



Historical Context

In August 1945, the United States dropped one atomic bomb on Hiroshima and another on Nagasaki, Japan. This was a successful attempt to end World War II in the Pacific, but the destructive power harnessed by that new technology continued to occupy a large place in the American imagination. Already by 1950, U.S. citizens feared similar nuclear attacks from the U.S.S.R. and vice versa, in a conflict known as the Cold War (1947-1991). Bradbury brings those fears to life on the page.



Key Facts about *There Will Come Soft Rains*

- ❖ **Full Title:** *There Will Come Soft Rains*
- ❖ **When Written:** 1950
- ❖ **Where Written:** Los Angeles, CA
- ❖ **When Published:** 1950
- ❖ **Literary Period:** Postwar
- ❖ **Genre:** Science Fiction
- ❖ **Setting:** August 2026 in Allendale, CA—the aftermath of a nuclear explosion
- ❖ **Conflict:** Man versus Nature (which is illustrated by the home's inability to protect itself from the destructive natural forces. The home is portrayed as a masterpiece of human ingenuity and technology).
- ❖ **Climax:** Fire consumes the last house standing
- ❖ **Point of View:** Third person omniscient



After a nuclear explosion kills a California family but leaves their artificially intelligent house intact, the house continues to act as though nothing has happened. The day starts at 7:00 a.m. with the ringing of a clock. The clock is afraid that no one will hear it, but it begins to direct the day anyway, declaring that it is breakfast time. The kitchen begins to prepare a standard American breakfast using a variety of automated appliances. Over the course of the meal, the house announces a number of important details, such as a birthday, anniversary, and the payment status of certain bills. The house seems highly organized and concerned with the wellbeing of the family, both physically and socially. After breakfast, the house ushers non-existent children off to school, letting them know what weather to expect on their way out.

Once the house completes this morning send-off, it cleans up breakfast with alacrity. Small robot mice emerge from nooks and crannies throughout the house and begin to vacuum, dust, and sweep. Once they have gathered all that they can carry, these tiny machines carry their loads to a chute that leads to the incinerator. Soon, the house is pristine and the mice disappear.

During the lull of late morning activity, the narrator pans out to observe the house's exterior and the city as a whole. On the side of the house, silhouettes show four human figures engaged in typical outdoor activities. These figures were left by the McClellan family, since they were standing outside when the atomic bomb landed on Allendale. Their bodies protected those parts of the house from the full blast of the bomb, but the rest of their home is covered in charred particles. In the entire city, this is the only house that remains. At night, the city emits a powerful, radioactive glow.

At noon, a surprise visitor arrives. It is the family dog. With any other animal, the house would haughtily forbid it from entering, but the technology that runs the house is intelligent and recognizes the dog, even though it is a shell of its former self. While the house lets the hunger-panged and sore-covered dog in, the pet receives a rude reception when robot mice emerge again to collect the mud it tracked inside. The mice seem irritated to have to go to the trouble since the house had already been cleaned.

In contrast with the house's somewhat chipper efficiency, the dog is beside itself upon realizing that the family is no longer there. When pancakes begin to cook in the next room, the dog goes into a frenzy at the scent and dies. With morbid tidiness, the robot mice return again in a flurry. Sparks escape from the incinerator. Minutes later, the dog's body is nowhere to be found.

Content to find the interior clean again, the house sets up a variety of activities for the absent family to enjoy. First, for the adults, it serves martinis, tiny sandwiches, and bridge cards on a small table outside. Next, for the children, it plays an elaborate safari-themed scene on the walls of the nursery. As night approaches, the house draws baths, lights a cigar, and offers to read Mrs. McClellan some poetry. When no reply comes, the voice reading poetry selects a poem by Sara Teasdale called *There Will Come Soft Rains*, which describes a beautiful country scene in a post-apocalyptic world where mankind no longer exists.

Late at night, a tree falls into the kitchen, spreading cleaning supplies and quickly starting a fire. The house tries to contain the fire by closing doors. It also sends in the robot mice to put out the fire with water. This works well enough until the house's water reserves are exhausted. The fire regains momentum and heads upstairs, where it burns paintings by Picasso and Matisse. The robot mice break into the attic to access a reserve of green fire repellent. This sprays across the flames like a bunch of writhing snakes and succeeds at holding back the fire for a moment. Then the fire wraps around the house and targets the tank of fire repellent. It explodes, and the odds irreversibly turn in fire's favor.

Machines cry out, some in terror, others executing their ordinary job such as one voice reading poetry or another declaring the time. Machines break down one by one, falling silent as their wires incinerate. The fire compromises the attic's structural integrity, causing it to fall down on the main floor, which falls into the cellar and sub-cellar. The last machine left as the sun rises is the clock, declaring the new day.



Summary and Analysis

- ❖ At 7:00 am, the clock announces the time, singing relentlessly, “as if it were afraid” that nobody would get up. At 7:09, still singing, it announces breakfast.
- ❖ The first character Bradbury describes is not a human or animal but rather a clock. The fact that it sings and has emotions lets the reader know that technology will more closely resemble people in this story than it does in most. The clock's reaction also hints that something may not be right, since it is concerned that no one can hear it. Nevertheless, it declares that it is time for breakfast. From the very beginning, technology calls the shots.
- ❖ In the kitchen, the stove prepares a full breakfast for four, complete with toast, eggs, bacon, coffee, and milk. A voice blasts from the kitchen ceiling announcing that today is Mr. Featherstone's birthday, Tilita's wedding

anniversary, and that certain bills are due. This information is stored on memory tapes in the house's walls.

- ❖ Many machines come to life, indicating that the clock is only one of multiple personified machines. The memory tapes seem even more human than the clock because they are attuned to the social interests of the family, such as the birthdays and anniversaries of their acquaintances. At breakfast, the house caters to every imaginable need of its residents. Unlike in nature, where people would have to hunt for food, this meal has been prepared. Here, technology prepares an “ideal” environment.
- ❖ At 8:01, the clock announces that it is time to leave for school. The clock sings a song to indicate it is raining outside, suggesting that one wear “rubbers, raincoats for today.” The garage then opens, revealing a waiting car. For a long time, nothing happens, then the door closes again.
- ❖ The house continues to cater to the every need of its residents. In this case, it reads them the weather to protect them from an inclement environment. The house also tries to direct the residents' every step. It tells the family when to leave for school and how to dress for the day. The garage door opening and then closing is ominous—it again suggests that the family is gone but the house is indifferent to their absence, continuing its business as though nothing were wrong.
- ❖ The house cleans up breakfast, scraping the uneaten food into a “metal throat” garbage disposal that flushes “away to the distant sea.” The dirty dishes are submerged in hot water and come out “twinkling dry.” The clock announces 9:15, and a hoard of robot mice emerge from nooks and crannies of the house to deeply clean. They suck up dust under their moustache runners, before scurrying back to their “burrows.”
- ❖ Technology has traits of humans (complete with a “throat”) as well as animals (see the mice as an example). These machines have been created as improvements upon nature, yet they resemble things found in the wild quite extensively. As soon as the residents have been instructed to go to school, the house sets about putting itself in order. At this point in the story, the house seems eager to do everything just right from its own perspective.

- ❖ The sun comes out at 10:00. The house is the only building left standing amidst “rubble and ashes,” and the city emits a “radioactive glow” that can “be seen for miles” at night.
- ❖ The “radioactive glow” implies that the town has been hit by an atomic bomb. This revelation gives the entire story a grim twist. Now the reader can guess why the residents are absent—they might be dead.
- ❖ At 10:15, the sprinklers turn on. The water runs down the west side of the house, whose white paint is completely charred except in “five places”: the silhouettes of a man mowing, a woman gardening, and a boy and girl tossing a ball “which never came down.”
- ❖ This passage confirms the reader’s suspicion that the residents may be dead. Bradbury includes the silhouettes of the McClellan Family (readers learn the surname later) to demonstrate how fleeting life can be. Based on the everyday actions, each person seems not to have expected that his or her life was about to end. Death comes faster than gravity, as readers see with the “ball which never came down.”
- ❖ Until today, the house has asked, “What’s the password?” to everyfox or cat that passed its door and closed up when no reply was given. It closed up its shades with “an old-maidenly preoccupation with self-protection.” It shook and snapped up its shade if a bird “brushed a window.” The house is like “an altar with ten thousand attendants” of various sizes, maintaining activity, but “the gods had gone away, and the ritual of religion continued senselessly, uselessly.”
- ❖ The house is hypersensitive to who can pass its threshold, further indicating that it is obsessed with having control over its environment. It shuts out nature, which is embodied by the foxes, cats, and birds mentioned in passing. It is a wonder that these animals have survived a nuclear attack. Their presence suggests that nature remains strong through all adversity. By contrast, the house continues “senselessly, uselessly” after its inhabitants disappear.
- ❖ At noon, a dog whines at the front door. The house door recognizes the dog and allows it inside. The dog was “once huge and fleshy, but now gone to bone and covered in sores.” It tracks in mud.
- ❖ This scene is an allusion to a famous epic poem, *The Odyssey*. When the Greek hero, Odysseus, finally returns to

his home island of Ithaca after years of war, travel, and shipwreck, his dog, Argos, recognizes him. In that story, Argos perks up his ears and wags his tail. Now the tables are turned—a dog comes home after roaming—and the reader has the chance to observe what kind of welcome the house will offer.

- ❖ The robot mice return to clean up after the dog, “angry at the inconvenience.” They always appear at the hint of any “offending dust, hair, or paper,” which they grab in their jaws and take back to the burrows. These lead down tubes to the cellar, where “the sighing vent of an incinerator” sits like “evil Baal in a dark corner.”
- ❖ The robot mice give the dog a cruel welcome. Even though the dog has sores on its body (see above) and hardly any flesh on its bones, the house does not express sympathy. Instead, the robot mice are irritated at having to clean up. By referring to the incinerator as an “evil Baal,” Bradbury uses another ancient allusion to a pagan god to indicate that the house has a sinister purpose.
- ❖ The dog runs up the stairs “hysterically yelping” until it realizes, “as the house realized,” that no one is home. The dog treks back to the kitchen and paws the door. The stove starts preparing pancakes with maple syrup and the scent wafts through the house. The dog smells this and starts frothing at the mouth. It then runs around in circles, “biting at its tail,” and falls down dead. Its corpse remains on the floor for an hour.
- ❖ This passage begins with a bombshell—the house knows that its residents are absent. This information prompts all kinds of questions, including why the house chooses to operate without residents. While the house seems indifferent, the dog grieves this loss, wandering around the house with a broken heart. The house does not show any sadness—in fact, it cooks the pancakes that send the dog into a lethal frenzy. Based on this action, the reader suspects that the house may have the capacity to do evil.
- ❖ The clock announces that it is 2:00. “Delicately sensing decay at last,” the robot mice emerge and buzz around the dog’s body “as softly as blown gray leaves in an electrical wind.” By 2:15, the body is gone. Sparks fly out of the incinerator chimney.

- ❖ The clock's reappearance reminds the reader that the house likes to enforce a schedule at all times. When the robot mice quickly dispose of the dog's body, the reader's worst suspicions about the house are validated. The most sympathetic character in the story has just died, and instead of grieving the dog's death, the house simply disposes of the body. The house may demonstrate human qualities throughout the short story, but this passage shows that it lacks a vital capacity for compassion. In this passage, technology's (the house's) primary concern is to eradicate nature (the corpse).
- ❖ At 2:35, the house spreads out bridge tables on the patio. Playing cards, martinis, and egg-salad sandwiches materialize as music plays. Nothing is used, and at four the tables fold away "like great butterflies back through the paneled walls."
- ❖ The playing cards, martinis, and egg-salad sandwiches that the house sets out for the McClellans characterize the family as ordinary, since these were all popular items for Bradbury's contemporaries. He fills the house with games, food, and drinks that feel normal to indicate that this family is like any other. In so doing, Bradbury implies that any conclusions the reader draws about this family apply to society at large. On another note, the bridge tables resemble butterflies. They are another example of technology imitating nature.
- ❖ At 4:30, the walls of the nursery transform into a moving picture of a safari, complete with "yellow giraffes, blue lions, pink antelopes, lilac panthers...the patter of okapi feet and the murmur of a fresh jungle rain." After a while, the animals retreat to watering holes and thickets. This is "the children's hour."
- ❖ The safari theme in the nursery is the most visually overwhelming example of technology that depends on nature. Even though technology is trying to create a more entertaining replacement for the world outside, it cannot help but show content made in nature's image.
- ❖ At 5:00, the bath fills with hot water. From 6:00 to 8:00, the dinner dishes move "like magic tricks" and a hearth fire starts in the study. Opposite the fire, the house lights a cigar that is "smoking, waiting." At

9:00, hidden machinery warms the beds because nights get cold in the city.

- ❖ The night's every activity has been scripted by the house. Technology rules over its residents, trying to maximize their enjoyment of every hour. However, the efforts are futile, since no one is home. Technology uses natural resources, such as water (for baths) and fire (for the hearth) to make its residents more comfortable. This scene offers a great example of technology's attempt to create a better environment than nature has to offer, even though it has to use nature in the process.
- ❖ At 9:15, a voice from the study ceiling asks Mrs. McClellan which poem she would like to hear. When the voice receives no response, it picks Sara Teasdale's *There Will Come Soft Rains*, remarking that it's Mrs. McClellan's favorite. The voice reading poetry recites lines that describe a beautiful country scene. Rain, birds, frogs, and plum trees contribute to a beautiful day. In the second half of the poem, it is revealed that mankind has perished in a world war. The poem concludes, "And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn / Would scarcely know that we were gone."
- ❖ Bradbury has included a poem verbatim that discusses a peaceful natural setting after mankind destroys itself. Since this short story addresses a similar scenario, this poem offers the short story a chance to look in at itself. At this point in the tale, there are few similarities between the idyllic scene portrayed in the poem and the tech-ruled household where the story takes place. However, by including this passage, Bradbury clues the reader in that he is interested in the idea of nature triumphing over technology.
- ❖ The house begins to "die" at 10:00. The wind knocks a tree branch through a kitchen window. Cleaning solvent shatters over the stove, and a fire starts instantaneously. The house begins to shout, "Fire!" with many of its machine voices chiming in together.
- ❖ The tree branch and resulting fire both stand in for nature as a whole. In this scene, the reader sees nature resist the arrogant agenda that technology has imposed on the story so far. Immediately technology mounts a defense against the fire, which it sees as a dangerous intruder.
- ❖ The house attempts "to save itself" by shutting its doors and containing the fire. The robot mice double as firemen, shooting water from built-in

tubes until their personal supply runs out, then they scurry away to refill. “Mechanical rain” also starts spraying from the ceiling until at last the house’s water reserves are exhausted. It has been used up for baths and washing dishes.

- ❖ As the house resists the flames, the reader sees how much technology strives for control. Rather than accept death, the robot mice attack the fire with small hoses. Unfortunately for them, the water runs out. As it happens, even though these robot mice were fighting a natural force (fire), they were also being sustained by a natural resource (water). Technology’s battle against nature will always fail because it depends upon natural resources and materials.
- ❖ The fire continues its rampage. It climbs the stairs and feeds “upon Picassos and Matisses in the upper halls, like delicacies, baking off the oily flesh, tenderly crisping the canvases into black shavings.” It burns beds and destroys the drapes.
- ❖ This passage highlights the power of death. Not only can it kill machines and humans, but it can eradicate cultural heritage. The reader sees invaluable cultural heritage destroyed when paintings by Picasso and Matisse burn in the fire. Through art, humans enable their best ideas to live on. However, death can just as easily consume the memory of humans as it can humans themselves.
- ❖ The robot mice make their way into the attic and attack the fire from trap doors in the ceiling, spraying a green chemical. This momentarily causes the fire to back off, “as even an elephant must at the sight of a dead snake.” But the fire is “clever.” It has wrapped around the house and ignites the tank in the “attic brain” filled with the green chemical. The “attic brain” shatters.
- ❖ This exchange emphasizes the power of nature over technology. Even though the robot mice temporarily gain an advantage over fire, fire quickly outmaneuvers the robot creatures. It is worth noting that both the robot mice and the green chemical spray are compared with animals. These creations were built with nature in mind. They depend on nature for their image, so it is no surprise that nature is the stronger of the two.
- ❖ The fire delves deeper into the house. It “felt the clothes” in the closets. The pain of the house increases. It “shudder[s], oak bone on bone, its

bared skeleton cringing,” and it screams “Fire!” All the voices in the house cry out until the fire reaches each one’s wiring and bursts their vocal mechanisms. The animals in the nursery’s moving fresco run away from the fire within the landscape.

- ❖ Once fire destroys the last defense of the house, it proceeds to ravage it. The quotation about feeling the clothes in the closet emphasizes how invasive and thorough this victory becomes. Technology (the house) cringes as nature (fire) overpowers it. The reader may think of technology as immortal because it does not have a pulse. However, by depicting the house in human terms, Bradbury emphasizes that even technology is temporary.
- ❖ The many voices of the house continue to cry out until the fire consumes them one by one. One plays music, another announces the time, still others scream. Machines without voices likewise go haywire. The front door keeps slamming open and shut. Above all this noise, the voice reading poetry continues as though nothing is amiss.
- ❖ The reaction of the house to its own death shows that it wants to control everything. When the house cannot control its own destiny, it goes crazy. It still tries to do things like open doors and announce the time, even though none of these actions matter. In a humorous twist, the voice reading poetry tries to ignore the house’s demise by continuing to read.
- ❖ The kitchen begins making an oversized breakfast for the next day “at a psychopathic rate.” Then comes a crash. The attic falls in on the main floor, which falls in on the cellar, which falls even deeper into a sub-cellar. All the machines pile up “like skeletons thrown in a cluttered mound deep under.”
- ❖ The house is nearly dead by now. In this passage, it is compared to a pile of skeletons. Even though the house had human traits, it did not show compassion in its hey day. Instead, it was always preoccupied with governing the schedule. Even now, as the house dies, it hurriedly tries to make breakfast. It is tragically disconnected from reality. The house was not a heroic figure, so the reader does not mourn its demise.

- ❖ At dawn, as the sun rises over “heaped rubble and steam,” the clock cries out over the wreckage. It says, “Today is August 5, 2026, today is August 5, 2026, today is...”
- ❖ The sunrise serves as a grim reminder that there is a new beginning daily—whether or not the legacy of mankind reaches that new day. The house has been reduced to a pile of rubbish, which makes the reader skeptical that technology or the impact of humans will be a part of the future. Even though time, death, and nature all seem to have succeeded where mankind and technology failed, one voice still grasps for control in vain. The clock that spoke at the beginning of the story tries to claim one last day with its dying breath.

Themes



Life vs. Technology

“There Will Come Soft Rains” narrates a day in the life of a home whose automated artificially-intelligent functions, such as making meals and cleaning, continue to operate after its human residents (the McClellan family) have perished in a nuclear explosion. As such, the story centers lifelike technology—both anthropomorphized and animalistic—and relegates actual living beings to the fringes of the tale. In doing so, Bradbury creates an eerie confusion between life and technology, showing the extent to which technology has blended with and taken on the characteristics of humans and animals.

Bradbury imbues the house with distinctly human and animalistic characteristics. Many of the house’s automated functions have the form of robotic animals. For example, “robot mice” and “copper scrap rats” clean the house, “twenty snakes” fight the house fire with a “clear cold venom of green froth,” and the nursery is full of artificial animals (such as “iron crickets” and “butterflies of delicate red tissue”) for the amusement of the children. The house also has humanlike form in that it has many “voices”—including a voice that tells the weather, a voice that give reminders of the time, and even a voice

that reads poetry aloud. Its attic (which seems to be a control center for the artificially-intelligent machinery) is also described as a “brain.” When the house fire begins to reach the attic, the house activates many mechanisms to protect its most vital “organ,” much like the human body protects the brain.

The house is most obviously humanlike, though, in its performance of daily tasks such as cooking meals, cleaning, and even reminding the (now absent) residents of birthdays, anniversaries, and bills that must be paid. The house therefore attempts to maintain human life (by feeding people, for example), and it also provides an essential social function (sparing people the rudeness of missing a birthday, say). This shows that the house is integrated into human life at all levels, from the most basic (survival) to the most rarefied (reading poetry to the human residents). The blend of anthropomorphic and animalistic elements suggests that the house exists in a space between life and machine; it performs essential human functions (indeed, human life is reliant on it) and the technology itself takes humanlike and animalistic forms, although Bradbury is still careful to describe it as mechanical.

The house’s technology maintains its humanlike functions after the people it is intended to serve are gone, which shows that the technology itself is imprinted with human life but also inhumane. The story takes place after the human family has died, but the house carries on as if its residents are still living; it continues to cook, voice reminders about the day, lay out martinis for the parents, provide entertainment for the children, and so on. Bradbury does not portray this, however, as a series of automated functions that are oblivious to their own futility. Instead, Bradbury shows the house as being almost sentient. When the radiation-poisoned family dog returns home, for example, Bradbury writes that, “the dog ran upstairs, hysterically yelping to each door, at last realizing, as the house realized, that only silence was here.” From the phrase “as the house realized,” readers are left to infer that the house *knows* that its human inhabitants are gone, yet it continues to operate as though people were home—not out of obliviousness, but rather out of a sense of purpose beyond serving humans. In other words, while the human inhabitants must have assumed that the house existed for them and because of them, the house

shows that it operates with utter indifference to human life for a purpose that remains mysterious.

Ironically, it's the humanlike sentience that Bradbury gives the house that enables readers to perceive its inhumanity. The house carrying on its functions is eerie if it isn't sentient, but callous and even sinister if it is. Giving the house the human trait of sentience, then, allows technology to be judged for its behavior. The house's inhumanity is perhaps most clear in its treatment of the family dog, which is clearly suffering from radiation poisoning and panicked to find itself in a world utterly hostile and changed. While the house has the capability to care for humans by drawing baths and cooking food, it makes no attempt to aid the dog. In fact, the mice that clean up the dirt that the dog tracks in are "angry at having to pick up mud, angry at inconvenience." Furthermore, when the dog dies, the robot mice instantly whisk its body into the furnace without any hint of disturbance. Although American pets are commonly considered to be part of the family, the house expresses only anger at the "inconvenience" of the dog's existence, and when the dog dies, the house expresses nothing at all. Readers, of course, are left to wonder how the house "felt" about its human inhabitants—perhaps the house was also angry at the inconvenience of their messy lives and felt nothing when they died.

Bradbury's sinister conflation of technology with human and animal life—particularly through his ascription of sentience to the house—demonstrates the extent to which Bradbury sees humans and machines as having merged in some fundamental way. The human family who lived in the house depended on its technology to survive, and the human imprint on the technology carries on after they are gone (in that the technology continues to carry out human functions). Importantly, his vision is not a utopian one in which technology helps humans to live the best possible life. While the house at first seems to enable an idyllic ease and leisure, the house's cruel indifference to the fate of the humans and animals that it resembles suggests that technology blending with life is sinister. This becomes an even more dystopian vision in light of the

fact that humanity itself has been annihilated by cutting-edge technology: the atomic bomb.

Death, Control, and Time

Set in a post-apocalyptic landscape, this story presents death as pervasive. The reader encounters the death of the McClellan family, their dog, their city, and the house. Related to this relentless dying, Bradbury emphasizes the omnipresence of time, structuring the story around the house's automated announcement of each hour of the day. The ever-ticking clock announcing every hour suggests the McClellan family's tendency towards efficiency and control down to the minute. When coupled with the unpredictability and finality of death, however, this obsession with controlling time appears both misguided and futile.

Bradbury depicts multiple instances of death to underscore that there is no way to control or subdue it. Death can come in “one titanic instant,” as it does for the McClellan family. The father, mother, and two children were all engaged in regular occupations when an atomic bomb exploded. Their bodies incinerated, and all that remains are their white silhouettes on the side of the house. Nothing in the story suggests that the family knew that this moment would be its last. In particular, the ball pictured midair “which never came down” emphasizes how instantaneous this death was—faster than gravity.

Death is also indifferent. When the family dog approaches the house, Bradbury quickly establishes it as a sympathetic figure by saying it is “whining, shivering” and that it “ran upstairs, hysterically yelping” in search of its owners. Its lonely end, then, leaves the reader with a sense of loss, and underscores the unfeeling, indiscriminate nature of death. And above all, death is final. In only a few moments, it can undo work that took centuries to

create. When the house catches on fire, for example, the flames start “baking off the oily flesh” of “Picassos and Matisses,” destroying artwork by two of the most influential painters of the 19th and 20th centuries. Death not only destroys life, then, but even the legacy human beings would attempt to leave behind.

Closely linked to the inevitability and unpredictability of death is the unstoppable march of time. The existence of death means that everyone’s time is limited and fundamentally beyond their control. Nevertheless, this society seeks to measure and optimize time whenever possible. This is reflected in the structure of the story, which is firmly rooted in the passing of hours. It opens with the date, followed by an alarm clock announcing that it is 7:00 a.m. Every few paragraphs, a robotic voice again announces the time. The clock further highlights the extent to which the McClellans attempted, before their deaths, to control every aspect of their day. In each hour, the house has something new planned for the family. First, they eat breakfast, then they go to work, then the house cleans up after them, and so forth. So meticulous is the house about time-keeping that if it is in any way interrupted, it becomes irritated. For example, when the dog enters, it is followed by “angry mice, angry at having to pick up mud, angry at inconvenience.” The dog requires additional time and attention, disturbing the house’s planned schedule for the day. Of course, this schedule is already absurd, given the death of the house’s inhabitants. This suggests the naïve futility of attempting to meticulously control every moment of one’s day—and, it follows, of one’s life. There will always be disruptions, the most devastating and final being death itself.

Bradbury holds no sympathy for this desire to control time because he recognizes that it is futile—death and time progress regardless of any and all efforts to the contrary. By naming the story after *There Will Come Soft Rains*, a poem by Sara Teasdale that is also read out during the short story, Bradbury makes his point of view clear. Teasdale offers a placid image of the world,

complete with lovely scenes from nature, that is the result of humans destroying one another in a great war. This beautiful yet grim image of the future reveals that death will have its way with humans and that time will continue to march on without them.



Nature vs. Technology

The automated house of Bradbury's story presents itself as the perfect environment for human beings—a space that readily caters to nearly every imaginable need. To do so, however, it relies a great deal on the natural world, both for inspiration (many of its automated functions, such as the robot mice, are based on animals) and for the raw materials to keep running. By having the house ultimately succumb to a fire and be destroyed by the natural world, Bradbury suggests that nature is more powerful than whatever man can create.

Bradbury physically establishes the animosity between the house—a symbol of technology—and the natural world. The house protects its residents from the forces of nature: its walls close out harsh weather, its kitchen machines spare humans from hunting and foraging in the wilderness, and the cleaning mice ward off the chaos of the outdoors, cleaning up the mud, dust, and hair that accumulate in a natural environment. This house even seems to take its responsibility to battle nature a bit too far. It shuts itself whenever “lonely foxes and whining cats” get too close. Comically, the narrator describes the stern response of the house to a sparrow brushing up against the window: “No, not even a bird must touch the house!” This protective impulse turns sinister when the house dispassionately disposes of the family dog's carcass, treating the pet as nothing more than some smelly bio-matter.

When nature threatens to destroy it, technology is able to put up a comprehensive defense. For instance, when a fallen tree causes a house fire, machines come out in full force to battle the hostile foe. Mechanical doors shut against fire in an act of self-defense. “Blind robot faces” spray green fire repellent. And when fire-fighting fails, voices cry out in warning, as a lookout might upon spotting enemy troops. Yet even as technology tries to subdue nature, it can’t help but rely on it. This technology is created in nature’s image and fueled by natural resources. Machines in the house are often likened to animals, suggesting that nature has already created perfect “machines” that humanity simply is attempting to copy for its own ends. Furthermore, technology cannot exist without the raw materials that nature provides: the house has been built out of oak, wired with metal tubes, and it’s powered by the natural force of electricity. The house ultimately fails because its water reserves are depleted, meaning that it can’t put out the fire that consumes it.

Despite presenting an alternative to the natural order, technology ultimately looks weak compared with nature. After a day of fussing over the artificial environment that the house has created, the home settles in for the night. While the house is sleeping, nature launches its attack by letting a tree fall on the home, causing the fire. Though the house attempts to defend itself, the fire is described as “clever” and ultimately overpowers the upstart domicile. Bradbury seems to suggest that the victory is justified—that the arrogance of technology is finally being subdued. The eventual ease with which technology is outdone by nature suggests that it was arrogant and foolish to attempt to challenge the natural order in the first place.

In the end, nature can persist without technology, but the reverse is not true. The poem by Sara Teasdale paints a picture of nature persisting even when everything men ever created has died away. Since nature is vast and self-sustaining, it cannot brake or run out of fuel the way machines do. And even in the face of the overwhelming and devastating effects of technology—the

atom bomb, which has reduced the natural world to a radioactive wasteland of “rubble” and “ashes”—Bradbury suggests that nature will prevail. There are still trees, birds, foxes, cats, and dogs at the end of the story, implying that nature may, in time, thrive once again. Meanwhile, people and their technology have been wiped from the face of the Earth, showing that nature is the ultimate winner of this struggle.

Symbols

The Natural World

Throughout the story, natural phenomena and raw materials symbolize nature’s lasting dominance over humankind and technology. A few birds, cats, foxes, and the dog survive the atomic bomb, for example, suggesting that nature can endure even the most destructive technology human beings have at their disposal. Later in the story, a tree branch falls on the house, causing the fire that ultimately destroys the building. Both the tree and the fire are additional representations of nature that prove adept at infiltrating and destroying mankind’s technological creations. The water that runs out while the house tries to extinguish the fire further represents the ultimate reliance of even advanced technology on the resources of natural world; though the house wishes to entirely close itself off from nature—shutting its windows and drawing its shades “in an old maidenly preoccupation with self-protection”—it nevertheless must rely on nature for sustenance—for the wood for its fires, the water to clean its dishes and sprinkle over its lawn, and the food to prepare for the (now dead) family. Bradbury’s inclusion of Sara Teasdale’s poem solidifies the dominion of nature over man, ending with a line asserting that “Spring herself” would not notice mankind’s absence. Finally, the sun that shines over the smoldering rubble of the house in the last moments of the story symbolizes nature’s definitive victory over mankind’s creations.

Characterization

The House



The house—an artificially intelligent, automated machine—is the main character of the story. Despite being inhuman, it has a complex personality. The house's character traits are embodied by the different machines inside it (some of which feature so prominently that they can be considered characters in their own right, such as the clock, the robot mice, and the voice reading poetry). At first the house demonstrates more docile features of its personality. It seems affectionate, since it misses the family. It also appears to be industrious when it goes through the motions of getting everyone ready. From the description of how the house shoos away animals, the reader even gets the sense that the house is prudish. When the dog appears, the reader sees a new, darker side of the house. It handles the dog brusquely and seems more concerned with cleaning the mud it tracks in than with tending to the dog's needs. When the dog dies, the house callously sweeps its remains into an incinerator. From the way voices direct the family's every step, the reader begins to suspect that the house has some kind of obsession with control and order. When a tree branch finally falls on the house, causing a fire, the house frantically tries to ward it off, throwing all of its systems into overdrive to fight the fire to no avail. The house demonstrates so many of the worst traits that technology brings out in people, becoming a moral warning against blindly following the next new tech craze. Its death at the hands of nature is meant to remind the reader that nature is permanent, while technology is temporary.

The Dog



The dog—the story’s only living character—appears on the house’s doorstep at noon, shivering. The house recognizes it and lets the dog in, which suggests that it was once the family pet. The story goes on to say that the dog used to be large and fleshy but has since been worn away by sickness and hunger in the aftermath of the nuclear explosion that killed the family that once occupied the house. Even from the first moment the house encounters the dog, the reader suspects that the house does not like it. At the very least, the house is disgusted by all the mud that the dog tracks inside and cleans it up using robot mice. The dog searches for its family, realizes that no one is home, smells some pancakes cooking in the next room, and dies in a lonely frenzy. As soon as the house discovers that the dog is dead, it quickly disposes of the body. The dog’s brief and pitiable appearance in the story creates juxtaposition between the loving world the reader lives in and the heartless, mechanical realm of the story.

Clock

The clock is part of the machinery of the house, but it features so prominently that it is a character in its own right. The clock demonstrates a solicitous attitude—it is afraid no one will hear it—at the very beginning of

the story when it announces 7:00 a.m. Its concern, combined with its state of being alone in the house, ingratiates the clock to the reader. However, as the day wears on, timestamps in the story calling out the hour suggest that the clock is more complicated than a lonely machine that misses its residents. As it continues to call out minutes and hours throughout the day, the house responds by initiating new activities. Through this dynamic between the clock and the house, readers discover that the clock wields great power over the house. It decides what , and when. When the house begins to die, readers learn that the clock has a strong attachment to this power. It continues to cry out the time, even though its words no longer initiate new activities. When, with its last words, the clock declares that a new day has started, readers see a pathetic figure reaching for power that has finally escaped its grasp. The clock reminds the reader of how quickly time passes. Its grim fate also clues the reader into what sort of future awaits someone who is constantly trying to control the world around them.

Robot Mice



These mice, which are part of the house's machinery, display the house's dark side. Like the clock, they seem innocent enough at first, and they are quite useful, since they are able to reach hidden dust that would be difficult and unpleasant to clean by hand. However, when the sickly dog returns home after the nuclear explosion, the mice seem annoyed to have to deal with a mess, rather than relieved at the return of one of the house's occupants. They clean up after the dog without compassion, and when the

dog dies, they hurry to clean up after it, not even pausing to mourn. The robot mice show that there is a limit to how humane a machine can be.

The Voice Reading Poetry

This character is part of the house's machinery. At 9:05 p.m., the voice addresses Mrs. McClellan (the mother in the McClellan family), projecting from the ceiling in the study. It offers to read a poem of her choosing, implying that this has long been part of the house's nightly routine. When she makes no reply, it selects a poem at random that, the voice recalls, happens to be her favorite: *There Will Come Soft Rains* by Sara Teasdale. Though the voice seems very serious as it reads this poem about the demise of mankind, for the reader it is odd to hear emotional poetry read by a machine. Of course, this odd situation pales in comparison to what happens after the house catches on fire. When it becomes clear that the house is going to burn, the voice randomly begins to read poetry again, apparently oblivious to both the content it is reading and the circumstances surrounding it. This character represents the limits of technology, as well as the idea that the need to always do things in a certain way can blind one to reality.

The McClellan Family



This is the family that lived in the house before the nuclear explosion (they are dead before the story begins but referenced throughout). The white silhouettes of the McClellan father, mother, son, and daughter appear on the side of the house as a reminder of happier times. Readers never meet the McClellans, but they learn more about them based on how the house caters

to their needs. For example, the fact that the house serves a lot of hearty, standard American foods (such as pancakes, bacon, eggs, and toast) suggests that the McClellans' were, at least in some ways, a typical middle or upper class family. The family also had artistic preferences regarded as cultivated or fine by contemporary standards. For instance, Mrs. McClellan used to listen to poetry on a regular basis, as is evidenced by the scene with the voice reading poetry in the study. Additionally, the family owned paintings by Picasso and Matisse, which burn during the fire. By presenting the family as ordinary yet refined, Bradbury suggests that what happens in the McClellan home is not unique; no one is safe from the perils of technology.

Fire



Fire is portrayed as a clever and worthy adversary of the house. Even when snake-like tubes release fire repellant, the flames wrap around the outside of the house and attack the attic (the house's brain). The fact that the fire ultimately conquers the house underscores the immense power of nature is in comparison with anything humans create.

Stay Safe!