English Essay

Question (4): Discuss how particular values and attitudes are promoted within at least one studied text to challenge an audience.

Individuals in society reflect their own concerns over the direction their community takes in the literature and artistic works of turbulent time-periods. This can be seen in 'Immersion' (2012) by Aliette de Bodard and 'The Pedestrian' (1951) by Ray Bradbury, two science fiction short stories that challenge the ways their technologically inclined audiences view their interaction with technology. 'Immersion' is set in a space dystopia where the Galactic and Rong cultures mimic contemporary issues of racism through the use of Immersers which manipulate appearance to appear ethnically Galactic. On the other hand, 'The Pedestrian' is set in a defunct future of the United States where entire cities spend their nights watching television, and the only citizen who experiences individuality, Leonard Mead, is persecuted. Although both texts were written in different time periods, audiences from both time periods hold a strong interest in technology. Both texts promote an intrinsic value of family, culture and human

connection, alongside a critical attitude towards society's neglect of individuality, and a sceptical attitude towards technology and challenge the progressive attitudes of readers that are passionate about technology.

By presenting unique characterisations that contrast their dull environment, both 'Immersion' and 'The Pedestrian' promote a strong value of human connection in society and challenge their audience's pessimism towards in-person communication. In 'Immersion', de Bodard presents to readers a conversation between Second Uncle and Galactic Galen Santos, when Second Uncle "rubbed his hands, ... a Galactic expression of satisfaction." This characterisation of Second Uncle as a financially driven person who sacrifices his connection to his Rong culture for smoother interactions with his Galactic customers portrays him as immoral in his willingness to discard his cultural norms and values. This further conveys how authentic human connection is lost when Second Uncle actively suppresses his speaking habits. In doing so, de Bodard challenges the audience's indifference towards the necessity for human connection within society. Furthermore, in 'The Pedestrian', Leonard Mead walks down a silent street, asking the houses "What is it now? Eight-thirty P.M.?

Time for a dozen assorted murders? A quiz? A revue?" Through his repetition of rhetorical questions and flamboyant actions, Leonard Mead's characterisation as embracing his freedom while being isolated from society promotes the importance of human connection in contemporary society, as it forces readers to register how bleak and mundane a world without interaction is. In contrast, the audience's value of technology as an indicator of scientific development and their disregard towards traditional values of human connection is challenged, as both texts articulate the dehumanising impacts of technology. Thus, using a subtle dialogue and imagery enhanced by the lack of a response, both texts further promote the significance of human connection to the reader, challenging the audience's more apathetic views on family values.

'Immersion' and 'The Pedestrian' both promote a worried attitude regarding society's disdain for distinctiveness, while challenging their audiences' own beliefs on individuality. In 'The Pedestrian', Leonard Mead is portrayed as the only person "in a city of three million" who regularly walks down the empty streets of the city, rather than conform to society's expectations of him to spend his nights watching television. Bradbury describes how Leonard Mead was "alone in this world", and how walking through the streets "was

not unequal to walking through a graveyard". Bradbury's use of a simile to present the streets as completely devoid of life enhances the unnatural aesthetic of the empty city. In doing so, Bradbury details a society of conformity, demonstrating to audiences a society opposed to individuality. This challenges Bradbury's audience's indifferent attitude towards society's ignorance of individuality, portraying their focus on technological progress as detrimental to societal well-being. Furthermore, de Bodard's 'Immersion' critiques the need for disenfranchised members of society to fit in, and how such changes harms individuality. In 'Immersion', Agnes, a native Rong who chose to constantly wear an immerser to become more Galactic, describes how "It's people like you who have to work the hardest to adjust... the stretched eyes that crinkle in the shapes of moths, the darker skin...". Through the use of imagery, de Bodard presents ethnic Rong people as inhuman and outcasted from the text's society. In doing so, de Bodard condemns contemporary society's ostracism of unique cultures and individuals. Thus, by utilising characterisation via internal monologues, both texts emphasise the necessity for concern regarding modern society's desire for homogeneity and mindless conformity.

Furthermore, both texts advocate a critical approach towards technology and its impact on individuality, challenging their science-fiction audience's endearing values of technology. In 'Immersion', Agnes explains how immersers are "a Galactic toy", and "it takes a Galactic to believe that you can take a whole culture and reduce it to algorithms". This use of a nihilistic, cynical presents a sombre attitude towards technology. de Bodard emphasises how technology can be used to control culture and homogenise society. Similarly, Bradbury's 'The Pedestrian' further describes the uncanny ability for technology to mimic humanity, and its effect as an eradicator of individuality. When describing the "one lone car wandering and wandering the empty streets", Bradbury emphasises how the car would speak "in a metallic whisper", and how "there was no one in the front seat". This personification of the automatic police car seeks to confuse the audience, who respond with unease as the separation between humankind and technology is blurred. The artificial lack of humanity works to promote a fearful attitude towards technology's ability to imitate humans, challenging the audience's endearing and hopeful attitude towards technology. Thus, by utilising personification and dialogue, both texts promote a doubtful attitude towards technology, further

challenging their audiences' own optimistic attitudes towards technology.

Thus, by utilising dialogue, imagery and personification, both texts successfully promote the value of human connection, and antagonising attitudes towards technology's effects on individuality. Furthermore, the texts critiques contemporary society's apathetic attitudes towards individuality, to challenge the more technologically-inclined audience, opposing their optimistic, endearing attitude towards technology, and sense of disregard for technology's effect on individuality. Both text's expression of concern regarding technology's threat to individuality seeks to resonate with their audience and promote their personal uneasiness over the looming threats to modern society. In this way, texts are able to confront their audiences and critique relevant issues with societal progress.

Biblography(Harvard Referencing System):

- Bradbury, R., 1951. *The Pedestrian*. The Reporter.
- de Bodard, A., 2012. *Immersion*. Clarkesworld Magazine.