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Mrs. Small

Bradbury's Future

WWII was the deadliest event in military history, leaving approximately 3% of the world's population dead. Previously unimaginable machines were created to optimize the slaughter of millions. Writing many of his stories in the wake of this horrible war, famous author Ray Bradbury was no stranger to the destructive power of technology and weapons. The arms race, and its product of the atom bomb, loomed over the safety of many, so naturally, Bradbury took a very pessimistic stance towards the 21st century. Many of his books incorporated the theme that technology would become superior to humans. The short stories "The Pedestrian" and "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains," are no exceptions. The latter takes place in (*gasp*) August 2026, and it is an interpretation of Sara Teasdale's famous poem of a similar title. Humans, extinct from a nuclear war, have left the world to their technologies. The story's plot revolves around a house, which protects and maintains itself. "The Pedestrian," on the other hand, takes place in a world where humans are still alive but have become devoid of happiness and social interaction. Technology runs society, the police have been reduced to a completely automated car that has the power to arrest people. "The Pedestrian" more effectively expresses Bradbury's views about technology- that it has become dominant over humans- by utilizing imagery, dialogue, and characterization in order to show the dynamics between humans and technology.

In “The Pedestrian,” Bradbury uses vivid imagery to convey his point about the power of technology, while in “August 2026,” he only uses imagery to describe the plot. In “The Pedestrian,” he compares houses to “tombs, ill-lit by television light, where the people sat like the dead” (1). Bradbury uses this eerie imagery to convey that the humans of the future turn mechanical and lifeless. Technology, on the other hand, thrives. As Mead is walking down the street, “[a] lone car turned a corner quite suddenly and flashed a fierce white cone of light upon him. He stood entranced, not unlike a night moth, stunned by the illumination, and then drawn toward it” (1). The comparison between Mead and a moth adds to Bradbury’s theme that Technology becomes superior to humans by expressing Mead’s helplessness in the face of a police car, like a moth in the face of a light. The car, the last remaining member of the police force, (as crime has been very nearly eradicated) is completely automated yet has the authority and power to arrest Mead and take him to a psychiatric center for evaluation. In “August 2026,” Bradbury similarly uses imagery to convey this theme but to a lesser extent. He mainly portrays technology as superior through the fact that it outlasts humans, rather than using imagery to compare the roles of each in society. Bradbury describes the remains of humans: “Here the silhouette in paint of a man mowing a lawn. Here, as in a photograph, a woman bent to pick flowers...[the house] had shut up its windows and drawn shades in an old-maidenly preoccupation with self-protection which bordered on a mechanical paranoia” (2). Even though he describes how humans perished, he is not able to actively compare the interactions between humans and technology because humans have all died. Bradbury’s usage of dystopian imagery in both stories helps convey his theme about the superiority of technology when compared to humans. While “The Pedestrian” uses imagery to analyze both “species” roles in society,

“August 2026” uses imagery only to emphasize that technology outlasts humans, rather than examining the dynamics between the two groups.

“The Pedestrian” also uses its dialogue to better convey Bradbury’s message than “August 2026.” The former uses its dialogue to analyze the dynamics between technology and humans in a futuristic society, while the latter cannot have significant dialogue because humans have all died. When Mr. Mead is walking alone, he encounters “The police, of course, but what a rare, incredible thing; in a city of three million, there was only one police car left” (1). Initially shocked, he explains that he was just “Walking for air. Walking to see” (2). However, the robot probes him with a series of questions and eventually arrests an innocent and powerless Mr. Mead. Despite his innocence, he lacks authority over the robotic car and is unable to protest or do anything at all. The police car takes him against his will to the Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies. The dialogue in the story conveys Bradbury’s theme most powerfully, as it analyzes which group has the power in society- humans or technology. During the plot of “August 2026,” however, there is no such dialogue between humans and technology, because all humans have perished due to a nuclear war. Inspired by Sara Teasdale’s “There Will Come Soft Rains,” Bradbury’s story focuses on the aftermath of a nuclear strike, “not one will know of the war, not one / Will care at last when it is done” (Teasdale, lines 7-8). Teasdale’s theme- once humanity perishes, nothing will care about us- is used in “August 2026” to also promote Bradbury’s theme. The house in the story does not care about the disappearance of the humans, as it just goes on ordinarily pretending nothing is wrong. Bradbury indicates this by having a one-sided conversation between the voices of technology and the humans who are dead. When a fire breaks out in the house, the house instinctively calls out “Help, help! Fire! Run,

run!...Fire, fire, run, run, like a tragic nursery rhyme” (4) with no humans to hear it. The house continues on with how it had been programmed, and it doesn’t care that humans are gone.

This adds to Bradbury’s theme that technology has become superior, because it has outlasted humans, who have killed themselves through nuclear war. Both “The Pedestrian” and “August 2026” use dialogue to convey Bradbury’s theme, however “The Pedestrian” is able to use dialogue more effectively because it identifies the power that technology has over humans in society, while “August 2026” is unable to do so because the humans in the story have all died.

In “the Pedestrian,” Bradbury also uses characterization to portray technology’s superiority over humans. When Mr. Mead encounters the lone police car they erupt in dialogue; the robotic car immediately takes the upper hand with a series of penetrating questions. Bradbury uses this dialogue in order to portray the police car as a very powerful figure with lines such as “Don’t speak unless you’re spoken to!” (2) and with the repetition of “Get in” (2) when Mr. Mead attempts to plead his case. Through this command-like conversation, Bradbury successfully portrays technology like the police car as having power over humans like Mr. Mead. In addition to characterizing the technology, Bradbury also describes the humans as “scarab beetles, a faint incense pattering from their exhausts, skimmed homeward to the far directions” (1). These comparisons show how the roles of society have reversed, humans have become mechanical and lifeless, while technology has gained power over them. In “August 2026,” Bradbury also characterizes the house. When the fire erupts, “The house tried to save itself” (4) with a combination of water and a “gushing green chemical” (4). Bradbury characterizes the house as independent, able to maintain itself as well as fend for itself. On the other hand, Bradbury mentions how humans had all perished due to an atomic war- humans had eventually killed themselves. This contrast in “August 2026” also reinforces Bradbury’s theme, but is not as

effective as in “The Pedestrian” where both groups - humans and technology- are analyzed through their character.

Through both of these stories, we are able to clearly see one of Bradbury’s most common themes. “The Pedestrian” portrays it more effectively, with a direct comparison between humans and technology, while “August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains” does not include an analysis of humans. Although both of Bradbury’s stories seem far-fetched, some of his ideas have already come to life in the 21st century. The police car in “The Pedestrian” does not seem very alien to self-driving cars, and the house in “August 2026” contains many pieces of technology that are already in current society- Roomba cleaning robots, audio readers, and even fire sprinkler systems. While humanity might not yet notice it, technology is becoming stronger in our everyday lives, and patterns are beginning to form connecting our society to those of Bradbury’s dystopias.