

# Symbolism through the short story the pedestrian by ray bradbury essay sample

[Media](#), [Television](#)



Since the turn of the century, new technology has slowly begun to create an anti-social and impersonal society. Take, for instance, the advancement of the entertainment industry; people's idea of a social night out is "going to the movies", where there is very limited social interaction. With the advancements of kitchen appliances, time is rarely spent with one's family in the kitchen whether it is to cook, wash dishes, or just socialize. Since online chat rooms and email, the use of the telephone has become almost obsolete, and people rarely meet face-to-face. When one thinks of how impersonal western civilization is today, try to imagine life fifty years from now. The short story "The Pedestrian", written by Ray Bradbury, is set fifty years from today. In "The Pedestrian" impersonality is shown to be the result of advancements in technology through the symbolic use of the empty police car, the empty streets and the continuous viewing of television.

Ray Bradbury expresses the negative impact of technology in "The Pedestrian" through the use of the empty police car. Leonard Mead is on his nightly walk and is approached by an empty police car, he is questioned about his walking and if he has reason to do it. After he tries to explain his reasoning for walking the police car orders him to get in, and informs him that he is going to be taken to a psychiatric ward.

"He put his hand to the door and peered into the back seat, which was a little cell, a little black jail with bars. It smelled. It smelled of riveted steel. It smelled of harsh antiseptic; it smelled too clean and hard and metallic. There was nothing soft in there." (p157)

In this passage, Ray Bradbury uses many symbols to represent impersonality. The “ little black jail with bars” shows that the police car is a jail cell on wheels. The fact that it is black shows that a criminal or potential criminal is not given any chance for imagination or creativity, no colour represents no excitement or happiness. The symbol of the car being empty with no police officer represents no chance for excuse or repentance. This symbol of no mercy shows that technology is in control of the humans in a world designed and build by humans, Leonard Mead is out for a walk, where is the crime in that? And yet the police car insists he go to the psychiatric ward for questioning, without giving Leonard a chance to explain. A world designed by humans should be controlled by them, when technology takes over, a problem has arrived.

The result of advancements in technology is also shown in “ The Pedestrian” through the empty streets. During Leonard Mead’s evening walk, he reflects on why people stay at home and what they do. On Leonard’s walk he notes that “ The street was silent and long and empty, with only his shadow moving like the shadow of a hawk in mid-country. If he closed his eyes and stood very still, frozen, he could imagine himself upon the centre of a plain, a wintry, windless American desert with no house in a thousand miles, and only the dry riverbed, the streets, for company.” (p154)

This passage is very symbolic and uses multiple things to portray the emptiness and loneliness of the streets. Leonard’s shadow is describes as like a hawk, this description shows that he must move without being noticed by the police or anyone in their homes as not to disturb them; it also means

that his shadow is the only thing keeping him company. When he closes his eyes the city is described as a wintry plain, a desert, and the streets as dry riverbed. This symbolic representation shows how alone and empty the streets felt to him, with everyone tucked in their houses in front of their TV's. This quotation is very symbolic and helps one realize the emptiness and loneliness of a city under the control of technology.

The continuous viewing of television in the short story "The Pedestrian" is shown to be a negative impact of advancements in technology. After the police car insists that Leonard's job has become obsolete, Leonard realizes that

"Magazines and books didn't sell any more. Everything went on in the tomblike houses at night now, he thought, continuing his fancy. The tombs, ill-lit by television light, where the people sat like the dead, the grey or multicoloured lights touching their faces, but never really touching them." (p156)

One can tell the entertainment industry has been taken over by TV when not even books or magazines sell. In this excerpt, people's homes are described as tombs, which revolve around the television. The TV was the main, if not only, source of light and people stayed glued to it for hours. The passage also says that the light touches their faces, but that isn't enough. One needs physical interaction to keep a healthy level of sanity. And the quotation refers to the people as "like the dead", no longer in control of their own lives but instead addicted to the TV, never wanting to leave its presence in fear of

the fact that they might miss something. The fact that one cannot leave the presence of the TV shows how technology has taken control and made life completely impersonal.

All of the symbols used come together to show that in just fifty years time, how impersonal life could potentially become. The advancements in technology are slowly working together and creating an impersonal atmosphere. While today, books still sell, and magazines are still read, household appliances are making things so convenient one rarely finds the need to leave the comfort of their own home. In “The Pedestrian” the symbolic use of the empty police car, the empty streets and the continuous viewing of television all combine to show that the impersonality of life is caused by the advancements in technology.