

Are Humans Enough?

Decoding Posthuman Subjectivity in Ray Bradbury's
The Veldt, There Will Come Soft Rains and Marionettes, Inc.

DIPTARKAN BHATTACHARYA

ABSTRACT

Ray Bradbury's stories were ahead of his own time. They envisioned posthuman spaces before the term was discovered. Posthumanism is a critical method of looking at the challenges that divide the traditional anthropocentric views of humans at the center of the world. Posthuman subjectivity sees the self as a dynamic and adaptable entity being remade through the interactions of humans and technology. Through a discursive analysis of his three stories, the article decodes the posthuman subjectivity in his stories that blurs the line between reality and virtual reality.

KEYWORDS

posthuman, virtual reality, Anthropocene, nonhumans

Posthuman subjectivity initiates a new way of looking beyond traditional human-centric definition by integrating non-human elements. It rejects the anthropocentric views that humans are the center of existence. As P.K. Nayar says, "view Posthumanism studies cultural representations, power relations and discourses that have historically situated the human above other life forms, and in control of them." (13) This distinctively explains an entity identified as 'humans.'

According to P.K. Nayar, posthumanism directs its strategic concepts through two visible strands stemming from very different views of the human, today. The first one through pop posthumanism of cinema and pop culture that defines the techno-modifications of the human, arguing that technological, biological modifications will improve the 'human.' The second strand of posthumanism might be termed as 'Critical Posthumanism.' It calls to attention more or less the humans, machines and the organic body. As Katherine Hayles says—"The posthuman implies not only a coupling with intelligent machines but a coupling so intense and multifaceted that it is no longer possible to distinguish meaningfully between the biological organism and the informational circuits in which the organism is enmeshed." (35) In our world where technological systems open up a vast array of multifaceted ideas, over reliance on such systems end up disrupting the pure human experience. Posthumanism is characterized by a loss of subjectivity based on bodily boundaries. For example Kazuo Ishiguro's novel '*Never Let me Go*,' Priya Sarukkai Chabria's novels '*Generation-14*,' '*Clone*,' Manjula Padmanabhan's novels '*The Island of Lost Girls*,' '*Escape*,' '*Harvest*' (play) all define a cloned subject producing itself from being other as self. Charlie Brooker's renowned series '*Black Mirror*' focuses on a posthuman subject that obliterates the bodily function while entering into a complete array of non-human entities. Posthuman subjectivity defines the concept of a traditional, autonomous human being as a heterogeneous and fluid entity shaped from interactions between nonhumans, technologies and environments. It always questions the boundaries of heterogeneous subject whose self-definition continuously shifts to a much more fragile existence. This perspective critiques the idea of Anthropocentrism by looking into a more complex, process-based form of self. It is seen as an indefinite process of becoming, a dynamic creation which is influenced by technology and evolving environments. By depending on a techno-modulated utopia the human self completely erases itself and places it as a

posthuman other. The artificial intelligence lures as the locus of Anthropocene. Posthuman subjectivity questions that mediated space where traditional humanism becomes a posthuman subject.

Ray Bradbury through his ideas incorporated the techno modulated world of today long time ago. His short stories and novels deal with fantasy, science fiction, horror mystery and apocalyptic notion of destruction caused by the over nudged scientific temper. For example in "*The Martian Chronicles*," "*Mars is Heaven*," "*Dark They Were and Golden-Eyed*," deals with themes relevant to posthumanism. He critiques the over usage of cold war of technology with the scientific temper. He often uses tropes to examine humanity's relationship with machines and how the later topples the former by replacing it. His stories are less explored where he devises the concept of posthumanism. The paper critically explores Bradbury's three stories "*The Veldt*," "*There will Come Soft Rains*" and "*Marionettes, Inc.*" through a discursive association with posthuman subjectivity. "*The Veldt*" published on September 23rd, 1950, issue of *The Saturday Evening Post* appearing as "The World the Children Made". Bradbury through a science fictional usage gives us a glimpse into the world of cold mechanics of technology and the psychology of people. He showcases the dichotomy between artificial intelligence and anthropocentric activity where the former one diminishes the later. The story centers around the family of Hadley's who are a techno modulated family.

The whole house is controlled by the machines. Their children Peter and Wendy obsessed with the nursery charts into a world of virtual reality thus bridging a gap between the illusory and rational mind. The nursery room acts as a posthuman space through which the children's desires and fears are catered to. It shows how the posthuman subjectivity becomes a breeding ground of toppling the human activity through techno modulated systems. The story examines this idea by showing how advanced technology affects interpersonal interactions and human psychology. The nursery

becomes the virtual reality that places itself as a centrifugal force without human coordination. At one point, the nursery becomes the parents of the children by diminishing the natural world and its perceptions. Despite being meant to be a source of amusement and comfort, this technological marvel ultimately brings the family to ruin. Bradbury initiates a metaphor of a cautionary tale through this story about the dangers of living in a hyperconnected world where technology mediates our everyday experience. The posthuman space thus circumvents the children's life by a fear of aggression and violence. When George and Lydia decide to close the nursery permanently in order to follow and adapt to the natural lifestyle, the children's aggressive way of conduct resurfaces a violent underpinning:

“Will you shut off the house sometimes soon?”

“We're considering it.”

“I don't think you'd better consider it any more, Father.”

“I won't have any threats from my son!”

“Very well.” And Peter strolled off to the nursery.

(Bradbury, *Stories*; Vol-1)

The nursery exerts an imaginary power over the children in such a way through which they could be controlled. By the end of story when we see the dreadful violent death of their parents, the whole technology and machination assimilate with the children. The posthuman places artificial intelligence as the real self where the children become a mere pawn in the hands of an automated system. The whole techno-modulated system succeeds in diminishing natural perceptions while placing it with an automated one. This represents posthuman anxieties about the loss of human control and unforeseen risks of intelligent machines gasping life to the fullest.

“There Will Come Soft Rains” was published in 1950 in two different versions—a short story in *Collier's* magazine and a chapter of the fix-up novel “*The Martian Chronicles*.” Written as a chronicle

about a lone house standing intact in a Californian city that has been obliterated by a nuclear bomb and later destroyed in a fire caused by windstorm, the title is from a 1918 poem of Sara Teasdale published during the Second World War and Spanish flu pandemic. Like “The Veldt,” this story focuses on a stand alone house heavily guarded and controlled by robotic equipments. The story starts with a robotic voice stating date, time and the year from which it is conceived that Bradbury uses a dystopic trope of giving us a cautionary tale.

“Today is August 4, 2026,” said a second voice from the kitchen ceiling “in the city of Allendale, California.” It repeated the dates three times For memory’s sake. “Today is Mr. Featherstone’s birthday. Today is the anniversary of Tilita’s marriage. Insurance is payable, as are the water, light and gas bills.”

(Bradbury, Stories; Vol-1)

Bradbury explores the concept of posthuman subjectivity by personifying a techno-modulated house. The whole plot centers around a post-apocalyptic world where humans are extinct and technology with its modulated system has taken the place of humans. They have created a new civilization by artificial intelligence, robotic stratagem and techno-modulated utopias. The posthuman question thus arises at this point at what cost does the artificial stratagem replaces humans. Later on it is known that the whole family has been obliterated after a nuclear holocaust where the whole city is glowing under the radioactive material. The whole family turned down to ashes stands in their former way during the nuclear attack. The house seemingly unaware of human extinction continues its daily routines demonstrating a self-absorbed subjectivity persisting even after its creators are gone. It creates a blurred line between what is deemed as reality and virtual reality. The house preoccupies human instincts such

as paranoia, anger, self-protection thus toppling itself from the edges of being an inanimate object. Its self-absorbed, repetitive actions driven by programming represent a form of posthuman subjectivity.

The story gives us a cautionary outlook on unchecked technological advancement that usurps human frailty thus replacing human with its unchecked activities. It highlights the indifference of both nature and technology to human existence. But ultimately through the symbolic assertion of the windstorm in the story, Bradbury uses nature as a stronger tool that destroys the techno-modulated house at the end of the story. He demonstrates the arbitrariness of technology by the self-reflexiveness of nature where nature stands as a strong tool irrespective of the stronger posthuman world. Bradbury uses Teasdale's poem to comment on the arbitrariness of techno-modulated life where the binary of human and non-human are too futile to represent itself.

Marionettes, Inc. published in March 1949, in *Startling Stories* conjures the conflict between humans and machines through their dependence on technology. Brailing replaces himself with a humanoid named Marionette that looks like him in every manner to restrain himself from his wife and his married life. Smith, his friend wants to replace himself just like Brailing to to evade his marriage restrain himself from his wife. On the contrary his wife replaces a lookalike humanoid of herself thus restraining Smith from her married life. The title "*Marionettes, Inc*" itself draws on the metaphor of Marionettes as robotic double who replaces the subjectivity from the humans to itself. The robotic double places itself as humans and entraps the humans on the foreground of humanoids:

"You won't mind waiting a moment, will you? I have to make a phone call."

"To whom?" Brailing Two frowned.

"No one important"

"To Marionettes Incorporated? To tell them to come and get

me?” “No no nothing like that!” He tried to rush out the door
A metal firm grip seized his wrists. “Don’t run!”

(Bradbury, *Stories*; Vol-1)

There emerges a strict blurring of lines between the human and non-human entity where the former one gets dominated by the later one. Brailing Two, the double humanoid of Brailing traps the real Brailing, in the cellar thus foregrounding the humans and establishing itself as the ultimate human. Like the nursery in “The Veldt,” *Marionettes* fully exercises its uncontrollable power over Brailing that confirms the issue of unchecked technological advancement:

“Marionettes are made to move, not lie still. How would you like to lie in a box most of the time?”

“Well—you wouldn’t like it all. I keep running. There’s no way to shut me off. I’m perfectly alive and have feelings.”

(Bradbury, *Stories*: Vol-1)

The posthuman space arises at this point where Brailing Two and Smith’s wife Nettie replace themselves with a robotic double. They are far removed from becoming more than an adaptable entity. The human self becomes decentered while the robotic double becomes the fundamental locus of the civilized world. Bradbury prompts us through a cautionary tale to think about the dangers of unsupervised and unmonitored usage of technology.

The posthuman subjectivity creates a duplicity with a non-human entity creating chaos through a techno-modulated world. So, a definitive question arises that are humans enough. Posthumanism arises out of the fact that humans can evolve at a faster rate with the help of machines, but unfortunately technology and advanced scientific temper try to replace humans with non-human entities as the ultimate human. Bradbury discloses the reality of posthuman

spaces through a nightmarish future by putting a cautionary tale. The three stories that the article discusses within the parameters of posthuman subjectivity gives us a thorough reality check on our own technology mediated posthuman future. By an excessive dependence on technology and its appendages, we are reclaiming humanist anxieties under the prototype of a posthuman subject. We are often reminded of our own frailties by such authors who offer us a looking glass to perceive our techno-modulated utopias.

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