

The themes of the advancement of technology and its effects on the psychosocial h...



Ray Bradbury is an award-winning author widely known for his descriptive style of writing in American literature. Branded by careful construction of ordinary details and use of figurative language he has demonstrated a great deal of success in using symbolism in his works (New World Encyclopedia contributors). 'The Veldt' by Ray Bradbury, is a short science fiction story published in 1951. It is one among a collection of eighteen other similar short stories in the book 'The Illustrated Man'. The story is particularly stimulating the writer uses an array of themes to address the problems that comes with overdependence of technology.

Bradbury writes about a family that lives in a technology-enhanced house. George Hadley and Lydia Hadley are Wendy and Peter's parents. Their automated house accomplishes supernatural things like feeding and clothing its inhabitants. The troubling story begins when Lydia asks his husband whether he has noticed something unusual with the nursery. Apparently, the nursery is one of the most exclusive and exciting rooms in the entire house. Its glass walls are able to recreate scenes and sounds that are invoked by its occupants' thoughts. When the couple visits the room, they find themselves in the middle of an African veldt and can hear the papery rustle of vultures and sound of lions savoring their prey. The sounds and images are shockingly believable that they are compelled to run out of the room.

While George wants to believe that their children are not passionate about violence and blood, Lydia is worried they could be. In any case, the room was designed to allow the kids exercise their minds with unusual fantasies and in turn provide this information to their parents. George contemplates to shut

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down all the electronics and lead a simple life; an idea Lydia welcomes with open arms. For a while, she felt like the house had taken up all her wifely duties.

When George goes back to the nursery a second time and tries to alter the situation, nothing changes. He is now inclined to think that his children have overridden the nursery's response. Concerns over whether they were psychologically healthy begin to creep his mind and decides to ask them about the nursery when they arrive home from a carnival. After the kids refute knowledge of the veldt and Wendy goes into the nursery, she comes back with information that the scenery has changed.

The apparent secrecy and disobedience displayed by the two children compel George to invite a psychologist to come and establish the problem. It is established that the veldt suggests the hostile attitude the children have towards their parents. This is eventually demonstrated at the end of the story where the children lock up their parents to be eaten by the lions.

In 'The Veldt', family is substituted with technology. George and Lydia want the best for their children. They spend a fortune to acquire "HappyLife Home", a home meant to make the life of their children worthwhile. Indeed the house achieved the purpose for which it was meant. But it does this so well that their parents start getting the feeling that they are being phased out by technology. This is seen when David McClean says "...This room is their mother and father, far more important in their lives than their real parents..." (Bradbury 15). In a typical family setting, such problems would be

easily rectified but the Hadley's children would rather kill their parents than
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have the nursery shut down. Peter is seen shouting at his father to the top of his voice “ I hate you!” when George shuts down the nursery (Bradbury 16).

It could be argued that George and Lydia are not great parents. One could also argue that technology is powerful enough to cause an addiction.

Bradbury’s tale very well describes today’s culture where we see members of the family texting using their phones over dinner. We would rather be distracted by technology than a fellow family member. According to the author of this story, the supremacy of technology spells an end to familial relationships.

Bradbury successfully manages to demonstrate how technology leads to conflict of identity in the family setup. In several instances we find George and Lydia struggling to establish their identity as parents while at the same time fighting for their personal identity. As a confession to her husband, Lydia says “ I don’t know - I don’t know...Maybe I don’t have enough to do...” (Bradbury 8). Everything including giving a bath to the children is done by the house. Similarly, George feels like he has been stripped off his parenting duties and cannot establish a proper communication platform with his children. This is evidenced when George tells Lydia how their children threw tantrums upon being given slight punishments (Bradbury 8). We can deduce that he is afraid he does not have the right to punish them for any wrong doings. Their worry to find relevance underscores the natural human desire to find importance in day to day tasks and the need to feel that one is making positive impact to the society. According to Bradbury, even with advances in technology, such a basic urge does not cease.

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In his story, Bradbury does a good job at using metaphors to capture the imagination of his audience. He uses his characters to describe implied conditions using metaphors. For instance, George is used to describe the virtual sun in African veldt to be “ like a hot paw” (Bradbury 8). This comment is meant to spark the memory that there exist lions in African Sahara. Another instance is when George describes the lions’ eye to be “ like the yellow of an exquisite French tapestry” (Bradbury 6). This remark reminds of the scenic view of lions and their beauty. In any case, the lions in this context are artificial just like tapestries. The author conveniently uses metaphors to heighten his descriptive passages and provide clear mental images that underscore the theme of danger.

The choice of words used to describe how the automated house accomplishes various tasks is important in understanding Bradbury’s use of personification in relation to his overriding theme of technology. At the onset of the story, we see the narrator words that “ His wife paused in the middle of the kitchen and watched the stove busy humming to itself, making supper for four” (Bradbury 5) and “ This house which clothed and fed and rocked them to sleep and played and sang and was good to them” (Bradbury 5). He is interested in showing how actions expected to be done by human assumed by technology.

The artistic element of evident throughout the story is that of point of view. The story is told from a third-person point of view. This would mean that he or she does not actively take part in the in the story. It is important to note however that the narrator is very closely aligned with the character of

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George Hadley. It can be seen that he does follow George in all scenes and does not depart to go and report anything happening away from George. This pattern only breaks upon George and Lydia's demise. The narrator goes ahead to deliver the scene involving David McClean, Peter and Wendy. The author fails at in making the reader aware of each character's thoughts and feelings as the narrator is biased. To the end of the story, the audience cannot understand what thoughts Hadley's children have other than those voiced and captured by the nursery.

Ray Bradbury style can be described, finally as one that depends on figurative and highly descriptive language in his fictional works. The stylistic effects succeed in helping the readers construct mental images of his fictional work throughout the story. The main theme that is the advancement in technology and how it interferes with the psychological health of people is well captured. While the demise of George and Lydia might have been sad, the real pain is left for the children to feel. The lessons that be drawn from this story are relevant to the current society.