TWO ANALYSIS ESSAYS on the story: 

**August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains**

1. In 1950, Ray Bradbury wrote the story *August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains*, a post-apocalyptic tale of a house standing alone in a world destroyed by nuclear war. The timing of the story is significant, as the world was still reeling from the effects of the Hiroshima bomb. People were terrified at just how powerful the nuclear bomb was and feared that they might face the same fate of the citizens of Hiroshima.

Bradbury uses this story to question human’s reliance on technology. The house was created for the sole purpose of serving mankind. Despite the house’s wondrous skills, the house cannot save the family, or humans, from the viciousness of a nuclear bomb. On the other hand, the house does not require humans to keep working – in fact, throughout the story it doesn’t even notice that they are gone.

By the time the reader is exposed to the house, the owners have been eradicated, “their images burned on wood in one titanic instant”. (Bradbury 25) The house continues to make breakfast, have little robotic mice that clean the house, and even read poetry for, essentially, no one. When the story begins, it appears that machinery has triumphed over humans. Humankind might have fallen beneath the powerful nuclear bomb, but technology has not. Furthermore, while the family relied on the house to take care of them, the house does not require them to survive. (Dominianni 50) However, as the story proceeds, the reader watches as the house is attacked by a fire. As the house scrambles to save itself, there is a sense of panic as each part of the house is activated. Doors “[spring] tightly shut” and “blind robot faces [peer] down with faucet mouths gushing green chemical”. (Bradbury 27) In the end, the house succumbs to the blaze and crumbles. The only bit of technology remaining is the dying voice of the house, proclaiming the current day to be “August 5, 2026”. (Bradbury 28) While technology has ultimately lost the battle of survival, humans lost the war long ago.

There Will Come Soft Rains gets its title after Sara Teasdale’s poem of the same name. Bradbury uses this poem as a warning of just how little technology and nature care for the endurance of humanity. “Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree / if mankind perished utterly / And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn / Would scarcely know that we were gone.” This is seen throughout the story, as the house continues to function without the aid of the family that owns it. Humans developed this technology to help them, but the technology does not care if humans are around to use its services.

One of the most jarring themes in the story is the realization of just how “robotic” the house is. (Hicks) There is a distinct lack of human emotions. From the beginning, one can see how efficient the house is – the stove ejects “eight pieces of perfectly browned toast, eight eggs sunnyside up, sixteen slices of bacon, two coffees, and two glasses of milk”, a voice informs the family that the “insurance is payable, as are the water, gas, and light bills”, the weather box announces the weather, and “an aluminium wedge [scrapes the uneaten food] into the sink”, where they are cleaned. (Bradbury 25) While having a house that takes care of a family so well is enviable, it’s almost scary how inhuman the house really is. This is the most obvious when a starving dog manages to find its way into the house. Instead of compassion, the mice are “angry at having to pick up [its] mud, angry at inconvenience”. (Bradbury 26) The dog smells pancakes cooking but the house will not open its door to let it eat. When the dog dies in a fit of hunger, the mice, without any sadness, push the dog into the incinerator.

Ultimately, Bradbury warns not about the advancement of technology but rather the complete dependence on it. (Dominianni 49). The conveniences that the house provides appear to be beneficial, but in the end are completely useless. Bradbury also points out the lack of “humanity” within the machinery of the house. Instead of a family having to cook and clean, the house does it for them. There is no love within the house; only a cold, emotionless proficiency. While it would require more work, perhaps it would be more meaningful for a family to work together to keep their house running properly. Instead of being a mere house, it would become a home.  

March 3rd, 2011  by Carlen Stacy-Lara

Discussion questions:
Do you believe that we as a society have too much dependence on technology these days?
If given the chance, would you live in a house such as the one described in this story?
What advantages do you think technology gives us? What about the disadvantages?

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Source: http://bmfowler.edublogs.org/2011/03/03/august-2026-there-will-come-soft-rains/

2. Cell phones, IPODs, and Plasma TVs. Cars, Nuclear reactors, and Weapons of Mass Destruction. Humans are killing the planet. All the new technologies that have been created to make life better are slowly destroying the Earth. This is the warning that Ray Bradbury is sending to his readers in his short story "August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains". His use of personification warns that the fate of the house will be the fate of humans as well, if the current course of action is not altered.
The story begins with a "smart house" starting the morning routine for the family that lives in it. The problem is that the family is gone. Bradbury uses personification to demonstrate a sense of emptiness. "And the rain tapped on the empty house, echoing" (Bradbury 946). Right away, Bradbury reveals to the reader that something is amiss. He continues the story, leaving little clues to the demise of the family that once occupied the house. The house "consumes" the uneaten breakfast in the sink and prepares the next phase of the morning (Bradbury 947). That's when Bradbury reveals what has happened to the city that the house is in. He explains that the house is now alone in the ashes of what used to be a city, and that this city now gives off a "radioactive glow" (Bradbury 947). That's when the reader knows that this house is a survivor of nuclear war. This story was written as part of a novel that was to be "a cautionary tale, warning against the cultural perils that lay ahead" (Weller 156). Bradbury was warning readers about the upcoming Hydrogen and Atom bombs. The World was on the brink of nuclear war and Bradbury was voicing his concerns for all to read. In Bradbury Speaks, written by the author himself, Bradbury says that his own belief is "that the universe exists as a miracle and that we have been born here to witness and celebrate.... Our purpose is to perceive the fantastic" (41). Bradbury wants readers to marvel at the Earth and its wonders rather than destroy it.

In his critical essay, Wayne L. Johnson states that "In "There Will Come Soft Rains," robots become tragic symbols for man's dreams and hopes gone awry" (36). Bradbury draws a connection between man's imagination and his machines (36). He shows readers that the technologies they have created will be part of their own demise. These technologies will live on past their creators, but will not go on forever. The poem in "There Will Come Soft Rains", by the same title, foreshadows what will come of Man's technologies. "And not one will know of the war, not one/ Will care at last when it is done./ Not one would mind.../If mankind perished utterly;/And Spring... would scarcely know that we were gone" (Bradbury 948). Bradbury is explaining that the Earth will go on without us and in the process, will reject our technological advances. Kevin Hoskinson thinks "It is perhaps the most vivid image Bradbury's cold war novels offer of the synthetic hell man makes for himself from the raw materials of science, technology, and irrationality" (132). The irrationality that Bradbury is trying to show us, that the "Gods" of the story will disappear and the "altar" will be destroyed.

In "There Will Come Soft Rains", Bradbury uses the power of science fiction to "shock" his readers out of their comfort zone and into reality. Using a form of fantasy to bring people face to face with reality is what Bradbury does best. And to Bradbury, "science fiction's very ability to disturb, to activate the imagination by visualizing the worst, provides our best hope for the future" (Mogen 104). Bradbury is an activist and the novel is his protest sign. In his biography of Bradbury, Mogen quotes the author explaining: science-fiction stories "are a convenient shorthand symbolic way to write of our huge problems. Smog, freeways, cars, atom bombs, most of mankind's trouble these days comes from an abundance of machinery and an undersupply of imagination applied to that machinery. S-f supplies the imagination whereby to judge, suggest alternatives, and provide seedbeds for future improvements. (104)
Bradbury isn't solely condemning mankind for its role in the Earth's troubles. He is sparking the imagination of readers who will become future inventors, politicians, teachers, and advocates. He is trying to reshape the future, one reader at a time. Interestingly though, he is trying to shape the future into the past.

In *Conversations With Ray Bradbury*, Arthur Unger says that Bradbury's "ideas are constantly skewed toward sometimes unique, sometimes amazingly old-fashioned Bradbury-esque versions of reality on the planet Earth" (107). This old-fashioned thinking is evident in "There Will Come Soft Rains". The smart house makes a breakfast worthy of June Cleaver. The family that perished mid-action, is in typical 1950's roles. Mom tending to the garden, dad mowing the lawn, and the children playing catch, these images come straight from Rockwell (Bradbury 947). In fact, "There Will Come Soft Rains" was chosen by the author himself to "represent the essence of Ray Bradbury" (Unger 107). He's quoted in Unger's piece as saying "It's a lovely science-fictional semi-fantasy metaphor of the sadness of the world that existed for us in 1950" (107). But this metaphor was as much a fantasy of the past as it was of the future.

The spectacular way in which the house was destroyed is a comment on mankind's pending demise. A tree branch falling through the kitchen window and knocking over cleaning solution set the room ablaze. The house tried to save itself. It turned on sprinklers and sent mechanical mice with water to put out the flames, but it was no use. The house was consumed by flames before anything could be done (Bradbury 949). Bradbury uses the metaphor of the burning house to show what will happen to the human race. The house, set in its ways, continues on with the daily routine despite the humans being gone. While continuing the routine, the house uses up all the water that would eventually be needed to save itself. Here, Bradbury is warning that mankind is using up all its resources during our "daily routine" and that those resources may be needed in the future. Doom seems inevitable. But is it? The story is warning, foreshadowing, reasoning with the readers. Like the ghost of Christmas future, however, Bradbury is giving mankind a chance to change before it's too late.

So what is it that Bradbury proposes mankind does to reverse the death sentence? For starters, Bradbury wants mankind to stop adding to the problem of machines and go back to simpler times. But more so than that, Bradbury wants us to seek alternatives to life on Earth. Somewhere were we can start anew. Like *The Martian Chronicles*, the book that "There Will Come Soft Rains" is from, Bradbury thinks that humans should look to Mars as an alternative. In *Bradbury Speaks*, Bradbury was asked how we could prepare ourselves for the "long voyage home". The voyage home being a trip to Mars, Bradbury responded: We must forgive all our wars and dissolutions, all our criminal sins and terrible exploitations. We must cleanse ourselves as best we can and try to take along the sinless good as proper baggage, never forgetting our history of struggle, failure, and struggle again, encouraging the crippled earthworm to become the gossamer flight. We have been given eyes to see what the light-year worlds cannot see of themselves. We have been given hands to touch the miraculous. We have been given hearts to know the incredible. Can we shrink back to bed in our funeral clothes? Mars says we cannot.... We sit up in our coffins to abandon the Earth's mortuary tomb, knowing that we are the betweens. (Bradbury 47)

What is most interesting is how conflicted Bradbury's wishes are. He wants to return to simpler times, yet advance to unknown planets. He wants to abandon machinery, yet board a rocket to Mars. What is clear is that he advocates change in the status quo.

"August 2026: There Will Come Soft Rains" is a warning. Bradbury is warning readers of the doom to come. Should mankind not heed his warning, a crashing end is sure to come. Even today, his message rings true. The world is in a constant state of turmoil and destruction. Countries like North Korea again put us on the brink of nuclear war. Mankind has ignored Bradbury's warnings up to today. But this story is as much a comment on today's current events as it was in 1950. Bradbury's message is clear: self-destruction is inevitable without immediate and broad changes in the world of today. All that's left is for mankind to listen. If we do not, the well will be dry when we are screaming "Fire!"

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