parents are there talking to the officers. The boys climb a tree and look in on the proceedings through a window but cannot hear anything clearly. The police chief spies the boys outside in the tree but remains quiet about it. When the meeting finishes and all exit, they come around under the tree and the scene ends with the police and Will's father staring up at the boys while they are simultaneously looking down at them; they are gently pulled down from

the tree. It is a quite effective scene actually and uses a fade out and a fade in to Will's father walking the boys home. Jim enters his house and his mother slams the door. Charles says he will have to speak to her tomorrow. This section and the following abortive exchange between Will and his father is the most significant omission from the later novel and screenplay texts. Charles wants to hear Will's side of things but he hesitates claiming his father would not believe him. He mentions the boy (Cooger) the old man and the merry-go-round and his father shakes his head and tells him to start again. A frustrated Will lies this time telling his father that they went to rob Miss Foley, threw what they stole in the river but wants to pay it all back and hopes the police will just put him on probation. His father does not believe this either and sends Will up to bed and discusses events with his wife. Charles cannot fathom the fantastic story his son has tried to tell him but believes that Miss Foley gave her money and jewelry to the carnival in exchange for some fantastic offer. Unable to sleep, Charles leaves the house and a frightened Will speechlessly watches him go from his bedroom window.

Bradbury begins the next sequence with the wind gently blowing Will's bedroom window curtain. Both boys stir in their rooms and go to their windows. In the moonlit sky they spy a distant balloon with a figure in its hanging basket. The boys figure it is the carnival looking for them and Bradbury describes the balloon "gliding like a spider among the clouds, moving nearer." The boys both reach for their field glasses, "we see what they see as their field glasses zigzag, then fix to a single view." There is nothing more of the balloon as the camera cuts to Charles approaching the carnival alone in the meadow outside town.

The balloon sequence was dramatically expanded for the narrative with the boys foiling the carnival's attempt to locate them by shooting down the balloon without anyone even knowing it happened. The elaborately described sequence where Charles enters the abandoned mirror maze at night is absent from the book. Charles becomes aware of the carnival's evil plans in stages through his suspicions, search through library records and encounter with Mr. Dark during the carnival parade.

As Charles enters the meadow late at night to investigate the carnival, ghostly images are described along with the moon and stars wheeling in the night sky above. Otherwise, there is ominous silence other than the fluttering of carnival pennants. It is a very cinematic and suspenseful sequence hauntingly described on paper. Charles

approaches the mirror maze and tentatively entering, he sees multiple reflections of himself but of him successively grown older and older. This is all carefully described including the man's movements into the maze, his facial expression and even the movement of his eyes *before* the camera reveals what he sees; it is nearly three full pages. When Charles returns home he says nothing to his wife about what may have been a hallucination but it feeds into his growing suspicion about the carnival.

More foreboding and fright dominate the atmosphere as the morning dawn brings a cloudy day and thunder is heard in the background; suspense is definitely building. Will leaves the house to report to the police for probation as he said he would. On the way, it begins to rain just a little before he meets Jim. In a vacant lot they find a frightened little girl who will not give them her name but finally asks for help. They have no idea of who she is but it slowly dawns on Will that it might be Miss Foley and that the carnival has done this to her. Jim will not believe it and runs in fright and Will soon follows after him. This is rather out of character for the reckless Jim and he never shrinks from anything in the later narrative. They go to Miss Foley's house, find it empty and in disorder and they (mostly Will) surmise that the carnival is out to make a "devil's bargain" with people so it can capture and torture their souls. There is a lot of dialogue among them about this. This dialogue is boyish enough, but a little too refined for boys their age. "Devils," they think, capture people's souls just so they can have the pleasure in tormenting them. It is pretty good "folk theology" that leads us to speculate the boys have probably sat through a couple of "fire and brimstone" sermons or have viewed some paintings from Hieronymus Bosch, but they have largely figured out what the dark carnival is about. I believe the book improves on this by having the boys and Will's father come to similar conclusions together in the library, backed up by Charles' research.

The boys are going back for the little girl when the carnival parade comes and they go into hiding under the storm grate in the street. Bradbury goes full tilt here, describing the catalogue of freaks that make up the parade with the Illustrated Man in the lead who blows a whistle "that no one can hear" that stops the music and carnival dead in its tracks. This unusual scene would be visually arresting but Bradbury chose a more nuanced and detailed description of the arrival of the carnival parade in the book. However, the carneys now mingle with the downtown crowd handing out free tickets and

the boys see at a distance Mr. Crosetti in a trance like state enter into an empty cage where he is locked in and becomes part of the parade. “Mr. Ellis” happens by and the boys under the grate get his attention and he goes to stand over them. The Illustrated Man comes and probes him for information about the boys revealing their tattooed images on the palms of his hands. Ellis is evasive and an enraged Illustrated Man clenches his fists so tightly that his nails puncture one of his palms so that blood drips down on top of Will. The Dust Witch is nosing around too but is offended by Ellis’ pipe smoke and stumbles off with the Illustrated Man behind dripping blood as he follows her. When the hypersensitive blind magician arrives, Ellis feigns an animated conversation with someone who is not there and he moves on too. Now that the danger has passed Ellis tells the boys to meet him in the library later that night.

The boys meet Ellis in the library surrounded by books on the occult and he says that he thinks the carnival has been traveling for centuries, thieving men’s minds and souls but no one’s the wiser, and if so—he draws his finger across his throat¹⁷⁷. The Illustrated Man enters and although the library is obviously closed Ellis casually asks what book he is looking for. A scuffle soon erupts and Ellis is knocked out. The boys are hiding but scrambling to find a book and when the Illustrated Man catches hold of them and drags them off. The boys see a copy of the Bible on the shelf but he just laughs saying, “Oh that would do no good. The Bible don’t work on such as me! I could juggle it and ten more like it.” Obviously not your garden variety “devil,” he drags the boys out where a few of his minions are waiting and the Dust Witch casts a spell on the boys, and Bradbury elucidates her incantation in a short paragraph that is reproduced in the book. After the spell is cast, they are led away deaf, dumb and blind. Reaching the carnival some of their school friends call out to them but they are totally unaware as they are taken into the tent where the crowd is just leaving Mr. Electrico in his chair. Will’s father arrives to revive Mr. Ellis at the library and they hurry off to the carnival.

As I indicated at the beginning of this section, from here on things are rapid and sketchy. Charles and Mr. Ellis mount a carnival platform together and Ellis fires the rifle that fells the Dust Witch and a needle, which seems to have been a talisman for the spell

¹⁷⁷ Ellis is a janitor and his speech and mannerisms suggest that he might be a black man, although this is no where indicated.

she cast on the boys, falls from her hand before the boys who have witnessed all this from a distance come back to normal. The bullet has been inscribed with a smile design and Ellis silently mouths the words that it is *not* a crescent moon but his smile etched on the bullet and the Dust Witch starts to panic as she slowly reads his lips from a distance before the bullet reaches her and she falls. The treatment contains only a minimal hint of how the men have reached the conclusion that laughter and good spirits are weapons against the carnival, but this scene proves it and carries some dramatic power the way Bradbury had written it.

The Illustrated Man signals closing time and sounds a deafening note on the calliope that drowns out Ellis' call to the boys who are pursued by The Blind Magician and The Dwarf. They hide and run through the backstage confusion to make their way to the now deserted midway. Bradbury indicates there are now only Ellis and Charles to help the boys and emphasizes they must stop Cooger from rejuvenating on the merry-go-round and that The Illustrated Man must be destroyed because he "changes the shape and form of the fates of the people he has tattooed on his body." He describes the final pursuit thus, "the two boys and the two men fight a retreating battle of run, hide, destroy, run again, hide again, destroy again, depleting the powers of the Carnival, knocking over the Wheels of Fortune."

They finally manage to shut off the power and the lack of current to the "electric chair" finishes off Cooger. It is Jim who fires a bullet that kills The Illustrated Man, now trapped in the mirror maze, "a bullet through the thousand mirrors, killing a thousand images of evil." The freaks "released from bondage" run off into the meadow as the wind topples what is left of the carnival and the men and boys head for home. Missing of course, from the later texts is Jim not in full possession of his senses, taking a spin on the carnival before being pulled off by Will, then taken for dead but revived by Charles and Will's mirth and laughter. While a coherent work that could stand alone, with some well delineated filmic sequences, subsequent work on the treatment yielded richer elaborations of its themes.

VII PRODUCTION HISTORY

Bradbury stated that it took about twenty-eight years for his original treatment to find its way to the screen. He also remarked that along the way he had about fifty meetings with easily a dozen filmmakers concerning *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. The most careful biographer of the author's work, Jonathan R. Eller suspects that Bradbury had already sent writer/producer Val Lewton¹⁷⁸ some material in the late 1940s which may have been in a similar vein to SWTWC.

I will not go into unnecessary detail here but needless to say Bradbury really believed in his treatment and subsequent novel and was tireless in his efforts to get it filmed. Eller notes in *Ray Bradbury Unbound* (164) that by the fall of 1960 he had his screenplay under review at Twentieth Century Fox and the draft novel under review at Columbia Pictures because he had heard that producer/director George Pal was to purchase the rights to Charles Finney's 1935 novella, *The Circus of Dr. Lao*¹⁷⁹. This story and Bradbury's both feature a circus coming to town but they are not very similar works. Around this time Bradbury mailed a typescript of his novel to Jack Clayton—now a director whom he had come to know as an associate producer for *Moby Dick*—he later sent him a copy of the novel. Also in the early 1960's he sent the story to Disney Studios and Walt Disney himself liked the story but did not think it was right for his studio at the time. In late 1966-67 he sent a French translation of the novel to François Truffaut just after Truffaut finished his adaptation of *Fahrenheit 451*. Truffaut also liked the work, especially the focus on the young boys but said it did not fit into his plans. It would be interesting to speculate what a stylist like Truffaut who privileged the author in adaptation, might have done with Bradbury's text.

¹⁷⁸ I mentioned Bradbury's appreciation of Lewton's intelligent handling of fantastic subjects for film in an earlier chapter. He invoked Lewton's films again in a well received 1968 article for *Playboy* titled "Death Warmed Over."

¹⁷⁹ Pal's film was released in 1964 a family oriented special effects show that was fairly popular but a universe away from Bradbury's later film. Bradbury did read Finney's work after he had developed SWTWC and claimed he was not impressed by it and indeed it has never gained much of a reputation

The first serious effort to adapt the book came in the early 1970s when producers Robert Chartoff and Irwin Winkler¹⁸⁰ optioned the book and they were pleased with the screenplay Bradbury had developed from his earlier treatment. Bradbury suggested Sam Peckinpah as director and they thought that choosing someone really tough who would go against the grain of the author's poetry might work. Nothing came of this and the producers tried Twentieth Century Fox but they rejected it as a "kid's picture"¹⁸¹. Next, they tapped director Mark Rydell who did a rewrite with Bradbury but unable to secure funding, their option expired. In 1976, Peter Vincent Douglas, son of actor Kirk Douglas optioned the book and once again Jack Clayton came on board as director and worked with Bradbury to trim the script down to 120 pages. Clayton was absolutely furious that the Paramount production head rejected the script outright, without even carefully reading it.

Douglas continued to shop it around to directors like Jonathan Demme and John Carpenter and finally Stephen Spielberg who said he would do it as a follow up to *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), but never followed through or gave a reason why which deeply disappointed Bradbury, especially after he had told the author how much of an inspiration his *It Came From Outer Space* had been to his own science fiction megahit. Finally Disney entered the picture again under production head Tom Wilhite. At 30, he was very young for such an important position but had done a great deal to reverse the fortunes of Disney Studios. At the time they were going in the direction of live action, family oriented pictures and Wilhite who had grown up in a small town himself was attracted to the themes of Bradbury's work and with an initial 10 million dollar budget a deal was finalized in the summer of 1980 (*Cinemafantastique*, Vol.13, #5: 32). Shooting began at the end of September 1981.

¹⁸⁰ Their later big successes among others were *Rocky* (John G. Avildsen, 1976) and *Raging Bull* (Martin Scorsese, 1981).

¹⁸¹ This was a big handicap in the era before *Star Wars* and *E.T.*

VIII THE CAST

The film narrative is primarily presented through four main characters; a pair of adult males and two boys on the cusp of adolescence. The acting was uniformly good with considerable critical praise going to British newcomer Jonathan Pryce in the part of Mr. Dark and veteran Jason Robards as Charles Halloway the father of one of the youthful protagonists. Casting actors according to their peculiar abilities and parts they are to play is considered an art in itself and the leads in SWTWC seem perfectly cast, both of them with extensive theatrical experience. Jason Robards had been associated with the project a decade earlier when director Sam Peckinpah wanted to cast him as the villainous Mr. Dark. However Jack Clayton who believed he had an “instinct” for casting turned 180 degrees to cast Robards as Halloway and brought in Pryce for Mr. Dark. His instincts proved justified.

Jason Robards was a little older than the fifty-four years his character was identified as having. This was not a problem especially since a struggle with being “too old and tired” to be a father to a young boy is integral to the character. As an actor, Robards had a sort of humble gravitas that allowed him to take on common man roles as well as historical figures such as Abraham Lincoln and Franklin D. Roosevelt. A fellow actor comments on Robards’ beginning as an actor. As a favor to Robard’s actor father, Robert Clarke¹⁸² a struggling young actor himself, agreed to meet Jason Jr., as he was then known, in New York when he was enrolling in the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in 1947.

I got there first and sat where I told him I’d sit, and in walked this tall, gaunt...*homely* fellow. He had just gotten out of the navy, as his father had indicated, and he was therefore still quite skinny, and his eyes were kind of sunken into his head. He was terribly nice and we had an enjoyable conversation, but I certainly had no idea how to “help him” as his dad had requested...The next time I heard of Jason Jr., he was doing some things on television, which was a brand new medium, and

¹⁸² Clarke made a modest living in film and television for almost forty years and published his memoirs because he discovered he had a sizable group of fans due to the numerous science fiction and horror pictures he had appeared in during the 1950s.

then the *big* springboard for him was the play *Long Day's Journey into Night* ...From there he took off like a rocket (67).

Perhaps unpromising as a youth, Robards quickly grew into a powerful actor who made quite a mark on stage before entering film much later at the age of thirty-seven in 1960. More closely associated with the works of Eugene O'Neal than any other actor and with his gravelly but commanding voice he excelled at playing low-keyed, sardonic, somewhat disintegrated characters. Neither physically imposing, nor "movie star handsome" his long, pointed face and blue eyes gave him a distinctive, somewhat authoritative presence suggestive of powers buried within. These qualities served him well in *SWTWC* as Charles Halloway, a man experiencing regret and pain in growing older, a strained relationship with his young son, and finally as one who must find the strength to confront and defeat a malevolent, metaphysical adversary. In the film he is a well dressed, middle class man in the more fitting role of town librarian instead of its janitor as in the source text.

Stage trained actors are usually adept at using their body and voice in service of performance and remaining firmly in character throughout since they must perform live from beginning to end without any extended breaks. Robards often played characters with a mix of stoic resolve and world weariness, and the film medium through the close perspective the camera offers, highlighted his ability to skillfully convey his character's inner self through his hands, mouth and eyes. Above all, Robards' magnificently controlled speaking voice allowed him to bring out the poetic quality of Bradbury's script with natural ease. Moreover, though not being one of those films "constructed through faces," in extensive close up and reaction shots, it still has that strongly emotional quality through Robards (and Jonathan Pryce's) finely tuned performance. In his role, Robards brings substantial development to his character while working out seemingly every imaginable permutation of despair and regret. Yet he carried his guilt, anger and feelings of inferiority with such calm and poise that it made his ultimate victory over Mr. Dark and his own self-doubts all the more triumphant. Moreover, he embodied a character whose down to earth heroism audiences can appreciate and share in.

Although he had a distinguished career in film and television, Robards preferred theater and a large number of his filmed works were adapted from the stage. He was an

interesting actor to watch, often playing characters with unconventional personal codes such as in *A Thousand Clowns* (Frank Coe, 1965) and in Sergio Leon's *Once a Upon Time in the West* (1968). Robards was one of only a few actors to win the "Triple Crown" of acting, an Oscar, Emmy and Tony award. Prior to SWTWC he won the best supporting actor Oscar two consecutive years for *All the President's Men* (Alan J. Pakula, 1976) and *Julia* (Fred Zinnemann, 1977). Robards was a marquee actor as one might expect to headline a major production, and his casting here perhaps added extra adult appeal to this film produced by Disney, a company known for its juvenile and family oriented product.

In only his second major film role Jonathan Pryce brought a deft touch to his co-starring role as the films' antagonist Mr. Dark. Being British, director Clayton was more likely to be familiar with Price who began in regional theater in England in the 1970s and had just under a dozen appearances on British television before appearing as king Herod in the made for TV docudrama *The Day Christ Died* (James Cellan Jones, 1980). Heavyweight actors such as Christopher Lee¹⁸³, Peter O'Toole and Rutger Hauer were considered for the role, but Clayton insisted on an unknown face which probably worked to Pryce's advantage for the malevolent role of the master of the soul-snatching carnival, since he carried no identification or expectations for audiences from previous roles. After seeing him in a videotaped, semi-horrific scene with two ventriloquist's dummies from the play "Comedians," which Pryce won a Tony award for, producer Peter Douglas was convinced he had found "Mr. Dark".

However, in playing a supernatural being, something more than the typical, urbane, English villain was called for and Pryce delivered. The Shakespearian trained actor had never read Bradbury's novel, and claimed that "Science fiction and horror literally terrify me" (Cinefantastique: vol.13 no.5:34) but he liked the character because he felt it would be able to retain the book's language in the film. Neither Pryce (nor Clayton) were interested in the exaggerated, grotesque aspect of the character but rather opted for subtle menace. It was a showy role for the bearded, thirty-four year old actor demanding sexual swagger and intimations of incredible evil. He is played as a predator, a pied piper and a puppet master, expertly manipulating and grasping the emotional

¹⁸³ Lee became acquainted with Bradbury during his time in Britain writing the *Moby Dick* screenplay and thereafter remained alert to playing in anything related to Bradbury.

strings of whomever he can. Nevertheless, the film leaves a great deal of Mr. Dark's motivation and mythology to be inferred. His mere presence had to suggest things far more diabolical than the film shows us. His dignified speech and bearing with brief glimpses of desperation suggest he may once have been human, but entered into a pact with cosmic evil for a degraded kingship and kingdom.

Pryce played his role with remarkable subtlety, leaving aside any threat of physical force to project menace, yet with great restraint befitting the battle of will and intention waged with the unassuming Charles Halloway. Pryce¹⁸⁴ brings an admirable range to a character that could easily have been cryptically one-dimensional in a compressed medium like film. In complete control of the carnival, he is erudite, proud and boastful but not beyond nervous anxiety when on the prowl or sensing a threat. He is a powerful adversary but not without the hint of an Achilles heel. There is a complexity and multilayered nature to this supernatural being that is surprising and better discussed later. Pryce delivered a careful and memorable performance. Even playing against a strong actor like Robards, he was impressive in a couple of truly powerful scenes and the film may have benefitted from one or two more. He was nominated for best supporting actor for his portrayal of Mr. Dark.

Will Halloway and Jim Nightshade, the boys who first discover the evil of the carnival and are under the threat by it were played by Vidal Peterson and Shawn Carson respectively. Neither of these boys had much film acting experience but play their roles adequately. Carson perhaps the better of the two, but his part allowed him to display more reckless courage than Peterson who played the calmer, steadier youth. The latter's implicit likeness to Bradbury as a boy extends even to his physical appearance with his open, gentle face, blonde hair and round glasses.

Children can be difficult to work with on a film set but Clayton had worked with children before on *The Innocents* (1961) and gave a lot of attention to the boys. He was very precise with them, "pure direction," he called it, believing that with children it is necessary "to communicate directly to their subconscious." He emerged as something of a father figure to them and they were calling him "dad" after a few weeks. However,

¹⁸⁴ Pryce went on to a fine career of varied roles in films like Terry Gilliam's classic *Brazil* (1985) up to the present with the globally popular *Game of Thrones* TV series

Clayton recalled “the boys got pretty cheeky and I had to slap their hands, so to speak” (Cinefantastique vol. 13 no 5:37).

The film historian and critic, Bill Warren an expert on fantastic cinema was less than enthusiastic about the boy’s performances. While he didn’t see them as “acterly,” he believed their parts required youths who were “extraordinarily expressive, sensitive and dynamic” while to him, they seemed “just ordinary boys.” Perhaps Warren was right, although there is nothing seriously wrong with their performances. It is difficult to imagine thirteen-year-old boys with the wealth of experience and maturity necessary to fully transmit the depth and conflict of emotion these boys are freighted with. On film, they both seem younger, more childish than thirteen and although their bantering and scuffles are toned down from the book, the flashes of jealousy and resentment they have, mixed with genuine concern for each other seem a little beyond their capacity to convey.

Then there were the actresses needed to play the boy’s mothers, Ellen Greer as Mrs. Halloway and Diane Ladd as Mrs. Nightshade. Both roles are small, yet important in illustrating the dynamics of the households the boys are being raised in. Mrs.Halloway, appears to be a devoted and contented homemaker, who is entertained by her husband’s stories and tries to comfort him when he expresses his misgivings about not being a more lively father for his son. Scenes with his wife show that Charles is not alone in his pain although it is not within her power to relieve it. She demonstrates active concern when she scolds and disciplines Will while Charles meekly backs her up showing that he doesn’t feel up to the task early on. Her role is small, but she is a nurturing center of stability and appears to be the only character completely outside the reach of the evil allure of the carnival. This is perhaps in keeping with how Charles views her in the book, completely fulfilled as a woman and mother rather than an “unconnected fool” who can be trapped by the passage of time.

Diane Ladd, as Jim’s mother brings the needed delicacy and fragility to the role. Appearing to be around 40 she is still an attractive woman who is careful in how she dresses and seems to pamper herself a little. She is a vaguely neglectful mother unintentionally contributing to Jim’s willful, restless streak since he appears to receive little guidance from her. Perhaps this better serves the screen narrative and it certainly makes her more sympathetic than in the book, where her over protectiveness of the boy

seems to be the cause of his rebellion. The film makes it obvious that she is not up to the task of being both mother and father for Jim, but we don't censor her for this because there is no doubt that the boy is precious to her and that she loves him. She tenderly comforts the boy when he needs it, explaining a little to him about the father he never knew and in a way, anchors him by declaring his likeness to his father, although it is a comparison given with a measure of caution as well as with affection.

The rest of the cast are solid with veteran character actor Royal Dano playing the small, but important part of Tom Fury, the lightening rod salesman. Dano played the part of Elijah in *Moby Dick* when Bradbury first became acquainted with him. The tall, thin, worn-looking Dano was familiar to audiences from dozens of westerns and often played unsophisticated, rural characters. He was "The Tattered Man" in John Huston's 1951 classic *The Red Badge of Courage*.

He was very good in this unusual role of a wandering eccentric, who appears to possess some unusual, esoteric, knowledge. He reminds one of the itinerant sage often found in fantasy fiction who has something valuable to impart to the questing hero. However, he plays an interesting variation on this archetype in SWTWC. When peddling his wares to the townsfolk he is a smooth-talking, travelling salesman, but brings sincere warmth and childlike innocence to his interaction with the boys. He is happy to sell a lightning rod to Jim for next to nothing, which acts as a vital defense against the harm Mr. Dark later tries to do to him.

Although an adult with adult desires, for instance he is enchanted by the beauty of the Dust Witch, Tom Fury seems more at home in the boy's world. His enthusiastic interaction with the boys embodies a spirit of play and make believe. He is presented wandering into town at the beginning of the narrative, ahead of an approaching storm, a harbinger of things to come. He briefly appears in the middle and at the end of the story and is the first person to fall under the carnival's spell and the only captive clearly shown to escape. Neither madman nor "divine fool," his acts of resistance are nothing short of heroic. A casual, unwitting agent of the "light" he is an unrecognized ally of Charles Halloway and the boys in their struggle against Mr. Dark. His screen time is brief but he always commands our attention. Pryce's character was not the only one to retain some of

Bradbury's poetic prose. It falls naturally and finally forcefully from the lips of this engaging eccentric; and what a creation Tom Fury is.

Although not identified as such, Pam Grier plays the part of the "Dust Witch," the most seductive tool of Dark's carnival. Her character is even more mysterious than Mr. Dark's and she openly performs magic, seemingly with the aid of the large ring set with a luminous red stone she prominently displays. She is entirely at the beck and call of Mr. Dark and is the epitome of evil as a beautiful, seductive force. In the carnival she alternatively appears as "the most beautiful woman in the world," a fortune teller, an exotic dancer and enticing carnival patron in rapid succession. It is implicit that her appearance changes according to the beholder and near the end while she is a stunning beauty for Tom Fury, the boys glimpse her as a horrible apparition.

Grier is an exotically beautiful, statuesque woman; an African American¹⁸⁵ of mixed Caucasian and American Indian blood (with a dash of Hispanic, Chinese and Filipino as well), which if anything, facilitates her effortless shift to different roles in the film. The source texts provided little description of her character so we may conclude that it was very carefully conceived and interpreted by the filmmakers and pre-production drawings and notes bear this out. A great deal of time, effort and money were expended in her character's final conception (and costumes) that was not arrived at quickly. They wisely avoided resorting to any standard Disney concept of a witch. This was also in keeping with the director's desire for the fantastic elements of the film to stem from its contextual reality.

Prior to SWTWC she was known as an action heroine in several "Blaxploitation¹⁸⁶" films from the 1970's including an interesting role as a detective (probably the first black woman) in *Sheba, Baby* (William Girdler, 1975), and later as a murderous prostitute in *Fort Apache, the Bronx* (Daniel Petrie, 1981). She was still

¹⁸⁵Tom Wilhite, Disney's production head denied the rumor that the studio was wary of casting a black in a major role (remember filming was in 1982) It was still a touchy issue for the studio then and Wilhite said he was more concerned about casting a black woman as a villain, thinking it unfortunate that the only black had a negative role and would rather have cast one of the innocent men as a black but that the story wasn't structured that way (Cinefanastique, Vol.13 no.5 :34).

¹⁸⁶ These were films made with mostly black casts to appeal to black audiences. They were often somewhat violent and usually the black protagonists, by a combination of force and wits gained the upper hand against the whites and other, less savory blacks.

beautiful and a formidable screen presence years later when Quentin Tarantino cast her as the lead in *Jackie Brown* (1997). Grier's performance in SWTWC exemplifies the old maximum "less is more." Her performance is powerful because she achieves a great deal by doing very little; she says very little, but by small gestures of the hand, nods of the head and looks ranging from seductive to sinister keeps our attention focused on her while we are left to wonder, building various expectations. She is like the eye at the center of a hurricane. Bringing destruction in her wake, we never know which way she may turn or what harm she is capable of doing.

Bruce M. Fischer rounds out the carnival, playing Mr. Cooger, Dark's partner. He has less screen time than Grier's Dust Witch, partly because he rides the carnival's carousel backwards to become a sinister looking child sent out to entrap one of the town's folk. He is the front man for the carnival overseeing the games, rides and handing out tickets and prizes. He affects calm, good natured speech but glowers calculatingly at people when not interacting with them; perhaps not so different from a real carnival barker. He is just as the source text describes him, a large, fierce looking man with flaming red hair (balding in the film) and piercing blue eyes.

Aside from Tom Fury, there are four unfortunate, if not lonely and apparently "unconnected" town folk who fall victim to the carnival. These were small parts but their characters were sufficiently developed for the roles they had to they play. Veteran actor Richard Davalos plays Mr. Croscetti, the town barber. Davalos was one of a crop of handsome, juvenile actors from the 1950s and 60s and played James Dean's more stable, older brother in *East of Eden* (Elia Kazan, 1955) and amassed many, mostly TV credits afterwards. In SWTWC he is a heavy set man with a big beard and thick curly hair. He is an easy-going, jovial sort but simmers with unsatiated desire for beautiful women. The actor effectively transmits this without exaggeration.

Mr. Tetley, is a shop owner and tobacconist who sells Charles Halloway his cigars. Played by Jack Dengal, he is a carefully dressed, thin, somewhat nervous man. He is a grasping, obviously frustrated sort who longs after riches and all the things money can buy but with a touch of lasciviousness too. We are not the least surprised that a character portrayed like this becomes entangled in Cooger & Dark's Carnival.

On the other hand, there is Ed, the bartender played by James Stacey. Stacey had a solid career, mostly in television from the late 1950s until retiring in 1991 and was twice nominated for prime-time Emmys. In 1973 he lost a leg below the knee and an arm at the elbow and his character's inclusion in SWTWC adds considerably to the film. Of all the characters here that ache with longing or regret, we might expect this double amputee to be at the forefront. He *does* miss the days gone by when he was a football hero, but he appears to be the happiest, most well adjusted of the lot. He displays not a hint of self-pity, but is always smiling and cheerful. A sociable fellow, the boys seem to love him as do Charles Halloway and the rest of town. We really feel sorry for him when he falls prey to the carnival—it seems so unfair, so evil in his case. He has our immediate sympathy as a victim of a terrible accident or worse yet, perhaps a casualty of war. Who could fault him for wanting to be whole again?

Finally there is Miss Foley, the boy's stern, old maid school teacher. Not a bad person, but obviously unhappy. The source of her discontent is not immediately evident but it comes as no surprise when revealed. The filmmakers avoided the cliché of lost love or betrayal; we have no idea why she is alone although there are hints that she let opportunities pass her by, and her fate at the hands of the carnival comes through a particularly deceptive channel and is a cruel one indeed. The actress Mary Grace Canfield, was (or was made to) look a lot older here than in her heyday as a popular television comedienne in the 1960s and 70s but would have been a familiar face to audiences in 1983. The same is for true for Jack Dodson¹⁸⁷ who has a cameo role as “doc,” the town doctor and Charles Halloway's friend who joins him in the bar.

IX THE DIRECTOR AND FILM CREW

Decades earlier when production of SWTWC first appeared likely, Bradbury was counting on director Sam Peckinpah. He was impressed by the director's enthusiasm and desire to film the story just as it was written. Bradbury was disappointed that he never

¹⁸⁷ Dodson was a dignified, yet comic fixture on the long running, immensely popular *Andy Griffith Show* and its spin off *Mayberry RFD*. Dodson was a close friend of Robards from the theater and he always tried to get him a part in the theater productions he starred in because he enjoyed his company so much

fully got behind the project as he had promised, but in retrospect he may not have been the right director for the job. In view of his work, it is difficult to imagine Peckinpah, directing children in a film that trades in understated terror and deep emotion with a touch of period nostalgia. Peckinpah's work calls to mind strong, choreographed violence, gun play and seedy Mexican brothels instead of small town carousels and librarians.

Although the Disney studio was not immediately convinced, Jack Clayton was probably a good choice for the kind of film Bradbury envisioned *Something Wicked This Way Comes* to become and not just because he had previously worked with Bradbury on the screenplay; he was known as a subtle craftsman. However, Clayton was not exactly a hot, young director at the time. His last film, an adaptation of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* was filmed back in 1974 and was a critical and popular failure in spite of a stellar cast. His film remained close to the source text but suffered from a languorous pace and lack of a clear and consistent point of view causing the Gatsby character to lose much of the multi-faced complexity it had in the novel (Tibbetts and Welsh 99). The film medium inherently possesses an omniscient storytelling voice. That is, the camera can capture just about anything but care must be taken as to the perspective from which it records events and people that essentially become an *interpretation* of narrative and character. Unfortunately, the carefully crafted visual aspect of this period film left it a bit static in terms of character dynamics. The beautiful images but subdued story telling may have served a different kind of narrative like the understated social realism pictures the director had previously filmed, better than *The Great Gatsby*. Baz Lurman's more recent adaptation (2013) utilized a number of formative techniques that at times made the film seem disjunctured or confusing but it was better at opening a window into the psyche of the complex character of Gatsby.

Clayton's lackluster film may have given the Disney executives pause before hiring him, but Bradbury pointed to his splendid earlier works such as *Room at the Top* (1957), a trenchant satire on contemporary British life which some considered even better than its well-received source novel. The film paved the way for several first rate British films about working-class life. Moreover, his adaptation of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Innocents* (1961) was a superb ghost story where Clayton managed to

preserve the “ambiguity of James’ text in a medium that must *show* us the ghosts” (Tibbetts and Welsh 249). The film makes us believe what we are seeing while leaving us uncertain as to the veracity of our perceptions. It was subtly crafted and powerful, yet violated none of the generic expectations for a classic ghost story¹⁸⁸. Notwithstanding, Disney production head Tom Wilhite was concerned by a certain “coolness” he had sensed in the director’s earlier projects but Clayton reassured them by pointing out that *Something Wicked This Way Comes* was more emotional material than either *The Great Gatsby* or *The Turn of the Screw*.

Clayton came into his own as a producer and director with the award winning 1956 short *The Bespoke Overcoat*. He seems not to have been greatly involved in the scripting of his films but loomed large as a producer, with more credits here than as a director. He began by serving as associate producer on several films, notably with director John Huston e.g. *Beat the Devil* (1953) and *Moby Dick* (1956) (it was here that he became acquainted with Ray Bradbury) before becoming a director. His directorial credits were relatively few because he was involved with many projects that never reached the screen.

As one might already gather, Clayton was known as a “very literary” director. Virtually all of his films were literary or stage adaptations. He was known as an extremely focused director, meticulous to detail. He had a reputation as a fine director of actors, in four of his ten pictures actors were nominated for awards. He was, as they say “a director who knew what he wanted” and seems to have got it without friction in SWTWC from a very professional cast that was “spot on,” as I have indicated above. Jason Robards affirmed as much by commenting that “there were no shooting mistakes, or ad libs and no great analysis or discussion—at least as far as Jonathan Pryce and I were concerned” (Cinefantastique, Vol 13, no.5:37).

He seems to have enjoyed a good and productive relationship with Bradbury in his role as screen writer, even allowing him to be present during much of the filming which is something of a rarity in filmmaking. Usually directors do not want to have the writers around when filming their scripts. Earlier, when the project was at Paramount, they had attacked Bradbury’s 260 page screenplay (enough for a five hour film) together,

¹⁸⁸ I could not sleep after seeing it on television one evening as a child.

in what Bradbury called “a terrific writer-director relationship” (Cinefantastique, Vol 13, no.5:31) paring it down to a lean 120 pages. Yet there was an unfortunate turn in this. Perhaps because of the sharp rejection the script got at Paramount, or Clayton’s insecurity he had John Mortimer a previous collaborator, rewrite Bradbury’s script for Disney without informing Bradbury. He allowed Bradbury to submit changes (about a dozen) which he casually dismissed and would not speak to Bradbury on the set for the first two weeks of filming until he wrote a “love letter” to John Mortimer. Then things returned to normal between them.

It would appear that Mortimer did not make many outright changes to Bradbury’s script, but rather omissions; many were probably small, perhaps one was rather substantial. It is difficult to know because of the reshooting and other extensive changes made in post production. It is likely some of these omissions were due to technical or budget restrictions as per normal. Nevertheless, the bulk of Bradbury’s script must have remained intact because he was awarded *sole* credit as screenwriter.

Endless tinkering with the shooting script is par for the course in Hollywood. The major problems with this long, drawn out production (running almost 2 years) came from other sources, mainly technical in nature: set design and construction, conception and execution of special effects and the actual cinematography. It was a complicated film from the point of view of the sheer number of creative people involved, all coming up against a determined, even stubborn director. Hardly anything was deemed satisfactory when post production was reached. From the start Clayton told the studio executives “If you’re expecting me to make a horror film or a bit of whimsy, I’m not doing it.” When asked how he planned to handle the frightening bits he told them, “the way they scare *me!*” (Cinefantastique, Vol 13, no.5:32). This seemed reasonable and was good enough for the producers.

Clayton wanted to let the characters and relationships carry the audience into the fantasy instead of letting the machinery do the work. He wanted people to be able to look at any event in the film in two possible ways-either literally or as only possibly happening; perhaps harkening back to *The Innocents*. Just the same, special effects were needed and Clayton found arranging these to be complicated and time consuming, so he tried using the simplest means possible to achieve the required effects. He chose to

handle most of the film's effects during principal photography using physical effects shot live on stage instead of complicated post-production opticals.

Therefore the absence of a full effects team during preproduction and lack of detailed storyboards covering effects shots ultimately cost the film tremendous amounts of time and money later on (*Cinefantastique*, Vol 13, no.5:33) when these were added. Moreover, Clayton did not believe he got the best special effects crew, the majority of whom were working on *Tron* (Stephen Lisberger, 1982) or the EPCOT project. Finally, *no one* was satisfied with the special effects. Some thought the budget inadequate or that concepts and expectations were to blame. According to Allen Hall, head of mechanical effects, all his "effects were either lit poorly, designed without enough "punch," or simply ruined, compromised or made more expensive by needless meddling" (*Cinefantastique*, Vol 13, no.5:41).

Computer generated effects were used in the film but they needed to be matched with live action in a period film and most of these didn't look at all organic in the way the film needed, for example the subsequent computer animated replica of the real railroad train seen hurtling out of the darkness in the credit sequence. Thus, a lot of the computer animated footage was not used in the assembled film. However, nearly 200 optical effects were added to the film under the direction of effects supervisor Lee Dyer. Some of these like the rotoscope animation of the glowing pages of a diary as Mr. Dark rips them out in his confrontation with Charles Halloway, and the threatening skies of an approaching storm are quite effective. Others such as the tornado-like storm that sweeps the carnival away at the end are less so. The travail of creating, filming and inserting the special effects are recorded in exhaustive detail in the cited issue of *Cinefantastique* and there is no need to discuss this aspect of the film any further at this point. Suffice to say that the effects are there to serve the narrative, they were not meant to overmaster the story and in spite of any short comings, they hold up well enough in the film 35 years after its release.

In terms of set design, Clayton was not concerned with constructing an alternative world, but an old one to evoke a familiar feeling from the audience as if they had been there before. To this end Victorian storefronts, wrought iron gazebos and a spectacular library were constructed straight out of the 1890s, all surrounding a town square. Bradbury was almost moved to tears to see such a detailed construction of his "Green

Town.” No expense was spared as this turn of the century town was built from the ground up on the Disney lot. Under the supervision of production designer Richard Macdonald, a crew of 200 labored for three months on the one acre set, the largest built in Hollywood in nearly a generation.

However, Macdonald’s designs for the carnival, built on Disney’s Oak Range in Newhall, California were more understated, primarily consisting of a series of flat facades, yet with curves and flourishes giving it an air of impermanence. Much of the construction was in line with the key elements of the plot: the temple of temptation, the mirror maze and the “freak” tent to display the living waxworks of the souls entrapped by the carnivals enticements. A key set-piece was not built but located and refurbished, a 70 yr. old wood and brass carousel that had been in service in a California amusement park up until 1974.

Photography was another matter as Clayton did not want a lot of flashy movement or technique, instead electing to use a very fluid “master scene” style of shooting which allows the actor to use all his resources. Cinematographer Stephen Burum found this to be an admirable way of bringing out the dynamics of a scene, but it was a lot more difficult than making certain things work through the cutting. Clayton had an aversion to copying other director’s work in terms of individual shots or shooting style, but still filming progressed steadily, on time and within budget, but friction rapidly developed between several key members of the production crew, namely designer Macdonald and Burum.

Though neither of them stated it openly, Macdonald seemed angry over the lighting and choice of camera angles for his vaunted sets which he had built to last, while Burum complained about the inherent structural difficulties in Macdonald’s sets for effectively capturing the narrative. Since Burum was tasked with filming he thought he should have been consulted on set construction, and believed if he had, it would have saved a lot of time and trouble. Clayton commented that in most of his films the art director and cameraman “were often at loggerheads” (*Cinefantastique*, Vol 13, no.5:38), but this feud never seemed to subside although Clayton tried to smooth things over the best he could. Also, the makeup effects supervisor, Robert J. Schiffer had an important

role in production and found himself battling all of the above as well as producer Peter Douglas and the film's mechanical staff at times.

I think it is beyond question that under these circumstances, director Jack Clayton did a good job in making a carefully, even beautifully mounted picture. His overall conception and the tone he created for the narrative seem right. He helped Bradbury condense his screenplay but must have been pleased with elements that were not present, in Bradbury's earliest screen treatment dating from 1959, like introduction and exposition of an underlying rift between Charles Halloway and his son, and the demise of the Dust Witch in a different and more dramatic way, also adding a nice circularity to the narrative through Tom Fury. These were certainly Bradbury's ideas and they remained in the screenplay Clayton had the writer cut by two-thirds

Clayton deserves credit for many of the aspects that contribute to *Something Wicked This Way Comes* being a memorable film that has not been neglected with the passage of time since its disappointing release. He cannot be blamed for any of the later insertions and particularly omissions in the film as released. In fact, one "key" scene between Charles and his son that was edited out angered both Clayton and Bradbury a great deal, but this will be discussed during examination of the film. Clayton's SWTWC does not display the "coolness" or emotional detachment detected in some of his earlier work but was (and still is) criticized for being a little too "tame" and static.

The studio executives who were initially quite enthusiastic became suspicious of short comings such as these before the film was completed, and became really worried when it was screened before a test audience including Clayton, Bradbury and his whole family. Bradbury was optimistic, he had already seen the film and loved it, but a capacity crowd filled out preview opinion cards (a common practice) that were just average or below. The film's twenty-four year old producer Peter Douglas¹⁸⁹ thought Clayton had done well enough for the film to be well received critically, but felt they needed more for the broad market they wanted to reach. The other executives were blunter and believed the film lacked energy and clarity, and there was no "magic," or not enough magic in a

¹⁸⁹ He had enjoyed moderate success with his first production, the time travel picture *The Final Countdown* (Don Taylor, 1980). Both this and SWTWC were films that were not highly successful upon release but have acquired a following over the years.

picture that desperately needed some. While director Clayton was not completely out of the loop (or off the hook) the film was essentially taken out of his hands and the studio “doctors” went to work for the better part of a year on the picture so the final cut was significantly different from Clayton’s¹⁹⁰ original cut.

Figures vary according to source but the film cost the studio around 16 million and an additional 7 million before it was deemed ready for release. Effects specialist Lee Dyer headed the team responsible for most of the insertions and reshooting, and while he worked with Clayton on much of this it was difficult because the director was neither effects savvy nor used to working with storyboards and the director was understandably “touchy” about overhaul outside of effects. Dyer insisted that his suggestions were “organic to Bradbury’s original screenplay and complimentary to the staid, quiet fire of Clayton’s first cut,” and “there was never the idea of loading on effects cosmetically. We tried making story points out of everything we did, and tried tying the loose threads together” (Cinefantastique, Vol 13, no.5:43). I think it important to quote Dyer’s intentions because he shares so much responsibility for what we finally see on film and his contributions went beyond effects. He believed there were certain visual concepts and story areas which needed further development and devised four new sequences for the film which required calling back most of the actors for reshooting. He said that at the time he was getting 3-4 page advice memos from Ray Bradbury and producer Peter Douglas which he had to wade through and finally block out as overload.

With the director now sidelined, an interesting thing happened. The executives were calling the shots now and they remembered all the cautionary memos Bradbury had been sending them especially through the latter part of production and a day after the preview, studio head Ron Miller called and asked Bradbury to come in and see him. In an unpublished interview conducted by Jonathan R. Eller dated October 23, 2007, he recalled his meeting with Miller:

So I walked into his office and he said, I hope you’re not going to say “I told you so.” I said, “There’s no time for that. Rebuild the sets. Rehire the actors. Get a new musical score. Take the last reel and let me become film editor. I’ll make up an

¹⁹⁰ Of course Clayton never entertained the idea of making another picture for Disney.

ending script, and put the last reel together so it's not hilarious [inadvertently funny]. And then there's this scene missing and that scene missing. So I became the director of the film. And the director was there, standing around the side...so we did all the things that I wanted changed—we did a new musical score which is fabulous...and the film was finally previewed and we'd saved it. And it went out in the market.

The studio asked for his advice and seems to have taken much of it. Bradbury was involved in the special effects that were added and present during some of the reshooting and he quite possibly had a hand in directing some scenes. It is nearly impossible to specifically ascertain all of Bradbury's post production involvement although it was enough for the studio to consider crediting him as "second director." Bradbury did not push for this but his part in the finished product exceeded the story and screenplay credits he received. He was definitely responsible for an important addition toward the end which we will see later.

It is interesting to note a sequence that was part of his early screen treatment and further elaborated in the book that he suggested but was not included. This came midway through the story when the boys are being threatened by the Dust Witch. In the same unpublished interview he described it in the 2007 interview:

You could do the scene with the Dust Witch and the balloon, you see, because at night when the boys hear something and see the fog going, following them and it's around the house and they both go to the window to look up. So that's where you do the new scene, the balloon is there. So you don't have Jim coming over to join Will, except he does and they look out the window again and there's the balloon, and it's marking the house, it's scraping the house. So both boys are terrified, and Will gets this idea. Without saying anything he reaches up on the wall and gets his bow and arrow. And Jim says, "What are you doing? He takes it and you don't have to have that young boy. You have a substitute, or you do a digital animation of the boy. And he runs out of the house and down the middle of the street, and the balloon follows him all along, and he finds a house that's being re-constructed (it's almost empty), and he goes in the house and climbs up toward the top and waves. We don't have to see him close up. We see the boy waving and the balloon comes down and it gets a shot, and goes wiff-wiff-wiff-wiff, and flies out in the country and dies. And

then you start the parade the next day, you see? If I could get them to let me do this—I'd pay for it myself, if they'd say they'd do it.

Stalked at night by the Dust Witch in a balloon—it is such an intriguing, surreal sequence of images it is not surprising that Bradbury never gave up on having them inserted into the film. The boys *are* pursued to their houses by a mysterious fog sent by the Dust Witch but what happens when they reach their homes, a mysterious infestation of spiders that turns out to be a dream sequence, was something much more pedestrian and roundly criticized in the film.

Bradbury (and others) saw the need of a different sound track and here they scored a coup. Clayton had approached French composer George Delerue to write an understated score because he had hoped to let the natural quiet of the story carry most of the movie. Delerue's soundtrack was understated, wistful and rather short. The main theme was a simple, uplifting piece written for solo flute, harp and strings. The studio thought it nice music but for the wrong film and wanted something more full-bodied. The studio originally called Jerry Goldsmith but he was already busy so they turned to 28 year old James Horner¹⁹¹. Time was short and so everyone tried to help by sending him Delerue's music and offering to discuss concepts but he just asked for the picture without any preconceived notions. In a month's time he had scored the film from beginning to end with a lush, orchestral sound track of over an hour in length. The studios released the film's soundtrack separately. Finally they brought in Oscar winner Richard Portman (*The Deer Hunter* Michael Cimino, 1978) for new sound effects. He came up with some interesting and unique effects well linked to the film's thematic elements. Finally, as Bradbury had said the refurbished film was "saved" and ready for release in the U.S. on April 29th of 1983.

¹⁹¹Horner already had the big budget pictures *Wolfen* (Michael Wadleigh, 1981) and *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn* (Nicholas Meyer, 1982) to his credit and was establishing a distinguished career with 2 Oscar wins and dozens of nominations up until his untimely death in a plane crash in 2015.

X THE FILM: THEATRICAL TRAILER, TITLES AND OPENING SEQUENCE

A trailer is quite important since it reaches film goers, and this one is nearly three minutes long. The theatrical trailer for *Something Wicked* seems effective: “There’s a storm coming... For every heart there is a wish...For every soul there burns a desire...But never whisper your dreams¹⁹² for someone may be listening... And for every wish there will be a price.” Throughout, the trailer presents cuts of the town’s characters and the carnival parade followed by the eyes of the Dust Witch opening within a block of ice, with continued narration “and for every desire there will be a cost.” Finally there are scenes of Mr. Dark confronting Charles Halloway with the boys’ images tattooed on his palms and a bit of the final library confrontation. The trailer ends with the narration “Ray Bradbury’s fantasy tale of light, and darkness is getting closer, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*.” Bradbury’s name is displayed above the film’s title for the last frame. Bradbury is used here as a “brand name” to spur interest in the film without explicitly stating that the film is an adaptation of his book, in spite of the fact that his book had become a widely read classic now twenty years after its publication. The trailer describes the story as a “fantasy tale of light and darkness,” otherwise the trailer makes the film seem dark indeed.

The titles sequence begins with utter blackness and wavy red lines, like splashes of paint (or blood) in the center of the frame that liquidly move and refine themselves into “Ray Bradbury’s” followed by a wipe that shows a mass of black dots nearly obscuring most of a bright red frame, the red color dominating the top of the frame, then the title of the film is “splashed” in deep red across the inky black background. Now in the center at a distance there appears a small light with steam or smoke billowing above in deep darkness still far off. The director’s name appears in blue letters in the lower foreground, followed by the names of the principal players, then credits for the music composer (James Horner) and Lee Dyer for “special visual effects,” highlighting their importance to the film. Before the final credits for producer and director we see “screenplay by Ray Bradbury, based on his novel.” All the while we have been listening to Horner’s ominous 9-note “march theme (putting one in mind of the Darth Vader march

¹⁹² Obviously a little different than the wishes Disney’s “Jimminy Cricket” once suggested we make.

from *Star Wars*) but he wastes no time in introducing a richer, more melodic variation of the same theme as we see what is obviously a train now, still cloaked in darkness, slowly coming closer. In fact the train finally “runs over” us as the credits end with the train’s lamp, now looming like a full moon in the top of the frame making a bright flash leading into a rapid dissolve to leafy daylight. It is at first washed-out but then brightens like an old Polaroid snapshot developing before our eyes. We are in the “real” story world now.

As the opening sequence unfolds, the carnival is shown to arrive by train, however trains in the cinema are freighted (no pun intended) with significance. Outside the Western, they have emotional connotations—arrivals or departures, they may be associated with passion like in *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945). Excitement or sadness but certainly unstoppable power, we can be crushed¹⁹³ in an instant which is what happens here. Also, a train (unless you see this one arrive at night) is a very inconspicuous way for supernatural forces to enter a town, although the nighttime train sequence is attention-getting especially for the abrupt tension relieving shift into the softly lit story world.

This leafy daylight is not too bright but soon becomes an ever broadening expanse, a pastoral of rich fall color presented through a series of slowly dissolving shots. This gradual succession of increasingly vivid and expansive shots would seem to mirror the memory process of recalling long past events and images. Gentle voice off narration (we hear a voice but do not see the speaker) begins: “First of all it was October, a rare month for boys. Full of cold winds, long nights, dark promises...and the wind mourns in such a way that makes you want to run forever through the fields (intercut with a full shot of two boys running through these fields) because up ahead ten-thousand pumpkins lie waiting to be cut.” The accompanying music soars majestic at this point.

There is a fade to a man on a dirt road with a small town below in the distance and he hails a 1920s style car that passes him by on the way to town but it does not stop. These scenes were inserted in post-production. A film crew traveled to capture the fall colors in Vermont and the small town seen in the distance as the lightning rod salesman approaches. Narration continues with “It was the October of my twelfth year when the

¹⁹³The train sequence brings to mind the ancient silent recording of an arrival of a train that had the audience ducking for cover.

seller of lightning rods came along the road toward Green Town, Illinois sneaking glances over his shoulder because somewhere, not far back was a terrible storm.” This impending storm, established from the beginning is an important motif never entirely absent from the narrative. It is there for a purpose, the travelling salesman and the storm are of a piece, and his sustained, over the shoulder gaze at it cause us to wonder if he is being pursued by the storm or somehow bringing it to town with him.

Narration continues, “my mind goes back to Green Town, the place where I grew up, in my memory I’m back on Main Street again, among my neighbors who gave me my first glimpses into the fearful needs of the human heart.” The camera moves rapidly from downtown to the sidewalk briefly resting on a wooden Indian and the narrator varying his voice to a higher pitch says, “the cigar store was owned by a Mr. Tetley, a man obsessed with money. Mr. Crosetti, (in view outside his shop) our barber, cut my hair a thousand times, always talking about far away ladies he would never know. I remember Ed the barman, (shown hopping on his one leg while sweeping the street in front of the bar) yesterday’s football hero still haunted by forty-yard runs down the dark fields of his dreams.”

The scene shifts to two boys seated alone in a classroom before closing in on the teacher behind her desk. “Our teacher was Miss Foley. We couldn’t believe it but folks said that once, before we were even born, she had been the most beautiful woman in town. And of course I can still see Jim Nightshade, my best friend, my blood brother, my shadow.” The camera moves in on the seated boys at this point and Jim, in contrast to the other boy (who we assume to be the narrator, soon identified as Will) is indicated as something of a rascal by the mischievous drawing of their teacher he is finishing and hides before she can see it. Without a touch of the rogue, he is still less formally dressed than the other boy. The boys are finally excused and go hurtling across neighborhood lawns with Will stumbling and saying to Jim “I won’t always be younger than you. “A moment before, their banter while running revealed that they were born on the same night but Will is a little sore that Jim was born just a minute before midnight and Will a minute after (as described in the book). The camera very fluidly follows the boys as they run along the main street briefly greeting all of the characters introduced in narration and crippled Ed, even offers to race them. All in all, it is a calm, perhaps idyllic setting.

The camera closes in briefly on “the seller of lightning rods” that we saw earlier, now giving his pitch to a small crowd. The boys pause for a moment to look at this stranger before they enter a building. The salesman continues, “Some folks need special protection. I can sniff out which of your old homes is in danger. Some folks draw lightning to ‘em as a cat sucks in a baby’s breath.” As the camera follows the boys up the library stairs there is a cut to a man placing books on a shelf, and narration resumes one last time. “But (with a hint of surprise in his voice) I suppose this is really the story of my father and that strange, bleak, whispery autumn when his heart was suddenly too old, too tired, too full of yearning and regrets, and he didn’t know what to do about it.”

Almost six minutes of screen time has elapsed during this opening narration. I did not reproduce the entire narration, but much of it is lifted directly from the novel and overall it could not be more Bradburian in tone, although Bradbury did not speak this narration—that was added in post-production at the suggestion of effects specialist Lee Dyer. Some of Dyer’s post-production recommendations went beyond special effects but necessarily touched on the theme and structure of the film. Of course, many dislike voice over narration but this is well done and appropriate. The actor Arthur Hill delivers it with expert elocution, smoothly with varied emotional tone and emphasis. Many auditioned for this part including Bradbury, but Hill does a superb job. The narration is accompanied by constantly shifting scenes and movement, the camera gently dollies much of the time.

It is never static except for a few moments with the boys seated in the classroom. It appears they have been kept after school for whispering to each other during class, their old teacher seems to be strict. When the clock reaches four the boys are excused, and are literally off to the races.

The narration contains exposition of a number of characters, establishes the place, time and an elegiac tone and expectations for what is to come all supported by the cinematography, but it is not pleonasm as voice over narration may often be. That is, it does not state the obvious that we may catch on first glance through the images alone. The opening shows and tells us many different things, unveiling a broad canvas to engage the spectator’s creative imagination in narrative construction. The narrative voice of the opening scenes does not lock us into a strict interpretation to follow, but opens a wide range of possibility through presentation of a “comfortable world” not too unfamiliar to

us. The narrator as an adult has just recounted his boyhood memories, with unmistakable emphasis of content and feeling and thus it lends an undeniable veracity to the tale. We must accept the film that unfolds as the narrator's boyhood experience as he actually lived it. Nevertheless, viewed from an adult perspective we expect the tale to be told not as idealized myth of childhood but as a meditation on valuable, enduring life lessons not easily learned. This is most evident from the narrator's closing words about his father. Bradbury and Clayton had reservations about the off-screen narration but Clayton admitted that early screenplay drafts had utilized this structural device (Cinefantastique, Vol 13, no.5:43) and I believe it works quite well as executed.

XI FILM STYLE

It should already be apparent that *Something Wicked This Way Comes* is a carefully filmed and crafted period picture. Much of it takes place outdoors and at night and characters are always on the move as well as the camera. Although there are many optical and special effects they are not gratuitous but judiciously elaborate a narrative that is presented in detailed linear fashion. In terms of the open/closed paradigm of filmic style I have used to characterize the other films, *Something Wicked* is rather closed, though hardly "mechanistic" or fatalistic. It presents a rather spacious and pleasant space with possibilities and potential we can relate to, yet it is somewhat closed in being self-contained. The viewer may not want to remain in such a place but there is no entrapment, a sense of openness and freedom still prevail. It does not appear to be an oppressive or unhappy place, but there are clearly undertones of discontent there.

The setting after all, is the microcosm of a small town located on the open flatlands, established from the outset through the coming of the seller of lightning rods and approaching storm¹⁹⁴ as vulnerable to invasion from outside forces. Moreover, its inhabitants pretty much inhabit a closed space, not so much because they live in a small town but because, as we soon discover, they are confined in uncomfortable psychic

¹⁹⁴ The storm motif, with its visual force and later narrative function is a better corollary device than the unseasonable weather and the strange way it makes the town's inhabitants feel in Bradbury's early screen treatment. This later change was of course Bradbury's

spaces of their own device. Their enjoyment of what life has to offer them is severely hampered by obsessive and frustrated desires they are hardly able to cope with or satisfy in this particular locale. And at least a couple of them would hardly be able to break their chains of longing and regret wherever they might choose to go. It is certainly presented this way.

The narration has informed us that the story is really about Charles Halloway and he is living on the open/closed border. He is connected. He has friends, a loving wife and a fine son to raise. In his small town he enjoys an expansive freedom of mind and spirit through literature. He is the town librarian and seems to know and savor every book on its shelves. However, he is trapped in a melancholic middle-age and carries a deep, unspoken regret and already sees himself as “old.” Too old to be a good father to his son he thinks, and his situation is all the more tragic because he actually has more than the others, he *is* connected to his family and others and has a fine active mind.

We all experience times of sadness, longing and frustration. It is fair to say that most of us experience regret in one way or another but Charles is trapped in something a lot worse—self-pity. In no uncertain terms, A.W. Tozer called this “the most reprehensible sin of the human heart” (32). He defined it as an attitude that can become a state of being that cuts us off, if you will, from our Creator, and the plentitude of life, the healthy and unhindered relationships we should enjoy with others. This is where Charles is, and he cannot begin to fully appreciate what he has because of it. Charles is a living, breathing example of the abstract open/closed paradigm. He either closes in on himself further or rids himself of self-pity and regret to open up to life now and the future. The choice is his alone.

XII FURTHER CHARACTER EXPOSITION

The boys have entered the library now and this brief sequence shows the librarian¹⁹⁵ to be Will’s father. Almost immediately something of their strained relationship is revealed as well as a great deal about the other boy, Jim Nightshade. The

¹⁹⁵ In the novel he was the library’s janitor

librarian comes from behind and greets Will with “Hi son! The boy seems a bit irritated telling his dad that he has startled him. He quickly suggests a number of exciting book titles that do not seem to interest Will at all and he says, “I thought all boys liked adventure,” and Will replies, “I don’t know. Do all fathers”? It is a pretty cheeky reply from a boy his age and Charles shrinks a bit at this, and this serves as an opening for Jim who is above inspecting the shelves, “Mine sure does,” he says. The camera cuts back to Charles and Will who exchange a knowing glance at each other, showing an indulgence of Jim’s “tall tales” about a father he has never known.

Jim tells a big story about his father out somewhere in Africa, claiming that when he comes home he is going to bring him a shrunken head. Will is a bit tired of hearing things like this and from here on the boys are further differentiated in terms of character and temperament. Jim is the dreamer, attracted to the mysterious and forbidden. A bit of a rebel, he calls things into question. On the other hand, Will is more down to earth, honest and practical, but quick thinking and not too timid

The boys leave with their books and Will says to Jim, “look, who are you fooling, your father doesn’t ever write” and Jim angrily retorts “that’s better than a father that’s afraid,” as Will cuts him off in mid sentence, yelling that “my father isn’t afraid of anything...he’s just a bit old...that’s all. It doesn’t mean he’s afraid of anything.” “Doesn’t it,” Jim responds. “Anyway, my father is here. Yours isn’t coming back, is he? Not ever.” Looking down and biting his lip Jim rather defiantly says, “One day. You’ll see.” As mentioned earlier both boys have absent fathers of a sort, Will’s dad is “here” but the boy has to defend his father to his best friend. Will wishes, his dad would “snap out of it,” whatever *it* is, but he has no clue and does not know how to help him and this only becomes more evident as the story continues. Jim knows he had a father but knows nothing about him and wants to believe he will come back. Their exchange shows they are not little children and a healthy spark of life exists in them both.

In spite of any shortcomings, Will has a secure family life and because of this he is stable and at least has an idea of what he should be, Jim does not, he is a perpetual and spirited seeker. He is something like Telemachus, the son of Odysseus in Homer’s *Odyssey*. Like this mythical figure, Jim is unsure of himself, he does not know who he is and is petulant and reckless partly because he has never known his father. This makes it

more difficult for Jim to have a guide for properly asserting himself which he is always eager to do. Whether good or bad, he would like to know, and be his father's son but he knows nothing and there is no one to tell him anything significant about his missing parent. His mother tells him precious little, so he resorts to making up fantastic stories about a parent who may no longer exist which does not seem very healthy. Standing outside in a gazebo Jim is the first to hear the faint music of the carnival. This is in keeping with the hypnotic pull that the carnival and its proprietor Mr. Dark will have on him. Will just thinks it must be the wind.

There is a cut to the lightning rod salesman walking past the boys' houses as they arrive. He identifies himself as Tom Fury and is fully convinced one of their houses needs protection. Old Tom might be an eccentric mountebank but he is great with the boys. He is the type you might trust to look after kids for a while because he would probably play with them and entertain them with great stories. He singles out Jim's house as the one in danger and urges him to go ask the "man of the house" permission to buy a rod. Will is a bit outraged when Jim says he will do just that. When Jim enters the house his mother calling from upstairs has to ask if it is him, then tells him to get his dinner out of the "icebox" because mama's all tired out. Jim seems a 1930s version of a "latchkey kid," he mostly has to take care of himself. There is a cut to his mother in a nightgown reclining on her bed, stroking a long-haired cat with a tea tray at her side. He shouts up to his mom that he is going to buy (he does not ask) a lightning rod for the house because there is a storm coming but she does not want to hear about bad things like that right now. She is obviously in a fragile state. He knows where the money jar is in the kitchen and pays Tom very little, telling him that his "pa said yes." His face is strained and there is poignancy to his little falsehood.

Returning to the adult world and some final exposition, we see Charles exiting the library and he pauses to pat the head of the stone lion at the entrance. Somehow, this does not seem like a ritual, rather from his facial expression he seems to need a little extra strength as he strides into the street. He stops at Mr. Tetley's for a cigar and obsessed with picking lottery numbers, he asks Charles if he ever plays the numbers and Charles casually says no, he never takes risks. Tetley believes someday he will win big then it will be expensive, imported cigars; "rolled between the smooth plump thighs of Cuban

ladies.” Tetley now seems the most self-absorbed, least content of the four introduced in the opening narration.

Mr. Crosetti¹⁹⁶, the barber speaks up now asking Charles if he “can smell it.” He thinks there will be visitors, lovely ladies. Charles responds with a bit of incredulity, “you’ll have to do with the ladies you get here Mr. Crosetti, we don’t get visitors in this town; not in October; or any other time of the year.” Before he leaves Crosetti, in an interesting shot-reverse-shot beside his spinning barber pole, tells Charles he should try some of his color restorer, saying it would make him years younger. After a pause Charles says rather sadly, “I wish it were that easy.”

The last stop before home is the bar where Ed the barman is enthusiastically speaking about the surprise ending of a recent football game to another customer, “Doc” who warns Charles to have just one drink and only one cigar because of his heart. Charles picks up a football goes back and makes a pass to Ed. who catches it using his good arm and the stump of the other. This is important for later on. It is no secret that Ed loved the game and misses it but he is still a cheerful sort and they all have a drink together before Charles leaves. The information given about these characters in the opening narration has been confirmed in real time and interaction without adding a great deal, but we know more about Charles now and he is not hard to identify with.

XIII THE CARNIVAL IS COMING

The camera cuts to Jim a little frustrated with hammering his newly purchased lightning rod to the roof. Will crosses the tree limb adjoining the roofs of their houses to join him. He is about to give up and “throw the thing away” but Will interjects, “and get burned?” “Yea,” Jim replies. His careless response is much less emphatic than in the book but will soon be compensated for during a scene with his mother. The sky is already gray and windy and a paper blows into their hands, an advertisement for a carnival arriving on Saturday, which seems odd for that time of year. In the street Charles sees a tall figure,

¹⁹⁶ In Bradbury’s novel, he was the first one to anticipate the carnival smelling candy and hearing the far off music which brought a tear to his eye, nothing that sentimental here.

clad in black allowing the wind to scatter his advertisements where it may. It is a case of “catch as catch can” for Dark’s Carnival and a paper blows into the hands of Charles and we can read the description of the carnival as he sees it. He puts the paper in his pocket with a troubled look on his face.

Still in the street we see Charles in front of a large shop window perhaps a furniture store, (or a funeral parlor?) and with the black figure still scattering papers to the wind in the background, Charles gazes at a coffin through the window that momentarily transforms into a block of ice with a faint outline of a female figure inside. There is a medium close up of Charles now gazing at a large luminous ring on the hand of this frozen figure. We now see him in a puzzled pause put his hand over his eyes. When he opens them again, the camera has taken us a step back for a medium over the shoulder shot of the coffin again as first seen, suggesting that what he thought he saw was merely an aberration. However, as he moves on the camera lingers for a moment on the coffin allowing us to momentarily ponder the strange the illusion that has just occurred.

This was a wisely inserted piece of the strange in what has been up to now an extremely quotidian narrative. Charles’ aberrant vision would seem a foreshadowing of his vulnerability to the seductive evil of the coming carnival. At any rate, Charles is not behind the narrative curve and has an inkling of things coming unhinged just as the boys shortly will. We will see more of this block of ice with its encased figure soon. She (the Dust Witch) has arrived before the carnival, a bit like a dark, distaff John the Baptist announcing the imminent coming of someone or something greater. At any rate, the stage has already been set for the supernatural occurrences that follow.

Cut to Charles’ living room with the family in front of the fireplace. He is trying to add a little levity to things saying that the day’s big wind blew so hard that it blew one of the stone lions off the front of the library steps and that it was “probably prowling around town now looking for some tender young Christian to eat.” His wife is amused but Will is not and asks about the ball of paper he has in his hand. He says it is nothing and we see this crumpled carnival advertisement now being consumed in the flames of the fireplace in close up, before a reverse shot shows the glare of the flames reflected in close up on the glasses of Will who seems to be lost in thought before the scene fades to black. Obviously Will is curious and Charles is nervous and trying to be protective.

Everyone is upstairs in their rooms now and Will overhears some of his father's laments to his wife. Though Will does not hear the conversation clearly, it is shown to be disturbing for him as it would be for any youngster. This sequence marks the adult sensibilities of the film; it is a moment of marital intimacy marked by haunting discontent. Charles, still fully dressed is reclining on the bed with his wife at his side. She appears to be around forty, is not exactly beautiful but rather fetching in her nightgown, twisting her hair over her bare shoulder and trying to comfort Charles who barely seems to notice. Such self-pity as his is inconsolable indeed. He admits that "Will makes him feel so old" and that he should at least be able to play a little baseball with him. She says it does not matter with a heart like his. We may take this as having a dual meaning. He has a "good heart" although a physically weak one.

The bedroom sequence is warmly lit and balanced with small lamps on either side of the reclining figures with Charles just a bit off center in the frame. There is a small night stand in the foreground between them and the camera with a small, guilt edged black book that appears to be a Bible. This part of the film seems to introduce the possible entrance of evil or at least plays on the good/evil dichotomy—the coffin/strange figure in ice, the black clad man "sowing the wind," the lion searching for "a tender, young Christian," the bedside Bible, and there are more such references to come. Charles finally says he feels restless and "there must be a storm coming." Charles goes out to the library.

It is late and there is a cut to an upwardly angled shot of Jim's roof with the lightning rod against the stormy sky. Will awakens to see his father leave the house as the town clock begins to chime and we have a succession of cuts to the empty streets. The town is asleep while Charles is shown inside the library looking for a book. However, as the clock strikes twelve we cut to Tom Fury walking alone and he has the same illusion Charles had earlier, only the figure in the ice is much sharper now for him and he enters the building as if in some kind of a trance, muttering about some kind of beautiful vision. He looks down on a woman's face, the red eyes open wide and there is a superimposed effect like falling snow over the face still encased in ice; it is as if time freezes.

Back to the boys' houses there is a faint, mournful sound from far off and the boys awaken almost simultaneously to behold the train over the rooftops in the distance. The

camera closes in slightly and we can make out its white puffs of smoke as it approaches the outskirts of town. If this were not weird enough, the distant train seems to be moving, not in slow motion but still with a dreamlike slowness...a carnival arriving in the middle of the night Will muses rhetorically. “Hell yes! Come on! Jim says.

XIV THE CARNIVAL ARRIVES

The Boys quickly dress and scamper down from their windows. It is the middle of the night and the camera briefly cuts to Charles in the library as he thinks he hears a train whistle too. The camera now follows the boys as they run through the woods and find a vantage point near the tracks. From their point of view slightly below the tracks the camera tilts up slightly to give us a full view of the passing train. First comes an engine without a visible conductor. Then cars pass like one marked “the temple of doom” and an open flat car with the block of ice that Charles had “hallucinated” earlier followed by an illuminated passenger car completely empty as we see the full moon partially obscured by the smoke of the locomotive. The sound track has been soaring, rising and falling, building tension without release as a corollary to intercuts of the perplexed faces of the boys who have been expecting to see the train carrying animals and people but there are no signs of life whatsoever. This is a “ghost train” that has arrived of its own accord and it pulls off on a spur to slow to a stop. In the novel, Bradbury describes the sound of its whistle:

The wails of a lifetime were gathered in from other nights in other slumbering years; the howls of moon-dreamed dogs, and sleep of river-cold winds through January porch screens that stopped the blood, a thousand fire-sirens weeping, or worse! The out-gone shreds of breath, the protests of a billion people dead or dying, not wanting to be dead, their groans, their sighing burst over the Earth! (51)

How would a filmmaker find a corollary for such an aural description? The bizarre appearance of the empty train in moonlight and the sound track help a great deal but when the train sounds its whistle and begins to slow to a stop, it is not a train whistle we hear. The best approximate description might be like a combination of distant human

screams and fingernails run over a chalkboard and it is *very* loud. The boys bury their faces in the grass and cracks appear in the angelic statuary (they are near a cemetery) through which bright light “bleeds through.” Combining sound and cinematic elements carefully, I believe the filmmakers created a close approximation of Bradbury’s descriptive passage. The boys do not see the statuary effect but get up and run after the caboose when the train has passed.

They run on some distance and crouch behind a tree near a field where the train has come to a stop and a medium shot records the wonder on their faces. The carnival is already in place. A cut takes us close to a Ferris wheel, tilts down and pans to show illuminated, but empty carnival structures. The camera moves back to reveal something like an “enchanted circle” of the arranged carnival structures with lightning flashes illuminating the encampment revealing a little more of this dim scene while stimulating our desire to see more; the boys certainly do. Will hesitates wondering aloud, how it could be but Jim leads the way.

The night for day lighting here is good, the full moon seems to be providing the illumination as the boys prowl the empty carnival before entering an empty railroad car with heavy, ornate furnishings and thick curtains giving the impression of an old fashioned funeral parlor. As the boys investigate, the camera pans to a close up of a darkly shrouded figure in a corner, an exotic-looking woman whose face is partially obscured by a black lace veil—the truly eerie music adds to the effect and suspense because the boys do not see her. They wipe cobwebs from the walls revealing old photographs—the whole ambient reeks of antiquity and neglect. Suddenly a tarantula crawls across Will’s resting hand on a table. They scream, run out and immediately carnival music begins to play and the camera returns for a close up of the veiled woman’s impassive face and pans down to show the huge spider in the palm of her hand. She is gently stroking it with her fingers.

In the novel the boys witness strange figures emerging from the train, silently directed by Mr. Dark as the carnival structures seem to blossom up almost magically from the ground. Memorably eerie in print, it would have been rather elaborate to film and would have done away with the slightest conjecture about the origin of the carnival. The timing of release of information is particularly important in film. However, the entry

of the empty train and effect on the statuary are fantastic enough and the pristine look of the assembled, deserted carnival give the impression that it just fell from the sky through supernatural agency. The fact that the boys wander in for a look and have their first brush with the bizarre complete with an unseen, malevolent onlooker propels the narrative forward rather well.

There is a cut to Charles now leaving the library, he is tentative and seems to have heard the distant carnival music. The camera follows him from behind like a stalker and he pauses at the window where he earlier saw the coffin/ice block. Now a close up shows a few shards of ice, the ring, and what appears to be perhaps a string lying in the middle of it that seems to trace the outline of the hat Tom Fury was wearing. Indeed The Dust Witch as the advance scout of the carnival has snatched Tom Fury because as we shall see later he may be the carnival's greatest threat.

The camera cuts to the inside of Charles's house and views him from above as he wearily enters and closes the door. This is the third time we have been inside the house and it has always been presented as a warm, comfortable place. The shot composition is completely different now suggesting imprisonment, claustrophobia and barriers. The foyer is illuminated by one lamp divided by the post of the stairway banister that cuts through the frame in a black, diagonal line. Charles starts climbing the steps turns when he reaches a landing and sees his son seated a few steps above, blocking his way. Charles sits below the boy and they speak in whispers. "What is it son, can't sleep? The two are center frame in medium close up and Will slowly shakes his head. His father continues, "thought I heard a train; can't be this time of night." Will says, "couldn't have been a carnival coming, not in October. You never did see any scrap of paper about a carnival coming, did you?"

Of course tension is building from two directions. Will is not speaking about what he has just seen at the carnival and his father has his suspicions after his "hallucination" of the block of ice. Charles does not reassure his son by answering his question, instead as the clock chimes he opines, "three o'clock, they call it the soul's midnight." Will asks, "Do they? Why?" Pausing, Charles answers, "I don't know, I guess it's the time a lot of people die" pausing again, "I only meant old people" he tries to say this reassuringly. We

do not doubt that Charles is a fine man but he is up to his neck in self-pity, and thus has been rather useless to his family up to this point.

Charles begins again by telling Will, “We should have a talk some time. Just you and me” Will innocently asks, “what about?” “Oh, about when you were small—that picnic we took down by Indigo River. Now look son, (emotional, breathing heavily now) I know you got a fright.” Will stops the conversation, “I better get back to bed now—mom wouldn’t want us up this late...talking. She’d say we gotta think about tomorrow.” Charles pats the boy on the head, “yea, guess you’re right son.” It is a finely played and filmed scene, and what we have is another instance of Will essentially “defending,” or perhaps in this case “saving” his father. However, Charles has made a first attempt to come to terms with what we do not yet fully know.

XV THE SOUL STEALING CARNIVAL

The next sequence begins by a fade in to the carnival seen in daylight at a distance in a little valley outside of town, an establishing shot. There is a cut to a medium shot of the boys running (again) to the carnival. Then finding themselves in a happy crowd of people in the bright sunshine, Jim, with a hint of disappointment observes, “It’s just a plain, ordinary carnival.” But Will displaying his good sense replies “Jim no. It can’t be. It can’t be ordinary. We just couldn’t see it last night in the dark.” They call out to Ed, the crippled barman who is shown hoisting a sledge to pound the scale to send the metal bit to the top to ring the bell. He manages and the boys run to embrace him. Such a demonstration of physical prowess is certainly gratifying to a man like Ed, the carnival has already given him something, it seems.

I have already mentioned that “Ed” makes a fine addition to the film. His character was almost certainly Bradbury’s creation. Director Clayton helped Bradbury trim his screenplay by two-thirds but never seems to have had any creative involvement with scripts. He had a reputation as a fine director of actors and a cinematic craftsman but concerned himself with filming, not altering screenplays.

A big, red headed carney (soon identified as Dark's partner, Mr. Cooger) hands Ed his prize, a ticket to the mirror-maze. Ed pauses at the entrance and he sees himself with a restored arm and leg while the sound track softly plays football game cheers and the echoes of Ed's earlier words about how he loved the game. Still with his crutch, he goes in and there is a quick flash at the entrance of the maze. No one seems to have noticed this except the boys and maybe it was just a trick of the sun. Anyway, the mirror maze was the "catch trap" for Ed, and who knows, maybe the dark powers of the carnival gave him the strength to ring the bell and win his "prize." Jim asks Will if he wants to go in but Will emphatically answers "no, those mirrors... like last night." Will has probably just saved his friend, (and himself) at least for the time being.

A moment later old Miss Foley exits the maze obviously in a daze. Her confused words to the boys who think she is dizzy or sick are lifted from the novel, "it's so bright in there; so beautiful and so strange. It must have dazed me, I don't quite remember." Indeed, we shall see that memories of visions past are what snare her. She tells the boys she must go off to meet her young nephew. We have not seen inside the mirror maze yet, but viewer curiosity has certainly been aroused. Mirror reflections can be unsettling and it is typical of the glimpse of the strange and grotesque a carnival offers us; we may be fearful to look but we want to look anyway.

There is a cut to the black laced hands of "the fortune teller" who appears to be the mysterious figure we saw earlier in the train car. She is the Dust Witch of the novel but never identified as such here. Her ring with the large, luminous stone is again in evidence as an insert shot shows her stroking a man's palm. "I see your place of work—and a red, white and blue pole turning." It is Mr. Crosetti of course, who has already been marked as something of a superstitious type, expecting something completely out of the ordinary to arrive at his little town. "It's a miracle, your eyes see everything," a close up of the barber shows him in an excited sweat now. She continues, "Only I think there is something missing in your life...something that could make you so happyyy—you have lived a long time without the scent of ladies' skin. They're waiting for you my good sir. Call them." Now this is just superb voice acting; low, sultry and measured; she nearly purrs like a cat, it's hypnotic.

There is a cut to the exterior where the same big carney is calling out the winning ticket at the “wheel of fortune.” Mr. Tetley rushes to have ten, one-hundred dollar bills (a small fortune in 1930 terms) placed one by one in his hand. “And may I offer you a cigar sir, rolled between the smooth, plump thighs of Cuban beauties.” Now how did Cooger know that was what he wanted? He is offered a free pass to the Ferris wheel and seated there is “the fortune teller” now a vision of beauty in a classy, white outfit with small, black polka-dots, a short skirt and high heels. What more could he want? If a racehorse and a good bottle of scotch were necessary, I’m sure they would somehow have materialized too. Tetley wastes no time in sitting next to her, effusing about his good fortune. The ride takes them up and out of the frame. A moment later it comes down and Cooger helps the solitary lady from her seat while helping himself to Mr. Tetley’s cigar.

Walking along the midway they hear Middle Eastern sounding music coming from a tent labeled “The Temple of Temptation.” There is a convenient hole in the tent, just big enough for Jim to peer through. Will advises against it but we see Jim’s eye from the inside of the tent¹⁹⁷ before the camera cuts to a group of exotically dressed and partially veiled women performing an alluring dance in front of a full tent of rapt men, Crosetti of course in the front row. The lead dancer who appears to be “the Fortune Teller” (Dust Witch) pulls him from his seat using her scarf. Jim’s rapt enjoyment is rudely interrupted by a dwarf who smacks his cane against the side of the tent, saying “show’s over boys—too young, come back in ten years,” he concludes with lascivious laughter. A cut back inside the tent shows Crosetti, now without his shirt, laughing uncontrollably as the women begin caressing his torso¹⁹⁸.

The boys crawl under a large, empty tent to find the beautiful period merry-go-round with the out of order sign. No need to describe the sequence in detail because it follows what I have already outlined from the novel. Cooger unexpectedly comes from behind and suspends the boys in mid-air until Mr. Dark makes his entrance, establishing

¹⁹⁷ This would be a corollary to the vague reference to his sexual curiosity in the book where he (apparently) peers through a window at a couple having sex in a brothel, Will tries to pull him away there too.

¹⁹⁸ A few parents might have agreed with the dwarf’s declaration of “too young—come back in ten years.” The film got the new “PG” rating, children under twelve were supposed to be accompanied by a parent, but at this point a few of these parents were probably wondering—“Is this a *Disney* film?!”

his dominance and control from the outset; “My name is Mr. Dark, I advise you to respect it.” The sequence is not as evocative as written in the novel perhaps, but it is very well realized in performance. Jim’s presenting Dark with a dead beetle is (wisely) omitted but the kaleidoscopic effect of Dark’s tattoos and the shot-reverse shot of Jim’s fascination with them is as cinematic as it gets. There are brief close ups of Mr. Dark’s face and the actor’s rather large, light brown eyes hypnotically widen and alternately narrow as he seems to be measuring Jim. Dark hands them their free pass, inviting them to return “but for now, the show is over” as he motions with his cane and they hurry off as if already under his orders. Will was a little hesitant in accepting the passes, but not Jim who suggests they hide and stay until after the carnival closes.

There is a cut to a bloody red sun rapidly sinking in a cloudy sky before a dissolve to the empty carnival entrance at dusk. Unseen, the boys sneak under the tent and see Mr. Dark spinning Cooger backwards on the supposedly “out of order” merry-go-round. There is accompanying music but nothing as pedestrian as music played in reverse. Instead it is an unsteady cacophony as fuzzy, blurred effects give us Cooger becoming younger, finally a child even smaller than the boys. The blurred, soft bluish lighting effects of the carousel in full shot give it the otherworldly appearance of an alien spacecraft. Mr. Dark then lifts him off the ride saying, “it’s late, time to go about your work Mr. Cooger.” He runs off and the boys follow him at a discrete distance to Miss Foley’s house. Will pauses on the way to notice a sign on Crosetti’s barber shop that says “closed due to illness.” He notices the hypnotic spinning of the still illuminated barber pole and touches it as he leaves, just another sign that something is really wrong.

The boys had heard Miss Foley mentioning her “visiting nephew” so they are justified in going to her house and their suspicions are confirmed as they see shadows in her window. Here Jim takes the lead as his friend wonders aloud who it might be with Miss. Foley. “Don’t you know Will? I wanna warn Miss Foley.” Will does not think that this is his true motive, but rather he just wants to “meet that thing” and is ready to run before Miss Foley answers the door. Similar to the source text(s) Jim tells her that they just wanted to see if she was alright and that Will (about to blurt out the truth) is silenced by Jim adding that Will is sick and will not be at school tomorrow. Of course they are introduced to sinister, silent little “Robert” as her nephew. His silence and expression

approximates the source text about the unnatural, evil eyes in the “mask” of the young boy’s face.

They leave and Will cannot believe Jim touched “the thing” by shaking hands, but this kept up a normal appearance and Will is now wondering what Jim is planning. Robert, still silent comes out and picks up a rock. It appears he is going to throw it at the boys but pivots and throws it through Miss Foley’s upstairs window and runs away. The boys are seen and catch the blame from Miss Foley before they run too. In one of those startling cinematic surprises, Will turns a corner and runs into his father and screams. He asks, “What’s the trouble son?” The camera slowly pans up to his father’s face, from the same angle his son would see it and Charles slowly forces a cryptic smile. “There are smiles, and there are smiles,” Charles tells his son in the source text and his unnatural one here really makes us wonder what will come next.

Jim registers uneasy surprise when he comes home and sees his mother slow dancing with a well-dressed middle aged man who does not so much as greet the boy. They have already had their supper but she promises to “fix him something nice.” He is not interested and timidly excuses himself for bed, and we are left with a close up of his mother’s distraught face. This sequence balances out the reckless, unflappable Jim. It shows that he is still a young boy, who is vulnerable, a bit sad now and in need of comfort.

Slightly condensed from the source text, she goes upstairs closes his window blocking the cool, night air saying it must be because boys have “hot blood” and that he is like his father in this respect. This does not displease the boy. Especially when she continues by telling him that he truly resembles his father physically and that he is “all she has left of him” loves him and will be so sad to see him go someday. She tells him that when he leaves home, “Harry will be dead forever; now go to sleep.” To his mother at least, he is his father’s son and Jim’s hopes need not be completely dashed that his father is alive somewhere. Jim, like the mythological Telemachus has received some comfort in these words, he finally has more of an idea of who he is and through her manner and words, his mother has certainly redeemed herself in our eyes, if she ever needed to be in the first place.

The scene shifts back to Will and his father outside in his robe and lighting his cigar, he sits the frightened boy down to finish the talk they started the day before. I will not reproduce the whole dialogue here although it is quite important. Essentially he explains to Will that it was another man, Harry Nightshade (Jim's father) that jumped into the river without hesitation to rescue Will. It was not him, and he says he cannot forgive himself or Harry either for that matter. Will says he remembers that someone grabbed a hold of him. His father explains that he never learned to swim because his father did not think boys should learn to swim. Charles finishes by saying, "When you see the end of things close, and staring at you, it's not what you've done that you regret—it's what you didn't do, and most of all that afternoon at the river when there was nothing I could do Will. Blame my father if you like, blame me but we got to stop blaming sometime." It is a fine scene and the father's "what you haven't done is what you regret" is not permission for Will to go "sow some wild oats" but of course to behave in such a way that he will have no regrets later. And the invitation toward forgiveness, "we've got to stop blaming" is for both of course, but Will finds this easier to accept than his father.

Will understands and we have a close up of his tender face as he says "I just wish you could be happy." His father trying to lighten things a little says, "Just tell me I'll live forever, then I'll be happy." Will, almost in tears tells his dad not to talk like that *somebody* might hear. Does Will have an inkling that the carnival preys on those consumed by regret and self-pity? His father has unburdened himself to his son and it was good for his son to hear this from his father, and that Jim's absent father did something heroic after all.

Happier now, Will starts climbing up the trellis to his bedroom and invites his dad to follow him a couple times but his father declines, saying he wants to finish his cigar and then lock the house. I cannot really see Charles in bulky robe and cigar following his son up the trellis. Production head Tom Wilhite had the scene cut that shows Charles following Will up the trellis with Will extending his hand to his father as they reach the window. He thought that scene, as included in the book would have put a premature end to the film. Bradbury and Clayton thought the scene should not have been removed. Maybe they were all partially right and maybe a compromise could have been found like Charles starting up at his son's invitation but pausing, going back down saying he wanted

to finish his cigar then lock up. At any rate, as filmed with the camera from Will's perspective looking down on his father's somewhat relieved but still sad face works just fine. Confession is always good, but it is often not enough; perhaps that is why it is often followed by penance, or better still restitution of some kind. Charles still has a ways to go.

XVI MISS FOLEY FALLS; TOM FURY RESISTS

This part of the film is composed of a series of unusual sequences, each rapidly paced and well timed. The narrative is greatly advanced as important new information is presented, primarily about the powerful evil of the carnival and its possible weakness. There are some surprises as new questions are raised and new conflicts emerge (especially between the boys), and the stage is well set for final resolution. Action begins with a cut to Miss Foley's house where she is shown doing some reflexive mirror gazing. In terms of use of space, time and gesture, she seems to be engaging in some kind of (perhaps) unconscious bodily enactment or "natural magic." As she removes her glasses a rippling image of her younger self previously described as "the most beautiful girl in town," momentarily appears and she breathlessly repeats "Yes, yes" and the image returns again for good. We have a brief close up of her narcissistically running her hands over her face. Was she only wishing or did her earlier experience in the "mirror maze" have something to do with this? That seems to be the real "catch trap" for people like her and Ed who desire not things but physical rejuvenation. There was little doubt to her desire but we see a momentary flash in her eyes and she cries out; she has become blind. She falls; then crawls over to her "nephew" as the camera pans up to so we may appreciate his evil grin from above. He is standing over her now and we later see him (still a child) leading her in the carnival parade as a beautiful blind woman. Deceived like the others, Miss Foley cannot appreciate her renewed beauty and she belongs to the carnival now. She is every bit as alone as in the earlier pre-novelized script where she lost the life she had by being transformed into a little child, but with her adult memories and sensibilities intact. Now blindness has made her as dependent as a child without even leaving her the prospect of "growing up" again.

The town clock is striking a late hour and Will sees Jim climbing down from his bedroom window and he also descends to pursue him on the way to the carnival. Will has to tackle Jim and accuses him of “ditching” him. He warns Jim not to go near the carnival at night saying that Mr. Cooger will make himself so big, tall and strong that he would kill them both. An angry Jim denies this saying, “let me go. I’ll remember this when I’m older.” “Older,” Will repeats, “you’ve got it all figured out. You want to take a spin on the merry-go-round so you’ll be two feet taller, looking down on me...and you’d ditch me!” He delivers the last words with a sense of betrayal and disgust. He uses this term “ditched” so often, once even in relation to his father, that it leads us to believe that like many children he has a hidden fear of abandonment, possibly because he has not experienced a close relationship with his father.

We see rolling storm clouds in the sky before the boys make their way to the carnival together. When they arrive, they overhear Cooger saying that he had some trouble with the kids but Dark dismisses him saying that they must not be allowed to interfere with their plans. They now sneak into a tent where they see Tom Fury strapped to an electric chair with a metal helmet on his head. He is muttering, “Damnation; death and destruction, Tom Fury knows.” Mr. Dark is interrogating him, tell me you old fool when is the lightning,” with a hint of exasperation in his voice. “When is the lightning due? I must know. Lightning reveals our dark corners, rain washes away our dust—tell me when¹⁹⁹!”

Now we know the carnival has a weakness, not crosses, silver bullets or courageous people but a powerful phenomenon of nature. The story world seems to present a combination of dangerous and benign elements but not an unstructured cosmos, and Tom Fury appears a curious mixture of the humble and sublime. Against the supernatural evil of the carnival, the vagabond shows a primitive purity; not a mediator of the lightning’s power, but he seems to be holding fast, bound to a mysterious promise. Fury answers Mr. Dark, “I’m Tom Fury, did I take the name?—no, it took me! What color is lightning, where does the thunder go when it diesThe boys are watching unseen and the

¹⁹⁹ I like this rather poetic description of “them” by Mr. Dark. It sets forth their purely evil nature in a different sort of way. “Dark corners,” refers to their true but thinly masked appearance, and “dust” not only suggests the grave but is the smallest, most insignificant whole particle aside from the atom. If humans are a mixture of “dust” and spirit, these creatures are only dust.

camera pans to show the captive townsfolk standing like wax figures, and the boys call out to Mr. Crosetti disguised as “the bearded lady” and Mr. Tetley in the guise of his cigar store Indian but they do not react.

Panning back to Dark and Tom Fury, the master of the carnival firmly but gently, says as if he were making a hypnotic suggestion, “If I show her to you, your bride, you will tell when the storm is coming.” There is a moment of silence and Dark motions with his fingers and there is a cut to a full shot of The Dust Witch in shimmering white veils wearing something like a crown on her head. The icy shimmers break apart and fall away leaving her standing in full view for the first time, accompanied by a little ethereal sounding music centered upon a brief flute melody. Cut to close up of Tom Fury, wide-eyed rhapsodizing about her beauty as she slowly approaches. Calmly but with a hint of desperation, Dark almost whispers, “You will tell me when the storm is coming.” The Dust Witch has moved to their side. We have already seen her fantastic figure but now for the first time we have a close up of her unveiled face, lips pursed in anticipation, not a smile exactly but revealing some beautiful white teeth²⁰⁰.

Tom has a secret and he is not telling. He says, “No, lightning will skip the world, and make men hop and skip like scalded cats.” “You fool, Dark exclaims, “lightning shall make you hop and make you tell,” as he pulls the lever and we see Fury scream and writhe in the grip of the electric charge. From his hiding place, Will screams out, “stop it!” The Dust Witch turns now to reveal to the boys a horrible, blue, eyeless face full of stitches as if she were a corpse that had undergone an autopsy. Her visage is unmistakably of death and decay, though an animating spirit is present and is accompanied by a growl though a mouth that is sewn shut. This was a strong image in itself, but all the more alarming in juxtaposition to the camera’s full presentation of her extraordinary beauty only moments before. The boys scream and flee, passing a guillotine on the way that severs a replica of Will’s head and the camera lingers for a moment on its upward death stare. This is the first time a little blood has been shown and it naturally suggests the boys are marked for execution or will somehow be neutralized, and no doubt remains that the carnival is well able to do this or anything it wants. None

²⁰⁰ I think this actress’ exotic kind of beauty was unrivaled by any other actress working in Hollywood at the time.

of its captives have been freed and the boys have merely escaped for the moment. There was good rhythm to the succession of sequences. They were blocked and choreographed for maximum effect. There was desperate action throughout with a good dose of the macabre, but nothing seemed gratuitous.

The preceding could be considered a culmination of a two-part climax, the first being when Miss Foley fell victim to the carnival, leaving only the boys or Charles as the next victims. The narrative becomes more interesting at this point because after seeing what the carnival *can* do, we are now led to believe it is not invincible. This leads to speculation on how and at what cost it can be defeated and how broadly it may function. Does the coming storm merely reveal the true nature of the denizens of the carnival, make them powerless or destroy them? If Mr. Dark learns when the storm is coming, what measures can he take and what is Tom Fury's link to the storm? A thunder storm at the end of October is just as unusual of an occurrence as the late arrival of the carnival; is the storm somehow being guided to follow the carnival? If the storm is a threat to the evil carnival why did Tom Fury sell a lightning rod to Jim to protect him from the same storm? Like any natural phenomenon is the storm only neutral, or might it somehow be used as a tool against the carnival through special means and how may they be appropriated? At this point just as in the book, only the boys know the carnival as the supernatural rupture and plague that it is, so they are at great risk. If they escape will anyone believe them and just what sacrifice (Tom Fury²⁰¹ has made one) or level of human agency is necessary to defeat the carnival? The resolution of the narrative turns on all these questions.

With the boys now on the run, there is an insert shot of the Dust Witch's hand with that large ring already beginning to emanate a faint green mist, as Dark states the boys "have seen too much" (the only pedestrian line he ever utters) and orders her to bring them back to him. The boys run through the darkened forest back to their homes pursued by the green mist which is semi-transparent, low to the ground like fog but creeps along in an almost sentient fashion like some kind of horrible hand seeking to grasp them. It is a good effect followed shortly by a bad one. As I described earlier, when

²⁰¹Fury's torture and questioning, even in this fantastic context suggests the all too real dilemma of a prisoner of war.

Will gets home he really gets a scolding from his mom but as he is sent up to bed, perhaps wondering if she has been a little too tough on the boy, she casts a few nervous glances at Charles as if to say “ok, now it’s your turn.”

Charles continues the process of building understanding between him and his son. He enters Will’s room with a glass of milk, sits on his bed and says, “You know, I never liked my father either a good part of the time.” What follows is a scene similar to the source text that advances the narrative but in a more subtle and condensed fashion. Will asks if grandpa was a good man and Charles, for the first time without his habitual somberness responds, “Everybody thought so.” The boy now asks if they talked about evil. His father tries to keep things light by saying “Oh, we had devils for breakfast, lunch and dinner at my house.” Still serious, Will says that he believes in devils and asks if they can hurt you if you are good and asks if he is a good person. His father is visibly disturbed by this but reassuringly says, “I wouldn’t count on your mother’s answer right now but I think you are.” He pats the boy on the head and says they will talk tomorrow but when he is at the door, Will cautions his father saying, “Dad be careful. Dad something’s going on.” Now perplexed, “Something,” his father echoes. “Just be careful, ok?” Will adds as his father closes the door. Obviously the burden of knowledge is weighing heavily on the boy and he is searching for a way to communicate what he knows in a believable fashion. Also, we have another example of the son trying to protect or save his father.

XVII SPIDER ATTACK!

The green mist is now shown at the roof of Jim’s house. It hisses and crackles as it is drawn (perhaps against “its” will) to Tom Fury’s lightning rod, striking and illuminating it. It is as if the lightning rod (not the green mist) has provoked the storm and these celestial fireworks are ambiguous because the boys find themselves under threat during the storm although not directly by it. Soon there is thunder and bright lightning flashes that awaken the boys and Jim crosses the tree limb connecting his window to Will’s bedroom. Standing together now they hear creaking sounds and their searching faces are interrupted by two *total* blackouts for just under a second each, a good

naturalistic device to heighten suspense and momentarily blind us to impending or probable danger. Jim points to the ceiling that is beginning to crack and drop plaster. They look over their shoulders to the window and it is covered with big spiders. In a moment the whole room is crawling with them. We see them from all angles, one on Will's shoulder, he accidentally squashes one (really sticky and disgusting) as he reaches for the door knob, finally retreating to the safety of his bed, they appear under his covers too. Jim is a little more active in trying to fight them off but the scene goes on for a long time and there seems to be no escape as the spiders just keep coming.

The spiders, for the most part are the red-kneed Mexican tarantulas we often see in films. They are actually rather docile and the species most often chosen as "pets." The filmmakers imported a few dozen of them, augmented by two hundred fake ones on strings and nine mechanical ones for close ups and it is so well executed you really cannot tell the real from the fake; but what a lot of expense and work for a scene that is ultimately neither imaginative nor very effective. They "directed" the live spiders with jets of cold air,²⁰² probably about as difficult as trying to herd a bunch of cats. However, the sound track is effective and unique, composed of three elements: There is the nervous, desperate sounding high string scale that constantly repeats, punctuated at intervals by a sharp rasping sound and an uneasy, low background noise produced by recording the spiders running over glass, styrofoam and piano keys (Cinefantastique, Vol 13, no.5:47). This last sound effect, in low volume accompanied the Dust Witch scenes too, linking her to the spiders²⁰³.

This scene was a post-production insertion and the boys look about a year older (because they are) and it ends abruptly when both boys awake screaming in their separate beds. I think this worse still. Dream sequences should *look* like dreams and reveal the inner turmoil or workings of the dreamers like Truffaut did with Montag's "fever dream" in *Fahrenheit 451*; this was just a bad dream. The Dust Witch has been linked to spiders

²⁰² This technique was probably discovered by Jack Arnold's film crew while working with a giant, uncooperative Panamanian spider for *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) and when required, appears to have been used in films ever since.

²⁰³ A rather clever linkage I think. Aside from their inherent "creepiness" they are all predatory. The orb weavers are linked to narcissism due to their habit of spending days motionless poised in the center of their webs. Others are prowling hunters or ambush predators; the Dust Witch could be characterized by all of the above.

since her introduction but this scene does not reveal anything pertinent or even really threatening. In literature one may create elaborate passages then later “tell” us it was just a dream; but here we have just been deceived although the mist sequence was interesting until the spiders appeared. In the beginning, nothing suggested we would be viewing a dream but it was, and a gratuitous one at that. Roundly criticized, it is one of the few missteps of the film, devised by effects expert Lee Dyer at behest of the studio. It seems *any* variation of Bradbury’s balloon sequence²⁰⁴ would have been better and probably less expensive and time consuming too.

XVIII INTERLUDE

Day cannot dawn too soon and there is a fade in to a church steeple and music is heard. Inside the church the camera gently pans to show all the characters in medium shot standing together singing a hymn. As we might expect, Charles is singing with little joy or conviction, the boys are not singing at all but cast nervous glances at each other (maybe because Will’s mom is so off key). Coming just at the right time, it is a brief helping of Norman Rockwell’s America just before something truly wicked comes their way in the guise of that most cheerful of American rituals, a summer carnival parade. This brief, true-life sequence is quite effective coming on the heels of the boys’ dream of spiders. Throughout there has been a steady cycle of tension building and release while the narrative has progressed steadily and with admirable subtleness and attention to detail. One cannot really fault the film for its rhythm, it keeps our interest and perhaps harkens back to the more measured mode of classical Hollywood narrative.

One can appreciate the church scene on a number of levels. We have a portrait of all the remaining characters gathered together but their being in church suggests no special protection. They do not leave the service as bullet-proof, conquering heroes. The church scene serves to showcase their individuality as much as it does any kind of group cohesion because we plainly see different attitudes or “states of being” among them; from

²⁰⁴ I particularly like the element where the balloon passes over and marks Jim’s house with a silver snail-like trail.

the anxiety and dread of the boys to Charles' dull lack of animation; he just seems to be following a script, to his wife's blithely happy spirit, even the nervous fragility of Mrs. Nightshade is on display. The film (as well as the novel) is consistent in showing there is nothing "magical" about the church or its symbols—it appears that what is important is the existing network of connection and loyalties, directly related to what is inside the individual and the choices he/she is prepared to make. The fade out from the church comes with a phrase from a hymn, "Now when the dusky shades of night..." as a gradual fade in gives us Mr. Dark prowling the streets at the head of his parade. A very fine transition indeed, initiating another build to climax and pivotal confrontation.

XIX THE CARNIVAL COMES TO TOWN: FIRST SHOWDOWN

A lyric from the former front man for the band *The Eagles* might seem incongruous in academic writing but I like the song's critique of the "culture of victimization" and impatience with self-pity.

You drag it around like a ball and chain, you wallow in the guilt, you wallow in the pain...you wear it like a flag, you wear it like a crown...if you don't wanna play then you might as well quit... It's gotta stop sometime so why don't you quit. Get over it. Get over it" Glen Frey, *Get Over It*.

In the following sequence Charles "gets over it" in a big way and is ready to "play" against an adversary that should beat him in the worst way; devour him actually. Putting away his self doubts and torment Charles goes from being a truly weak man to a strong one. It is delightfully encouraging to watch. If the film has had a couple slow patches until now, it thunders along like a freight train from here.

The boys, still dressed in their "Sunday best" are now in the street and Jim shouts there is a parade. Quick thinking Will responds, "No it's a search—we can't go home, they'd follow us and kill our folks." The boys run into a building and there is a cut to a medium close shot of Mr. Dark leading the parade while slowly turning his head to each side, carefully scanning the crowd that lines the streets. We have several brief intercuts of him doing this throughout the sequence. It has added potency for the menace it carries in

the midst of celebration and we wonder what Mr. Dark can do to the boys if he finds them in a crowd in broad daylight. The parade as filmed reveals some carnival oddities but it seems to embody the cheerful, playful nature of a circus parade complete with elephants and camels, instead of the less savory offerings of the carnival, and it is joyously received by the townsfolk. Some of the carneys are even shown to mix and shake hands with the onlookers. The filmmakers wisely chose not to show anything of the off-putting strangeness of the carnival parade of freaks as found in Bradbury's earlier texts. The parade seems a pleasant diversion eliciting curiosity and delight from the townsfolk including Jim's mother, Mrs. Nightshade.

Cut to Charles at home, a bit annoyed by having his reading of the Sunday paper interrupted by a phone call. It is Will saying, "Dad they're after us." Rising from his chair Charles, for the first time with authority and firmness says, "Look son, you come home!" We hear "We can't" before there is a cut to Will's dangling receiver before the camera slowly pans to show the two boys hiding under a storm grate just below street level. All action in the sequence thus far has been rapid and seamless.

The spectator now views the passing parade as the boys do, from below and slightly obscured by the storm grating under which they are hiding. They see two cloth-covered boxes pass in the procession which they believe are coffins--boy size. There are also brief shots of Mr. Crosetti as "the bearded lady, Mr. Tetley as his cigar store Indian and a young, beautiful Miss Foley being led by the boy Cooger. Why did no one in such a small town recognize them? Maybe they thought it was just part of the carnival fun. Jim's mother pauses near the grate where they are hiding and a costumed dwarf hands her a card then motions for her to bend down so he can whisper in her ear. Will has to muffle Jim's cry as we view this from their perspective. A barking dog²⁰⁵ comes to the grate threatening to reveal the boys in hiding but Jim carefully reaches up through the grate and moves a discarded biscuit to where the dog can finally take it and leave.

Things are getting more desperate by the moment as Charles arrives in a hurry. His friend "Doc" calls him over wondering why the bar is closed for the first time in

²⁰⁵ In the novel it is a small child that peers into the storm grate because he has dropped a piece of candy, but he is too small and puzzled to speak clearly about what he sees. The dog on the other hand, is insistent and noisy until the boys remedy the situation.

twenty years, thinking that “Ed just must have taken off.” Charles remarks, “that’s not like Ed,” as the two of them enter through the unlocked door. Moreover, Doc finds it odder still that the unlocked till is still full of cash. The men are standing at the bar and Charles asks Doc if he has seen Will and Jim when someone enters. The man politely begins, “Excuse me gentlemen I’m a stranger in this town, I wonder if you could help me, my name is Dark. I’m looking for two young boys.” The camera cuts to Charles’ stoic face, as he calculatingly replies, “The town’s full of them.” Dark, now in close up and with a faint smile nervously continues, “Yes sir, no doubt, no doubt, but these boys seem two of a kind, one toe-headed (light blond) – the other black as pitch, you could take them for blood brothers.” Doc asks, “What have they done?” “Done sir”, he replies, why nothing wrong, surely. They’re two lucky lads that have won prizes at the carnival. I mean to give them the prizes they so richly deserve. Can you help me?” The actor’s manner and delivery are nuanced and flawless. At times he displays a nervousness that leaves him a little short of breath while at other moments he is rather assured and his final query is almost plaintive. I have mentioned that Jonathan Price’s performance brought understated menace and panache to a character that could have easily been a bit one-dimensional in a compressed medium like film, this scene is merely one example. It is the only time Dark appears slightly vulnerable but it passes quickly.

Charles excuses himself and goes outside noticing the other closed shops and steps over the grate where the boys are hiding. “Dad,” Will whispers as he reaches up to grab the toe of his shoe and Charles bends over to see as Mr. Dark approaching from behind enquires, “Did you lose something sir?” Affecting normality, he comments that folks around here all seem to be on holiday as he lights his cigar. Stepping a little closer Dark, (gravely now) “These boys I’m looking for, perhaps you know them.” Tensely Charles, says, “Those lucky fellows, won prizes I think, wouldn’t want them to miss out on their good fortune,” as Dark now extends his palms revealing their tattooed faces. Charles swallows but composes himself and hesitantly at first, invents false names for them concluding they are both fine boys and “a credit to our little town if you want to know the truth.”

Jonathan Price in character as Mr. Dark is not a big man. Nonetheless, he is tall and imposing in his black suit and top hat as he steps face to face with Charles saying,

“And the truth is that you are lying, you see I already know their names, I got their names from a blind girl, used to be a teacher here abouts—poor creature by the name of Foley.” There is a cut to the boys looking at each other in shock. Now another close up of Dark as he moves almost nose to nose with Charles and nearly gasping with repressed rage, “Now tell me, old man, what’s your name.” The camera, mirroring Charles’ predicament presents him off center, in slightly angled close up but without hesitation he gives his full name, “Halloway, sir; Charles William Halloway. “Yes, of course the town’s librarian,” Dark replies, his fist is now so tightly clenched it is beginning to bleed, a couple drops of blood fall on the face of Will, hidden below. “I have the honor sir,” Charles says while Dark interjects, “and have had it for many years I think; all that time spent living through other men’s lives.” Charles cannot repress the fear he feels when he briefly glances down to Dark’s bloody fist; but he remains unshaken, “Dreaming only other men’s dreams, what a waste.” With only the briefest of pauses Charles confidently, yet politely states, “Sometimes a man can learn more from other men’s dreams than he can from his own—come visit me sir, if you wish to improve your education.” Dark’s expression goes from almost blank to malevolent intensity as he concludes, “I will, and I may improve yours.” Charles has put his adversary “in check” for now, but “mate” is hardly certain. Mr. Dark returns to the head of the parade and a dwarf hands him his cane as he swings it in a wide arc and after a moment’s silence the parade begins again, only now they march off in lock step to a funeral like dirge. There are medium close ups of Dark looking fixedly over at Charles as he slowly leads the parade and reverse shots show Charles calmly looking back a couple of times, each time tilting his head up a little, showing determination. He even stands a little taller placing his hands on his hips for a moment, cigar defiantly in his mouth. The old self-pity seems to have evaporated and though he is certainly confused and should feel fear, he appears to be a new man.

If this was not strange enough, Charles sees a little boy paused from the parade with a football in his hands that he silently passes to him. If any doubt remained, the “ball” is in Charles’ hands now so he has got to play. After a moment he passes it back but the boy catches it with one arm only the way Ed, the barman did. Charles, sternly asks, “Boy, what the hell is going on.” No answer as he turns to join the parade and Charles watches him go. It is simply a fine, understated scene. If he had not already

suspected, he must surely be open to understanding the supernatural malice underpinning the carnival.

After the parade has passed on a little further, he drops his cigar on the grating and as he bends to pick it up he whispers to the boys, "Come to the library tonight." There is a rather long close up of Will in profile looking up with small streaks of Dark's blood and tears on his face. He reaches his fingers up through the grate and his father interlaces his fingers with Will's. A cut back to Will shows him nodding his head yes, as the scene dissolves and the music ends. This interlocking of hands substitutes the scene cut earlier from their home after the first father-son talk and I believe the tentative father-son reconciliation is more powerful presented this way and at this time. It is not Will reaching to help Charles up the last rung of the trellis to his bedroom window, but Charles reaching down to his son, blood and tear stained in the gutter. They may not have reached a full reconciliation or understanding of one another yet, but they are allies in extremis and finally it is up to Charles to save his son instead of the other way around.

I mentioned in the *Fahrenheit 451* chapter the strong resemblance I detected between fire chief Beatty's words and the persuasive attitude of "The Cynic" in C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*. The cynic was the protagonist's greatest peril in *The Screwtape Letters* just as Beatty was for Montag. We know Bradbury had read and admired Lewis' book, (Eller, *Unbound* 94) is it possible there is a reflection of another character from that work in Mr. Dark? In *The Screwtape Letters*, there is a character known simply as "The Tragedian." Like Mr. Dark, he is a tall, thin man, dressed in black, with a top hat and he uses a cane. He leads around his shrunken victim on a chain like a pet. Lewis uses that name for him because of his exaggerated, melodramatic manner which is precisely what his victim, the grossest caricature of self-pity you can imagine, falls prey to. Poor victim, everybody was against him and he deserved so much more, he thinks and The Tragedian merely plays into that existing attitude as Mr. Dark seems to do with many he manages to capture. In *The Screwtape Letters*, the chained victim has a final encounter with his deceased wife who tries to win him over. However, he holds on to his (mostly) imagined hurts and refuses to give them up with "The Tragedian" affirming him in his victimhood and self-pity (though not exactly making him a false promise). When listening to his wife he is described as getting "a little bigger and

brighter” but when listening to the other he finally shrinks down to the size of an insect and is literally swallowed²⁰⁶ by “The Tragedian”.

“The Tragedian” was already something of a “stock character” in 1945 when Lewis drew him and there is no hint of “camp” in Mr. Dark, but he is not unlike “The Tragedian” in his dress, manners, speech and especially his strategies to destroy people through “the chains they have forged for themselves,” by affirming their obsessive grievances, regrets and self-pity whenever he can. In the scene I have just described between Charles and Dark, the former seems to visibly shrink when first confronted by Mr. Dark but becomes “bigger and brighter” when he sheds self-pity as I see it, actually extending a challenge to his adversary. Although the carnival does not literally swallow its victims, it is highly emphasized (we see shortly) that they truly *feed* on their victims or gain sustenance through their pain.

XX FINAL SHOWDOWN: THE LIBRARY, IT IS CHRISTMAS RIGHT HERE AND NOW

I find it interesting to observe (for North Americans at least) that we have the morbidly fun carnival of Halloween, followed a month later by Thanksgiving and then Christmas. Somehow, this just seems a proper celebratory progression. The next scene dissolves in at night to the library building. The two boys and Charles are seen from some distance now inside the library, and the camera perspective causes the high parallel rails of the shelves on either side of them to appear to slightly angle inwards positioning them in the very center background of the frame. The quiet, somber setting lends the air of a church sanctuary to the setting as viewed through this frame. Still in long shot, they are seen at an illuminated table and we hear what seems to be the end of Will’s explanation, “That’s why they had the parade so they could find us and kill us and so we had to hide. Who’d believe us? “I believe you”, Charles says. “But we’re not grownups,” the boy declares. Charles then responds delivering perhaps the best line of the film and in perfect

²⁰⁶ The devil eat devil and devil eating victims aspect was highly emphasized in the 3 act stage adaptation of Lewis’ story.

pitch, “That’s why I believe you.” If I resort to rather extensive citation of the screenplay in this final section it is because I believe some of it absolutely key to analysis of the narrative.

The last pieces of the puzzle fall in place when Charles reads aloud a diary entry from his father who was a minister in the town. “Now listen to this” as he slowly begins to read.

October 1891. We have had no good fortune since there arrived here the autumn carnival. It seems strange to speak of such things in these enlightened days but a lame servant girl went to the fortune teller to enquire how she might run. Her leg was mended but then she went mad. It seems they destroyed people by granting their dearest wishes which has been the way of the devil since God created the world.

There is a momentary dimming of the lights as distant thunder is heard to remind us of the brewing storm. “Old folks in the town say they remember these carnival people visiting in autumns past, in the days of their youth. The autumn people swore they would return some other autumn, each time the visit ended with a most unusual storm.” This is not deductive speculation but an eyewitness account, actually from Charles’ deceased father which has further significance to come. Footsteps are heard and Charles tells the boys to hide. Alone now we have a close up of Charles in profile and he is beginning to sweat and breathe with difficulty. Panic probably, but possible signs of a heart attack and we already know he has a weak heart.

Now there may be a continuity error here, and it may be because of a different camera perspective (or that the next sequence simply needed more natural light). Before, it appeared only *their* desk was illuminated with a single lamp but the camera, now slightly behind and above Charles reveals three other desks with two lamps each for a total of six²⁰⁷, the Biblical number for Man. The demon Mr. Dark must pass by these to confront Charles who proves himself a man indeed. Hearing the approaching steps, Charles pensively quotes Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*; “By the pricking of my thumb, something wicked this way comes.”

²⁰⁷ The three tables with a pair of lamps each may suggest the three of them against Mr. Dark.

The camera pans and we see Dark now near and reading verse from a book. The scene has an air reminiscent of the Biblical narrative where the devil is quoting Scripture to Jesus during His wilderness temptation as Dark reads, “then rang the bells loud and deep, God is not dead, nor doth he sleep” ...and Charles finishes the verse by memory; “the wrong will fail, the right prevail, with peace on Earth and good will to men.” Dark retorts, “It’s a thousand years to Christmas Mr. Halloway.” “Wrong! Charles asserts, it’s here in this library *tonight* and it won’t be spoiled.” Dark replies that “If Will and Jim bring it with them on the soles of their shoes, then we shall have to scrape them,” as he begins calling out and searching for them:

Will... Jim... free rides on the merry-go-round. How would you like to be king of the carnival, ruler of the rides? Wouldn’t you like to be grown up Jim? How would you like that, not to be looked down at, not to be told to run away and play—you’d be trusted, you’d be feared, and know what grownups do behind locked doors when children are asleep. Come to me Jim ...I’m the father you’ve been waiting for my son.

Now these are rather weighty things for a fatherless, twelve year old boy like Jim to take in. He is not just being urged to steal apples from a neighbor’s tree, but it rather echoes the Serpent’s promise of forbidden knowledge and power to Eve in the garden, worded in a modern context the boy will understand. There is a brief cut to Jim in hiding but he appears to be holding up well enough with Will at his side.

Charles stands now, wide-eyed yet without fear and declares, “I know who you are. You are the autumn people...where do you come from; the dust; where do you go, the grave.” He speaks as if he is figuring it out only now, believing this knowledge and dismissal of Dark gives him some power over the situation. Over Charles’ shoulder we see Dark slowly approach and speak with carnal satisfaction, “Yes, we are the hungry ones. Your torments call us like dogs in the night and we do feed, and feed well.” Charles replies, “You stuff yourselves with other people’s nightmares.” Dark replies, “We butter our plain bread with delicious pain. So you do understand a little?” Dark concludes.

In Medium shot-reverse-shot, Charles confronts him with the best weapon he knows, still holding his father’s diary. “You are known in this town; my father.” Dark disdainfully cuts him off, adding, “That preacher, that half man.” He seems to be saying

that his father could not beat him so why should he think he can. Charles quietly responds, “He’d done goodness.” Dark continues, “Tasteless fare; funerals, bad marriages, lost loves, lonely beds. It is our diet. We suck the misery and find it sweet. We search for more always. We can smell young men ulcerating to become men a thousand miles away, and hear a middle aged fool like you groaning with midnight despairs half-way around the world.”

Mr. Dark is quite an adversary. There is no reaching for the Bible to save oneself here, and that book was portrayed as something he “can juggle and ten like it” in the pre-novel text²⁰⁸. Dark has made light of the “spirit” of Christmas (indirectly God), Charles’s father and him, dismissed the often frustrating minister’s tasks and aid as useless, also indicating that they of the carnival are an all but unstoppable force. They have been coming and going as they please perhaps for centuries and no one seems to have stopped them yet. His attacks on Charles are of the most intensely personal nature and are designed to make him crumble. He angrily seizes the diary from Charles saying these books cannot hurt him and disparagingly calls him an old man while telling him to listen to his heart beating weaker. Now coming closer to Charles, “tell me where the boys are hiding and I can make you young again...say thirty?”

I will not reproduce all of Dark’s monologue here but it is forceful and probably the high dramatic point of the film and definitely higher profile than in the novel. He begins ripping pages from the book he has snatched from Charles; these momentarily glow as he tears them out page by page before they fall to the floor. He does this for each “year” beginning with thirty, “gone,” then, thirty-two, “You might still learn to swim,” forward to thirty-five, “oh, a year to start a family, build a fortune. You could still run up the steps without panting for breath; gone.” He continues ripping pages and taunting, “thirty-nine, finally still young.” He again starts speaking of Charles’ weak heart as he approaches number fifty then concludes “you are lost” and throws the book at Charles who falls.

²⁰⁸ More refined in the novel, Dark snatches the Bible from Will’s father declaring, “Myths, unfortunately, are just that. Life, and by life I mean so many fascinating things, goes on, makes shift for itself, survives wildly and I not the least wild among many” (Bradbury, *Something Wicked* 211)

After he ripped out “page forty-two” Will had cried out, “Dad don’t listen.” Dark approaches the fallen figure who defiantly reaches out and utters “damn you,” but Dark grabs his hand and squeezes it until it bursts like a piece of rotten fruit saying, “a taste of death so you will know it when it comes again, soon.” With Charles out of action he goes off in the direction of Will’s voice, and he seems to enjoy the hunt. But before he departs the Dust Witch arrives in yet another costume, her skin seemingly covered with dark gold paint, and is ordered to give Charles another taste of death—seems Dark would rather torture than outright kill, but ultimately he intends to “stop Charles’ clock.” Although we see her ringed hand near Charles, there are no incantations or “tickling of the air” which caused Charles to laugh in the source text. He is too weak to beat the Dust Witch with laughter here and I believe it would be less effective in film than the source text. Close ups of Charles lead us to believe that he may actually succumb, leaving no one to help the boys.

“Jim Nightshade, what a good, what a proper name for a carnival. Dark and Nightshade’s Pandemonium Carnival. That’s your name Mr. Nightshade.” Dark tells Will his mother was spun back and forth on the carrousel until she had become quite mad, “You should have heard the single sound she made.” There is sharp lightning and thunder now as Dark calls out to Jim with some urgency as “the clever one” and offers him a special reward if he comes out and gives up his friend.

Dark wonders aloud where the boys may be “filed,” “A,” for adventure or “B,” for boys, “J,” for Jim, or “N,” for Nightshade or “H,” for hidden. There is a close up of his black gloved hands and arms scaling the shelves that seem snake-like in their movement before he grasps the boys from behind and roughly brings down. He speaks with almost breathless delight as he moves them along and there is a cut to the Dust Witch in the hall ahead as he tells Jim he is going to meet his new mother now. A view from a window shows Will’s mom exiting a church meeting and pausing to speak with the pastor and Will cries out, but Dark calmly adds “I must have been mistaken, it must have been your mom at the carnival tonight Jim.” So Dark can be “mistaken”? Either this demonstrates the fallibility of Dark’s evil or that he was lying to Will to further discourage him. And Will’s mother appears too well anchored to be trapped by the carnival.

The Dust Witch waves her ringed hand in front of the boy's mouths at Dark's orders and they become silent and manageable. Walking the boys now to the carnival, he shows enthusiasm for his new "partner" Jim. What happens to Mr. Cooger? Seems there is no honor among devils. Will, as in the source text will be spun back to infancy to become a plaything for the laughing, evil dwarf the camera pans down now to show us. This is all quite unsettling.

Charles slowly regains consciousness in the library and next we see him with a bloody rag wrapped around his hand running toward the carnival. As he approaches he meets Mrs. Nightshade who says she has a ticket and is to meet Harry. It is not easy for her to accept, but he tells her that the one she will meet is not Harry. He has to shout at her to get her to go home while he runs on to the mirror maze. He pauses at the illuminated maze that has the foreboding air of an endless, devouring hole complete with a formally dressed dwarf standing in dark silhouette at the entrance motioning for Charles to enter. The perceived depth to the maze however, shows it to be anything but a dark hole that one might illuminate. Rather, it is a dazzlingly bright riot of mirrored reflections suggesting sensual overload and confusion, without remedy or recourse. This glowing portal in center frame with the dwarf as doorman (dressed as a Mr. Dark in miniature) is perhaps the most surreal image of the film, framed as it is by the surrounding natural world gently serenaded by the sound of crickets.

XXI THE MIRROR MAZE: A FINAL CONFRONTATION WITH SELF

Most of this sequence was added in post production and actors were called back for reshooting (Cinefantastique, Vol 13, no.5:43). Charles begins truly alone in this misty labyrinth of mirrors. As he wanders in, he hears Dark's voice. "Not dead yet, Mr. Halloway, come looking in my mirrors for another chance? Shall I help you find it? Would you know it, if you saw it?" While projected on a circular mirror, Dark says, "here the mirror of dreams of beauty," as we see Crosetti being mobbed by the exotic dancers at the carnival. Then Mr. Tetley, "The mirror of riches beyond wishing where Mr. Tetley lies buried." Then, "look here for the great and famous Ed; the barman of all the football

years, all dreams past.” Then Miss Foley, “all her beauty and vanity, lost in the unwinnable battle against time.” Somehow this seems the most piquant of all. Charles hears Will calling out and sees him in a vision being washed away in the river. In a realistic shot (he no longer is surrounded by mirrors and mist) we see him sitting on the bank watching, unable to help. Dark taunts him bitterly telling him to resign himself to failure and regret and that his time has passed and he is too old now to do anything about it.

Nevertheless, he hears Will’s voice echoing desperately, Dad! I love you!” Next there is a brief shot of Charles reflected in a mirror a good twenty-five or thirty years older than he actually is. Then he is back to his real age sitting dejectedly but The Dust Witch is caressing him now. Will calls out again, “Dad no, I love you” Charles rises and sees the boy through a mirror drowning in the river, he smashes the mirror with his elbow and there is a close up of him grabbing the boy’s hand and pulling him out of the water. This was Bradbury’s post production idea and I think it was a good one in that it dramatically resolved the father-son rift, releasing Charles from his guilt. When the man and boy embrace, all the mirrors shatter and the mirror maze is no more.

There is a cut to a different part of the carnival and the lightning finally strikes. It strikes Tom Fury of course, and he springs from his chair with a glowing lighting rod in his hand and runs head long for the Dust Witch, impaling her with his rod. We have a close up of old Tom and he looks a lot less haggard and a good ten or twelve years younger now. The Witch has a rather long demise, turning into a tangle of blue lines of electric current that are then pulled up into the sky. The end is now coming partly thanks to Tom Fury. This electrical or lightning motif associated to Tom Fury was something Bradbury expanded from the novel adding a fine cinematic finish to the film.

There are rapid cuts now of the storm winds uprooting the carnival tents while Charles and Will are seen running from a tent. There are cross cuts of a worried Mr. Dark and members of the carnival fleeing in panic as it begins to rain. Now it is Dark’s turn to ride the carrousel with Jim. Charles gets there just before Will and pulls Jim off although the boy appears to be dead. It is too much for Will who begins to cry thinking Jim has “ditched” him for good now, but Charles shakes the boy and says “Stop it, Stop it! That’s what they want. Watch me, laugh, hop around,” and he does this in a circle with the

spinning carrousel filling the background of the frame making for a dizzying effect. Will forces a little joy and Jim wakes up and they exit as fast as possible.

Lightning strikes the carrousel and jumps to Dark who is shown suffering from the electrical charge but cannot extricate himself from the still spinning device. A very odd, nightmarish shot of real horses running aside the carrousel is shown. Have they been liberated from the machine as wooden figures or were they merely part of the carnival? There are several quick cuts to the mayhem of carneys on the run, one even looks like a grown Mr. Cooger, but the faces of the town's victims briefly illuminated by a lightning flash reveal no action from them which is a bit disappointing, we can only anticipate. There are cuts back to Dark who is engulfed in electric charges becoming grotesquely old and falling. A Dwarf, with some difficulty scoops him up and carries him off. This is according to the source text (although it was the Skeleton Man there who does not appear in the film) so we suspect there may be no real end to Mr. Dark, just as evil continues to exist. The tents and all are shown being sucked up into what has become a tornado now.

We see Charles and the two boys at a safe distance with the massive funnel cloud swirling on the ground behind them. Unfortunately, this is not one of the best special effects. The funnel cloud is gradually shrinking and having done its job recoils back into the sky and there are the clear skies of an early dawn as the three run back to town laughing a little. They reach the town and touch the barber pole that illuminates itself and begins to spin again. This may be a sign that all is really back to normal and gives a glimmer of hope that the town's victims may return a little later. Several shots from this sequence showing the town's residents restored to normal were dropped in post-production (Cinefantastique, Vol 13, no.5:30). Charles pulls out a harmonica and blows a couple riffs.

The story draws to a close as they are shown in full shot strolling through the still sleeping town, light cheerful music plays with a hint of the harmonica. Voice off narration comes again but as a coda, "For my father being old was all right now. He had freed himself from the shadows and liberated our town. So I think he knew that bright morning that he had made a memory that will live as long as sons tell sons about fathers they loved." Fade to black and ending credits.

Something Wicked This Way Comes is an entertaining and edifying tale and richly realized for the cinema in just under ninety-five minutes. A “faithful” adaptation skilfully developing elements from the novel as well as crafting new events only suggested in the novel to good cinematic effect. In keeping with Bradbury’s pre-novel screenplay it is not “such as us” who may temporarily defeat evil and send it packing, but something bigger than us, beyond our understanding or control. Here it was this freak storm. Not “Deus ex-machina” but a special storm that the carnival feared and may always pursue them if need be, but human actors were necessary too. I think Bradbury was saying, face up to life as it is, not as we would like it to be. Make the tough choices and celebrate it always; not simple optimism, but “optimal living.” We might reflect on that and thank him for entertaining us along the way.

XXII CLOSING COMMENTS

In summary, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* is a beautifully mounted picture that captures its period very well. It is well structured and coherent throughout. The special effects were not over done, serve the narrative very well and nearly all of them still hold up well decades after the picture was made. The acting was superb. Even the children who have received some negative criticism acquitted themselves well. The poetic nature of Bradbury’s prose came to life in performance not only through Jonathan Pryce’s “Mr. Dark,” but also through Jason Robard’s Charles and even the eccentric Tom Fury played by Royal Dano. The script was of a quality rarely found in cinema today, ranging from children’s banter, melancholic meditations, brief poetic and literary citations etc... all fitting naturally into the story and always believable coming from these characters. It is entertainment that deals with several serious themes in a sensitive, but not facile manner that most of us can relate to. In particular, I think the fine presentation of the difficult father-son relationship and its resolution has not been fully appreciated by critics.

As previously mentioned, the ending left a few questions, particularly as to what became of the captive townsfolk although we may assume normality has been restored

with the re-lighted barber pole once again spinning as it should as symbolic of this. We do not know the original ending before post-production scenes were added but Bradbury's suggestion that Charles pull his son out of the water in the hallucinatory mirror maze sequence worked very well. Not only because of the aforementioned father-son reconciliation, that shatters the mirror maze but because of the other-worldly peril and suspense that it allows. There Charles must bear the taunting once again of Mr. Dark and confront his prematurely aged self in mirror reflection with the deadly Dust Witch at his side. Although the spider sequence was extravagant, it was neither imaginative nor worked very well, and it seemed over the top and a bit pointless. If they had substituted it for even a simpler "balloon" sequence as per Bradbury's earlier texts and later suggestion, the film could have had an unforgettable sequence, perhaps unparalleled in surreal novelty for mainstream film up until that time.

Why was the film so unsuccessful at the box office? It deserved its "PG" rating, it was too intense for young children. But in spite of its two boy protagonists, it probably missed the mark with older kids in 1983 because it was a period piece, and these kids were already becoming obsessed with video games so something like Disney's *Tron* (Steven Lisberger, 1982) or *The Black Hole* (Gary Nelson, 1979) were maybe more in keeping with their taste at the time. Finally, *Something Wicked This Way Comes* is a film for adults and that is the likely reason it has not been forgotten with the passage of time and seems to have accrued a following and more consideration over the years. The numerous critiques one finds on the Net and other references indicate a certain respect or popularity for the film and many adults express more appreciation for it now than they had when seeing it in their youth. Often films that impress us at a certain time in our lives fade in appeal with time or as we grow older. I do not think this the case with *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. By all indications it is a film often viewed at home (by families) around Halloween time. Not a perfect film by any means but it deserves to be considered a "classic" as many now refer to it.

Conclusion: OCCASIONAL WARNING, PERPETUAL WONDER

I SUMMARY COMMENTS

If I have spent as much time with source texts and production background as actual film analysis, this was in keeping with analyzing the films as adaptations, yet independent works. Everything we see in the cinema or on television is an adaptation of some kind. Before filming begins there is always a written screenplay to follow that evolved from a previous skeletal “treatment.” In the right hands, the multi-track nature of film can bring something of value out of any written work, be it a classic like *Great Expectations* or *Moby Dick* or more contemporary, hard-boiled fare like Mario Puzo’s *The Godfather*. While adaptations may be properly viewed as such, they should still be judged on their own merits as a separate work. If an adaptation of a cherished work disappoints, the path is still open for other adaptive efforts, which appears to be the case with most of Bradbury’s cinema adaptations thus far. As I have mentioned, *all* the analyzed films (except *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*) based on the author’s works are in various stages of preparation (or serious consideration) for new cinematic incarnations. This includes *The Illustrated Man* directed by Jack Smight in 1969). In particular, I think *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit* and *Something Wicked This Way Comes* benefitted from the evolution of their source texts before being filmed.

Aside from the litany of resources the cinema brings to bear on its raw material of words on paper, adaptations may “update” their source, transpose it to an entirely different context or utilize different kinds of characters to tell a similar story; the possibilities are virtually limitless. Although Bradbury’s works generally lacked finely developed characters, he frequently employed much lively and realistic dialogic interaction, conducive to the cinematic medium. The compactness and cohesion around a single theme or impression, characteristic of his short stories is also conducive to film development. The abundant ideas and novel observations in his longer works make them fertile for adaptation, offering a variety of paths to follow and elements for selected emphasis or further development.

Throughout his career Bradbury firmly insisted that he very rarely sought to slant his writing for the market and never to please the critics; he wrote for himself, out of his needs and the sheer pleasure of writing. There should be no doubts about this. He never harbored pretensions of entering the pantheon of the great novelists, but he wanted to be seen as more than just an “entertainer” and he abhorred what he termed “pointless” writing or performance art. At best, he wanted to awaken people to different ways of thinking and seeing things pertaining to human experience. Not all writers aim to do this with the same expenditure of effort and persistence as Bradbury did. These motivations plus the highly personal, even idiosyncratic nature of his writing and love of performance might explain his desire to adapt so many of his works for performance media. In his works he often sought to illuminate or celebrate aspects of life although he put forth his criticisms too, but more in a spirit of warning in belief that much can be done to put things right. He chose to caution us against manifest tendencies in society that troubled him. In terms of his science fiction, he repeatedly stated that he was not trying to predict the future (which he did in uncanny ways) but to prevent it. That is, a dystopia not brought about by technology, merely abetted by it. He believed we were firmly in control of our machines and thus, how we choose to use them.

I have stated that a considerable amount of his published work was actually conceived or written for performance before being published. Performance seems to have been his ultimate and most desired goal. And in this pursuit he even managed to adapt several good performance pieces from material that apparently held little promise for performance of any kind. This would buttress his claim that he was the best adaptor of his own work since he was aware of all that was behind it and knew how to mix, recast or extend his own metaphors and concepts. For Bradbury, ink on paper was just not sufficient for what he desired to illustrate or communicate. He had the greatest satisfaction in seeing his work come to life in performance and as he himself observed many of his works became more fully developed and often better realized either on stage, television or film, especially when he had a hand in adapting them.

I would remind the reader of director Stuart Gordon’s comments on Bradbury’s screenplay for *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit*. Gordon also wrote screenplays and knew what they should be and was quite impressed with what Bradbury gave him. I have read

other screenplays, many online or through supplements from magazines like *Sight and Sound*-Scorsese's *Goodfellas* (1990) comes to mind, and Bradbury's screenplays do not seem inferior to me. Screenplays must segue into shooting scripts as adequate guides for filming, and Bradbury's screenplays, apart from occasional conceptual extravagance, are well-structured for this. I have been fortunate enough to obtain photocopies of several of these from the Albright Collection originals through the Center for Ray Bradbury Studies at the Indiana University and (like Gordon) I am impressed as well.

He managed to draw the reader into the frame, which is uncommon for this type of writing. They do not read like simple schematics; the story and images have life and movement, waiting to be realized. That is, Bradbury's scenarios are more than just careful elaboration of scenes, or description of a sequence of varying shots. He often included sound and music cues, always the movement of actors and their interaction with their environment, extending to notes on motivation and feelings manifested through small gestures, even facial expression. Bradbury's screenplays suggest that he is watching a film unfold in his mind while he is writing and he spared no detail. He included things to help the actor and director, but his scenarios are precisely timed, sequenced and economical, without an unnecessary word. I hope I have presented a reasonable argument for Bradbury as a "performative/cinematic" writer. From what I have encountered during the course of research for this thesis, I am fully convinced. While other writers, like Dickens and Shakespeare for example, have been adapted more often, if we consider Bradbury's many hours of television (theater and radio) adaptations, he must still rate very high on the list of authors adapted for performance. Furthermore, in terms of variety of performance medium one may add to the above, experimental theater with dance and mime, musicals, even a couple of cantatas. Few writers could equal the variety and volume of Bradbury's work. I will briefly revisit the analyzed films before briefly examining some of Bradbury's other adaptive work on film I consider relevant.

The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit is truly Bradbury's picture. Directed by Stuart Gordon who directed the Chicago stage adaptation that the author liked the best of any he had seen, the film was shot just as Bradbury had written it. Gordon changed nothing save for a couple of minor cuts that I mentioned in the chapter analysis. Aside from omitting a brief early scene, a more elaborate, latter chase sequence was substituted for something

simpler. Vamanos being chased by his opponent's car was better slapstick and even turned into a kind of quirky victory for him. This finale did not harm the picture at all, and the director probably sustained better narrative focus and rhythm this way. It is a "small" picture (77 minutes, with a minimum of sets) but technically, *everything* is good: the opening animation, the music, lighting and set design, the camera work is varied and effective, and of course the acting and direction seem faultless. With this film Bradbury certainly proved he could make his serious points dramatically and with a light touch through believable, likable characters and humor.

How rare it is to encounter a picture with comedy that is not the least bit "cruel" and is offered without resorting to profanity, violence or anything vulgar or distasteful. As such, it reminds one of the classic comedies of the silent and early sound eras. Of all the films discussed it is the only one that does not really "leave room" for a remake (a sequel maybe). I cannot imagine the source text better realized than in Gordon's film. Unfortunately, it is by far the least known of the pictures examined in this thesis and deserves to be seen by more people. It had a modest release in VHS and finally DVD, but it had a very limited theatrical release and I do not know how much, if any, play it has had on television.

Fahrenheit 451 had an inventive, stylish director in François Truffaut who privileged the source text and thus his emphasis on "books as people" is certainly justified if not fully successful. Yet this did drain the film of some of its human drama and perhaps he did not make the case for the importance of books and reading as forcefully as he should. Many have singled out the film's rather poetic ending, although viewing the film is something of a melancholic experience overall. However, as many have remarked, it is a picture that gets better on repeated viewings because there are so many fine touches and connotations large and small to be appreciated. Talk of a remake has circulated for well over a decade. It is a good candidate for a remake not only because more technical aspects of the future like "the mechanical hound" (omitted from the film) and interactive TV may be more effectively presented, but the source text's multiple themes offer so many different directions to explore and choices of emphases for a filmmaker. Another version is currently being prepared for cable television to air in 2018.

It is a good text to revisit because the themes and issues raised in the novel have

become so very prevalent today. We are *living* some of *Fahrenheit 451* now, the general decline of literacy, the way media journalism has become, (very biased some would say) sound bites not leaving us time to think, not to mention the inroads of virtual reality and social media, which figure prominently in the narrative. A remake could bring out new valences of Bradbury's source text and it would be a fascinating exercise for a would-be adaptor to have a look at Bradbury's proposed screenplay(s) for *Fahrenheit 451* where he carried his source text further through interesting additions to character and society that added some fascinating, cinematic scenes and concepts.

Something Wicked This Way Comes is a well-made film; the effects are technically competent and believable and the camera work excellent. The film is solid and laudable in its period re-creation and very well acted. In terms of acting, it is difficult to imagine another set of (adult) actors giving better performances, particularly the leading players, Jonathan Pryce and Jason Robards. However, it really should be remade. Some of the post-production additions and omissions were perhaps unwise, the ending could have been a little more solid and it seemed a bit rushed in parts. Bradbury's suggestion for the ending with the father pulling his son from the river in the mirror maze added a degree of closure but does not seem to have been as fully realized as Bradbury had perhaps intended. It did make up for the earlier scene that was cut of father and son climbing to Will's window together. The post-production mirror maze scene did add a healthy dose of other-worldliness to the picture as well as better overall narrative closure in terms of the father-son estrangement.

It would be interesting to see some omitted elements from Bradbury's screen treatment and novel included, or just more developed in a remake. A future adaptation could leave out the spider invasion (a late addition to the film that does not appear in any version of the novel) and give us something a little more surreal like a variation of the balloon sequence, for instance. The film is suitable for family viewing and I suspect many families enjoy it at Halloween. However, I agree with many²⁰⁹ that a remake should venture to be a little less "tame" and more terrifying. It is still very much Bradbury's film

²⁰⁹ "Many" refers to nearly all professional critics and fans who have commented on this film. There is a good deal of commentary available including an overall interest for a remake. Apparently one is in the works for cable TV at present.

and a beautifully mounted picture and there still remains more that could be explored from Bradbury's source text(s).

II OTHER ADAPTED WORKS

Bradbury's first screenwriting credit dates back to 1953 when John Huston asked him to adapt *Moby Dick* (1956). Revered as "the classic American novel" there is enough material in this very long book to make three or four films, but how, with the resources available to mid 1950s filmmaking can one do justice to such a masterpiece in just under two hours. Huston was one of the young writer's heroes²¹⁰ and he hesitated to mention that he had never actually read Melville's book. In fact, neither of them had read it in its entirety. When Bradbury probed for the kind of interpretation the director wanted, a "Freudian or Jungian script," Huston said he wanted "Bradbury's *Moby Dick*" (Touponce ed., *Revue* 8). That is exactly what the director got. Finding himself a bit "at sea" with such a task, Bradbury simply dived in, reading the middle of the book and other sections before reading it from start to finish (several times) and he surfaced with something as valuable as the gold coin captain Ahab nailed to the mainmast of the ship as prize to the first man to sight the white whale. As Bradbury stated, the doubloon nailed to the mast was his "master metaphor" and the rest came after that.

Some reproduction of Bradbury's screenplay I believe is merited. Ben P. Indick termed it "a collaboration in which skillful dramatic writing made a classic come alive, quite original in itself, yet seemingly employing actual words and scenes from the book" (17). Aside from the famous "Call me Ishmael" opening, the protagonist's wanderings to Nantucket are recast in voiceover narration:

Whenever I get grim and spleenful, whenever I find myself pausing before coffin warehouses and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet, whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul, then I know it is high time to get to the sea again. (The CAMERA follows him briskly) Choose any path you please and ten to

²¹⁰ Bradbury was not one to keep a grudge, but Huston made the six months he spent wrestling a screenplay from that mammoth book sheer torment for him at times.

one it carries you to water. There is a magic in water that draws all men away from the land and runs them over the hills, down creeks and streams and rivers to the sea. The sea where each man, as in a mirror finds himself.

These were Bradbury's words, not Melville's and Bradbury has "the camera peer at ponds, lakes, standing pools, a creek, a river and in a series of shots Ishmael strides and the rivers grow larger and the sound and look of them seem to rush him on" (Bradbury, "Moby Dick" 16).

Ishmael is soon seized into merry singing and drinking at the inn where he is to room with a "cannibal." He has to share his bed with Queequeg, who finally does not seem too threatening. "Oh well...better to sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian," Ishmael mutters. Of course they later become friends and when Queequeg later "casts the bones" and believes he is destined to die soon, he falls into a catatonic stupor. Ishmael tries to awaken him by reminding him of their oath of friendship but to no avail. Among an international crew, when a sailor identified as "The Portuguese" starts to lightly run a knife over the paralyzed Queequeg's chest, Ishmael tries to stop him and the sailor, brandishing his knife says, "Let me see the color of your liver!" Queequeg springs to life, hoists the sailor in the air and is about to break him in half across his knee when Ishmael intervenes. Instead of recovering on his own, as in the story, Bradbury awakens Queequeg only to save his friend (Eller, *Unbound* 17-25).

But Bradbury knew when to be faithful to Melville abbreviating, but not eliminating a single word of Ahab's final speech: "To the last I grapple with thee! From Hell's heart I stab at thee! For hate's sake I spit my last breath at thee, thou damned whale! Thus! I give up my spear!" However Bradbury alters Ahab's death, with him (instead of Fedallah who Bradbury omitted) "Lashed round and round to the White Whale's back, the sodden body of Ahab is seen, like a corpse on a great white bier. We see his body, Ahab's face in nightmare, his eyes wide" (Bradbury, "Moby Dick" 178). In the film, while bound to the whale we see Ahab's free arm swing back and forth as if beckoning the others to follow him to his terrible fate. Huston, as usual made a few small alterations to the script, enough to get co-screenplay credit with Bradbury though having seen the film (and reading Bradbury's script) this seems exaggerated. Bradbury contested this decision but the young, first-time screenwriter did not have any clout with the

academy. A film is a highly collaborative effort, but if there is any truth in the saying that a film can finally be no better than its script, then *Moby Dick* is as much Bradbury's film as Huston's.

The Illustrated Man was a portmanteau of three short stories from Bradbury's 1951 story collection using a linking theme of the Illustrated Man's tattoos, in turn "coming to life" for the young man who offers the tattooed man a place at his campfire and discovers these enchanted images are able to tell the future as well. Bradbury optioned film rights to the book in 1967 and Smight's screenwriter used the tattooed carnival freak that Bradbury had used in the prologue and epilogue of his book, as the primary narrative thread of the film—he introduces the "stories" behind his tattoos in response to his accidental companion's queries. This was not a bad strategy to link the three stories together, but perhaps this framing narrative slowed and diluted the story as a whole. The film was a critical and popular failure. Nevertheless, it had strong performances by Rod Steiger, Clare Bloom and Robert Drivas²¹¹ in each episode. In spite of its poor critical and popular reception, it played frequently on American television, often in "prime time."

The first episode, "The Veldt" dealt with the unhealthy obsession some children had with their virtual reality TV. The episode had a sleek futuristic look to it, everything very white and sterile. It also presented realistic family conflict and suspense²¹² while wisely dispensing with the heavy-handed reproof of the couple's well meaning but unwise parenting from the family psychologist found in the source text. The second episode *The Long Rain* brought unusual action, conflict and a sense of wonder to the film as we find ourselves witness to a stranded crew of astronauts in the constant, pounding rain of Venus trying to make their way to shelter. More than just getting out of the rain, it is a question of survival and becomes survival of the fittest.

The third story *The Last Night of the World* was dull, depressing and not at all imaginative. It compares unfavorably with its source text which carries more impact

²¹¹ Drivas was excellent in the film but unfortunately he died quite young leaving a scant body of film and television work. In *The Long Rain* episode Steiger's brutal manner and spacesuit design foreshadowed "The Beast Rabban" in David Lynch's adaptation of Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1984).

²¹² In David Mogan's book, Bradbury describes how he would have filmed part of that segment of the film and it would have at the least added more suspense.

overall and has some pathos that the filmed version misses. Basically, the end of the world has been foretold so let us spare our children the agony by giving them “the capsule.” The end of the world does not come, but after what the parents do, they wish it had. What an awful way to end the film; another story should have been selected. Moreover, the closing moments when the Illustrated Man’s terrified companion tries to kill him with a rock (thinking one of his tattoos predicts his death) is not much better, as we see him furious and bloody, go off in pursuit of his attacker. We hope the Illustrated Man’s attacker escapes, but the film indicates that he probably will not. The dreary, predictable last story and the violent, open-ended “closure” of the framing story, complete with a freeze frame of the brutalized Illustrated Man, probably reduced the overall appeal of the film. If Bradbury had been involved with the picture in any meaningful way, we could expect it would have been different. It was Howard B. Kreitsek’s first screenplay and may give proof to the adage that a film can rarely overcome a weak screenplay.

There have been proposed remakes of this film and the first two stories could be put to good use again. The first updated and made more contemporary since virtual reality is already with us. The second was really the best, dramatic and otherworldly of course, and with an unexpected ending. The special effects could be improved although they were not bad in the film. Any number of other stories from the same collection could be better used for the third installment if desired.

1969 proved to be a disappointing year for Bradbury in terms of cinema adaptation. Bradbury had sold the rights to his story “In a Season of Calm Weather²¹³” from his story collection *A Medicine for Melancholy* (1959) in late 1967. The story revolved around a vacationing couple who have a magical encounter with Pablo Picasso. It was a tight, concise narrative and Bradbury thought it would make a good thirty-minute film incorporating some Picassoesque animation. Basically a man discovers a beach drawing made by none other than Picasso himself and tries to salvage it from the advancing tide. It was made as a ninety-minute film starring the first-tier leading man Albert Finney and Picasso himself was to appear in the film but did not.

²¹³ Bradbury mentioned the inspiration for that story came from when he was at the beach and picked up a popsicle stick and began drawing pictures in the sand. He thought what it would be like if one had always wanted to own a Picasso all their life by chance happen on to him drawing in the sand (Bradbury, 1996:64).

The production of *The Picasso Summer* was a comedy of errors and a total fiasco²¹⁴ from beginning to end. Initially, Bradbury worked along with Wes Herschensohn who devised some impressive stand-in animations that were heavily cut in final editing in 1968 (Eller, *Unbound* 258-259). Herschensohn²¹⁵ really conceived the entire film but Bradbury lost interest in the project after so much of his work was cut. According to Sam Weller, Bradbury felt angry and betrayed at an early screening of the film and chose to use the pseudonym “Douglas Spaulding” for his co-screenwriting credit. The original director, Serge Bourguignon who was at first enthusiastic about Bradbury’s screenplay, detoured from it “deciding to ad-lib the story, to give it a more “natural” narrative flow.” It was a bad artistic choice and Bradbury remarked that the only redeemable attributes of the film were the Michael Legrand score and Barbra Streisand vocals. The film never reached theatrical release, although it seems to have had very limited television exposure and then all but disappeared, but seems to have been issued in VHS or DVD format. The credited director was Robert Sallin and Edwin Boyd shared screenplay credit.

The Screaming Woman (Jack Smight, 1972) was only loosely based on Bradbury’s highly anthologized 1951 story by the same name; he did not write the teleplay. In Bradbury’s story children at play hear the cries of a woman buried alive in a box and no one believes them until later one of the children says the woman was now singing. Repeating a phrase from her song the child’s father recognizes it was a song composed by his Helen just for him and rushes to dig her up. In this made-for-TV movie version children are absent but it had an all-star cast. The plot revolved around a ruthless daughter-in-law trying to have her wealthy mother-in-law committed to an insane asylum for hallucinating the screams of the buried woman. The older lady played by Olivia de Havilland, finally does manage to unearth the woman just as the one who buried her seems ready to do her in

Many of these small made for TV genre pictures of the 1970s, harkening back to the “B” program pictures of earlier decades were actually good, usually only running for around an hour and fifteen minutes as this one did. Indeed, this was a well-made picture with Smight using elements from Bradbury’s story to mount a suspenseful, at times

²¹⁴ See *The Bradbury Chronicles* (2005) 280-282 for details.

²¹⁵ Wes Herschensohn, *Resurrection in Cannes: Making of the Picasso Summer* (1980)

frightening film. Strong language and adult situations made it quite a forceful entry in the made for TV films of the early 1970s.

The Martian Chronicles (Michael Anderson, 1980) was a six-hour television mini-series and a real disappointment for Bradbury. Although Bradbury had written several earlier drafts none of them were used. His friend, genre writer Richard Matheson adapted the screenplay. Bradbury was not displeased with the work of Matheson, who had a well-deserved reputation as a screenwriter able to adapt texts considered difficult for film, e.g. his Poe adaptations for American International Pictures in the 1960s. He was however, very disappointed with the final film. It was essentially a British production and in spite of some interesting location work in places like Malta and Tunisia it did not deliver much excitement or wonder, it was ponderous and slow. However, it did have some good moments like the opening episode of the Martian woman's premonitions of the earthmen's arrival and her jealous husband who dispatches them upon their arrival. Also, a sense of wonder (and beauty) is achieved through depiction of the Martian craft sailing across the desert sands pursuing some colonists only to deliver a bitterly ironic gift.

"It's obvious the way that film is directed that someone was very, very bored. There's no sense of excitement. If I were going to become a director, and didn't wake up thinking, this is the greatest job in the world, I would quit" (*Cinefantastique*, vol. 13, no 5:45). That was Bradbury's take on the film, and Rock Hudson in the leading role seemed bored too. Bradbury did remark that a ninety-minute version ran in European theaters (the mini-series played on German television) but he did not comment since he had not seen it. I have parts of a *Martian Chronicles* screen treatment Bradbury was working on for MGM Studios dated 1960 when big budget, more adult science fiction was coming into vogue. He wrote a second script for Alan Pakula in 1963-65 and yet another in 1977, (Eller, *Unbound* 215-216) but the mini-series bears little resemblance to it. The poetry and pathos from the source text and Bradbury's unproduced screenplay were absent in this rather lifeless production. The IMDB currently lists *The Martian Chronicles* as "under development so let us hope that in remake, something better emerges.

The Halloween Tree (Mario Piluso, 1992) won the Emmy Award for "Best Animated Children's Program" of that year. It was scripted (written for animated film in

the late 1960s) and narrated by Bradbury with Leonard Nimoy as the voice of “Moundshroud” who takes four children back through time to teach them about the origins of Halloween customs while they try to save the life of their friend. Bradbury always loved the holiday and found some inspiration for the narrative from his 1940s trip to Mexico and their festivals associated with “the day of the dead.” I have not seen the film which runs a whole hour and thirty minutes but I have read an earlier version of Bradbury’s teleplay and it is an entertaining and instructive work for children (and adults).

Among the more noteworthy television adaptations was the 1982 short directed by Ed Kaplan, closely based on the author’s highly anthologized short story “All Summer in a Day” and the hour long *Any Friend of Nicholas Nickelby is a Friend of Mine* (based on his story of the same name). It was released the same year and directed by Ralph Rosenblum for *American Playhouse* on the American Public Broadcasting Network. Also from 1982, was *The Electric Grandmother*, an hour long production for the NBC television network directed by Noel Black. Bradbury updated his earlier *Twilight Zone* teleplay for this and he was quite pleased with all these productions. In between he extended his “Electric Grandmother” concept into a rather long short story “I Sing the Body Electric” for a 1969 short story collection by the same name. There are actually dozens of stories adapted from Bradbury’s work or that he wrote himself for television stretching as far back as 1951 and extending to the present with a number of these produced and released outside of the United States.

III THE RAY BRADBURY THEATER

By far the most important of his adapted work from this period was *The Ray Bradbury Theater*, which aired sixty-five, thirty-minute episodes from 1985 to 1991 on cable television, garnering many awards. This was truly a showcase for the author’s adaptive talents. He chose all the stories that he adapted himself and he had oversight of the shooting script and actual filming in most cases. His producers essentially gave him

“carte blanche” over the series even extending to casting and the final form of each televised episode

Although budgets were modest, it was considered a “prestige” program and largely through Bradbury, the series was able to enlist a great number of name actors including Peter O’Toole²¹⁶ for the episode “Banshee.” I have viewed all the episodes and read most of the source texts and believe Bradbury did a fine job adapting them. Indeed, he usually brought fresh ideas to old stories even combining elements from different stories into coherent new performance pieces. They were not all “masterpieces” of course and the science fiction themed episodes were perhaps among the weaker, with exception of “Mars is Heaven” and “The Long Years” which I think were better realized than in *The Martian Chronicles* mini-series. Overall, the series brought novelty and a variety of interesting stories to the television medium which at the time did not have a surplus of that. I have spoken of the series previously but I will touch upon a few episodes.

“Touch and Go”(1948) later published (and filmed) under the title “The Fruit at the Bottom of the Bowl”, was a curious, rapidly paced suspense story that really shined in performance starring Robert Vaughn. There is no indication that Bradbury originally conceived this story for performance, but that is where it gains its fullest force and expression. Unpredictable and with a twist ending, it was a fine tale of someone who thinks he has gotten away with the perfect murder but rapidly spirals out of control trying to erase all evidence of the crime. It was one of the series’ better episodes.

Great Wide World Over There, published in 1951 as “Cora and the Great Wide World” was adapted and broadcast on American television in two versions in 1955 and 1956 before being filmed again for the last season of *The Ray Bradbury Theater* in 1992. It is easy to see why because it is a touching and highly original story about a lonely woman living in backwoods isolation with her husband. She can neither read nor write but longs for contact with the outside world²¹⁷, and she is a little jealous of her neighbor, old Mrs. Brammam who seems to get mail every day. Cora Gibbs does not even have a mailbox.

²¹⁶ The series’ producers were too much in awe of the legendary actor even to approach him.

²¹⁷ Jonathan Eller reports that Bradbury said his primary inspiration for the story came through his wife, whose father carried on extensive letter writing. Moreover, the author was extremely moved by the performance of Tyne Daily in the televised episode.

One summer day her college-age nephew comes to stay for a while and teaches Cora rudimentary literacy, teaching her the alphabet traced in flour on the kitchen table. Later when it is time to write Cora comes to the sad realization that “I don’t know nobody. If I write, who’s going to write me back.” Her nephew cheerfully pulls a magazine from his backpack telling her there are plenty of people that would love to hear from her and write her back. He shows her advertisements for things like “Universal Muscle Building Inc.”, “Luna Cosmetics”— even offering a free sample, and “Moonlight” private detective agency etc... Too unsure to write herself, Cora dictates and her nephew writes dozens of letters.

Cora keeps checking her new mailbox for letters but nothing yet. And very early one morning, while she is waiting, her nephew remarks that it is too early for a mail truck to come and Cora realizes that no mail truck has *ever* passed by the area. Curious she checks her neighbor’s box and her nephew tells her the letters inside are 10-20 years old and not even addressed to her. Mrs. Brammam has been conducting a kind of charade where she has been “receiving” the same letters every day for years.

Soon the letters start pouring in and Cora is ecstatic to receive a message from the outside world beginning “Dear Mrs. Gibbs”—she repeats the words over to herself, delighted that now she is *somebody*. Of course her neighbor receives nothing and becomes sullen and withdrawn—with the mail car delivering to Cora, and not to her she can no longer maintain her illusion of receiving mail. When the nephew decides it is time to leave, Cora is sad to see him go because she really cannot write letters by herself but she most regrets that she had not paid more attention to her nephew’s face, although she said she would “know his hands in a dark room among a hundred people.”

Seeing her crestfallen neighbor another morning when she received mail and Mrs. Brammam did not, she confesses to her nephew that she has done “a frightful thing. A mean and spiteful thing,” that she is ashamed of. She whispered one more favor of her nephew (which we are not privy to) and he promises to write her twice a week as he leaves. A little later mail is delivered to *both* residences, no words are exchanged between the now estranged neighbors, but the knowing glances traded between the women are priceless. Her nephew promises aunt Cora “a word” every week. The first letter, “a pencil” with a drawing below so she could understand it. Words can never do justice to

performance but at least one may have an idea of the warmth and originality of this story that naturalistically glides across the screen in just twenty-four minutes.

The actress²¹⁸ playing “Cora” must truly carry the whole narrative and her character is not one we would commonly, or perhaps ever encounter. But after that brief teleplay we think we “know” her inside and out, and understand her completely. This was no small accomplishment and required the actress to project ignorance and innocence combined with wisdom, determination, patience and tenderness. She also had to convincingly project the sensitivity and humility that allowed her to come to the awareness that she had perhaps unwittingly, really hurt her neighbor. Without pretense or idle words, she more than makes amends for what she has done, not through words but through covert action. There were many fine episodes like this in *The Ray Bradbury Theater*, and casting was a strong point throughout as were the interesting locations like Canada, France and New Zealand.

Other examples of superb casting were Jeff Goldblum in “The Town Where No one Got Off” from the story by the same name. Published in 1958, the story is as much a mystery as “weird tale.” It has also been highly anthologized and included in at least seven textbooks. Goldblum’s natural nervousness, and racing, somewhat paranoid mind, immediately draws the spectator into this weird tale. Bradbury’s old friend, the celebrated supporting actor James Whitmore brought his low-key gravitas and easy air of home-spun wisdom to bear in “The Toynbee Convector,” which without his performance might have seemed merely a weak, didactic exercise.

Another interesting episode is *The Pedestrian* from his 1951 story that he adapted earlier for the stage. It is characteristic of the author’s better work using striking metaphors and hauntingly beautiful images of a late, solitary walk among the blowing autumn leaves under a full moon to establish an individualistic and poetic mind-set that strikes sympathetic cords in the reader. Frequently anthologized, this acclaimed precursor text to *Fahrenheit 451*, reads as a poignant, memorable tale creating an atmosphere and mood through unspoken impression and sensation. The dramatic potential of this very

²¹⁸This was the marvelous Tyne Daly. Attractive, but not glamorous, she played the unflappable, relentlessly common sense partner of the female police duo on the long running *Carney and Lacey* (1981-1988) but her best work was still ahead of her.

short story would seem well hidden behind an almost entirely descriptive and internal narrative. It affords a mere glimpse into a sterile future mainly through the disgruntled musings of an individual soon to be apprehended by an automated police car and taken away to an asylum simply because he refuses to stay at home in front of his viewing screen breathing conditioned air. Almost nothing happens, and apart from the cursory exchange between the pedestrian, Leonard Mead, and the patrol car, there is no dialogue. A severe overhaul, perhaps one only its author could envisage, was undertaken to prepare this work for the stage. The resulting one-act play staged by the author's own company in Los Angeles in 1964 shows something of Bradbury's acumen as dramatist and scenarist.

Here, Bradbury becomes his own palimpsest as he extracts ideas, brief passages and metaphors from his other writings. This self-referential quality is typical of his dramatic adaptations, but he chooses material carefully, further developing ideas while reshaping them for utterance and dialogue. In adapting his own work Bradbury chooses not to return to the source text but to write fresh. In the previously mentioned telephone interview, he said he would later "pass over" the source text lightly "like a fish fertilizing its eggs." Thus he avoids "self-plagiarism" while imparting to the adapted work an expanded vision and coherence all his own. "My screenplays, like my stories, are a collection of all the metaphors I've absorbed all my life. Only I can know them and how to use them and create from them (Tibbits 70).

For "The Pedestrian," Bradbury had to (re)create the shadowy Leonard Mead as someone who actually speaks, and fashion another character expressly for him to converse with. Because of the inherent differences between media, adaptations always involve a sort of trade off. In this case, most of the subtle, haunting quality of the short story seems to have been lost. However, the mass media critique was sharpened, the tacit lament for the decline of community and imagination was articulated and the pleasure of contact with nature was necessarily exhibited.

The production notes for *The Pedestrian* stage play, a much earlier adaptation of this tale show Bradbury to be circumspect and precise, aware of the exigencies of the medium as well as the potential shortcomings of the drama:

When it is cast perfectly, the entire play works as a tour-de-force for two. When cast weakly, the play begins to founder because of length. I found it necessary to cut my own play in order to hurry it along in the hands of weaker players. ... eliminating two full minutes ... can save the day (Bradbury, *Pedestrian* 22).

Bradbury's descriptions of Leonard Mead and his friend Stockwell, brief, yet detailed show his preoccupation with character as expressed through performance:

... Mead should be played by the kind of chap you might find coming out of an Irish pub; that fellow who would gladly bend your ear...quick and alert to the strange verities of the world, without being flamboyant. It is a delicate line to tread, but the actor who plays this part should be encouraged to take the role right up to the edge of said flamboyance without turning into a ham before our eyes (Bradbury, *Pedestrian* 22).

For the supporting role of Stockwell, Bradbury suggests that:

...we should watch him slowly being drawn in the wake of the faster, easy-talking Pedestrian. Stockwell starts older, remoter, stodgier, and gets lighter on his feet as the play progresses and he gets "infected" by the night and their wondrous perambulation (Bradbury, *Pedestrian* 23).

Going beyond mere description, he delineates character development here. In Stockwell, a genuine supporting character is sketched whose complacency is stirred as he becomes a sort of ricochet board for the earnest philosophies of "the Pedestrian." The personification of ideas and attitudes, conflict and resolution in these two characters illustrates Bradbury's practice of perfecting his stories over time through the performance mode. The source text's focus on isolation and alienation still persists, only filtered through the prism of two separate characters. Initially, Mead and Stockwell appear as temperamental, perhaps intellectual opposites but the dramatic narrative reveals the bonds of alienation they share.

Bradbury's production notes are rather detailed and extensive, including schematic drawings and descriptions of scenery. He envisages everything as a well considered whole, and perhaps most noteworthy are the visual, sensory aspects; sounds, changing lighting and backgrounds while keeping his characters moving around the stage

which he considered just as essential for the drama as for the print version. While striving for the beauty of the well spoken word and a “theater of ideas”, Bradbury seeks to bolster or go beyond these by strongly emphasizing the audio-visual and multisensory images as part of the story; it’s an experience he seeks to transmit. For instance, Mead and Stockwell not only pause to marvel at the dew-laden grass but kneel to taste it—one reporting it as bitter, the other sweet. Even within the space/time limitations of the stage, Bradbury is intent upon recreation or extension of the sensorium he uses in prose.

A detailed comparison between the theatrical and televised versions is hardly necessary, all the dramatic elements and most of the dialogue remain. The dramatic action in the teleplay, with its strong concern for human characters and human interrelations is natural for the theater. The teleplay is “theatrical” in that it follows the lead of dialogue, yet it was “tightened” and refashioned for another medium where the narrative is advanced and enhanced with the aid of cinematic realism and devices. It is hardly filmed theater like many TV shows (still) tend to be, in the sense that characters are maneuvered around a two or three-camera set up on a soundstage.

The opening scene has the camera tilting down from a rooftop labyrinth of antenna to the sterile, somewhat dilapidated city streets, accompanied by a mournful trumpet solo similar to that heard during the opening credits of *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (Jack Arnold, 1957), the opening effectively suggests a mood of despair and solitude. The houses are all dark except for the flicker of television screens as a figure is shown sneaking across the deserted cityscape to the locked door of one of the houses. The early part of the narrative is enhanced through the simple technique of cross-cutting. Shots alternate between Mead calling out and knocking at Stockwell’s back door while the latter drowns in his darkened living room in front of his TV. The television is broadcasting a gangster film with scenes analogous to what is actually happening at Stockwell’s house, someone is knocking at the TV gangster’s door pleading to be let in. Only after this televised scene plays out in a hail of confusion and gunfire does he realize what is actually occurring and answers his door. Without uttering a word, Stockwell’s confusion suggests he may be more attentive and comfortable with the artificial than the real. After letting Mead in, Stockwell is evasive and shame faced like an adolescent interrupted while indulging in some sort of naughtiness. He says he did not hear the door

because he was in the bathroom, but Mead seeing the light of the TV in the next room responds with a fair amount of disgust, “She had you, didn’t she Bob” Then he approaches the TV and addresses it directly:

The head of the Medusa, lies in my parlor and stares, my friends, frozen statues numbed by the Medusa’s glares. Radiant fuzz collects in our ears while this new god paints life on our eyes incredible stuff, new dwelling, the Keystone cops, cathedral, the demi-divine, pint size.

This is the most obvious instance of intertextuality with the lesser-known story *The Murderer* (1953). In that story, Brock, makes an almost identical statement to the criminal psychiatrist trying to understand his aggression against communication devices. In *The Pedestrian*, Leonard Mead is only speaking to a television set, and while soliloquy may be better suited to theater than cinema it serves an important purpose in this teleplay. Moments earlier as Mead was seeking to enter Stockwell’s house, the camera frequently cut from the two men to the television screen, now Mead, by addressing it directly practically elevates it to character status. Indeed, it does “speak” though it cannot hear or be reasoned with and exercises a profound influence on everyone and everything in the story.

By personifying the TV Mead is not just name-calling but seeing things for what they have become. It is as if electronic transmission devices and the reproductions they transmit have become as “real” and necessary to people as the actual people they were created to serve. Tellingly, Mead speaks of the TV “painting reality on our eyes.” “Eyeballs” is exactly the term modern media marketers use for potential customers, signifying the mere presence and receptivity of the viewer. Consistent with satire, the depicted future is more like a disturbing look at the present. Mead’s last poetic barb, comparing the TV to a cathedral while mocking it for its inadequate size is illustrative of a society that has lost its traditional, humanistic moorings.

After the “Medusa” speech, Stockwell apologetically tries to interest his friend in what is about to be broadcast but to no avail. Their brief exchange concerning what the medium has to offer only serves to emphasize the banality and recycled nature of the programming. Again, the point may be that television just wants us to watch more television in a sort of tautological feedback loop. These opening scenes also serve to

establish Leonard Mead as a distinctive and more complex character than usually encountered on television. He becomes self-conscious and slightly embarrassed as he reaches the end of his denunciation of the TV. Glancing self-reflectively at Stockwell he seems to realize that he has lapsed into making a speech.

Although he tends to philosophize he does not seem to take himself too seriously and while glib and ironic still maintains an almost adolescent enthusiasm and curiosity. When he lavishly describes the experience of walking the city at night, Stockwell asks him if it is really like that and grinning he replies, "Well yes, give or take a metaphor or two." His tongue-in-cheek answer, "speaking outside the story," ameliorates the "theatrical" quality of the discourse, though it attempts to recapture some of the poetic vividness of the short story's descriptive passages. Mead's "telling" is not the same as "showing" though it leaves no doubt concerning its effect on him. He concludes by saying it makes him feel "rich, sad...alive." Though Mead alone is speaking it does not constitute a descriptive pause as one would find in literature, since the story time continues and his words advance the narrative by breaking Stockwell's reluctance to leave the house.

For the more realistic filmic medium Bradbury wisely cut the length of speeches, found in the stage adaptation giving the silver-tongued Mead a moderating self-consciousness preventing him from pontificating through a glib, self-deprecating sense of humor. While this may represent a refinement of character over the stage performance, it is impossible to tell. But, Stockwell given more to do and say, does in this later version become a more realized and sympathetic character than he appeared in the play. The effects of his dependence on television are elaborated and his subsequent awakening to the meaning of the earth goes beyond the quasi-religious experience of tasting the dew drenched grass, extending finally to the humble dandelion, a symbol of hope and well being in other Bradbury texts. After Mead is taken away for "rehabilitation," Stockwell, ordered to "disperse" and return home is shown returning to the spot where he had partaken of "the sacrament of the earth" with Mead. He kneels to pick a flower. "A dandelion ... gone to seed," he says, as he launches it with a breath and the camera lingers upon the cottony seed floating off into the blackness of the night; a cinematic ending approximating Stockwell's newfound wonder with the real. This was just another

sample of how Bradbury was able to infuse an old work with other ideas making the narrative suitable for the screen.

With the exception of *The Martian Chronicles*, Bradbury had reason to be generally pleased with his filmic adaptations from the early 1970s onwards. That is, until the 2006 release of *A Sound of Thunder* (Peter Hyams). In an earlier chapter I mentioned Bradbury's frustration in adapting this. It was essentially out of his hands and he only received "story credit" for the film. Fortunately, he did get his way in insisting that the filmmakers leave the butterfly *in* the picture, which turned out to be the most poetic, evocative moment of the film, and maybe its best executed special effect as well.

Mostly filmed in Eastern Europe, there were numerous production problems and floods destroyed sets. Hyams actually had a respectable résumé as a director including several science fiction and horror subjects-however, *A Sound of Thunder* did not display a great deal of imagination in expanding Bradbury's short story. Critiques were uniformly negative with some decrying the film as a curious throwback to the low-budget science fiction films of the 1950s because of its formulaic approach, including an unimaginative script and rather lifeless acting²¹⁹.

The director chose to show the time distortion coming is successive "time quakes" that radically alter the plant and animal life. These were not bad as realized but some of the mutant creatures resulting from these were rather pedestrian (e.g., a giant bat and a sea serpent). There was a level of predictability to the film that should not have been there. Nevertheless, there is already enough incident in Bradbury's highly anthologized short story (one of his best known) and so much more is implied, that it would be a fine project for another adaption. Although it was panned by critics and all but ignored by audiences, the film has come to cable television and I have run across more recent critiques, less harsh than the initial ones. The accident that changed the future, the crushed butterfly, coming back to life and floating away at the end sort of redeemed the picture for audiences perhaps.

²¹⁹ However, some critics cited the veteran actor Ben Kingsley's spirited performance in a supporting role.

IV CLOSING COMMENTS

I would recommend the majority of Bradbury's filmed works to the reader. Most, unreservedly and some with great enthusiasm, for there is something there for every taste. However, and I am hardly alone in this, Bradbury's original texts should be read too. It has been said that spending time reading an author may influence us in a similar manner to the way our friends and acquaintances may influence us. "Bad company corrupts good manners" as the old saying goes, but if there is some truth to that, we should never fear to reach for Bradbury. His work will usually entertain us, occasionally frighten us or even transmit a sense of gloom and sadness. But negativity or nihilism, look elsewhere for that. As Calvin Miller observed, he was an "apostle of hope" (129). If one does not always find Bradbury's moral or spiritual perceptions to be profound, then at least he elaborated these imaginatively and memorably. Obviously, one of the functions of art is to present what we already "know," perhaps have experienced or seen. But the best art may infiltrate our firmest notions and make us think--maybe I do not know that as well as I thought or maybe I have not thought through all the implications of that issue. Bradbury was a firm believer in art's capacity for this and I believe he often achieved it.

I risk the cliché "American Original" for Bradbury but he was undeniably that. A *Publishers Weekly* review of *Driving Blind* (1997), one of his later story collections, remarked that "Much of the text is dialogue and it works because Bradbury excels at portraying the robust textures of American speech" (Weller 319). But he was so much more talented than that. His stories transcended genres, and his work enjoys some of the widest readership any author could hope for. Sam Weller commented that in his final years he spent late mornings and afternoons opening mail. He "received, on average, three hundred letters a week from fans in China, Argentina, Japan, everywhere" (Weller 327). A lot of his work began to appear, at first in unauthorized translations, in Russia and China decades ago.

Aside from all I have already said to characterize his work, I would reemphasize Bradbury's uncommon ability to cause a reader, any reader it would seem, to touch base with life as it has been lived. A reader (or viewer) cannot help but recall some "forgotten" feeling, or mood, someone or some incident from the past; most likely something of our

younger selves. He was a humanist to the core, his works ideally suited to cinema. Bradbury's works were composed of wonder and warning, with the emphasis on wonder. I only hope to see more of his work adapted for the screen.

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