

Ryan Mechery

Ms. Small

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### Humanity's Loss of Power, Prosperity, and Status to Technology

Scientists debate all the time about what astronomical phenomena will cause our demise: will it be global warming, the sun's supernova, or even an asteroid similar to one that wiped out the dinosaurs? Surprisingly, our worst enemy might actually be one of our own creations, technology. As a civilization becomes more and more technologically advanced, it becomes more probable that a simple mishap, like pressing a button that sends out nuclear missiles en masse, will cause our extinction. Through two different thought experiments, science fiction author, Ray Bradbury, explores this type of dystopian future in his works, "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains," and "The Pedestrian." Both science fiction stories were written at volatile points in human history, namely during the post-World War II era, when the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki showed the world the destructiveness of technology and also the Cold War, when nuclear fallouts and apocalypses were very real possibilities. The first story describes a technologically advanced house, set five years from our current future, that is bustling with activity amidst a war-torn, decaying world. Conversely, "The Pedestrian," describes a desolate, yet living, world through the eyes of an outcast named Leonard Mead who strives to be free from the fetters of society that mandate that life must revolve around technology. Although "August 2026" attempts to paint technology in a positive light, "The Pedestrian" more effectively conveys that technology will cause humanity's downfall through its eventual domination over us, deprivation of individuality, and ultimately, its annihilation of the human race.

Because of its use of dynamic pacing and symbolism behind it, “The Pedestrian” more effectively conveys how technology will result in loss of individuality as a facet of humanity’s downfall compared to “August 2026.” In the beginning of the story, we meet an outcast named Leonard Mead who enjoys taking walks. As the story progresses, the world unfolds where “magazines and books [do not] sell anymore. Everything [goes] on in the tomblike houses at night now” (“The Pedestrian,” 1). The lack of publications and private activity show that the people in the “The Pedestrian” don’t communicate with each other and it points to this world being a dystopia. As Mead navigates the desolate city, he cries out into the street, “What’s up tonight ...Where are the cowboys rushing, and do I see the United States Cavalry over the next hill to the rescue” (“The Pedestrian,” 1), but no response was heard. This line reveals that the people in “The Pedestrian” aren’t simply introverts, they are recluses, who cower behind in their houses, and don’t even react to a lunatic shouting at the crack of dawn. Mead is approached by a faceless, shapeless, robot who interrogates him and demands he stop his “illicit” actions. Looking at the two, Mead is an outcast who finds pride in living, whereas the robot is an authority figure that cannot think beyond what it can see. When Mead tries to explain his reason for going out, the robot uses very abrupt phrases and says, “Get in.” (“The Pedestrian,” 1) and “Speak Up!” (1), while Mead sticks to his eloquent way of speaking. Between Mead and the robot’s dialogue, Bradbury uses dynamic pacing with polysyndeton and asyndeton, respectively. This literary device is hard to pick up on at first, but it further adds to both characters’ personalities. Looking at Mead and the robot again, while the two characters seem insignificant in the course of this future, they symbolize something far greater. Mead embodies the ideals of humanity, creativity, and uniqueness, while the robot embodies mindless conformity. With this in mind, the dynamic pacing now reveals that most of humanity as a whole, is no different from

the mindless robot if people fail to hold on to what makes them human. In contrast, “August 2026” uses a very slow pacing which serves merely to prolong the house’s chores during the day. Even when looking at the story as a whole, “August 2026” does not mention individuality as an aspect of humanity’s downfall because there are not any humans living in the story. From what can be inferred, the civilization that perished in “August 2026” is comparable to society today meaning that technology did not impact their lives in the same way as “The Pedestrian.”

Although “August 2026” attempted to use imagery to portray technology as advantageous for society, “The Pedestrian” more effectively uses descriptive language to emphasize that humanity will be vanquished by our abdication to technology. In “The Pedestrian,” since everyone stays inside and watches TV all day, “there [is] no need now for the police, save for one lone car wandering and wandering the empty streets” (1). The people in this society have relegated the duty of law enforcement to technology, but on a wider level, humanity has become subservient and tethered to their creation. Without ever going outside, the people, “went on in the tomblike houses at night now ... [and] sat like the dead, the gray or multicolored lights touching their faces” (“The Pedestrian,” 1). The “tomblike” houses and “gray” lights both make the world feel depressing and set imagery of death. Furthermore, this mood and imagery reveal how addiction to technology is causing humanity’s downfall as television turned a once prosperous people into prosaic zombies. Because the people mindlessly consume technology, they have become chained to it without means of escape. In contrast, imagery, in “August 2026,” describes technology in a helpful way where “tiny robot mice dart [,] sucking gently at hidden dust” and “dinner dishes [are] manipulated like magic tricks” (3). Historically, household chores such as sweeping and doing the dishes were seen as menial tasks that could be relegated to servants. Technology, in “August 2026,” serves a similar role as merely an assistant to humans.

Since the people didn't view technology in a higher regard, the downfall in "August 2026" wasn't brought about by man's interactions with technology. Looking back, as Mead is arrested and crammed into the police car, he notes that the back seat "smell[s] of riveted steel ... it smells[s] too clean and hard and metallic" ("The Pedestrian," 2). The olfactory imagery simply states that police cars have not changed much, but on a symbolic level, it communicates that technology has control over society. Just as one would use an antiseptic for sterilization, technology is using its authority to "disinfect," or purify humanity of its radical tendencies as seen by the robot's treatment of Mead.

Using a ghastly and lonely tone, Bradbury convinces the reader that technology has caused the demise of the world in "The Pedestrian," whereas in "August 2026," technology is portrayed positively although it destroyed the planet. The first story takes this idea literally by describing a world where all life has succumbed to nuclear radiation. One would expect such a world to be bleak, and lifeless, with images of death that would all add to the somber ambiance. However, the one house that remains appears to be living with, "garden sprinklers whirled up in golden founts, [that fill] the soft morning air with scatterings of brightness" ("August 2026," 1) and even a voice that recites warm poems before bedtime. "Golden" founts, "soft" air, and brightness are all words that have warm meanings and positive connotations which set a whimsical tone and provide a sharp contrast to the world at hand. Since nuclear radiation is the root cause of humanity's annihilation in this story, the tone negates this theme and the reader is led to believe that the world is animate when it is, in fact, lifeless. Alternatively, the world described in "The Pedestrian" is filled with multitudes of people yet is empty to its core. In a city of three million, "lights might click on and faces appear and an entire street is startled by the passing of a lone figure" ("The Pedestrian," 1). The forgotten people that Mead cannot interact

with, “[sit] like the dead, [with] the gray or multicolored lights [of ill-lit television] touching their faces, but never really touching them” (“The Pedestrian,” 1). Television has become this their reality and serves as a reminder of this civilization’s degeneration. Since everyone in this dystopian society has lost all ability to think for themselves, they have become dead, to a certain extent, because of their inability to adapt. In the final scene of “The Pedestrian,” as the car drives off to a Psychiatric Center, Mead looks out the window and all he can see is, “the empty streets with the empty side-walks, and no sound and no motion all the rest of the chill November night” (“The Pedestrian,” 2). The lack of sound further adds to the macabre tone but also leaves the reader feeling hollow on the inside.

All in all, “The Pedestrian” better explores the meaning of downfall in three different ways and uses various forms of language devices including, pacing, imagery, motifs, and tone, to back up those claims. The stories may seem like mere science fiction novels that dwell upon meaningless fantasies. However, they both raise critical questions about where life is heading in our modern-day and age. If we fail to understand the dangers of technology, our life may very align with the apocalyptic scenarios that Bradbury describes.