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Pulling Us Apart:

A Look at Separation in "The Pedestrian"

Ray Bradbury's classic story "The Pedestrian" is very simple. A man goes for a walk and gets taken away to jail for his suspicious behavior: walking outside. While this story questions how technology can overwhelm us and separate us from one another, it also makes a clear statement about what it means to live life. Through his use of description, Bradbury creates a picture of the hundreds of people we never see. This living death they exist in is devoid of interaction with one another, the laws we set up to govern ourselves, and actual nature in our world. For Bradbury, living is more than being isolated; it is interacting with our world and the people in it.

Throughout the story, Mr. Mead doesn't interact with a single human, but Bradbury doesn't simply show us that, he makes a clear point of saying that at the first of the story, noting that Mr. Mead "was alone in this world of A.D. 2053" (1). Moments later, we are told that "on his way he would see the cottages and homes with their dark windows, and it was not unequal to walking through a graveyard where only the faintest glimmers of firefly light appeared in flickers behind the windows" (1). His view of these houses as graveyards creates a separation between him being alive and the houses—and therefore their residents, if there are any—being dead. While he notices all of these details, the residents do not even look out or appear. In this case, Mr. Mead is living by simply being out in the world. While we can physically live in seclusion, the comparison

of the houses to graveyards brings up images of death. This very comparison shows that Bradbury sees living as more than simple existence. It is, in fact predicated on the idea that living is more than simply being alive.

In another moment, Mr. Mead stops and imagines his world in a different way: "If he closed his eyes and stood very still, frozen, he could imagine himself upon the centre of a plain, a wintry, windless Arizona desert with no house in a thousand miles [...]" (1). Without a doubt Mr. Mead feels ostracized and separate. In this case though, we can see that Mr. Mead is able to imagine the world around him, yet the narrator notes that "Everything went on in the tomb-like houses at night now (2). Here Bradbury points toward, as he does in many other places, an idea that living is not simply interacting with other people, but also interacting with the world.

Another way that Bradbury points toward the people in the houses not living is by not referring to them as people, but just as the houses: "The moon was high and clear among the stars and the houses were grey and silent (2). At this moment the police car—notice even it has no people—is questioning Mr. Mead's single status. So, the car asks him questions, and the houses do not reply. By describing them as "silent" Bradbury implies that they—or the people in them—could have noticed something was going on, but they did not. Here, they took no part in life, simply sat and did nothing. While we are horrified by the idea of anyone being arrested for simply walking down the street, and having seen similar things happen in the news, we know that people do speak up about the issue, these houses (people) stay silent. In essence, this is one way that Bradbury suggest that living also involves engagement with not only people, but laws, rules, and culture.

In the end, Bradbury is making a statement about the power of technology and its potential to separate us from each other and be addictive, but he is also making a statement about being alive. For Bradbury, it's more than simply existing. It is engagement with our natural world. It is not letting our shells—clothes, houses, cars—represent us. Most importantly, it is engaging with the structures we've build that make up society: people's rights, laws, and human interaction.

Work Cited

Bradbury, Ray. "The Pedestrian." *Riverside Local Schools*, 1951, <http://www.riversidelocalschools.com/Downloads/pedestrian%20short%20story.pdf>.