

Isaac Lau

Ms. Small

Humanities - J section

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Technology's hostility against humans

In many ways, technology seems to be so different from humans, that it seems as if technology directly goes against human nature. In the short stories, "The Pedestrian" and "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains" by Ray Bradbury, technology is portrayed as being on a different side than nature or humans. Bradbury wrote these stories in the early 1950s, just when the Cold War was starting, and there were high tensions over the use of technology in atomic weapons. Many people, including Bradbury, were fearing the end of civilization. "August 2026" is set in the year 2026 when a nuclear apocalypse has already wiped out humanity, and a singular house tries to maintain itself. "The Pedestrian" takes place in the year 2053 when a man named Mr. Mead gets arrested by robotic police. Both stories are about a dystopian world where technology controls much more than humans and nature. Although "The Pedestrian" and "August 2026" are similar, the former more effectively conveys how technology goes against human nature through its use of a third person limited point of view, its contrasting tone, and the tension between humans and technology.

A contrasting tone and language in "The Pedestrian" shows the stark difference between the worlds of nature and of technology, better showing the conflict between technology and humans than in "August 2026". "The Pedestrian" can be divided into two parts, before Mr. Mead meets the robot police, and after he meets the robot cop. In the first part, Mr. Mead walks through nature by himself. The language Bradbury uses shows the elegance of Mr. Mead as he "would pause, cock his head, listen, look, and march on his feet making no noise on the lumpy

walk” (Bradbury 1). However, this language sharply changes after he meets with the robot police when it says, “Walking, just walking, walking?’ ‘Yes, sir.’ ‘Walking where? Or what?’ “Walking for air. Walking to see” (Bradbury 2). The language Bradbury uses goes from floaty and dreamy to stiff and choppy. This shift matches the context of the story; the dreaminess of the first half is paired with Mr. Mead walking through nature, while the choppiness of second half is paired with the anxiety of interacting with technology. Bradbury uses more than reversals in language to demonstrate the difference between nature and technology; he also uses reversals in mood. The mood is peaceful as Mr. Mead is pushing “through autumn leaves with satisfaction and [whistling] a cold quiet whistle between his teeth...” (Bradbury 1). He is enjoying nature and he whistle indicates he feels serene. In contrast, the mood of the interaction with the robot police implies danger: “Leonard Mead’. (...) ‘Speak up!’ ‘Leonard Mead!’” (Bradbury 1). The robot demanding that Mr. Mead repeats himself resembles an interrogation, where Mr. Mead is at fault. There is a strong correlation with robots and technology being hostile against humans and nature. However, in “August 2026”, the correlation is not as strong. Although there is a contrast in mood from before the fire and after the fire, it does not show the same contrast in tone between humans interacting with nature versus humans interacting with technology. The mood goes from cheerful from before the fire to urgent, but still energetic, using longer sentences and similes (Bradbury 4). The reversal in mood and language from “The Pedestrian” shows the contrast between the peacefulness of nature and the hostility of technology.

The tension between humans and technology is shown through the robotic opposition in “The Pedestrian”, but “August 2026” minimizes tension by forming a symbiotic relationship between robots and humans. In the second half of “The Pedestrian”, Mr. Mead is confronted by the robot police: “Business or profession?’ ‘I guess you’d call me a writer.’ ‘No profession,’ said the police car” (Bradbury 1). Later on, the confrontation continues: ““And you have a viewing

screen in your house to see with?' 'No.' 'No?' There was a crackling quiet that in itself was an accusation" (Bradbury 2). The robot police are against traditionally more human qualities, such as creativity. The robot also seems angry with Mr. Mead for not using technology, creating tension when there is no need for tension. Since the robot did not like how Mr. Mead has more human traits, it shows that technology resents human nature. In "August 2026", the tension between technology and humans is different. There are no humans left, but their impact can still be seen. At the beginning of the story, the house tries wakes people up, make breakfast, and announce the news, even though there are no people in the house (Bradbury 1). Humans and technology used to work in harmony, with technology helping humans instead of technology going against humans. "The Pedestrian" more effectively conveys the tension between humans and technology than "August 2026" through the rejection of humanity from technology.

The third person limited perspective used by "The Pedestrian" is more effective than the omniscient perspective from "August 2026" because the limited perspective invites the reader to actively follow a character, leading to a more emotionally appealing story. At the beginning of the short story, Mr. Mead is walking through nature and observing his surroundings. The third person limited specifically focuses on his perspective so the reader has nothing else to be distracted by. The narrator describes Mr. Mead as "he was alone in this world of A.D. 2053, or as good as alone"(Bradbury 1). "The Pedestrian" immediately establishes a human main character that the reader can sympathize with. This sets up the reader to question and follow Mr. Mead, which makes he or she more involved. However, Bradbury uses third person limited, instead of third person omniscient. Later on, Mr. Mead "closed his eyes and stood very still, frozen, he could imagine himself upon the center of a plain..." (Bradbury 1). Bradbury's use of the word "could" shows a hypothetical, in that the audience does not directly know Mr. Mead's thoughts. There is a distinction between the reader and Mr. Mead; the reader is not him, but

rather is traveling alongside him. In contrast, "August 2026" uses a third person omniscient. At the beginning of August 2026, Bradbury writes, "In the living room the voice-clock sang...", showing a perspective from the clock, but later on "In the kitchen the breakfast stove gave a hissing sigh..." (Bradbury 1), which shows perspective from multiple characters. The lack of a main focus means "August 2026" uses third person omniscient. Although this means the reader would be able to understand more, it means that they would not have a deeper connection with the characters, since less time is spent focusing on individuality. Thus, "The Pedestrian" is more effective in communicating at a more personal level, encouraging the reader to be more engaged.

"The Pedestrian" and "August 2026" both deal with dystopian worlds, but using tension, contrasting tones, and third person limited, "The Pedestrian" is more effective in demonstrating technology's hostility against humans. Around the time period when Bradbury wrote both of these stories, new advancements allowed the creation of weapons capable of destroying all of humanity. Bradbury saw a future where human creations go against the nature of their owners instead of helping them. In addition, he also saw a different future where technology used to help people, but eventually was destroyed. Technology can be deeply different than humans, to the point where it starts to differ from the intentions of the being that created it.