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Topic: Exploration in Bradbury's *The Illustrated Man*

Slant: Literature

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Declaration

I declare that this assignment is my own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion. The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced, failing which I am willing to accept the necessary disciplinary action(s) to be taken against me.

Student's Signature :

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ben Wei', is placed over a grey rectangular background.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

Bradbury's uniquely lyrical writing style with its heavy use of metaphor has drawn the interest of literary critics examining different aspects of his work. His works, said to straddle the boundaries "between fantasy and science fiction" (Anderson, 1990,

p.12), place normal human beings in extraordinary settings to “use the strange light of an alien world to illuminate the dark regions of human nature” (Mambrol, 2018). Yet, the tossing of humans into unfamiliar environments also allows one of humanity’s core traits to shine as characters explore to seek out more about the world around them. A paper discussing the formation of Bradbury’s distinctive individual style observed that far from shying away from the unknown in the foreign environment, the overwhelming majority of Bradbury’s characters “share the same traits of character, they are inquisitive, they want to discover the world, experience it and see it” (Alekseevna, Victorovich, Song, 2020). This shared inherent curiosity together with a powerful drive to explore the world around them are the traits whose portrayal I would like to discuss.

1.2 Rationale

Technological development is to a large extent motivated by man’s capacity for scientific exploration and curiosity, which lead to the desire for a deeper understanding of how things work and the synthesis of knowledge to create useful products. With advanced technology as one of the defining characteristics of science fiction as a genre, it also makes sense for exploration to feature heavily in science fiction works, for example through motifs like the spaceship, utilised always in science fiction “not for experimental parabolas but for exploration” (James & Mendlesohn, 2012). Exploration as a theme recurs similarly throughout the backdrop of a civilisation with newly developed spacefaring technology: A good many of the stories feature visiting new lands or fantastic interstellar journeys, as well as introspective exploration as characters discover insights about themselves catalysed by the refreshing sights and experiences of the Universe.

Exploration therefore features heavily in *The Illustrated Man* due to the pervasiveness of technology that is motivated by curiosity and, as technology allows for increased accessibility of many aspects of the universe, brings out within characters the innate human desire to explore and know. Human exploration as a theme arises as an inevitable product of the vast new abilities gifted to humanity through new and powerful technologies. With a drive for exploration being a core trait necessarily possessed by many characters within science fiction worlds, it would be of interest to determine how the presentation of this trait can give rise to messages on the value of exploration to humanity as a whole.

1.3 Definition of Terms

Berlyne’s 1966 framework for exploratory behaviour comprises both goal-directed exploratory behaviour where humans engage in activities for the sole purpose of receiving tangible rewards, and novelty-directed behaviour where humans seek “stimulation, regardless of source of content, that offers optimum amounts of novelty, surprising-ness, complexity, change or variety”.

With curiosity being a core motivating factor for exploration, the definition of curiosity will also be kept in mind when identifying exploratory behaviour. Curious behaviour has been described by psychologists as asking large numbers of unprompted questions (Peters, 1978), reading widely and deeply (Schiefele, 1999), making attempts to comprehend how others think, feel and behave (Renner, 2006), willingness to take risks for new experiences (Zuckerman, 1994), and show perseverance on challenging tasks (Sansone & Smith, 2000). Maw and Maw (1964) pull these behaviours together and state that a curious child

1. Reacts positively to new, strange, incongruous, or mysterious elements in the environment by moving toward them, exploring them, or manipulating them
2. Exhibits a need or a desire to know about themselves and their environment
3. Scans their surroundings seeking new experiences
4. Persists in examining and exploring stimuli in order to know more about them (pp.197-198)

1.4 Research Questions

Within *The Illustrated Man*,

1. Are value judgements placed on curiosity and exploration? Do the value judgements change to fit differing contexts in different stories?
2. How does exploration harm or bring benefits to characters displaying exploratory behaviour or the people around them? Do characters in different stories experience different forms of benefit and harm?

1.5 Thesis Statement

Exploration and curiosity within *The Illustrated Man* is portrayed by the range of stories to be both an inherently incredibly joyful and meaningful emotional experience, but can also be taken to unhealthy extents and used as a force for destruction.

1.6 Scope of Research

Multiple editions of *The Illustrated Man* exist; I will be using the American edition with 18 short stories plus the frame story of "The Illustrated Man" as it was the first to be published and therefore also the original, the edition to be nominated for the International Fantasy Award in 1952, as well as the edition that was made into the 1969 film *The Illustrated Man*. Other versions are comparatively undecorated.

1.7 Significance of Research

In some lenses *The Illustrated Man* can be viewed as a dystopia, as the technology used to bring great benefits to mankind in most science fiction novels is here shown to create moral and practical problems on an immense scale. The pervasiveness of technology and the havoc it wreaks are so great that nearly every aspect of the lives of characters is in some way negatively influenced by technology, and characters must use the lessons derived from exploration as a weapon with which to defend their last dregs of humanity from being overwhelmed. With many of Bradbury's other

renowned works such as *Fahrenheit 451* or *The Martian Chronicles* being dystopian, I hope to be able to contribute ideas on how the fundamental human trait of a desire to explore manifests in different forms in a dystopian context. This would be especially poignant given that curiosity and exploratory attitudes are often seen as in direct opposition to the intellectual suppression (MasterClass, 2020) imposed upon citizens by a dystopian state.

1.8 Limitations

The societal and scientific context between Bradbury's publishing of his anthology (1951) and my reading it (2021) differ wildly, most notably in the aspects of scientific development and degree to which the world had been explored. At the time of publishing the polio vaccine had not been discovered, and neither had experimental evidence for the Big Bang theory as a model of the universe's creation. In world exploration, Mount Everest had not been scaled, and it was to be nearly another decade before the first descent to Challenger Deep and two decades before the first man on the Moon. The incredible difference between scientific and discoverial development between our two times can lead to differing interpretations.

Take the example of the healing ray, enthusiastically featured by Bradbury in the short story *The Man*. Modern science determines such a ray to be a scientific impossibility, and the pulp fiction and amateur sci-fi of the past $\frac{3}{4}$ century has overused the healing ray to such a gross extent that it has now become a kitsch cliché of the neophyte author. The featuring of such an item by an established writer such as Bradbury may be interpreted as a critique on convention or as an ironic motif by a modern reader, while Bradbury himself may simply have been projecting his optimism on what was scientifically plausible in his time.

2 Literature Review

2.1 *Biological Perspectives on Curiosity*

With curiosity as one of the core motivating factors for exploration, a brief analysis of curiosity will also be provided here. *The Illustrated Man* seems to align itself with Keller and Voss' (1983) idea of boredom as a possible antithesis to curiosity. Dissatisfaction with currently available stimuli can push a person to seek out new information, more to distract oneself from the boredom at hand than a genuine desire to digest and absorb new knowledge as seen in "The Fire Balloons" where Doug's father is endlessly bored of Earth or in "Marionettes, Inc." where Braling receives insufficient intellectual stimulation from his simpering wife. Alternatively, George Loewenstein's Information Gap Theory (1994) posits that curiosity is just one of many human drive states such as hunger or sexual arousal that motivate specific behaviours to induce satisfaction. In this view, curiosity can also be taken to unhealthy extents similar to vices like gluttony and lust, motivating unhealthy exploration such as exploration as a means of escape from other responsibilities.

Curiosity and the desire to explore as a harmful addiction that damages both oneself and the people around them (most notably the family) features heavily as a theme throughout *The Illustrated Man*.

David Hume (2009) proposed that there was a 'good' variety of curiosity characterised by 'love of knowledge', drawing parallels to William James' identification of a form of curiosity he referred to as "scientific curiosity" or even "metaphysical wonder", defining it as the response of the "philosophic brain .. to an inconsistency or a gap in its knowledge". (p.430) This brand of curiosity, that is motivated solely by the enjoyment derived from learning, is described as "feelings of mystery, of strangeness, and of wonder" (McDougall, 2018), which are all feelings that arise in healthy exploration. Hume also proposed the existence of a 'bad' curiosity exemplified by nosiness, as well as being a busybody in general. The so-called bad variety of curiosity is here characterised by a selfish presumption that one has the right and authority to know certain things when they in fact do not have such rights (such as the paparazzi), causing society to view people with this form of curiosity as nuisances. In this categorisation there is an implicit value judgement of the different forms of curiosity, and it would be of interest to determine whether this value judgement carries over to Bradbury's works. For example, Clarisse from *Fahrenheit 451* believes she has the right to know more about the world around her even after the tyrannical government has revoked these rights, and she is punished for it by being mown down by a speeding car. Even so, far from being nosy, Clarisse is portrayed in the novel as a cheerful, charismatic bastion of pure curiosity.

The existence of a 'bad' variety of exploration can be extrapolated from the above 'bad' curiosity. 'Bad' exploration would refer to when the explorer presumes they are indisputably right to impose their own beliefs on foreign lands and use their own frameworks developed on their home worlds to understand experiences removed from those on which the stubborn explorer's beliefs were made.

2.2 Exploration in Literature

In the absence of the ability to travel, whether to other parts of the world or to entirely inaccessible fantasy universes, literature has long served as a worthy alternative to appease wanderlust. Early literature featured exploration prominently in quest form, where the protagonist embarks on a long journey into unknown lands to accomplish some goal, usually to retrieve an object. The epics of Gilgamesh, the *Odyssey*, the *Ramayana* and *Journey to the West* epitomise ancient attitudes towards exploration where journeying was seen only as a means to an end - although meaning could be found throughout the journey in individual characters' self-discovery through the hardship they experience, the modern concept of the intrepid 'explorer' who seeks out new lands only for the joy of discovery had not yet come into existence. The motivating factor for exploration was limited solely to material benefit (often through conquest), and these attitudes were reflected in ancient literature to portray

exploration primarily as a method to obtain tangible benefit. Yet even in these early times there already existed the concept of forbidden exploration or exploration taken to unhealthy extents such as when Ulysses attempted to sail to Mount Purgatory fueled by “pride and a thirst for knowledge” (Farrell, 1986). Ulysses is here a false pilgrim as his exploration was motivated by pride and greed rather than a healthy “piety and humility” as well as an acknowledgement of his own inferior place compared to the gods. Of course, he is punished for this by having the journey ending in shipwreck and death.

Exploration as a method of exploitation, whether of natural or human resources, only achieved greater recognition in the colonial era. Colonisation as a form of exploration was celebrated in novels like *Robinson Crusoe*, *Treasure Island* and Kipling’s Indian writing like *Kim*. These vast “primal tales from the frontier” (The Guardian, 2014) allowed educated Britons especially to transport themselves away from the grey gloom of their homeland and take part in the firsthand thrill of exploring “the big blank spaces in the map” (Doyle, 1912). Despite the now-unacceptable unquestioning superiority of white Europeans over any other racial group as portrayed in colonial literature, viewing conquest and the seizing of resources as the only form of exploration had now been eroded as readers willingly transported themselves to foreign lands if only to hear about and experience a different form of life, demonstrating the seedlings of a curiosity to see more of the world and exploration as a form of novelty (Kashdan et al., 2004).

Records of British expeditions to the Arctic in the mid-1800s highlight the difficulty of inhibiting explorers’ desire to experience the lands they have reached emotionally rather than logically. Explorers were highly encouraged to record only objective, mathematical data on natural phenomena in the hopes of achieving “neutrality”; Compulsory usage of the scientific table “renders systematic the work of definition, by reinforcing it with the work of classification”. Arctic explorers existed only as data collectors, on a mission to carry out “the mathematization of nature” where the data collected could only be “read, but not pronounced”. (Ricoeur, 1985) In contrast, artistic engagement with an environment “creates or induces a new manner of finding oneself, of feeling oneself living in the world”, allowing explorers to make their return with new self-discoveries and insights into novel ways of seeing the world. While objective observations certainly contribute to greater scientific awareness, a crucial aspect of human development is thus neglected through the suppression of explorers’ natural desire to experience exploration through a sensual instead of scientific lens. It was only upon their return that explorers became free to publish narratives of their journeys. Several, including Hearne's Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean (1795) and Thompson's unfinished Travels - “rise to the level of literature through their success in conveying the author's personality and palpable narrative presence.” (Behrisch, 2003) For example, Hearne's horror as he watches his Indian companions slaughter a camp of

Inuit twists itself into the reader's horror, not purely through recollection of the event itself, but "through the emotional intensity of observing with the explorer's own eyes."

An interesting point to note is that up to a few decades ago, the sea was one of the main motifs in exploration literature, as the "holder of power and mystery" as well as "the Frontier" (Farrell, 1986). This makes sense due to the necessity of making arduous sea voyages before being able to gain access to foreign lands and explore areas far removed from one's own homeland. Only recently in the atomic age did the exploration motif shift to "Space: the final frontier" (Star Trek The Original Series, 1969), causing a massive surge in popularity of science fiction and interstellar exploration as "The magic, the adventure, the stranger" now lay "beyond the shores of the earth's atmosphere". Outer space became the destination for readers "to explore strange new worlds. To seek out new life and new civilizations. To boldly go where no man has gone before!"

Exploration in literature manifests itself through one final way. The power of literature is in its ability to carry the reader along in the journey of the plot. Both the reader and the journeying character undergo self-discovery as the plot progresses, showing the value of literature as a means for introspective exploration that can "spark a person's imagination in such a way that genuinely new and unique ideas can flourish" (Wu, 2018).

Attitudes towards exploration in literature thus consist of a purely materialistic one where exploration is used as a means to obtain resources, as well as one which promotes a more emotional connection with the explored locations and views exploration as a joy in itself. Furthermore, exploration through a physical space can also foster internal exploration as the explorer gains new perspectives on the world.

3 Methodology

Bearing the psychological definitions of exploratory behaviour and curiosity in mind, the anthology was read and a theme map constructed to categorise the manner in which exploration was portrayed among different stories. Not every story contained a plot related to exploration, but a pattern emerged among those that did with some stories showing characters to enjoy exploration as an inherently meaningful activity, while characters in other stories used exploration only as a means to an end such as to avoid confronting one's own inner problems. The stories were thus discussed under the two main opposing ideas of exploration as an end and as a means.

4 Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Exploration as an End

A recurring theme in *The Illustrated Man* is the inherent joy and meaning to be found within exploration. "The Rocket" opens with Bodoni's powerful desire to visit outer

space in a rocket: “Many nights Fiorello Bodoni” “would let his heart soar alone into space, following the rockets,” (p.172) and his family wants to see outer space so badly that they are driven almost mad with desire: Bodoni’s wife’s “eyes were strange. Her voice shook. ‘The meteors, like fish. The universe. The Moon.’” (p.174) Doug in “The Rocket Man” who is too young to ride a rocket goes to lengths to secretly obtain from his astronaut father’s uniform “brilliant motes of meteor dust, comet tail, and loam from far Jupiter glistening like worlds themselves which drew me down the tube a billion miles into space, at terrific accelerations.” (p.64) The descriptions of space here are alien yet beautiful, seeking to characterise space as an object of intense desire. When exploration is finally obtained, characters are also filled with joy: Bodoni’s children walk with “their blood singing, their faces glowing”. (p.181) Bradbury thus drives across multiple stories the point that exploration is a beautiful and highly fulfilling activity.

The counterexample used by Bradbury in “The Last Night of the World” conversely shows that a life devoid of exploration is a meaningless one. This story is unique in the sense that there is minimal plot progression, rather, it is more of a vignette detailing the conversation between a husband and wife as they think about their life on the last night of the world. How the world ends is not made clear, everyone simply knows that the world will cease to exist. Through their conversation it becomes clear that this pair lives absolutely banal lives. The husband “won’t miss a thing except perhaps the change in the weather .. and I might miss sleeping” (p.88), showing how there was so little joy in their lives that there is nothing to look back fondly on. The absence of joy found in death is nothing new to this couple who has never known joy in the first place, causing them to embrace the end without an ounce of regret or sadness - “How can we sit here and talk this way?” To which the wife replies, “Because there’s nothing else to do.” (p.88) The sheer lack of a desire to say last words, to visit someplace or some person for the last time shows how meaningless and devoid of emotion their life is. The couple’s choice to follow their usual nighttime routine on their last night in the world is reflective of their utter failure to step out of their comfort zone at any point in their life, leading to them collecting practically no memorable experiences throughout their life and leading a life completely devoid of meaning.

Exploration is thus portrayed by Bradbury to be an inherently joyful and fulfilling act, with the converse of living in comfort to be meaningless and failing to make proper use of the time we have to live.

4.2 Exploration as a Means

While the above section discusses exploration as fulfilling its own purpose, this section will discuss the use of exploration to gain a tangible benefit.

Exploration is shown to be an unhealthy way to escape one's responsibilities, especially in the family. Braling in "Marionettes, Inc." has two forces in his life pulling him in opposite directions - Braling has "wanted that trip (to Rio, the city of his dreams) all (his) life," (p.155) but is tied down by his overbearing wife whose brand of love is characterised by how she "tore her clothes and rumped her hair and threatened to call the police unless (Braling) married her." (p.150) Exploration for Braling thus serves the purpose of an escape, and he needs this escape so badly he buys a perfect mechanical simulacrum of himself to fool his wife with while he is gone. However he is eventually punished for allowing his desire to explore to make him betray his wife by having the simulacrum turn sentient, fall in love with the wife, and lock him in the basement to enjoy a long and happy life. Braling's desire to explore and his familial responsibilities are both equally valid; Braling is punished more for his irresponsibility in trying to use exploration as a form of escape without taking the proper action to resolve his familial issues. Bradbury may be trying to show here that the explorer's call and the explorer's family are diametrically opposed forces in the explorer's life. This point is brought up again in "The Rocket Man" which features an absent father constantly traveling among the stars. His desire to explore is so powerful that he cannot spend more than a few days on Earth without developing a longing to return to space: "And by the third night maybe Dad'd be out here on the porch until 'way after we were all ready for bed, and then I'd hear Mom call him in, almost like she called me from the street at times. And then I would hear Dad fitting the electric-eye door lock in place, with a sigh. And the next morning at breakfast I'd glance down and see his little black case near his feet as he buttered his toast and Mother slept late." (p.65) Exploration is here portrayed as an antithesis to an explorer's familial commitments. Exploration is still portrayed as something beautiful, as seen in the descriptions of Dad's rocket paraphernalia. His rocket uniform "was glossy black with silver buttons and silver rims to the heels of the black boots, and it looked as if someone had cut the arms and legs and body from a dark nebula, with little faint stars glowing through it. It fit as close as a glove fits to a slender long hand, and it smelled like cool air and metal and space. It smelled of fire and time." (p.66) Bradbury's message here is not to show exploration as a force of evil tearing families apart, but rather to show both the family and the explorer's calling as opposite but equally valid forces.

Apart from avoiding the boredom end of the exploration-immobility spectrum, Bradbury also cautions us to be mindful of relying too much on exploration as a form of escape from problems in the real world. Captain Hart of "The Man" resolves to visit world after world in a wild chase to meet God, and is filled with hate and fatigue on the journey - he shoots the mayor of the unnamed town when he cannot give concrete directions to God's whereabouts, "leaning wearily" over his body and "stagger(ing) with exhaustion" (p.49). Yet, all Hart will ask of God when he finally reaches him is "a little - peace and quiet" because it's been "a long, long time since - since (he) relaxed." (p.50) Captain Hart would in fact be able to find relaxation at any time through introspection and simply not being so hard on himself. However his

obsession with finding God's physical location and artificial prolongation of his journey leads him to become bitter, when, if all he truly wanted was to find spiritual calmness, all he had to do was end his journey and look inwards. The irony of Hart's futile intergalactic chase is cemented by the implication that God is in fact omnipresent. He can only be found through true divine belief and the cultivation of a mindset devoid of hate as well as accepting that human arrogance is useless in searching for him. Captain Hart is here thus relying on continued exploration as a drug of sorts, to pretend to himself that he is working to reach his goal when in fact he is dragging himself further from it owing to the hatred he generates on the way.

4.3 The Meaning of Exploration

The second reason for Hart's exploration in "The Man" being an example of poorly executed exploration is his inability to accept the new viewpoint of the inhabitants of the town. Hart was taught on Earth and through his personal experience to think of God as a single human-like being, made special only by his possession of supernatural powers, and something that can be sought out and found through brute-force combing and searching the galaxy. When confronted by the reality that God is everywhere at once and can only be found through belief and spiritual calmness, Hart fails to change his mindset and continues attempting to deconstruct the new reality with the now outdated, overly rational mental framework of his past. He attempts to discern God's physical appearance, the better to search for him, and breaks down in anger when he is told his eyes are "The color of the sun, the color of the sea, the color of a flower, the color of the mountains, the color of the night." (p.45) Despite the obvious and absolute failure of his scientific framework, Hart refuses to take in new developments and change the way he sees the world, resulting in his becoming even more estranged from the God he searches for. If Hart had simply opened his eyes and accepted that he was wrong; accepted that reality was not as he had thought, he would have achieved his goal.

Compared to the stubborn Hart, "The Fire Balloons" with its charismatic protagonist Father Peregrine is an example of good exploration because it features a shift in the main character's mindset by the end of the story, showing learning and meaning derived from exploration. Father Peregrine arrived on Mars with the genuine desire to spread the gospel and bring salvation to the Martians, but he does not realise that the Martians operate on an entirely different spiritual level as himself and have long transcended sin to exist in a state of perpetual spiritual purity. Far from trying to force the divine framework that he has learned on Earth onto a completely incompatible foreign context, he understands that different civilisations and cultures have different ways of coming to terms with Christ. Father Peregrine's open mindedness and willingness to accept new ideas works in his favour as he comes closer than ever to Christ through his interaction with the spiritually pure Martians. The revelation is enough to make him "like a child, on his knees, tears streaming from his eyes, crying

to himself" (p.85), showing the great value of accepting new ideas found during exploration to meaningfully add to one's personal experience.

5 Conclusion

The crisscrossing themes of *The Illustrated Man* show that while the ideal form of exploration is inherently joyful and meaningful, it can be taken to an addictive extreme that ruins commitments on the ground, especially family. However, keeping an open mind during exploration and understanding the perspective of other beings will allow the explorer to walk away with new ideas and insights of the world.

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