

"Membangun Budaya Literasi yang Bermutu melalui Kajian Isu Mutakhir"

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## Poetry in Dystopia: Exploring Allusion in "There Will Come Soft Rains" by Ray Bradbury (1950)

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### ABSTRAK

Alusi adalah suatu kiasan dalam karya sastra yang merujuk pada nama tempat, tokoh, peristiwa, atau karya sastra lain yang terkenal, yang menciptakan asosiasi tersirat. Dalam cerita pendek "There Will Come Soft Rain" by Ray Bradbury yang diterbitkan pada tahun 1950, terdapat alusi puisi karya Sara Teasdale dengan judul yang sama. Alusi puisi dalam cerita ini menjadi penting karena memiliki keterkaitan terhadap cerita yang menggambarkan distopia yang ironis, di mana alam akan terus berlangsung tanpa adanya manusia. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori Thomas sebagai metodenya. Ia membagi kiasan menjadi enam sub-bagian, salah satunya adalah referensi tunggal yang merujuk pada konsep yang sudah ada sebelumnya dalam teks eksternal, seperti yang digunakan Ray Bradbury dalam cerita pendeknya "There Will Come Soft Rains" yang merujuk pada puisi Sara Teasdale dengan judul yang sama. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa puisi Teasdale memiliki pengaruh signifikan terhadap cerita pendek Bradbury. Tema keduanya menggambarkan kebangkitan alam pasca-apokaliptik tanpa adanya manusia. Puisi Teasdale menegaskan ironi dalam cerita Bradbury yang menggambarkan kekuatan alam dalam kontras gelap, terlihat dari kehancuran rumah berteknologi tinggi oleh api. Ini menyoroti ketidakberdayaan manusia di hadapan kekuatan alam dan teknologi yang telah mereka ciptakan sendiri. Interpretasi bahwa alam terus berjalan tanpa manusia, mencerminkan ketidakpedulian manusia terhadap lingkungan. Ini menegaskan pentingnya menjaga keseimbangan antara teknologi dan alam demi keberlanjutan hidup manusia.

Kata kunci: puisi, alusi, alam, distopia, apokaliptik

### ABSTRACT

Allusion is a figure of speech in a literary work that refers to a place name, character, event, or another famous literary work, creating an implied association. In the short story "There Will Come Soft Rains" by Ray Bradbury, published in 1950, there is an allusion to a poem by Sara Teasdale with the same title. The poetic allusion in this story is important because it has a connection to the story that describes an ironic dystopia, where nature will continue without humans. This study used Thomas' theory as its method. He divided allusions into six subsections, one of which is a single reference that refers to a pre-existing concept in an external text, as Ray Bradbury uses in his short story "There Will Come Soft Rains," which refers to Sara Teasdale's poetry with the same title. The results show that Teasdale's poetry has a significant influence on Bradbury's short story. The themes of both depict the post-apocalyptic awakening of nature in the absence of humans. Teasdale's poetry emphasizes the irony in Bradbury's story, depicting the power of nature in dark contrast, seen in the destruction of a high-tech house by fire. This highlights the powerlessness of humans in the face of the forces of nature and the technology they themselves have created. The interpretation that nature goes on without humans reflects humanity's indifference to the

environment. This emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between technology and nature for the sustainability of human life.

Keywords: poetry, allusion, nature, dystopia, apocalyptic

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## INTRODUCTION

Poetry by Wallace Stevens is a "revelation of words by means of the words." It is an event in language that transcends the literal meaning of words. This means that poetry contains deep meaning, so that this literary work is sometimes used as an allusion in other literary works such as short stories. In Schwartz (2021), allusions are generally regarded as brief but purposeful references, within a literary text, to a person, place, event, or to another work of literature. According to Wheeler, cited in Tarakcioğlu & Kalipci (2020), the uses of allusion include "to establish a tone, create an implied association, contrast two objects or people, make an unusual juxtaposition of references, or bring the reader into a world of experience outside the limitations of the story itself." In this case, the poem as an allusion can provide a reference to the meaning or experience contained in the poem, which can be used as a reference to further explore the literary work that uses the allusion.

In the short story "There Will Come Soft Rains" by Ray Bradbury, there is an allusion in the form of Sara Teasdale's poem, which has the same title as the story. This poem has a meaning that is intertwined with the content of the short story, so this poem plays an important role in the story. In Bradbury's short story, a house full of high-tech appliances—such as a garden sprinkler that activates automatically to maintain water flow, a stove that cooks food automatically, and a clock that always sounds to remind people of the time—seems pointless in a dystopian setting where no one lives. In the story, Bradbury also alludes to stanzas from Sara Teasdale's poem, which tells of a post-apocalyptic world where nature remains peaceful and beautiful after human extinction. The poem imagines a world where nature continues in the absence of humans, with images of gentle rain, birds singing, and frogs in a pond singing at night. This proves that the two works are related because they share the same theme, which is the state of nature without humans.

In previous research by Numan et al. (2023), Bradbury's short story was analyzed from an ecocritical perspective through the use of dystopian technology, and it was found that Bradbury's story functions as a warning against the potential of dystopian technology and the

need to prioritize human and natural safety as technology develops. Then, Tia (2022) analyzed the transitivity of Bradbury's short story, which focused more on the clause level. In addition, research by AlAjmi (2023) analyzed how Teasdale's poem inspired Bradbury's short story. This research discusses the two authors in terms of their works and compares the two works separately, although there is still a connection. Based on the previous studies, this paper brings novelty by emphasizing more on the allusion of Teasdale's poem that is directly related to Bradbury's short story without linking to the author's background. By analyzing allusion, readers can learn that two different works can be related to each other. As in Bradbury's short story with an allusion to Teasdale's poem, the theme of both, human vs. nature, leads to human negligence towards nature.

This paper aims to explore the deeper meaning of the poem "There Will Come Soft Rains" as an allusion in Ray Bradbury's short story set in an ironic dystopia and also to find out its relationship and function in building the theme and message of Bradbury's short story. By examining the intertextual context, the meaning of the poem related to the story, as well as irony and reflection.

## METHOD

In Thomas's theory (1986) resulting from his research entitled "Virgil's Georgics and The Art of Reference," the typology of allusion divides into six sub-sections: casual reference, single reference, self-reference, correction, apparent reference, and multiple reference or conflation. Based on the typology of allusion above, this paper will refer to a single reference. Single reference refers to a concept that already exists in another text, whether it is a situation, person, character, or object. The author expects the reader to remember the context of the allusion and apply that context in a new situation so as to convey the idea on a level of intense subtlety. In Ray Bradbury's work "There Will Come Soft Rain," there is a single allusion that refers to Sara Teasdale's poem of the same name.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The story centers on the atmosphere of the house, which still carries out human-like routines, even though there are no humans there. This

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depicts the state of nature that can continue without being influenced by human presence. The story alludes to Sara Teasdale's poem with the same title, "There Will Come Soft Rains." This raises the question of why Bradbury made the same title for his short story, as well as quoting every stanza of Sara's poem. Through this analysis, researchers will explain how the allusions in Sara's poem are related to and influence Bradbury's short story in three sub-discussions: intertextuality, the meaning of the poem related to the story, irony, and reflection.

### Intertextuality

Based on the Cambridge Dictionary, intertextuality is the connection between different works of literature and art and the meanings that are created by them. Intertextuality is often associated with postmodernism, particularly with the field of postmodernism where literature meets critical theory. Haberer (2007) states that postmodernism can be viewed as a development of modernism that manifested itself during the first decades of the 20th century, in the years preceding and following the great fracture of the First World War. In this context, the relationship between Bradbury's short stories and Sara Teasdale's poetry will be explained.

Ray Bradbury's short story was published in 1950 and depicts a natural world with advanced technology and a post-war atmosphere. In history, 1950 is the time after World War II in 1945. Meanwhile, Sara Teasdale's poem, published in 1918, the year after World War I, depicts nature through spring in a post-war setting. This can be interpreted that the two works have an intertextual context because the settings are both in a post-war situation. Sara's poem was created first, which may have influenced Bradbury to create a work that could recall the natural conditions in a dystopian setting by developing the theme in a darker contrast. In addition, both Bradbury's short story and Sara's poem contain an air of irony because the development of nature is not accompanied by human existence. This relates back to the atmosphere of postmodernism, which, according to Haberer (2007), leads to a state of irony as a consequence of new developments, such as consumerism, new technologies, and globalization.

Moving on from the background connection between Bradbury's story and Sara's poem, researchers will discuss the other intertextual context of the two works. The title of Ray Bradbury's short story shares the same title as the work used as a metaphor, suggesting an intertextual relationship between the two works,

which emphasize the central theme of nature's resilience. The title contains the phrase 'soft rains'; in the poem, this phrase describes the soft, peaceful rain seen in Teasdale's poem (1918) first line, "There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground", which also signifies that nature continues to unfold with beauty and serenity, emphasizing the sense of rebirth of the post-apocalyptic state. While in Bradbury's short story, the phrase 'soft rains' has a different meaning. It follows the activities of an automated house after all humans have been wiped out, most likely by nuclear weapons. The soft, peaceful rain in this case not only signifies the beauty of nature, but also emphasizes the destruction of humans and their absence.

In Teasdale's poem, the resilience of nature is shown in springtime, "And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn" (Teasdale, 1918, lines 11). Spring, according to the Oxford dictionary, is the season between winter and summer when plants begin to grow. This can be interpreted as the ongoing awakening of nature, which is indifferent to human conflict in the form of war. This is shown in, "And not one will know of the war, not one / Will care at last when it is done." (Teasdale, 1918, lines 7-8).

In Ray Bradbury's short story, one house survives when other buildings have been destroyed, and the house itself remains, but at the end of the story the house is destroyed by fire: "The fire burst the house and let it slam flat down, puffing out skirts of spark and smoke." (Bradbury, 1950, p. 5). This depicts the destruction of the house by fire despite its advanced technology, becoming a metaphor for the destructive forces of nature.

In Sara Teasdale's poem, war is clearly stated, "And not one will know of the war, not one" (Teasdale, 1918, lines 7). Whereas in the short story by Ray Bradbury, war is not mentioned explicitly, it is depicted in the short story that the surrounding buildings are destroyed by nuclear bombs, and there is also a radioactive light visible at night. Nuclear bombs and radioactivity are synonymous with war, which can indirectly lead to a world that has been damaged by war: "At night the ruined city gave off a radioactive glow which could be seen for miles." (Bradbury, 1950, p. 1). In both short stories and poems, the themes raised in the literary works are about how the world continues even after the extinction of humanity.

The difference between the tone in the poem and the short story "There Will Come Soft Rains" is that in Sara Teasdale's poem, the tone is calm, serene, and accepting. The poem portrays nature

as indifferent to human destruction and the struggles of war, emphasizing the idea that nature will go on regardless of what happens. The tone of Ray Bradbury's short stories is more somber and critical. The story depicts the devastating effects of nukes and the destruction of human civilization, as well as highlighting the technology that continues to work without humans, and in the story does not involve human relationships and emotions. Sara Teasdale's poetic style uses neat rhyming couplets and straightforward language to convey her message. The poem presents a simple and peaceful picture of nature, which shows its indifference to human conflict. The style in Ray Bradbury's short stories uses vivid imagery, figurative language, and personification to create a sense of realism and to emphasize the contrast between the beauty of nature and the destruction caused by human actions. The use of futuristic homes and advanced technology adds to the sense of irony and criticism of human dependence on technology.

Thus, the connection between Teasdale's poetic allusions and Bradbury's short story can enrich the discussion of the short story in terms of intertextuality. This contribution includes several important aspects. First, intertextuality helps readers deepen their understanding of Bradbury's short story. This refers to how the allusions to Teasdale's poetry add aspects of interpretation to the themes or messages contained in the short story.

Second, intertextuality opens up the reader's perspective to see how literary works shape each other, either through direct influence or symbolic reflection on themes. By highlighting the relationship between Teasdale's poem and Bradbury's short story, this research provides insight into the way authors use other textual references to enrich or deepen the meaning of their work.

Third, the intertextuality between Bradbury's short story and Teasdale's poem offers a relevant historical context, as both present a dystopian setting. This not only enriches the analysis of themes but also helps explore the dynamics of the development of literary genres and the writing methods used by the authors.

### **Nature vs. Humans**

Broadly speaking, the poetry "There Will Come Soft Rains" symbolizes the insignificance of humans before nature and nature's indifference to humans. This is shown in the fragment of the poem that contains, "There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground, / And

swallows circling with their shimmering sound;" (Teasdale, 1918, lines 1-2).

From the lines of the poem above, it can be seen that nature and its contents seem calm, peaceful, and cheerful, which is described with the soft rains soaking the ground, creating a distinctive fragrance, and birds making cheerful chirping sounds despite the background of the poem that takes place after a war. In addition, nature's indifference toward humans is shown in the lines that contain, "Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree, / If mankind perished utterly;" (Teasdale, 1918, lines 9-10). Then, it can also be interpreted that the lines above suggest that nature will continue to work and develop even if humans perish.

Afterward, the meaning of the poem is alluded to in the story, where the story tells about the abandoned automated house, which takes place after a nuclear war. Furthermore, the house can be symbolized as a form of humanity in the context of indifference to its surroundings. This is proven on the first page, which shows the house doing chores routines such as cooking, cleaning, etc., without caring about its surroundings, even though it is described as: "The house stood alone in a city of rubble and ashes" (Bradbury, 1950, p. 1). From the quote above, it can be understood that the house is focused on itself because it is safe from any impact, so it does not care that the surrounding houses have burned and become ashes, which are most likely burned due to the war. In this way, it indicates just like in the poetry itself that stated nature's indifference to humans that they were perished, which is depicted with the automated house doing chores while other houses are destroyed. However, on page four, when the house started to burn, it can be interpreted that the house panicked and realized because it finally felt that the house did not want it to happen to itself. Which is that it did not want to burn. This is seen in the narration: "The house tried to save itself." Then, if from the beginning the house cares or has a sense of humanity, the house is silent, not doing routines, feeling empty and saddened by the situation of other houses.

Besides, the event when automated houses start to burn can indicate nature's indifference to humanity's demise that wants to erase the only trace of humans, namely automated houses, by burning. Thus, both of the literary works are exploring how nature's indifference to humans, which is nature, will continue to work even if humans perish.

By discussing the themes in Bradbury's short story that highlight the indifference between humans and nature and the allusions to

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Teasdale's poem, this discussion can enrich the understanding of the relationship between humanism and the environment in literature. The study reveals how technology replaces the role of humans, both in creating destruction or beauty. In addition, the discussion highlights the existence of nature that persists despite the extinction of humanity and serves as a social critique of humanity's disregard for the consequences of their own actions.

### Irony and Reflection

As defined by Burgers & Steen (2017), "saying the opposite of what you mean" is how irony was described. Garmendia (2018), in her book entitled *Irony* on page 9, explains that irony is frequently misinterpreted for satire, sarcasm, and parody; some writers tend to identify ironic as being sarcastic or parodic by others. Irony generally gets used as a critique on the previous frame rather than establishing a new one, as the writer can both defend and challenge the frame by critiquing the established frame (Burgers et al., 2016).

Situational irony is employed in Sara Teasdale's poem "There Will Come Soft Rains" in relation to Ray Bradbury's short tale of the same name. Situational irony is unintentional (Garmendia, 2018, p. 6). Zhang (2023) defined situational irony as the contrast between expectation and realization, as well as the discrepancy between general expectation and actual occurrence. This is an example of an irony in affairs or occurrences, demonstrating how little people seem to care that an individual has no influence over their circumstances.

The irony emphasizes how humankind's self-inflicted catastrophe cannot be prevented by technical advancements. In the first page of "There Will Come Soft Rains" (1950) by Ray Bradbury, it is explained that when the clock has rung to remind the time and to remind people of their usual activities, there is no sign of life in it.

*"Eight-one, tick-tock, eight-one o'clock, off to school, off to work, run, run, eight-one! But no doors slammed, no carpets took the soft tread of rubber heels. It was raining outside. The weather box on the front door sang quietly: "Rain, rain, go away; umbrellas, raincoats for today..." And the rain tapped on the empty house, echoing." (Bradbury, 1950, p. 1).*

The data indicates that the house is empty; there are no indications of human habitation, as evidenced by the statement, "But no doors slammed, no carpets took the soft tread of rubber heels." No doors slammed, which might mean that since no one lives in the house anymore, the door did not slam. And since there were no

people there to tread on, no carpet acquired the cushioned feel of rubber heels. In the painting, those who remain human take the shape of a silhouette in paint.

"Ten-fifteen. The garden sprinklers whirled up in golden hues, filling the soft morning air with scatterings of brightness. The water pelted the windowpanes, running down the charred west side where the house had been burned, evenly free of its white paint. The entire west face of the house was black, save for five places. Here is the silhouette in paint of a man mowing a lawn. Here, as in a photograph, a woman bent to pick flowers. Still farther over, their images burned on wood in one titanic instant, a small boy, hands flung into the air; higher up, the image of a thrown ball, and opposite him a girl, hands raised to catch a ball which never came down.

The five spots of paint—the man, the woman, the children, and the ball—remained. The rest was a thin charcoaled layer." (Bradbury, 1950, p. 1-2)

The silhouette in paint depicts activities that humans usually do. Like mowing a lawn, picking flowers, or playing with a ball. But sadly, it only remains in the form of a silhouette in the painting because, in fact, there are no more humans living in that house.

In addition, Ray Bradbury's 1950 short story "There Will Come Soft Rains" describes the catastrophic impact of technological advancement on the environment as well as the fallout from humanity's alienation from the natural world. It follows that this short story falls within the category of ecocriticism. The study of literature requires ecocriticism because characters in literature have an inherent connection to nature, which they either maintain destructively or productively (Fenn, 2015). Ecocriticism, according to Buell (1999), is the study of how literature and the environment interact while maintaining a commitment to environmentalism's practical application. Beyond merely studying nature, further ecocriticism has set itself apart from traditional nature writing, first by emphasizing the relationship between the human and non-human worlds and subsequently by taking an ethical stance and being devoted to the natural environment (Ramadhan et al., 2024).

The story is again classified as ecology since it is set in a post-apocalyptic future in which a nuclear accident has destroyed the ecosystem, and the house now serves as a symbol of the destructive power of human actions. Despite being a relatively young scientific field, ecology has long been a popular issue in literature and art, as Meeker (1997) notes. Meeker first uses

the term "literary ecology" in his book, *The Comedy of Survival*. He defines it as an interdisciplinary study of the works of literature relating to environmental themes and relationships, as well as an attempt to figure out how literature has influenced the ecology of humanity as a whole. Sutton and Anderson (2020) then stated in their book on page 3 that the relationships and interactions within individuals, their physical environments, their biology, and their backgrounds are all examined in the context of human ecology. Environmental anthropology, which is the more "cultural" or humanistic branch of the study, and ecological anthropology, which encompasses a large amount of biological anthropology, are both included in human ecology.

From the first page of the story "There Will Come Soft Rains" by Ray Bradbury, which reads, "[...] The house stood alone in a city of rubble and ashes," we can infer that this is about a nuclear explosion. This house was the only one left. At night, people can see kilometers of radioactive glow radiating from the devastated city. It explains why the city is left in ruins after the nuclear war, with ashes and rubble all over the place. This catastrophe raises the possibility of a catastrophic environmental effect that might harm ecosystems extensively and result in long-term ecological deterioration.

Nonetheless, the beauty of nature is sometimes overlooked. We regularly imagine advances in technology inventions without taking into consideration how they might influence the environment. We unleashed a nuclear blast, for example, which is one of the most powerful bombs capable of eradicating the human race. The narrative thus highlights the significance of understanding the delicate balance between technology and people and illustrates the peril of unchecked technological advancement as well as the value of a responsible approach to integrating technology into human lives. It also indicates how literature may promote sustainability and environmental consciousness.

The connection between irony and reflection as the meaning of Bradbury's short story can enhance the discussion about ecocriticism. Irony occurs because nature and technology are still working even though the humans in the house no longer exist, and the nuclear blast has resulted in the environment around the house being destroyed, leaving only the house. Furthermore, this can increase the discussion of Bradbury's short story in terms of ecocriticism regarding the consequences of the nuclear explosion that occurred in the environment of the house and the irony that was created by it.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, it was found that the deep meaning of Sara Teasdale's poetic allusion has a strong connection and influence on Ray Bradbury's short story with the same title, "There Will Come Soft Rains." The connection includes the same title, especially the phrase 'soft rain,' which has different interpretations but is still interrelated. Then the theme of the two works is also the same, where Teasdale's poem first created describes the post-apocalyptic awakening of nature without humans; this has influenced Bradbury to create a work that could recall the natural conditions in a dystopian setting by developing the theme in a darker contrast—seen from the destruction of the house that was originally the only thing left at that time. The meaning of Teasdale's poem, which relates to Bradbury's story that nature will go on regardless of the existence of humans who have passed away, could reflect the human nature that does not care about the surrounding conditions that are being destroyed. Furthermore, Teasdale's poem that alludes to the irony of Bradbury's story when a fire engulfs the only intact house in a post-war, technologically advanced world. This can reflect the importance of maintaining a balance between technology and nature for the sustainability of human life.

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