

Progress or Regress?

Throughout all of human history, progress has always driven us forward, but will this be the case forever? Ray Bradbury was an author that would argue otherwise. Bradbury is well known for his sci-fi short stories, with “August 2026: There will Come Soft Rains” and “The Pedestrian” being shining exemplars. These two particular stories were written in the early 1950’s immediately following the Second World War. Bradbury expressed his worries that the marching advancement of technology and weapons under the guise of “progress” would eventually conclude with the end of the human race. When Bradbury wrote “August: 2026” he did not write about a shining world of hope filled with technological marvels but rather a world of cities constituted of radioactive glow and rubble. The situation is similar in “The Pedestrian”, albeit more nuanced. Here, humans have become brainless husks that blankly stare at viewing screens. Taken as a whole these stories paint the image of the Bradbury’s future, a future in which the march towards progress results in the end of humanity, whether this be through eradication of all humans or the eradication of humanness. Through dystopian mood, visualization of setting, and technological human replacement, Ray effectively demonstrates in “The Pedestrian” than in “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains” that through the desire for progress, humanity will eventually make itself irrelevant.

The short story, “The Pedestrian” conveys that progress drives humanity to be irrelevant in an implicit way as opposed to “August 2026”’s more explicit method and is thus more nuanced and effective in conveying the theme. Through the use of mood and visualization together, Ray Bradbury is able to show the world to be emotionless. Ray Bradbury depicts the

setting of "The Pedestrian" as a cold world, one devoid of anything that could be remotely considered human. When Mead gets into the cop car, Ray Bradbury shows this emotionless mood by writing, "It smelled of riveted steel. It smelled of harsh antiseptic; it smelled too clean and hard and metallic. There was nothing soft there" (Bradbury 2). As Bradbury writes this particular section of the text, he describes the car as reeking of metal and harsh antiseptics as well as being cold and hard. The mood set is one of coldness and not humanity. This helps the reader understand that because of progress, even the elements of the world usually controlled by humans such as police have become mechanized, cold, and cruel. When Mead is walking, he believes that, "If he closed his eyes and stood very still, frozen, he could imagine himself upon the centre of a plain, a wintry, windless Arizona desert with no house in a thousand miles, and only dry riverbeds, the streets, for company" (Bradbury "The Pedestrian" 1). The way that Bradbury describes the city at night starkly contrasts with the bustling lively world of modern cities. When Bradbury visualizes this setting and shows that the city at night is as cold and empty as a desert, the reader understands that progress led the city to become as technologically advanced but also led to the 'death' of the city and its human aspect. Overall, in "The Pedestrian" Mead himself conveys the dystopian mood and setting. This allows for the theme of human unimportance to be conveyed slowly and over time as the reader learns more about the world. This slow but effective method of conveying the mood gives "The Pedestrian" its superior abilities.

However, in "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains," Ray Bradbury is more explicit or direct with the conveyance of the theme through visualization of setting and mood, thus reducing the level of nuance and emotion which gives "The Pedestrian" its superior

communicative skills. When Bradbury wants to explicitly communicate the cold mood he writes, "At eight-thirty the eggs were shriveled, and the toast was like stone. An aluminum wedge scraped them into the sink, where hot water whirled them down a metal throat which digested and flushed them away to the distant sea" ("August 2026" 1). Bradbury describes all of the food and machinery in a non-appetizing and mechanical way, thus taking away positive feelings usually associated with food. The food is also not prepared by humans and instead by a robot, indicating that in the times before the city was destroyed even this function was mechanized. This explicitly shows the reader that in every aspect of human life from cooking to firefighting, technology has taken over. Thus in "August 2026" Bradbury is very direct in his examples of human redundancy. Later on, Bradbury explicitly visualizes the dire state of the city by writing, "The house stood alone in a city of rubble and ashes. This was the one house left standing. At night the ruined city gave off a radioactive glow which could be seen for miles" ("August 2026" 1). When Ray Bradbury visualizes this city, he does so directly. Instead of carefully letting the reader know that the city is cold and empty through Mead's eyes, he directly states that the city is left in rubble with only one house left standing. While this does get the point across that in this world humanity has destroyed itself through its need of progress and the replacement of humans, it lacks the level of complexity that "August 2026" brings to the table when Bradbury conveys the theme through Mead's point of view.

Finally, because Ray Bradbury sets technology up to be the destroyer of human uniqueness in "The Pedestrian," he is able to more effectively convey that the progress itself resulted in human redundancy. Oppositely, in "August 2026" technology did take over the lives of the house's inhabitants, but Bradbury does not carefully spin a web that allows the reader to

understand that technology took away the inhabitants very humanity the same way he does in "The Pedestrian." Humans consider their consciousness and uniqueness to be extremely important, and this theme resonates with the readers that would rather not exist at all than be husks of their former selves. Part of the web is spun when Mead thinks that, "The tombs, ill-lit by television light, where the people sat like the dead, the grey or multi-colored lights touching their faces, but never really touching them" (Bradbury "The Pedestrian" 2). Mead shows that the lives of most people are not as mechanized, but their uniqueness is sucked out by the viewing screens that leave them emotionless. When Mead notes to the police that he has no viewing screen, this shows that this lack of technology made Mead who he is. When the reader picks up subtle clues like this, they construct the theme and as a result understand it better. In "August 2026" Bradbury describes what life used to be like in the house by writing, "'Mrs. McClellan, which poem would you like this evening?'" The house was silent. The voice said at last, "Since you express no preference, I shall select a poem at random'" (Bradbury 3). In this case the house explicitly takes the humanity away from the inhabitants. Traditionally, even when the majority of life is mechanized machinery cannot be creative. However, in this case the house is capable of this as well. This shows the complete redundancy of human uniqueness as even this aspect is taken over by the house. This very explicit way of conveying that the house controlled every aspect of the occupant's life lacks the sophistication of Mead describing through his eyes what technology was doing to the lives of the people using it. In summary, while "August 2026" directly shows how the house has taken over every aspect of life, "The Pedestrian" more delicately and effectively shows the link between technological use and human uniqueness by showing that the two cannot coexist together.

Overall, when Ray Bradbury uses dystopian mood, visualization of setting, and demonstration of technological human redundancy in "The Pedestrian" he is able to demonstrate more effectively than in "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains" that through the desire for progress humanity will eventually make itself irrelevant. The way that Bradbury conveys each of the themes allows "The Pedestrian" some superior communicative abilities, as the way these literary devices are used is more nuanced. Alternatively, in "August: 2026" Bradbury is more direct in conveying the theme with these literary devices, and as such the story has a lower level of nuance. However, regardless of the nuance of the literary devices, the theme is still the same and is still applicable today. With people spending more and more time on the internet and social media people have become less and less connected to the real world and some can argue that Bradbury's predictions are already coming true. Not many find it in themselves to walk every day when they could go home and simply relax in front of the TV. We seem to rely more and more on technology to keep us entertained while we focus less and less on the beauty of the real world. Will the redundancy of humanity soon be upon us, or is it perhaps already here?