

Tender Heart High School Sec-33B, Chandigarh

Class:X 18.11.24. P-1

Subject: English Literature

Prose: The Pedestrian

Synopsis of the story: The story begins with Leonard Mead, a resident of an unnamed city taking a night walk in the year 2053. In fact, Mead has been walking the city streets alone every night for the last ten years. While walking through the empty streets, he passes the homes of citizens, who are inside watching different types of programmes on Television. During his walk on the road since all the people are inside their homes, engrossed in the light entertainment programmes on their Television screens. The other persons are described as if they were dead: “gray phantoms” who live in “tombs.” Mead enjoys his walk taking in the sights, sounds and smells of the natural world. While taking the walk he speaks to himself, and also addresses the people in the homes, asking them what they are watching on television. On a particular night, however, Mead encounters robotic police car—the only one left in the city, as crime has virtually ended. The car interrogates him, trying to know why he is out by himself at night. This enquiry reveals that Mead is a nonconformist in many ways: he is unmarried and lives alone, he is a writer in a society that doesn’t value the written word and does not have a Television set. Upon getting the relevant information about Mead’s nonconformity, the car tells Mead to get in and reveals that he is being taken to a psychiatric institution to be studied for regressive tendencies. As the car drives through the night, Mead recognises his house from the distinctive glow of the bright lights inside.

Title of the Story: The Pedestrian’ is a befitting title for the story by Ray Bradbury as the entire story revolves around the protagonist of the story, Leonard Mead who has been going for night-time walks for the last ten years. In fact, it is his being a pedestrian walking alone on the roads at night that creates the background for the plot of the story and highlights its theme i.e., the dehumanising effect of technology on the people. The story got published in 1951 implying Ray Bradbury, wrote it imagining the situation a century ahead in future. At the time of the story’s inception the popularity of television had increased manifold with large number of households owning television sets. Besides, during this time period, car culture was over American cities and computer technology was on the rise. All this made the Author imagine how these developments would change the city life after a century. The author has predicted that the city would look like a hive of activity during the day with cars filling the streets and at night, the streets would be ‘silent and long and empty’ with every householder remaining indoors, numbed into complacency by his/her television set. It is

against this background that Leonard Mead was walking alone on the deserted streets of a city. This behaviour was seen as nonconformist by the law enforcing agencies as by that time all the householders were indoors, glued to their Television sets. When Mead was questioned later on in the story by the robotic police car, he described himself as a writer, i.e., a person who had his own thoughts and viewpoint; a person who preferred walking outside appreciating nature; a person not watching television. Besides, his purposeless walks, his other nonconformist activities included: following an outdated profession (writer), not using modern technology, and being a bachelor. He is seen as a regressive nonconformist. The robotic police car takes him to the Psychiatric Centre for Research on Regressive tendencies' to cure him of his independent, unorthodox thinking so that he can Fall in line with the rest of the population of the city. Thus, Leonard Mead is identified in the entire story by his singular peculiarity as a 'pedestrian' and hence, justifying the title of the story.