

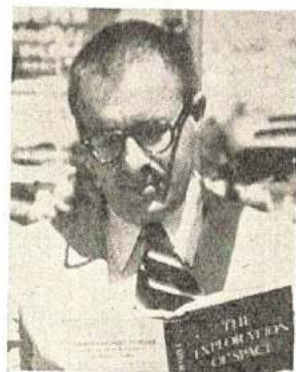
About Ray Bradbury

By Arthur C. Clarke

(Chairman of the British Interplanetary Society and who also heads the Club's Editorial Committee)

NOBODY seems to like Ray Bradbury: he's either loved or hated. Even his most violent critics admit that he's got something, though they may want no part of it. His impact on modern science fiction has been tremendous, and indeed probably unequalled since the far-off days of Stanley Weinbaum. Yet the extraordinary thing is that, on almost any reasonable definition, Bradbury does not write science fiction at all.

Apart from his pure fantasies and horror stories, most of Bradbury's tales concern a planet called "Mars". But that is merely a label. Bradbury's "Mars" has an atmosphere we can breathe, which the real Mars hasn't. It has Earth-like people. Indeed, in one story the first human explorers encounter, through a literary *tour-de-force*



RAY BRADBURY

outstanding even for Bradbury, the towns and even the relatives they'd left behind on Earth. How does the man carry it off—as he undoubtedly does?

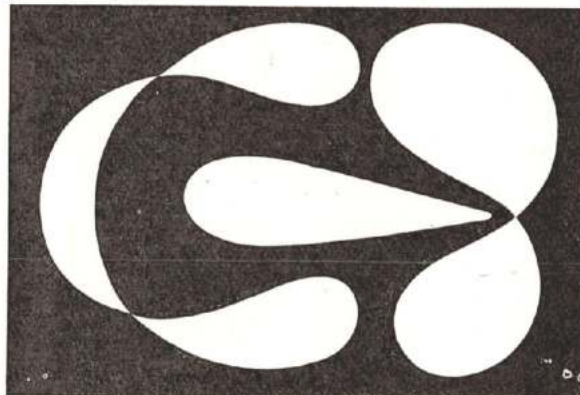
Isaac Asimov, in *Modern Science Fiction*, has analysed this phenomenon, which is so exasperating to those writers who make a fetish of scientific accuracy. "In my opinion," he writes, "Bradbury gets away with it because he does not really write science fiction. He is a writer of social fiction. His Mars is but the mirror held up to Earth. His stories do not depict possible futures: they are warnings and moral lessons aimed at the present."

This is true enough, as far as it goes; but it is quite insufficient to account for Bradbury's prestige and popularity. For he holds the mirror not only up to Earth, but to Everyman, and for that reason his stories have an emotional

impact probably unequalled by any other contemporary writer in this field.

Discussing Bradbury in the book mentioned above, Sprague de Camp has remarked that fictional characters often "represent a complex of ideas or sentiments somewhere in the writer's mind: something that the writer is, or was, or would like to be, or is afraid of being". And that is one reason why these characters often appeal to readers, since the readers, too, carry round such complexes.

But enough of theory. Seeing how it's done will not add to one's enjoyment of the stories. All that matters is that Bradbury is a poet and that he writes from the heart—and that the best of his stories will still be enjoyed when the real Mars is just another name on the Space Port Departure Board. . . .



C W B

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