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The Degradations of Society and Mankind in the Future

Imagine the nuclear holocaust in the mechanized world of “August 2026,” and the lonely man in the streets of the city of 3 million in “The Pedestrian.” Ray Bradbury authored both short stories, which he wrote in the 1950s, during the height of the formidable Cold War. The Cold War was a time of rapid advancement, stemming from the fear of countries falling behind technologically speaking and of nuclear fallout. Both of these Sci-Fi stories take place in vastly different futuristic settings, which contain different outcomes for society. “August 2026” is set in a mechanized society, where the robots continue to work as programmed, even though their employers (humanity) has been wiped out. The society in “The Pedestrian,” consists of a society of 3 million living their lives seemingly normally in the day but focused much more on TV entertainment in the night. Ray Bradbury’s “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains,” more effectively demonstrates the dystopian theme of degradations of societal standards of living, through its narrative point-of-view, mood, and imagery, than “The Pedestrian,” as Bradbury creates a sense of universal relatability in the former and becomes too specific in “The Pedestrian.”

In “August 2026,” the third person omniscient point of view allows for a more universal response to the degradation of society, whereas in “The Pedestrian,” the mix of dialogue and third person limited narration restricts the readers to one point of view. Readers immediately

enter the course of narration of “August 2026,” learning about the setting and more, through the details the narrator provides, but because the narration is omniscient, no bias is involved.

However, in “The Pedestrian,” along with the third-person limited narrator providing details, Leonard Mead, the protagonist, presents direct personal opinions. “August 2026” describes a banality of humanity, as seen in the echoing of the machines continuing their work, through its emotionless approach of narration. Bradbury allowed the story to be more explicit rather than of direct sympathetic or unfeeling intentions. “The five spots of paint...remained. The rest was a thin charcoaled layer. The gentle sprinkler rain filled the garden was falling light,” [1] demonstrates a seamless transition from a description of the last remains of a family to a calm scene of a garden being watered. A complete lack of emotion results, allowing for readers to form their own opinions and see the uniqueness of the faults of this society, as the details of the deaths of the family members do not overshadow other aspects of the entire theme and story itself. The format of “The Pedestrian” is different from that of “August 2026”. In this work by Bradbury, with a definite human character established from the beginning, the third person limited should not be seen as relatable, as his views tend to be very specific and direct in certain areas. Mead, the main character, lives in a world seemingly dominated by the television which provides entertainment for many after dusk. Mead, however, chooses to enjoy night walks, “for air” [2] as he puts it. As the only perspective introduced is the negative bias of Mead towards those who choose to spend their nights watching TV (as Mead prefers to walk outside at night), as well as a lack of any other perspective or bias, readers are only offered access to Mead’s thoughts and perspective, displayed when he mocks the TV viewers as he passes by their homes [1]. “The Pedestrian” lacks any potential relatable issue, as this use of technology is not considered morbid or destructive within reason universally, but more so to the opinion of one

person (who is the sole person with a problem with society's mannerisms in the whole story) which contrasts the general universal agreement of "August 2026" that nuclear holocaust is something to be afraid of and given attention to.

The tragic mood of "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains" effectively conveys the theme than the bleak and lonely mood of "The Pedestrian." With the theme relating to societal degradations, an effective mood would be one that really resonates with people and can relate to their own communities. "August 2026" repeats a time-themed phrase to represent the time throughout. "Eight-one, tick-tock, eight-one o'clock, off to school, off to work, run, run, eight-one," [1] being an example of the eerie phrase, continuously ringing in the background of this appalling story. As the story progresses, the constant reminder of the time acts as an ominous symbol representing the lack of humans to abide by the time and form their days around a timetable. Examples like, "After a long wait the door swung down again," [1] brings up the impression of an empty world. The atmosphere becomes very pessimistic, with a lack of hope arising. "The Pedestrian," develops the mood from the singular point-of-view of Leonard Mead. True, Mr. Mead does not sympathize with those who choose to spend their time differently than him, but he himself makes the indication that they are enjoying themselves in their homes. With this contradiction of belief (Mead's ideas are not universally agreed upon), readers are not engaged or in any way caused to have any sympathy to Mead's argument. Moreover, an atmosphere of disparity arises when the mechanized house in "August 2026" succumbs to the fire hopelessly, paralleling its lack of purpose or motivation to even survive the fire as there are no humans to serve, evoking a strong sense of hopelessness in the future for readers. A similar moment occurs in "The Pedestrian," when Mead is confronted by the automated cop car. "'Get in' ... He got in," [2] describes the moment that Mead voluntarily subdues to the robotic voice

and enters the car. This is not an act of hopelessness, it is one where Mead realizes his differences with society and accepts them. The mood of “August 2026” effectively demonstrates how awful the outcome would be if society fell to nuclear holocaust, but “The Pedestrian” does not clearly exemplify that television use is truly a degradation, as represented in its bleak mood.

The imagery in “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains” evokes a lot of relatable feelings of despair/degradation in readers, whereas in “The Pedestrian,” it is futuristic but not inherently dystopian. Subtle but effective imagery vividly describes the implied nuclear holocaust taking over society in “August 2026.” However, in “The Pedestrian,” the imagery does not probe a view of a society that has degraded over time, rather it gives an insight to a possible one. The imagery in both stories depicts how each society usually functions. The section of “August 2026” which depicts the use of effective visual imagery, “Here the silhouette in paint of a man mowing a lawn...” [1] ominously describes the state of multiple different people, like a man mowing his lawn or a woman picking up some flowers. Then the nuclear fallout hit and proceeded to essentially exterminate this society, leaving only nuclear shadows in its place. This dramatic use of visual imagery details on how society evolved into creatures capable of a worldly self-destruction, a clear indication of a societal degradation. In “The Pedestrian,” a moment of disbelief is presented using auditory imagery in, “Was that a murmur of laughter from within a moon-white house? He hesitated but went on when nothing more happened,” [1] where it is posed that the inhabitants seem to be having fun with their situation (coming home to watch TV). The civilians all seem to collectively be enjoying their current situation, as Mead is simply isolating himself rather than the opposite. Another idea is the way machinery and technology will come to revolutionize our households and societies. In “August 2026,” the use of kinesthetic imagery represents the automation of technology, essentially replacing humans in

many daily functions. In “The Pedestrian,” it is mentioned that infrastructure like roadways is heavily utilized, and that during the night everything becomes dead silent outside. This visual and auditory imagery show the contrast between day and night in “The Pedestrian,” where like modern times, the day is bustling but urban night life is generally quiet. The applications of visual, auditory, kinesthetic imagery in “August 2026” effectively evokes readers to feel disparity or a sense of degradation whereas in “The Pedestrian,” the visual and auditory imagery does not help to create a true sense of negativity.

Ray Bradbury’s “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains,” more effectively demonstrates the dystopian theme of degradations of societal standards of living, through its narrative point-of-view, mood, and imagery, than “The Pedestrian,” as Bradbury creates a sense of universal relatability in the former and becomes too specific in “The Pedestrian.” The overall narrative style and point of view, mood, and imagery of “August 2026” is very universal and therefore more enticing and effective in getting its theme across. The bleak mood and imagery and overall restricted and narrow point-of-view of “The Pedestrian” does not allow for it to be effective in conveying the theme. With the current state of affairs between worldly powers, nuclear war almost seems inevitable, and it is in the best interest of all of humanity to heed to the subtle warning promulgated by Ray Bradbury nearly seventy years ago as he wrote “August 2026.”