The Veldt

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF RAY BRADBURY

Ray Bradbury grew up in Waukegan, Illinois, a town that eventually featured in his fiction as "Green Town." He attended high school in Los Angeles, and never went to college. Because of his educational background, Bradbury was a huge proponent of libraries, to which he attributes his education as a writer and thinker, and where he wrote the story that eventually became the classic book *Fahrenheit 451*. Bradbury got his first break in 1947 when Truman Capote, then a young editor, noticed his story "Homecoming," which was eventually published in *Mademoiselle*, and garnered an O. Henry Award. A prolific writer, Bradbury wrote 27 novels and around 600 short stories. He died in Los Angeles at the age of 91; by his death he was already regarded as the most important science fiction writer of his era.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

When Bradbury was born in 1920, many of the things he came to write about didn't exist. As he grew up, radio and television introduced the world to a new form of mass entertainment. These new media were instantaneous, widely accessible, and made life seem vivid and interesting. Combined with the post-WWII economic boom, these new technologies aided in the creation of a consumer culture that emphasized instant gratification, constant and stimulating entertainment, and intense comfort created by the automation of daily human tasks. Simultaneously, the 1950s were a period in which young people began to rebel against established authorities. Bradbury viewed many of these cultural developments with distaste, and wrote fiction to warn against what may come of this new technology. As he stated in an interview, "My business is to prevent the future."

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Bradbury cites the Biblical story of Daniel in the lions' den, which he learned about when he was a child, as an early influence on "The Veldt." He also cites Aldous Huxley's futuristic *Brave New World* as having a powerful impact on his writing. William March's 1954 novel, *The Bad Seed*, captures many of the same themes as "The Veldt"; the novel attempts to understand human nature through the mind of a murderous child.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Veldt
- **When Written:** 1950
- **Where Written:** Los Angeles
- **When Published:** 1950, published originally under the title "The World the Children Made"
- **Literary Period:** Science fiction/Fantasy
- **Genre:** Short story/Science fiction/Fantasy
- **Setting:** The Happylife Home, a futuristic suburban house
- **Climax:** Wendy and Peter murder their parents
- **Antagonist:** The "nursery"; Wendy and Peter
- **Point of View:** Omniscient narrator

EXTRA CREDIT

Old-fashioned. Bradbury never owned a computer in his life, preferring instead to write and correspond via typewriter. When asked what invention he would eliminate from the last 100 years, he responded that he would get rid of the automobile.

Bradbury Theater. Bradbury's talents and interests extended beyond the literary field. He adapted many of his stories for "The Ray Bradbury Theater," a television series that aired from 1985-92. He was nominated for an Academy Award for his animated film, *Icarus Montgolfier Wright*, and won an Emmy Award for his teleplay of *The Halloween Tree*.

PLOT SUMMARY

George and Lydia Hadley think something is wrong with the "**nursery**" in their expensive **Happylife Home**. The Happylife Home is a futuristic house that automates almost every human routine: it cooks and cleans, turns lights on and off, transports the Hadleys to their bedrooms via an "air closet," and even rocks them to sleep. As the kitchen automatically makes dinner for them, Lydia asks George decide to take a look at the nursery, or call a psychologist to examine it.

The Hadley parents walk to the nursery, which turns out to be a virtual reality environment—a room that can immerse users (in this case, the Hadley's children) in a virtual world of their own imagining. It does this by receiving "telepathic emanations" from the children's minds. In the nursery, a perfect, three-dimensional rendering of an African **veldt** surrounds George and Lydia. They observe vultures above and lions in the distance, feeding on something. Lydia hears a scream, but George, in awe of the "mechanical genius who had conceived this room," doesn't notice.

The lions approach George and Lydia, "feverishly and startlingly

real." As the lions break into a run toward the couple, Lydia screams and they both run out of the nursery. While Lydia cries in terror, George laughs and consoles her, saying that none of it is real. But Lydia replies that it feels *too* real. She demands that George lock the nursery and tell the children, Wendy and Peter, to stop reading about Africa. George agrees and locks the door; he suggests that Lydia has been working too hard and needs to rest. Lydia replies that, on the contrary, she hasn't been working at all. She proposes that they shut off the Happylife Home and take a vacation. She expresses the desire to perform normal human tasks again, to once more feel "necessary."

Later, George enters the nursery again and reminisces about the times when his children would imagine wonderful fantasy scenes. Now, the veldt that they have created doesn't feel as good. He reflects that there is too much death in the veldt, and it can't be good for the children to get in the habit of imagining death (while at the same time musing that children naturally think about death without really understanding it). He tells the nursery to make the veldt go away, but it doesn't respond.

The parents confront their children about the African veldt, but Wendy and Peter play dumb, insisting they don't know about any veldt. Wendy manages to run to the nursery and change the scene before George and Lydia can see it again. They send the kids off to bed. Then George finds one of his old wallets in the nursery, chewed up and bloody. He locks the nursery door.

In the middle of the night, George and Lydia talk and agree that their children are openly disobeying them; they have been spoiled, and must now be disciplined. They decide to invite their friend, psychologist David McClean, to take a look at the nursery. Then they hear eerily-familiar screams coming from the nursery, and realize the children have broken in through the locked door.

The next day, Peter asks George not to lock up the nursery. George tells him that he and Lydia are considering turning the whole house off and for a month. Peter thinks this is an awful idea, saying that he hates the prospect of tying his own shoes and grooming himself. He issues a vague threat to George before going back to the nursery.

David McClean arrives to look at the nursery, and says that it doesn't "feel good." He recommends that they destroy the room and bring the children to him for treatment. He explains that the nursery "'has become a channel toward destructive thoughts,'" and that it has become more important to Wendy and Peter than their actual parents. Together, David and George turn off the nursery.

Wendy and Peter become extremely upset. As George turns off the rest of the Happylife Home, turning it into "a mechanical cemetery," the children cry and beg for one more moment in the nursery. George acquiesces, and the children go in, momentarily appeased. George and Lydia are upstairs changing when they hear their children calling for them. They run into the nursery and the children, having set a trap, lock them inside. The parents scream as the lions in the nursery kill and eat them. David McClean arrives to help the family settle into their "vacation" from the Happylife Home, but instead sees Wendy and Peter in the veldt, having tea.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

George Hadley – George is the patriarch of the Hadley family. He is more authoritative than his wife, Lydia, and attempts to take control of his children's addiction to the **nursery**. While he initially admires the **Happylife Home** and the "genius" of the nursery, he comes to see their technology as a genuine threat to the happiness and cohesiveness of his family.

Lydia Hadley – Lydia is George's wife. She is the first to perceive the negative effects of the **Happylife Home**, and wishes she once again had a "purpose", which she feels the fully-automated house has stolen from her. She is also genuinely frightened by the realistic power of the **nursery**. While she is the one who encourages George to take definitive action and shut off the Happylife Home, she also has a soft spot for her children that results in her and her husband's ultimate demise.

Wendy Hadley – Wendy is the Hadleys' daughter, and Peter's sister. The two siblings are extremely similar, and are almost like robots: they appear a little too perfect, sometimes speak in unison, and don't display much emotion. They are spoiled children who care more about the **Happylife Home** and the **nursery** than their own parents. They will stop at nothing to retain the comforts of automated life and to remain in their own imaginary world.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Peter Hadley – Peter is the Hadleys' son, and Wendy's brother. He is 10 years old, and described as smart for his age. It is implied that, between him and Wendy, he is the schemer.

David McClean – David is a psychologist and a friend to the Hadleys. He understands the dangers of the **nursery** and helps George and Lydia diagnose the problem.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

CONSUMER CULTURE AND TECHNOLOGY

"The Veldt" portrays a futuristic society in which things, especially consumer goods, have gained a life of their own. In the name of convenience and contentment, technology fulfills people's every need, reducing humans to passive beings who only eat, breathe, and sleep. Bradbury, who wrote this story in 1950, was responding to the post-World War II consumer culture that was rapidly developing as the U.S. economy boomed. It's remarkable how closely his extrapolation of American culture at that time resembles our world today. In 2015, motion-sensing lights and doors exist in every developing city. More sophisticated technologies have replaced human labor in the job market. In other words, "The Veldt" satirizes a consumerist culture that has since grown to fulfill much of its author's prophecy.

In the story, the Hadleys are coddled by the technology in their **HappyLife Home**, so much so that they begin to feel dependent on it. One might argue that this dependence becomes a kind of addiction. Through the Happylife Home, the Hadleys have all of their needs and desires at their fingertips. But they (and especially their children) can no longer imagine life without a mechanical mediator enhancing every experience. Lydia, the mother, is the first to view the Happylife Home as a threat. She begins to feel "unnecessary," and wants to experience the sensation of performing normal human tasks once again, so she suggests that they take a "vacation" and shut off the Home for some time. The mechanization of life makes the Hadley parents not only feel useless, but also inhuman. Without their daily routines to perform, they find that the Happylife Home has taken away the purpose and, therefore, the joy of their lives. George refers to the family as having "mechanical, electronic navels," and implies that they are not truly living when under the influence of the Happylife Home.

The assumption that convenience leads to happiness is one of the story's major critiques of the consumerist, technological society that it depicts. The Happylife Home, which does everything for the Hadleys, including cutting their food, is designed with the belief that making life easier—so easy that its residents don't have to lift a finger—will make those residents happier individuals. This assumption posits technology as the answer to many of our "first-world" concerns. But in "The Veldt," we see the Happylife Home have the opposite effect on the Hadley family. Instead of feeling happier and more fulfilled, the parents experience their lives drained of meaning as they essentially cease to be necessary as parents. The children, for their part, don't even understand that their lives have lost so much meaning. They are so dependent on the Happylife Home that their own parents—that relationships to other people in general—are rendered valueless to them.

"TOO REAL" REALITY

In Bradbury's story, virtual reality has powerfully altered the Hadley family's perception of reality. In the Happylife Home, this technology takes the form of a "**nursery**", a room for the Hadleys' children that immerses them in any scene the can imagine. For the children Wendy and Peter, the power of virtual reality reaches the point where they would much rather interact with the nursery than with the real world. As George points out, "They live for the nursery." So much so, **in fact, that they kill their parents in order to keep using it**.

Bradbury's nursery presents us with a paradox. In "The Veldt," the Hadley children are completely dependent on the nursery. As the psychologist in the story, David McClean, comments, the nursery has become their new mother and father. Yet within its walls, the nursery grants them a frightening amount of power. Able to create anything they can imagine, they are essentially little gods. But these are gods without morals: the story strongly implies that the children use the nursery to kill their parents. But some questions linger, unanswered. How conscious are Wendy and Peter of the severity of their actions? Has virtual reality dulled their sense of real consequence?

"The Veldt" raises important questions about reality that are most pressing today, as companies are actually developing vivid renderings of virtual reality. What should our relationship to this kind of technology be? Will virtual reality actually become powerful enough to trick us into thinking that it's completely real (think The Matrix)? If so, will we lose control? And how far should we let our imaginations run? Perhaps there are certain ideas in our heads that should remain in our heads. The phrase "too real," which occurs several times in this story, is loaded with these concerns. The power of the nursery gives George and Lydia a sense of unease; they come to realize that they cannot distinguish between virtual reality and their reality. Virtual reality becomes *too* real to be virtual; indeed, it ultimately becomes reality itself. The blurry line between the Hadleys' experiences and the experiences generated by the nursery forces the reader to ask the question: if a machine-generated world is just as real as our own world, what meaning does our own world have?

The phrase "too real" also implies a culture of overstimulation that plagues society. It is perhaps the incredible vividness and intensity of the nursery that makes the Hadley children unable to enjoy the real world any longer. Like a drug, the nursery demands that one get high on images, on fantasies, and remain that way. Bradbury wrote this story in a time when television was exposing its first generation of consumers to image and information overload. Today, it is not only easy to imagine but almost impossible *not* to see a child's or adult's eyes peeled to a screen of some sort, oblivious to what is going on around them. This overstimulation—and the resulting need for even more overstimulation—leads Peter to say: "I don't want to do

anything but look and listen and smell; what else is there to do?" But, as the reader knows, there *are* other things to do, things that make people human: thinking, caring, and loving, among others.

HUMAN NATURE

The **Happylife Home** is Bradbury's futuristic vision of technology nearing its zenith. It may seem strange, then, that the predominant image in the story is that of an African **veldt**. The juxtaposition between advanced technology and this quintessential image of nature merits investigation. Technology and Nature are usually imagined as polar opposites. The development of technology, we might say, has allowed us to become masters of nature. In "The Veldt," the **nursery** allows the Hadley children to create any environment imaginable. In an interesting twist, though, Bradbury shows that the power of the nursery's technology actually becomes a conduit for the expression of basic human nature.

It is significant that Wendy and Peter repeatedly imagine a barren landscape populated by vultures and menacing lions. The veldt is an emanation from their minds that aims to fulfill their desire—the death of their parents. George reflects that the children are too young to think about death, but then corrects himself: "Or, no, you were never too young, really. Long before you knew what death was you were wishing it on someone else." David McClean confirms the children's fascination with death when he observes that the nursery, instead of providing the children with a fantastic diversion, has "become a channel toward destructive thoughts." The psychologist's diagnosis of the nursery implies that the veldt represents deep and dark tendencies in the Hadley children. Bradbury may be referencing the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, who believed that children had unconscious drives to have sex with and kill their parents. Here, of course, the latter wins over, as George and Lydia, without realizing it, hear the children rehearsing their parents' violent deaths over and over again in the nursery.

Bradbury's depiction of human nature has moral as well as psychological implications. Bradbury wrote "The Veldt" shortly after World War II, when the public was intensely concerned about the implications of the Holocaust. What did the atrocities of the war imply about human nature? In the 1960s, Stanley Milgram would conduct a famous psychology experiment that showed that humans were quite willing to inflict a significant amount of pain on other human beings. It appeared that human nature was more amoral than most would like to think. "The Veldt" appears to reflect on human nature in a similar way. The Hadley children, having killed their parents, do not seem emotional about it at all. In fact, they act like civilized people, drinking tea, having accomplished their goal. Bradbury wants us to ask ourselves what we would do if we had complete control over a technology like the nursery. Would we be as selfish and destructive as the Hadley children?

The veldt pictured in the nursery can ultimately be read as a mirror of the barrenness that life is reduced to in the mechanization of humanity. You might expect the most advanced technology in the house to look sophisticated, but the opposite is true. Bradbury gives us a glimpse of the loneliness, savagery, and meaninglessness that has governed human history and that may be even more palpable today. Underneath all the sophistication, we are still animals, as viciously human as ever.

DEATH OF THE FAMILY

On the most basic level, "The Veldt" is about a family going through the typical problems that arise in family life. George and Lydia are parents who spoil their children, and then try to discipline them by taking away the toys they originally spoiled them with. In response, Wendy and Peter begin to hate their parents. The difference between the Hadleys and a real family is that the Hadley children's toys are much more powerful than the toys that children usually play with. Eventually, the children's hatred ends in a rebellion and their parents' death. Bradbury's story is a study in how technology disrupts normal family relations.

George and Lydia want the best for their children. So they purchase the **Happylife Home**, a home designed to make Peter and Wendy happy and fulfilled. Indeed, it does its job, but it does that job too well. George and Lydia become concerned about their role as parents in the Happylife Home; they feel as if they're being phased out by their technology. As David McClean says, they have let the Happylife Home become more important to the children than their own parents. In a normal household, parents in this situation might be able to fix their family troubles. But in this case, Peter and Wendy are so obsessed with the **nursery** that they would rather kill their parents than part with it. Their new reality far surpasses a reality in which their dreams never come true. And the technology is so powerful that George and Lydia can't compete with it. You can confiscate a video game, but not the nursery: it will find a way to get rid of you.

Perhaps George and Lydia are bad parents. On the other hand, perhaps consumer technology is just too powerful and addictive. Bradbury's story might as well describe today's culture, in which children and parents alike watch TV during dinner, text message during conversations, and are constantly distracted by their technology. One would rather be in front of a screen than another human being.

To Bradbury, the power of technology spells the end of family, and the end of meaningful human relations. If everyone has a nursery to create his or her own world, there may no longer be any need to have real conversations, to foster real

relationships, with real people, in the shared, real world. In portraying the destruction of the Hadley family, Bradbury is voicing a fear that the consumerist world we are building will result in the destruction of the very idea of family and all of the values—love, respect, loyalty, companionship—that make possible our humanity.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE HAPPYLIFE HOME

The Happylife Home symbolizes a new consumerist society in which all of our needs and desires are instantly met, and all of our daily tasks become automated. It simultaneously frees the Hadleys to do whatever they want, and renders them passive beings, dependent on its technology and unsure of what to do now that they don't have to do *anything*. In some ways, the Happylife Home becomes even more human than the humans that live within it, because it performs all of the tasks that make us human. It therefore represents the loss of independence and a sense of purpose in life, and signals our misconception of what a happy life means.

THE "NURSERY"

The nursery is a product of society's most sophisticated technology, and gives its users the amazing ability to create a virtual world from sheer imagination. A "nursery" is another name for a children's bedroom and playroom, the place where children grow up. But Bradbury's nursery actually helps raise Wendy and Peter—so much so that it replaces their parents. It becomes an addictive machine that gives the children massive stimulation, gratifies their deepest and darkest desires, and isolates the children from the real world. The nursery is a double-edged sword: it symbolizes the incredible possibility that technology presents, but also the danger of using technology for sheer pleasure, of getting carried away by its power, and of ultimately choosing technology over humanity.

THE VELDT

The veldt, with its punishing heat and its menacing lions and vultures, represents the reality of human existence and human nature. As a product of the **nursery**, the veldt serves as a mirror of reality: despite the implication that technology (represented by the nursery) represents "progress," the result of this progress is a barren, primeval landscape. The veldt shows us that human existence hasn't really changed since its inception; we are cruel savages by nature, and despite the advances of technology, we remain so. In fact, the story suggests, technology may in fact help us express our selfishness and cruelty more effectively: the veldt is a direct emanation of the Hadley children's minds.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *The Illustrated Man* published in 2012.

The Veldt Quotes

"They walked down the hall of their soundproofed Happylife Home, which had cost them thirty thousand dollars installed, this house which clothed and fed and rocked them to sleep and played and sang and was good to them.

Related Characters: Peter Hadley, Wendy Hadley, Lydia Hadley, George Hadley

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Having convinced her husband George to go check their nursery, Lydia Hadley walks with him through their house. Bradbury calls it the Happylife Home, in a sarcastic nod to the false happiness that the home will bring them. In telling us how much the home costs "installed," Bradbury suggests the home is primarily a purchasable, manufactured product—it is standardized, came as one complete unit, and can be bought by anyone with the money to afford it. If this home does make the family happy, it won't be a unique or hard-won happiness.

As we quickly find out, these characters are helpless, relying on their home to do just about everything for them. Bradbury lists out all the things that the Happylife Home can do for them, like a list of "features" in a catalog. Later in the story, George has a hard time even imagining that they might cook for themselves or live without the many luxuries of their Happylife Home. Bradbury knows that this sort of technology can be very tempting, as we imagine ourselves being cooked for and cared for by a smart home. But their Happylife Home lures the Hadley family into a false sense of happiness, makes them unable to do anything for themselves, and ultimately spells the end of George and Lydia.

They stood on the thatched floor of the nursery. It was forty feet across by forty feet long and thirty feet high; it had cost half again as much as the rest of the house. "But nothing's too good for our children," George had said.

Related Characters: George Hadley (speaker), Peter Hadley, Wendy Hadley, Lydia Hadley

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Once again, the details Bradbury gives on the home remind us of the kind we might find in a catalog. Readers learn of its "thatched floor" and find out the exact dimensions of the nursery. These details help us imagine the nursery (in which most of the story will take place) but also echo the consumerism at the center of Bradbury's story. It is an enormous room: sixteen hundred square feet of floor space, and thirty-foot-high ceilings. The nursery alone is bigger than many small homes, and its ceilings are more than three times as high as the standard nine-foot ceiling.

We also learn that the room cost half as much as the rest of the house. George anticipates that an observer might find the nursery a little excessive, hence his suggestion that "nothing's too good for our kids." Throughout this story, Bradbury plays with the central irony of George and Lydia's relationship to their children: the very things that they think make them good parents end up destroying their family. George is proud that he's able to provide such an expensive nursery for his children, thinking it will be good for them. But as the story progresses, we find out that the nursery is very bad for all of them. George's statement suggests his stubborn wish to be a good father. But by spoiling his children with this fancy nursery, he ends up losing control over the family.

The lions were coming. And again George Hadley was filled with admiration for the mechanical genius who had conceived this room. A miracle of efficiency selling for an absurdly low price. Every home should have one. Oh, occasionally they frightened you with their clinical accuracy, they startled you, gave you a twinge, but most of the time what fun for everyone, not only your own son and daughter, but for yourself when you felt like a quick jaunt to a foreign land, a quick change of scenery.

Related Characters: George Hadley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Now, standing in the nursery, George is swept away by its realistic depiction of the veldt and thinks the room came at an "absurdly low price." Having just learned that the room cost half as much as the rest of their house, we might consider George's thought with a bit of skepticism. He is swept up in the experience, and the words that Bradbury puts into George's mind reflect this. George's beliefs that a "mechanical genius" must have come up with the room and that "every home should have one" reflect his childlike excitement upon arriving in the nursery. Whenever George steps into the nursery, he seems to feel a bit like his children.

At the same time, Bradbury lets some of George's fear slip through. Neither George nor his wife Lydia can ever decide exactly how they feel about the nursery. They are simultaneously amazed by it, afraid of it, and angry at the way it ends up an obsession for their children. George's fears emerge for a bit, but then are replaced by the consumerist mantra "what fun for everyone." Fighting against his primal fears about being near such a realistic lion, George forces himself to think of the fun his children might have playing in the nursery. Then George once again imagines *himself* having a good time in the nursery, just like his children. Yet we never see George or Lydia going to the nursery to actually enjoy themselves—instead they only go because they are worried by it.

"Walls, Lydia, remember; crystal walls, that's all they are. Oh, they look real, I must admit—Africa in your parlor—but it's all dimensional, superreactionary, supersensitive color film and mental tape film behind glass screens. It's all odorophonics and sonics, Lydia. Here's my handkerchief."
"I'm afraid." She came to him and put her body against him and cried steadily. "Did you see? Did you feel? It's too real."

Related Characters: Lydia Hadley, George Hadley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

Here George offers his unconvincing reassurance to Lydia, and it seems like he is also trying to convince himself not to be afraid of the veldt. He knows Lydia is correct when she says the Africa in their parlor is "too real." Through these characters, Bradbury is exploring the limit of how far we ought to take our technology. Like many works of science fiction before and after it, "The Veldt" is concerned with the boundary between reality and illusion. When the lines start to blur, bad things tend to happen.

This interaction between the Hadley parents is melodramatic, meaning there's something overdone about elements like George offering Lydia his handkerchief. Meanwhile, Bradbury makes up a whole bunch of technological terms that reflect his sense of humor. He mixes the made-up terms like "mental tape film" and "odorophonics" with real ones like "color film" to make them seem like real features of the nursery. We might find "odorophonics" funny because it blends smell (odor) and sound (phonics) into a nonsensical term. In offering his explanation of the nursery, George exposes himself as an unaware consumer. He says meaningless things like "it's all dimensional, superreactionary, supersensitive" and we learn that he doesn't really have a sense how the nursery works at all.

"You know how difficult Peter is about that. When I punished him a month ago by locking the nursery for even a few hours—the tantrum he threw! And Wendy too. They live for the nursery."

Related Characters: George Hadley (speaker), Wendy Hadley, Peter Hadley, Lydia Hadley

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

Upon hearing Lydia's suggestion that he shut off the nursery for a while and give their kids a break from it, George is terrified of how Peter and Wendy might react.

Before the literal death of their family at the end of the story comes the death of their family structure: George and Lydia have lost all control over their two children.Always back-and-forth in their reactions to the nursery, Lydia and George seem more like children than parents.

They cannot make a decision that might save their family without great fear at how Peter and Wendy will respond. Because the nursery seems more real than anything else, the kids have become addicted to it. As George says: "They live for the nursery." George is helpless to stop his children's addiction to the African veldt.

One other interesting thing: we might remember the names Peter and Wendy from J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan stories. Bradbury might have chosen these names to remind us of the way Barrie's Peter and Wendy escape from reality by going to Neverland. In Bradbury's story, the nursery is their Neverland—but it's more sinister the "realer" it becomes.

"Maybe I don't have enough to do. Maybe I have time to think too much. Why don't we shut the whole house off for a few days and take a vacation?"
"You mean you want to fry my eggs for me?"
"Yes." She nodded....
"But I thought that's why we bought the house, so we wouldn't have to do anything."
"That's just it. I feel like I don't belong here. The house is wife and mother now, and nursemaid. Can I compete with an African veldt? Can I give a bath and scrub the children as efficiently or quickly as the automatic scrub bath can? I cannot."

Related Characters: George Hadley, Lydia Hadley (speaker), Peter Hadley, Wendy Hadley

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 12-13

Explanation and Analysis

Lydia worries that her nervousness might come from having too much time to think, a common fear in modern society. Bradbury puts an ironic spin on this, because it doesn't seem like either Lydia or George have been doing much thinking at any point in the story. Still, she might be onto something in suggesting that they don't have enough to do. When the house does everything for them, what's left to focus on?

The Hadleys are so deeply immersed in their technological

trap that they can't imagine people cooking for themselves. But the fact that George even brings up the fried eggs suggests that he remembers a time when people— and not their houses— cooked breakfast.

As Lydia explains, the house has essentially replaced her (assuming that she previously took on the role of domestic housewife). She can't keep up with the "too real" images displayed for her children in the nursery, and her role as a caretaker has been eliminated. Perhaps, as Bradbury suggests, the roles of each family member in supporting the family as a whole are a key part of the family's survival. Still, George resists the idea that they might shut off the house and go away—and his reluctance seems to be because of the money he spent on it. They "bought" the house and nursery, so he doesn't want to waste it, even if it's making the family fall apart.

> Remarkable how the nursery caught the telepathic emanations of the children's minds and created life to fill their every desire. The children thought lions, and there were lions. The children thought zebras, and there were zebras. Sun—sun. Giraffes—giraffes. Death and death.

Related Characters: George Hadley (speaker), Peter Hadley, Wendy Hadley

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

Bradbury is back into his humorous pseudoscience here with another explanation of how the nursery works. This passage takes place in George's mind as he thinks about the veldt during dinner with Lydia. Because it is natural for people to have desires and seek ways to fulfill them, it makes sense that the nursery becomes an addiction for Peter and Wendy.

This is one of the places where Bradbury's writing style reflects what his story is talking about. He begins with sentences and by the end of the passage just writes: "Sun-sun. Giraffes- giraffes. Death and death." Bradbury eliminates the words in between to reflect how quickly the nursery picks up on the children's thoughts and provides them with gratification.

> He chewed tastelessly on the meat that the table had cut for him. Death thoughts. They were awfully young, Wendy and Peter, for death thoughts. Or, no, you were never too young, really. Long before you knew what death was you were wishing it on someone else.

Related Characters: George Hadley (speaker), Peter Hadley, Wendy Hadley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

George chews "tastelessly" on the meat made for them by their Happylife Home. This suggests either that the food their fancy house makes for them is not very good, or that George is so nervous about the nursery that he can't taste the food he is eating.

The reader is still immersed in George's mid-dinner thoughts about the nursery. This is one of Bradbury's more interesting reflections on the ways children think about life and death. George seems to debate with himself in his own head: first he thinks his kids are too young to think about death, and then he decides the opposite. This is a rather dark reflection on human nature, with George's conclusion that kids are wishing death on other people before they even know what it is. It foreshadows the end of the story, when Peter and Wendy successfully wish death on their parents.

> How many times in the last year had he opened this door and found Wonderland, Alice, the Mock Turtle, or Aladdin and his Magical Lamp, ...all the delightful contraptions of a make-believe world.... But now, this yellow hot Africa, this bake oven with murder in the heat. Perhaps Lydia was right. Perhaps they needed a little vacation from the fantasy which was growing a bit too real for ten-year-old children.

Related Characters: George Hadley (speaker), Wendy Hadley, Peter Hadley, Lydia Hadley

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

By referencing some of the most widely known children's stories in Western culture, Bradbury shows that Peter and Wendy's time in the nursery started out innocently. They imagined things from their favorite stories and saw them on the walls around them.

But throughout this story there is something that bothers George and Lydia about the Africa scenes playing on the walls of their nursery. It seems like there is nothing more "real" than the veldt, where animals eat other animals in front of Peter and Wendy. Why does this bother George and Lydia so much? They fear that their kids are no longer interested in the make-believe of children's stories and instead have begun to fixate on violent fantasies of the African veldt. Yet, with all their worries about what is "natural" or not for children, George and Lydia forget that there is, in some ways, nothing more "natural" than animals and their instinctual ways of life.

George Hadley stood on the African grassland alone. The lions looked up from their feeding, watching him. The only flaw to the illusion was the open door through which he could see his wife, far down the dark hall, like a framed picture, eating her dinner abstractedly.

Related Characters: Lydia Hadley, George Hadley

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

George goes into the nursery again, this time alone, to see what his kids might be encountering inside. He seems to be looking for flaws in the illusion, signs that the veldt is not real, but he can only find one. The lions are aware of George, and based on the technological explanations Bradbury has given us, it must be George's imagination that makes them so. Amidst all his anxiety about his children and their nursery, George might be having some "death thoughts" too, projected onto the wall when the feeding lions look at him.

He sees Lydia through the door, which he has made sure to leave open, eating "abstractedly." This means Lydia is preoccupied, and we have further evidence that their life in the Happylife Home is far from happy. Evidence like this throughout this story suggests that the two parents are extremely worried about their children, who in turn are addicted to the nursery and ungrateful toward their parents. In the Happylife Home, the Hadley family is quickly falling apart.

"Hello, Mom. Hello, Dad."

The Hadleys turned. Wendy and Peter were coming in the front door, cheeks like peppermint candy, eyes like bright blue agate marbles, a smell of ozone on their jumpers from their trip in the helicopter.

"You're just in time for supper, said both parents.

"We're full of strawberry ice cream and hot dogs," said the children, holding hands. "But we'll sit and watch."

Related Characters: Lydia Hadley, George Hadley, Peter Hadley, Wendy Hadley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Wendy and Peter enter the house speaking in unison, which gives them a kind of creepy or even robotic presence. They're also holding hands, which might be a bit strange given the other things we've learned about them. Peter and Wendy seem to have teamed up against their parents. It's also strange that they intend to watch their parents eat.

Bradbury's fantasy-world description of the kids suggests how spoiled they are, and how they treat all of life as a kind of entertainment for them to watch. They're addicted to their thrilling lifestyle, signaled by the fact that they've just gotten out of a helicopter.

They don't need their parents' dinner because they're full of what seems like carnival food. This furthers the sense that they don't need their parents, especially in traditional ways like relying on them to make food or bathe them.

"I don't know anything," he said, "except that I'm beginning to be sorry we bought that room for the children. If children are neurotic at all, a room like that—"

"It's supposed to help them work off their neuroses in a healthful way."

"I'm starting to wonder." He stared at the ceiling.

"We've given the children everything they ever wanted. Is this our reward—secrecy, disobedience?"

Related Characters: Lydia Hadley, George Hadley (speaker), Peter Hadley, Wendy Hadley

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

The Hadley parents are surprised to find that their efforts to improve their children's lives with their technologically advanced nursery have backfired, leaving their kids unable to do anything but sit in the nursery and dream up images of the dangerous veldt.

George suggests that it's Peter and Wendy's neuroses--their anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues--that makes the nursery a bad match for their personalities. Yet, as Lydia says, the nursery was meant to help them "work off" their worries. The nursery, this symbol for a hands-off form of parenting, has failed to fulfill its purpose and instead has turned Peter and Wendy against their parents.

> A moment later they heard screams.
> Two screams. Two people screaming from downstairs. And then a roar of lions....
> "Those screams—they sound familiar."
> "Do they?"
> "Yes, awfully."
> And although their beds tried very hard, the two adults couldn't be rocked to sleep for another hour. A smell of cats was in the night air.

Related Characters: George Hadley, Lydia Hadley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

Here Bradbury lays on the suspense. Lydia says the screams sound familiar, but doesn't say who they might sound like. The reader doesn't find out until the end of the story, but it's an ominous suggestion. (It's later revealed that the screams are coming from an imagined version of George and Lydia--the children are fantasizing about their parents being killed.) The two kids have broken into the nursery while George and Lydia try to fall asleep, further suggesting that the parents have little control over what their kids do.

Like at other points in the story, Bradbury uses personification to make parts of the Happylife Home seem like members of the family. Here, the bed "tried very hard" to rock George and Lydia to sleep. This is what we might expect the parents to do for Peter and Wendy. And given how distressing their situation is, an hour is not a terribly long wait to fall asleep. The Hadleys have grown used to a very easy lifestyle, so any relatively normal difficulty becomes a big one.

The "smell of cats" tells us that the nursery's "odorophonics" are working well to create the illusion of lions in the nursery. The boundary between reality and illusion continues to blur, and it becomes more and more clear that the lions in the nursery might actually be dangerous.

> Peter looked at his shoes. He never looked at his father any more, nor at his mother.

Related Characters: Lydia Hadley, George Hadley, Peter Hadley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

Bradbury uses a typical symbol of disengagement from a social situation, gazing at one's shoes, to show that Peter is unable--or at least unwilling--to engage with his parents. That he "never looked" at his mother or father suggests how distant he has grown from them.

Whether Peter is guilty, angry, worried, or simply not interested in talking to George is not clear. But it is should be fairly shocking for George and Lydia to learn that their child cannot even look at them. This is one of many cues from their children that George and Lydia fail (or refuse) to really understand.

Bradbury picks up on a trope of the child distractedly interacting with his parents but turns it into something more sinister, a sign that Peter is drifting further and further from his parents, and towards something dark and dangerous.

"Matter of fact, we're thinking of turning the whole house off for about a month. Live sort of a carefree one-for-all existence."
"That sounds dreadful! Would I have to tie my own shoes instead of letting the shoe tier do it? And brush my own teeth and comb my hair and give myself a bath?"
"It would be fun for a change, don't you think?"
"No, it would be horrid...."

Related Characters: Peter Hadley, George Hadley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

When George tells Peter that they're considering turning off their house for only "about a month," Peter can't imagine life without the Happylife Home doing everything for them. Any sort of independence-- tying his shoes, bathing, and so on-- is almost impossible for Peter to imagine.

Bradbury continues to use lofty, almost British-sounding words in Peter and Wendy's dialogue. Peter uses the words "dreadful" and "horrid," in a caricature of what a kid's tantrum might really sound like. Bradbury often uses misplaced words in ways like this to make his dialogue strange and comic.

Once again, George fails to have any influence on what his children want to do. He tries to make the situation sound fun, but Peter wants to hear none of it. And Bradbury's fictional technologies continue to show up in the story, with the "shoe tier" as an amusing example.

"I don't want to do anything but look and listen and smell; what else is there to do?"

Related Characters: Peter Hadley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

Peter's question "what else is there to do?" shows how deeply he needs the nursery to feel entertained. Looking, listening, and smelling: these are the attractions the nursery provides.

They're also the hallmarks of reality, and it becomes even clearer that Peter can no longer see the veldt as an illusion, a detachment from reality. It has become his reality, and when his father tries to take it from him he fights back viciously.

One of our great fears about consumer culture is that people who use products might become addicted to them, at the cost of things like family life or any human connection at all. This has clearly happened to the Hadley family, but in a twist of the usual tragic story it's the children--and not their parents--who have an addiction that tears the family apart.

"My dear George, a psychologist never saw a fact in his life. He only hears about feelings; vague things. This doesn't feel good, I tell you. Trust my hunches and my instincts. I have a nose for something bad. This is very bad. My advice to you is to have the whole damn room torn down and your children brought to me every day during the next year for treatment."

Related Characters: David McClean (speaker), Wendy Hadley, Peter Hadley, George Hadley

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 21-22

Explanation and Analysis

In another darkly comic move, Bradbury brings in a psychologist as a sort of false authority figure for the story. George and Lydia are failing to get through to their children, so maybe a psychologist will be able to. It is not really clear what Bradbury thinks, in the end, of the psychologist's opinions. Dr. McClean's last name suggests a joke about the way psychologists try to come in and purify ("clean") their patients' lives. And the sarcastic assertion that "a psychologist never saw a fact in his life" seems to place psychology next to the pseudoscientific explanations George gives of the nursery itself.

But the reader is also intended to see McClean's statement that feelings are "vague things" as ironic. One of the Hadley parents' biggest problems is that they don't trust their feelings about the bad things the nursery is doing to their

kids--but McClean does trust his feelings. Thus Bradbury suggests that maybe psychology, with its focus on feelings, with its hunches and instincts, can tell us more than other types of science about certain issues.

Either way, McClean sees the Hadleys' situation as very serious. He wants them to tear down the nursery and bring Peter and Wendy in for therapy every day for a whole year. That's a whole lot of therapy, and with this advice McClean is trying to express the severity of their problem.

"One of the original uses of these nurseries was so that we could study the patterns left on the walls by the child's mind, study at our leisure, and help the child. In this case, however, the room has become a channel toward destructive thoughts, instead of a release away from them."

Related Characters: David McClean (speaker), Peter Hadley, Wendy Hadley

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

In psychology, the term "projection" refers to the way people defend themselves from unpleasant things by imagining them instead to be part of people or things around them. In this story, the projection is literal: you think of something, and it shows up on the walls around you almost instantly.

Dr. McClean explains that rooms like the nursery were originally meant to help children by enabling psychologists to see what is going on in a child's mind. But, in the Hadleys' nursery, the opposite is happening. The more violent images they conjure up on the wall around them, the more Peter and Wendy want to see violent things.

This reflects another fear we often have about things like movies and video games: the more realistic their violence, the more we become used to seeing violence in our everyday lives. Instead of allowing the children to release their "destructive thoughts," this nursery brings Peter and Wendy further into them.

"You've let this room and this house replace you and your wife in your children's affections. This room is their mother and father, far more important than their real parents. And now you come along and want to shut it off. No wonder there's hatred there. You can feel it coming out of the sky. Feel that sun. George, you'll have to change your life. Like too many others, you've built it around creature comforts. Why, you'd starve tomorrow if something went wrong in your kitchen. You wouldn't know how to tap an egg. Nevertheless, turn everything off. Start new."

Related Characters: David McClean (speaker), Peter Hadley, Wendy Hadley, Lydia Hadley, George Hadley

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols:   

Page Number: 22-23

Explanation and Analysis

The psychologist delivers his final verdict about the Hadley family. As discussed above, the family's death is preceded by the fact that Peter and Wendy no longer need their parents. Dr. McClean blames George and Lydia for "letting" their kids find a replacement for them in the form of their nursery. Then, even worse, the parents try to take away the nursery. This is a pretty harsh judgment for a psychologist, who might normally spend some time exploring the ambiguity of their situation--but McClean isn't speaking as the Hadleys' doctor, he's speaking as their concerned friend.

Dr. McClean says they can feel the hatred from the Hadley children beaming down from the sun and the sky in the veldt. The emotional turmoil in this family is made real in the nursery, which functions as a metaphor for their inability to come together physically or emotionally. The psychologist goes on to recommend that they get rid of the "creature comforts" supplied by their Happylife Home and learn to take care of themselves again. He mentions an egg, just as George does when Lydia suggests turning off the home earlier in the story.

Even though he knows it will make Peter and Wendy hate their parents, Dr. McClean recommends that they turn the whole house off and start a new life. Of course, as we soon find out, it's too late for these interventions.

"I don't imagine the room will like being turned off," said the father.

"Nothing ever likes to die—even a room."

Related Characters: David McClean, George Hadley (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

George's fear about the nursery extends so far that he is now afraid of the room itself: it will not like being turned off, he worries.The obvious conclusion to draw from this is that the room must, in some sense, have feelings. This is another place where Bradbury blurs the line between real and illusory. The nursery has taken on a larger-than-life presence in the story, and indeed has become the center of everything happening in the Hadley family. If the Happylife Home and the nursery are smart enough to do everything for this family, might they become so smart that they can develop feelings and begin to "take over" in some sense? Or is the nursery an innocent room, ruined by the children's dark fantasies? Bradbury seems insistent on leaving these questions unanswered, leaving the reader to decide whether the Happylife Home and its nursery are sinister technologies or simple tools whose intentions become distorted by their users.

"Lydia, it's off, and it stays off. And the whole damn house dies as of here and now. The more I see of the mess we've put ourselves in, the more it sickens me. We've been contemplating our mechanical, electronic navels for too long. My God, how we need a breath of honest air!"

Related Characters: Lydia Hadley, George Hadley (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

George finally lays down the law and decides that they'll have to turn off the Happylife Home. His resolve will last only a few paragraphs, until Peter manipulates his father into letting them use the nursery one more time. Bradbury continues to hammer home the ineffectiveness of George and Lydia in deciding how their family will function. Suddenly, convinced by his psychologist friend to see the house and nursery as bad things, George is "sickened by them." But it'll be too little, too late.

Bradbury uses another trope, navel-gazing, which is used to suggest that someone is spending too long thinking about themselves. But he puts his usual humorous twist on the expression, using the more complex word "contemplating," as if staring at one's own belly button were a philosophical act. George calls them "mechanical, electronic navels," suggesting that his family has been infected in some way by all the technology around them. They have become one with all the mechanical, electronic stuff they use to get by every day. This is contrasted with the "honest air" they might breathe outside their Happylife Home, the cave in which they've lived out so much of their lives.

The house was full of dead bodies, it seemed. It felt like a mechanical cemetery. So silent. None of the humming energy of machines waiting to function at the tap of a button.

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

In the brief period when the Hadleys have turned the house off, it seems strange to them that their lives aren't accompanied by the humming of technology. This is a provocative passage from Bradbury, with the house "full of dead bodies." Given that it seems like a "mechanical cemetery," the dead bodies might be all the disabled machines. There is a void now that the machines are turned off, but once they are back on it will be a different type of dead bodies somewhere in the house.

The other aspect of these machines is their persistent state of "waiting to function" for the user. The machines never have any downtime, or decide they'd rather not fulfill their duty, and so they offer instant gratification to the Hadley family. To have everything at the touch of a button, and then to have none of it, would be jarring indeed. Yet the reader gets the sense that, if the Hadleys are able to make it through this first stretch of life without constant technological help, they might make it as a family. Tragically, this won't be the case.

"I wish you were dead!"

"We were, for a long while. Now we're going to really start living. Instead of being handled and massaged, we're going to live."

Related Characters: George Hadley, Peter Hadley (speaker), Wendy Hadley, Lydia Hadley

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

This is George's breakthrough moment, when he'll finally set the family back on course, or so we're meant to think. George's heroic pronouncement is prompted by Peter's disturbing wish. Of course, as foreshadowed throughout the story, George's brand of heroism will crumble easily under pressure from his son. He pronounces triumphantly that now, without the Happylife Home in their way, the Hadleys will "really start living." It's an intriguing idea, and Bradbury picks up on the way that we all sometimes make earnest commitments only to forget them only a few hours later.

The evil that George mentions here, "being handled and massaged," relates more directly to the Happylife Home than to the nursery itself. Even though the nursery seems like the most addictive and the most dangerous element of their home, the focus of George's commitment to a new life is his decision to no longer be taken care of by the home. His failure to adequately explain to Peter that it's the nursery that is most pressingly in need of being turned off, or why the nursery might be harmful for them in the first place, is another missed chance for him to connect with Peter and save the family from its rapidly approaching destruction.

He stared at the two children seated in the center of the open glade eating a little picnic lunch. Beyond them was the water hole and the yellow veldtland; above was the hot sun. He began to perspire. "Where are your mother and father?"

The children looked up and smiled. "Oh, they'll be here directly."...

A shadow flickered over Mr. McClean's hot face. Many shadows flickered. The vultures were dropping down the blazing sky.

"A cup of tea?" asked Wendy in the silence.

Related Characters: Peter Hadley, Wendy Hadley, David McClean (speaker), Lydia Hadley, George Hadley

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 26-27

Explanation and Analysis

There are few things more traditionally "innocent" than a brother and sister eating "a little picnic lunch" together, but we come to learn that Peter and Wendy's picnic takes place next to a very brutal scene. In the climax of Bradbury's story, it seems that the boundary between the real world and the nursery has been erased completely. George and Hadley have been sucked into the veldt and eaten by the lions, while their children eat a picnic nearby. Peter and Wendy are seemingly just mildly entertained by the violence they're witnessing, and completely uncaring regarding their parents' fate--this family was "dead" long before George and Lydia are literally killed.

Dr. McClean, who comes across Peter and Wendy after walking into the nursery, is hit by the "hot sun" that he earlier claims signifies the children's hatred toward their parents. He seems panicked, urging the children to go, and Bradbury suggests that McClean might be about to disappear too.

The strange formality of Peter and Wendy's speech, and their bizarre tendency to speak and act in unison, reemerge here. Instead of saying "they'll be right back," the two children respond: "Oh, they'll be here directly." In the very last sentence of the story, Wendy offers the psychologist a cup of tea. They continue to manipulate adults with a false innocence and a false politeness, emphasizing the horror inherent in human nature--if children can act like this, then nothing is truly innocent.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

THE VELDT

The story opens during a conversation between the Hadley parents, George and Lydia, in their thirty thousand-dollar **Happylife Home**. The futuristic Happylife Home fulfills their every need: it clothes them, feeds them, and even rocks them to sleep. As the futuristic Home makes dinner for the family, "humming to itself," Lydia asks George to take a look at the Home's "**nursery**," or to call a psychologist in to examine it. George agrees to look at it himself. As they walk toward the nursery, motion-sensor lights in the hallway automatically turn on and off as they track the parents' progress.

The first few lines establish the setting as a technological future of plenty, centered around an easeful domesticity in which the family literally doesn't have to do any work of their own. At the same time, the branded "Happylife Home" suggests the consumerism behind this seeming paradise and the mention of the need for a psychologist suggests all actually isn't as wonderful as it seems. "Taking a look" at the "nursery" uses language that makes the nursery sound like a car or machine, and makes it clear that even child-rearing in this world has been "outsourced" to technology.

The parents reach the **nursery**, the most expensive and sophisticated feature of the **Happylife Home**. Before their eyes, the blank walls of the nursery transform into a three-dimensional African **veldt**. George feels the intense heat of the sun and begins to sweat. He wants to get out of the nursery, saying that everything looks normal but that it is "a little too real," but Lydia tells him to wait. They observe more details in the veldt: the smell of grass, water, animals and dust, and the sound of antelopes and vultures. Lydia points out the lions that have been eating in the distance. They can't tell what the lions are eating, but it makes Lydia nervous. She hears a scream, but George says he didn't.

The narrator points out how expensive the nursery is in order to illustrate the extent to which George and Lydia have spoiled their children. But our expectations of what a nursery should look like are totally upended by the frightening veldt that it actually presents. That this veldt reality appears "too real" establishes the allure of manufactured reality, how it can be more stimulating than actual reality. Meanwhile, it's interesting that the scene the children have created is one of primeval nature, rather than a cartoonish fantasy. The screams will grow in importance as the story continues.

As the lions approach them, George admires the "genius" of the **nursery**. To him, the room is a "miracle of efficiency." It is so real that it becomes frightening sometimes; but for the most part, he muses, "what fun for everyone." The lions stop fifteen feet away from George and Lydia, "feverishly and startlingly real," and then charge at the couple. George and Lydia run out into the hall and slam the door. Lydia is crying with terror, but George is laughing; he reminds Lydia that the nursery's reality isn't real.

George's amazement at the nursery's virtual reality attests to this room's status as the peak of human power and technology. Bradbury's description of the nursery—"what fun for everyone"—resembles an advertisement for a theme park or movie. The fact that the nursery sometimes feels a little too real again references the overstimulation of mass entertainment – for Bradbury the nursery represents a logical extension of television. Here, Lydia feels the line between reality and virtual reality beginning to blur.

Lydia, still afraid, says that the **veldt** is "too real." She tells George to make sure their children, Wendy and Peter, stop reading about Africa, and instructs him to lock up the nursery for a few days. George suggests that Lydia perhaps has been working too hard and needs to rest, but Lydia argues the opposite—that she has too little to do, and is therefore thinking too much. She suggests that they shut off the **Happylife Home** and take a vacation. She expresses the desire to do routine human tasks that the Happylife Home does for them: cooking eggs, mending socks, cleaning the house. She convinces George that the Home is rendering them unnecessary, and that it's having a negative effect on their psychological and physical health.

The Hadley parents' unhappiness isn't caused by the fact that they are working too hard—rather, it's that they have nothing to do. The Happylife Home has taken over all of their daily tasks, such that they no longer feel useful and necessary in their own home. Lydia's desire to cook and clean once again suggests the idea that machines that fulfill our every whim do not create true happiness. The Home has taken away the Hadleys' sense of purpose*: they want to feel like they belong in the world, and in order to belong in the world they must feel like they matter, which requires that there be work that they have to do.*

The Hadley parents eat dinner without their children, who are at a carnival. As George watches the dining table make food, he reflects that it would be good for the children to live without the **nursery** for some time. "Too much of anything isn't good for anyone," he thinks. The nursery uses the "telepathic emanations" of the children's minds to create scenes that fulfill their desires. They can conjure anything up in the nursery. In George's opinion, Wendy and Peter have been spending too much time in Africa. The animals in the **veldt** devour their prey right before his children's eyes. George reflects that it is never too early for a child to think about death; in fact, they wish death on others even before they understand what death is. Lost in his thoughts, he walks to the nursery and listens to a lion's roar, which is followed by a scream.

George's reflection that the children have been spending too much time in the nursery raises the notion that Wendy and Peter might be addicted to their technology. And in this case, George recognizes that the nursery is especially dangerous because it gives the children so much power with so little responsibility. He realizes that the veldt is an expression of his children's darkest thoughts. George understands that it is natural for children to wish death or destruction on others, before they even know the consequences of such a wish, but fears that Wendy and Peter, by playing out their thoughts of death in the nursery, might reinforce this natural predisposition in a way that leads toward actual violence. The lion's roar and the subsequent scream seem at the moment to indicate that his concerns are accurate (later it will be revealed that his concerns are accurate but also have come too late).

George enters the **nursery** and reminisces about the past imaginary worlds his children created. But this new world is unbearably hot and cruel. The children's fantasy world, he reflects, is becoming "a bit too real." Alone in the **veldt**, he can look back and see through the open door of the nursery: through the door he sees his wife, "like a framed picture," eating dinner. In front of him, lions are eating their own dinner and watching him. George tells them to go away, but they don't budge. He tries to send out thoughts of Aladdin to get the nursery walls to change, but nothing happens. Frustrated, George goes back to the dinner table and says the nursery is broken; it won't respond to his thoughts. The parents hypothesize that the room is stuck as a veldt because the children have been thinking about Africa so often, or that Peter has set the nursery to remain in veldt mode.

The children's transition from scenes of Aladdin to the African veldt signals a loss of innocence, a loss that is perhaps brought about more quickly by their addiction to the nursery and the responsibility-less power it gives them. Furthermore, George's inability to change the walls of the nursery implies that the situation is slipping beyond his control. The open door that captures Lydia "like a framed picture" is a crucial image. It gives us a view of reality from the perspective of virtual reality. Bradbury describes the view using words that imply artifice: reality is presented in the same way as a painting or a movie. This further blurs the lines between reality and the nursery's "artificial reality", and suggests that reality depends on where you stand. The image also presents a neat juxtaposition between a human eating and of the lions feeding, another commentary on the fundamental animal-ness or savageness of human instincts and desires.

Wendy and Peter return home. George asks them about Africa, and the children feign ignorance, insisting they haven't created an African **veldt**. Wendy runs to the **nursery**, and when she comes back, announces that there is no Africa. The four Hadleys walk together to the nursery and see a beautiful forest. George, suspicious, sends the children to bed. He walks through the scenery and picks up something in the corner of the nursery, where he observed the lions earlier. It's one of his old wallets, chewed up and bloody. George closes and locks the nursery door.

The Hadley children are shameless in their manipulation of their parents. At the same time, Bradbury's description of them makes them appear almost robotic. All of their actions and utterances are described in unison: one can imagine them speaking together in a flat, emotionless voice. The Hadley's appear to live perfect lives in their Happylife Home, but in truth the parents feel useless, while the children are un-feeling. The bloody wallet is another hint of what the children have been up to – a hint George seems to at least partly understand when he locks the nursery door.

George and Lydia can't sleep. They agree that Wendy changed the **nursery** from a **veldt** to a forest to try to fool them. They don't know why, but George is determined to keep the nursery locked until they find out. They reflect that the nursery is supposed to help children express and cure their neuroses, but that perhaps it is not having the desired effect. They decide to discipline their spoiled children, agreeing that Wendy and Peter have become disrespectful and disobedient. They hear two screams from the nursery, and then a roar of lions. Apparently, Wendy and Peter have broken into the nursery. Lydia thinks that the screams sound eerily familiar, but isn't sure how. George and Lydia are unable to fall asleep for another hour, when their beds finally succeed in rocking them to sleep.

George and Lydia's assessment of their children is essentially accurate; but, at the same time, the parents don't recognize the extent of the issue. The fact that Wendy and Peter have so easily broken back into the nursery, and that George and Lydia don't even try to do anything about it, demonstrates how little power the parents actually have over their children. George and Lydia's rocking beds further infantilize them—they are like babies in a cradle. Meanwhile, the vaguely familiar screams produced by the nursery's technology establish a haunting tone, which George and Lydia's technological infantilization helps them ignore. Technology within the story is both the problem and the cure, which might be the definition of any addiction.

In the next scene, Peter has a conversation with his father. He never looks at his father or mother any more; instead, he looks at his feet. He admits that he and Wendy have been creating the **veldt** in the **nursery**, and asks George not to turn off the nursery. When George reveals that he and Lydia are considering turning the **Happylife Home** off for a month, Peter becomes upset at the idea of tying his own shoes and brushing his own teeth. He says that he doesn't want to do anything except "look and listen and smell." He tells his father that he'd better not shut off the Home, and returns to the African veldt.

The fact that Peter does not look at his father illustrates how estranged the children are from their parents, and from human interaction in general. Peter does not seem to feel any kind of love or care for his father; he goes so far as to threaten George's life. Peter's wish to do nothing except "look and listen and smell" demonstrates once again how the Happylife Home has reduced the Hadley family to beings who are both passive consumers of entertainment and animal-like in their interests. The overstimulation of the nursery has made Peter care only about continuing to stimulate his senses (look, listen, smell). He doesn't want to think, love, share; he wants to interact with the technology that gives him instant gratification, not with other people.

George and Lydia invite their friend, psychologist David McClean, to examine the **nursery**. David observes that the **veldt** doesn't "feel good." A psychologist, he says, works based on feeling, not hard fact. And the nursery is giving him a bad feeling. He advises George to destroy the room and send the children to him for treatment. The nursery was originally developed so that psychologists could study children's minds, but in this case, he says, the room has become a dangerous channel for the children's destructive thoughts. He remarks that George has turned from a "Santa Claus" into a "Scrooge." First he spoiled the children by purchasing the **Happylife Home**; then he allowed them to become dependent on it. Now, he is functionally taking away their new mother and father. The lions begin to make David nervous. George asks if the lions could actually become real, and David says no. Before leaving the room, David finds a bloody scarf that belongs to Lydia. Together, the men turn off the nursery.

David McClean's assertion that psychologists work based on feeling contrasts with the unfeeling nature of the two Hadley children and suggests Bradbury's fear that technology robs humans of feeling and empathy, of what makes people human. McClean's description of the family's dynamics paints the Happylife Home as being even better than having parents in the sense that eating donuts all day is even better than having healthy food: the Happylife Home gives the children whatever they want and will never say no. The original usage of the nursery to study the human mind reinforces the idea that the veldt the children have produces is a true reflection of human nature. It also implies that this technology could have productive and revolutionary applications, but that in a consumerist culture, it merely becomes an addictive form of entertainment.

In response to the nursery getting turned off, Wendy and Peter become extremely upset and throw a fit. Upset at her children's crying, Lydia begs George to turn the **nursery** back on for a little longer. George refuses, and proceeds to go around the house turning off the other automated elements of the **Happylife Home**. The house becomes as silent as a cemetery. Peter, desperate, tells George that he wishes George were dead. George replies that they have all been dead, but will start to really live now. But upon further entreaty, he agrees to let the children use the nursery one last time before David arrives to help them move out of the house for their vacation.

That Bradbury describes the Happylife Home as a "cemetery" after George turns it off suggests that the Happylife Home, when it was on, had a life of its own. The interaction between Peter and George highlights the familial conflict created by the intense technology of the house, a conflict that actually presents opposite sides of the same coin: Peter chooses technology over his father, while George finds the technology deadening because it steals from him his purpose, his fatherhood. That George then lets his children use the nursery one last time indicates that he doesn't think that Peter actually means *he wants George dead. He thinks, rather, that his son is metaphorically expressing his deep anger. He doesn't understand the depth of his son's estrangement from the family and from other people.*

Lydia and the children go to the nursery while George gets dressed. Lydia also comes to get dressed, and together they reflect on their foolishness—they should never have bought the Happylife Home! They then hear Wendy and Peter calling for them. George and Lydia run into the nursery, into the **veldt**, but their children aren't inside. Then the door of the nursery slams shut, trapping George and Lydia in the veldt. The parents realize that their children have set a trap. As they bang against the door, they hear the sounds of approaching lions on all sides. They scream, and suddenly realize that the screams they have been hearing in the nursery were their own.

The "genius" of the Happylife Home has so completely eclipsed George and Lydia's roles as parents that it has destroyed the Hadley family: the children have no family feeling at all for their parents, or for people in general. Wendy and Peter, without any remorse, murder their parents in the nursery. In the process, virtual reality becomes full-on reality, which seems like just a final step since, to Wendy and Peter, the nursery is much more real and exciting than reality itself. The children renounce reality—and their parents—in favor of technology. This outcome also speaks to the insidiousness of technology: George and Lydia were worrying about what technology was doing *to their children, not realizing what it had* already done.

Some time later, David arrives at the **nursery** doorway, and sees Wendy and Peter eating a picnic in a glade. Beyond them is the **veldt**. David, feeling the heat of the sun, starts sweating. He asks the children where George and Lydia are, and the children reply that they'll be coming soon. In the distance, David sees lions eating. He looks harder as the lions move over to a watering hole to quench their thirst. David sees the shadows of vultures approaching from above. In the quiet of the veldt, Wendy offers David a cup of tea.

The heat of the veldt, which reflects the savageness of human nature, contrasts starkly with the civilized tea that Wendy and Peter enjoy in the glade. The end of this story signals the end of a generation and the birth of a new one: a generation in which selfishness, cruelty, and a lack of emotion (induced by excessive technology) supplant the love, care, and understanding that are crucial to our shared humanity. Though they appear civilized, Wendy and Peter are just two more savage animals in the technology-enabled veldt.

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