

Although, the story of  
'degradation through  
technology',



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Although, formally speaking, Ray Bradbury's stories *The Veldt* and *The Rocket* belong to the literary genre of sci-fi, they are not as much about exploring the theme of bright technological future as they are about exploring the effects of futuristic technology on one's consciousness.

The common thing about both stories is the fact that, in them, author strived to exploit the motif of parental/social alienation, which he thought was going to represent one of the most important aspects of futuristic living. At the same time, even though the plots of *The Veldt* and *The Rocket* revolve around the theme of how technology might affect the workings of people's consciousness, they offer diametrically opposite views, in regards to the subject matter. Whereas; *The Veldt* implies a counterproductive essence of such an effect, *The Rocket* promotes an idea that the utilization of technology does not deprive people of their existential vitality, but on the contrary - endows them with it. In other words; whereas, *The Veldt* is best referred to as the story of 'degradation through technology', *The Rocket* is most appropriately defined as the story about 'revival through technology'.

In our paper, we will aim to explore this thesis at length. In *The Veldt*, readers are being exposed to the story of two comparatively well-off but overly decadent parents George and Lydia coming to realization of the fact that their 'HappyLife Home', which featured visually three-dimensional nursery for kids, was in fact causing more harm to their and kids' well-being than good: "The more I see of the mess we've put ourselves in, the more it sickens me. We've been contemplating our mechanical, electronic navels for too long.

My God, how we need a breath of honest air!" (p. 17). As it appears out of story's context, the reason why George and Lydia were becoming increasingly weary of their house, filled with a variety of different technological gadgets, is that while living there, they felt as if life-force was being gradually sucked out of them - in 'HappyLife Home', there was nothing for both parents to occupy themselves with. In fact, house's nursery had even taken over the upbringing of their children Peter and Wendy.

This; however, had proven to be only a half of the problem - as time went by, George and Lydia started to realize that their kids were growing progressively alienated from them, on one hand, and becoming increasingly addicted to spending time in the nursery, on another. Slowly but surely, the techno-nursery became a surrogate parent for Peter and Wendy. As it was pointed out by story's another, psychologist David McClean: " You've let this room and this house replace you and your wife in your children's affections. This room is their mother and father, far more important in their lives than their real parents" (p.

16). Despite the fact that *The Veldt* was written circa 1951, in this sort story Bradbury was able to prove the strength of his prophetic insights beyond any reasonable doubt - after all, what author contemplated upon in this particular story, had now become a part of objective reality. Nowadays, the computer had effectively replaced parents for teenagers in many American families.

This, however did not make the lives of parents any easier - as McClean had rightly suggested, it is only the matter of time before kids, addicted to

playing with hi-tech gadgets, become mentally inadequate: " One of the original uses of these nurseries was so that we could study the patterns left on the walls by the child's mind, study at our leisure, and help the child. In this case, however, the room has become a channel toward-destructive thoughts, instead of a release away from them" (p. 16). Therefore, it makes no surprise that *The Veldt* ends on a tragic note - after having realized that their parents were serious about shutting down the nursery, Wendy and Peter decided to lure George and Lydia into it, in order for them to be eaten by lions.

The morale of this story could be articulated as follows: people who are being deprived of their existential vitality, due to having all of their desires fully satisfied, cannot possibly utilize technology to improve their lives even better - on the contrary, rich but decadent people's continuous exposure to technology will deprive them of the remains of their liveliness. Nevertheless, as we have pointed out earlier - in *The Rocket*, Bradbury discussed the effects of technology on people's consciousness from an entirely new perspective. In it, story's main character Fiorenzo Bodoni, who always dreamt of a space travel but was never able to afford it, decides to spend his lifesavings so that at least one member of his extended family would be able to experience the treat of a lifetime - flying to Mars on rocket, just like rich people do. He does it despite his friend Baramante's advise not to act foolish and to remain content with the fact that there are certain things that poor people will never be able to do: " No, Bodoni, buy a new wrecking machine, which you need, and pull your dreams apart with it, and smash them to pieces" (p. 178). In other words, even at the story's very beginning,

Bradbury provides readers with the good clue as to the main character's affiliation with the lowest social strata - hence, establishing an entirely new semantic context, within which story's plot would unravel, as compared to what it was the case with *The Veldt*. Unlike the characters of George and Lydia from *The Veldt*, Bodoni is being represented to readers as someone with the strong desire to help his children to be able to attain social prominence in the future, despite the impossible odds. Ironically enough though, it was namely Bodoni's realization of a sheer preposterousness of such his intention, which only added to the strength of his resolution to step over the limitations of its own social status - he swore to provide a chance to one of his numerous kids to experience space travel.

Nevertheless, it did not take too long for Bodoni to apprehend that if one of the children does fly to Mars, it would make the kid feeling guilty for the rest of his life, on the account that others were denied the same opportunity. In its turn, this caused story's main character to spend his hard-earned money to buy the mockup of a rocket, to put it in his backyard, and to install 3D TV screens in place of illuminators, so that all of his kids would be able to 'travel' to space and back, without knowing that this 'travel' was an illusion: "Let all of space come and go, and red Mars come up under our ship, and the moons of Mars, and let there be no flaws in the color film. Let there be three dimensions; let nothing go wrong with the hidden mirrors and screens that mold the fine illusion. Let time pass without crisis" (p. 184).

After having 'flown' to Mars and back with all the children onboard, Bodoni felt if his actual life's mission has been fulfilled - after having been to 'space', his kids will never think that, due to their low social status, there are

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things in life that they could never even dream of doing. Even Bodoni's rather unimaginative wife Maria had grown to appreciate what her husband did: " Very late in the night Bodoni opened his eyes. He sensed that his wife was lying beside him, watching him. She did not move for a very long time, and then suddenly she kissed his cheeks and his forehead.

' What's this?' he cried. ' You're the best father in the world,' she whispered" (p. 185). The morale of this story is: those with burning desire to fulfill their life-dreams, despite lacking financial means, represent the better part humanity, because it is namely this type of people that make scientific, cultural and social progress possible.

When we compare the endings of *The Veldt* and *The Rocket*, it will appear that; whereas, Bodoni's poverty was proven an asset, within the context of how his life was affected by technology, George and Lydia's prosperity, within the same context, was proven to be the key to their ' undoing'. Thus, just as we have stated in the thesis, the reading of Bradbury's both stories provides us with the insight onto the fact that technology itself can never be referred to as being ' inheritably wicked', as decadents do. Whereas; the utilization of 3D technology by George and Lydia in *The Veldt* resulted in bringing about their ultimate demise, the utilization of the same technology, on the part of Bodoni, allowed him to endow his children with an acute sense of self-respect and to strengthen the integrity of his marital relationship with Maria. This is exactly the reason why *The Rocket* is the last story in *The Illustrated Man* - apparently, Bradbury wanted to emphasize his belief in the beneficence to the mankind of just about any science-based technology. The analysis of motifs, contained in both stories, leaves very few doubts as to the <https://assignbuster.com/although-the-story-of-degradation-through-technology/>

full validity of his prophetic insights – just like the characters in *The Veldt*, today's White people in Western countries continue to grow ever more technologically minded. However, this does not make them more 'alive' – unlike their ancestors, who used to bring the light of civilization to savages; they now allow these savages to colonize their own countries under disguise of 'celebration of diversity'. Alternatively, the continuous utilization of technology by poor but mentally adequate people, unaffected by ideologies that derive out of bellyful idling (neo-Liberalism, New Age, etc.

), as Chinese and Russians, had created a situation when it is now only the matter of very short time, before the mission of bearing the light of civilization will be given to them. In *The Veldt* and in *The Rocket*, Bradbury referred to the concept of technology in essentially the same manner that Richard Wagner referred to the concept of 'gold' in his operas – just as it was the case with gold in Wagnerian operas, people's exposure to Bradbury's 'technology' turns weak even weaker and strong even stronger. Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to suggest that, besides high literary, there is also a high philosophical value to both of Bradbury's stories.

## References

Bradbury, Ray "The Illustrated Man". New York: Bantam Books, 1983. Print.