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**The world of childhood  
in Ray Bradbury's *The Illustrated Man***

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**Abstract**

This article is devoted to an analysis of the motif of childhood in *The Illustrated Man*, a collection of short stories by Ray Bradbury. The particular focus is on the initial story, "The Veldt," and the last two stories, "Zero Hour" and "The Rocket." The article interprets imagination as a distinguishing feature of children's world, as opposed to the world of adults, characterised by logic and lack of imagination. This difference, the article claims, results in a clash of the two worlds. The article also analyses Bradbury's negative view of technology expressed in the stories, with its addictive and destructive potential, as well as technology's relationship to imagination. Another object of analysis is the ways Bradbury suggests to reconcile the worlds of children and adults and to avoid technology's pernicious effects. The article also aims to analyse the way in which the intertextual framework contributes to these themes and to interpret the meaning of the arrangement of the stories within the volume.

**Key words**

Bradbury, children, *The Illustrated Man*, imagination, technology

## **Świat dziecka w *Człowieku Ilustrowanym* Raya Bradbury'ego**

### **Abstrakt**

Artykuł poświęcony jest analizie motywu dzieciństwa w zbiorze opowiadań *Człowiek Ilustrowany* Raya Bradbury'ego. Analiza w szczególności skupia się na opowiadaniu początkowym, *Sawanna*, oraz dwóch ostatnich – *Godzina zero* i *Rakieta*. Wyobraźnia zostaje zinterpretowana jako wyróżnik dziecięcego świata, w przeciwieństwie do świata dorosłych, naznaczonego logiką i brakiem wyobraźni. Z tej różnicy – brzmi jedna z tez artykułu – bierze się konflikt pomiędzy światem dzieci a dorosłych. W artykule omówiony jest też, wyrażony w opowiadaniach Bradbury'ego, negatywny stosunek do techniki, jej uzależniającego i niszczycielskiego potencjału oraz relacja techniki do wyobraźni. Przedmiotem analizy są też sposoby, jakie Bradbury sugeruje, aby przezwyciężyć konflikt świata dzieci i dorosłych oraz uniknąć zgubnych skutków techniki. Ponadto celem artykułu jest analiza intertekstualnych odniesień pod kątem ich wkładu w tematykę opowiadań oraz interpretacja sensu takiego, a nie innego układu utworów w zbiorze.

### **Słowa kluczowe**

Bradbury, dzieci, *Człowiek Ilustrowany*, wyobraźnia, technika

### **1. Introduction**

In Ray Bradbury's collection *The Illustrated Man* (1951) there are four stories which feature children as prominent characters: "The Veldt", "The Rocket Man", "Zero Hour" and "The Rocket". At least three of them seem to be deliberately arranged within the volume, with one of them appearing at the beginning of the collection ("The Veldt"), two ("Zero Hour" and "The Rocket") at the end, and one ("The Rocket Man") is placed near the middle of the text. Since the beginning and end of

a book – prologue and epilogue aside – are naturally its prominent parts, the placing of the “children” stories in these positions makes the theme of childhood conspicuous.<sup>1</sup> This article starts with brief summaries of the four stories and then focuses primarily on “The Veldt”, “Zero Hour” and “The Rocket” with the intent of proving that they stress the importance of imagination as a defining feature of childhood. The article also analyzes the conflict between the world of children and the world of adults.

The first of the stories in *The Illustrated Man* to feature children, “The Veldt”, tells the story of George and Lydia Hadley, a couple who purchase a state-of-the-art, thoroughly automated house which does all the housework. Moreover, the couple’s children, Peter and Wendy, have a gigantic nursery with walls capable of producing extremely vivid and meticulously detailed virtual reality of any kind, complete with sounds and smells, triggered by mental commands. Within less than a year, the children become so addicted to the nursery that they become hysterical when the father switches the room off for some time as a punishment. All this the reader learns in retrospect; the story starts when the family has lived in the high-tech house for about a year and the relationship between the parents and the children has been deteriorating for two months since the children were first denied something they wanted and then punished by a ban on the nursery. Now the children’s usual fairy-tale fantasies enacted on the nursery walls are replaced by images of an African veldt where ferocious lions wallow in a bloody feast under a scourging sun. When the alarmed parents watch the scene, they instinctively get scared of the life-like lions approaching them and run in panic. Also, Mr and

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Robin Anne Reid: “Since Bradbury’s regular collections of short stories have sold well and continue to do so, he must, as a writer, perceive a different purpose in revising and arranging stories to create a work such as *TIM [The Illustrated Man]*. [...] a close reading of the conclusions and themes of the various stories reveals a unified narrative connection” (2000: 37-38).

Mrs Hadley sometimes hear screams from the nursery and George finds his wallet and his wife's scarf, stained with blood, on the nursery floor. When the parents decide that both their children and themselves have been spoilt by the mechanical house and need to take a holiday from it, the children once again throw a tantrum; then they trick the parents into coming into the nursery and lock them inside, where, it is suggested, they are devoured by the lions, which have come alive.

The story does not describe the moment of the parents' death, and in the last scene, when a friend comes to help the Hadley family to leave for their holiday, the children – now innocently playing in the nursery – say their parents will come in a moment. However, what supports the children-as-killers interpretation is the fact that, in the last scene, the children in the nursery are smiling (1951: 18) – which they certainly would not be, had they released their parents from the room after locking them in, because they would have been punished. Additionally, this interpretation is supported by the foreshadowing – in the form of the screams and the eerie findings in the nursery. Robin Reid also implicitly assumes this interpretation, as she calls the children “killers” (2000: 46). Anthony Bernardo (2004), too, says that the “elder Hadleys” are killed.

In one of the two final stories, “Zero Hour”, the main characters are a seven-year-old girl called Mink and her mother, Mrs. Morris. Mink, like all kids under nine in the neighbourhood, takes to playing a new game. The game is called “Invasion” and it involves constructing strange devices out of simple household tools and utensils, according to the instructions of an invisible or imaginary person called Drill. Mink, who actually treats the game quite seriously, solemnly tells her disbelieving mother that children are being used by aliens as a “fifth column” and that all adults are going to be killed. Mrs. Morris has a phone call from a friend who tells her that the game has suddenly become popular amongst children all over the country. Later that day, as the “Zero Hour” of the “Invasion” comes,

it turns out that the kids were not kidding: the invasion is real and the adults are going to be killed.

The protagonist of "The Rocket" is Fiorello Bodoni, a poor junkyard owner with a big family. One night, watching rockets zooming by, he dreams of space travel, as he has been doing for a long time. A friend of his, old Bramante, meets him and tells him that his dreams are useless because even if he can afford a space trip for one of his family – which is the best he can hope for – the rest of the family will hate that person or be "sick with" dreaming of space travel (1951: 173). But Bodoni does not give up and the following morning the Bodoni family pull straws to decide who is going to take the space trip. At this, they realise that Bramante was right: choosing one person is not a viable solution. They agree that the money Bodoni has been saving should be invested in new equipment for the junkyard. However, when somebody offers Bodoni a mock rocket to dispose of, he buys it instead of investing in the new equipment. After an unsuccessful attempt at starting it, Bodoni is close to destroying the rocket but then he has an idea. With the remaining money from his savings, he equips and reworks the mock rocket to invite his family on a space trip. His wife Maria thinks him mad and declines but the children accept his offer. The trip turns out to be a 3-D virtual tour, but the children never realise it. After their "return" Maria expresses her admiration for Bodoni.

"The Rocket Man" appears around the middle of Bradbury's collection. It tells about a rocket pilot who visits his wife, Lilly, and his fourteen-year-old son, Doug, at infrequent intervals. The mother, anxious about the numerous dangers awaiting him in space, says to her son that, should his father die in space, she would not be able to look at the planet where he died. During one of the pilot's stays at home, she demands that her son ask his father not to go to space anymore. But in fact Doug is fascinated by space travel and wants to become a rocket man himself. When Doug's father leaves on another

space mission, he promises that when he comes back this time, it will be for good. The day after his departure, the news comes that “[father’s] ship had fallen into the sun” (1951: 72). This makes Lilly and Doug change to a nocturnal lifestyle “for a long time” (1951: 72). Though the fourteen-year-old protagonist could be considered a child, in actual fact the world of Doug is not a world of childhood. Firstly, Doug is an adolescent rather than a child<sup>2</sup> and secondly, his world is not the world of imagination and his dreams are not separated from the realm of adulthood: he dreams about becoming a space pilot as an adult. Moreover, his dreams do not immediately materialize, unlike Mink’s from “Zero Hour” or Peter and Wendy’s from “The Veldt”. Finally, there is no clash between childhood and adulthood. If Doug is involved in any conflict, it is the conflict between father and mother, i.e. a conflict within the adult world. For all of these reasons “The Rocket Man” is not an object of analysis here.

## **2. Imagination as an essential feature of childhood**

The world of childhood in *The Illustrated Man* seems to feature children’s imagination as its defining characteristic. This claim is suggested by Lahna Diskin as quoted in Pere Gallardo-Torrano’s review of Bradbury’s collection in *Utopian Studies* (2001). What should be particularly noted is the strength of imagination and the fact that children treat it seriously. Sometimes, combined with the impressionable nature of children or with their strong emotions or desires, imagination is capable of endowing the unreal with real existence. The imagination of children is juxtaposed with the adult, rational, down-to-earth approach to life. In “The Veldt”, imagination is combined with hatred excited by parental punishments and results in bringing lions to life. It is the adults’ lack of imagination that pre-

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<sup>2</sup> The distinction between children and adolescents is particularly important in “Zero Hour” as will be discussed further on.

vents them from realizing that the children's fantasies have materialized, and as a result they presumably die. Similarly, imagination and impressionability is what makes the alien invasion possible in "Zero Hour", while the adults are presented as too unimaginative and patronizing to realize the danger in time. It is also the impressionable nature of children that enables them to believe in the "space trip" organized by Fiorello Bodoni in "The Rocket", while the father, obviously, does not fall for the illusion that he has created.

While it seems quite likely that what brings the lions in "The Veldt" to life is the children's imagination aided by hatred for their parents,<sup>3</sup> there is also an interesting technological aspect suggested by the fact that the room itself, or the house, just like Hadley's children, may hate the father "for wanting to switch it off", i.e. for wanting to "kill" it (1951: 15). In his article on "The Veldt", Anthony J. Bernardo claims that it is the house that "makes the lions real" and that, at that point, "the Happylife Home becomes almost godlike. Peter, in fact, regards it as a god" (2004). This, however, is not entirely convincing, because the way Peter addresses the nursery or the house could be interpreted as a command as much as a prayer: "Don't let them do it!" wailed Peter at the ceiling, as if he was talking to the house, the nursery. 'Don't let Father kill everything!', and later, after shutting his parents in the nursery: "Don't let them switch off the nursery and the house" (1951: 17). (In this last instance, he could actually be talking to the lions). It is also interesting to note that from the beginning of the story, the nursery no longer obeys the parents' commands, and the children seem to have taken complete control over it.

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<sup>3</sup> There is at least one other story by Ray Bradbury, "Pillar of Fire" from a 1966 collection *S Is for Space*, where the idea of a monster coming to life out of pure hatred is stated explicitly. It can be assumed that in "The Veldt" the same kind of motivation applies implicitly. However, in "Pillar of Fire" it is not specified whose hatred it is that brings the monster to life, other than his own.

This again supports the interpretation that the children, rather than the house, are the miracle-makers.

Moreover, the context formed by other stories in the collection should also be taken into account. The stories almost always present technology as threatening and harmful to people, but never show it as possessing supernatural powers. In fact, in “The Exiles”, science and rationalism, connected with technology, are placed in radical opposition to the supernatural characters. It may be concluded that while technological equipment acquires certain supernatural features in “The Veldt”, it is only because the children’s feelings and imagination have made it do so. This becomes evident when we consider this transformation in the context of “The Exiles”, where the existence of certain characters requires the belief in them on the part of others. Additionally, characters who owe their existence to other people’s imagination appear in Bradbury’s stories outside of *The Illustrated Man*, for example, in “On the Orient, North” (1988), “Pillar of Fire” (from *S Is for Space*; 1966) and – to some extent – “The Messiah” (1976). The lions, which acquire real, as opposed to merely virtual, existence in “The Veldt”, seem to belong to the same category of characters.<sup>4</sup>

In “Zero Hour” it is again children’s imaginations that seem to bring the aliens to life. In the children’s belief, the aliens’ very existence seems to depend on whether somebody believes in them or not: Mink says that adults “are dangerous [...] ’cause [they] don’t believe in Martians” (1951: 167) and when her mother makes fun of her she tells her, “You’re laughing!

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<sup>4</sup> The fact that the lions owe their physical appearance in the characters’ world not only to Peter and Wendy’s faith but also to their strong emotions, simultaneously places the beasts into another, overlapping class of Bradbury characters, namely those who come into existence as a kind of emanation of other characters’ strong feelings. This category includes such figures as the penitent from “Bless me, Father, for I Have Sinned” (1984), the ghost from “Banshee” (1984) and, especially, the two ghosts from “That Woman on the Lawn” (1996). (The stories “On the Orient, North,” “The Messiah,” “Bless me, Father, for I Have Sinned,” “Banshee” and “That Woman on the Lawn” are collected in *Bradbury Stories: 100 of His Most Celebrated Tales*).



You'll kill Drill and everybody" (1951: 166). Thus, when Mrs. Morris suggests to her daughter that aliens come from her head rather than from Mars, she may be closer to the truth than Mink realises. But it is exactly this suggestion that so irritates the girl. Perhaps the real point of difference between Mink and her mother is not so much whether Martians exist or not but how seriously you treat the products of your imagination.

In "Zero Hour", the power of children's imagination is aided by their impressionability. In fact, being impressionable is shown as definitive of childhood (as opposed to logic, which implicitly defines adulthood). We can see this in the conversation between Mink and her mother:

'Mom?'

'Yes?'

'What's lodge-ick?'

'Logic? Why, dear, logic is knowing what things are true and not true.'

'[Drill] mentioned that,' said Mink. 'And what's im-pres-sionable?' It took her a minute to say it.

'Why, it means – 'Her mother looked at the floor, laughing gently. It means – to be a child, dear.' (1951: 167-168)

The world of adults, in opposition to the world of children, is governed by logic, and it is certainly marked by the lack of imagination. Because of this lack, George and Lydia from "The Veldt", as adults, are unable to fully realize what is happening in their children's nursery: that the walls enact their death in the jaws of lions. They hear screams that sound familiar, but they cannot recognize them as their own. Even when George finds his wallet with traces of saliva and blood, and his wife's blood-stained scarf, the parents are still unable to realize that the objects have materialized out of a 3D film. They sense danger but their rational and logical adult reasoning forces them to dismiss the possibility that anything can step out of the

screen. In “Zero Hour”, Mrs. Morris rationalizes and represses all the eerie facts around her, thus ignoring the danger. Adults’ rational, down-to-earth thinking prevents them from seeing at least some of the things that children see – and also from doing what the children are able to do: for example, Helen, Mrs. Morris’s friend, cannot make the yo-yo disappear, even though Mrs. Morris can plainly see her daughter do so. Thus, the adults’ rationality and logic not only limits their perception but also limits their abilities and makes them vulnerable to dangers that they are unable to see.

Out of the three stories – “The Veldt”, “Zero Hour” and “The Rocket” – the latter is special in that children’s imagination, while still playing a major role, is not shown as a sinister force. In “The Rocket”, the children’s imagination is still a defining feature of childhood and – aided, no doubt, by their impressionability – it enables them to believe the 3D projections to be a real space trip. It seems important, however, that in this story, the children’s world of imagination is not placed in opposition to the world of adults: it is the children’s father who conceives the idea of the “space trip”, which definitely is an imaginative act. Moreover, the father’s attempt proves that he treats his children’s imaginative needs and desires quite seriously. The fact that both children and adults have imagination<sup>5</sup> may be part of the explanation why the children’s imagination does not run amok: the children do not find an opposition to their imaginative world and do not have to fight for it, as in “Zero Hour”. One can notice a certain similarity to “The Veldt” in the presence of the technological aspect: the 3D projection. But in “The Rocket” the children and the adults use the technology together and thus it cannot be used by one against the other. However, it can be noticed that, in spite of sharing in the same imaginative world, it is the father who remains in control and in fact creates the “space trip” for his

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<sup>5</sup> Fiorello’s wife initially shows scepticism but later expresses a wish to engage in the fantasy herself.

children. In contrast to the previously considered stories where the products of imagination assumed physical existence in the fictional world, in “The Rocket” the “trip” remains illusory and is only believed to be real by the children owing to their impressionability. It seems possible to conclude that while children’s imagination has the power to change reality, when imagination is controlled by adults, it remains safely within the sphere of the unreal.

Reflecting on the relation between children and technology Bernardo argues about “The Veldt” that “[t]he nursery reproduces images of the children’s thoughts, in effect becoming their imagination. This relieves the children of the necessity of developing their imagination by contact with the outside world” (2004). Bernardo seems to suggest that the children become passive due to their use of technology, which may appear plausible, especially when Peter says that he “[doesn’t] want to do anything but look and listen and smell” (Bradbury 1951: 13). Nevertheless, the children’s horrid ideas seem to be their own, rather than something fed to them by the nursery: technology does not replace imagination but aids it. Although it is possible to see the children as hooked on technology or addicted to their nursery, technology does not replace imagination. In “Zero Hour”, children’s imagination is equally lethal to adults as in “The Veldt”, even though it has not been perverted by overuse of technology, while in “The Rocket” imagination is not dangerous at all *in spite of* being aided by technology.

### **3. Childhood and adulthood: the worlds in conflict**

*The Illustrated Man* shows children and adults as living in two different worlds which can easily come into conflict, although this conflict is not inevitable. In “Zero Hour”, the conflict between the children and the adults arises out of the very nature of childhood and adulthood: a conflict between (underrated)

fantasy and (overrated) logic. In “The Veldt”, there are actually two conflicts: children against adults and humans against technology. The latter conflict may be seen as triggering the former. However, while the children in “The Veldt” think they are allied with technology, in fact they are its victims just as much as their parents. Of course, the differences between the children’s and adults’ worlds (imaginary versus rational) also play an important part in the children-adults conflict in “The Veldt”, preventing the adults from realizing the danger. “The Rocket” offers a solution to both of these conflicts: the adults treat the children’s fantasy seriously and help them to realize it by employing technology, but the technology is reduced to a minimum. While the adults accompany the children in the realization of their dream of space travel, it may be observed that the rocket remains immobile and the space travel is actually reduced to a 3D show. In “The Rocket” imagination is no longer a sinister and destructive force nor a power able to change reality. It seems significant that “The Rocket”, a heart-warming story, is placed at the end of the collection, immediately after the sinister “Zero Hour”, thus introducing a more optimistic and hopeful twist to the children-adults conflict.

Peter and Wendy, the names of the child characters in “The Veldt”, are, of course, an allusion to the names of the protagonists in J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (Reid 2000: 41, Bernardo 2004). If we compare the two Peter and Wendy pairs, it turns out that Bradbury’s characters share a very important feature with the Barrie characters, namely their almost complete disregard for their parents’ feelings in favour of having a good time – in Neverland or in the nursery, which constitutes a parallel to Neverland, as it is a fantasy-come-true. Children’s callousness in *Peter Pan* is what enables them to fly to Neverland (Barrie 1984: 212-213) and also to forget about their parents for a while. However, in Barrie’s novel it is because children are “gay and innocent and heartless” that they can go to Neverland (1984: 220), whereas in Bradbury’s story it is the

other way around: the children become heartless *because* they go to their “Neverland” too much.<sup>6</sup> Also, in the case of Barrie’s characters the disregard for parents is graded – Wendy is not totally callous, while Peter utterly hates all adults, his own mother included – whereas in Bradbury’s story the children are fully united against the adults. Another parallel is suggested by the fact that in both stories children kill adults: as in *Peter Pan* the killing takes place in Neverland (1984: 178-190), so in “The Veldt” it takes place in the nursery, which is equivalent to Neverland. The intertextual reference to Barrie’s famous story serves to reinforce the theme of children’s potential hatred towards adults, but with a new twist: here the natural clash between the worlds of children and of adults has been aggravated by the children’s addiction to technology.

In the story “Zero Hour”, children are the enemies of adults, too. The conflict is all the more highlighted as there are no more military conflicts in the fictional world, which makes the children-adults conflict appear to be the only conflict in the world. Unlike in “The Veldt”, however, the animosity between children and adults cannot be blamed on the children being spoiled with technology: there are many futuristic inventions in “Zero Hour” but they do not seem to have much influence on the children. If anything can be suggested as an explanation why children in this story should wish adults dead – apart from the fact that the latter force them to wash their ears and forbid them to go to bed late (1951: 167) – it is probably the fact that the adults do not treat the kids seriously enough. No matter what Mink tells her mother, Mrs Morris disregards it as

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<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, in Bradbury’s stories children seem to have a natural predisposition towards cruelty: compare Mink and other children from “Zero Hour”, who aren’t spoiled by any nursery, but still want to kill their parents. The nursery in “The Veldt” is thus what triggers the potential for hatred which is already present in the characters.

irrelevant, even when Mink says it is “a matter of life and death” – as, in the end, it turns out to be indeed.<sup>7</sup>

It is interesting to note that in “Zero Hour” there is also a kind of third party in this conflict, apart from children and adults (and apart from aliens): children of ten and more, who are on the verge of adolescence. The process is marked by the loss of imagination and credulity. Mink scornfully says that such children, i.e. adolescents, are even “worse than parents”, and so they are going to be killed first, while, as far as her parents are concerned, Mink “[wi]ll be sure [they] won’t be hurt much” (1951: 168).<sup>8</sup>

As has been discussed above, the children-adults conflict in “The Veldt” is highlighted by means of an intertextual allusion to *Peter Pan*. By analogy, the story “The Rocket” uses a Biblical allusion to propose a resolution of the conflict. In “The Rocket”, Fiorello Bodoni emerges as a godlike figure because he is a father who creates a kind of universe for his children and, like in the biblical account of creation, he does it within seven days, the seventh day being the day when “The Rocket” stops and the trip ends, which resembles the day when God “had rested from all his work” (Gen 2: 3). The allusion to *Genesis* is made fairly explicit when we read that “Bodoni looked and saw red Mars and it was good” (1951: 181), which is a paraphrase of the words “And God saw the light, that it was good” (Gen 1: 4) and similar phrases at subsequent stages of creation as described in the Bible. A little earlier in Bradbury’s story, Fiorello prays “to himself”: “let nothing happen to the illusion in the

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<sup>7</sup> The idea that children should be treated seriously can also be found in Bradbury’s short story “Screaming Woman” (first published in 1951 and then included in *S Is for Space*) where another girl protagonist meets with disbelief when she reports to her parents a matter of life and death – a woman buried alive – and her report also turns out to be true (in this case, however, the girl manages to convince adults and the woman is saved).

<sup>8</sup> It is also interesting to note that there are characters in the story who are somewhere on the borderline between children and adolescents: these are Joseph Connors (1951: 164) and Peggy Ann (1951: 169).

next six days. Let all of space come and go, and red Mars come up under our ship [...] and let there be no flaws in the color film. Let there be three dimensions [...]. Let time pass without crisis” (1951: 181). These words are reminiscent of God’s words “Let there be light [...]. Let there be a firmament [...] and let it divide the waters from the waters” etc. (Gen 1: 3-26). Although the fact that Fiorello prays “to himself” may simply mean that he prays silently, it can also be a discreet suggestion of his godlike character – in this case as the one to whom prayers are to be addressed. Also, when Fiorello talks to Bramante, the latter says that he “will be just a bit nearer God, in space”, which foreshadows the parallel between Fiorello and God. The Biblical parallel seems to put Fiorello’s undertaking in a good light. What he makes for his children is a delusion, and a costly one, which may ruin the family, but the reference to divine creation makes it a noble act, as does the praise Fiorello receives from his wife at the end.

Apart from the intertextual framework, the difference between the two types of virtual reality – in “The Veldt” and in “The Rocket” – and their effects on people may have to do with the fact that in “The Veldt” it is the children themselves who create their virtual reality, while in “The Rocket” it is the father who produces the illusions for his children and accompanies them while they experience it. It is also very interesting to note that while Fiorello Bodoni shows his children illusory images without the children realising they are illusory, in contrast Peter and Wendy show their parents an illusion which, in turn, the parents do not know has become real.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The three stories – “The Veldt”, “Zero Hour” and “The Rocket” – juxtapose the worlds of children and of adults and present them as two separate realms. All three stories emphasize the power of children’s imagination, which sometimes can make

dreams real. This imagination can be dangerous if it is not paid enough attention. In “The Veldt” and in “Zero Hour”, children are shown as a menace to adults and can actually kill their parents – not directly, but consciously and deliberately. In the words of Robin Reid, Bradbury presents children “as a separate race, hostile and antagonistic to their parents (2000: 51). Reid calls the two worlds “alienated” (2000: 48). “The Rocket” also juxtaposes the two worlds but, unlike in the other two stories, the conflict is avoided thanks to the attitude of the father who treats the imaginative dreams of the children seriously and because technology, which in “The Veldt” is a baleful power, here is under wise control.<sup>9</sup> The juxtaposition of the two stories – “Zero Hour” and “The Rocket” – at the end of the collection gives the three “children” stories, and the book as a whole, a heartening and reassuring twist by suggesting that the child-adult conflict is not inevitable.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> According to Reid, out of all the stories in the collection, even “The Rocket” can “hardly qualify as optimistic” as far as faith in technology is concerned (2000: 39).

<sup>10</sup> This, by the way, is in keeping with the message of the epilogue, which also ends on a hopeful note, thus suggesting that potential menaces in general can be avoided. “The narrator, by the end, believes that the stories predict the future, as shown by his decision to run away when he sees the image of his murder. Since he is able to escape to a nearby town, his survival reveals that the predicted future can be averted by the right action: the future revealed by the stories is not inevitable” (Reid 2000: 39).



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