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Humanities

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The Irreplaceable Humanity after World War II

In the Post-World-War-II era, many pieces of science fiction literature surfaced. The American author Ray Bradbury wrote two science fiction short stories called “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains” and “The Pedestrian” in 1950 and 1951 respectively. He uses the stories to discuss the nature of technology through the use of literary devices. He makes the argument many times that the technology he writes about and humanity are very different. Humanity is the true nature of people, which involves emotions, empathy, beautiful imperfections, brilliance, and appreciation of the natural world. In both of Bradbury’s stories, he shows that technology can never replace humanity equally well by showing imagery of the same effect, symbolism that gives parallel senses of dehumanization, and allusions that portray similar messages from history.

The imagery that Bradbury incorporates in “August 2026” and “The Pedestrian” highlights that technology cannot replace humanity equally in both stories. In the first story, Bradbury gives a rich description of the elements of the house and the outdoor conditions, so that the reader can get a clear image of the scene. One of the most vivid scenes is his description of the nursery, in which he describes the “color and fantasy” with the faux “aluminum roaches and iron crickets, and in the hot still air butterflies of delicate red tissue [waving]” (2). This imagery gives the reader the sense that there is artificial beauty with a terrifying twist, which remains consistent with much of the description of the rest of the house. The robots that

Bradbury describes in the nursery are flawless; they are unlike the imperfections of nature. While the children that lived in this house are certain to have enjoyed playing with the fake animals, it is scary and inhumane to many readers of this day and age to think that young children would be surrounded by such falsities rather than nature daily. “The Pedestrian” also shows a frightening insight into the future through Mr. Mead reporting what he sees on his walk. He notices “the tombs [houses], ill-lit by television light, where the people sat like the dead, the gray or multicolored lights touching their faces, but never really touching them,” (6). The imagery of the illumination gives the reader an eerie mood. Mr. Mead is implying that the people in his generation kill time in their houses without experience what of life has to offer. The exposure to dull, unnatural lighting in contrast with the bright blue sky during the day or the starry darkness at night shows the irreplaceable lack of humanity through the disconnect from nature. Clearly, both of Bradbury’s stories show with the same effect that technology cannot be a substitute for humanity through imagery.

Bradbury displays that technology can never take the place of humanity in his two short stories through the symbolism that shows similar effects of lack of empathy. In “August 2026” a tree falls on the house towards the end of the short story due to the atomic bombings. This event causes the house to catch fire, representing the aftermath of the atomic bomb, a product of technology. The technological monster goes on to burn the whole house, not only the technology of the house itself but the human-like parts too. “It fed upon Picassos and Matisses in the upper halls, like delicacies. Now the fire lay in beds, stood in windows, and changed the colors of drapes!” (3). The symbol of the fire shows that technology ruthlessly destroys humanity and other machinery, without emotion. This means that technology could never replace the beauty and empathy that humanity has. “The Pedestrian” also sends this message through Bradbury’s

symbols. He uses light to represent humanity, and darkness to represent the lack of it. Bradbury describes Mr. Mead as a kind, empathetic man, and illuminates his house to reflect that bright personality: “one house in an entire city of houses that were dark, but this one particular house had all of its electric lights brightly lit, every window a loud yellow illumination, square and warm in the cool darkness” (6). The use of the symbolism shows the whole city as dark, tasteless, and unhuman-like; and shows Mr. Mead’s home as light and loving. The irreplaceable beauty and light of the house is something that the black cold city could never imitate. In this way, these two stories show equally that technology cannot take the place of the beauty of humanity.

Allusions to history convey the message that technology cannot be a substitute for humanity with the same end result in both of Bradbury’s stories. He refers back to the atomic bombings in Hiroshima during World War II in “August 2026,” which occurred just a few years before the story was written in 1950. In his writing, he describes the atomic shadows of the humans on the walls of the house: “a small boy, hands flung into the air; higher up, the image of a thrown ball, and opposite him a girl, hands raised to catch a ball which never came down” (1). The use of the allusion to history causes the reader to feel negatively towards the advancements of technology. Bradbury effectively sets this mood for the bomb by showing the remnants of the humans that used to be there. He shows that the advancements of technology are destructive and dangerous, and lack the emotion and love that is prevalent in humanity. In his other story, “The Pedestrian,” he also uses allusion to hint at this message. In Bradbury’s day, the use of television was becoming more and more popular, and beginning to take away from the joy children had from playing outdoors. He wrote about the fear of people becoming addicted to television. In the story, the police car questions Mr. Mead for being outdoors and not watching television. “And

you have a viewing screen in your house to see with? Just walking, Mr. Mead? But you haven't explained for what purpose" (6). Bradbury depicts the advancement of technology as having unsympathetic and cruel characteristics, which are unlike the kindness and empathy that humans possess. Even the values of the technological world (watching television) are different from the values of humanity (enjoying nature and the outdoors). As a result, Bradbury uses allusions well to show that technology cannot replace humanity with the same effect in his two stories.

The two short stories show with an equivalent outcome that technology cannot take the place of humanity through Bradbury's use of similarly affective imagery, symbolism with the same meaning of dehumanization, and allusions showing alike messages. Readers fear the future that Bradbury writes about, one in which mankind is lost to the advancements of technology. Especially after World War II, people were exposed to the potential dangers of technology. Through his stories, Bradbury warns people about the loss of human characteristics that are bound to happen if people are not careful to preserve humanity in the rapid changes that technology brings.