



The Art of Fiction



Bradbury was born in 1920 in Waukegan, Illinois, the son of a lineman for the local power company. As a child, he developed a passion for the books of L. Frank Baum and Edgar Allan Poe and immersed himself in popular culture, from cinema to comic strips to traveling circuses. Because Bradbury's father was often out of work during the twenties and thirties, the family repeatedly moved between Illinois and Tucson, Arizona. His sense of uprootedness and dislocation was compounded by the death of his beloved grandfather when he was five, and his baby sister's death from pneumonia two years later. The experience of great loss appears frequently in his work. By the spring of 1934, lured by the prospects of sunshine and steady employment, the Bradbury family moved to California, where Bradbury has lived ever since. As a teenager, he roller-skated all over Hollywood, collecting autographs and taking photos with stars like Jean Harlow, Marlene Dietrich, and George Burns. After he graduated from Los Angeles High School in 1938, he joined the Los Angeles Science Fiction League, befriending writers Robert Heinlein and Leigh Brackett. In 1940, with the help of Heinlein, he made his first professional sale, to a West Coast literary magazine called *Script*. Bradbury's poor eyesight stopped him from being recruited for the Second World War, and it was during those years that he established himself in the pages of pulp-fiction magazines like *Weird Tales* and *Astounding Science Fiction*. *The Martian Chronicles*, his second book, was embraced by the science-fiction community as well as critics, a rare achievement for the genre. Christopher Isherwood hailed Bradbury as "truly original" and a "very great and unusual talent." Three years later Bradbury published the novel for which

he is best known, Fahrenheit 451. In all, Bradbury has written more than fifty books, including The Illustrated Man, Dandelion Wine, Something Wicked This Way Comes, and his 2009 story collection, We'll Always Have Paris. He has worked often in television and film, writing teleplays for Alfred Hitchcock Presents and the screenplay for John Huston's 1956 adaptation of Moby-Dick. In 1964, he established the Pandemonium Theatre Company, where he started producing his own plays—he is still actively involved with the theater today. He has also published several poetry collections, including When Elephants Last in the Dooryard Bloomed. He has even worked in architecture, contributing to the design of San Diego's Westfield Horton Plaza and the interior of Spaceship Earth at Disney's EPCOT Center. Despite recent setbacks—a stroke in 1999 and the death of Marguerite, his wife of fifty-six years, in 2003—Bradbury has remained extraordinarily active. He continues to write and he remains charming and filled with boyish jubilation. When dining out he regularly orders vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce for dessert. He has just completed a new collection of short stories, tentatively titled “Juggernaut.” He recently told me he still lives by his lifelong credo, “Jump off the cliff and build your wings on the way down.”

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