# Ray Bradbury: Summary and Analysis of "The Pedestrian"

These notes should be used to add to your general understanding of the story as a whole.

Summary

"The Pedestrian" offers a glance into the future, where a man, [Leonard Mead](https://www.gradesaver.com/ray-bradbury-short-stories/study-guide/character-list#leonard-mead), goes for long walks every evening by himself. The year is 2053, and Mr. Mead is the only pedestrian near his home. He has never seen another person out walking during the many hours that he has strolled. He lives by himself - he has no wife, and so it is a tradition for him to walk every evening. It is never said explicitly in the story, but it can be understood that he is the only, or one of the only, walker in society.

On this particular evening, a police car stops him and orders him to put his hands up. He answers a series of questions about his life and family, and his answers are unsatisfactory to the police. This car is the only remaining police car in the area. After the election last year, the force was reduced from three cars to one because crime was ebbing, and they were seen as unnecessary. When Mr. Mead answers the question of employment by saying he is a writer, the police interpret his answer as "unemployed." They order him to enter the car despite his protests, and as he approaches, he realizes there is no driver at all - the car is automated.

Mr. Mead is filled with fear as he sits down in the cell-like backseat. The car informs him that he is being taken to a psychiatric centre because of his regressive tendencies. His behaviour is not acceptable in society - no one walks anymore, and it is queer that he continues to do so as his primary hobby. En route, they pass his house, which is the only house that is lit up and inviting to the outside eye. Mr. Mead's behaviour is completely atypical of the society in which he lives.

Analysis

Once again, Bradbury shows his scepticism of technology and "progress" in "The Pedestrian." In this story, a popular pastime is viewed as regressive, outdated, and abnormal. Mr. Mead's behaviour is deemed threatening even though it is not hurting anyone - the powers in charge believe that his determination to walk every night could upset their social stability. He does not have a viewing screen in his house, which is expected of the members of this society. His behaviour proposes an alternative activity that the government does not approve of, and this threatens their monopoly on control.

The act of ostracizing someone who is different than the rest of the group appears again, which is a common theme in Bradbury's stories. The police car, a representative of the powers in control, disapprove of his behaviour, but the entire society disapproves as well. Ostracizing him is another form of censorship. His lit-up house is symbolic of his difference from the rest of society. He is very easily identified as someone who is different.

The story calls into question the idea of progress for the sake of progress. An automated police car is programmed to stop Mr. Mead, even though he has not committed an offense. There is no room for human discretion and judgment in a world that is fully automated. Additionally, the viewing screen is considered a way to distract the public and keep them under the watchful eye of the government. A roaming public that is out walking is much harder to control than one that is stationed in front of its television set. Thus, Bradbury's story raises the question of, "What does progress really mean? Is advancement, regardless of the consequences, a positive step in the right direction?"

Additionally, this story highlights the dangers and "slippery slope" of a government determining what is best for a group of people without their input. What exactly does "regressive tendencies" mean, and who has decided that walking means being regressive? Does our society resemble that of the pedestrian's, and if it does, is that a good or bad thing? Once again, Bradbury's stories prompt us to reflect on our surroundings and continue to be relevant despite a different temporal age.

In “The Pedestrian” we have the theme of conflict, connection, alienation, control, loneliness, and acceptance. Taken from his “The Golden Apples of the Sun and Other Stories” collection the story is narrated in the third person by an unnamed narrator and after reading the story the reader realises that Bradbury may be exploring the theme of conflict. Leonard is doing nothing wrong but because of the accepted societal norms that exist in 2053 he is deemed to be potentially regressive by the computerised police car. This may be important as Leonard is doing something that would be considered normal today but in 2053 his walking at night-time to get air is not seen as something that is acceptable. If anything, Leonard is simply connecting with his environment though again this is deemed to be unusual activity in 2053. There is also a sense that society is under the complete control of those in authority. There is only a need for one police car, and everybody remains in their house when it is dark. It is for this reason that Leonard sticks out. It might also be important that Leonard is taken to a psychiatric centre as this would sum up the mentality of those in authority. They cannot see that Leonard may like walking at night-time rather they view his actions as regressive.

It might also be significant that Leonard is not deliberately trying to break the law or disturb the status quo. He is simply doing something that he himself would consider to be very normal and which the reader is aware he has been doing for years without incident. This could be important as Bradbury may be suggesting that a machine (police car) will only follow the rules that it has been given and as such because of the possible authoritarian nature of society in 2053. Sees what Leonard is doing as being something wrong. The reader does not doubt that should a human have engaged with Leonard things might have been a little bit different. Leonard may have simply been given a warning by a police officer. In reality machines appear to have absolute control. Not only is there the computerized police car but the viewing screens which keep the streets empty of people may also have absolute control over people. The reader suspecting that all information on the viewing screens is already approved by those in authority. The fact that Leonard looks into the windows of the homes he passes by may also suggest that Leonard longs to connect with others in an attempt to combat the loneliness he feels.

It is also interesting that anytime Leonard has gone for a walk he has never seen another human being. This again might suggest to the reader just how deeply controlled people are by those in authority. Bradbury also through his use of dark and bland colours in the story may be symbolically trying to highlight to the reader the type of life that people are living. If anything, 2053 appears to be a world that people have given up on what some critics might suggest is very natural behaviour. Things like going for a walk or trying to get some air are no longer considered to be normal. How people live their lives appears to have changed dramatically. With Leonard being the only exception to the rule. Which might suggest to those in authority that Leonard is not conforming to how they would like things to be. Though again in a present-day scenario Leonard’s actions are very normal. It is also possible that Bradbury is suggesting that should an individual transfer power to a machine thing that were once considered simple and normal will no longer be viewed upon in this manner.

The end of the story is also interesting. Though Leonard protests about what is happening to him. He still obeys every instruction he is given by the computerized police car. It is as though he knows that he has to be compliant as things may turn out worse for him should he disobey the instructions that he has been given. Though it is clear that Leonard is being isolated or alienated from others due to his behaviour. There is also a sense that 2053 is a world of extremities. Leonard is being brought to a psychiatric centre for a simple matter. However, those in authority view Leonard’s actions as being something more dangerous. Should more people like Leonard go for walks at night-time the status quo that is being imposed on people will change. The fact that there is only one police car and that crime is so low is also interesting as the reader suspects that those who commit crime may have been treated harshly. To ensure that others do not commit a crime. If a simple issue of walking the streets at night leads Leonard to a psychiatric centre the reader can only imagine how severe the punishment might be should someone commit a crime. If anything, 2053 appears to be a world in whereby humans have given up control of their lives. Preferring instead to embrace technology