



## The Toynbee Convector

©2010 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

Reading THE TOYNBEE CONVECTOR is a bit like watching Willie Mays in his last season, a shadow of his former self. The analogy is not exact; unlike athletes, writers do not necessarily decline as they age. Still, the author of these stories--the Bradbury of the 1980's--could not write a book like THE ILLUSTRATED MAN or THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES.

The title story, "The Toynbee Convector," is typical of the collection. It is set in the late twenty-first century, and the world it depicts is much more hopeful than our own. How has this transformation been brought about? Late in the twentieth century, a man named Craig Bennett Stiles pretended to travel into the future, "returning" with tapes and films which he had faked to simulate a glorious world free of pollution, free of war. The time traveler's benign trickery was accepted by the millions who watched his televised report on the future: Thus inspired, humankind proceeded to make Stiles's lie a reality.

The story is a fable, then, meant to counter the negative thinking that has characterized so many state-of-the-world assessments in the 1980's. Given that intent, it would be unfair to fault Bradbury for a lack of realism, yet even on its own terms, as a fable, the story does not work. The language is trite, the sentiments are saccharine (in a typical bit of overkill, the time traveler speaks of a world which has "cured cancer and stopped death"); there are no individual details to animate the reader's interest.

Bradbury is an attractive ambassador of optimism, whatever hat he is wearing. (Among current Bradbury projects mentioned in the dust-jacket blurb, one in particular stands out: "He has been asked to help design a twenty-first-century city to be built near Tokyo.") What he offers in THE TOYNBEE CONVECTOR is blueprints for stories, sketches from an idea man, not vital engagements with language.

### Copyright Notice

©2010 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:  
<http://www.enotes.com/toynbee-convector-salem>