

Eric Li

Ms. Small

Humanities Section H

9-16-2018

The Threat of Technology

Modern technology is incredible. It is collectively the greatest achievement man has ever accomplished, and it is still progressing. With smartphones, tablets, computers, and other electronics accessible to many, people have become more introverted than ever before. Social interactions have decreased to a minimum. While being a revolutionary achievement, modern technology has caused an unbelievable amount of damage to society, both socially and physically. Ray Bradbury, a pivotal author of the 20th century, predicted this half a century before. In several of his works, such as “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains” and “The Pedestrian”, he warns of the destruction that technology will bring. Some of those stories present this theme better than others. Although both of Bradbury's stories, "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains" and "The Pedestrian" use unnerving imagery, eerie allusions, and characters development to convey their respective themes, "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains" is ultimately more effective in sharing its message that technology threatens to be humanity's downfall.

Bradbury utilizes imagery more effectively in “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains” than “The Pedestrian” to convey its dystopian theme. Throughout “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains,” Bradbury bombards the reader with sensory imagery. First, there's the nuclear shadows. These shadows were described vividly, depicting “a man mowing a lawn,” (1)

“a woman bent to pick flowers,” (1) and “a small boy” (1) playing catch with “a girl” (1). The fact that the nuclear explosion caught the family doing such innocent and typical things shows how technology, specifically military technology in this case, will harm everyone, even people like this seemingly happy family who have done nothing to deserve it. The nuclear shadows elicit sympathy from the reader and are, as a result, extremely effective at showing the danger of technology. Moreover, the “ruined city [gives] off a radioactive glow” (1) according to Bradbury, which paints an eerie image that not only establishes an unnerving mood but also directly relates to the theme that technology will lead to the downfall of mankind. The unnerving mood only heightens the horror of the situation and what technology can do. However, in “The Pedestrian,” imagery is not used as effectively. For instance, Bradbury describes the “good crystal frost” (1) in the air as Mr. Mead walks in the “silent and long and empty” (1) streets with “particularly uneven” sidewalks. The imagery in “The Pedestrian” is quite vivid, but it does not support the theme regarding technology. It does establish a bleak mood, but the underlying cause is not clear. Silent and empty streets could mean a number of things. Cracked pavements could mean many things, and so can a cold environment. This is very unlike the imagery in “August 2026,” where descriptions like the radioactive glow or the whirring of the mechanical mice directly and clearly relate to the theme of technology while still establishing that same sort of eerie mood.

While character development is present in both short stories, the ‘character’ in “August 2026” is developed in a more memorable and meaningful way than those in “The Pedestrian” in relation to the theme. In “August 2026,” Bradbury personifies the mechanical house. The house’s voice-clock persistently interrupts the text regularly with exclamations of the time, like

“Seven-nine, breakfast time, seven-nine” (1). The relentless, intrusive presence of the voice serves as a constant reminder of the technological lifestyle of people in the future. It shows that technology will embed itself to become a constant part of daily life with its ability to perform tasks better than any human. For instance, the automatic breakfast stove of the house is able to make “eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs sunnyside up, sixteen slices of bacon, two coffees, and two glasses of cool milk” for breakfast, efficiently and effortlessly. The characterization of the house displays how technology has, in a way, taken over people’s lives and suggests that technology will not only cause humanity’s physical downfall, but also cause its emotional downfall. However, in “The Pedestrian,” Leonard Mead’s character is not developed as effectively. Mr. Mead is characterized an ordinary person, as seen in his nightly walks. The development of Mead’s character accomplishes nothing until the police officer arrests him, revealing a problem. The problem that normal people are considered insane in “The Pedestrian” because society is so advanced in “The Pedestrian” that things normal people do are considered “Regressive Tendencies” (2) in the hypothetical world of “The Pedestrian”. However, this is weakly linked to “The Pedestrian”’s theme on the danger of technology because the message communicated by Mead’s characterization is too general. It refers to the harm caused by society’s advancement, not specifically technology, making the underlying theme vague. On the other hand, the personification of the house directly relates to technology and clearly implies the negative impact of technology. Therefore, the character development of Mr. Mead in “The Pedestrian” did not contribute to the theme as much as the character development of the mechanical house in “August 2026”.

The dystopian theme is communicated more effectively in “August 2026” than in “The Pedestrian” because of the more meaningful allusions made in “August 2026”. In “August 2026”, Bradbury makes an allusion to a Sara Teasdale poem called “There Will Come Soft Rains,” a poem that foresees a war that will cause the extinction of humanity. This is crucial because Bradbury wrote “August 2026” in 1951, a time right after World War II when advanced technology was revolutionizing warfare. Armored vehicles, machine guns, nuclear weapons, etc were on the rise. By referencing the Sara Teasdale poem, Bradbury insinuates that the progress of military technology will ultimately destroy all of humanity, supporting the theme that he’s trying to communicate. Meanwhile, in “The Pedestrian”, Bradbury alludes to the address of his childhood home, “Eleven South Saint James Street” (2), by recounting it as Mr. Mead’s address. The only thing this does is that it suggests that the short story was influenced by Bradbury’s own experiences, which contributes minimally, if at all, to the theme regarding the danger of technology. Thus, the allusion made in “The Pedestrian” was trivial and was much less significant towards contributing to the theme than the allusion made in “August 2026”.

Imagery, character development, and allusion are popular techniques used in literature. Bradbury uses these three literary techniques to his advantage to deliver his theme that technology will lead to the downfall of humanity. As seen in the examples, he uses them more effectively in “August 2026” compared to “The Pedestrian”. However, despite his inconsistent usage of literary techniques, the underlying message is clear. Bradbury foresaw the negative consequences of technology the moment the television was invented. Today, Bradbury’s predictions remain accurate. Technology obviously benefits society in many ways by making things easier and more efficient than ever before, but it is also a detriment to society. So for now,

there is no answer to whether technology is good or bad. There are two equally balanced sides to it. Only time will tell which side will ultimately outweigh the other.