

## No Matter What: Great Expectations!

### Humanitas Luncheon

*We live in the greatest age that man has ever known. And yet we constantly tell ourselves that 1984 will most certainly arrive. In the midst of prime encounters with the Moon and Mars, we doubt. By the millions, we save lives every year with our medicines, yet forget to count the noses or give the credit. The Doomsayers move among us as if their sooth were gospel. We lend them our ears. Any fool, such as myself, who dares to say a good word about tomorrow, or even the day before yesterday, is an idiot-fool. Worse, he must have some dire motive soon to be brought out in the light.*

*I cannot help myself. If there is a gene for happiness and a chromosome for joy they must be somewhere in my blood, and were there in the days before I was born. I can only act as I act, glad to be out of bed every morn, happy to be at work before breakfast, celebrating my finished work at night.*

*All of which is the long way around to saying why I am part of the Humanitas Awards each year. Some years I have not been able to see all of the films or help judge, but yet I feel happily compelled to be here at the luncheon ceremony itself.*

*Why?*

*Because I feel that I am not a blind optimist among other blind optimists. If that were all that the Humanitas Awards meant, we should never meet again. Blind optimism is no better than its other half, blind pessimism. Somewhere, critically and aesthetically, we must meet on a common ground to dream the future and build it. We must offer no sugared promises that everything every time will turn out right in the end. They can't and they won't. And, after all, finally, each of us, somewhere up ahead, must face a future, on our terms, that includes illness, age, and a time of going away forever, which time we would like to forestall as long as necessary.*

*Meanwhile, while we are here, what?*

*I ask only, and you must ask only, that we give ourselves, that we give everyone, an opportunity to behave optimally. Which only means a chance to act up to the level of our genetic inclination and excellence. That, for me, is the only meaning of the word optimism. Not happy endings. But the chance to build toward a happy ending, with a reasonable opportunity for success.*

*The films I have seen while judging the awards, in various years, have given me not just hope but a strong hope for the future, because many of the films have dared to speak clear truths and make hairline judgments, see the dark, and help move us toward the light, regard our warts and bumps and scars and yet see how tall we can stand on occasion when we take off our platform shoes and use our minds instead of our skeletons, for size.*

*Idealism, in its practical sense, is what we speak of, hope for, dream on here. Not pontifical, not condescending, not didactic, not baptisms of do-goodism, not hectoring, badgering, lecturing by and through television. But, in time, to toss people into what I would like to call the Schweitzer*

*Centrifuge...remembering what the good African doctor once said, "Do something. Someone may imitate it."*

*It goes without saying you must do something good or, if you're fortunate in your intuitions, and pursue your art and craft with easy passion, not looking over your shoulder, you may fall into better-than-good and go headlong upstairs into excellence, a state that we all pray for.*

*Not an easy thing to ask for ourselves, or the writers of the scripts that go on television. But it can happen when people get ideas that take over and blackmail the writer with threats of, "If you don't write me now, I'll never give you another decent idea in your life!" The writer, if he is wise, gives in to the blackmail, the demand, lets his love for an idea speak, and often enough in the last few years, winds up here at this luncheon, at these tables, with these awards, and our attention.*

*The Humanitas Awards are just one more way of saying, "You cared. You did. You became. You are. We love you. On top of which, since you must be fed and clothed, here in return, is some of the bread that you cast on the waters."*

*In sum, all of us here care about the future without being pompous, we congratulate the winners without being saccharine, and we say, finally, that in excellence is profit on every level, for the mind, the heart, the soul, and the pocket, which, after all, must roof a house, feed a mouth, birth a child, educate a wolf-boy or cat-girl, burn a mortgage, or retire a beloved parent. Rewards for excellence. And, this Christmas, lumps of coal in the shoes and boots of the Doomsayers.*

*Afraid of the future? I am not. For I feel we go there with our robot friends and one robot device is Television, which is no more and no less than the humanity we program into it. I do not fear futures so much as people who forget that they are the future, and must behave so as to insure it.*

*Pasteur taught us that by taking a little piece of death and introducing it into our bloodstream we gave ourselves back a gift of life. The irony of the metaphor must be continued in our writing for television. Not to avoid the truth, but to prepare a serum of the proper proportions of light and dark, death and resurrection, with which to fortify our aesthetic and insure our subsistence.*

*Not to shrink from unpleasantness our first tenet. Not to wallow in it, our second. Rejuvenation and survival our final goal.*

*A disaster film, for me, is one that doesn't even try. So, no disaster TV films, please. Trial and error, by all means. There isn't time to learn everything about the aeronautics of television writing when you stand at the edge of the cliff. You must jump off with an idea and write like hell, building your wings, on the way down, praying for a soft landing.*

*Four years ago when our Viking Lander arrived on Mars and photographed the barren wastelands, Roy Neill, on NBC's Today TV Show taunted me with: "How does it feel, Mr. Bradbury, to have written about Mars all your life, and now we land there and find there is no life?". To which I replied, "Fool! There is life on Mars. And it is us. It is us!"*

*Let me paraphrase that in favor of the Humanitas Award Winners here today. "There is life in Television after all. And it is you. It is you!"*