

A Medicine For Melancholy and Other Stories Study Guide

A Medicine For Melancholy and Other Stories by Ray Bradbury

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Plot Summary

“A Medicine for Melancholy” is a collection of thirty-one short stories by Ray Bradbury that range from fantasy and science fiction to romance and horror. In the story “In a Season of Calm Weather”, George Smith longs to own a painting by his favorite artist, Picasso, but cannot afford it. Stunned to see Picasso drawing in the sand at the shore, George is heartbroken because he is unable to save the drawings from the tide. In “A Medicine for Melancholy”, the teenaged Camillia seems to be suffering from an unknown ailment, which a Dustman named Boscov cures her of by having sex with her. In “The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit”, six Mexican-American men, down on their luck, purchase a white summer suit with the hopes it will give them confidence and change their lives. In “Fever Dream”, young Charles is sick and has his body taken over by a parasitic germ, wherein he sets out to spread the contagion to other people. In “The Marriage Mender”, a married couple argues about whether their bed is too uncomfortable or just right, only to have the couple come to love the bed when the wife learns she is pregnant.

In “The Town Where No One Got Off”, a man on a train gets off at a random town for a change in life, only to meet a man who has never left the town who harbors the same ill thoughts as he does. In “A Scent of Sarsaparilla”, the elderly William Finch discovers his attic is a time machine. His wife refuses to believe him, or to accompany him when he asks her to come with him permanently into the past. She is stunned when William disappears from the attic before her eyes. In “The Headpiece”, a deformed man hopes his new hair will make him more attractive to his blind, pretty neighbor, but she remarks that even with the headpiece, she can still see his deformity because the man has not come to love himself. In “The First Night of Lent”, the narrator discovers his Irish driver is only a capable driver when drunk. In “The Time of Going Away”, the elderly Willie believes he is dying after reading a National Geographic article about how Pacific Islanders feel their time is coming and say goodbye. His wife is annoyed when Willie leaves to die, only to come home a few hours later, healthy, hungry, and cold. In “All Summer in a Day”, young Margot predicts the rains on Venus will stop that very day, only to have her classmates disbelieve her and lock her in a closet as the sun comes out for an hour.

In “The Gift”, a mother and father bring their son up to space to celebrate Christmas. In “The Great Collision of Monday Last”, an American of Irish descent visiting Ireland volunteers to drive two bicycle collision victims to the hospital through heavy fog when no Irish locals will brave the weather conditions. In “The Little Mice”, a landlord discovers his Mexican tenants, quiet as mice, are so quiet because all they do is drink when they come home from work. In “The Shore Line at Sunset”, Tom and his best friend Chico discover a stranded mermaid. Tom lets the mermaid go rather than allowing Chico to capture her and sell her. In “The Day It Rained Forever”, three elderly permanent male residents of an old desert hotel feel rejuvenated and if the rains have come when an elderly female music teacher moves in. In “Chrysalis”, a man named Smith, poisoned by radiation, goes through morphological changes and gains the ability to fly and breathe in space. In “Pillar of Fire”, a reawakened corpse William Lantry



decides to spread fear in the future world where he now has awakened because the future world has done away with the sentiment and emotion of fear. In "Zero Hour", the children in Mrs. Morris's neighborhood unwittingly unleash an alien invasion when they think they are merely playing games.

In "The Man", skeptical Captain Hart, faithful Lieutenant Martin, and their exploration crew discover a planet where Jesus has been. Hart cannot believe it, so sets off to find scientific proof that Jesus exists, while Martin, ever faithful, learns that Jesus is still on the planet. In "Time in Thy Flight", Mrs. Fields brings three students on a time machine field trip back to Illinois in 1928, where two of the children decide to stay behind because they fall in love with a better world. In "The Pedestrian", a writer who enjoys evening walks in a modern age where no one does such things anymore unless they have to is arrested and taken to a psychiatric center. In "Hail and Farewell", a man of 43 who has never aged past 12 must move around every few years to avoid suspicion. In "Invisible Boy", a local witch pretends to make the son of family friends invisible at his request. In "Come into My Cellar", neighborhood boys unknowingly unleash a mushroom alien invasion.

In "The Million-Year Picnic", people from Earth come to live on Mars during an atomic war. In "The Screaming Woman", a nearly-murdered woman is saved by the song she sings, attracting help in the nick of time. In "The Smile", a young boy saves a scrap of the Mona Lisa from being destroyed by his contemporaries who blame the past for the post-atomic war world in which they live. In "Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed", Earth colonizers on Mars are physically transformed into Martians by the Martian atmosphere and setting. In "The Trolley", an elderly trolley driver takes the local kids on one last ride on the trolley before the service is shut down in favor of buses, which none of the kids want to happen. In "Icarus Montgolfier Wright", Jedediah dreams he is Icarus, the French balloonist Montgolfier, and the Wright Brothers, all in the night before he is set to become the first person to fly a rocket to the Moon.



In a Season of Calm Weather – A Scent of Sarsparilla

Summary

In a Season of Calm Weather – George and Alice Smith are on vacation at Biarritz on the French shore. George, an art lover, is thrilled with the trip because Picasso is visiting friends a few miles down. George dreams of saving up \$5,000 to commission a painting from Picasso. While George is walking along the beach, he discovers a tanned stranger drawing images in the sand. George realizes the artist is Picasso. He wonders how it might be possible to save the drawings in the sand, such as using Plaster of Paris to preserve them. The artist smiles at George, and heads down the beach. George then meets his wife for dinner, sadly listening to the sound of the tide coming in.

A Medicine for Melancholy (or: The Sovereign Remedy Revealed) – Camillia, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Wilkes, is suffering from an unknown illness and is being attended to by Doctor Gimp in London in 1762. Camillia believes she is dying, and requests to be put outside to see the blue sky. A passing stranger observes that Camillia is merely suffering from melancholy. As people pass, they all comment as to what Camillia may be suffering from. Mr. Wilkes and his son begin charging people to register their opinions. At last, a Dustman advises leaving Camillia out overnight on Saint Bosco's Eve to bathe in the glow of the full moon. That night, the Dustman returns to see Camillia. He says the name of the ailment that affects Camillia is Camillia Wilkes and introduces himself as Bosco. The two then have sex. The next morning, Camillia is her old self once more.

The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit – Martinez, Vamenos, and Villanazul, three poor young Mexican-American men, hang out outside of a pool hall and talk about how the beautiful night makes them wish for a better life, such as having jobs and friends. They jealously watch a man pass by with two beautiful young women on his arms. Vamenos believes it is due to the man's new white summer suit. Martinez thinks that if he had such a suit, nothing else would matter. An acquaintance named Gomez suddenly appears, urging three men to go in on buying a \$60 white ice cream summer suit with him, Dominguez, and Manulo. All men are the same height and build, something which Gomez says has taken him months to bring together. They all agree to pay \$10 each and share the suit, with each person borrowing it one night a week.

The six men head to Shumway's Sunshine Suits, owned and operated by Mr. Shumway. Martinez and the others find the perfect suit on a dummy, which Mr. Shumway agrees to sell, throwing in the dummy for free. The six men are thrilled. As they begin to wear and share the suit, they feel larger than life, popular, confident, and worthwhile. Manulo sings and plays guitar to a captivated audience, while Dominguez turns the heads of all the girls in town. Even the scruffy Vamenos looks sharp in the suit.



However, the five men worry that Vamenos will ruin the suit because Vamenos is careless and sloppy. They later see Vamenos drinking, smoking, eating a taco, and allowing a large woman to hang onto him, crushing the suit's shoulder pads. The five men panic when Vamenos is struck by a passing car. Vamenos is injured, but the suit is okay. He urges his friends to take the suit off him as an ambulance comes so that the paramedics will not cut apart the suit. After Vamenos is taken to the hospital, Martinez is stopped by a beautiful girl named Celia Obregon who saw him in the white suite earlier. He explains the suit will be his again to wear soon, but she explains she doesn't care what he wears because she just wants him.

Fever Dream – Thirteen-year-old Charles is sick and feels as if his body parts are disappearing. The doctor pays a house call and explains this is merely from being feverish. Charles worries the germs inside him are going to get together and take over his body, becoming Charles himself. Charles panics and tries to choke himself, so the doctor orders Charles's parents to keep Charles strapped down to his bed so he doesn't hurt himself. The next day, Charles appears to be fine. He says he can't wait to go back to school and shake the hands of all the other kids, grow up, get married, and have children. He kisses his parents several times and pets the family canary once, waiting to see what happens.

The Marriage Mender – Husband and wife Antonio and Maria argue about their bed. Maria thinks the bed is bumpy and uncomfortable, while Antonio believes it is very comfortable. They can't agree on anything. The next day, Antonio feels badly about the fight, so he decides to buy a new bed. He learns his wife is pregnant, but she no longer wants a new bed since her baby has been conceived in the old bed.

The Town Where No One Got Off – The narrator and a fellow passenger aboard a train speak of how people only ever get off at big stops like New York or Los Angeles, but never at small stops like Fox Hill, Nebraska, unless they have business or roots there. The narrator then decides to get off at Rampart Junction, Iowa, for a change. The fellow passenger warns the narrator he'll become instantly bored. Within seconds of leaving the train, the narrator is bored and unimpressed. An elderly man sits in a chair, watching the narrator. The old man explains he has been waiting for the narrator, or someone like him, for twenty years. The old man speaks of how people end up hating other people, or different things. The old man goes on to talk about outlets for hate, such as killing, and says that if a stranger were to be killed in a small town like Rampart Junction, no one would ever know. The narrator explains his life has been going poorly, and he has been seeking to kill someone as well. Neither man goes through with it. The narrator gets back on the train and goes home.

A Scent of Sarsaparilla – The elderly William Finch is supposed to be cleaning in the attic in the winter when he suddenly comes down to see his wife, Cora. She smells sarsaparilla and is annoyed because he hasn't thrown out anything. William explains that attics are time machines in which old men like him can travel back 40 years when life was new, fresh, and always summer. Cora says there was winter in the old days as well. William counters that if one rode a unicycle carefully for only a week in each year, it could be summer the rest of their lives. Cora goes upstairs to the attic later to find her



husband in a fancy suit that doesn't smell of mothballs, and she believes he's been out all day rather than cleaning. William denies this, urging her to remember the past. He has drawn \$500 out of the bank and urges Cora to come with him. She refuses. He suddenly disappears. She screams and searches the attic, coming to the western window, where she can see twilight July fields, can hear laughter, and can see fireworks. She smells sarsaparilla, and she spends the last thirty years of her life alone.

Analysis

"A Medicine for Melancholy" is a collection of 31 short stories by Ray Bradbury. From the start, the theme of the fantastic (that which is unexpected, and includes science fiction and fantasy) is present. The fantastic for Bradbury can range from the horrific – such as Charlie being taken over by germs in story "Fever Dream" – to the romantic and nostalgic, such as William Finch traveling back in time through his attic in "The Scent of Sarsaparilla". The fantastic also has encounters with reality as well, such as in "The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit", where the suit Vamenos wears is miraculously unharmed when he is struck by a car. Yet, the reader should also note that fantasy confronts reality as Celia explains to Martinez that it isn't what he is wearing that has attracted her to him, but who he is as a person that has attracted her to him. Whether or not the suit itself has magical powers is irrelevant to who Martinez (and people in general, symbolized through Martinez) truly is.

Melancholy itself is also an important theme which pervades these stories, beginning with "In A Season of Calm Weather". George Smith has longed to own a piece of art by Picasso but has been unable to afford such a work, so his discovery that Picasso is drawing in the sand is thrilling. But just as quickly, the art – though free – cannot be obtained or saved by George. He becomes melancholy because he knows the tide will carelessly wash away the art that he himself has so desperately longed to own. Interestingly enough here, the reader should note that Bradbury is also commenting on the nature of art itself (symbolized by drawings in the sand, i.e., art in nature and the nature of art) as something belonging to no one man in particular. No one can own an individual work of art, so to speak, because it belongs to humanity as a whole. The tide washing away the drawings in the sand is a reminder of this.

Melancholy also factors heavily into "The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit". Martinez and his friends are down on their luck, without jobs, girlfriends, or prospects, and so they are all very depressed. Only the ice cream suit jolts them from their lack of self-confidence. In "The Scent of Sarsaparilla", melancholy is more subtly presented in William Finch's longing for the past. (Here, the theme of the past intersects with melancholy.) William Finch longs to return to the past, and discovers he may do so through his attic. His longing for the past is a sense of melancholy and longing for better times, which his wife cannot open her eyes to see. As a result, she does not disappear into the past with him, even when given a chance to do so. She spends the next 30 years of her life alone, and melancholy as a result. In "The Marriage Mender", the argument between Antonio and Maria – and the melancholy they face as an aftereffect of their anger – is done away with by news that Maria is pregnant.



There is also a very subtle theme of dystopianism present in the story “The Town Where No One Got Off”. Dystopianism itself will reemerge in later stories as a central theme, but here, it is not largely pronounced. The narrator of the story is seeking change in life, is looking for something different, and is dissatisfied with things as they currently are. His encounter with the elderly man in the town is also melancholy and dissatisfied with life, looking for something different and unusual. Both men contemplate murder, but not seriously, and then go about their separate ways. They have had the unusual experience they were both seeking, and return to their lives as normal.

Family also factors into Bradbury’s stories in many ways, and family will become an important theme throughout this collection. The vacation that George takes to France in “In a Season of Calm Weather” is taken with his wife, who lovingly worries that George’s desire to get a hold of Picasso may ruin his trip. In “A Medicine for Melancholy”, Camillia’s parents desperately seek a cure for whatever mysterious melancholic illness afflicts their daughter (which the reader will recognize as either sexual and/or romantic yearning). In “Fever Dream”, Charlie’s parents pay for a doctor to tend to their son with the hopes that their son will soon be better. In “The Marriage Mender”, the fight that Antonio and Maria have had over their bed is abated when word comes they are both going to be parents. The love of family does away with whatever differences the two may have. In “A Scent of Sarsaparilla”, William desperately hopes his wife will journey back in time with him, but she refuses to do so, and so he must journey alone.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways are the characters in these several stories affected by melancholy? Select three characters and explain how melancholy affects the plot of the stories in which they feature. Is their melancholy cured or not? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why is George Smith both elated and brokenhearted to discover Picasso drawing pictures on the beach in France in “In a Season of Calm Weather”?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you believe that Cora refuses to journey back into the past with William in “The Scent of Sarsaparilla”? Why does William seem so eager to go back into the past, even if he must do so alone?

Vocabulary

solitudinous, ravenous, melancholy, exasperated, enthralled, subtle, jostling



The Headpiece – The Great Collision of Monday Last

Summary

The Headpiece – Mr. Andrew Lemon's new hairpiece arrives in the mail. Looking in the mirror, he feels younger, handsome, and like a new man with it on because it obscures the ugly hole in his head. Hearing the blind Miss Naomi Fremwell in her apartment, Lemon removes his hairpiece because he is not ready to try out his new look on her yet. He is in love with her, and decides to propose to her. She gently declines. Lemon believes it is because of the hole in his head. He explains it was received courtesy of his crazy ex-wife, who took a hammer to his head. He visits her again later to restate his proposal wearing the hairpiece, but Miss Fremwell tells him she can still see the hole in his head.

The First Night of Lent – The narrator relates the story of an Irishman named Nick, whom he met in the autumn of 1953 in Dublin, Ireland, while working on a screenplay. Nick was the narrator's driver. The narrator asks Nick what Nick will give up for Lent. Nick considers giving up cigarettes. The next night, he arrives smoking cigarettes, saying he has given up his other vice, alcohol. This leads to horrible driving while Nick is sober. The narrator gives Nick money to buy a bottle of Irish moss.

The Time of Going Away – Seventy five-year Illinois resident Willie has a premonition of death, and packs to prepare for the trip. His wife, Mildred, thinks he is full of nonsense and reminds him he is too young to die. Willie disagrees, believing he can feel it in his very bones. He explains that Pacific Islanders call it the Time of Going Away, in which they say their goodbyes and give away their earthly possessions. Mildred believes her husband has once again been influenced by National Geographic magazine, such as in the past when he wanted to go to Siberia to find frozen woolly mammoths to sell the meat. Willie is nevertheless convinced he must head off into Illinois. He returns at 9:30 that night, shaken but unharmed. Mildred explains she is burning all of his National Geographic magazines. Willie has no problem with this, and asks Mildred to say the blessing over dinner.

All Summer in a Day – With their teacher out of the classroom, 9-year-old Margot and her classmates anxiously look through the window to see if it will stop raining that day. Once every seven years does it stop raining for only an hour on Venus. The other kids, children of the explorers of the planet, do not like Margot, who is frail, quiet, and who has lived her first four years of life on Earth. Margot remembers sunlight and the sun the way the other kids cannot, because they were too young to remember the last time the sun appeared on Venus. Margot assures them the sun will come out that day, but the other students become angry, thinking it won't ever happen. They lock Margot in a closet, but are then amazed when the sun comes out. The teacher allows them to go outside and enjoy the sunlight. The students are thrilled. As the rain returns, they sadly



return to class, knowing it will be seven years again before they see the sun. They then realize they have left Margot locked in the closet, and let her out.

The Gift – A mother, a father, and their son prepare for a rocket trip into space the day before Christmas in the year 2052, but their little tree exceeds the weight limit for travel. The boy's parents are disappointed because they wanted everything to be perfect for the boy's first space flight. As midnight strikes on the rocket ship, the father brings his son to the observation deck where he can see a billion stars, like candles on a Christmas tree. The boy is thrilled.

The Great Collision of Monday Last – A bloodied man enters Heber Finn's pub, explaining there has been a collision. The Doctor and a dozen men including Heber rush down from the pub to the scene of the collision in the foggy night. An American with them says he did not hear a collision, let alone did he hear any cars on the road. Nevertheless, the bodies of Pat Nolan and Mr. Peevey from Maynooth are brought into the pub, having been in a bike accident. It is explained to the American, McGuire, that some 300 Irish die this way each year. The two injured men will survive, but only with assistance from a hospital. The American volunteers to drive because no one else is willing in the fog. Though an American, McGuire's ancestral roots are in Ireland. The American is told to drive quickly and to turn off his headlights when other cars approach to avoid blinding them.

Analysis

In these stories, the theme of melancholy continues to gain strength. In "The Headpiece", Andrew Lemon hopes that his new hairpiece will cover the hole in his head and make him a new man much the way Martinez and his friends hoped their suit would make them new people in "The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit". However, while the new hairpiece (and the ice cream suit for Martinez) may make Andrew appear differently, he is still the same person, lacking in self-confidence. This is illustrated by Miss Fremwell's remark that she can still see the hole, or rather, Andrew's self-consciousness. This is all the more telling because Fremwell is physically, though not emotionally and intuitively blind. Whether or not Andrew will remain melancholic, or will seek to gain greater self-confidence is unknown by the end of the story.

In the story "The Time of Going Away", melancholy also subtly enters the story in the form of Willie. Willie, convinced he is dying after reading about death customs on Pacific islands among natives in National Geographic, is saddened to think he might die but has also been heavily influenced by what he has read. His wife is more annoyed than anything else, knowing her husband is too young to die and knowing that National Geographic negatively influences her husband. However, when Willie goes away, his wife does become slightly sad, contemplating what life might be without him. However, Willie's return coincides with her decision to burn all his National Geographic magazines so that he never gets such a notion of death into his head again.



Indeed, Mildred's annoyance and temporary melancholy toward her husband should not be seen in a negative light – but in context of the theme of family. Mildred deeply loves her husband, and does not want to think about things like death. She wants him to live happily and optimistically, and such a thing is not possible while issues of National Geographic are lying around the house. Here, the theme of family is especially strong in Mildred's unabated worry for her husband. The theme of family can also be seen in the enchanting story "The Gift", where a mother and a father bring their son into outer space to celebrate Christmas. Unable to bring a Christmas tree due to weight restrictions, the father presents space as a Christmas tree, full of a billion star-lights.

The fantastic also appears as a theme in "All Summer in a Day". Margot, and others living on the planet Venus, rarely ever see the sun. Margot, born on Earth and looking forward to the sunlight, is disbelieved by her fellow students. That people should be living on Venus and that they might breathe outside on Venus without oxygen apparatuses is fantastical. Tragically, the seemingly fantastical event of sunlight is missed by Margot, who has cruelly been shut up in a closet by her classmates. Indeed, it is because of Margot's past on Earth that her classmates are particularly hostile to her because they have never experienced the Earth's atmosphere.

The past also factors into the story "The Great Collision of Monday Last". There, an American of Irish descent is visiting Ireland, and feels out of place among the customs and culture of his ancestors. Their fear of the fog, for example, and their superstitions regarding the fog are very much a part of the past. It is partly why the American agrees to bring the injured men to the hospital in the fog. He is thus accepted among the locals for his bravery, and at once becomes a part of the past, the present, and the future.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Andrew Lemon's hairpiece in "The Headpiece" not have the effect he so desires? How does Andrew's experience compare to the experiences of Martinez in "The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit"? How are the situations similar or different?

Discussion Question 2

Why do Margot's classmates shut her away in a closet in the story "All Summer in a Day"? Is the act cruel and inexcusable, or can the children be excused for what they have done? Explain.

Discussion Question 3

In what ways does superstition and impressionability play into the stories "The Great Collision of Monday Last" and "The Time of Going Away"? Does reality or fantasy win out in these stories? Explain.

Vocabulary

tremulously, affront, premonition, compulsory, catafalque, improbable, equilibrium



The Little Mice – Zero Hour

Summary

The Little Mice – The narrator and his wife have rented out one of their rooms to a Mexican couple for the past three years. The Mexicans are so quiet the narrator and his wife have never heard even a spoken word or a dropped pan from them. It intrigues the narrator, and leads him to nickname the couple “the mice”. The Mexican husband works at U.S. Steel, while his wife sews in a dress loft. The Mexican husband pays his rent three months in advance. A plumber explains to the narrator that, while doing repair work for the Mexicans, he discovered the Mexicans did not have a single lightbulb anywhere in their apartment. In late December, a fire breaks out. The narrator rushes to warn the Mexican couple. He discovers their house is full of empty wine bottles. The Mexican couple relocates, continuing to work and drink in the evenings while the narrator returns to a warm home.

The Shore Line at Sunset – Tom and his best friend Chico are on the beach near Coast Highway. While Chico enjoys their bachelorhood, Tom is increasingly seeking a woman to marry. A young boy arrives to alert both men to a woman on the beach, possibly drowned. Tom and Chico rush after the boy. Rather than a woman, they find a beautiful mermaid. She is still alive. Tom is amazed. Chico thinks they should take the mermaid captive and sell her somewhere. Chico rushes to grab the truck and three hundred pounds of ice to preserve the mermaid, but Tom lets the mermaid wash out to sea with the tide and live. Chico is enraged, saying Tom will never change. Tom counters that Chico will never change. Chico finally admits things turned out for the best. Tom decides to begin searching for the mermaid once more.

The Day it Rained Forever – Mr. Terle is the elderly owner and proprietor of a dusty old hotel in a desert ghost town, and has two elderly and permanent residents, Mr. Smith and Mr. Fremley. The three men look forward to January 29, the day each year it rains. When no rains come by the night of January 29, Mr. Smith is prepared to move out. Terle stops Smith, telling him a storm is coming. Just then, elderly Miss Hillgood arrives in her vintage 1924 Kissel. She is a retired music teacher, and has brought wine and musical instruments along with her. She is going to be moving in. After a good dinner, Miss Hillgood plays for the three men, who are stunned by the beauty and emotion of the music. The men themselves begin to play music, and become lively. They know the rains have come.

Chrysalis – Rockwell, McGuire, and Hartley, three doctors, examine the body of a man named Smith, mummified green from radiation, dead except for his beating heart. Smith breathes once every four minutes, while his heart beats once every 35 seconds. Rockwell declares Smith the most incredible medical phenomenon in history while Hartley wants to shoot Smith and put him out of his misery. Rockwell carefully examines Smith, and comes to the conclusion that Smith is not dead or diseased, but in evolutionary metamorphosis. Smith is currently a chrysalis. Rockwell wonders how



Smith might emerge in the coming weeks, imagining Smith might become a superman. Smith goes missing, leaving his cocoon body behind. This leads the doctors to imagine he must be dangerous, otherwise, he would have remained. Suddenly, Smith returns and speaks with the doctors. Apart from turning green, he remembers nothing. Rockwell is disappointed that Smith seems to be normal. The doctors bid Smith goodbye. Once he is out of sight, Smith flies up into space.

Pillar of Fire – William Lantry, born in 1898 and dead in 1933, rises from his grave in the last cemetery on Earth in the year 2349. He is full of hate and stunned that so much time has passed. He declares himself an anachronism, and sees how the cemetery is being emptied out by workers under government orders. Looking into the center of Salem town, William sees a massive finger-shaped incinerator where all dead bodies are burned in a Pillar of Fire. William declares war on the present, and kills a man passing by, taking his clothes. William then heads into town to investigate the incinerator, called “The Incinerator”. He questions the Attendant of the Incinerator about the process, then kills the Attendant and incinerates him.

A second Attendant enters the room, asking if William is one of the men recently returned from Mars. William explains he is not. The Attendant begins looking for the first Attendant, during which time William stabs him and throws his lifeless body into the fire. William then rigs the Incinerator with explosives, and is five miles away when the building explodes. Curious, he calls the police department, but they are now known as Peace Control and no longer have a homicide department. William realizes he must act carefully to fit into the modern world, so he decides to go to the library. There, he learns all horror works by Edgar Allan Poe and other writers were destroyed in the Great Burning of 2265. Everything relating to horror, such as Halloween has been done away with. The librarian speaking with William explains that several people returned from Mars, including a man named Burke, have been seeking books and information about cemeteries and tombs, for such places still exist on Mars. William then leaves the library.

As William heads into the town once more, he meets a boy who explains that nobody even fears the dark anymore, so there are no more streetlights. William is enraged because fear has positive side effects – such as encouraging safety and imagination. He walks ten miles to the town of Science Port. He takes a nap in a water drain, where he dreams of workers discovering his empty grave. He then destroys the Science Port incinerator, which kills 400 people. He kills the driver of a passing car and steals it, determined to destroy all the incinerators. He goes to the Science Port warehouse that has been temporarily set up as a morgue, where he sees a strange, tall man with white hair. The man introduces himself as McClure, and says they’ve been trying to find William since the day before since there aren’t many cases of suspended animation in history. McClure seems to have no idea about what William has done. William realizes they have no reason in the present not to be honest or trusting – or naïve. William plots to go to Mars.

McClure comes to realize that William is killing people to have company. William then moves to kill McClure, but McClure does his best to rationally and logically deter



William. William says he will kill everyone and then go to Mars, but McClure explains that even the dead on Mars are now being incinerated. Even if William kills everyone, McClure explains, William will still be alone and won't be alive anymore, because the object of his resurrection, his hate, will cease to exist. William is then apprehended by two men at McClure's command, placed in a golden coffin, and incinerated.

Zero Hour – Mrs. Morris watches as her daughter Mink collects pans and tools for a game she, Joseph Connors, and other New York neighborhood children are playing called “Invasion”. Mink is annoyed to be forced home for a meal, insisting Invasion is a matter of life and death. If Mink doesn't help Drill and his alien friends, she explains, they'll all die. Mink reveals that Drill has explained they needed a new way to attack in surprise, otherwise they'd lose if they attacked in the conventional way. Mrs. Morris then speaks to her friend Mary in Scranton, who reports the local children are playing a game called Invasion. Meanwhile, Mink and her friends are constructing some sort of device, but Drill has become stuck halfway. A short time later, Mr. Morris returns home from work and a series of loud explosions are heard. Mrs. Morris suddenly realizes the game is not a game, and rushes her husband into the attic where they lock themselves in. Dozens and dozens of footsteps are heard in the house below. The attic lock is melted, and Mink appears in the doorway.

Analysis

The fantastical again becomes important thematically through most of the stories in this section. In “The Little Mice”, the fantasy is gentle and unusual. The Mexicans in the story live in their own fantasy world which consists of working only to come home and get drunk, imagining themselves to be living in their homeland. Only a fire disrupts their pattern of living – a crashing into of reality. In “The Shore Line at Sunset”, Tom and Chico are directed by some boys to a stranded mermaid. Mermaids are a fantasy element in and of themselves, and Chico at first does not believe what he is seeing with his own eyes. His decision to take advantage of the fantastic fails against Tom's decision to let the mermaid wash back out to sea.

Fantasy also factors centrally into the story “Chrysalis”, where rather than having negative and dangerous effects on Smith, radiation has immensely positive effects on Smith. Smith transforms into a person who can fly and breathe in outer space. In “Pillar of Fire”, fantasy includes William Lantry rising from the dead centuries after dying and seeking to put fear back into a modern world that has done away with it. In many ways, the future world William finds himself in is dystopian, for fear has done away with things like imagination and preventative safety. This is unacceptable to William, who sets out on a murderous and destructive rampage to put fear back into people. Fantasy is also crucial in the story “Zero Hour”, where interdimensional travel made possible by unwitting children unleashes an alien invasion on America.

The theme of melancholy also factors heavily into some of these stories. In “The Shore Line at Sunset”, Tom is unhappy because he hasn't been able to find a young woman to marry and build a life with. Having discovered and let a mermaid go, Tom continues to



be melancholy as he seeks to find the mermaid – and others – once again. His search for a wife is replaced by a search for a mermaid – someone he can truly never have. In “The Day It Rained Forever”, the three elderly patrons of the dusty desert hotel are sad, believing that the best of their lives is gone by, and that their currently situation will never change. Only the arrive of Miss Hillgood turns things around for them. In “Pillar of Fire”, William is driven by hatred of the present, but also suffers from a slight melancholy at the way the world is now versus what it was centuries before. The past is no longer the past.

The past also figures thematically into the tenderly-drawn story “The Day It Rained Forever”. Here, the elderly residents of an old, dusty hotel – the men and the hotel are symbolic and representative of one another in appearance and age – look back fondly on the past, and bleakly on the future. Smith is prepared to strike out elsewhere to try to change his life, but is stopped by Miss Hillgood’s arrival at the hotel. Miss Hillgood reminds the men what it is to be young and full of life again, and the metaphorical rain she brings is one of a restoration of the soul.

Discussion Question 1

Where do fantasy and reality separate in these stories? Select three stories and explain an element of fantasy and where it departs from reality in these stories. How do these fantasy elements affect the plots of the stories?

Discussion Question 2

While Chico wants to sell the mermaid found in “The Shore Line at Sunset”, Tom lets the mermaid escape back into the sea. Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why is William so angry in the story “Pillar of Fire”? What does he set about to do in anger? Is there any justification for William’s actions? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

mystify, bewildered, grievous, fathoms, dubiously, degeneration, anachronism, dynamo, requisitioned



The Man – Come into My Cellar

Summary

The Man – Explorers Captain Hart, Lieutenant Martin, their crew, and their spaceship have just landed on a new planet near a magnificent city and expect to be welcomed as heroes. Hart can't understand why no one has come to see them, however. Martin investigates and reports back that the people on the planet are happy, in peace, and don't seem to care about the explorers. He reveals a man, infinitely good, wise, and with the power to heal the sick, has already been to the city. The man is someone for whom the citizens have been waiting a long time, perhaps a million years. Hart thinks the man must be a competing explorer captain, but Martin says this is not so. Hart is nevertheless angered and unimpressed. He is likewise skeptical and incensed that Martin and the crew could even entertain the belief the man might be Jesus. Hart says he doesn't believe it.

The next day, Hart, Martin, and an assistant head into the city to meet with the mayor. Hart seeks hard evidence and scientific proof as to the man's abilities and presence. Hart is condescending towards the people he speaks with, earning a rebuke from Martin. Martin tells him to leave the people alone, that they are good and entitled to their opinions. Martin says the people have something the captain will never have – a little faith – and so he decides to stay among them. Martin tells the captain to take his scientific method elsewhere. Suddenly, the two competing explorer ships land, badly damaged from a cosmic storm, full of dead and seriously wounded crewmembers. Martin suggests the man might be able to help. Hart realizes this can be scientifically done, so they rush to the city. No one has seen the man in a while, so the mayor thinks the man may have probably gone. Enraged, Hart scrambles back to his spaceship, determined to keep seeking out the man. The mayor reveals the man is still in the city, and that Hart will be forever late in missing the man.

Time in Thy Flight – Mrs. Fields brings three middle school students, Janet, William, and Robert, on a field trip in a time machine back to the year 1928 to a small town in Illinois to observe how children lived in the past. The students are amazed to see local children going to the circus, which, like Christmas, has vanished by the time of the students. The students are also amazed to see how much time families spend together. The students are moved to see the Fourth of July and Halloween. Janet and Robert are especially taken with the fun the children seem to be having, in a world where religion, ghosts, and holiday celebrations still existed. Mrs. Fields explains their own time – with Work Day, Machine Day, and William C. Chatter's Birthday – is much more sensible. However, Robert and Janet decide to remain behind. William begs not to be taken back in time on field trips anymore.

The Pedestrian – It is the year 2053. Leonard Mead enjoys taking evening walks even though he is always alone in doing so. Sidewalks have fallen into disuse and disrepair, as people prefer to spend their evenings inside watching television rather than being



outside. A mechanized police car driven by robots – the only law enforcement in a city of three-million people – stops Leonard. Leonard is asked his profession, which he responds is writing. This does not register with the police, who comment that Leonard has no profession. It has been years, Leonard thinks, since books or magazines have been read. The police then ask what Leonard is doing outside. Leonard responds that his merely walking. The police robots can't make sense of this. They ask Leonard's address. He gives it as Eleven South Saint James Street. He explains he is unmarried, has walked every night for years for no other real purpose than merely to walk, but is then ordered into the police car. The car goes past his home toward the Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies.

Hail and Farewell – Willie looks like a boy of 12 even though he is actually 43. He never ages, and must move every few years so no one will catch on. He sadly says goodbye to his temporary parents, who know the truth. He presents himself at random doors, seeking shelter and food until someone takes him in. Despite his ability to travel and his appearance, Willie does not feel free or careless like a child should. He takes a train and gets off randomly at the town of Valleyville, population 10,000, because it looks green and nice.

Invisible Boy – Old Lady, a kind witch, attempts to convince Charlie to come out of the closet in which he is hiding. Charlie's parents have gone on vacation. Charlie has sought out Old Lady's company as she is an old family friend. Charlie will not come out of the closet unless Old Lady makes him invisible. She gives him a charm – a bat eyeball with a needle through it wrapped up in a gingham cloth – which she says makes him invisible when put in his pocket. The charm is merely a ploy to get Charlie out of the closet, with Old Lady only pretending Charlie has been rendered invisible. Charlie is thrilled, but Old Lady reminds Charlie it is no fun to be invisible, because people will look right through him. Eventually, Charlie tires of the game, and Old Lady allows him to believe he is reappearing. Charlie returns home, but the invisible Charlie remains behind with the Old Lady who hugs a sack of sticks.

Come Into My Cellar – Hugh Fortnum wakes up happily on Saturday, listening to his wife Cynthia cooking breakfast, his son Tom taking a shower, and the neighbor, Mrs. Goodbody, a gentle elderly Christian woman waging war with insects and worried about flying saucers. Tom's special mail order of the Sylvan Glade Jumbo-Giant Mushroom kit arrives, a kit designed for people to grow mushrooms in their cellars and then sell them for a handsome profit in a mere twenty-four hours. Fortnum is amused but disbelieving, and heads into town. He runs into his friend Roger Willis, who insists something feels off with the world, and that he is afraid all the time. He cautions Fortnum to watch everything for a few days. This unnerves Fortnum, who asks his wife about it later. Cynthia shrugs it off. Tom reports his mushrooms are growing well, but Cynthia doesn't like that Tom is growing mushrooms. She then gets a call from Dorothy Willis, wife of Roger, saying that Roger is gone.

Roger's son, Joe, explains to Fortnum that it was he who discovered his father had packed up and left. Fortnum agrees to look for Roger. At home, Fortnum still sees Mrs. Goodbody at war with the bugs. A telegram arrives from New Orleans from Roger,



telling Fortnum to refuse all special deliveries. Fortnum calls Dorothy to learn that three days before, Joe had received a special delivery package of mushrooms – something all the boys are growing now in the neighborhood. They are mushrooms that Mrs. Goodbody has been mistaking for insects, and spraying. Fortnum then realizes the special deliveries are coming from New Orleans. He reveals everything to his wife, who can't believe giant alien mushrooms are special mailing packages to people across the country for a mushroom alien invasion. Fortnum shrugs it off. Later, Cynthia goes missing, and Fortnum realizes his son has eaten some of the mushrooms and is now acting strangely. He imagines his wife must be dead in the basement, so he goes down to say goodbye.

Analysis

The fantastic – fantasy and science fiction – remain a key thematic element to most of the stories in this section of the collection. The fantastic is critical in the story “Time in Thy Flight”, in which children take a field trip not to any particular place in their own day and age, but to a time in the past. Fantasy is crucial to the tragic story “Hail and Farewell” which features a boy who appears 12 and never ages, forcing him to have to move every few years. Fantasy of a different type factors into “Invisible Boy”. While Charlie is not truly made invisible, an invisible version of Charlie remains behind with Old Lady, who has always longed to be, but was never able to be, a mother. In “Come Into My Cellar”, fantasy and science fiction collide through an alien mushroom invasion that is spread through special delivery and unwitting local boys.

Distinct from fantasy though both drawn on belief, faith is critical to the story “The Man”. In the “The Man”, the ever-skeptical Hart cannot accept that Jesus has visited the planet he believes his crew have discovered, while the ever-faithful Martin readily accepts Jesus's presence. No proof will ever be enough for Hart, leading him to a never-ending search, while Martin has all the answers he needs through faith, meaning he finds the truth about Jesus in the present. It is how Martin may then enter into Jesus's presence, while Hart will be forever chasing rather than accepting Jesus. (There is even irony in Hart's name. Faith is often a matter of the heart, and Hart has no faith.)

Themes of the past and dystopianism factor heavily into the story “Time in Thy Flight”, in which the dystopian society in which the students on the field trip are dissatisfied with their highly-mechanized, technologically-sure world. They long for gentler, simpler times – those of 1928 Illinois where they decide to remain behind. Indeed, the search for other, better planets than dystopian Earth in “The Man” is symbolic of man's search for God, and is symbolic of man's quest for a better world – Heaven. Dystopianism is likewise critical to the story “The Pedestrian”, where people are obsessed with television and where no one does anything outside anymore unless there is a real reason for it. This is what makes Leonard Mead so unusual: he enjoys walking simply for the pleasure and ability to walk. Leonard is out of pace in his day and age, and so he is arrested by an unforgiving mechanized police force incapable of understanding something that is different – such as something done in the past. Both the children of “Time in Thy Flight” and Leonard in “The Pedestrian” long for a better past.



Melancholy also factors heavily into “The Pedestrian”. Leonard has bouts of sadness because he feels out of place in his day and age. Melancholy is also crucial to understanding Old Lady in “Invisible Boy”. Old Lady has always wanted to be a mother, but for unknown reasons, never became one. Her visit with Charlie leads her to sadly imagine what life might be like with a son. Melancholy is also critical to understanding Willie in “Hail and Farewell”. Willie has something that most people dream of – eternal youth – but to him, eternal youth is a trap rather than freedom. It limits what he can do, where he can go, and how long he can stay.

Discussion Question 1

Why do Hart and Martin both approach word that Jesus may be on the planet differently in “The Man”? What conclusions and outcomes do Hart and Martin reach based on their beliefs?

Discussion Question 2

What do Leonard in “The Pedestrian” and Robert and Janet in “Time in Thy Flight” have in common? How does this affect them? Why?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways does the fantastic factor into the stories “Invisible Boy”, “Hail and Farewell”, “Come Into My Cellar”? How do fantasy and/or science fiction determine the plot of each of these stories? What outcomes do these stories have based on the level and the kind of the fantastic contained within them?

Vocabulary

apparatus, instantaneous, regressive, bemused, intuition, guffaw, jaunty



The Million-Year Picnic – Icarus

Montgolfier Wright

Summary

The Million-Year Picnic – Tim, Michael, Robert, their mother, and their father go from Minnesota to Mars under the guise of a fishing trip vacation in the late 1990s. They pass the magnificent ruins of ancient Martian civilizations as they float down a river. Suddenly, the rocket the family has taken to Mars explodes by their father's doing so they can't be tracked. The family explores several abandoned Martian cities, finding one in which they will now live given the devastation nuclear war as brought to Earth. It is expected that someday, other families will arrive in government-issued escape rockets, though most will probably head to the moon. At least their old neighbor Bert Edwards, his wife, and several daughters are only a day or two behind. The father symbolically and literally burns old papers, essays, and government documents from Earth to signal a new start to human existence. He then says he will show his children Martians. He shows them their reflections in the water.

The Screaming Woman – Ten year-old Margaret Leary lives in a warm, friendly, quiet neighborhood where nothing bad ever happens and no one expects anything bad to ever happen. After getting ice cream one summer day, Margaret hears a screaming woman through the ground in the vacant lot behind her house. Mom and Dad do not believe Margaret, thinking her imagination is to blame, and believing that nothing bad ever happens in their town. Mom is reminded of gossip that Helen Nesbitt and her husband, Charlie, had another fight the night before. Dad reveals he once dated Helen, and that she made up a song only she and he shared. Mom is unimpressed. Neither parent will help Margaret as she seeks to dig up the woman. Only her friend Dippy agrees to help, as he too hears the screaming. Mr. Kelly thinks the kids are up to no good, and orders them to stop digging. Distressed, Margaret hears the woman singing the words "I loved you fair, I loved you well". She relates this to her father who suddenly realizes his daughter is not making up her story, that it is Helen buried in the ground. He rushes out to save her.

The Smile – It is 2061. Humanity has barely survived an atomic war. People now wear gunnysack clothing and the temperatures are very cold. Young Tom and many others gather in the town square to gaze and spit upon the Mona Lisa out of anger for the past, specifically for all that led up to the war and the current situation people find themselves in. Indeed, all of humanity now gets by motivated by hatred. They smash apart any trace of civilization. Tom waits in line with a man named Grigsby, who explains all this to Tom, who is just old enough to begin to understand. When Tom's turn comes to spit on the painting, Tom can't do it because he finds the painting beautiful. A decree comes that the painting is to be handed over to the people of the town to destroy. In the scuffle, Tom grabs a shred of the painting to save it. Safe at home in his family's cave, he looks at the scrap. It is the Mona Lisa's smile. He carefully hides it away.



Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed – Harry Bittering, his wife Cora, their children Dan, Laura, David, and 1,000 other Earth people have gone to colonize Mars in the event the war raging on Earth should destroy it. Bittering does not like Mars, believing only Martians are fit for Mars. Cora reminds him they'll be safe on Mars, and tells him not to worry. Soon, word arrives that much of the world has been atom-bombed, so any hope of return is virtually nonexistent. Soon, Bittering realizes his crops and fruit trees all appear to be changing in the Martian landscape. The peach blossoms have extra petals, the roses turn green, the grass turns purple, and the cows grow horns. Harry is more determined than ever to get back to Earth, so he plans on building a rocket to return. He begins to speak Martian words without ever having learned Martian. All the people begin to change, their bodies getting thinner and taller, and their eyes turning golden. They soon forget they ever came from Earth. Five years later, a group of Americans arrive on Mars, saying they have won the war and are there to rescue the stranded thousand people. They find no people, but only Martians who can speak English.

The Trolley – Mr. Tridden, the conductor of the last trolley running in the city, brings all the children for one last ride on the trolley the last day the trolley will be running. Thereafter, a bus service will take its place and the trolley tracks will be cemented over. The children are horrified the trolley will be removed, for they have come to love it. Trolleys have a character that buses don't have, the children insist. The children decide to meet for a game of kick-the-can after supper.

Icarus Montgolfier Wright – It is 1971. Jedediah Prentiss is set to make history as the first licensed rocket pilot to fly to the Moon. The night before the trip, he dreams that he is Icarus, taking flight for the first time ever. He dreams he is Montgolfier, French hot air balloon pilot. He dreams he is one of the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk. In his dreams, someone asks his name. He responds that it is Icarus Montgolfier Wright, motivated by the same dreams of flight, freedom, discovery, and innovation as those three men.

Analysis

The fantastic continues to be a dominant theme through most of the last stories in this collection. "The Million-Year Picnic" relies heavily on science fiction as a family journeys to Mars to establish a new civilization distinct from what they now consider to be a dystopian society on Earth. Science fiction and fantasy blend in a similar setting in "Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed" wherein 1,000 Earth refugees seeking a new home on Mars do not retain their humanity, but are transformed into Martians. Interestingly enough, the story "Icarus Montgolfier Wright" – originally written and published in 1956 – saw the first manned flight to the Moon as a matter of the fantastical taking place in 1971, when events in real life would see man first step foot on the Moon in 1969 by way of Apollo 11. Bradbury was not far off.

The future – specifically that of a dystopian future – also factors heavily and thematically into many of these stories. In "The Million-Year Picnic", the Americans who come to colonize Mars are seeking escape from a dystopian world. In "Dark They Were, and



Golden-Eyed”, Earth refugees leave a dystopian, war-torn Earth for the safety of Mars. “The Smile” involves a dystopian future world, one in which the landscape and people have barely survived an atomic holocaust. Cornfields glow at night from radiation, the weather is always cold, people scrape by, and survivors hate the past for their dystopian present. Interestingly, the reader should note that Tom alone finds not hated, but beauty in the past though the Mona Lisa.

It is this beauty in the past that the theme of the past becomes central to some of these stories. A very slight sense of dystopianism can be seen in the story “The Trolley”, where a future with buses is seen far less favorably than a past with trolley cars. Ironically, it is the young rather than the old who already long for the days of the past, unhappy with the way the future will turn out. In “Icarus Montgolfier Wright”, Jedediah Prentiss dreams he is Icarus, Montgolfier, and Wright, respectively, all past aviation pioneers. Indeed, Prentiss’s own flight will make history, and secure his place in the past.

The theme of family also remains strong in many of these final stories. “The Million-Year Picnic” is a story in which families of refugees arrive on Mars. The families stick together in order to make a new life and to survive in a new world, and thus become the first of a new generation of Martians. In “Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed”, Harry Bittering longs to return to Earth but remains for the time being on Mars to help care for his family. Only when the realization sets in that he is changing does Harry determine to return to Earth, with or without his family. In “The Screaming Woman”, 10-year-old Margaret is unable to convince her kind but disbelieving parents that there is a live woman buried in the vacant lot behind their house. Only with the revelation of the special song by Margaret does her father come to believe her, rushing to save the buried woman in the nick of time.

Discussion Question 1

How are the experiences of Harry Bittering in “Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed” and the family of “The Million Year Picnic” similar and different, especially with respect to the themes of the fantastic and dystopianism?

Discussion Question 2

In “The Smile”, Tom finds himself unable to spit on the Mona Lisa, and lunges at a scrap of the painting in order to save it. Why? (Reference the themes of dystopianism and the past in your answer.)

Discussion Question 3

How does the theme of the past affect the stories “Icarus Montgolfier Wright” and “The Trolley”? How do these two stories compare in plot and nature to stories like “The Pedestrian” and “Time in Thy Flight”?

Vocabulary

excavate, disperse, appreciator, mosaic, onerous, uncharted, eternity



Characters

George Smith

George Smith factors into the story “In a Season of Calm Weather”. George and his wife are Americans vacationing on the French coast. George longs to own a Picasso painting. He is thrilled to discover Picasso on the beach, drawing figures in sand. George, however, has no way of saving the drawings, and is saddened when the tide comes in.

Camillia Wilkes

Camillia Wilkes is a teenaged girl living in London in 1762 in the story “A Medicine for Melancholy”. Beautiful but suffering from an unknown illness, Camillia believes she is dying. No one agrees from what she suffers until a Dustman advises leaving her out overnight to bathe in the glow of the moon. The Dustman then has sex with her, healing her melancholy.

Martinez

Martinez is a young Mexican-American man in the story “The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit” who, jobless and depressed, longs for a sharp white summer suit that will make him feel better and look good. He goes in with his friends Vamenos, Villanazul, Dominguez, Manulo, and Gomez to purchase such a suit for \$60. Martinez believes the suit makes him confident and more attractive, but as Celia later tells Martinez, she wants to date him, not the suit.

Charles

Charles is a 13-year-old boy in the story “Fever Dream”. Charles worries that the germs from his fever are going to take over his body. The doctor assures him this isn’t so. However, the germs do come to take over Charles’s body, leading him to want to spread the infection all over the world.

Antonio and Maria

Antonio and Maria are a married couple who can’t agree on anything in the story “The Marriage Mender”. They are especially at odds over an old bed which causes a massive fight between them. The next day, Antonio decides to replace the bed. Maria, who has become pregnant, refuses to have the bed replaced since she has conceived a baby in the bed. It is now the best bed ever to her.



The Narrator of "The Town Where No One Got Off"

The narrator in "The Town Where No One Got Off" decides to depart the train on which he is traveling for the small, obscure town of Rampart Junction, Iowa, for a change. The narrator meets an old man, who like him, has had a rough go of things and wants to kill someone. The narrator does, too. Neither the old man nor the narrator act on their desire, and both go their separate ways.

William Finch

William Finch is a kind, elderly man who is supposed to be cleaning out his attic in the story "The Scent of Sarsaparilla". He discovers his attic is a time machine to the past, and encourages his wife, Cora, to come along with him. She refuses multiple times, ultimately leading William to slip back through time without her.

Andrew Lemon

Andrew Lemon is a deformed man in the story "The Hairpiece". Having been attacked with a hammer by his crazy ex-wife, Andrew's forehead is deformed by a giant hole and hidden with a new hairpiece. Andrew is very self-conscious and unaccepting of himself, but loves his blind neighbor, Miss Naomi Fremwell, with all his heart. He proposes marriage to her twice, which she declines both times because Andrew has not yet learned to love himself as he is.

Nick

Nick is the narrator's driver in the story "The First Night of Lent". Nick is a heavy smoker, and contemplates giving up cigarettes for Lent. Nick chooses to give up liquor instead, leading Nick to become a horrible driver while sober. The narrator urges Nick to return to the bottle, even paying Nick a handsome bonus to go out and buy some Irish moss.

Willie

Seventy-five year-old Illinois resident Willie has a premonition of death in "The Time of Going Away" after reading an article in National Geographic Magazine about how Pacific Islanders approach death. His wife, Mildred, thinks as normal that Willie has gotten a fool idea into his head after reading the magazine, but Willie heads out into Illinois determined to die. He returns home a short time later, shaken but well, ready for dinner, and content with the knowledge his wife is burning all of his National Geographic magazines in the fireplace.



Margot

Nine-year-old Margot is a student on the planet Venus in the story “All Summer in a Day”. A native of Earth, she can remember entire days of sunlight. She is frail, quiet, and keeps to herself. She is disliked intensely by her classmates because of her origins. When she argues the scientists have predicted an hour without rain, her classmates become angry and shut her into a closet. This prevents her from experiencing the sunlight on Venus.

The Family of "The Gift"

The father and mother in “The Gift” want their son to experience Christmas aboard a rocket ship in space. But because of weight limits, they cannot bring along a Christmas tree. The father arranges it so the boy is able to see the stars on the observation deck just at midnight, so that the stars appear like a billion candles on a Christmas tree. The boy is thrilled beyond belief.

McGuire

McGuire is an American visiting Ireland in the story “The Great Collision of Monday Last”. Though not a native Irishman, McGuire’s ancestral roots reach back into Ireland. When two cyclists are injured on a foggy night, only the American McGuire is willing to risk traveling in the fog to save the lives of the two men by driving them to the hospital. In this way, McGuire is accepted among the locals as family.

Tom and Chico

Tom and Chico are best friends in the story “The Shore Line at Sunset”. Chico loves the life of a bachelor, while the more romantic Tom wants to find a woman to marry. Both men discover a stranded mermaid on the beach. Chico wants to sell the mermaid, but Tom lets the mermaid wash back out to sea while Chico goes to get the truck. Tom decides he will remain at the shore as long as he can to try to find the mermaid again.

Smith

Smith is a patient of Doctors Rockwell, Hartley, and McGuire in the story “Chrysalis”. Smith has been exposed to radiation, has turned green, and his body has morphed into a chrysalis. Smith remains in the chrysalis for months, while his body evolves beneath the surface, giving him the power of flight, and the power to breathe in outer space.



William Lantry

William Lantry, born in 1898 and dead in 1933, rises from the grave in the year 2349 in the story “Pillar of Fire”. William realizes he is an anachronism, for he comes from an age – the Great Depression – in which fear was a daily factor in peoples’ lives. William decides to bring fear back into the world of 2349, where fear has been outlawed. Driven by hate, he kills all the people he can to enjoy their company, but is himself ultimately caught and incinerated.

Mink Morris

Mink Morris is a small girl in the story “Zero Hour”. She, along with all the other neighborhood children, are playing what their parents believe is a game called Invasion. Only belatedly do their parents realize the game isn’t a game at all, and that aliens have invaded the country through dimensional travel devices their children have unwittingly constructed.

Hart and Martin

Captain Hart and Lieutenant Martin are space explorers in the story “The Man”. Hart is intensely scientific and skeptical, while Martin is open-minded and thoughtful. When they discover that the inhabitants of a new planet have reported seeing Jesus, Hart is dismissive and seeks scientific proof, while Martin is ready to believe. Realizing the people of the planet are good and decent, Martin decides to remain among them while Hart rushes off across space to find proof of the man. Martin then learns that the man is still on the planet, and goes to meet Jesus with an open heart and an open mind.

Janet, William, and Robert

Janet, William, and Robert are three students who take a field trip into the past in “Time in Thy Flight”. The three middle-school-aged kids study childhood in 1928 Illinois on the trip. Janet and Robert are taken with the beauty, freedom, fun, and innocence of the era while Robert is panicked by it, longing for the scientific surety and machinery-driven certainty of his own age. Accordingly, Janet and Robert remain behind in 1928, while Robert never wants to leave his own age again.

Leonard Mead

Leonard Mead is a middle-aged writer who enjoys long walks at night in the story “The Pedestrian”. Mead, unlike everyone else in the city, enjoys being outside and doing things other than watching television, such as walking. After years of doing this, the city’s lone police car stops Mead, finding his desire to walk for enjoyment to be strange



because it has no concrete purpose. Mead is arrested and taken to a psychiatric center as a result.

Willie of "Hail and Farewell"

Willie is a 43-year-old who never aged past 12 in the story "Hail and Farewell". Willie, despite being young forever, is forced to move every few years or people will grow suspicious. He only ever tells the people who take him in his secret so as to avoid public situations. Willie says farewell to his current home and heads out by train, deciding to randomly get off and try his luck in Valleyville.

Old Lady

Old Lady is a kindly witch who watches out for Charlie, the son of family friends in "Invisible Boy". Old Lady plays a game of invisibility with Charlie until Charlie heads home. Old Lady, who has no family of her own, is saddened to see Charlie depart, and wonders what it might be like to have her own son. She hugs a sack of sticks and speaks to the sack to try to get over her depression at being alone.

Hugh Fortnum

Hugh Fortnum is the husband of Cynthia and father of Tom in the story "Come into My Cellar". Hugh's son, like all the other boys in the block, are growing alien mushrooms determined to take over the world. Hugh learns this all too late after Tom has eaten some of the mushrooms, and his wife has been killed by the mushrooms. Hugh ultimately heads down into the basement where his son is growing the mushrooms to say goodbye to his wife.

Tim, Robert, Michael, and Their Parents

Tim, Robert, Michael, their mother, and their father leave a nuclear war-torn Earth for Mars in "The Million-Year Picnic". They are the first colonizers on Mars centuries after Martians themselves died out. They wish to leave their old life on Earth behind and start again on Mars. Other families are set to follow suit. Tim and his family thus become the first wave of a new generation of Martians.

Margaret Leary

Margaret Leary is a 10-year-old girl who lives in a quiet town where nothing bad ever happens in the story "The Screaming Woman". This is why no one believes her when she first tells everyone she hears a woman screaming through the ground in the vacant lot behind her house. Only when her father recognizes the song the woman sings does



he realize Margaret is not making it up. He then rushes to save the woman, unburying her just in time.

Tom

Tom is a young boy living in a post-atomic war world in the year 2061 in the story “The Smile”. Tom is just old enough to begin understanding things. He learns of the practice of defacing and destroying elements of the past, such as paintings and factories, due to hatred for the past because the past led to the present. Tom joins his friend Grigsby and other villagers in line to spit on the Mona Lisa, but Tom cannot bring himself to do this because he is struck by the beauty of the painting and the woman in it. When the painting is ripped to shreds, Tom grabs a piece of the painting to save and admire.

Harry Bittering

Harry Bittering, his family, and 1,000 other Earth people colonize Mars in “Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed” in order to preserve the human race should an atomic war on Earth destroy the planet. Bittering hates Mars, and wants to return to Earth. He panics, noticing how everything is changing on Mars – including crops, animals, and the people themselves. Ultimately, the Martian world transforms Harry and the others into actual Martians, who know nothing about their past.

Mr. Tridden

Mr. Tridden is the last trolley driver on the last trolley in the story “The Trolley”. He brings the children of the town for one last ride on the trolley, happy to see how thrilled they are with the transportation. Mr. Triddle sadly says goodbye as the day winds to a close, knowing that buses will replace the trolley the very next day.

Jedediah Prentiss

Jedediah Prentiss is the first licensed rocket pilot to fly to the Moon in 1971 in the story “Icarus Montgolfier Wright”. The night before the flight, Jedediah dreams that he is Icarus, taking flight for the first time ever; then Montgolfier, French hot air balloon pilot; then the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk. In his dreams, someone asks for his name. He gives it as Icarus Montgolfier Wright, motivated by the same dreams of flight, freedom, discovery as those men. Jedediah hopes to have a long and happy life, coming to die peacefully on Mars in at least the summer of 1999.



Symbols and Symbolism

Picasso's drawings

Picasso drawings are scribbled into the sand on the French shore by Picasso in the story “In a Season of Calm Weather”. The drawings are beautifully done, and represent the kind of artwork that George has longed to own by Picasso, but has been unable to afford. Now that such artwork is free and in the sand, George has no way of saving it or preserving it from the tide that comes in. The artwork, therefore, symbolizes that which George may never have – a piece of Picasso’s artwork.

Summer suit

A vanilla ice cream white summer suit is purchased for \$60 from Shumway’s Sunshine Suits in “The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit” by Martinez, Vamenos, and Villanazul, Gomez, Dominguez, and Manulo, all of whom contribute \$10 toward the purchase. They all agree to share the suit, believing it will bring them good luck. They all come to feel this way about the suit, believing it is the suit that ends up giving them confidence and making them admired. But as Martinez later finds out from Celia, a girl who wishes to date him, it isn’t the suit but Martinez himself that she is interested in.

Smell of sarsaparilla

The smell of sarsaparilla accompanies William Finch when he comes down from cleaning the attic in the story “The Scent of Sarsaparilla”. The smell of sarsaparilla arises as William travels into the past numerous times, demonstrating to his wife that he truly is traveling into the past. When she refuses to go back into the past with him for good, she is left with only memories and the scent of sarsaparilla.

Hairpiece

The hairpiece is purchased by Andrew Lemon in the story “The Hairpiece” to hide the hole in his head. Andrew believes the hairpiece will make him a new man, both to himself and to others. Feeling confident, he proposes marriage to his blind neighbor, Miss Naomi Fremwell. She gently declines twice, noting that the hairpiece has not encouraged Andrew to actually love and accept himself.

National Geographic Magazine

National Geographic Magazine is read each month by Willie in the story “The Time of Going Away”. The magazine features a story about how Pacific Islanders approach death, which in turn leads Willie to believe he is going to die. His wife thinks his



imagination has run away, as it always does when Willie reads National Geographic. When his wife is proved to be correct, she burns his collection of National Geographic Magazines and prepares dinner.

Chrysalis

A green, body-shaped chrysalis is formed by Smith in the story “Chrysalis” when Smith is exposed to radiation. The chrysalis shelters his body while his body transforms internally, giving Smith the power of flight and the ability to breathe in space. The chrysalis itself becomes representative of change in general, and representative of the changes that the doctors hope will one day occur in human beings – healthier, stronger, smarter, faster, superhuman.

Interdimensional travel devices

Interdimensional travel devices figure in the story “Invasion”. The devices are unwittingly constructed by children in Scranton, New York, and across the country at the direction of the aliens who seek to use them to launch a surprise attack on America. Only belatedly does Mink’s mother realize what is going on, but by then, it is too late. The aliens invade and come for Mink’s parents, and the parents of all other children in the country.

Invisibility charm

An invisibility charm is given to Charlie by Old Lady to make Charlie emerge from his hiding place in the closet in “Invisible Boy”. Consisting of a needle through a bat eye wrapped in a gingham cloth, the charm allows Charlie to believe he is invisible. When Charlie tires of the game and decides to head home, he returns the charm, allowing Old Lady to pretend that Charlie is reforming from thin air.

Old papers

Tim’s father burns old government papers and documents from Earth after moving to Mars in “The Million-Year Picnic”. This is done symbolically and literally to signal a new start, a new civilization, and a new world for humans who have moved to Mars. Indeed, Tim and his family are the first of many people that are moving to Mars.

Private song

A private song between Margaret’s father and his old love Helen factors centrally into the story “The Screaming Woman”. At first, Margaret’s father believes her insistence that she is hearing a screaming woman through the ground is just her imagination running wild. Only when Margaret repeats the words to the song known only to her

father and Helen does her father realize there really is a screaming woman buried in the vacant lot. Because of this, Margaret's father rushes to save Helen.

Mona Lisa

Leonardo DaVinci's most famous painting, Mona Lisa, is featured in the story "The Smile". The painting is a vestige of the past which people line up to spit on in anger for the way things turned out in the present – human beings scraping by following an atomic war. When Tom's turn comes to spit on the painting, Tom can't do it because he finds the painting too beautiful to mar. A decree then comes that the painting is to be handed over to the people of the town to destroy. In the ensuing destruction, Tom grabs a shred of the painting to save it. Safe at home in his family's cave, he looks at the scrap. It is the Mona Lisa's smile. He carefully hides it away.



Settings

Illinois

Illinois is a Midwestern state in the United States of America, is Ray Bradbury's home state, and is featured in the stories "The Time of Going Away" and "Time in Thy Flight". It is primarily small-town, rural Illinois that is dealt with in both of these stories. In "The Time of Going Away", a small town elderly married dispute the husband's reading National Geographic, as the magazine gives the husband bad ideas. One such article convinces the husband he is dying, so he heads off into Illinois to die, only to return healthy but hungry hours later. In "Time in Thy Flight", the Illinois of 1928 is visited by a field trip from the future. The Illinois of 1928 is warm, summery, carefree, inviting, and relaxed, and causes students Janet and William to stay behind.

Mars

Mars is one of the planets in the Solar System. Mars features centrally into several of the stories in the collection, notably "Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed", and "The Million-Year Picnic." In both stories, Mars is colonized by refugees from Earth. The refugees of "Dark They Were...", are physically transformed by the Martian environment, and turned into actual Martian beings. Likewise, anything from Earth brought with them is transformed by the Martian environment, such as roses which turn green and cows which grow horns. The refugees of "The Million-Year Picnic", however, retain their humanity but assume the mantle of "Martians".

Earth

Earth is one of the planets in the Solar System. Earth is home to numerous countries, including the United States of America. Earth factors into each of the stories in the collection in some way, some more prominently than others. It is a place from which many people in the stories must either escape due to atomic war (such as in "The Million-Year Picnic" and "Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed"), or must live on as survivors following an atomic war or in a dystopian future (such as in "The Smile" and "Pillar of Fire"). Earth is also a place targeted for alien invasion in "Come Into My Cellar" and "Zero Hour". Earth is also home to the fantastical, such as children who never age ("Hail and Farewell"), witches ("Invisible Boy"), and mermaids ("The Shore Line at Sunset"). It is also a home planet from which explorers set out such as in "The Man", "Icarus Montgolfier Wright", and "All Summer in a Day".

Ireland

Ireland is one of the numerous countries on Earth, and factors centrally into the stories "The Great Collision of Monday Last" and "The First Night of Lent". Ireland is seen as a



country of superstitions and old-world charm in “The Great Collision”, where an American of Irish ancestry visits the country and becomes accepted among the locals when he volunteers to drive two injured people to the hospital in the fog because the locals will not chance it. In “The First Night of Lent”, the narrator discovers his driver is a horrible driver without alcohol in his system.

The Moon

The Moon is a satellite body of Earth, and factors into the stories “The Million-Year Picnic” and “Icarus Montgolfier Wright”. The Moon in these stories has an oxygen-rich environment and is suitable for human habitation. The Moon is a destination of many of the refugees who are fleeing Earth in the “The Million-Year Picnic”. The Moon is also the destination of the first-manned rocket flight in space in 1971 in “Icarus Montgolfier Wright”. The Moon therein comes to represent a new chapter in the history of human flight.



Themes and Motifs

Family

Family is an important theme in the short story collection “A Medicine for Melancholy” by Ray Bradbury. Family involves mutual love, compassion, loyalty towards, and emotional, spiritual, and physical support of individuals who may or may not be blood-related, but who still behave in the fashion of the traditional family unit. Family can be found consistently throughout Bradbury’s collection, and family affects the plot of the stories in various ways – sometimes positive, sometimes negative.

In the story “In a Season of Calm Weather”, George and Alice Smith, husband and wife, take a vacation together to the French coast where Alice worries her husband’s time may be ruined by longing after meeting or buying a piece of artwork from Picasso. In “A Medicine for Melancholy”, Camillia’s family will do whatever they must to diagnose the illness that afflicts their only daughter. This includes soliciting the opinions of doctors, passersby, and taking the advice of a Dustman. In “Fever Dream”, Charlie’s parents worry and fret over Charlie’s illness, wanting their son to quickly get better and hiring a doctor to this end. In “The Marriage Mender”, a bickering married couple’s disagreement is put aside by word that they will be having a baby. In “The Scent of Sarsaparilla”, William Finch discovers his attic is a time machine and encourages his wife to disappear into the past with him. Though she deeply loves him, she doesn’t believe he is telling the truth and so refuses to go with him.

In “The Time of Going Away”, Willie has a premonition of death after reading an issue of National Geographic. He is convinced he is going to die, but his loving and annoyed wife disagrees, having dinner ready for him when he returns home perfectly fine but hungry. In “The Gift”, a boy’s parents present space as a kind of Christmas tree to him as they celebrate Christmas aboard a rocket ship in outer space, wanting their son to have the best Christmas possible. In “Zero Hour”, Mink’s mother, as well as the parents of countless other American children, observe the trendy new game their children are playing. Deeply loving of their children, none of the parents suspect their children are unwittingly preparing to unleash an interdimensional alien invasion on them. The children of “Come Into My Cellar” do much the same to their parents.

In “Time in Thy Flight”, the children visiting 1928 Illinois from the future become enamored with the idea that families used to spend time with one another. Accordingly, two of the children remain behind in order to live in a better world. In “Hail and Farewell”, the affliction of youth contracted by Willie means he can never stay in the same place for long, so he must move every few years and find a new family to stay with. Not having a stable family hurts Willie deeply. Likewise, not having a son deeply hurts Old Lady in “Invisible Boy”. In “The Million-Year Picnic”, a father helps his family adjust to life on Mars, while Harry Bittering does his best to help his family adjust to life on Mars in “Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed”. Meanwhile, Margaret’s father finally



believes her about a woman being buried in the empty lot behind their house in “The Screaming Woman”, digging the woman up and saving her life in the nick of time.

Melancholy

Melancholy is an important theme in the short story collection “A Medicine for Melancholy” by Ray Bradbury. Melancholy is essentially depression, sadness, and even a sense of nostalgia for better times and places. Melancholy is critical to much of Bradbury’s writing, and in particular, many of the stories in this collection.

In the story “In a Season of Calm Weather”, George Smith is miserable to discover that Picasso has drawn pictures on the shore that he can neither keep nor save from destruction by the tide. In the story “A Medicine for Melancholy”, Camillia suffers from an unknown ailment which is described as melancholy (though modern readers will recognize heartache and romantic longing) and treated through sex with the Dustman. In “The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit”, Martinez and his friends are down on their luck and lacking in self-confidence. They feel sad and depressed until they decide to purchase a suit that changes their lives. In “The Marriage Mender”, the bickering and sadness that comes after the fights Antonio and Maria have is cured by knowledge they are going to be parents.

In “A Scent of Sarsaparilla”, William Finch sadly reflects on a past long gone. He is thrilled, however, to learn his attic can transport him into the past. His wife becomes melancholic for the next thirty years of her life after deciding not to return to the past with him. In “The Headpiece”, Andrew Lemon is unhappy with his cranial deformity, which he buys a hairpiece to hide. However, his self-confidence is utterly lacking, even with the new hairpiece. His misery is only increased when this is pointed out to him. In “The Time of Going Away”, Willie believes he is dying, something which makes his wife a little sad, though annoyance wins out over the sadness because she knows there is nothing wrong with Willie. In “All Summer in a Day”, the children sadly await the sunshine. Their desperation and anger at Margot for having experienced sunlight that she can remember leads them to locking her in the closet. In “The Shore Line at Sunset”, Tom wishes sadly that he had a wife.

In “The Day It Rained Forever”, three elderly men reflect sadly on the past and on life in the present. Their melancholy for better times is only alleviated by the timely arrive of Miss Hillgood, who rejuvenates their souls. In “Time in Thy Flight”, time traveling students on a field trip to Illinois in 1928 come to reflect sadly on how much better things were in the past than they are in the future, and so decide to remain behind in 1928. In “The Pedestrian”, Leonard sadly reflects on how life has changed, and longs for the past. He finds it saddening that people would rather watch TV mindlessly inside than interacting with one another outside, or by doing anything outside at all without a real purpose. In “Hail and Farewell”, Willie’s life is full of sadness as he must travel every few years to avoid arousing suspicion relating to his eternal youth. In “Invisible Boy”, Old Lady is saddened by the fact that she never had a son. In “The Trolley”, the children of



an unnamed city sadly think about how their beloved trolley is set to be replaced by a bus, which they do not want. They long sadly for a past that hasn't even ended yet.

The Past

The past is an important theme in the short story collection “A Medicine for Melancholy” by Ray Bradbury. Thematically, the past – incidents, events, situations, and circumstances in a person or place’s history – can largely affect the present. The past has tremendous bearing on many of the collection’s stories in various ways.

The longing for a better time and for the experiences of the past feature heavily into some of the stories. In “The Scent of Sarsaparilla”, William Finch reflects on the past, on better and warmer times, likening attics to time machines, and then discovering his own attic is actually a time machine that enables him to go into the past. William’s wife contends he remembers the past too fondly, though William disagrees and makes this plain by actually traveling to stay in the past. The past is not good for Andrew Lemon in “The Headpiece”, however, as it was in the past that his crazed wife took a hammer to his head and nearly killed him. The deformity from the injury has destroyed Andrew’s self-confidence in the present.

In “The Day It Rained Forever”, the three elderly residents of the dusty old desert hotel reminisce about better times, about their youth, and about better places. The past is a place they are sad to know they can never return to –but the arrival of Miss Hillgood excites them and makes them feel young again in the present. The past is a place that William Lantry likewise cannot return to in “Pillar of Fire”, as he is awakened from the grave centuries after his death. The past in which William lived was one that depended upon fear for purposes of fun and safety. The present world in which he awakens – without fear – makes him long for the fearful world of the past, and causes him to set out to bring fear to the present. In “Time in Thy Flight”, two of the children on a time travel field trip to 1928 Illinois are so enamored with the idea of families spending time together, and the carefree lives children once had, that they refuse to return to the future.

In “Hail and Farewell”, Willie doesn’t truly have a past because he is forever 12 years old. He must move every few years, creating an entirely new past each time he travels. In “The Screaming Woman”, the song shared between Margaret’s father and Helen years before is what convinces Margaret’s father that she is not lying that Helen is buried in the vacant lot behind their house. In the story “The Smile”, the past is something that the people of the present detest, because the past led to the present –a post-atomic war world where everyone barely manages to scrape by. All vestiges of the past are spit upon or destroyed in anger. In “The Trolley”, the children of a city in transition between transportation of the past and present sadly reflect on the trolley’s last day of operation before the buses come in. In “Icarus Montgolfier Wright”, Jedediah Prentiss dreams of being past pioneer heroes of aviation, knowing that the following morning he is to become such a hero as the first pilot to fly to the Moon.



The Fantastic

The fantastic is an important theme in the short story collection “A Medicine for Melancholy” by Ray Bradbury. The fantastic, thematically, includes science fiction, fantasy, and the horrific. Many of the stories in the collection have strong underpinnings in the fantastic, which in turn drives the plot of the stories.

In “The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit”, the fantastic is very subtle. While it is implied the summer suit purchased by Martinez and his friends might have special powers that makes them better, more confident people, it is revealed that the suit is irrelevant to Celia, who wants Martinez for who he is and not what he wears. In “Fever Dream”, Charlie’s body is taken over by a parasitic germ determined to spread itself around the world. In the story “A Scent of Sarsaparilla”, William Finch’s attic becomes a literal time machine that takes him into the past. As such, William is able to finally forever disappear into the past when his wife refuses to come with him.

In “All Summer in a Day”, the human children living on Venus anxiously await the few hours each seven years the sun comes out against the rain. In “The Gift”, a young boy’s parents bring the boy aboard a rocket ship to celebrate Christmas in outer space. In “The Shore Line at Sunset”, Tom, Chico, and some local boys discover a stunningly beautiful, but stranded mermaid that Tom allows to escape. In “Chrysalis”, Smith undergoes an evolutionary metamorphosis in which he gains the power of flight and the ability to breathe in outer space. In “Pillar of Fire”, William Lantry wakes up after being dead for centuries, driven by hate of the future and a world without fear. As a walking corpse, William Lantry murders and tries to instill fear in the people of the future before he himself is incinerated. In “Zero Hour” and “Come Into My Cellar”, Earth plays host to alien invasion, by interdimensional aliens and mushroom aliens, respectively.

The fantastic is seen in “Time in Thy Flight” in which children of the future take time traveling field trips to see how children lived in Illinois in 1928. In “The Pedestrian”, a writer is singled out and arrested for enjoying walks by an automated police car that cannot understand how he could walk without a tangible purpose. In “Hail and Farewell”, Willie never ages, and must always travel to avoid arousing suspicion. In “Invisible Boy”, the fantastic is far gentler, wherein the Old Lady imagines having a son after the son of family friends heads home. In “The Million Year Picnic” and “Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed”, refugees fleeing from Earth settle on Mars where the characters in “The Million-Year Picnic” become human-Martians in name only, while those in “Dark They Were...” are literally transformed into Martians. In the story “Icarus Montgolfier Wright” – originally written and published in 1956 –fantasy and reality merge. The first manned flight to the Moon occurs in 1971 in the story, while events in real life would see man first step foot on the Moon in 1969 by way of Apollo 11.

Dystopianism

Dystopianism is an important theme in the short story collection “A Medicine for Melancholy” by Ray Bradbury. Dystopianism – essentially a world that is imperfect for



one reason or another, usually owing to the elimination or denial of human rights and human nature – factor critically into many of Bradbury’s stories in this collection.

In “All Summer in a Day”, the human children of Venus are very unhappy with living on Venus because it rains all the time. They are jealous of Margot, born and raised on Earth, and take their frustrations out on her by locking her in a closet. In “Pillar of Fire”, William Lantry is stunned to awaken a world in which the natural human emotion and reaction of fear has been done away with in everything from culture to human nature. William is so devastated and angry about this that he chooses to murder and destroy in order to force fear back into the lives of the people living in the dystopian present.

In “The Man”, faith coincides with dystopianism. The search for better planets than Earth in the story is symbolic of man’s search for Heaven, where God is found and everything is perfect. In “Time in Thy Flight”, time traveling students become disenchanted with their own future world when they encounter Illinois in 1928. They are jealous of family time and holidays like Halloween, which they do not have in their own world (having days like Machine Day instead). In “The Pedestrian”, Leonard feels out of time and out of pace in the modern world. He is a writer who enjoys doing things like walking merely for the pleasure of it. For this, he is denied his rights and arrested, forced into a psychiatric clinic against his will.

In “The Million-Year Picnic”, a family flees a dystopian Earth where war has ravaged the planet and killed countless millions. They are seeking a new start on Mars, where the patriarch of the family symbolically and literally burns old papers relating to their previous life on Earth. In “Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed”, a refugee family headed by Harry Bittering, a handful of people among a thousand, escape from a war-ravaged Earth to Mars in order to survive. Mars turns out to be as dystopically dysfunctional as Earth for the human survivors, for the Martian environment actually turns them into Martians, denying every bit of their literal humanity.



Styles

Point of View

Ray Bradbury tells his story collection “A Medicine for Melancholy” in the first and third-person limited-omniscient points of view. The stories “The First Night of Lent”, “The Town Where No One Got Off”, “The Little Mice”, and “The Screaming Woman” are told in the first-person limited-omniscient perspective, while all 27 other stories are told in the third-person perspective. Only the narrator in “The Screaming Woman” is named, revealed to be 10-year-old Margaret Leary, the only person who can hear the screaming woman at first. The first-person narrative mode gives the reader access to information other characters in the stories do not have, such as in the case of Margaret and the Screaming Woman. The reader knows Margaret is telling the truth, even if other characters in the story do not believe her. Likewise, the limited-omniscient aspect to the stories creates a sense of drama and the fantastic which are critical to Bradbury stories. For example, the reader and the wife of William Finch do not know if William is being truthful or not about attics being time machines in “The Scent of Sarsaparilla” until he actually disappears in plain sight.

Language and Meaning

Ray Bradbury tells his short story collection “A Medicine for Melancholy” in language that is semi-formal, semi-lyrical, and semi-casual, in keeping with the language of the 1940s and 1950s when the majority of the stories were written. Much of the language and information is therein dated to the time, presenting a time capsule of sorts into the thoughts, ideas, culture, science, and language of the day. For example, “atomic war” is used instead of “nuclear war”. The first manned flights to the Moon were envisioned as occurring in the 1970s, when in reality, the first manned flight to the Moon occurred in 1969. Likewise, the idea that people could breathe on other planets such as Mars is more of a science fiction plausibility rather than scientific fact. This was also an age in which it was imagined by some that radiation might have positive morphological changes on the human body – such as Smith gaining the power of flight in “Chrysalis”.

Structure

Ray Bradbury’s “A Medicine for Melancholy” is a collection of thirty-one short stories. Some, like “The Trolley”, are only a few pages long, while “Pillar of Fire” comes in as the longest short story at thirty-eight pages in length. The stories themselves have share many common themes with other stories, linking them together. For example, the stories “All Summer in a Day”, “The Pedestrian”, and “Time in Thy Flight” deal with dystopianism, while “Time in Thy Flight”, “All Summer in a Day”, “Zero Hour”, and “Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed” deal with themes of the fantastical. The majority of the

stories were written and published between the 1940s and the 1950s, with the earliest being in 1945 (“Invisible Boy”) and the latest being 1962 (“Come Into My Cellar”).



Quotes

Why? Why eat, breathe, drink everything French? So that, given time, he might really begin to understand the genius of one man.

-- Narrator (In a Season of Calm Weather paragraph 4)

Importance: George Smith and his wife have gone to vacation in France so that George might better come to understand the world the way his favorite artist, Picasso, does. George's dream is to own a piece of Picasso's artwork, but the staggering cost makes this impossible for the time being. Nevertheless, George is undeterred from his admiration for Picasso, and is stunned to find Picasso later that day on the beach, making drawings in the sand.

Wouldn't it be a fascinating change.

-- Narrator (The Town Where No One Got Off paragraph 4)

Importance: The narrator, who has had a run of bad luck in his life, decides to take a chance for a change and get off at the small town of Rampart Junction, Iowa. The narrator meets an old man who mirrors the narrator in many ways, being unhappy with life and seeking to kill someone. Neither man acts on their thoughts, and both go their separate ways. What could have been a boring stop ultimately becomes a psychologically-challenging event.

You know what attics are? They're Time Machines...

-- William Finch (The Scent of Sarsaparilla paragraph 19)

Importance: William Finch is supposed to be cleaning out his attic, but discovers his attic is actually a time machine to the past. He decides he will leave the present and return to the past. He begs his wife, Cora, to come with him. She thinks he is just an old fool, and would have no desire to travel back anyways. When she refuses enough times, William goes back in time without her.

Happy New Year, man, that's what it is, Happy New Year!

-- Andrew Lemon (The Hairpiece paragraph 7)

Importance: Having ordered a hairpiece to cover the hole in his head, Andrew Lemon feels like a new man. He exclaims a Happy New Year to himself in the mirror as such. The statement is ironic, however, in that nothing has changed at all about Andrew. He still does not love or even accept himself, something painfully obvious to the woman he wishes to marry. There is nothing new about Andrew at all.

It rained. It had been raining for seven years...

-- Narrator (All Summer in a Day paragraph 8)

Importance: Margot, and the other children of the explorers of Venus, anxiously await to see if the rain will stop as it does for only one hour once every seven years. The rain



here is symbolic of the torment Margot endures at the hands of the other kids for being different, just as the other kids deal with a different kind of world on Venus.

No. No, we'll just set here and wait, wait for that great day, January 29.
-- Mr. Terle (The Day It Rained Forever paragraph 8)

Importance: Terle and his fellow hotel residents await the day that it will rain, as it always does at least once a year. The men are old, have little in their life to be joyful about, and some even consider leaving. Only when Miss Hillgood arrives do the rains truly come – not literally, but metaphorically. She is a breath of fresh air for the men, bringing vitality, music, and happiness back into their lives.

I,' he said, addressing a poplar tree that was shaken by the wind, 'am an anachronism.
-- William Lantry (Pillar of Fire paragraph 15)

Importance: When William Lantry rises from the dead in the year 2349, he is stunned to discover that he has been dead for several centuries, and stunned to learn how much the world has changed. Emotions such as fear have been outlawed by banning genres such as horror in order to give people happier, healthier lives. William comes from an age (the Great Depression) in which fear was the primary thing that drove people on. William decides to bring fear back into the world of 2349.

Sir, yesterday, in that city, a remarkable man appeared – good, intelligent, compassionate, and infinitely wise... he was a man for whom they'd waited a long time – a million years, maybe.
-- Lieutenant Martin (The Man paragraph 35)

Importance: Having arrived on a newly discovered planet, Captain Hart expects to be greeted like a hero by the locals. When they don't turn out for Hart, Hart demands to know why. Martin finds out that a man who can perform miracles has beaten them to the planet. Martin believes the man is Jesus, while Hart refuses to believe at all without scientific proof. Martin remains behind in the planet's city while Hart goes off across space in pursuit of such evidence. Martin, who is open-minded and faithful, learns that Jesus has indeed been in the city all along. For the skeptic, no proof will ever be enough, but for the open-minded believer, faith is enough.

Get in.
-- Police car robots (The Pedestrian paragraph 55)

Importance: While out taking a walk on an evening in November 2053, Leonard Mead is stopped by the police. His profession as a writer and his desire to walk simply for the enjoyment of walking do not make sense to the mechanized police because all other citizens are in their homes watching television. Leonard is told to get into the police car, is arrested, and is taken to a psychiatric center dealing with regressive tendencies. This demonstrates the lack of freedom people in Mead's age have, but also demonstrates how common social activities like walking become strange in an age dependent on technology.



When you're just living on a street like we live on, you don't think awful things are going to happen.

-- Margaret Leary (The Screaming Woman paragraph 2)

Importance: Margaret lives in a quiet town in rural suburban America, a place where bad things rarely ever happen, and a place where no one expects bad things will ever happen at all. On the way home from getting ice cream, she hears a woman screaming through the dirt in the empty lot behind her house. No one believes Margaret at first. It turns out the woman was almost murdered and buried, and only Margaret's father recognizing the song the woman was singing leads to the woman being saved.

Tom, it has to do with hate. Hate for everything in the past.

-- Grigsby (The Smile paragraph 29)

Importance: Here, Grigsby explains why he, and all the other villagers, destroy and deface elements of the past – including the Mona Lisa. The past led to the present, and the people in the present are suffering in a post-atomic war world. As such, the people in the present get by on their hatred of the past. This is difficult for Tim to accept, as he sees in the Mona Lisa something of beauty, not hatred and ugliness.

Only a thousand of us here. No way back. No way. No way.

-- Harry Bittering (Dark They Were, and Golden-Eyed paragraph 34)

Importance: Harry Bittering, one of a thousand Earth people who have sought shelter from war on Earth by colonizing Mars wants desperately to return home. He does not like Mars, and realizes the Martian landscape is changing everything and everyone in it. Harry's ironic comment pertains not merely to not being able to physically return to Earth, but to the transformation which will ensure that return is impossible.