

Ray Bradbury: Literary Influences

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Ray Bradbury, one of the most revered science-fiction authors, has had many things occur in his life which directly influenced his style of writing. In addition to influencing his style, these events also affected the content and theme of his individual works. Putting all of this aside, however, if these specific events did not occur in Bradbury's life, he would not have become a science-fiction writer.

Throughout his childhood, Bradbury was exposed to many types of literature. While living in Waukegan, Illinois at the age of six, Bradbury's Aunt read him the Oz books. Also at this early age, Bradbury was encouraged to read the classic Norse, Roman, and Greek myths (Johnson 1). "When he grew old enough to choose his own reading material, the boy rapidly developed a fondness for the stories of Edgar Rice Burroughs and the comic book heroes Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers, and Prince Valiant." (Johnson 1). It was these comic book heroes who fueled Bradbury's fondness for science fiction. After moving to Tucson, Arizona Bradbury got a job at a local radio station because of his experience in Waukegan as an amateur magician. "'I was on the radio every Saturday night reading comic book strips to the kiddies and being paid in free movie tickets, to local cinema, where I saw 'The Mummy,' 'The Murders in the Wax Museum,' 'Dracula' ...and 'King Kong.'" (Johnson 2). In reference to his one year in Tucson Arizona, Bradbury recalls "'It was one of the greatest years of my life because I was acting and singing in operettas and writing, beginning to write my first short stories.'" (Johnson 2). After graduating from high school, Bradbury bought a typewriter and rented an office with the money saved from selling newspapers. While in his early twenties, Bradbury sold one science-fiction short stories every month for four years. He was paid \$20 for each story. "Bradbury sold some of his first stories in 1945 to magazines such as Collier's, Charm, and Mademoiselle." (Kunitz and Haycraft 111,112).

Ray Bradbury had a number of literary influences. "At its best, Bradbury's prose combines influences from a wide variety of writers, as well as other media-films, radio, and theater." (Mogen 27). "Indeed, when he first set up business as a writer, Bradbury spent several years in what he calls his 'imitative

period,' sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously adopting the tone and manner of writers he admired." (Mogen 27). After tapping into his own life experiences for subject matter and theme, Bradbury discovered his own literary voice. Bradbury feels this process began in 1942 when he wrote "The Lake," a story based on memories of childhood sweetheart (Mogen 27).

This personal memory is raw stuff of writers. This is the stuff you go to, if you want to write original weird stories. We're told all this stuff, you know, to go to the literature of Poe, to go to Hawthorne. This is all nonsense. These people dug their own symbols, their own needs, and their own terrors out of themselves, and got it on paper. They didn't get it from anyone else. When I made that magical discovery, then I began to write original weird stories (Mogen 27).

"Though his 'magical discovery' was that his own experience, especially his childhood in Waukegan, was a rich source of artistic material, Bradbury has paid tribute throughout his career to those artists and art forms that have most strongly influenced him." (Mogen 28).

When he was eighteen, Bradbury read a book called *Becoming a Writer*, by Dorothea Brande. "Bradbury recalls that *Becoming a Writer* 'helped change my life,' a tribute that suggests the profound impact of a book that helped him direct his energies both as a writer and as a reader." (Mogen 28). This book aided Bradbury in developing an original style and also helped him maintain disciplined and structured work habits (Mogen 28).

She deals with the subconscious and she tells you how prepare yourself. It's got to be a ritual, like being a monk. There are some good suggestions. She said that at night when you go bed you should put a piece of paper in the typewriter so your subconscious knows the paper is there. Then put a couple of nouns down on the paper, so they're laying there during the night. Then you get up to go right to the typewriter-no phone calls, no newspaper, no breakfast, nothing-and sit down and start typing whatever comes into your head. It doesn't have to make any sense. And out of all of this madness suddenly a line will come. Maybe you'll write a poem. Or just make a list of nouns: the night... the lake... the attic... the cellar, the wine, the frog.... Then you say to yourself, "Okay, I've got all these nouns. What do they mean?" (Mogen 29).

Two things commonly found in Bradbury stories are magic and monsters. Magic influenced Bradbury very much. "...in 1931 when, during a performance in Waukegan, the great magician Blackstone presented eleven-year-old Bradbury with a live rabbit." (Johnson 13). This theatrical magic is often found in Bradbury's works. "Bradbury's monsters come in many shapes and sizes. Interestingly, his monster that resemble the lizard or snakelike fairy tale dragons are his most sympathetic." (Johnson 33,34)." Bradbury's use of monsters can traced back to the motion picture "King Kong." "The love Bradbury has for 'King Kong'-which he claims to have seen forty-three times in forty-two years-probably arises, at least in part, from the qualities the film shared with its own best work: technical finesse, a tightly organized structure, intense evocation of mood, and an enthusiastic celebration of primitive emotions." (Johnson 34).

Each and every event in Bradbury's life played an important role in formation of this science-fiction author. At the age of 75, it is Bradbury's turn to influence the young generation. In addition to having several of his works in high school textbooks, Bradbury recently released "The Martian Chronicles" on CD-ROM ("Sci-Fi for you D: Drive" 89).

Works Cited

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