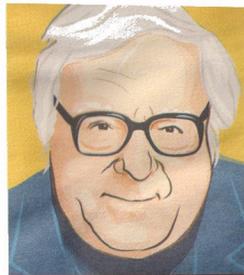


FICTION
IN THIS WEEK'S BOOKLET

Space

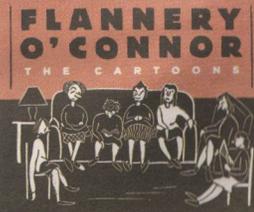
BY KEVIN MOFFETT



We'll never tire
of Ray Bradbury
Sam Weller remembers

THE JOURNAL

PRINTERS



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2012

The comic talent of Flannery O'Connor

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Ray of hope

Bradbury biographer shares the story of their first encounter

BY SAM WELLER

Twelve years ago I rang the doorbell to Ray Bradbury's West Los Angeles home. I was there to interview him for a profile I was writing for the Chicago Tribune Sunday Magazine. The Illinois-born author was on the cusp of turning 80, and it seemed a fitting time to reflect upon his career. As I stood there on that fine California day, waiting for someone to answer the door, Eucalyptus trees rustling in the breeze, I looked down to my feet. I was standing on a doormat screen-printed with images of jack-o'-lanterns. No surprise from the man who penned the autumnal gothic classic, "Something Wicked This Way Comes."

My journey to that point seemed like it had, in some ways, taken light years. My journey since that May afternoon in 2000 has been unexpected, even mind-boggling. In my quiet moments, I still wonder how it all happened.

Travel back in time: My father had read Bradbury aloud to my mother when I was nine months in utero.

When I was 11, I picked up the very same book I had encountered in the womb and read it for myself. It was a magnificently worn paperback copy of "The Illustrated Man." I read it late at night (a good time to read Bradbury), and I was soon enraptured by the sheer imagination of it all; by the melodious prose; by the pure humanity of the stories themselves. While Bradbury has so often been labeled a genre writer, I soon understood that his work couldn't be easily categorized. Since then, I have come to assert that Bradbury is one of those rare gateway authors, a writer who often uses genre as subterfuge to examine what could be deemed literary themes. One thing I learned in that first visit with him in May 2000, the man gave up reading genre and pulp fiction when he was in his late teens. Instead, he studied closely the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, Eudora

Welty, Willa Cather and others.

And so there I stood, waiting for the front door of the Bradbury home to open. I didn't know what to expect. My perception of Bradbury was gleaned from televised and print interviews, from his own television show, "The Ray Bradbury Theater," and from dust-jacket photos that depicted a warm, avuncular man who projected hope and enthusiasm, compassion and love. Ray Bradbury loved the idea of living. That much I knew.

A longtime maid answered the door and ushered me into the house, and the first thing to take my attention, just to the left, on the wall in the foyer, was a large oil painting. It was the original artwork of "The Illustrated Man" cover, the very book I encountered before I was born.

"Good afternoon!" boomed a voice. I looked to my right, down a few steps into a large formal living room. There, seated upon a white floral sofa, was Ray Bradbury. Numerous oversized stuffed animals were propped on the furniture all around him. He had lost over 60 pounds and was frail. Prior to our initial encounter, he had battled back from a severe stroke just seven months earlier. But all the iconic authorial visages were intact: the thick black-framed glasses, the full head of powder white hair, white tennis shorts, a starched Oxford and a tie covered with images of whales (Bradbury adapted "Moby-Dick" to the screen in 1956 for film director John Huston).

We shook hands, I took out my reporter's notebook and a tape recorder, and we spent the better part of the day in conversation. We ranged over his early days growing up in Waukegan; his move to Hollywood at the age of 13 in the middle of the golden era of cinema; his first forays into writing and publishing; and, later, the creation of his many novels and short

story collections, among them "Fahrenheit 451," "The Martian Chronicles," "Dandelion Wine," "The Halloween Tree," and so many more. We also discussed his work in film, television, radio, architecture and beyond.

Having spent a lifetime familiarizing myself with the man and his work, I knew well his mind-blowing curriculum vitae, and we ranged over it all that day. I met his wife, Marguerite, that afternoon, too. She was sipping a deep glass of Merlot, smoking a cigarette, reading a biography of Marcel Proust -- in French.

For whatever reason, Ray Bradbury and I hit it off. Certainly, I had come into the man's life in a moment of physical vulnerability. But my familiarity with his writing helped. We also shared Midwest roots. And he often told me in the years that followed that he saw in me his own youthful enthusiasm and zest for ideas. "My twin! My twin!" he regularly said to me, reciting the words his friend, filmmaker Federico Fellini, had once said to him.

That first interview was far ranging and, for me, inspirational. I learned that Bradbury's secret was that he was a philosopher who used poetic language and fantastic premises to examine the human condition. What if a near future society just stops reading books? What happens if that day finally comes and humankind colonizes another world, only to bring with us our same old timeless flaws? What happens to a 12-year-old child when he or she first realizes they are mortal and one day will die?

At the nucleus of all Bradbury is a philosophical question asking to be held to the light and turned gently in the hand.

Weeks later, he read my Tribune magazine cover story. He called me at one in the morning, as he often did, to tell me that he loved it.

And I was going to leave it at that. We had fostered a sort of father-son relationship, and I was perplexed and overjoyed at this unexpected outcome from a newspaper assignment. But he asked me to visit him again. He asked me to write more.

"I get more publicity," he laughed, "and we get to see each other."

And it was at this point that I had a grander notion. A book. A biography. I knew full well in my time spent reading his work that there was no single book that encapsulated his life between two covers. I approached him about this and he was initially reticent.

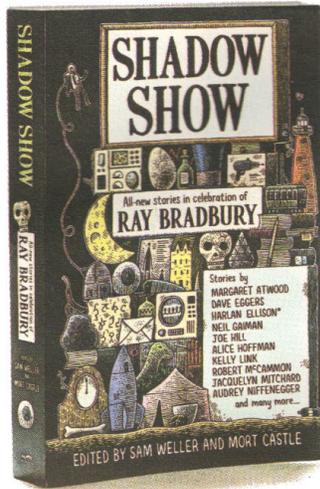
"Biography means you're dead," he said. "Call me in 30 or 35 years and we can begin working on it!"

But less than half a year later, he came around. I had gone to visit him, and he turned to me at lunch one day and asked me to write his biography.

And now, 12 years and three books later, I am more intrigued by Ray Bradbury's life and career than ever. I teach the only college life class in the country on his career and works, at Columbia College Chicago. Throughout the day, the life lessons he taught me emerge in myriad ways. I never tire of studying and thinking about his life.

Our life began that day in May 2000, for the Chicago Tribune Sunday Magazine. It was an assignment that has gone on and will go on for the rest of my life. Ray Bradbury finally left us, and me, on June 5, and I still haven't wrapped my head around it. This man who has simply always been there, writing professionally since 1941, is gone. This man who welcomed me into his galaxy and embraced me and let me share his story with the world is no longer here in physical form. Yet now, as I teach and travel the country speaking about him, and as I continue to write about him, I have truly but one goal. If through enthusiastically sharing his story, one middle school child opens up a Ray Bradbury book and falls in love with reading, I have done my job.

Sam Welter is the author of "The Bradbury Chronicles."



**Shadow Show:
All New Stories
in Celebration
of Ray Bradbury**
Edited by Sam Weller
and Mort Castle,
William Morrow
Paperbacks, 464
pages, \$15.99

Authors pay tribute to Bradbury

BY MEREDITH MARAN

When Ray Bradbury died on June 5 at age 91, he left a legacy even larger than an oeuvre encompassing 11 novels and 600 short stories. He also left a readership deeply divided about the quality and nature of his work. On the occasion of Bradbury's death, President Barack Obama positioned himself firmly as a fan, praising Bradbury's "gift for storytelling" that "reshaped our culture and expanded our world." Renowned short story writer Damon Knight, on the other hand, called the author of "Fahrenheit 451" and several other sci-fi classics "mediocre."

Bradbury denounced his critics and their categorization. "I don't write science fiction," he told an interviewer in 1999. "I've only done one science fiction book and that's 'Fahrenheit 451,' based on reality. Science fiction is a depiction of the real. Fantasy is a depiction of the unreal."

Question his gift, question his genre, but dare not deny that Bradbury is an American cultural icon. How many authors have a moon crater named after a novel they wrote, a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, stories published in both *Weird Tales* and *The New Yorker*, and literary prizes including a Pulitzer citation and the National Medal of Arts?

In their introduction to "Shadow Show: All-New Stories in Celebration of Ray Bradbury," editors Sam Weller and Mort Castle cite Bradbury's "looming shadow and lasting artistic impact" as their rationale for having invited 26 writers — some household names, many not — "who have been profoundly influenced by him" to "pen their own short stories in homage, stories that through image, theme or concept are ... Bradbury-informed." If that seems a convoluted, strained conceit for a collection, you're not alone there, either. Still, "Shadow Show" is a delightful if disconnected read, as surprising a sampler as a tasting menu drawn from every upscale and fast-food restaurant in town.

A few highlights:

Margaret Atwood's "Headlife" features Quentin, a bitter, greedy man who orders "everything on the list" at a youth-restoring clinic, only to suffer unexpected and cruel post-surgical consequences. In Dan Chaon's horrifying, entrancing "Little America," "Peter lies on

the bed, facedown, and Mr. Breeze binds his hands behind his back with a plastic tie. 'Is this too tight?' Mr. Breeze says, just as he does every time, very concerned and courteous." Alice Hoffman's piece, "Conjure," revisits a classic Bradbury theme, detailing the destruction of a best-friendship between two adolescent girls when a mysterious stranger comes to town. Jacqueline Mitchard writes "Two of a Kind" in the voice of a man named Jan, keeping a defining trauma secret from his adored wife. "Joanie is a happy woman, with a sunny heart. A heart with no shadows. That's why I never told her about it."

The most delicious bites proffered by this praise-platter are not to be found in the writers' stories themselves, but in the moving personal mini-essays that follow. "I read Ray Bradbury as a teenager, and those stories really sank in," Atwood writes. When Chaon declares, "Ray Bradbury changed my life," he's not hyperbolizing. In seventh grade, Chaon began writing stories and sending them to Bradbury — who answered each one with encouraging critiques. Hoffman, the magical realist, thanks Bradbury: "Due to his work, magic is no longer corralled into genre writing." Like Chaon, Mitchard describes "a correspondence and a friendship that has lasted thirty years, and quite a number of letters."

It is in these epilogues that the breadth and depth of Bradbury's influence is felt most keenly, and this anthology's raison d'être is best understood.

Meredith Maran is the author of 10 nonfiction books and a new novel, "A Theory of Small Earthquakes."