

Neena Xiang

Mrs. Small

Section K

24 September 2019

Technology: A Threat to Human Independence

Humans can be lazy creatures who are always trying to make less work for themselves. This has resulted in the development of new technologies, and as technology improves, so does the quality of life. Technology has brought the comfortable air conditioned houses that many people are fortunate enough to live in, but what did people predict about the future of technology in the 1950s? In a time of conformity and the looming danger of nuclear war, American author Ray Bradbury didn't view technology in such a pleasant light. In his two dystopian short stories "The Pedestrian" and "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains" he depicts two possible futures that have been devastated by the advancement of technology. "The Pedestrian" follows the arrest of a man who has gone on a walk in a society where any outdoor activity is unheard of, and "August 2026" describes a lone house that is obvious to the nuclear war that has wiped out its residents. Both stories reflect the way Bradbury thought of the development of technology. Through his use of vivid imagery, ominous setting, and eerie mood, Bradbury more effectively warns that the development of technology will eliminate human independence in "The Pedestrian" than in "August 2026."

Both stories use detailed imagery to create a loss of individuality and solitude, but “The Pedestrian” better conveyed the feeling of isolation in society. “August 2026” is able to emphasize the loneliness through the description of the breakfast scene: “At eight-thirty the eggs were shrivelled and the toast was like stone... hot water whirled them down a metal throat which digested and flushed them away to the distant sea” (1). The scene creates a cold feeling as the food is discarded, but at the same time Bradbury describes the food as if it is being eaten. An inhuman object enhances the sense of solitude, and the lack of human presence creates an unnerving sensation. Technology in this story outlives humans, and Bradbury uses the imagery to communicate loneliness from the absence of people. Although “August 2026” effectively displays the sense of isolation, “The Pedestrian” better presents a feeling of solitude through its imagery. Bradbury describes the street as “not unequal to walking through a graveyard where only the faintest glimmers of firefly light appeared in flickers behind the windows” (1). Society is painted as dead and lifeless, and the only signs of human activity are the TVs that flicker through the window. Bradbury crafts the lonely mood by comparing the streets, which are usually lively in today’s cities, to a graveyard which remains desolate until there is a need to visit. By using the apathy of the people living in that society, he heightens the loneliness felt with the main character. “The Pedestrian” emphasizes solitude in the story more effectively than “August 2026.”

Bradbury also better utilizes the gloomy setting in “The Pedestrian” to caution people of the consequences from an increased dependence on technology, while the energetic setting “August 2026” depicts technology as helpful tools in the everyday household that can still fail. The house in the story reminds its residents of the time and does certain tasks for them, chiming

“eight-one o'clock, off to school, off to work, run, run, eight-one!” (1). Bradbury takes a more positive view of technology in this storying, reminding his readers that technology can also aid people in their lives. Simple, dull tasks can be left to robots while people can spend more time doing the activities they enjoy. Despite the benefits Bradbury presents in “August 2026,” he still reminds his readers that technology can malfunction. The house in the story wasn’t able to put out the fire that engulfed it and “wailed, Fire, fire, run, run, like a tragic nursery rhyme” (4). The house and the fire warns his readers that technology can fail, and it can not save them from every situation. Technology can only do so much, hence people still need to be independent from it. Although house “August 2026” provides a warning, “The Pedestrian” more compellingly alerts of the dangers of technology. The people within the society of "The Pedestrian" have isolated themselves in their homes. Bradbury uses the complacency of the citizens of the city to create an eerie possibility of the future. The streets in the story become a mirror to reflect the isolation of its citizens. As Leonard Mead walks through the “silent and long and empty” streets, “only his shadow mov[ed] like the shadow of a hawk in midcountry” (1). Technology has made everyone reclusive and extinguished the social nature of humans in this story. Mead is the only one who breaks the conformity that consumes the city. Bradbury presents a terrible future that is more plausible than the scenario he presented in “August 2016.” The setting of “The Pedestrian” better amplifies the consequences of the overuse of technology and alerts the reader of possible dystopic aftermaths.

“The Pedestrian” also more effectively creates a callous mood that highlights the eradication of human autonomy, while “August 2026” used its somber mood to emphasize the possible companionship between technology and humans. The house in “August 2026” always

seeks to help the residents that once resided in the house. The house asks, “Mrs. McClellan, which poem would you like this evening?” and plays her favorite poem after not receiving a response (3). The people in the world had a healthier relationship with technology, so knowing that house will never get a response creates the melancholy mood. However, Bradbury still shows that humans in this world have given up some of their independence to the machines because people heavily rely on the technology that surrounds them. “The Pedestrian” exaggerates this idea that technology is the catalyst to isolation and complacency. The large city is left with a lone police car in “the empty streets with the empty side-walks” (1). The car is the only activity in the streets other than Mead, and it is completely robotic. The readers are left in a barren land devoid of any emotions. Technology completely entrances the people in this society and pulls them into isolation. People lose the reason to leave their homes and the community lacks any signs of life. The mood reflects the apathetic nature of the world of “The Pedestrian” as it completely revolves around technology.

“The Pedestrian” better cautions readers that the advancements and overuse of technology will strip humans of their autonomy than “August 2026.” Through both of his stories, Bradbury presents bleak futures that devastate humanity as a whole. Technology consumes society, and as a result, halts any more development. These predictions don’t have to be the future, for the future can never be completely foreseen. People have the free will and self-control to avoid scenarios such as in “The Pedestrian” and “August 2026.” The future is never set in stone, but these stories serve to remind people of a looming possibility that can come with any advancement in technology.