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Humanities

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Leonard Mead vs The World: An Analysis of Ray Bradbury Short Stories

Over the decades, writers have attempted to understand how increased technological dependence will impact human nature. As the rate of technological advancement rapidly increased, writers and philosophers alike wondered what the adverse effects of this technological development would be. Authors of the 20th century, including Ray Bradbury, generally believed that humans will eventually cease to behave like humans today, as a result of excessive technological dependence. Two short stories written by Ray Bradbury addressed this topic of a technologically advanced world: “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains,” and “The Pedestrian.” The story “August 2026” talks about a fully automated house, which is the only house left standing after a nuclear calamity, and the story “The Pedestrian” talks about a dystopian world in which most of the world lives a strictly regulated lifestyle, except for Leonard Mead, who lives by his own free-will. Using numerous literary devices in both stories, Bradbury established a bleak world which lacks individuality, increasing the efficacy of the points he made about technological dependence. Despite the similarities in writing styles between the stories, each one uses distinct techniques in order to prove the same points. Bradbury uses imagery, characterization, and mood to convey that individuality is lost as technological dependence increases in the story “The Pedestrian” more effectively than in the story “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains.”

The imagery of the bleak world which Bradbury describes in “The Pedestrian” tells a more visually compelling story of uniformity than in “August 2026”. In “August 2026,” Bradbury describes the house as a very sterile, and orderly environment. The house attempts to facilitate enjoyable human behaviors, such as martinis with music in the afternoon, or cigars after dinner. As enjoyable as these

activities are, Bradbury describes them in such a way that they seem lifeless, as if they're just another event within the strict schedule of the house. By making these uniquely human experiences a systematic process, Bradbury shows how the house would've stripped individuality from its inhabitants. Exhibiting free will is one of many unique human characteristics, and by strictly scheduling a person's daily life, you start to take away their ability to exhibit it. This idea of stripping humanity of its individuality is further reinforced when the house catches on fire, which "fed upon the Picassos and Matisse's in the upper halls, like delicacies..." (Bradbury 3). This imagery of the paintings being caught on fire can be likened to how the house burnt away the individuality of its inhabitants, convincing readers to believe that technology is capable of stripping humans of their individuality. Despite the compelling imagery displayed in "August 2026," the imagery utilized in "The Pedestrian" takes advantage of the absence of humans in a way that "August 2026" did not. While Mead went on his daily walk, he described the streets which he walked upon, where he could close his eyes and "imagine himself upon the center of a plain, a wintry, windless Arizona desert with no house in a thousand miles..." (Bradbury, 5). The visual descriptors Bradbury uses here, such as the words "wintry" and "windless" effectively describe the lifelessness of this futuristic world. He adds to this picture of desolation while describing the individual homes as "tomb-like buildings" (Bradbury 5), showing that the people of this world lack free will. By demonstrating this lack of free will, Bradbury effectively communicates to his audience that in this world of technological dependence, humans would eventually move on from their individualistic ways, and lead a more conformist lifestyle.

Although both stories use effective characterization to demonstrate the perils of a world which lacks individuality, Bradbury does so more effectively in "The Pedestrian," where he develops the stark contrast between the individualism of Leonard Mead and the conformity of the Police Car. In "August 2026," Bradbury develops the character of the house as a being which lacks spontaneity or free-will. It follows a strict schedule and does not adapt its procedures even though humans no longer live there. It still sounds the morning alarm every single day, gets breakfast ready, and cleans up after itself, "But the

gods had gone away, and the ritual of the religion continued senselessly, uselessly” (Bradbury 2).

Bradbury’s use of the words “senselessly” and “uselessly” perfectly describes the lives of the people who once lived in the house. Considering the rigidity of the house’s daily routine, readers can tell that the people who once inhabited it lived a rigid lifestyle as well, eating when the house would cook, and relaxing when it would facilitate. Additionally, the narrator of the story always mentions the exact time before describing what is happening within the house, further reinforcing this rigid characterization. This characterization of the house allows the readers to understand that by letting themselves be overtaken by technology, the people of the house eventually begin to lose their sense of individualism. As effective as the characterization of the house in “August 2026” was, the contrast between the police car and Leonard Mead in “The Pedestrian” was clearly stated. The story is told from the perspective of Mead, who “was alone in this world of A. D. 2053,” (Bradbury 5) as one of the last people to seemingly have retained their individuality. He is described as a lively man with a sense of humor, a trait usually attributed to the uniqueness of an individual. The fact that he is one of the only people left who exhibits such a trait shows readers that he’s one of the only individualistic characters left in the story, and that much of the rest lack this individuality. Suddenly, he encounters the one and only police car in the city, which has a soulless, “metallic” aura to it. As opposed to Mead’s unique characterization, the police car had a very black and white persona. It only thought in a binary manner, as demonstrated when Mead told the car he was a writer, only to get a response of “No Profession” (Bradbury, 5). Evident in the systematic thinking the car demonstrates and its lack of empathy or recognition for creativity, the world of A.D. 2053 is far different from the persona of Mead. Many of the characteristics exhibited by the people and technologies of this world starkly contrast those of Mead, who has been established as an individual. His existence proves to the reader how in contrast to any normal person today, a person in the future who is excessively dependent on technology will eventually lose their individuality.

The contrast between the desolate mood and the lively point of view of Mead in “The Pedestrian” helps readers build a stronger negative connotation towards a technological world than does the third

person omniscient narration in “August 2026.” In “August 2026,” Bradbury develops the mood of the story through the persona of the house, which is described as unwelcoming because of its robotic nature. Referred to Bradbury as “mechanical paranoia” (Bradbury 2), the house maintains strict order within its walls throughout the story and shuts out the outside world completely. The word choice further reinforces a jaded mood, especially when Bradbury describes the behaviors of the house as relating to “self-protection,” or “in an old maidenly preoccupation” (Bradbury 2). This word choice cements an aloof, desolate mood, and encourages a negative connotation towards the increased dependence on technology. “The Pedestrian”, on the other hand, more effectively portrays this mood by describing the isolated world of technology through the eyes of Mead. In this world, Mead is seemingly one of the last members of society who hasn’t fallen to the clutches of technology yet, and from his perspective, Bradbury depicts a scene of despair where every member of society lives lifelessly. Mead has an internal commentary where he thinks about the daily life of a normal person, who goes to work every morning, just to come back home to their living rooms “where the people sat like the dead, the gray or multicolored lights touching their faces...” (Bradbury 6). This stark contrast between the world and Mead is further strengthened when Mead realizes that merely hearing laughter from within a house is out of the ordinary. From what we’re told from Mead’s perspective, it’s obvious that technology is the root cause of many of these problems and has restricted humans from acting out of their free will.

In conclusion, Bradbury was able to effectively demonstrate the downfalls of excessive technological dependency in both stories, although his use of literary devices in “The Pedestrian” was stronger than in “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains.” By developing imagery, characterization, and the mood of the story in contrast with the persona of Leonard Mead, Bradbury effectively demonstrated the stark differences in the lifestyles of humans who heavily rely on technology and humans who retain their individuality, effectively proving that technology is the primary reason for humanity’s loss of individuality.