

“There Will Come Soft Rains” by Ray Bradbury

- **Background Information:**

- The story was written & published in the year 1950.
- The story explores society's fears of the devastating effects of war, after having survived World War II, which included the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan.
- Society's fears only grew further, as the world entered the Cold War era.
- The Cold War saw the rise of nuclear weaponry, and the Soviet Union tested their first nuclear bomb in 1949.
- Sara Teasdale's poem “There Will Come Soft Rains,” which was included in Bradbury's story, was published in 1918.
 - The poem was inspired by the events of World War I and the 1918 flu pandemic, which also devastated the planet and the natural world.

- **PLOT:**

(Exposition)

The story opens on a house (main character/setting) that is working through its daily routine.

It greets the family that lives inside, cooks their meals, cleans, provides daily reminders about their responsibilities, alerts them to the time and items in their daily schedule, instructs them on how to dress for the weather, keeps them protected and secure, and attempts to entertain them by reading poetry.

(Rising Action)

However, it is quickly revealed that the house is empty, due to the impact of a nuclear war (central conflict). The house has been abandoned and must survive on its own.

Throughout the entire story, the reader does not see any humans. Despite this fact, the house must survive on its own and continue through its daily routine and continues to serve/assist the missing family. This includes disposing of their sickly pet dog when it returns to the home.

(Climax)

Near the end of the story, a tree crashes through the kitchen window, knocking over a bottle of flammable cleaning solvent. A fire is ignited, and though the house attempts to put the fire out, it is ultimately unsuccessful.

(Falling Action & Resolution)

The house burns to the ground, except for a single wall (and voice-box). However, even in its "death" the house continues to attempt to care for the family, by reciting the date over and over.

- **SETTING (external):**

Mass destruction of a city following a **cataclysmic** event; All of the buildings seem to have been decimated by a **nuclear bomb or nuclear conflict** (radioactive glow), left in broken (rubble) and burnt (ashes) pieces, with the exception of a **single house**.

All that remains of the humans are **nuclear shadows** (the burned remains of the human beings – silhouettes, paintings & burned images) on the outer walls of the houses. **This reveals that the humans have been destroyed by the technology (the nuclear bomb) that they built.**

Evidence:

- *"A city of rubble and ashes. This was the one house left standing" (page 1).*
- *"At night the ruined city gave off a radioactive glow which could be seen for miles" (page 1).*
- *"Their images burned on wood in one titanic instant, a small boy, hands flung into the air; higher up, the image of a thrown ball, and opposite him a girl, hands raised to catch a ball which never came down" (page 1).*

- **SETTING (internal):**

The internal setting of the story takes place inside a futuristic and fully automated house, which is seemingly vacant/empty of all humans.

The house is equipped with various robotic devices that complete every possible task the humans may require, including: cooking, cleaning, setting the daily schedule, providing security, entertainment, childcare, etc.

*****This reveals to us what many of the humans of this society most valued.**

The humans relied very heavily on technology, and trusted technology for their survival.

In fact, the humans are seemingly obsessed with technology at the expense of all else. People no longer have to think or care for themselves, they are diminishing what it means to be human (to think creatively, critically, to care for others...).

Evidence:

- "The morning house lay **empty**. The clock ticked on, repeating and repeating its sounds into the **emptiness**" (page 1).
- In the kitchen **the breakfast stove gave a hissing sigh** and ejected from its warm interior eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs

sunnyside up, sixteen slices of bacon, two coffees, and two cool glasses of milk" (page 1).

- "The dirty dishes were dropped into a hot washer and emerged twinkling dry" (page 1).
- "*Nine-fifteen, sang the clock, time to clean*" (page 1).
- "Until this day, how well **the house had kept its peace**. How carefully it had inquired, 'Who goes there? What's the password?'" (page 2).
- "...**Wall panels flipped open and the copper scrap rats flashed swiftly out**. The offending dust, hair, or paper seized in miniature steel jaws, was raced back to the burrows" (page 2).

- **CHARACTER(S):**

There are no human characters present in the story. The only voice we hear, and the only action we see is from the one house left standing in the destroyed city.

- **PERSONIFICATION:**

Instead of human characters, the author uses the futuristic house as the story's only character. The house has been **personified**, and due to its programming and technology it **acts (cook/clean), feels (fear, panic, desperation, anger), speaks, and dies** as if it were a human.

The house is seemingly built to replace the humans (because of the house the humans no longer need to care/think for themselves). The level to which the house is made human, highlights how infatuated many humans in this society were with technology.

The use of personification makes the house's death more impactful and tragic. As we see the house feel panic, despair, and fear throughout its journey, we are given a tragic **insight into the same journey that would have be-fallen the humans as they met their same tragic ending.*****

It also allows us to understand the human experience of war in a more palatable way. In other words, it is easier to read descriptions of a house being burned down, than it would be to read vivid and graphic description of this happening to a house.

It experiences the following:

- While **singing** out the time and daily schedule (among its many other tasks) the house appears **anxious and nervous**, because no one responds to its questions and reminders:

"In the living room the voice-clock **sang**, *Tick-tock, seven o'clock, time to get up, time to get up, seven o'clock!* as if it were **afraid** that nobody would. The morning house lay empty" (page 1).

- However, it also shows **persistence** and **loyalty** to the family it serves. While the house does notice that the house is empty, it continues with its responsibilities and its sense of duty.

- “The house was an altar with ten thousand attendants, big, small, servicing, attending, in choirs... the ritual... continued senselessly, uselessly” (page 2).
- As the house catches fire, it also experiences **utter panic/terror** over its own destruction and the destruction of the technology it contains. It expresses a **desire to protect** its precious technology (and perhaps the humans it cares for), and **fights** to stay alive. But it is ultimately unsuccessful. Just like the humans before it, the house also “dies.”

“Fire!” **screamed** a voice. The house lights flashed, water pumps shot from the ceilings... **The house tried to save itself**... But too late. Somewhere, **sighing**, a pump **shrugged** to a stop” (page 3).

“At ten o'clock the house began to **die**” (page 3).

- **CONFLICT:**

- **Person vs. Person (Person vs. Environment/Nature) → the house vs. the fire (the tree/the wind)**

A tree crashes into the kitchen window of the house, which results in the house catching fire and burning to the ground.

In the story, the personified house represents the humans and their obsession with technology.

In contrast, the fire is also personified, but it represents nature fighting back against the destructive actions brought by the humans and their technology.

The decision made by the humans to push technology to the limit (playing with nuclear energy, and bringing nuclear warfare to the land) has resulted in nature being continually injured and poisoned (e.g the dog experiencing radiation sickness, the tree being weakened), which is why it “attacks**” the house.**

- **Person vs. Society → house vs. the humans who destroyed the world through war; humans who supported the advancement of technology**

A small group of humans collectively built a world full of advanced technology, nuclear energy, and total automation (machines who can complete human action).

The humans continually purchased more and more technology (as seen in the house), clearly supporting the idea that technology is worth the risk.

In the story, this has seemingly given way to a nuclear war or large-scale conflict. **Throughout this conflict, the humans destroy themselves, and the house is left to survive on its own.**

- **Person vs. Self → house vs. itself**

After the humans have destroyed each other and the rest of the city, the house has to continue on. However, it suspects or fears that it has been left alone.

The house must decide to persevere and continue to serve its family, despite its suspicions that they will not return.

- **SYMBOLISM:**

Dog/Tree = nature; innocence (bystanders)

the impact of human's love/obsession for technology on the natural world

Nature has continually suffered because of the world created by the humans. The after effects of the war (radiation, bombed/destroyed landscapes) has deeply impacted their ability to either survive or thrive. After being caught in the decimated warzone left behind by the humans, the tree is weakened, and the dog in the story is terribly ill, falls into madness, and dies.

- "The dog, once huge and fleshy, but now gone to bone and covered with sores, moved in and through the house... it ran wildly in circles, biting its tail, spun in a frenzy, and died" (page 2).

The author also includes a poem within his story entitled: "There Will Come Soft Rains." **The poem vaguely alludes to the war/conflict in which humans were embroiled. It also suggests that nature would be better off if humans were gone, as they would finally be free of the human's dangerous and harmful actions.**

- "And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.
Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree,
if mankind perished utterly" (page3).

Tree/Fire = the strength of the natural world; destruction of technological world

The tree and the fire, objects from the natural world, work together to fight back against the world the humans have created.

House = human's love for/obsession with technology

The house is built entirely of cutting edge technology. The humans needn't care for themselves, because they have built technology that can do everything for them. This also shows how valuable the humans consider technology to be. They use their technology to develop nuclear weaponry, which led to mass death and destruction.

Humans = "gods" (humans are considered the most powerful beings)

The humans are the **creators** of all of the technology within their world, and with their power they are also responsible for the world's **destruction**. In this way, they have acted like gods. In the quote that follows, Bradbury chooses to compare the humans to gods, as well as **using language that is connected to religion**.

- “The house was an [altar](#) with ten thousand attendants, big, small, servicing attending, in [choirs](#). But the [gods](#) had gone away, and the [ritual](#) of the [religion](#) continued senselessly, uselessly” (page 2).

- **IRONY:**

Situational Irony (opposite outcome of what was expected):

The house is meant to stand strong, and has every failsafe to keep it functioning; survives a nuclear war, however, it is destroyed VERY QUICKLY by a tree (nature).

- “It quivered at each sound, the house did. If a sparrow brushed a window, the shade snapped up. The bird startled, flew off! No, not even a bird much touch the house!” (page 2).
- “At ten o'clock the house began to die. The wind blew. A **failing tree bough** crashed through the kitchen window. Cleaning solvent, bottled, shattered over the stove. The room was ablaze in an instant!” (page 3).
- “The fire burst the house and let it slam flat down” (page 4).

Situational Irony

The humans believed the technology would save/protect/help them live safe and happy lives. Unfortunately, it does the opposite. The technology kills them.

- “Until this day, how well the house had kept its peace. How carefully it had inquired, ‘Who goes there? What’s the password?’ and, getting no answer from lonely foxes and whining cats, it had shut up its windows and drawn shades in an old maidenly preoccupation with self-protection which bordered on mechanical paranoia” (page 2).
- “At night the city gave off a radioactive glow which could be seen for miles” (page 1).
- “The entire west face of the house was black, save for five places... their images burned on wood in one titanic instant... five spots of paint—the man, the woman, the children, the ball—remained. The rest was a thin charcoaled layer” (page 1).

Dramatic Irony (when the reader has information that a character does not):

The house continues to work and complete its daily tasks, without the humans’ presence. The house seems to believe the humans will one day return.

In contrast, the reader – having read the descriptions of the empty house and the world outside the house – recognizes that the humans are dead and will never actually return. **The house cannot see the world outside, only the reader can.**

- “In the living room the voice clock sang... *‘time to get up, seven o’clock!’* as if it were [afraid](#) that nobody would. The morning house lay [empty](#). The clock ticked on, repeating and repeating its sounds into the [emptiness](#)” (1).
- “*Eight-one, tick-tock, eight-one o’clock, off to school, off to work, run, run, eight-one!* But no doors slammed, no carpets took the soft tread of rubber heels... and the rain tapped on the [empty](#) house, echoing” (1).

- “‘Mrs. McClellan, which poem would you like this evening?’ The house was silent. The [house] said at last, ‘Since you express no preference, I shall select a poem at random’” (page 3).
- “The entire west face of the house was black, save for five places... *their images burned* on wood in one titanic instant... five spots of paint—the man, the woman, the children, the ball—remained. The rest was a thin charcoaled layer” (page 1).

Epiphany:

The story opens with the narrator describing the house working through its daily routine. It also observes that the house is seemingly empty.

As soon as the narrator begins to describe the world outside the house, the reader realizes why the house is empty. All of the humans have been killed in some type of nuclear conflict. The main character (the house) does not learn/gain this knowledge, as it is not able to see the outside world, as the reader does.

- “The morning house lay *empty*” (page 1).
- “The house stood alone in a city of rubble and ashes” (page 1).
- “The entire west face of the house was black, save for five places... *their images burned* on wood in one titanic instant... five spots of paint—the man, the woman, the children, the ball—remained. The rest was a thin charcoaled layer” (page 1).

THEME → Write one sentence that expresses the message or lesson of the story, it should contain a cause and effect.

Topic (one word or multiple short phrases):

technology, humanity's over-reliance on technology, destruction

Theme:

Humanity's over-reliance on technology is what will ultimately bring our destruction.

Both human society and the natural world have suffered greatly due to humanity's decision to prioritize themselves and their love for technology above all else.

Humanity's obsession and over-reliance on technology will doom both human society and the natural world.

The over-use of technology will be humanity's downfall.