

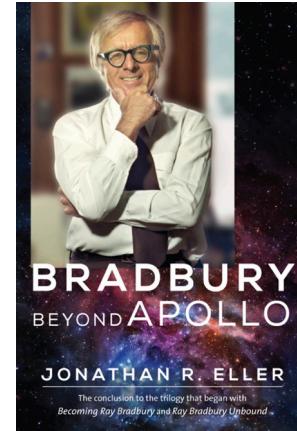
### *Bradbury Beyond Apollo*, by Jonathan R. Eller



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Jonathan R. Eller. *Bradbury Beyond Apollo*. U of Illinois P, 2020. Hardcover. 376 pg. \$34.95. ISBN 9780252043413. eBook ISBN 9780252052293.

Jonathan R. Eller's *Bradbury Beyond Apollo* completes a biographical trilogy begun a decade ago. The 2011 *Becoming Ray Bradbury* took us through the early 1950s, and the 2014 *Ray Bradbury Unbound* actually does touch upon the Apollo era and even Bradbury's 2012 death, but it is the 2020 *Bradbury Beyond Apollo* that truly delves into Ray Bradbury's work and life from the 1960s to the end. The tale is a wide-ranging and sometimes a frustrating and even sad one, told in detail with authority and with compassion and yet also with a true scholar's evaluation and critical judgment. As with Eller's previous two installments, the approach here falls somewhere between, say, that of the more theoretical and bibliographically encyclopedic 2004 *Ray Bradbury: The Life of Fiction* by Eller and William F. Toupance and that of a more popularly oriented biography such as Sam Weller's 2005 *The Bradbury Chronicles: The Life of Ray Bradbury*.



The book is divided into five sections, each of which comprises easily approachable chapters generally between five to ten pages each. Part I, "The Inherited Wish," covers the period of the late 1960s through the late 1970s, from Bradbury's awe and joy at NASA's crewed lunar landings through the Viking I robotic mission to Mars and the publication of *Long After Midnight*. "Beyond Eden" runs from 1977 through the mid-1980s, including Bradbury's deepening friendship with Federico Fellini and his work on Disney's EPCOT. Part III, "1984 Will Not Arrive," discusses the period of the early 1980s through the early 1990s, in which Bradbury spent a great deal of effort on, among other projects, often-abortive film work, *Death Is a Lonely Business*, and cable television's *The Ray Bradbury Theater*. "Graveyard for Lunatics" covers 1990 through the late '90s, with projects such as the sequel to Bradbury's previous mystery novel and *Green Shadows, White Whale* (1992), and ever more effort for non-print media, along with further NASA honors. "Closing the Book," the last section, takes us from the late 1990s until Bradbury's death in 2012, including further awards and honors, the author's final novels, and ever more story collections as well.

No one can deny the wide-ranging creativity of Ray Bradbury's efforts in many different genres across seventy-odd years. Certainly Bradbury's name looms huge, not just in the fantasy

and science fiction genres but in broader culture as well. Sought out by NASA “as a validating witness and celebrant—and also perhaps as a talisman”—during “key moments of exploration” (9), reprinted in his own “perennially popular collections” (104) and in school textbooks as well, and lauded with honors from awards for his writing to the naming of sites on the Moon (7) and Mars (1) and even of an asteroid (218), the difficult-to-pigeonhole Bradbury is remembered widely in a way that most other contemporary SF and fantasy greats are not. Three volumes of biography indeed may be necessary. And, Eller reminds us, this volume, like the previous two, covers not only familiar events of Bradbury’s life and career but also “a number of adventures that the public knows little about; yet these were things that he cared a great deal about, whether they succeeded in grand fashion or failed to reach the public eye at all” (2-3).

It is this unevenness of Bradbury’s output and the changes in trajectory of his creativity—a “story...so complex and so full of unrelenting (and sometimes uneven) creativity” (2), as Eller puts it—in the second half of his life that are perhaps the most eye-opening here. On the one hand, despite certain “significant” (3) and “enduring works” (308) appearing in these later decades, “the stories and fables that define Ray Bradbury’s twenty-first-century legacy were almost all written during the first two decades of his seventy-year career” (3). On the other hand, “Bradbury’s pace of writing never slowed, but most of his time at the typewriter was devoted to new adaptations of his stories for stage, television, and film. Newer versions of older adaptations inevitably involved a great deal of new writing as well” (41). Even pieces released brand-new to the public, though, nevertheless still “were often nourished from the safe harbors where he had crafted his earliest stories of fantasy and suspense” (308). Alongside “isolated but significant achievements” of the later part of Bradbury’s career, such as “The Toynbee Convector,” various essays, and *The Ray Bradbury Theater* (309), after all, stand “late-life fulfillments of major prose projects mapped out half a lifetime earlier, such as *From the Dust Returned* [2001], *Farewell Summer* [2006], *Somewhere a Band Is Playing* [2007], and *Leviathan 99* [2013]...” (3).

For any reader or critic of Bradbury’s art, Eller’s investigation is well worthwhile. *Bradbury Beyond Apollo* is impressively comprehensive, covering not only print works but also “the constant parade of lectures, creative consultancies, and adaptations for stage, television, and films that bled off his once broad channel of original short story production” (308), along with personal and business dealings with a host of famous names throughout the United States and Europe as well. And at the same time that Eller through his thoroughgoing and meticulous research can detail with insight and appreciation the various topics like no other, he is no uncritical panegyrist. Whether it is with a judgment of “Bradbury’s sometimes unreasonable ego” (55) or of the fact that the author “was not always the best judge of his own stories” and in later collections often picked personal favorites “that lacked the tight, emotionally powerful plots of his best work” (105), or with an acknowledgement of the “blunt” critiques, to put it mildly, from “various experts” of the Air & Space section of the Smithsonian Institution to Bradbury’s proposal for a planetarium show (109) or of Thomas Disch’s scathing review of *The Stories of Ray Bradbury* (105-106), this text puts Bradbury’s work into perspective rather than on a pedestal.

Bradbury's "true trajectory in the final four decades of his life," we are told, "would be that of a visionary, asked over and over again to tell us why we desire to explore, why we should go to the stars, and what we might become when we get there" (310). For a widely renowned author whose "unusual brand of science fiction—powerfully emotional studies of the human heart and mind mounted on a barely perceptible armature of science and technology—had inspired many scientists, engineers, and astronauts" (9) right along with countless ordinary readers, this was a worthy undertaking. So, too, was the writing of Jonathan R. Eller's *Bradbury Beyond Apollo*.

**Rafeeq O. McGiveron** has published articles, chapters, and reference entries on the works of authors ranging from Robert A. Heinlein and Ray Bradbury and George Orwell to Willa Cather and Truman Capote and Shakespeare. His edited collections include *Critical Insights: Fahrenheit 451* (2013), *Critical Insights: Robert A. Heinlein* (2015), and *Critical Insights: Ray Bradbury* (2017) from Salem Press. His novel, *Student Body*, was released in 2014, and *Tiger Hunts, Thunder Bay, and Treasure Chests: A Memoir of the Path to Fatherhood* was published in 2020.