Family relationships in the illustrated man essay example

Family, Parents

Ray Bradbury’s science fiction is much different than that of many of the other practitioners of the craft. While many science fiction writers focus on adult adventures throughout the galaxies and the dystopian future that awaits all of humanity, Bradbury spends a great deal of time looking at the interactions of children with each other and with their family members. A great deal of the drama in Fahrenheit 451 turns on Guy Montag’s relationship with the young Clarisse; the summer joys of Douglas Spaulding, who is just old enough to realize that moments of happiness are as fleeting as fireflies, are what drives the interest in Dandelion Wine. In The Illustrated Man, a more loosely connected set of stories, quite a few of the scenes involve the ways that family members, parents and children, interact with one another. Because these are the first and often most basic relationships that we have as people, they inform the ways in which we interact with one another. As such, they are where someone who would like to change humanity would begin.

“ The Veldt” involves a family living in a society far in the future. The parents have installed a three-dimensional nursery for their children in order to keep them entertained; one of the modern trends of parenting, even back when Bradbury was writing, was to use artificial means of entertainment to keep children occupied. This made parenting “ easier,” at least in terms of time spent with the children, but it also increased the emotional distance between parents and children. Even though the nursery cost almost as much as the rest of their house, their father had said, “’nothing’s too good for our children’”(Bradbury). The parents in this story notice that the children’s nursery is showing an African veldt with hungry lions gnawing on some

carcasses. They call in a child psychiatrist who suggests that the automatic house (which has many automated devices in addition to the nursery) should be turned off, so that the children can become more independent. The children are angry at first, but then they agree. When the children go missing, though, the parents look for them; it is a trick to lock the parents inside the nursery. The psychiatrist eats lunch with the children that day and, in the final scene, he notices the lions feasting on new prey. The implication, of course, is that trusting electronics to parent one's children only leads to disaster. Children need guidance from their parents, not from their televisions or gaming devices, and it is only this guidance that will lead them to become productive, ethical members of society. The trend toward giving children everything they want, or everything they think they need, is only going to produce generations of narcissists – as the children's disposal of their parents suggests. After all, the nursery was designed to catch " the telepathic emanations of the children's minds and [create] life to fill their every desire. The children thought lions, and there were lionsGiraffes – giraffes. Death and death" (Bradbury). Desire without direction leads to destruction.

" Marionettes, Inc." features another way in which people attempt to substitute technological devices for authentic relationships. Braling and Smith are two middle-aged men who feel confined inside their marriages. Braling's wife is always anxious, dictating his every move, while Smith's wife is clingy, always asking for his affection and presence, " call[ing him] at work twelve times a day [to] talk baby talk" (Bradbury). The fact that both men are conflicted about this might seem odd in our divorce-happy time, but back

when Bradbury was writing, divorce was not as easy to obtain, and there was more shame to it, so people just stuck it out in miserable marriages. Smith finds out about the Marionettes, Inc. company, which makes precise robotic duplicates of people. He tells Braling about it, but Braling has already bought one that he uses with his wife when he wants to go out and do his own thing. His wife has no idea what is going on, and he has devised a plan to travel to Rio while his marionette is carrying out his functions at home. Smith decides to buy his own.

As one might expect, though, the women are savvy to this already. Smith opens his bankbook to see if he has enough money to buy one, but $10, 000 is missing from his account. When he goes to wake his wife and question her, he tries to wake her, putting his head on her chest. He hears " Tick-tick-tick-tick-tick" (Bradbury). She has already replaced herself and left. Meanwhile, Braling's marionette has developed feelings toward Braling's wife and refuses to go along when Braling wants to take his place back. Braling attempts to call the company to get technical support, but the marionette refuses to let him. The marionette then tells him that he plans to take Braling's wife to Rio before saying goodbye. At the end, Mrs. Braling awakes to affection: "[s]he [puts] her hand to her cheek. Someone [has] just kissed it. She [shivers] and [looks] up. ' Why—you haven't done that in years,' she [murmurs]. ' We'll see what we can do about that,' someone said" (Bradbury). One could either conclude that the marionette has gotten rid of the real Braling, or that the real Braling has won out and has a new gratitude for his wife.

In both " The Veldt" and " Marionettes, Inc.," the importance of maintaining

strong family relationships is a theme of emphasis. Both families have attempted to substitute technological devices for authentic relationships, because the process of relating authentically is apparently too taxing. The possible consequences, as the stories relate, are much more costly than the characters would have thought.

Works Cited

Bradbury, Ray. The Illustrated Man. http://greenhumanities. edublogs. org/files/2012/09/Bradbury-Illustrated-Man-1wytglb. pdf