

# Editor's Introduction: Space/Race

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This issue of *The New Ray Bradbury Review* contains several articles themed around space travel, space programs and other types of space. And although it wasn't particularly planned this way, we also have at least one emergent theme, that of race.

Bradbury's early fiction included much science fiction, of which a fair proportion explores space and rockets. But unlike contemporaries such as Asimov, Clarke and Heinlein, Bradbury was never interested in the real nuts and bolts of how rocket ships might work. Instead he focused on the human element. If—as he firmly believed—the destiny of our species was to move out to the stars, pursuing what others might dub “the final frontier”, what would provide individuals with the motivation to fulfill this? What in our nature might prevent us in this pursuit? What would the pursuit do to us? How would we live with the severe risks and hazards of spaceflight? What would be the consequence for those we bring along, or for those we leave behind? What would be the consequence for those who currently inhabit the planets we intend to colonize?

While Bradbury's writing career rapidly moved on from space-based fiction, so that by 1960 he had all but given up writing new science fiction, the excitement of the real-life space race brought him to the fore as a popularizer of (or evangelist for) space exploration. The 1960s saw him appearing on national and international television as a proponent of space, and writing essays for popular magazines exploring the joys and perils of voyaging to the Moon and beyond. The 1970s and 1980s saw him publicly celebrating the soaring ambition of space travel with poems such “If Only We Had Taller Been”<sup>1</sup>—and lamenting America's post-Apollo loss of ambition with the pained “Abandon in Place.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bradbury performed “If Only We Had Taller Been” on many occasions. The most celebrated performance is from the 1971 *Mars and the Mind of Man* symposium, available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBtZjbTDTdk&t=140s>

<sup>2</sup> Ray Bradbury, “Abandon in Place”, in Roland Miller, *Abandoned in Place: Preserving America's Space History* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2016), viii-ix.

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## THE NEW RAY BRADBURY REVIEW

In this issue of the *Bradbury Review*, Roger Terry provides more context for Ray Bradbury's fictional spaces by recounting some of those *non-fictional* and biographical connections between Bradbury and the real-life space program.

Following this, John Gillespie takes one of Ray Bradbury's simplest short stories, "The Rocket Man", and shows how its unnamed title character is archetypal. The story is shown to be a (possibly unconscious) retelling of Tennyson's "Ulysses", as well as being intertwined with popular culture of the twentieth-century and beyond.

Devika Yadav further explores Bradbury's use of outer space as well as other spaces in *The Illustrated Man* (1951). Despite that collection's framing story set in rural Wisconsin, and its mixed contents ranging from science fiction to outright fantasy, it famously includes a number of Bradbury's most memorable and influential space stories, such as the aforementioned "Rocket Man", "The Rocket" and "Kaleidoscope".

Paul Donatich, who has written previously for *NRBR*, makes a welcome return to investigate ways in which Bradbury's body of work incorporates African American characters. As well as considering the main stories that deal with race ("Way in the Middle of the Air" from *The Martian Chronicles* and "The Big Black and White Game" from *Golden Apples of the Sun* being the two which loom large), his essay also weaves in the character of Blind Henry from *Death is a Lonely Business*, a number of Bradbury fragments originally published in this very journal, and the by now near-mythic "Mister Electrico". Inevitably, this essay includes some outdated racial words and phrases, but Donatich is careful to contextualise these.

Another regular of *NRBR* is Jeffrey Kahan, who extends the discussion of race in "Way in the Middle of the Air" to bring in its counterpart "The Other Foot" and—more surprisingly—"The Garbage Collector", a story he shows to have strong racial connotations. Kahan contrasts the young Bradbury's actively *anti-racist* fictions with some of the elder Bradbury's more contentious non-fiction statements on racial matters.

Christian Wilken then takes us to Bradbury's "ravine", that strip of wilderness which divides the fictional Green Town, Illinois, in *Dandelion Wine*, *The Halloween Tree* and other works. Using perspectives from Object-Oriented Ontology and New Materialism, Wilken shows Bradbury's Illinois stories to have commonality with other literature involving children, but also reveals a unique aspect in their existential explorations.

As usual with *The New Ray Bradbury Review*, we have in this issue an eclectic mix of celebration and exploration of Bradbury's life and works, with some surprisingly topical subjects under discussion, ranging from race to space billionaires.