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Uncle Ray's Dystopia

By TIM KREIDER

IF you'd wanted to know which way the world was headed in the mid-20th century, you wouldn't have found much indication in any of the day's literary prizewinners. You'd have been better advised to consult a book from a marginal genre with a cover illustration of a stricken figure made of newsprint catching fire.

Prescience is not the measure of a science-fiction author's success — we don't value the work of H. G. Wells because he foresaw the atomic bomb or Arthur C. Clarke for inventing the communications satellite — but it is worth pausing, on the occasion of Ray Bradbury's death, to notice how uncannily accurate was his vision of the numb, cruel future we now inhabit.

Mr. Bradbury's most famous novel, "Fahrenheit 451," features wall-size television screens that are the centerpieces of "parlors" where people spend their evenings watching interactive soaps and vicious slapstick, live police chases and true-crime dramatizations that invite viewers to help catch the criminals. People wear "seashell" transistor radios that fit into their ears. Note the perversion of quaint terms like "parlor" and "seashell," harking back to bygone days and vanished places, where people might visit with their neighbors or listen for the sound of the sea in a chambered nautilus.

Mr. Bradbury didn't just extrapolate the evolution of gadgetry; he foresaw how it would stunt and deform our psyches. "It's easy to say the wrong thing on telephones; the telephone changes your meaning on you," says the protagonist of the prophetic short story "The Murderer." "First thing you know, you've made an enemy."

Anyone who's had his intended tone flattened out or irony deleted by e-mail and had to explain himself knows what he means. The character complains that he's relentlessly pestered with calls from friends and employers, salesmen and pollsters, people calling simply because they can. Mr. Bradbury's vision of "tired commuters with their wrist radios, talking to their wives, saying, 'Now I'm at Forty-third, now I'm at Forty-fourth, here I am at Forty-ninth, now turning at Sixty-first" has gone from science-fiction satire to dreary realism.

"It was all so enchanting at first," muses our protagonist. "They were almost toys, to be played with, but the people got too involved, went too far, and got wrapped up in a pattern of social behavior and couldn't get out, couldn't admit they were in, even."

Most of all, Mr. Bradbury knew how the future would feel: louder, faster, stupider, meaner, increasingly inane and violent. Collective cultural amnesia, anhedonia, isolation. The hysterical censoriousness of political correctness. Teenagers killing one another for kicks. Grown-ups reading comic books. A postliterate populace. "I remember the newspapers dying like huge moths," says the fire captain in "Fahrenheit," written in 1953. "No one wanted them back. No one missed them." Civilization drowned out and obliterated by electronic chatter. The book's protagonist, Guy Montag, secretly trying to memorize the Book of Ecclesiastes on a train, finally leaps up screaming, maddened by an incessant jingle for "Denham's Dentifrice." A man is arrested for walking on a residential street. Everyone locked indoors at night, immersed in the social lives of imaginary friends and families on TV, while the government bombs someone on the other side of the planet. Does any of this sound familiar?

The hero of "The Murderer" finally goes on a rampage and smashes all the yammering, blatting devices around him, expressing remorse only over the Insinkerator — "a practical device indeed," he mourns, "which never said a word." It's often been remarked that for a science-fiction writer, Mr. Bradbury was something of a Luddite — anti-technology, anti-modern, even anti-intellectual. ("Put me in a room with a pad and a pencil and set me up against a hundred people with

a hundred computers," he challenged a Wired magazine interviewer, and swore he would "outcreate" every one.)

But it was more complicated than that; his objections were not so much reactionary or political as they were aesthetic. He hated ugliness, noise and vulgarity. He opposed the kind of technology that deadened imagination, the modernity that would trash the past, the kind of intellectualism that tried to centrifuge out awe and beauty. He famously did not care to drive or fly, but he was a passionate proponent of space travel, not because of its practical benefits but because he saw it as the great spiritual endeavor of the age, our generation's cathedral building, a bid for immortality among the stars.

His visions of a better world weren't high-tech but archaic, bucolic. In "Fahrenheit," Montag remembers "a farm he had visited when he was very young, one of the rare few times he had discovered that somewhere behind the seven veils of unreality, beyond the walls of parlors and the tin moat of the city, cows chewed cud and pigs sat in warm ponds at noon and dogs barked after white sheep on a hill." His utopia isn't some flying city or exotic planet but prewar, small-town America — specifically, Waukeagan, Ill., circa 1928, a town of porch swings and bandshells, dandelion wine stored up in cool cellars and fire balloons on the Fourth of July. His Martians are not alien like Heinlein's or futuristically evolved like Welles's but a premodern people akin to the ancient Egyptians or American Indians (or a boy's idealized conception of them), our superiors not technologically but spiritually. He was, like most of my favorite artists, a misanthropic humanist.

There's already been a lot of rhapsodizing about Ray Bradbury's "sense of wonder," the dark magic and October chill he infused into his work. But let's not turn him into something harmless, a kindly, childlike uncle spinning marvelous tales of rocket ships and dinosaurs. Don't forget that he was also the crazy uncle, the dangerous one, a malcontent and a crank, alarming everyone at the dinner table with impassioned rants and dire warnings. (For a bracing antidote to his sentimentality, reread the demented revenge

fantasy "Usher II," in which an entire board of censors is meticulously killed off after the manner of Edgar Allan Poe stories.)

The obverse of his reverence for the natural world was a keen-edged contempt for the greedy men and crass, destructive culture that would gladly bulldoze it for a buck. "We Earth Men have a talent for ruining big, beautiful things," says the archæologist Jeff Spender in "—And the Moon Be Still as Bright" from "The Martian Chronicles." "The only reason we didn't set up hot-dog stands in the midst of the Egyptian temple of Karnak is because it was out of the way and served no large commercial purpose." There isn't a hot-dog stand at Karnak yet, but I'm advised there are tourist shops selling pricey bottled water and Pharaonic souvenirs made in China.

I think of Ray Bradbury's work often these days. I remember "The Murderer" whenever I ask for directions or make a joke to someone who can't hear me because of her ear buds, when I see two friends standing back-to-back in a crowd yelling "Where are you?" into their phones, or I'm forced to eavesdrop on somebody prattling on Bluetooth in that sanctum sanctorum, the library. I think of "Fahrenheit 451" every time I see a TV screen in an elevator or a taxi or a gas pump or over a urinal. When the entire hellish engine of the media seemed geared toward the concerted goal of forcing me to know, against my will, about a product called "Lady Gaga," I thought: *Denham's Dentifrice.*

It is thanks to Ray Bradbury that I understand this world I grew into for what it is: a dystopian future. And it is thanks to him that we know how to conduct ourselves in such a world: arm yourself with books. Assassinate your television. Go for walks, and talk with your neighbors. Cherish beauty; defend it with your life. Become a Martian.

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[In this excerpted essay, Plank offers a variety of interpretations of Bradbury's "April 2000: The Third Expedition," lending insight into other stories collected in *The Martian Chronicles*.]

Ray Bradbury's most famous book is not a book; **The Martian Chronicles** (1950) are chronicles in outward appearance only. Rather they are individual stories strung on a chronological line, glued together here and there with smudges of connective tissue. They were clearly written independently, and many of them were originally published separately. The book purports to relate events that took place between January 1999 and October 2026, but many of them could have taken place—as far as they could have taken place at all—at different times and in a different sequence. This is particularly true of the first three expeditions from Earth to Mars. All three of them are wiped out, each in an unconventional manner, and each of them quite differently. Each expedition anticipates a certain type of Mars inhabitant, but there is little similarity between them.

None of the survivors, Martian or Terran, learn anything from their experience. None of these expeditions leaves a trace of itself, except that when the fourth expedition arrives fourteen months after the third, its members find a town full of Martians who have been dead ten days from chicken pox (the author's device, perhaps, to make sure they will not repeat their tricks?). It is concluded that the Martians have been infected unintentionally by members of the third expedition—"and as quickly as that it was forgotten." All that Earthmen can know, or care, is that the men of the third expedition landed on Mars and were never heard from again. Although some geographical features are named for the more eminent among them, these expeditions might as well never have taken place. Or, of course, they could have occurred in a different order. It is justified, therefore, to talk about **"April 2000: The Third Expedition"** as if it were an independent work, with not more than an occasional glance at the rest of the book.

"The Third Expedition" is a short (sixteen pages in the Bantam edition) and compact story. It observes the three classical unities of place (in and around the landed spaceship), of time (from one morning to the next), and of action. Plucking many chords of emotion, it moves deftly from utter bewilderment to revelation of conflict and swiftly to catastrophe. It is a masterpiece of its type. Later, we shall consider what that type is. The story divides itself naturally into three phases: (1) the idyll—from the landing to nightfall. The pace is leisurely, and this phase takes up the bulk of the tale, about thirteen pages. (2) the murders during the night. (3) the funeral in the morning. The last two are compressed into barely three pages.

Phase One. The spaceship is arriving on Mars. It carries a crew of seventeen, but one person has died en route. We are introduced to three of the survivors: John Black, captain; Samuel Hinkston, archaeologist; Lustig, navigator (perhaps Jews will not have first names in 2000 A.D.? No, it later turns out that it is David). The other men are neither named nor otherwise individualized. Black is eighty years old, but looks like forty—science in the second half of our century has rejuvenated him. Hinkston is forty-five; Lustig fifty. The spaceship has landed on a lawn in the middle of a town that down to the last small detail (a sheet of music entitled "Beautiful Ohio" sits on a piano) looks exactly like Green Bluff, Illinois (where Captain Black was raised), of long ago. They are later informed that the town is Green Bluff, Illinois, that it was founded in 1868, and that the year is 1926 (when Black was six years old).

The minds of the three men, understandably reeling, race through all sorts of theories to comprehend the incomprehensible. Have they, through an unexpected quirk of space travel, landed on Earth instead of Mars and thereby gone back in time? Have members of the first or second expedition survived and built—in an incredibly short time—a replica of an American

town? Were space travel and the colonization of Mars secretly initiated before World War I? Has a super-clever and super-powerful psychiatrist then combatted nostalgia among the colonists by "rearranging the civilization" so that it increasingly resembles Earth, until "by some vast crowd hypnosis" he has convinced everyone that it really *is* Earth?

Naturally, none of these hypotheses seems in the least plausible. The men are left in a state of stupefied bewilderment until a shattering experience provides the straw of an explanation—each encounters some aspect from his past. Lustig sees his grandparents. Hinkston espies his old house and runs to it. Black encounters his brother Edward, who conducts him to their parents. The other men, who were left behind in the ship with orders to man the guns, have meanwhile forgotten their duty, abandoned the ship, and mingled with a crowd of Martians who have festively assembled on the lawn. "Then each member of the crew, with a mother on one arm, a father or sister on the other, was spirited off down the street into little cottages or big mansions." And so an "explanation" of the awesome mystery is offered—through the grace of God, these deceased relatives have been given a second life, in a town on Mars that exactly duplicates their environment on Earth. By implication, the space trip has been providentially arranged to grant the sixteen Earthmen a reunion with their loved ones. The men are still confused, but they readily submit to their elders' admonitions not to question the Lord's infinite wisdom and mercy. The festivities come to an end; night falls. Groggy with happiness, the men lie down to sleep.

At this point it is perhaps appropriate to interrupt the narrative for some preliminary remarks on Phase One, be it only to note several features of the story that do not quite fit into its general sweep. No discrepancies appear at first reading, but on closer scrutiny they cannot be ignored. Though they may seem minor, they turn out to have great significance. I do not mean to say that the story as such is incredible. Of course it is. What I want to point out is that even if we accept the author's premises and treat the work as though it were a credible tale, there are still some things in the natural course of events that would have gone differently. It is for this reason that one must wonder why Bradbury placed his emphases in the curious way that he did.

When Lustig meets his grandparents, who have been dead for thirty years (in other words, they died when be was twenty) he "sounded as if at any moment he might go quite insane with happiness." He "sobbed ... turned ... kissed ... hugged ... held." That the men are overjoyed is natural. But is it natural for that joy to be so all-pervasive? Would anyone, suddenly coming face to face with the dead returned to life, feel nothing else? No admixture of horror, no trace of awe? No fleeting moment of resurgent animosity, no quick pang of guilt? Would a person touch the body that he saw buried years ago, without the least hesitation? Yet, in the story as told, there is not the slightest element of ambivalence. The negative feelings are totally absent. In the events that swiftly follow, however, these pent-up feelings break out with the elemental force of murderous fury.

Though the space travelers are grown, even old, men, they do not meet dead children or wives. Their reunion is with parents, grandparents, siblings—persons who died when the spacemen were young—representing ascending rather than descending relationships. Ed Black, the only sibling whose age is given, was seven years John's senior. When he died at twenty-six, John was nineteen.

They do not even think of others who may have died, or who were left behind on Earth, except for Captain Black, who fleetingly thinks of "Marilyn" (not otherwise identified). After a brief hesitation, Ed tells him that she is out of town, but will be back in the morning. The dead have not aged. They are all exactly as they were at the moment of their deaths. The same motif occurs in an even weirder form in another of the stories, **"April 2026: The Long Years."**

There is a similar tendency to extend time backward in the description of the town. All that nostalgia would associate with a small American town of 1926 is here: an iron deer on the lawn, popular songs of the period, Victorian architecture, a robin singing in an apple tree, a grandfather clock, a brass band, front porches, and a turkey dinner. There is a "victrola," but no radio, no telephone, no automobile. It is an old-fashioned town remembered from childhood, more quintessentially so than a town ever truly was. Furthermore, we are given to understand that all the astronauts hail from places like Green Bluff, Illinois. Of course, no one knows what the distribution of the population of the United States will be in 2000. These men, however, must have been born in our own time, and we know that now some 80 percent of the population comes from cities or suburbs.

Another motif, mental influence, is only hinted at here and will be revealed in all its devastating import in Phase Two. Seeing the town, Black finds it so similar to Green Bluff that it frightens him. Then he is informed that it *is* Green Bluff. Yet, Hinkston, the archaeologist, makes the professional judgment that no artifact there is older than 1927. Two pages later, a stranger tells them that the year they have come to is 1926. Do the men discover these things because they are sharp enough to recognize the truth, or do they become true because the men think they are true? And it is Hinkston who spins out the fantastic theory about it all being the work of a master psychiatrist who influenced minds sufficiently to create an entire culture. It is the measure of Bradbury's skill that all these motifs are muted, unobtrusive. If the reader notices them at all, he does so subliminally. It also raises a question as to whether the author's skill may have operated more unconsciously than consciously.

Phase Two. Consummate skill characterizes Bradbury's transition from Phase One to Phase Two. Day and night, life and death are not in sharper contrast than these two, but one phrase bridges the abyss between them. Captain Black shares a bed with his brother Ed, the same brass bed they had shared in life, in the same room with the college pennants and such. They lie down, "side by side, as in the days how many decades ago?" They talk a little, then fall silent.

> The room was square and quiet except for their breathing.
>
> "Good night, Ed."
>
> A pause. "Good night, John."

It is that phrase, "a pause," that makes the transition. The tumbling from one joyful surprise to the next is over; the time has come to think. The shift is abrupt and complete. Phase Two has begun.

To prepare for the tremendous acceleration of his narrative, Bradbury skillfully narrows the focus. Of the sixteen men, only three are singled out for individual consideration. Then two of the three, Hinkston and Lustig drop away. The last part of Phase One is exclusively concerned with Black and his dead relatives (a residue, perhaps, of the hierarchic-patriarchic orientation so predominant in the science fiction of somewhat earlier days—if you can have the captain, why bother with lesser men?).

Phase Two consists almost entirely of Black's internal monologue. A quite new realization suddenly hits him: what if all he has lived in during this day has been a phantom world called into being by the Martians in order to destroy the invaders? That would mean that after taking all they needed to know from his mind, the Martians had conjured up the image of Green Bluff in 1926 and altered themselves to appear as the dead relatives. With their sixteen enemies safely bedded down, the Martians will spring a trap. In the night they will change back into their real selves and kill their guests.

At first Black naturally shrinks from these thoughts, but as he thinks through them, the theory becomes distressingly convincing. All the pieces fall into place, and the puzzling events assume a new, menacing meaning. He must act at once to rescue himself, for there is not a moment to lose. Unarmed, he cannot hope to subdue his pursuers, so he tries to sneak out. But what seemed to be his brother sleeping peacefully by his side has now become a Martian—wide awake, challenging him: "Captain John Black broke and ran across the room. He screamed. He screamed twice. He never reached the door." The long, leisurely spell of blissful illusion has been broken in one devastating moment. Like lightning, terrible and brief, truth has struck; it has brightly illuminated the scene, making everything clear in a flash, only to be extinguished by the stabs of death. But in what sense can we speak here of truth?

Any interpretation of an imaginative work like **"The Third Expedition"** is hazardous because it is bound to be subjective. Still, it is hard to see how anybody could read it any other way than to accept Black's last theory as the correct one; the outcome proves it. The various explanations that the men tentatively put together before they met their beloved dead are, of course, to be discarded. But even the theory that Mars is the abode of departed souls, which they dazedly accepted from their relatives, does not stand up. It was only make-believe in the purest sense of the word; the Martians made the Earthmen believe. It cannot explain why Black and his fifteen companions are murdered. Black's theory does.

To say that the theory is "correct" means that it is correct within the framework of the story. It is the premise of the story that the reunion with the dead really happened, and if we accept this, we must also accept the explanation. In other words, if we willingly accept that the astronauts landing on Mars had the experiences described in the story, then we must also accept Black's final theory. Bradbury's art has compelled us to silence the voices of critical judgment within ourselves. However, Black's theory is in fact built on several large assumptions: (1) that the Martians are able, instantaneously and without any resources but their telepathic power, to probe Black's memories, drain his mind, and know everything he has ever known; (2) that the Martians have the power to compel their victims to perceive as real an entire world around them which does not in fact exist, and to blank out most genuine reality (though they still perceive each other, they fail to perceive the bleak Martian soil where they see green lawns, etc.); (3) that though they appear as loving relatives, the Martians are, in truth, malevolent, bent on killing. These are the assumptions that form the typical world picture of the paranoiac.

Phase Three. The story could have ended with John Black never reaching the door, but instead there is a brief coda. The reader's first impression is that the conclusion is simple and fitting. The Martians have murdered the sixteen strangers, and now they bury them with appropriate rites, except that the rites are not appropriate. The only purpose of the whole phantasmagoria was to lure the Earthmen to their deaths. Having achieved this, the Martians are by themselves. There is no discernible reason for them to maintain the macabre masquerade. Yet, to some extent they do. They weep; they pretend to mourn. For what? No one is left alive whom they could want to deceive.

This "effort aimed at a void" has worried science fiction critic Jörg Hienger, who in his book *Literarische Zukunftsphantastik* [1972] devotes several pages to Phase Three. If everything on Mars that resembles Earth, he asks, is but illusion—images telepathically extracted from the minds of the astronauts and hypnotically projected back into them—who has the illusion after the men are dead? He finds the question unanswerable. Given this fact and the even weightier observation that the entire ceremony serves no purpose for the Martians—and they, after all, are the ones who have arranged it— he concludes that Bradbury here postulates an end of rationality per se, thus achieving a powerful effect of the uncanny dissolving into the comical.

Hienger's analysis has the redoubtable advantage of that rigorous logic that is the pride of German philosophy, but he applies the criterion of consistency to external events when it would be more fittingly applied to the mental processes of the author (more of that later). Bradbury may simply have felt, as his readers appear to feel, that the burial is a proper and soothing ending, with its comic relief welcome after a night of horror. Phase One offered the fulfillment in fantasy of deep longings, Phase Two of deep fears. We have come to identify with the hero, to whom these were vouchsafed; now we would want for him what we would want for ourselves should tragic death overtake us—a decent burial. How many people are there who have not drawn satisfaction from imagining their own funeral, with all those who in life offended them among the mourners—"when it's too late, you'll be sorry." This is an infinitely more banal interpretation than Hienger's, but that is no reason to reject it. The reader's first impression may not have been so far off after all.

From here there are two roads to an understanding of what **"The Third Expedition"** is all about. We can (1) analyze the mental processes in the characters as though these were actual persons, that is, as though Bradbury had written a case history, or a tale of people who could possibly exist and the situations to which they are compelled to react could possibly arise. Or, we can (2) consider the events as projections of the author's mind. We will take route 1 first.

Bradbury deals with three types of deviant mental functioning: illusions, defined as misinterpretations of actual perceptions (trivial optical illusions are the best-known examples); hallucinations, defined as perceptions subjectively experienced without appropriate objective stimulus (such as seeing somebody who is not there); and delusions, defined as false judgments without rational basis (the belief of a psychotic that he is Jesus Christ is a popular example). The hallucinating person may be aware to various degrees that his senses deceive him. The hallucination raises a question, though no answer may be forthcoming. Delusions provide answers, though there may have been no obvious question. The men, faced with the hallucinations that provide the foundation of Phase One, look frantically for an answer. In Phase Two, they find one.

The lines between these three types of malfunctioning are fluid, and there are mixed forms. There is also an infinite variety in degree of firmness and impact, from the hardly noticeable to the overpowering. In fact, illusions, hallucinations, and delusions can only be called deviations or malfunctions in the sense that an ideally operating mental apparatus would be free of them. But nobody's is. They occur fleetingly in normal life. They may be provoked in more substantial form by various kinds of illness, by drugs, or by any stress. Only in their more malignant forms do they become indicative of physical or mental illness.

Phase One is saturated with hallucinations. A web so complete that it covers the entire scene and blots out almost all normal perception does not exist in reality, so it is unavoidable that the men look for an agent beyond human experience to have caused the phenomenon. Two questions arise. Why do the men shift from their original attitude of thinking of the cause as a benevolent agent (Hinkston proclaims at an early stage that "certainly a town like this could not occur without divine intervention") to the assumption of a radically malevolent agent? And why is the "good" agent seen as supernatural ("divine intervention") while the evil one ("incredibly brilliant" Martians) is not?

In deciding that his experiences are the work of a superhuman power, Black follows, though unaware, a hoary tradition. Primitive men attributed all extraordinary events to the action of superhuman beings—spirits, demons, gods. The external appearance of these imagined beings was an unequivocal revelation of their nature; the inimical ones among them were of ghastly ugliness. We have only to look at idols that men did not adore, but rather tried to propitiate to find proof. These idols entered Christianity and the tradition of Western civilization condensed in the form of the Devil. He is still surpassingly ugly. His suspect exterior has rubbed off on literature and the arts. The villain in many popular nineteenth-century novels and plays is invariably recognizable for what he is. The young girl he wants to seduce, exploit, and ruin is incarnate innocence. Modern audiences wonder how she can be so naïve that she is not immediately warned by his black moustache and shifty eyes. But we have not always done much better. The beings that have replaced the Devil are still monsters, J.R.R. Tolkien, who consciously harks back to the Middle Ages, holds a middle line: the good are not necessarily the beautiful, but those on the side of Sauron are, as the saying has it, ugly as Hell.

Growing sophistication has wrought a fundamental change in another respect. Men, now believing that they have a soul that matters more than the body, are no longer annihilated by brute force. The frontal assault is detoured through their minds. The Devil, who in the medieval version wrung Dr. Faustus' neck as though he were killing a chicken, now works by seduction. He

is not only the Prince of Darkness but also the Father of Lies. His principal "lie" is his ability to deceive his victims by setting all they desire before their eyes—by making them hallucinate. Legends are full of such instances.

It is a wide jump in time, but not much of a leap in substance from here to **"The Third Expedition."** What has happened is that the poor Devil has been secularized. In our enlightened age, we find it easier to believe in malignant octopuses on Mars than in him. God has also been secularized (in Arthur C. Clarke's *2001*, for instance, His role has been reassigned to the slabs and their masters), but not as completely. Belief in Him is still widespread and respectable. So, it does not jar that Black believes in God, but not in the Devil; that when he needs to postulate a benign influence he resorts to the idea of divine intervention, and when he needs to postulate an evil one, he turns to the Martians. But why does he have to switch from good to evil at all? Here it is instructive to consider Bradbury's immediate forerunners.

To postulate alien intelligences endowed with the hallucinogenic power that earlier ages reserved for the Devil and his cohorts is commonplace in science fiction; so much so that Hienger goes as far as to think that any alert reader versed in science fiction will have anticipated the solution long before Black proclaims it (which would be a pity, since suspense would be gone). In *Seekers of Tomorrow*, Sam Moskowitz cites two more direct precursors, both strikingly similar to Bradbury's tale: Campbell's *Brain Stealers of Mars* (1936) and especially Stanley G. Weinbaum's "A Martian Odyssey" (1934). Weinbaum's desert octopus (or whatever it is—he refers to it as "the Dream-Beast" or simply "the black horror") has undisputably the same hallucinogenic powers that make Captain Black's adversaries so formidable and uses them to similar sinister ends. It is more enlightening, though, to review the differences in Bradbury's and Weinbaum's treatment of the same motif.

Weinbaum uses it in one of many equally incredible adventures. He does not seem to know what jewel he holds in his hands, giving it away so lightly. The event remains without consequence. The loyal Martian "ostrich" protects the hero from succumbing to the lure, as in effect this intended victim remains indestructible through all his harrowing experiences. With Bradbury, the hallucinogenic power is squarely the core of the plot, and it is victorious. Resistance is impossible. Far from being inconsequential, the stratagem is decisive. The hallucination is less complete in Weinbaum's tale—the baiting apparition stands in an otherwise unaffected Martian landscape—while in Bradbury's the hallucination is all-embracing. Weinbaum has the alien power more or less reveal itself in defeat, but with Bradbury it remains, in victory, beyond perception. Its lack of shape and the absence of hints as to its nature enhance the uncanny atmosphere in **"The Third Expedition."**

There is a more fundamental difference: the role of the hallucinated person in the life of the victim. Weinbaum's character, Jarvis, thinks of Fancy Long, a New York entertainer on the as yet uninvented television, who is evidently a flirt. He may have had an affair with her, but all he will say is, "I know her pretty well—just friends, get me?" Do we get him? That was published in 1934. In any event, she clearly represents normal, conventional, adult heterosexual attraction. Things are totally different on Bradbury's Mars. Overt sexuality is absent and is kept out by the incest barrier: since all the beloved dead are blood relatives, there are no friends or "just friends." Rather, the relationship is anchored in the victim's childhood, long before adult love relationships could emerge. Moreover, the relatives are all dead, while Fancy Long is very much alive.

The comparison with Weinbaum's story makes the core of Phase One even clearer than the oddities we noted earlier. Phase One is a regression to childhood. The ambivalence of childhood was absent, having been repressed in passage to adolescence. Such ambivalence, however much of it there may have been in actual childhood, has no place in remembered childhood. Time has come to a standstill— as it always does in the unconscious. When we dream of a person we have not seen since childhood, we see him as he was then, not as we know he is now. The mental influencing, too, fits more naturally into the outlook of a child, since so much of his experience is of being manipulated by beings more powerful and of more penetrating intelligence than he is.

We are now in a position to see why the shift from the benign to the malign was unavoidable. It was the reaction to the fling beyond human limits that is embodied in Phase One. The dynamics of human development do not permit going backwards. But in Phase One the men *have* gone back, have indulged in regression. The overwhelming bliss they feel stems from their being allowed to wallow without restraint in regression. E. P. Bernabeu, author of one of the few psychological studies on science fiction stresses [in "Science Fiction: A New Mythos," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 1957] this point in a passage devoted to **"The Third Expedition"**: "The reliving of his 'happiest moments' is evidently in the author's plot a form of autistic gratification for which the condign punishment of the 'explorers' is their destruction." This somewhat theoretical formulation is supplemented by observation on actual behavior. People love to "go back to childhood," certainly, but it has to be a prettified childhood. Disneyland and its numberless imitations are huge successes. They reconstruct childhood fantasies. When it comes to a more real reliving of childhood, people hesitate. They shy away from psychoanalysis, but also from more mundane endeavors. The newspapers reported in June, 1977, that the inventor of Kitty Litter had developed Jones, Michigan, into a replica, as faithful as possible, of a typical town of some years ago (Green Bluff, Illinois, circa 1926?). However, the expected tourists did not come. Everything had to be auctioned off. He had invested $1,500,000 and retrieved $190,000.

The punishment for Black and his crew had to be more severe. They had "drunk the milk of paradise." Their "condign punishment" must be death. Therefore, the shift from divine intervention to the infernal machinations of Martians logically follows. It sets the tone for Phase Two. Moreover, it unifies the two very different phases. We can now take a closer look at outstanding problems that run through both phases: the subject of mental influencing and the question of the identity of the "relatives."

That somebody mistakes a person he encounters for a close relative, or sees a relative who is not there, is of course not an everyday occurrence, but it is not particularly rare. It is invariably a relative of deep emotional significance for the viewer. The experience is always surprising and often has a great impact. Many examples from both fiction and nonfiction could be given, but a few will suffice. The interest in extraordinary experiences around the moment of death has brought a spate of testimonials. Several years ago, *McCall's* related the story [Mary Ann O'ourke, "I Have Never Again Been Afraid of Death," November 1976] of a woman who had been given up by her doctors:

> As I lay in my bed I opened my eyes—and there, standing around my bed, were both sets of my grandparents, whom I had loved very much and who had died years before. I saw them as vividly as I am looking at you now ... they looked just as I knew them when I was a girl.... I wanted to go with them ... I felt such peace and love from their presence ... and I have never again been afraid of death.

Winston Smith, in George Orwell's *1984* (1948), under a stress that approaches or even surpasses that of imminent death, thinks he recognizes his mother in a fellow prisoner. The idea is not as unreasonable as it may seem because his mother had disappeared many years ago, and he has no way of knowing whether she is still alive or what she might be like now. On the other hand, he has no reason to think that she would be in the same prison as he at the same time or that she would look like that other woman.

The use of this motif in literature sometimes approaches the metaphorical. Heinrich Lersch, a German pacifist poet who wrote shortly after World War I, relates in a poem how he saw a dead soldier entangled in the barbed wire in front of his trench and how from day to day he became more convinced that it was his brother (of course, he was not). Similar episodes are found in autobiographical writings of former mental patients. For example, Fritz Peters relates in *The World Next Door* (1949) how he thought, for no manifest reason, that an elderly fellow patient was his father. An encounter that does not involve clearcut mistaken identity but is relevant to our study because of the abrupt shift of feeling and roles is found in Arthur Schnitzler's *Flight into Darkness* [1972]. The protagonist develops paranoia. As his brother, who is trying to lead him back to human companionship, embraces him, the sick man feels attacked by a hostile force and stabs him through the heart.

The idea of being influenced or indeed dominated by powerful enemies who exert a mysterious influence on the mind has, of course, long been recognized as a characteristic symptom of paranoia and related conditions. Especially since Viktor Tausk's pioneering study *On the Origin of the "Influencing Machine" in Schizophrenia* (1919), the mechanism of this delusion and its role in the development of the disease have been better understood. Psychiatric practice considers it, rightly, a symptom of clear and ominous meaning.

This is not the place to discuss the lamentable phenomenon, with its overtones of credulity combined with surrender of autonomy, that nowadays more people who are not themselves paranoid will accept this special delusion than ever before. We must also forego examining whether the latest technological "progress" has in fact made such an assumption more credible than it was in earlier times. The increased willingness to believe in mental influencing is no doubt part of the general loss of certainty resulting from the fact that so much that used to be impossible has become possible, and so it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that everything is possible. It is also partly due to the increased empathy with the mentally ill, praiseworthy where it means greater tolerance, questionable where it tends toward apotheosis.

It is not inappropriate here, perhaps, to invoke the noble shade of the knight of the sad countenance, who has for centuries served as the paradigm of the man who lives by his illusions, hallucinations, and delusions: Don Quixote. His nobility is predicated on his world of the imagination being nobler than the shabby reality around him, and on his willingness to give everything except his honor to prove that his fantasies have a deeper reality than that of the commonplace real, and that he could live up to these standards. Can the same be said of Black and his companions?

We have now traveled along route 1 for a considerable stretch. We have come quite close to our goal, but it has proved a longwinded road. How about the second route? We will now consider the content of the story as a projection of contents in the author's mind. We can do so for a simple and basic reason: the characters in the story do not exist except in the author's mind. This is true of all fiction, though to different degrees; least of all in historical fiction, moreso in realistic fiction, and to the highest degree in tales like **"The Third Expedition."** The characters' minds have no independent existence, because the characters themselves are only creatures of the author. They see, feel, think, and act the way they do because the author makes them see, feel, think, and act in that way, not because it is their nature.

This does not mean, of course, that an author necessarily shares his characters' perceptions and emotions. No writer worth his salt is limited to portraying himself. For instance, he may describe a man committing a crime, without ever having done so himself. Nevertheless, the thought of the crime must be in the writer; his mind must encompass the potential. He may fight it within himself, and the struggle may be the very reason why he describes it. To realize this is of particular importance for understanding delusions in literature. If John Black were living in a normal world, the idea of his brother changing into a Martian and killing him would clearly be a delusion, but he lives in an abnormal world. The truth of his idea is confirmed by events, so technically it is not a delusion. But the point is irrelevant. The author knows that the world into which Black has been flung is itself but a figment. He knows that Black's theory *is* delusion.

This can perhaps be made clearer if we look at the phenomenon from a morphological viewpoint. Whatever the character's perceptions, emotions, and reasoning in relation to reality—be it genuine reality or the "reality" of the story—they are illusions, hallucinations, and delusions in *form*. And just as a move in a game derives its significance only from the rules of the game, so here the form is what matters, because the reality has been rigged by the author. He has set the rules of the game. Because an author has stacked the cards against his characters, his work is resonant with irony. Eric Rabkin misses—or ignores— the point when in *The Fantastic in Literature* he speaks of "the sweetly lyrical romanticism of Ray Bradbury in ***The Martian Chronicles***." The sweetness is only skin-deep. The flesh underneath writhes with horror.

The author's role may be obscured rather than elucidated by taking it for granted that **"The Third Expedition"** is science fiction, as is often done, merely because Bradbury is a science fiction writer. It is true, of course, that he is. But while it is convenient to pigeonhole an author in a specific genre, it is equally obvious that this is an over-simplification. Some of the finest science fiction stories are the work of celebrated "mainstream" writers (R. Kipling, E. M. Forster, E. B. White, and A. France come to mind), and science fiction writers have written nonscience fiction. We cannot say, "It's called science fiction, so it is science fiction." We must measure **"The Third Expedition"** against the criteria of a rational definition.

L. Sprague De Camp, in his *Science Fiction Handbook* (1953), offers this: "fiction based on scientific or pseudo-scientific assumptions (space travel, robots, telepathy, earthly immortality, etc.) or laid in a patently unreal although not supernatural setting (the future, another world, and so forth)...." Even though De Camp cast his net wide, works like **"The Third Expedition"** would be caught. But that was a generation ago. Since then the genre has grown, branched out, matured. Sharper differentiation has become a necessity. There is consensus nowadays that science fiction should be distinguished from such adjacent types as fantasy, weird fiction, and the Gothic story. Even utopian fiction, long in eclipse, has recovered sufficiently to claim much of the territory that by default had gone to science fiction. The classical definition that H. Bruce Franklin gave in *Future Perfect* (1966) represents the prevailing modern thinking:

> Science fiction seeks to describe reality in terms of a credible hypothetical invention—past, present, or, most usually, future—extrapolated from that reality; fantasy seeks to describe present reality in terms of an impossible alternative to that reality. ... Science fiction views what is by projecting what not inconceivably could be; fantasy views what is by projecting what could not be.

"The Third Expedition" makes "pseudo-scientific assumptions," uses a "patently unreal setting," "projects what could not be." It is science fiction by criteria of times past, not by current criteria. This is important because it sheds light on the author's intentions, or at least on what intentions he does not have. He does not care to explore scientific developments or future human societies. He does not contribute to any of the educational or uplifting effects ascribed to science fiction: better understanding of the world we live in through better understanding of science, enthusiasm for the marvels that the future holds in store for the human race, etc. He carefully leaves such opportunities unexploited. For example, we hear next to nothing about the actual space trip, nothing about the real Mars, and nothing about the spacemen's equipment (except that they have "guns" and "atomic weapons"). Moreover, the density of oxygen in the Martian atmosphere is one-thousandth of what it is in ours. Although this was learned only through recent space probes and earlier estimates were much higher—as much as one-hundredth of ours—still, it was evident that men would not be able to breathe on Mars without special apparatus. Bradbury must have known this, yet, he chose to ignore it. He is not interested in the air the men breathe, the soil under their feet, or the ship they came in. He is interested in what goes on inside them.

The key is in his method. His technique of projecting his characters' inner life, of making it visible to his readers, is to describe events that happen in the characters' minds as though they were happening in the outside world. Obversely, what he presents as occurring on the outside—in the "reality" of his tale—is actually what goes on in the minds of his characters, and nothing else. "Out of sight, out of mind" has been reversed into "out of mind, out of sight." This method has not been much studied and does not seem to have a name yet, perhaps because it seems to be an innovation of the post-realistic era, although it is actually quite old. We find it in ancient fairy tales, in works of the Romantics, and in such modern writers as Hermann Hesse (who experimented with it brilliantly in *Demian* and *Steppenwolf*) and Franz Kafka. We are not told, for instance, that Gregor Samsa in *Metamorphosis* thinks he is a cockroach; we are told that he is changed into a cockroach (or whatever species of "vermin" best fits Kafka's description). The claim that this is the specific method of these writers, and that the

Bradbury of **"The Third Expedition"** is one of them, is admittedly bold. It is based on nothing more solid than subjective impression, but it proves its worth by providing the foundation for a coherent interpretation. I know of no other approach that can.

What does the writer really do? What makes him do it? What gift does he have? These questions are of great interest to psychologists, but for a long time they were leery of tackling them. Without the concept of the unconscious, the questions could not even be approached. Freud had too much respect for the Muses to be hasty about studying them. When the collapse of the seemingly stable European civilization in World War I compelled psychology to look at problems beyond individual scope, Paul Federn, a "first generation" psychoanalyst, coined this formulation in a book published in 1919 [*Zur Psychologie der Revolution: die vaterlose Gesellschaft*]: "What we can observe in early childhood as contents of fantasies and objects of anxiety works as unconscious forces hidden in the adult, to come to light misshapen in the delusion of the ill or wellformed in the work of the artist." Much exploration has been done since then, but Federn's terse pronouncement has stood up. It fits **"The Third Expedition"** amazingly well.

Pertinent observations could, of course, be made before. When Goethe was unhappy in love and Charlotte married another man, he did not shoot himself. He wrote the story of Werther, who did. Charles Morice, a French art critic, wrote an article in 1885 ["La Semaine," *Petite Tribune Républicaine*, April 2, 1885] reviewing the work of Odilon Redon who had produced astounding graphics, the counterpart in art of what works like ***The Martian Chronicles*** represent in literature (the best science fiction art is not necessarily found in illustrations of science fiction stories). Morice speaks of the double meaning of the word "dream." (Obviously it means one thing when we think of what we dreamt last night and when Martin Luther King, Jr., says, "I have a dream.") Morice says: "The meaning we must give the word "dream" is neither that of colloquial speech and prose (involuntary visions in sleep), nor the rare and poetic one (voluntary visions while awake). It is this and it is that, it is waking and sleeping. It is in truth the dream of a dream, the voluntary ordering of involuntary vision." It is this ordering of the disordered that makes the art we are dealing with what it is.

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[(essay date 2005) *In the following essay, Harlow finds* The Martian Chronicles *still relevant over fifty years after its initial publication.*]

Beyond providing pure enjoyment for space freaks and gadget geeks, one hallmark of the best science fiction is that it offers serious examination of the cultural and psychological landscapes and ethical questions raised by our changing times. In ***The Martian Chronicles,*** written in the late 1940s, published in 1950, Ray Bradbury reminds us that the world will become what we make of it, and each step in re-imagining ourselves brings us steadily closer to the future.

More than prediction, however, Bradbury claims that he is writing to "prevent the future," by pointing out the failings of society. To imagine an encounter with Martians is to see ourselves anew, an experience to be both hoped for and feared as it brings the knowledge that we, too, are the "other." This is the central idea of ***The Martian Chronicles,*** a meditation of self and other in the tradition of Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself,* where the encounter with the other becomes a means to knowing the self, an age-old theme basic to human nature and implicit in the experience of all art and literature.

While Whitman sought to unify and direct a nation divided by the politics of civil war, Bradbury, in the aftermath of WWII and the atomic bombings of Japan, sought to redirect the course of technology and prevent the human race from self-annihilation. Both Bradbury and Whitman concentrate not on the future but on the now, inviting us to come along with them, Whitman for a walk across America, Bradbury to Mars, to see the people as they are, for what they are--individuals with emotions, desires, hopes and fears.

Of his first published story, **"The Lake,"** Bradbury has said, "It was some sort of hybrid, something verging on the new." ***The Martian Chronicles*** may be seen as such a hybrid, one which resulted from the creative merging of a variety of literary techniques, steeped in the traditions of naturalism, romanticism and realism and suffused with a collage of allusions ranging from those which have been borrowed from and quoted outright--Lord Byron, Edgar Allan Poe, Sara Teasdale--to those which may or may not have been consciously assimilated into the text.

Bradbury set about his work in writing ***The Martian Chronicles*** with the cool critical eye of the naturalistic novelist, providing the laboratory conditions Emile Zola, in *Le roman experimental,* has set forth as necessary in order to observe the forces which work upon humans. The colonization of Mars, like the colonization of the Americas by Europeans, is characterized by greed and ignorance, fear of the natives, exploitation of the new world, and acts of genocide. This parallel is clearly drawn in the ***Chronicles*** episode, **"And the Moon Be Still as Bright,"** in which the Fourth Expedition to Mars arrives to discover that the Martian race has been killed off by a chicken pox virus brought to the red planet by a previous expedition, thus echoing the deadly smallpox epidemic which devastated Native American populations after the Europeans arrived on the scene. Spender, a member of the Fourth Expedition, sympathizes with the spirit of the Martians and seeks to avenge the death of the Martian race by raging against the earth crew in a manner bearing striking resemblance to the 1990's Unabomber case, in protest of the technology and greed that brought them to Mars. Spender invokes the poetry of romanticism by reciting Byron's "So We'll Go No More A-Roving," a poem, he says, that "might have been written by the last Martian poet." The Consul's assumption of the identity of William Blackstone, the white man who went to live with the Indians, in Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* comes to mind here, as does the romantic notion of spiritual vision gotten through an affinity, accidentally stumbled upon, for the land and the collective spirit of the inhabitants who lived there before. As with the Consul's drinking, Mars becomes a way of seeing, of being, a state of mind, a vision, an addiction.

The romantic notion of the power of the imagination to reinvent ourselves, to make the world over and to place ourselves in a history, in time, in the cosmos, is explored by Bradbury with the landing of Earth people on the Martian world. At first the core of the self for the Earth people, like the purple triangle that forms the core of Mrs. Ramsay in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse,* can be defined as an entity with a definite shape and color: the third planet from the sun, Earth. And yet the self has a way of spreading outward, and the core is, essentially, selfless. Mrs. Ramsay's self extends limitlessly through space, through time, to include the lives of other people, the lighthouse, the rooks gathering at twilight; beyond her own death to become the house, the sky, the neglected garden, the cleaning woman, the future of the cleaning woman's son, and so on, ad infinitum. In the same way, the people from Earth become part of the timeless haunted landscape of the Martian world and the dead yet still dreaming cities of the ancient Martian race. The knowledge of this slowly creeps into the consciousness, as when the captain of the Fourth Expedition wonders: were the Martians ancestors of humans ten thousand years removed? By the time the great intellectual leap is made, the flash of brilliance, Emerson's "transparent eye-ball," Borges's "The Aleph," the realization that *we* are the Martians, it has, more than likely, already become an accepted, matter of course fact of life.

And so one of Bradbury's transplanted Earth people looks back at Earth one day, trying to imagine the war he has heard about by radio and seeing nothing but a green light:

> "It's like when I was a boy," said Father Peregrine. "We heard about wars in China. But we never believed them. It was too far away. And there were too many people dying. It was impossible. Even when we saw the motion pictures we didn't believe it. Well, that's how it is now. Earth is China. It's so far away it's unbelievable. It's not here. You can't touch it. You can't even see it. All you see is a green light. Two billion people living on that light? Unbelievable! War? We don't hear the explosions."

Like the green light at the end of Daisy's dock in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby,* the green light of Earth is all that is left of a world that has been lost. We are woken up out of the dream. There is realism.

Even Bradbury can't avoid realism, that ugly but inevitable footnote to our existence. Realism is the spoiler of dreams, wrecker of homes, a death that extinguishes even desire. It brings with it the knowledge that ideas are not enough so we must act, it reduces music, however lovely, to the status of noise. Realism is the ultimate downer, as in songwriter Jimmy Webb's 1960's pop ballad, "MacArthur Park": "someone left the cake out in the rain ... and we'll never have that recipe again," a feeling James Salter's character, Nedra, in the novel, *Light Years,* knows all too well.

In ***The Martian Chronicles,*** realism is the littering of the Martian landscape, the shattering of the beautiful crystal cities of the Martians with a single blast of gunshot, the 1940's-era plain-old-Americans transplanted to Mars, the humanity of the Martians, and the tragic awareness that mankind doesn't learn from its mistakes, that its failings loom large.

A decade after the publication of ***The Martian Chronicles,*** the war in Vietnam found Americans involved in the same pattern of genocidal colonization that had been inflicted on countless cultures over the course of history, a pattern Bradbury had warned against with realistic and what now seems tragically prophetic vision.

The Martian Chronicles represents an original and serious work of artistic invention and vision, firmly grounded in literary tradition. It remains a force to be reckoned with, a pivotal work which has influenced the course of literature and the thinking of scientists and of ordinary citizens who face the task--with nothing less than the biological imperative of an entire species at stake, and with it, all life as we know it--of advancing human nature and values into an age in which atomic warfare and space travel have become part of the human experience. The challenge of Mars, according to Bradbury, is to the mind.

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[(essay date 1980) *In the following essay, Gallagher underscores the structural and thematic unity of the stories in* The Martian Chronicles.]

The Martian Chronicles (1950) is one of those acknowledged science fiction masterpieces which has never received detailed scholarly study as a whole. Its overall theme is well known. Clifton Fadiman says that Bradbury is telling us we are gripped by a technology-mania, that "the place for space travel is in a book, that human beings are still mental and moral children who cannot be trusted with the terrifying toys they have by some tragic accident invented."[1] Richard Donovan says that Bradbury's fear is that "man's mechanical aptitudes, his incredible ability to pry into the secrets of the physical universe, may be his fatal flaw."[2] And from "we Earth Men have a talent for ruining big, beautiful things" to "science ran too far ahead of us too quickly, and the people got lost in a mechanical wilderness ... emphasizing machines instead of how to run machines," ***The Martian Chronicles*** itself provides an ample supply of clear thematic statements.[3]

The structural unity of the novel's twenty-six stories, however, is usually overlooked or ignored. Six of the stories were published before Bradbury submitted an outline for ***The Martian Chronicles*** to Doubleday in June 1949.[4] Thus, while individual stories have been praised, discussed, and anthologized out of context, it has been widely assumed that the collection, though certainly not random, has only a vague chronological and thematic unity. Fletcher Pratt, for instance, says that the stories are "assembled with a small amount of connective tissue."[5] Robert Reilly holds that "there is no integrated plot," and Juliet Grimsley says that, although there is a central theme, there is "no central plot."[6] Finally, Willis E. McNelly stresses that Bradbury is essentially a short-story writer, that "the novel form is simply not his normal medium."[7]

The Martian Chronicles may not be a novel, but it is certainly more than just a collection of self-contained stories. Bradbury, for instance, revised **"The Third Expedition"** (which was published as **"Mars is Heaven"** in the Fall 1948 *Planet Stories*) for collection in the ***Chronicles,*** adding material about the first two expeditions and drastically changing the ending. ***The Martian Chronicles*** has the coherence of, say, Hemingway's *In Our Time.* The ordering of stories has a significance that goes beyond chronology and which creates a feeling of unity and coherence; thus it almost demands to be read and treated as though it were a novel. My purpose here, then, is to provide a means for understanding and appreciating ***The Martian Chronicles*** as a whole. I will discuss all of the stories, almost always in order and always in context, though I realize that this rather pedestrian approach may lead to a certain superficiality and qualitative leveling. I hope to show that the stories draw meaning from one another, as well as preparing the way for future close analyses. As David Ketterer has said, "if more teachers of literature are to be convinced that science fiction is a viable area of study, it must be demonstrated to them that a novel such as ***Martian Chronicles*** can open up to intense critical scrutiny just as *Moby-Dick* can."[8]

To facilitate discussion, the twenty-six stories in ***The Martian Chronicles*** may be divided into three sections. The seven stories in the first section, from **"Rocket Summer"** to **"And the Moon Be Still as Bright,"** deal with the initial four attempts to successfully establish a footing on Mars. The fifteen stories in the second section, from **"The Settlers"** to **"The Watchers,"** span the rise and fall of the Mars colony; and the four stories in the final section, from **"The Silent Towns"** to **"The Million-Year Picnic,"** linger on the possible regeneration of the human race after the devestating atomic war.

Bradbury's purpose in this first group of stories is to belittle man's technological achievement, to show us that supermachines do not make supermen. The terse power of **"Rocket Summer"** is filtered through three humiliating defeats before man is allowed to celebrate a victory. In fact, "celebration," the goal men seek as much as physical settlement, is the main motif in this section. Bradbury uses it to emphasize the pernicious quality of human pride. The stories build toward the blatant thematic statement of **"And the Moon Be Still as Bright"**; but this story is artistically poor, since the section does not depend on it, either for meaning or for effect. Next to a sense of delayed anticipation, the strength of the section stems from a sense of motion; the stories of the three defeats are not repetitious of one another. Bradbury varies both style and tone in **"Ylla," "The Earth Men,"** and **"The Third Expedition,"** increasing the intensity from the mellow and the comic to the savage. In this way, **"And the Moon Be Still as Bright"** serves a cohesive function as the climax of and clarification of views which we have already felt. Another significant motif in this section comes from the phantasmagoric atmosphere that Bradbury associates with Mars. This trapping, this "accident" of his fantasy, produces clashes of dream and reality, sanity and insanity, which serve functionally to underscore Bradbury's desire for us to view technology from a different perspective.

"Rocket Summer" is an audacious introduction to the subject of space travel. Its five short paragraphs capture the power and import of this technological marvel with the intensity of myth and the jolt of a hypodermic needle. The scene engenders an expectation of immediate and glorious triumph in space. The move to space changes Earth; in one leap, technology conquers nature. "The rocket stood in the cold winter morning, making summer with every breath of its mighty exhausts. The rocket made climates, and summer lay for a brief moment upon the land" (***Chronicles,*** 1). Often overlooked in the display of power, however, is that the summer created by this supernal force isn't altogether a pleasant change from the Ohio winter. The winter is, indeed, a time of constriction and inactivity, of negative things: doors are closed, windows licked, panes frosted over, and housewives lumber along "like great black bears." But the winter is also a time of "children skiing on slopes." The "warm desert air" of rocket summer ends these games, erases winter's "art work," and steams the town in a "hot rain." The power here is actually more display than benefit. Implying man's defiance and defiling of nature, **"Rocket Summer"** is a perfect foil for the final scene of ***The Martian Chronicles,*** in which the new Martians see themselves *in* nature.

The breathtaking power of the opening scene hovers over **"Ylla"** and **"The Summer Night"** like an uncollected debt. But both stories deflect this power into unexpected channels; both shift to the Martian perspective on human space travel. Men and their machines appear only in dreams, in premonitions--in a kind of advance mental infection made possible by the psychic powers of Martians. Ylla is party to a dying marriage which is a symbol of the dying Martian culture, and she views the coming American technological power in sexual terms. Subtly punning on the old notion of Earth someday inseminating space, Bradbury has Ylla literally see the captain in his phallic rocket as the man of her dreams, come to bring her new life. Then, with almost predictable irony, the first giant flex of our technological muscle is brought to naught by a jealous husband. Our technology will not impregnate this planet.

The reception planned for this first expedition is a bullet; a quirk of fate, a chance combination of time and place, subvert the first mission. The anticipation of glorious triumph in space that is ignited in **"Rocket Summer"** is defused. We feel sad, not because humans have died (they do not appear until the fourth story) or because a mission has been thwarted, but because the Martians are portrayed sympathetically and we respond to their desire for new life. The marital situation is recognizably human; along with Ylla, we know that marriage makes people old and familiar while still young. Most of all, however, we are sad because Mr. K's action is so totally fruitless:

> "You'll be all right tomorrow," he said. She did not look up at him; she looked only at the empty desert and the very bright stars coming out now on the black sky, and far away there was a sound of wind rising and canal waters stirring cold in the long canals. She shut her eyes, trembling. "Yes," she said. "I'll be all right tomorrow."(***Chronicles,*** 14)

In this absorbing, archetypal personal drama, the pinnacle of our technological progress plays but a supporting role.

As an introduction to the second expedition, **"The Summer Night"** returns to space travel the portentous power found in **"Rocket Summer."** The relationship of the two stories, in fact, is that of equal but opposite reaction. Whereas in **"Rocket Summer,"** space travel transforms an Ohio winter into a temporary summer, bringing people outside, in **"The Summer Night"** this same force creates a "winter chill" which forces the Martians inside. This time the portentous power is not in sexuality but poetry and song, the beautiful words of Byron and the familiar words of the old nursery rhyme. What is beautiful and familiar to us is seen as strange and ominous, even poisonous, to the Martians. With their speech uncontrollably infected with fragments of Earth song, just as their bodies will later be infected with chicken pox, the Martians fill the air with direful chants like "something terrible will happen in the morning" (***Chronicles,*** 16). In denigrating Ylla's dream man, Mr. K tries to point out the gulf between the two cultures: his height makes him a misshapen giant, the color of his hair and eyes are most unlikely, his name is no name, and he comes from a planet incapable of supporting life. Now a similar

perspective again dramatizes the otherness that Bradbury will mark in the second section as the reason why the colonization is so rapacious.

At this point, however, the Martians have little to fear, for **"The Earth Men"** of the Second Expedition, the first human characters in the book, are butts of Bradbury's wild comedy, pompous straight men who are reduced to babbling idiots before the rather grotesque conclusion. High on the pride of their accomplishment, these ambassadors seek the proper comprehension, appreciation, and celebration of their presence. "We are from Earth," says Captain Williams, pressing his chubby pink hand to his chest; "it's never been done before"; "we should be celebrating" (***Chronicles,*** 17-18). The Earth men want somebody to shake their hands, pat them on the back, shout hooray, give them the key to the city, throw a parade; ironically, however, they must struggle just to get attention. The great reality of Earth's technological world is treated as merely another manifestation of a common madness on Mars. In a bitter, comic touch, the only celebration they receive is from fellow inmates of an asylum.

In this story Bradbury uses several different techniques to achieve comedy at the expense of the Earth men. First they have the misfortune to land near the home of a Martian Gracie Allen. Their verbal exchanges with the daffy Mrs. Ttt, the archetypal house-bound housewife, contain the myopia, the logical illogicalities, and the flitting concentration Gracie Allen made famous.[9]

> The man gazed at her in surprise. "We're from Earth!""I haven't time," she said. "I've a lot of cooking today and there's cleaning and sewing and all. You evidently wish to see Mr. Ttt; he's upstairs in the study.""Yes," said the Earth Man confusedly, blinking. "By all means, let us see Mr. Ttt.""He's busy." She slammed the door again.(***Chronicles,*** 17)

Comedy in the following conversation with Mr. Aaa comes from his refusal to do anything but nourish his desire to kill Mr. Ttt. The result is a conversation that is not a conversation but two monologues, each escalating in intensity while moving in different directions. The only genuine response Mr. Aaa makes to the Earth men is a correction:

> "We're from Earth!""I think it very ungentlemanly of him," brooded Mr. Aaa."A *rocket* ship. We came in it. Over there!""Not the first time Ttt's been unreasonable, you know.""All the way from Earth.""Why, for half a mind, I'd call him up and tell him off."Just the four of us; myself and these three men, my crew.""I'll call him up, yes; that's what I'll do!""Earth. Rocket. Men. Trip. Space.""Call him and give him a good lashing!"....."Challenged him to a duel, by the gods! A duel!".....The captain flashed a white smile. Aside to his men he whispered, "*Now* we're getting someplace!" To Mr. Aaa he called, "We traveled sixty million miles. From Earth!"Mr. Aaa yawned. "That's only *fifty* million miles this time of year."(***Chronicles,*** 19-20)

In contrast to the obvious quality of the comedy in the above quotation, Bradbury lets the simple fact that "the little girl dug in her nose with a finger" undercut the captain's next attempt to impress a Martian with who they are. The comedy changes drastically, however, in the scenes with Mr. Xxx, the kind of mad scientist that Peter Sellers has played. At first the tone is delightfully absurd, as every attempt by the Earth men to prove that they really have made a space flight inevitably adds evidence of their "beautifully complete" insanity. The climax of the passage attests to the wacky madness of the very person entrusted to "cure" them:

> "This is the most incredible example of sensual hallucination and hypnotic suggestion I've ever encountered. I went through your 'rocket,' as you call it." He tapped the hull. "I hear it. Auditory fantasy." He drew a breath. "I smell it. Olfactory hallucination, induced by sensual telepathy." He kissed the ship. "I taste it. Labial fantasy!"(***Chronicles,*** 28-29)

Because the crew and the hardware are the product of a sickness that will make history--Martian medical history--the Earth men are celebrated at last--for being crazy. "May I congratulate you? You are a psychotic genius!. ... Let me embrace you!" (***Chronicles,*** 29). The tone darkens considerably, though, when Mr. Xxx kills the Earth men and discovers that their bodies do not disappear. Caught in the logic of his own argument, and with a faint echo of the infection aspect of **"The Summer Night,"** Xxx can only conclude that he has been contaminated. Eyes bulging, mouth frothing, he kills himself--the final absurdity. Something terrible did happen. Like **"Ylla,"** the Second Expedition comes to nothing, both for the Martians and the Earth men.

Almost in passing (for throughout ***The Martian Chronicles*** the "great" events are relegated to the interstices), **"The Earth Men"** provides important information about the Martian background. The reason why their culture is dying even before human settlement, a fact first sensed in **"Ylla,"** is that "a good number of their population are insane" (***Chronicles,*** 28). Now, in **"The Taxpayer,"** we get equally important background information about Earth. Sensing an atomic war and wishing to escape oppressive and pervasive government control, Pritchard seeks a new start on Mars: "maybe it was a land of milk and

honey up there" (***Chronicles,*** 31). In tried-and-true American fashion, Mars becomes the place of escape, of refuge, the place we head for when the going gets rough (the next story, incidentally, was first published separately under the title, **"Mars Is Heaven"**). Also interesting as an introduction to **"The Third Expedition"** is the continued questioning of the locus of truth found in **"The Earth Man."** Pritchard is the prophet of the atomic war that eventually destroys the Earth of ***The Martian Chronicles.*** He is the man who speaks the truth. Considered crazy, he is dragged away kicking and screaming. Clearly, Bradbury has created a kind of whirlpool in which appearance and reality, sanity and insanity, continually change places and are constantly intermixed.

"The Third Expedition" gathers the motifs that are established in the previous stories. It acts as the dramatic culmination of Bradbury's views on our technological achievement before the successful landing and the overt philosophizing of **"And the Moon Be Still as Bright."** The domestic resonance of **"Ylla"** and the Mrs. Ttt section of **"The Earth Men"** become the full-blown landscape of an old-fashioned, idealized, and therefore seductive mid-American town. The expectation of success created by **"Rocket Summer,"** as well as the need for celebration that are explicit in **"The Earth Men,"** become the loving reception, impossible to deny, of lost loved ones. The crumbling borders of appearance and reality that are present in every story now become a fatal human weakness. Mars is not a paradise, it is a hell.

Though **"The Third Expedition"** eventually picks up the savage tone of the ending of **"The Earth Men,"** it begins on quite a different note. The opening two paragraphs describe a heroic journey in the kind of stalwart prose and epic rhythms one would expect following **"Rocket Summer,"** if Bradbury were writing ***The Martian Chronicles*** in praise of our technological achievements.

Moreover, in **"The Third Expedition"** we meet "real" humans for the first time. In **"Ylla,"** the Earthmen are only a dream while in **"The Earth Men"** they are impotent puppets programmed with one desire. But here, for the first time, are people who think, who have that power which is associated in our technological world with the quintessence of humanity. Ratiocination is a key to the story, the pivotal concept. Thus, although the rocket lands incongruously like the preceding two expeditions (on a lawn of green grass, near a brown Victorian house, with "Beautiful Ohio" on the music stand), the story gains a realistic tone from the logical search for truth that is immediately applied by the captain. The story also gains an optimistic tone.

Captain Black is a "doubter" figure, a figure common in science fiction. The doubter figure is usually a character against whom the unbelievable marvel, the insoluble problem, is bounced. It is a device for getting information to the reader. Here, though, the doubter is the central character, one who clearly transcends the stereotyped status. Unlike his crew, Captain Black does not immediately and intuitively respond to the familiar setting on Mars. "How do we know what this is?" he asks, later saying, "I like to be as logical as I can" (***Chronicles,*** 33, 39). The Mars that the Third Expedition finds is a nostalgic, pretechnological, Midwestern small town of cupolas, porch swings, pianolas, antimacassars, Harry Lauder and Maxfield Parrish artifacts, tinkling lemonade pitchers, succulent turkey dinners, and friendly people. Like the Martian psychologist in **"The Earth Men,"** Black distrusts the reality he sees, even though its magnetic appeal is undeniable. In this inability to forget, or at least resist, the past, A. James Stupple sees a metaphor for ***The Martian Chronicles*** as a whole. In a time of exciting yet threatening and disruptive progress and change, Americans are attracted to the security of an idealized, timeless, and static past; and they make the fatal mistake of trying to re-create Earth rather than accepting the fact that Mars is different.[10]

The plot of this story moves from an emphasis on logic, which is finally overpowered by emotion, to the return of an emphasis on logic in the grim conclusion. For instance, the first half of the story, which is developed mainly through the conversation of the crew, has the air of an exercise in problem-solving. Five possible reasons are considered for the existence of an American town on Mars: one of the previous expeditions succeeded, a divine order may have ordained similar patterns on every planet in our solar system, rocket travel somehow began back in the early twentieth century, they have gone back in time and landed on Earth, and finally, to escape insanity caused by intense homesickness, early space travelers reproduced Earth as much as possible and then hypnotized the inhabitants into belief.

The captain no sooner settles for the last explanation ("Now we've got somewhere. I feel better. It's all a bit more logical" [***Chronicles,*** 39]) than he and his crew are hit with an emotional thunderstorm, and the explanation is found to be false. Everywhere the Earth men are greeted by old friends and relatives, and the very wish of the Second Expedition crew comes true. The American arrival on Mars is celebrated: people dance, a brass band plays, little boys shout hooray, the mayor speaks, and the crew is escorted away in loving style. Not even the captain can resist this. Confronted by his parents and brother, the old house on Oak Knoll Avenue, his old brass bed and college banners, the skeptic becomes a child again and is converted to belief. "It's good to *be* home," he says. "I'm soaked to the skin with emotion" (***Chronicles,*** 44).

In bed, however, reason reasserts itself. "For the first time the stress of the day was moved aside; he could think logically now. It had all been emotion" (***Chronicles,*** 45). In a vicious parody of the asylum scene in **"The Earth Men,"** Black's

reason, in careful step-by-step fashion, produces images as crazy as little demons of red sand running between the teeth of sleeping men, or women becoming oily snakes. The Martians have used his memories to pierce his defenses--in order to kill him. And the crazy image is true, as if his thought gave it life! Ironically, the moment of illumination, which reason provides, is also the moment of death. So the Third Expedition comes to naught, a victim of emotion and weakness for the past. Reason, the sire of technological progress, does not guarantee survival.

The story doesn't end with the murder of Captain Black, however, though this event is horrible climax enough. Almost blasphemously, Bradbury permits the Martian charade to continue to its *logical* end--in a mock funeral. Like **"The Earth Men,"** the *illusions* hold after the death of the humans, and we have a final absurdity, or more precisely here, a final profanity. A solemn procession of Martians with melting faces ring the graves while the brass band plays "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean"! In this second ending, in this final "celebration," Bradbury, like Mr. Hyde (in the Barrymore movie) taking one last, irresistible blow at his already dead victim, almost gratuitously pushes his satire on human pride from the personal to the national level. It has a chilling effect. Seen in relation to the story's focus on logic, its connection with **"The Earth Men"** and with Bradbury's overall satiric purpose, it seems perfectly organic.[11]

"And the Moon Be Still as Bright" is as baldly didactic as Kent Forrester makes it out to be, though I hope it is clear that this quality is not characteristic of ***The Martian Chronicles*** as a whole.[12] In a story which can be called the work's thematic center, Spender, the killer, the "very crazy fellow" who tries unsuccessfully to be a Martian, is Bradbury's mouthpiece. Spender is stalked and finally killed by Captain Wilder, a man who understands Spender yet who cannot be a Martian either. "There's too much Earth blood in me," he says. Yet, in one of those mystic transformations, the spirit of the hunted lives on in the spirit of the hunter. Wilder discovers that he is "Spender all over again" (***Chronicles,*** 71). Mars is left to the Sam Parkhills of this world, however; later, Wilder is "kicked upstairs" so he won't interfere with colonial policy on Mars. It's all quite gimmicky. Bradbury's theme is stated a bit too plainly and the disappearance of a character of such promise leaves us with a hollow feeling. Clearly he wants no obstructions in the way of the coming apocalypse.

Unlike most of the crew, Spender does not want a "celebration" to mark the successful arrival of the Fourth Expedition. Spender, whose imagination and sensitivity are contrasted with the physicality and sensuality of Biggs and Parkhill, feels the Martian presence around him and respects the remnants of Martian culture. He has ventured into space with awe, not pride, realizing that "Earth Men have a talent for ruining big, beautiful things" (***Chronicles,*** 54), that man has already brought chicken pox to Mars and will soon bring more pollution. "There'd be time for that later; time to throw condensed-milk cans in the proud Martian canals; time for copies of the *New York Times* to blow and caper and rustle across the lone gray Martian sea bottoms; time for banana peels and picnic papers in the fluted, delicate ruins ..." (***Chronicles,*** 49). Spender also realizes that humans hate the strange ("If it doesn't have Chicago plumbing, it's nonsense"), and will "rip the skin" off Mars, changing it to fit their image (***Chronicles,*** 64, 54).

Supermachines do not make supermen. Biggs, the archetypal ugly American christening the Martian canal with empty wine bottles and puking in a Martian Temple, is a stark commentary on human nature that does not keep pace with technology. He drives Spender over the edge, alienating him from his own culture. "I'm the last Martian," Spender tells Biggs before killing him (***Chronicles,*** 58). Spender sees that the Martians "knew how to live with nature and get along with nature," that the Martians had

> discovered the secret of life among animals. The animal does not question life. It lives. Its very reason for living *is* life; it enjoys and relishes life ... the men of Mars realized that in order to survive they would have to forgo asking that one question any longer: *Why live?* Life was its own answer.(***Chronicles,*** 66-67)

Spender/Bradbury seems to be saying that the Martians stopped where we should have stopped a hundred years ago, before Darwin and Freud blended art and religion and science into a harmonious whole. Spender also sees that the Martians knew how to die. Quoting Byron, he pictures the Martians as a race aware that everything must end, thus accepting the fact of their own cultural death. Mars should chasten our pride. "Looking at all this," says Wilder, "we know we're not so hot; we're kids in rompers, shouting with our play rockets and atoms, ..." (***Chronicles,*** 55).

Spender's vision of Earth through the Martian perspective is the clear criterion for Bradbury's satiric representation of Earth. Earth people are proud, polluters, sacrilegious, incapable of wonder, commercial, hostile to difference and hostile to nature. Earth is so odious, in fact, that Bradbury plants the seed here for **"The Million-Year Picnic"**: that we must shuck Earth off, that we need a new start, that we must become Martians. Spender is crazy, but as Herbert Marcuse and Theodore Roszak have argued, in a world in which Reason is Truth, and in which Technology is the embodiment of Reason, any move toward qualitative change will seem insane. Spender is crazy like Thoreau, who, the story goes, asked Emerson why, in a world of injustice, he too wasn't in prison. But as Forrester has pointed out, the severe artistic problem here is that the positive view of the Martians is given rather than being successfully dramatized. Most of the Martians we have met so far are killers! In several ways, therefore, **"And the Moon Be Still as Bright"** is not as satisfactory as the other stories in this section.

The second section of ***The Martian Chronicles,*** the fifteen stories from **"The Settlers"** to **"The Watchers,"** spans the rise and fall of the Mars colony. Because of the large span of events, this section seems less taut, less focused and more discursive than the first section. Whereas the very short stories in the first section (**"Rocket Summer," "The Summer Night," "The Taxpayer"**) were stories in their own right, as well as introductions to the main stories about the three expeditions, here the nine very short stories seem burdened with the "history" of the settlement. As a result, the flow is a bit choppy. The most important stories in the section are **"Night Meeting"** and **"The Martian,"** and the purpose of the section is to point to mankind's hostility toward difference--toward otherness, another manifestation of human pride--as the factor which determines the quality of colonization. I have already mentioned that A. James Stupple sees American attachment to a static past leading them to the fatal mistake of re-creating Earth rather than, to push his idea a bit, allowing Mars to re-create it.

Pritchard, the taxpayer, wanted to come to Mars because it might be a paradise compared to the wretched conditions mounting on Earth; but the Earthmen of **"The Settlers"** share no such sense of urgency or mission. There is no epic motivation here, no myth-making; they are an ordinary mix of men who come for an ordinary mix of reasons. What they share is "The Loneliness," a disease which strikes when "the entire planet Earth became a muddy baseball tossed away," and "you were alone, wandering in the meadows of space, on your way to a place you couldn't imagine" (***Chronicles,*** 73). The cure for the Loneliness is people; but to bring people, Mars must be changed, and this is the self-appointed task of Benjamin Driscoll in **"The Green Morning."**

The story is tricky. It is, as John Hollow calls it, a "cheerful" story since the colonization of Mars begins on a seemingly optimistic note.[13] This optimism has an unmistakable mythic resonance. Driscoll is a Johnny Appleseed figure interested in transforming the howling wilderness into a fruitful garden, "a shining orchard"; that is, Driscoll wants to repeat the colonization of North America on Earth. The magical soil of Mars repays his efforts with Whitmanesque abundance.

It is hard not to like a fellow with such charitable sentiments and such evident success. Having seen the results of the first cycle, however, Bradbury isn't interested in repeating it, and we must be careful not to take this optimistic tone too seriously. Driscoll is waging "a private horticultural *war* with Mars" (***Chronicles,*** 75, my italics), which even he suspects will precipitate tapping the untold mineral wealth of the Martian soil. He may be a Johnny Appleseed, but he is also Jack, of "Jack and the Beanstalk," forging a link to the land of hostile giants. Although he builds trees instead of domes, the result is the same: the technological onslaught of the next story. Cheerful as it is, Hollow says, **"The Green Morning"** is still a story of man "changing Mars to fit his image of what a planet ought to be," "an imposition of man's will upon a surface he only presumes to own." Most of the impositions are less attractive. The story comes full circle: Driscoll faints when he arrives on Mars, and he faints after his success. **"The Green Morning"** is not meant to signal beneficial progress.

Like Natty Bumppo, all Driscoll does is pave the way for those less noble than he. After a dream of man-in-nature comes the reality of man bludgeoning nature. A plague like the pox strikes this paradise. In a vicious parody of the gentle animality Spender seeks, the rockets--still controlling nature, turning rock into lava and wood into charcoal--are "The Locusts" bearing steel-toothed carnivores who, as Hollow says, "afraid of strangeness ... hammer Mars into a replica of Mid-America."

> The rockets came like locusts, swarming and settling in blooms of rosy smoke. And from the rockets ran men with hammers in their hands to beat the strange world into a shape that was familiar to the eye, to bludgeon away all strangeness, their mouths fringed with nails so they resembled steel-toothed carnivores, spitting them into their swift hands as they hammered up frame cottages and scuttled over roofs with shingles to blot out the eerie stars, and fit green shades to pull against the night. And when the carpenters had hurried on, the women came in with flower-pots and chintz and pans and set up a kitchen clamor to cover the silence that Mars made waiting outside the door and the shaded window.(***Chronicles,*** 78)

The diction in this description of domestic activity is particularly vicious. It clearly reveals Bradbury's almost snarling disgust at man's propensity to impose himself on the universe. Nevertheless, The Loneliness is conquered.

In **"Night Meeting"** an antimaterialistic old man who embodies an alternate way of living on Mars is the portal for a vision of communion that represents the way colonization should be approached. An American outcast simply because he is "old" and "retired," the old man is the gatekeeper of the dream land. One must pass through his world view before being blessed with the vision. He is not interested in making money from the gas stations he runs. "If business picks up too much," he says, "I'll move on back to some other old highway that's not so busy, where I can earn just enough to live on" (***Chronicles,*** 79). The only important thing for him is feeling the "difference" on Mars--the different weather, the different flowers, the different rain. Mars is a kaleidoscope, a Christmas toy, a succession of shifting patterns meant only to be enjoyed. "We've got to forget Earth and how things were," he says. "If you can't take Mars for what she is, you might as well go back to Earth. ... don't ask it to be nothing else but what it is." For this old man out of the mainstream of his culture, Mars has the beneficial effect of always providing something new; he is there to experience and to be entertained. He approaches Mars like a child (cf. **"The Million-Year Picnic"**), vivid proof that "even *time* is crazy up here."

Time is the key to this meditation on difference and human pride. Shortly after crossing the ideational threshold marked by the old man, Tomás Gomez responds to the sensual presence of time: "There was a smell of Time in the air tonight ... tonight you could almost *touch* Time" (***Chronicles,*** 80). Gomez goes further, in fact, actively cultivating its sensual presence by constructing similies: Time smells like dust and clocks and people; it sounds like water running in a dark cave and dirt dropping on hollow box lids; it looks like snow dropping silently into a black room or like a silent film in an ancient theater. Like the steps in a prescribed ritual, this exercise in imagination calls forth a being from another time, "a strange thing," a Martian with melted gold for eyes and a mechanical mantis for a vehicle. There are three stages in Gomez's night meeting with this Martian: incomprehensibility, a realization of different perspectives, and symbolic union. The result of the meeting is a distinct feeling of simultaneous reality, mutual fate, and mental (spiritual?) communion. For the first time in ***The Martian Chronicles,*** under the spell of the old man's pleasure in difference, Martians and Earthmen are not adversaries.

At first the language barrier keeps Martian and human apart. "Hello! he called. Hello! called the Martian in his own language. They did not understand each other." On Mars, however, the language barrier isn't a problem if there is a sincere desire to communicate; thus this is not a repetition of the conversation-which-is-not-a-conversation in the Mr. Aaa section of **"The Earth Men."** Here the Martian and the Earth man are *together* even in their separate tongues. Both ask, "Did you say hello?" and "What did you say?" They both scowl; they both look bewildered. When the speech barrier is overcome, as each disputes the reality of the other, this harmony breaks; but it returns in common reflections about time. Also, though they see each other differently during this stage, at least they are talking *to* each other in a mutual search for truth. You're a ghost; no, you're a phantom. "There's dust in the streets"; "the streets are clean." "The canals are empty right there"; "the canals are full of lavender wine." "You're blind"; "You are the one who does not see." "You are a figment of the Past"; "No, you are from the Past." "I felt the strangeness, the road, the light, and for a moment I felt as if I were the last man alive on this world"; "So did I" (***Chronicles,*** 82-85).

Confronted by their simultaneous realities and varying perspectives, Earth man and Martian do not recoil in solipsistic fashion or jump for each other's throat. Like the husband and wife in Robert Frost's "West-Running Brook," they "agree to disagree"; they accept the illogicality, accept their difference, and find a common bond. "What does it matter who is Past or Future, if we are both alive, for what follows will follow" (***Chronicles,*** 86). Decay and death will invariably strike both cultures. They "shake" hands and exchange wishes to join in the exciting pleasures of each other's present.

Bradbury doesn't give either culture the last reality; nor does he return the story to a human perspective. Instead he preserves the balance struck between the two cultures by holding the narrative point of view neutrally at the scene after both beings disappear with parallel reflections of their experience. Thus, in this mixture of dream and reality, which is so characteristic of ***The Martian Chronicles,*** we are finally given a vision of what could be on Mars, a vision soon blotted out by such stories as **"The Musicians," "The Martian,"** and **"The Off Season."**

"The Shore" and **"Interim"** continue the chronicle of Martian colonization begun in **"The Settlers"** and **"The Locusts,"** which is completed five stories hence in **"The Old Ones."** The first wave of men, "bred to plains and prairies," have "eyes like nailheads, and hands like the material of old gloves," and "Mars could do nothing to them" (***Chronicles,*** 87). The second wave, among whom are the town builders, come from the "cabbage tenements and subways" and permit the possibility of art and leisure. At last--completing civilization--come the old ones, "the dry and crackling people, the people who spent their time listening to their hearts and feeling their pulses and spooning syrups into their wry mouths, these people who had once taken chair cars to California in November and third-class steamers to Italy in April, the dried-apricot people, the mummy people" (***Chronicles,*** 118). Bradbury's disgust with the cycle of civilization is again supremely obvious in **"The Old Ones,"** but it is also evident in a more subtle form in **"Interim."** The description of Tenth City seems not to be slanted but, like an Iowa town shaken loose by a giant earthquake and carried to Mars by a twister of Oz-like proportions Tenth City is similar to the seductive trap designed by the Martians in **"The Third Expedition."**

"The Musicians" is a good example of Bradbury's skewed vision. Throughout ***The Martian Chronicles*** he has a delightful way of looking at things in an unusual, off-center way.[14] Our perspective on the First Expedition was that of a jealous husband; Byron is a threat to Mars. In a later story the end of the Earth is seen through the eyes of the owner of a hot dog stand. Likewise, in this compact yet powerful story, the desecration of Martian civilization is dramatized through a children's game. The focus on *difference* is still here. While in the background the Firemen burn Mars clean of its horrors, "separating the terrible from the normal," in the foreground, straining parental restrictions in time-honored fashion, a handful of adventurous kids revel in the brittle flakes of dead Martian bodies, imagining "*like on Earth,* they were scuttering through autumn leaves" (***Chronicles,*** 88; my italics). Instead of the hammering of the steel-toothed carnivores on the fifteen thousand feet of Oregon pine and the seventy-nine thousand feet of California redwood brought to Mars to fabricate a new Earth, we have the plangent strokes of the first daring boy, the Musician, "playing the white xylophone bones beneath the outer covering of black flakes." One culture makes music out of the death of another. Bradbury turns the advance of colonization "into a game played by boys whose stomachs gurgled with orange pop" (***Chronicles,*** 89). The result is a paralysis of

criticism. Here there are no culprits, no villains, just innocent "candy-cheeked boys with blue-agate eyes, panting onion-tainted commands to each other." Our truth that "boys will be boys" contributes also to the destruction of Mars.

Pritchard, the taxpayer, seeks Mars as an escape from "censorship and statism and conscription and government control of this and that" (***Chronicles,*** 31), an idea Bradbury returns to in the next three stories, **"Way in the Middle of the Air," "The Naming of Names,"** and **"Usher II."** After the mythic ownership implied by the act of naming, after all traces of Mars are covered by "the mechanical names and the metal names from Earth," after "everything was pinned down and neat and in its place," comes "the red tape that had crawled across Earth like an alien weed" (***Chronicles,*** 103). Mars has become a political and psychological mirror of Earth, as well as a physical one. "They began to plan people's lives and libraries; they began to instruct and push about the very people who had come to Mars to get away from being instructed and ruled and pushed about." **"Way in the Middle of the Air"** concerns a group of people who go to Mars to avoid being pushed about, while **"Usher II"** is about a man who pushes back.

Bradbury uses the vestiges of slavery in the South to suggest the generally oppressive conditions on Earth. Because **"Way in the Middle of the Air"** is the only story that dramatizes the migration, and since the departure is described in an extended river metaphor first introduced in **"The Shore,"** the "niggers" come to symbolize virtually all of the emigrants. "I can't figure why they left *now,*" says Samuel Teece. Things are looking up, laws are fairer, money is better. "What *more* [do] they want?" What they want is to be free now, free from law, from debt, from contract, from the KKK. Freedom--the ultimate human value. In Bradbury's eyes, we are all slaves.

In this story, Bradbury shows himself comic master of the stereotyped situation. In the person of Samuel Teece, the blustery power of the white establishment ("Ain't there a law?. ... Telephone the governor, call out the militia. ... They should've given notice!") is challenged. Teece feels the cut of the laconic humor of his porch cronies ("Looks like you goin' to have to hoe your own turnips, Sam") as he meets the withdrawal of the still docile, still shuffling darkies ("Mr. Teece, you don't mind I take the day off"). The story demonstrates that the establishment's only source of power is fear and that the only fear in the loss of this power is the loss of an artificial dignity. Belter, for instance, withstands Teece's attempts to scare him: "Belter, you fly up and up like a July Fourth rocket, and bang! There you are, cinders, spread all over space. ... There's monsters with big raw eyes like mushrooms" who "jump up and suck marrow from your bones! ... And it's cold up there; no air, you fall down, jerk like a fish, gaspin', dyin', stranglin', stranglin', and dyin'" (***Chronicles,*** 93-94). But Teece maintains his self-respect: "Did you notice? Right up to the very last, by God, he said 'Mister'!"

For all their dedication to the journey, however, these blacks do not suggest a new life on Mars; they remain servile stereotypes. Silly, for instance, plans to open his own hardware store. More important, they remain attached to their earthly possessions--and a motley collection it is: "tin cans of pink geraniums, dishes of waxed fruit, cartons of Confederate money, washtubs, scrubboards, wash lines, soap, somebody's tricycle, someone else's hedge shears, a toy wagon, a jack-in-the-box, a stained-glass window from the Negro Baptist Church, a whole set of brake rims, inner tubes, mattresses, couches, rocking chairs, jars of cold cream, hand mirrors" (***Chronicles,*** 101). These are all deposited with feeling and decorum on the road to the rocket. Although no possessions are taken, neither is anything forgotten. They do not "burn" the past like the family in **"The Million-Year Picnic"**; they carefully leave it where it can be seen "for the last time." Clearly, they carry Earth with them into the new land. The vacuum created by their departure ("What you goin' to *do* nights, Mr. Teece?") will soon be filled on Mars, too. The Bureau of Moral Climates reinstitutes the exercise of power which Mr. Teece exulted in.

"My lord, you *have* an imagination, haven't you?" says the Investigator of Moral Climates in **"Usher II"** about the fun house which Mr. Stendahl has built on Mars (***Chronicles,*** 115). Here again, Bradbury's vision is delightfully skewed. Of all of the possible examples of bureaucratic control on Mars, he focuses on an absurd extreme but one dear to the writer: control of the imagination. His focus is perfect, however, for the American inability to wonder is precisely why Mars is mistreated. They have killed the aliens on Earth (Sleeping Beauty, Mother Goose, the Headless Horseman, St. Nicholas), as well as those on Mars. As a result of legislation permitting only realism, Earth suffered a "Great Fire" in which all tales of fantasy, horror, and the future were destroyed. Now, with the investigators of Moral Climates and the Society for the Prevention of Fantasy, this higher level of civilization has finally reached Mars. In such a supremely technological society, the imagination is a totally alien force; but "we'll soon have things as neat and tidy as Earth," promises Garrett (***Chronicles,*** 107). Stendahl, however, has built a "mechanical sanctuary" as an obscene gesture to the **"Clean Minded People,"** as repayment to an "antiseptic government." In an ironic foreshadowing of the closing scenes of **"The Million-Year Picnic,"** similar to the one in **"Way in the Middle of the Air,"** Stendahl bases his sanctuary on ideas which transcend a burning on Earth--the ideas of Edgar Allan Poe.

In true Poe fashion, the story is laden with ironies: the inexorable advance of the bureaucracy is dramatized through its temporary but resounding defeat; the climate alien to human life on Mars is not physical but moral; technology is used to give life to a fantasy so that the accomplishment of technology can be subverted; reality and illusion again trade places; and fantasy is literally fatal. The use of "The Fall of the House of Usher" as a frame for the story anticipates the atomic

apocalypse, just as failure of mind precipitates physical collapse; and the use of "The Cask of Amontillado" reminds us once again that madness can masquerade as sanity. Suppressing wonder, however, can only result in the unleashing of horror. Like Spender, here Bradbury's spokesman for human values is a crazed killer who succeeds spectacularly this time.

In many ways **"The Martian"** is the central story in the second section of ***The Martian Chronicles.*** It is a horror story similar to **"Usher II,"** with "old ones" as the central characters. It is also a direct denial of the possibility of the acceptance of difference offered in **"Night Meeting."** As John Hollow has said, "the denial of the Martian's true self, of his existence as other than their projections on him, results in complete destruction." But this central story about the rape of Mars is not what one would expect. The horror perpetrated by the "good" guy in **"Usher II"** is malicious, almost masturbatory, whereas here the horror caused by the "bad" guys is accidental, understandable. Although the old ones in the introductory story are cardboard mummies, here they are sympathetic figures seeking new life. They grasp the promise of Mars not out of gross avarice or blind insensitivity but for reasons of the heart. As it is in **"The Green Morning,"** here Mars is enormously responsive to human action; but again Bradbury refuses to focus on a culpable segment of society. In **"The Musician"** it was the young, while in **"The Martian"** it is the old through whom Bradbury dramatizes the exploitation of Mars.

The story opens with the somber tone of **"Ylla."** Love is gone. Age nibbles at the corners of vitality. It is a dreary November of the soul. "It's a terrible night," Mrs. LaFarge says; "I feel so old" (***Chronicles,*** 120). Old LaFarge and his wife have lost their only son, with the result that the meaning is gone from their lives; and they have come to Mars to assuage their grief. "He's been dead so long now, we should try to forget him and everything on Earth" (***Chronicles,*** 119). But like a sentient chameleon, the Martian who comes their way has the magic ability to assume any shape. He becomes Tom, "an ideal shaped by their minds." Their life is quickened by the "return" of their son; the earthly dream has become a reality on Mars.

The problem is that Tom is subject to the force--"trapped" is his word--of any strong human emotion around him. What we see is a series of individuals, each struggling desperately, selfishly, and alone to make him what they want him to be. In town, for instance, Tom becomes Lavinia Spaulding, a drowned young woman whose parents are as distraught as the LaFarges. Obviously, the Martian cannot be all things to all people at all times, but that is what they want. Faced with having Tom "die" for the second time (an unthinkable agony), LaFarge struggles to keep him; but the city is rife with powerful urges. In the last scene Tom runs a psychic gauntlet which leaves him dead, misshapen and grotesque, the result of his inability to simultaneously satisfy the multitude of human dreams.

> Before their eyes he changed. He was Tom and James and a man named Switchman, another named Butterfield; he was the town mayor and the young girl Judith and the husband William and the wife Clarisse. He was melting wax shaping to their minds. They shouted, they pressed forward, pleading. He screamed, threw out his hands, his face dissolving to each demand. "Tom!" cried LaFarge. "Alice!" another. "William!" They snatched his wrists, whirled him about, until with one last shriek of horror he fell.He lay on the stones, melted wax cooling, his face all faces, one eye blue, the other golden, hair that was brown, red, yellow, black, one eyebrow thick, one thin, one hand large, one small.(***Chronicles,*** 130)

Humans do not respect limits! Tom is a beautifully concise symbol of Martian colonization. He is the magic planet torn apart, identity killed by a dense, hungry horde of grasping and competing American dreams. Like **"Ylla,"** nobody wins; the framework of the story permits only sadness, not anger. LaFarge and his wife--still in bed, still listening to the rain, still dreaming--effectively suppress the realization that in this story, lack of restraint has turned rape into murder. For the first time, humans are the killers. Yet the dream goes on.

Pritchard introduces the migration to Mars with the statement that "there was going to be a big atomic war on Earth in about two years" (***Chronicles,*** 3). This notion of imminent war is kept alive in **"And the Moon Be Still as Bright"** and **"The Shore"** before coming into focus in the last three stories of section two. An atomic war, powered by the same force that takes men into space, ingloriously ends the cycle of human civilization. In the context of ***The Martian Chronicles,*** it is a fitting end to a feverishly proud, competitive, commercial ethic. In contrast to the death of Mars, the end of our culture is suicidal, "unnatural," and unaesthetic ("a last-moment war of frustration to tumble down their cities"). More important to the theme of the section is that the war proves the people on Mars are still Earthmen, regardless of the distance between the planets and the amount of time that has elapsed since their separation. Mars has not homogenized them in the least. Father Peregrine likens the war on Earth to wars in China when he was a boy, far away and therefore unreal and beyond belief. But the proprietor of **"The Luggage Store"** believes otherwise: "I think we'll *all* go back. I know, we came up here to get away from things--politics, the atom bomb, war, pressure groups, prejudice, laws--I know. But it's still home there. You wait and see. When the first bomb drops on America the people up here'll start thinking. They haven't been here long enough" (***Chronicles,*** 132). He's right. Earth is still home. The war which eventually destroys Earth resurrects it in the memory of the colonists. And "The Watchers," after vainly putting up their hands "as if to beat the fire out," troop en masse to the luggage store.

The climactic story of the second section is **"The Off Season."** It is a story which dynamically couples commercialism with the destruction of earth and Mars. Sam Parkhill, the character from **"And the Moon Be Still as Bright,"** is the direct antithesis of the old man, the gas station, and the relish in and acceptance of difference found in **"Night Meeting."** "Like any honest businessman," he picks a choice location ("those trucks from Earth Settlement 101 will have to pass here twenty-four hours a day!") to reproduce the ultimate American banality: a hot dog stand. "Look at that sign. SAM'S HOT DOGS! Ain't that beautiful, Elma?" Even as we now joke about a McDonald's on the moon, Parkhill fulfills Spender's grim prophecy of commercial pollution: "We Earth Men have a talent for ruining big, beautiful things. The only reason we didn't set up hot-dog stands in the midst of the Egyptian temple of Karnak is because it was out of the way and served no large commercial purpose" (***Chronicles,*** 54). Minding the main chance, Parkhill's goal is to make a financial killing by making the "best hot dogs on two worlds" in his "riveted aluminum structure, garish with white light, trembling with juke-box melody." "We'll make thousands, Elma, thousands." Parkhill, a product of the mainstream of American materialism, puts his faith in Earth, in the customers it will send him.

The phrase *financial killing* is apt; the drive for dollars always entails the destruction of something. Here the commercial man literally kills. Parkhill, who doesn't like Martians, shoots first--mindlessly and wantonly--and feels sorry later. He operates on the principle of give and take in a world view in which the old inevitably gives way to the new. He is a bull in a china shop, who, by his rough advance, blows away the fragile Martians. The first Martian he shoots falls "like a small circus tent pulling up its stakes and dropping soft fold on fold." During the ensuing chase, he shoots a girl who "folded like a soft scarf, melted like a crystal figurine. What was left of her, ice, snowflake, smoke, blew away in the wind."

At the core of this story, however, is a colossal Martian joke, the kind of revenge that feeds on enormous human lust. Parkhill doesn't have to kill the Martians. "The land is yours," they say and give him land grants to half of Mars. Immediately Sam Parkhill is landlord of Mars. "This is my lucky day!" he exults. Looking toward Earth, he says in Statue-of-Liberty rhetoric: "send me your hungry and your starved." What the Martians know is that atomic war will wrack Earth. In another swipe at human materialism, Bradbury has the disappointed hopes of the owner of a hot dog stand our perspective on the end of our world. The destruction of Earth is briefly yet vividly described: "Part of it seemed to come apart in a million pieces, as if a gigantic jigsaw had exploded. It burned with an unholy dripping glare for a minute, three times normal size, then dwindled." The climactic emphasis, however, is given to Sam's emotionally estranged wife. Throughout the story Elma is the voice of criticism and caution. She realizes that Sam, in his drive for success, would kill her. During the chase she even identifies with the Martians. Now, picking up the celebration motif so evident early in ***The Martian Chronicles*** and finding, with explosive effect, the proper business term to characterize the future of humanity, she gives the benediction: "Switch on more lights, turn up the music, open the doors. There'll be another batch of customers along in about a million years. Gotta be ready, yes, sir ... looks like it's going to be an off season" (***Chronicles,*** 143). This second section of ***The Martian Chronicles*** ends with a thump of doom which casts a shadow far into the remaining stories about renewal.

The four stories--**"The Silent Towns," "The Long Years," "There Will Come Soft Rains,"** and **"The Million-Year Picnic"** linger on the possible regeneration of the human race after a devastating atomic war and the consequent evacuation of Mars. Bradbury does not allow hope to come easy, and when it does, it comes almost grudgingly. Just as Bradbury filters the power of **"Rocket Summer"** through three unsuccessful expeditions, he squeezes optimism about a second beginning on Mars--a really new life--through three resounding defeats. **"The Silent Towns"** is a parody of the familiar new-Adam-and-Eve motif in science fiction, which comically thwarts notions of a new race of humans. **"The Long Years"** and **"There Will Come Soft Rains"** focus on the machines, the sons of men, which inherit the Earth. Both stories end with meaningless mechanical rituals which mock the sentience that gave them life. ***The Martian Chronicles*** does not turn upward until the last story, **"The Million-Year Picnic."** Only in the complete destruction of Earth, Earth history, and Earth values, plus the complete acceptance of a new identity, can hope be entertained. "It is good to renew one's wonder," says Bradbury's philosopher in the epigraph, "space travel has again made children of us all." In the context of game, vacation, and picnic, this last story entrusts the possibility of new life to a small band of transformed Earth children.

Bradbury's irrepressible dark humor--so evident in **"The Earth Men," "Way in the Middle of the Air,"** and **"The Off Season"**--is again the vehicle in **"The Silent Towns."** War has come to Earth, and the towns on Mars are empty. Silence has replaced the musicians and the hammering of the steel-toothed carnivores. The Loneliness again strikes Mars. Walter Gripp, acutely aware of "how dead the town was," that he is "all alone," sprinkles "bright dimes everywhere" in a meaningless Johnny Appleseed charade as the last man on Mars. Gripp is a miner who "walked to town once every two weeks to see if he could marry a quiet and intelligent woman." The story gains movement from the continued search of this New Adam for his New Eve. As the story builds toward the apparition of Eve, however, the tone becomes increasingly mock-romantic.[15] When the phone rings, Gripp's heart slowed: "he felt very cold and hollow"; "he wanted very much for it to be a 'she.'" When he finally phones Genevieve Selsor in the beauty parlor, her voice is "kind and sweet and fine. He held the phone tight to his ear so she could whisper sweetly into it. He felt his feet drift off the floor. His cheeks burned." He sings the teary old ballad "Oh,

Genevieve, Sweet Genevieve" as he entertains beautiful dreams of his new partner. He doesn't find her in the first beauty salon he stops at, though he does find her handkerchief. "It smelled so good he almost lost his balance."

As we have seen so many times, however, on Bradbury's Mars, dream and reality are constantly changing places, always untrustworthy. Thus the real Genevieve is nothing like the anticipated one. Her fingers, cuddling a box of chocolates, are plump and pallid; her face is round and thick; her eyes are "like two immense eggs stuck into a white mess of bread dough." Her legs are as big around as tree stumps, her hair a bird's nest. She has no lips, a large greasy mouth, and brows plucked to thin antenna lines (***Chronicles,*** 152). This bizarre woman paws him, pinches him, puts her chocolaty fingers on him, and finally tries to bed him. The scene is priceless parody:

> "So here I *am*!""Here you are." Walter shut his eyes."It's getting late," she said, looking at him."Yes.""I'm tired," she said."Funny, I'm wide awake."

The presence of Genevieve Selsor, replete with wedding dress, is simply too much for Gripp.

> "Genevieve." He glanced at the door."Yes?""Genevieve, I've something to tell you.""Yes?" She drifted toward him, the perfume smell thick about her round white face."The thing I have to say to you is ..." he said."Yes?""Good-by!"(***Chronicles,*** 154-55)

And with that, the last man lights out for the territory, content to live out his life alone. As Hollow observes, Genevieve is an archetype of human piggishness, and Gripp flees from a symbol of mankind grown gross in the softness of material goods. His flight is Bradbury's way of saying that mankind isn't fit to continue.

"The Long Years" is also about a last man and his long wait. The action in the preceding twenty-three stories takes place between the years 1999 and 2005; now the scene moves to 2026. Though, after twenty years, Earth is only a memory, it is still home, and Hathaway longs for rescue, for return there. In the meantime, to combat The Loneliness which would have caused him to take his own life, he recreates mechanically both his family and an American town. Hathaway is a brilliant man, a genius, a still potent remnant of American technological prowess; yet he needs the security of familiar surroundings to save him from Martian otherness. Hathaway, in fact, chooses precisely the plan for survival suggested by Captain Black in **"The Third Expedition."** The consternation of Captain Wilder and his crew at finding such an apparently genuine and timeless domestic scene is another reminder of that grim story.

This time, however, the domestic scene is warm and real. Hathaway has done a "fine job," and when he dies, Mars is left to his mechanical family. He "took us as his real wife and children. And, in a way, we *are*" (***Chronicles,*** 163). The Americans cannot "murder" the machines: "They're built to last; ten, fifty, two hundred years. Yes, they've as much right to--to life as you or I or any of us" (***Chronicles,*** 165). Thus, in a way, human life will continue on Mars for a long time. Man buys a bit of immortality by building machines like himself. But this melancholy story remains brutally negative. The machines are built to last, but Hathaway knew that "all these things from Earth will be gone long before the old Martian towns" (***Chronicles,*** 156). Even while they last, however, these machines, which were deliberately not programmed to feel, perform an empty rite of supplication as chilling as the ending of **"The Third Expedition."** The fact that these are merely machines is never more vivid than in the concluding paragraph, a grim reminder of the scene in which wine dribbles down their chins.

> Night after night for every year and every year, for no reason at all, the woman comes out and looks at the sky, her hands up, for a long moment, looking at the green burning of Earth, not knowing why she looks, and then she goes back and throws a stick on the fire, and the wind comes up and the dead sea goes on being dead. (***Chronicles,*** 165-66)

In this story about a last man, the last mourner is only a paid pallbearer. Even the machines look mindlessly toward Earth.

"There Will Come Soft Rains" takes us back to Earth after the atomic war, to the mechanical children there. Like **"Rocket Summer,"** people are absent. It is a fitting climax to these stories of man's technological achievement. By taking man out of it, Bradbury helps us see our mechanical environment and think about our relation to it. Indeed, the story is directly connected to the thematic statement in **"The Million-Year Picnic"**:

> "Life on Earth never settled down to doing anything very good. Science ran too far ahead of us too quickly, and the people got lost in a mechanical wilderness, like children making over pretty things, gadgets, helicopters, rockets; emphasizing the wrong items, emphasizing machines instead of how to run the machines. Wars got bigger and bigger and finally killed Earth."(***Chronicles,*** 179-80)

The house is a mechanical wilderness, a symbol of a civilization which destroys itself in its own sophistication. The story reminds us that "built to last"--whether it be ten, fifty, or two hundred years--is the typical American short haul when

compared to cultures that measure their lives in the millions. It does not matter how much we live for our machines; they will never represent a significant continuation of our lives.

The house, which is the central character in **"There Will Come Soft Rains,"** is a supreme technological achievement. It sounds like the kind of domestic utopia that *Life* Magazine might have prophesied for an eager audience. The house wakes you up, prepares your meals, counsels you about the weather, reminds you of duties, cleans, and even entertains. It is "an altar with ten thousand attendants." It is a mechanical paradise antithetical to Ylla's natural one, with streams for floors and fruits growing out of the walls, following the sun and folding up at night like a giant flower. In accordance with the functions we often expect our machines to assume and the care we bestow on them, the house is described in human terms. It has a voice clock, memory tapes, electric eyes, a metal throat, an attic brain, and a skeleton; it acts like an old maid, digests food, and suffers paranoid and psychopathic behavior. The house is also the "one house left standing" in a city of rubble and ashes; its humanness only heightens the void created by human self-destruction. Since technology is meant to serve, it has no function without humanity. Machines cannot "exist" without men. Though we can be mesmerized by mechanical "life," without the masters, it is a meaningless charade. "But the gods had gone away, and the ritual of the religion continued senselessly, uselessly" (***Chronicles,*** 167).

The story begins in the morning, in the living room, in the snappy rhythms of the voice clock, with expectation of life; but it is actually about the machinations of death. "At ten o'clock the house began to die." This sophisticated product of technology is attacked, ironically, by fire, man's first technology, and none of the scurrying water rats, mechanical rain, blind robot faces with faucet mouths, or frothing snakes can help it save itself. Before it crashes into oblivion like the House of Usher, Bradbury paints a raging scene of technology madly out of control (***Chronicles,*** 171). This scene is so vivid, so tragic, so comic that it smacks of the final exorcism of the demonbeast technology in ***The Martian Chronicles.*** Like **"The Million-Year Picnic,"** this story about a last machine ends with a meaningless ritual. As the new day dawns, a "last voice," needle stuck, destined to become further and further out of sync with nature, repeats the date over and over again, endlessly. There can be no hope of life here. Mechanical time stands still while the eternal rhythm of nature moves on. If there is to be regeneration, it must be through the eternal-life principle of nature, a force technology has not been able to maim.

"The Million-Year Picnic" concerns another expedition to Mars. This time, though, it is as an escape from Earth, not as an extension of it. A former state governor secretly takes his family to Mars, "to start over. Enough to turn away from all that back on Earth and strike out on a new line--" (***Chronicles,*** 180). In order to consecrate his dedication to a new start on Mars, Dad destroys their transportation back to Earth and then deliberately burns a collection of documents symbolizing their way of life there. Though the children are told that the trip is a vacation--a game, a picnic--the tone of the story is somber, muted, primarily because the narrative stays close to the adolescent Timothy who can't quite understand his parents' actions. Thus Timothy's efforts to distinguish illusion from reality, to "lift the veil" his parents wear, establishes Mars as a strange, odd, puzzling place--it is different.

One key to the story is the children. Mars will be given to children who are still capable of wonder: "They stood there, King of the Hill, Top of the Heap, Ruler of All They Surveyed, Unimpeachable Monarchs and Presidents, trying to understand what it meant to own a world and how big a world really was" (***Chronicles,*** 179). The tone is optimistic yet tentative. If the Edwards' rocket succeeds, and if the human ritual here of telling the children every day how Earth "proved itself wrong and strangled itself with its own hands" succeeds, there is hope for a new start. A second key is nature. Nature is not an antagonist to be conquered, as in **"Rocket Summer,"** but a beneficial force to be sought. Dad's face looks like a fallen Martian city, Mom's eyes have the color of deep cool canal water, Robert's hand is a small crab jumping in the violet water, Timothy's hand is a young tarantula, Mike's face is like an ancient Martian stone image. They all whisper--like Spender--in the dead cities. They are all attracted to a town with a life-giving fountain. And climactically, they all receive their new identity as Martians from the rippling water of the canal. Nature, and the Martian culture that is based on it, are accepted without reservation. "This time earthmen may keep enough of the childlike wonder," says John Hollow, "this time earthmen may confront Mars and therefore reality on its own terms, seeing themselves as Martians rather than as transplanted earthlings; this time they may learn from the ancient Martians to enjoy existence as a million-year picnic, a camping out in the universe man will never own, an existence with a limit just as individual lives have limits, and yet still a feast, a meal, something to live on."

Unless we pay close attention to the sermons of Spender and the symbolism of **"The Million-Year Picnic,"** it is easy to feel that in ***The Martian Chronicles,*** Bradbury is against space travel per se. Nothing could be further from the truth. Over and over again in his personal statements, Bradbury has stressed that space is our destiny. Speaking as Jules Verne in an imaginary interview, Bradbury says that the function of the writer is to push the wilderness back. "We do not like this wilderness, this material universe with its own unfathomable laws which ignore our twitchings. Man will only breathe easily when he has climbed the tallest Everest of all: Space. Not because it is there, no, no, but because he must survive and survival means man's populating all the worlds of all the suns." There is only one thing that can stop this journey--the wilderness in

man himself: "Man's other half, yes, the hairy mammoth, the sabre-tooth, the blind spider fiddling in the venomous dark, dreaming mushroom-cloud dreams."[16]

The mushroom-cloud dreams are significant. The threat of atomic war, kept in the background and off stage in ***The Martian Chronicles,*** is more on Bradbury's mind than it might appear. "Today we stand on the rim of Space," he says; "man, in his immense tidal motion is about to flow out toward far new worlds, but man must conquer the seed of his own self-destruction. Man is half-idealist, half-destroyer, and the real and terrible thing is that he can still destroy himself before reaching the stars."[17] Perhaps, he suggests, a book for his time would be one "about man's ability to be quicker than his wars." "Sometimes there is no solution, save flight, from annihilation. When reason turns murderously unreasonable, Man has always run ... If but one Adam and Eve reach Mars while the entire stagecraft of Earth burns to a fine cinder, history will have been justified, Mind will be preserved, Life continued."[18]

Bradbury, then, comes not "to celebrate the defeat of man by matter, but to proclaim his high destiny and urge him on to it." The rocket is the conqueror of Death, the "shatterer of the scythe." The proper study of God is space.[19] Bradbury--like Jonathan Edwards, for example--is truly a moralist. Edwards said that if you believe in the certainty of a hell, it makes good sense to scare people away from it. ***The Martian Chronicles*** is Bradbury's hellfire-and-brimstone sermon.

Notes

[1]Fadiman's "Prefatory Note" to the Bantam edition of *The Martian Chronicles* has been dropped from recent printings.

[2]Richard Donovan, "Morals from Mars," *The Reporter,* 26 June 1951, pp. 38-40.

[3]*The Martian Chronicles,* pp. 54, 179-80. All page references are to the Bantam paperback edition first printed in 1951.

[4]See William F. Nolan, *The Ray Bradbury Companion,* Detroit: Gale Research, 1975, pp. 57, 189-94.

[5]Fletcher Pratt, "Beyond Stars, Atoms, & Hell," *Saturday Review of Literature,* 17 June 1950, pp. 32-33.

[6]Robert Reilly, "The Artistry of Ray Bradbury," *Extrapolation,* 13 (1971), 64-74; Juliet Grimsley, "*The Martian Chronicles:* A Provocative Study," *English Journal,* 61 (1972), 1,309-14.

[7]Willis E. McNelly, "Ray Bradbury--Past, Present, and Future," in *Voices for the Future: Essays on Major Science Fiction Writers,* ed. Thomas D. Clareson, Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, 1976. See also the first chapter in this book.

[8]David Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old,* Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1974, p. x.

[9]Nolan notes that in 1934, Bradbury was "an audience of one" at the Burns and Allen radio show at Figueroa Street Playhouse. *Bradbury Companion,* p. 45.

[10]A. James Stupple, "The Past, the Future, and Ray Bradbury," in *Voices for the Future.* See also the first chapter in this book.

[11]In the essay cited below, Forrester says that the final scene, though a masterpiece as an isolated tableau, "doesn't satisfy our need for a well-made plot and internal consistency."

[12]Kent Forrester, "The Dangers of Being Earnest: Ray Bradbury and *The Martian Chronicles,*" *Journal of General Education,* 28 (1976), pp. 50-54.

[13]John Hollow, "*The Martian Chronicles* and *The Illustrated Man,*" audio-cassette tape #1306, Everett/Edwards, Inc.

[14]McNelly mentions this, too.

[15]It is interesting that this story first appeared in *Charm* (see Nolan, p. 152).

[16]"Marvels and Miracles--Pass It On!" *New York Times Magazine,* March 20, 1955, pp. 26-27, 56, 58.

[17]Quoted by McNelly.

[18]"Marvels and Miracles."

[19]These ideas are in a *Playboy* article excerpted in "Shaw as Influence, Laughton as Teacher," *Shaw Review,* 16 (1973), pp. 98-99.

Source Citation (MLA 7th Edition)
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"Science fiction is the most important literature in the history of the world, because it's the history of ideas, the history of our civilization birthing itself. ...Science fiction is central to everything we've ever done, and people who make fun of science fiction writers don't know what they're talking about."
-Ray Bradbury

The Martian Chronicles Questions

Bring on the tough stuff - there's not just one right answer.

1. Why Mars? Could the stories have taken place on Venus or Jupiter, or does it have to be Mars? Is Mars a realistic place in the stories? Is it a mix of reality and fantasy?
2. Do you sense any nostalgia for the past in *The Martian Chronicles*? Which do you think Bradbury would say is best: the past, the present, or the future? Why?
3. How does the book's format of interlinked short stories help (or hinder, for that matter) Bradbury's point? How might the book have been different as a traditional novel?
4. At least one critic accuses Bradbury of inserting his opinions into the stories too much. Do you agree? And would it even be possible for a writer *not* to insert his opinions into a story?
5. Why might the publishers have chosen to replace "Way in the Middle of the Air" with "The Wilderness"? How are the stories similar?
6. What exactly is "science fiction" about this book? How important is the science—why, for example, couldn't this book simply be fantasy about an entirely different world?
7. Do the stories seem to change over the course of the book? What's different about the last stories when compared to the first? How does the tone change, if at all?
8. Could Bradbury be called either an optimist or a pessimist? Which label seems to fit him better?

The Martian Chronicles Theme of Change

The Martian Chronicles is about people confronting a new world. But will they change this world or will they themselves change? Throughout the book we see examples of things changing: the rocket changes winter into summer ("Rocket Summer"), Martians change from looking like one thing to looking like another. But then there are also examples of people trying to stop change, like Yll killing off the human explorers just to preserve his unhappy marriage. In *The Martian Chronicles*, change may not be good—but it's definitely unstoppable.

Questions About Change

1. Do humans change in *The Martian Chronicles*, or do they keep making the same mistakes? Is there some quality that everyone who changes shares?
2. How do people change the world? What human endeavors (science, art, philosophy) are particularly useful for changing the world?
3. How do Earth and Mars change for the better in this book? What causes these changes?

The Martian Chronicles Theme of Art and Culture

You can live without art, sure—but would you want to? *The Martian Chronicles* makes a strong case that life without art and culture is pretty meaningless. Several characters we like (Ylla and Spender for instance) seem to have positive feelings toward art, philosophy, and literature, whereas character we don't like (Briggs and Parkhill) see culture primarily as target practice. It's pretty clear where Bradbury comes down on the issue. As Spender argues, science may help preserve life—but art can help us figure out what life is about.

Questions About Art and Culture

1. Besides art and literature, what other forms of culture do we see in *The Martian Chronicles*? What about religion—is that a form of culture in "The Fire Balloons"? What about Driscoll's attempt to plant trees—should that count as culture? (Consider the many meanings of "culture.")
2. In "Usher II," Stendahl makes a passionate defense of literature—both in his lectures to Garrett and in his murder of the censors. Is his defense persuasive? What does he base it on?
3. How does *The Martian Chronicles* convey its feelings on art and culture?

The Martian Chronicles Theme of Identity

Identity in *The Martian Chronicles* is not just a question of masks and playacting, although it's that too. (Stendahl uses robot lookalikes to trick everyone at the party, even though it would seriously be easier just to shoot them all.) It's mostly important, however, because we've got two cultures meeting, trying to communicate, and figuring just what the other is all about. One of the first things they have to communicate is who they are. Think, for instance, of Tomás Gomez and Muhe Ca in "Night Meeting," trading their identities before going on to form a strange sort of friendship.

Questions About Identity

1. How do characters (and places) get identities in this book? For instance, take Timothy in "The Million-Year Picnic." What identity does he have and how did he get it?
2. When is identity mysterious? When do we not hear who is doing something? What about when Spender comes back to shoot Biggs—how long does it take for him to be identified? Are there other times when we don't know who someone is?
3. Other than masks and names, in what ways does identity emerge as a theme in these stories?
4. Is it possible to change one's identity? For instance, Spender calls himself "the last Martian"—but has he really changed? Does identity depend exclusively on history or biology?

The Martian Chronicles Theme of Memory and the Past

There's a reason VH1 keeps running *I Love the 80s* marathons: nostalgia is big business, and *The Martian Chronicles* knows that people love to reminisce about a better, more neon-tastic past. Many characters have childhood memories that affect the story in one way or another. For instance, "The Fire Balloons" is named after Father Peregrine's memory of the Fourth of July, and the Martians use childhood memories to trick members of the Third Expedition. These aren't just coincidences: Bradbury is posing serious questions about whether the past is better than the present and whether the future is going to get better or worse. And nostalgia isn't just a private matter; when societies get nostalgic, do they just end up going backward?

Questions About Memory and the Past

1. Which characters in the book seem most obsessed with the past? Father Peregrine and Captain Black come to mind, but what about the LaFarges, and their memory of their dead son Tom?
2. What is it about the past that seems to be the most memorable and desirable?
3. How do various characters attempt to break past and start over? How are the characters that go to Mars interested in starting over? How does the family in "The Million-Year Picnic" try to break with the past?

4. What examples can we find of childhood memories helping characters? How might such memories be dangerous?

The Martian Chronicles Theme of Isolation

In *The Martian Chronicles*, you can choose your own isolation adventure: you can be totally alone, like Gripp at the beginning of "The Silent Towns;" or you can just *feel* alone, like Spender at the beginning of "—And The Moon Be Still As Bright." Sure, Bradbury shows that crowds and large groups of people can be scary (see the crowd in "The Martian"—or in his short story "The Crowd"). That doesn't mean he's pro-isolation. Being alone is not presented in a positive light in *The Martian Chronicles*, but it can be even worse to be surrounded by people who don't see things the way you do. The lesson here? Befriend a nice group of like-minded people. Okay, Ray, we'll get right on that.

Questions About Isolation

1. What benefits to isolation does *The Martian Chronicles* suggest? Is it worse to be completely alone or to be with people who don't see things the way you do?
2. Who suffers the most from isolation? Does Spender suffer by being isolated from the rest of the crew? Or, given his plan to kill off everyone and live alone forever, does Spender enjoy his isolation? What about Wilder, who is politically isolated?
3. What do the many scenes of isolation in this book share in common? For instance, Gripp and Hathaway are both "the last man on Mars" (they think). What is similar about the way they deal with their isolation? What about the house in "There Will Come Soft Rains"—how does it deal with isolation?

The Martian Chronicles Theme of Home

In *The Martian Chronicles*, home is where the... well, actually, where is it? Home is where one belongs (identity) and where one has a past (memory and the past). None of the settlers ever seem to feel like Mars is home, although presumably the Martians do. But home can also change. Since one of the main plots in the interchapters is the movement of humans looking for a new place to settle, we can say that one of the main motivations in the book is the desire to find a home. But are any of the characters we see at home happy where they are? Is it really possible to return home? And can home—like the automated house—go on without us?

Questions About Home

1. Think about the homes depicted in *The Martian Chronicles*. We see Ylla's unhappy home, Captain Black's deadly fake home, and the abandoned automated home in "There Will Come Soft Rains." What makes these homes unhappy? What examples of happy homes do we see, if any?

opinions of the book? For instance, does Spender's description of Americans hold true for the Americans we see in the book?

2. Do you think this book is an accurate portrayal of the way people felt about the natural world in the 1940s? What about today? What has changed between then and now?
3. How do people attempt to control the environment in this book? Which characters succeed, if any?
4. Are there any positive interactions between humans and the natural world in this book? Any examples of people helping the environment?

Books & Authors
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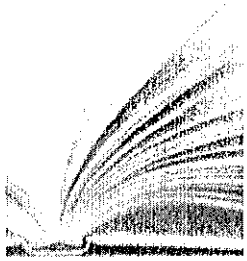
The Martian Chronicles (1950)



about this book

Community Rating ★★★★★

Other

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The Man Who Fell to Earth (1963)

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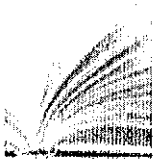


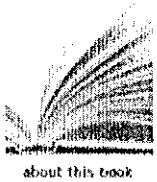
about this book

Golden Witchbreed (1983)

Lynne Christie's job is a hazardous one: envoy of the Earth Dominion to Orthe, a pre-industrial planet

Fourth Planet from the Sun (2005)

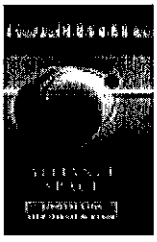
The dozen stories in this volume, previously published in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction



about this book

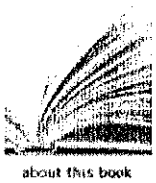
The Girl Who Heard Dragons (1994)

This stunning collection of previously unpublished short fiction illustrates the depth and range of the



Alliance Space (2008)

Alliance Space is a collection of two novellas from author C.J. Cherryh. In "Merchanter's Luck," a space



about this book

The Needle (1950)

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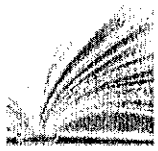
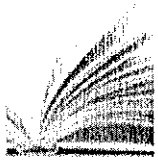
Red Mars (1993) AWARD WINNER

While on the Ares enroute to Mars, the first 100 colonists, scientists and astronauts realize that they



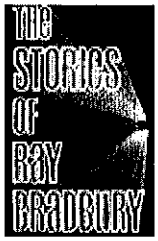
Harm's Way (1993)

Following an encounter with a mysterious stranger who claims to have known her mother, Sophie runs away



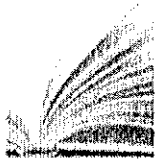
Voyage to the Red Planet (1990)

The United States government goes broke during the Grand Depression and sells off various agencies, with



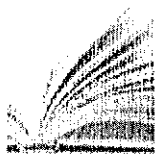
The Stories of Ray Bradbury (1980)

This collection of Ray Bradbury stories contains all 100 of Bradbury's short stories as well as a nine-page



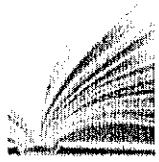
Kirinyaga: A Fable of Utopia (1998)

Disgusted by what has become of Kenya in the modern world, Koriba, an educated man with distinguished



Washed by a Wave of Wind (1993)

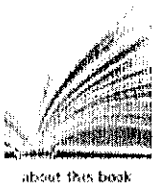
Contains a five-page introduction by the editor, "Toward a Science Fiction From the West"; an 11-page



The Toynbee Convector (1989)

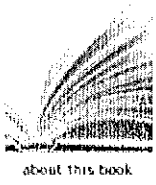
The twenty-three stories contained in this collection originally appeared in such magazines as Omni,

The Season of Passage (1992)



On the second manned mission to Mars, medical officer Lauren Wagner discovers the fate of the astronauts

Endangered Species (1989)



Wolfe's most recent collection contains thirty-four stories, ranging in publication date from 1968 to

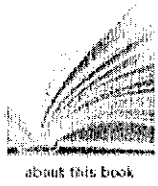
The Illustrated Man (1948)

The Illustrated Man is Ray Bradbury's classic collection of science-fiction short stories. The book

Lake of the Sun (1989) AWARD WINNER

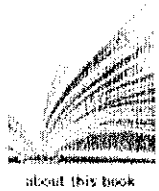
Earthmen exploring Mars are perceived as evil invaders by the native Martians. The possibility of war

Fahrenheit 451 (1953)



The novel is set in a futuristic society that prohibits the reading of books because books stimulate

I Sing the Body Electric! (1969)



Ray Bradbury has been called the greatest science fiction writer ever. His stories are written in a clean

Ender's Game - Orson Scott Card
Speaker for the Dead - Orson Scott Card