

Garyth Page Violette

Mrs. Small

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The Divergent Evolution of Humanity and Technology

Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber, was a mathematics professor and Harvard alumni. Instead of achieving his full potential, he would wind up in jail for his atrocious acts as a domestic terrorist. His actions were the result of his spite, for what he considered to be the doom of society at the hands of technology. His beliefs would eventually lead to many academics losing their lives in a series of mail bombings. In his manifesto, he implies, "Let's stick to the practical and the concrete: Would you like it if people lived in a virtual world? If machines were smarter than people? If, in the future, people, animals and plants were products of technology?" These ideas, which were taken to the extreme, draw a lot of similarity to the ideas suggested in Ray Bradbury's "The Pedestrian" and "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains." In the stories society wanes with the evolution of technology causing its eventual elimination or dead existence, as the distinction between the artificial and natural become increasingly diluted. The two articles similarly and contrastingly portray the importance of monitoring our relationship with technology, so that it enhances our humanity rather than degrade it. Ultimately, "The Pedestrian" is more effective at achieving this by portraying technologies' effects on our norms, characteristics and welfare though an improved use of imagery, structure, and characterizations.

"The Pedestrian" is more effective at conveying the theme through its more effective portrayal of the effects technology can have on our societal norms. Its use of contrasting characterization, between an altered and normal way of life, strongly supports this idea directly.

In comparison, “August 2026: There will come soft rains” indirectly displays how technology altered humanity by characterizing the effects technology had on humanity. The stories portray society's views of normality through its beliefs or the remnants of technology. This is important because technology can control humans without their realization, causing society to lose its ability to think and act on its independent beliefs. Bradbury characterizes the alterations to our norms in the “Pedestrian” via the content in the dialogue between the protagonist, Mr. Mead, and antagonist, the empty police car. Mr. Mead goes on walks for their pure simplicity and beauty. The mechanized police car, or the antagonist, is representative of the altered and dehumanized society. The baffled attitude of the police car towards this innocent activity: ““Walking where? For what?”” (2), displays how technology can make our lives increasingly artificial, causing us to view natural acts as very unnatural behaviors. This means that we lose our tangible connection with reality. For the readers, it is shocking to imagine how walking would wind someone up in a “Psychiatric Center for research of Regressive Tendencies” (2). The other short story by Ray Bradbury depicts how humanity’s norms have changed by displaying how technology’s capabilities can affect our way of life. The remaining technology in the house tried to operate independently, this depicts how it was supposed to adapt to our needs. For instance, “In the kitchen the breakfast stove gave a hissing sigh and ejected from its warm interior eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs...” (1). This convenience portrays how technology’s growth can normalize the efficiency of human lives. As technology grows, so does mankind’s dependence on it. However, its destruction when confronted with nature showed that it was still reliant on us. Overall, the two excerpts show that society needs to be careful of its relationship with technology since it can alter norms and way of life. “The Pedestrian” better depicts this through the direct characterization of society with the advances of technology.

“The Pedestrian” describes how these norms tie into the way in which we act through its use of imagery, which strongly suggests that if technology alters our beliefs without our realization, it can exert control over our behaviors. Humanity’s beliefs can be rooted in societal norms and this in turn can affect its actions and characteristics. In that regard, technology affects how humankind functions, and therefore it is important to be vigilant of how it is affecting our actions. In the *Pedestrian*, Bradbury conveys the deterioration of society at the whim of addicting technology through a use of vivid visual imagery. This is evident when he reveals the desolate, eerie atmosphere of the street that, “was silent and long and empty, with only his shadow moving like the shadow of a hawk in midcountry”, and that if Mr. Mead, “closed his eyes and stood very still, frozen, he could imagine himself upon the center of a plain, a wintry, windless Arizona desert.” (1). Bradbury’s words, like “frozen”, and his metaphorical comparison between the neighborhood and a vacant desert suggests that society has grown dead, distant, and disconnected. This is the result of society’s attachment to technology, which leads to its detachment from one another. As technology intertwines in individuals’ lives, it becomes an extension of their selves, with human characteristics. Humanity’s reliance and dependency on technology suggests that mankind is losing human qualities to technology. Likewise, “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains”, uses the rhetoric of the house exclaiming, “Rain, rain, go away; rubber raincoats for today” (1), to give it a voice. The alliteration and rhythm to the sentence gave the expression an emotional attitude, even though it was still quite robotic. The normality of peoples’ technological dependency is changing the characteristics of human lives, as it does technology. “The Pedestrians” direct emphasis of society’s behaviors in a perceptible way more clearly supports this idea and theme.

Both articles display how technology can have adverse consequences on our lives in different ways, but “The Pedestrian ” portrays how technology's effects on our characteristics affects our own welfare, allowing for a more thorough argument. “The Pedestrian” suggests that a technological attachment can not only accelerate human lives but take them away. As a result of society’s attachment, “magazines and books didn’t sell anymore. Everything went on in tomblike houses at night now... where the people sat like the dead, the gray or multicolored lights touching their faces, but never touching them” (2). The visual and metaphorical descriptions of the idle and detached individuals show that the way people use their creations can turn into an unhealthy reliance where they lose control for increased satisfaction. This can create an unhealthy relationship that absorbs human qualities. However, in “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains ” society is physically, not mentally, destroyed by the technological developments. The apocalyptic setting of, “The house alone in a city of rubble” which “gave off a radioactive glow” (1), displays the destruction of humanity from the overwhelming power of its own weaponry. This story is a take on the poem “There will come soft rains,” and is based on the period of nuclear tension during the Cold War. Some of imagery, like the carbon shadows of children out playing, portray the actual effects of nuclear use. Unlike “The Pedestrian,” this article shows that technology can be used incorrectly, and that humanity must be careful of its actions due to the growing power of its own creations. The story’s portrayal of how technology can threaten societal welfare is something that humanity must be more mindful of.

The short stories reflect on the need to be aware of how mankind interacts with technology because it could affect human welfare. It can do this by changing the way individuals think and act. This is supported by the techniques Bradbury uses to show that technology can affect peoples’ norms and values. Bradbury does this by using dialogue with certain structures,

visual imagery that adds to the mood, and other techniques to describe the characters and setting. These techniques create a plot and story structure in “The Pedestrian,” which is more specific to the theme. As a society we must be mindful of how technology impacts us, since the basis for humanity could erode as it grows too powerful beyond our control. In the real world, we need to make sure it aids and doesn’t just accelerate the rate at which we live.