

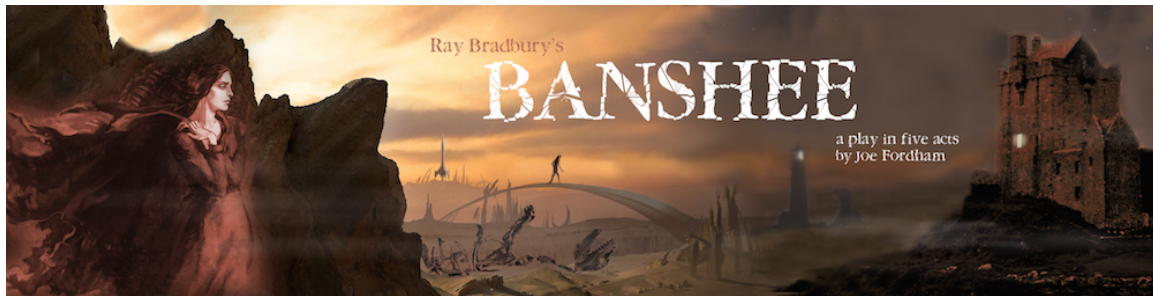
Ray Bradbury's

# BANSHEE



a play in five acts

by Joe Fordham



## Brief Synopsis

A young American screenwriter visits a remote Irish castle where film director John Greyheart has been secluded, adapting a literary classic into his next motion picture. Greyheart bullies his writer, challenging him to recall other stories from his fledgling career. The writer obliges with the tale of a lonely lighthouse keeper and an ancient sea serpent; a story set in a futuristic city patrolled by robotic police cars; a love story set on Mars; and a confessional about a Hollywood monster-maker and a dictatorial producer. The evening culminates when an undead creature beckons from the moors, summoning Greyheart. Based on five stories by Ray Bradbury.

## Playwright Biography

**Joe Fordham** is a writer, journalist and filmmaker. Joe has written and directed award-winning short films for BBC TV and Channel 4 TV, and the 2008 BAFTA/LA short film finalist *The Glitch*. He studied advanced screenwriting under Sy Gomberg at UCLA, and since 2001 has been associate editor at *Cinefex* magazine. He co-authored Titan Books' *Planet of the Apes: Evolution of the Legend*, and can be found online at [flashfilms.us](http://flashfilms.us).

**Ray Bradbury**, American novelist, short story writer, essayist, playwright, screenwriter and poet. Highlights include *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), *The Illustrated Man* (1951), and the screenplay for John Huston's *Moby Dick* (1956). Bradbury received numerous literary and cultural awards, including the 2004 National Medal of the Arts and a 2007 Pulitzer citation.

**Ray Bradbury's *Banshee***  
**a play in five acts**  
**adapted from the works of Ray Bradbury**  
**by Joe Fordham**

**Program Notes**

Ray Bradbury has been a literary hero of mine since the time I first stumbled on his books *The Illustrated Man*, *The Martian Chronicles*, *Dandelion Wine*, *Fahrenheit 451*, and especially his short stories. I've returned to those again and again as my tastes have grown. Over the years, his writing remained a touchstone for the imaginative and the macabre and, really, the pure magic of the written word.

When I first arrived in LA, ostensibly working in visual effects but trying to shop my screenplays and my short films around, Ray published his first collection of short stories in decades. It was a bit of a mixed bag, called *The Toynbee Convector*. But a couple of the stories were real zingers and they got me thinking 'what if?' I decided it was time somebody put together the definitive tribute to Ray's fiction as a movie that would, once and for all, capture the poetry and power of his stories on film.

I'd never been satisfied with other people's attempts to adapt Bradbury's work to the screen – Jack Smight's *Illustrated Man* was tonally all wrong; Disney's *Something Wicked this Way Comes* felt too on-the-nose; Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451* I liked, but it was not the book; and the Rock Hudson TV series based on *The Martian Chronicles* was shoddy. I felt the closest anyone had come to capturing a cinematic vision of Bradbury's prose was not a Bradbury adaptation, and that was Charles Laughton's one and only film, *Night of the Hunter*, which pulsed with Bradbury menace.

My idea was to combine a couple of Ray's new stories with a handful of his classics to make an anthology-style screenplay, using Ray's recent gothic horror story, *Banshee*, as a framing device. I wrote a ten-page treatment and a cover letter and mailed it to Ray's home address on Cheviot Drive, out near Rancho Park Golf Course.

Four days later, to my amazement, Ray's reply arrived on his personal letterhead. The envelope included a bright yellow label for a bottle of Dandelion Wine, bottled on the estate of the Bradbury Vineyards in Greentown Illinois, vintage 1998, and it was autographed to me, February 8, 1990. It almost didn't matter that Ray's note was a polite 'no thanks.' He called it a 'fascinating idea,' but he explained that he did all of his own adaptations, including his recent teleplay for *Banshee*, which was part of the cable TV *Ray Bradbury Theatre* series. It was the best rejection letter I ever received!

I saw Ray over the years at various speaking engagements. He was a passionate, fearless and outspoken fellow. And it was a complete surprise when he turned up, unannounced, at one of his Pandemonium Theatre Company productions, his own stage adaptation of *Dandelion Wine*, at the Fremont Theatre in Pasadena in 2006. It was a wonderful evening. Ray was now wheelchair-bound, but still sharp as a tack, and beaming with joy, soaking up the love. That was the last time I saw him in person.

After Ray's death, in 2012, I felt a deep loss. A few years later, when a real estate developer tore down Ray's home of 50 years, reducing it to rubble, I felt I had to step up. I recalled my old story, how Ray had given it his praise, and I took a leap of faith: I turned my anthology screenplay treatment into a theatre piece, a play in five acts.

While writing, I found the voice of Ray speaking through the characters. Elements of his personal life crept into the narrative, sometimes culled from interviews and documentary films that I revisited in my research. Suddenly, this was no longer an exercise in simply stringing together Ray's stories; it started to come alive, weaving elements of his life and fiction together around the central idea of his *Banshee* story, which in itself was a fictionalized account of his real-life adventures working with John Huston on the 1956 Warner Bros. film of *Moby Dick*.

It was an energizing writing experience, and I have had some encouraging reactions from friends -- and from a theatre and television director who knew and worked with Ray. Rights issues still need to be addressed and, so far, Ray's lawyer in New York has not acknowledged my overtures. But my plan is to try to put this up as a staged reading, and another acquaintance has offered to video that for me, with a professional multi-camera and sound recording set up. That's as far as I've taken it.

If a staged reading is successful, I'll submit a DVD to Ray's daughters, if I can't get them to attend. All I want to see how far I can take this, to spread awareness of Ray's work, and to finally pay tribute to America's great fantasy writer.

Joe Fordham  
Burbank, CA  
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John Huston and Ray Bradbury, circa 1956