

Theme: Utopia and dystopia - exploring alternative worlds

Text: Extract from Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953)

He opened the bedroom door.

It was like coming into the cold marbled room of a mausoleum after the moon had set. Complete darkness, not a hint of the silver world outside, the windows tightly shut, the chamber a tomb-world where no sound from the great city could penetrate. The room was not empty.

5 He listened.

The little mosquito-delicate dancing hum in the air, the electrical murmur of a hidden wasp snug in its special pink warm nest. The music was almost loud enough so he could follow the tune.

He felt his smile slide away, melt, fold over, and down on itself like a tallow skin, like the stuff of a fantastic candle burning too long and now collapsing and now blown out. Darkness. [...]

10 Without turning on the light he imagined how this room would look. His wife stretched on the bed, uncovered and cold, like a body displayed on the lid of a tomb, her eyes fixed to the ceiling by invisible threads of steel, immovable. And in her ears the little Seashells, the thimble radios tamped tight, and an electronic ocean of sound, of music and talk and music and talk coming in, coming in on the shore of her unsleeping mind. The room was indeed empty. Every night the

15 waves came in and bore her off on their great tides of sound, floating her, wide-eyed, toward morning. There had been no night in the last two years that Mildred had not swum that sea, had not gladly gone down in it for the third time.

The room was cold but nonetheless he felt he could not breathe. He did not wish to open the curtains and open the french windows, for he did not want the moon to come into the room. So, 20 with the feeling of a man who will die in the next hour for lack of air, he felt his way toward his open, separate, and therefore cold bed.

An instant before his foot hit the object on the floor he knew he would hit such an object. [...] His foot, sending vibrations ahead, received back echoes of the small barrier across its path even as the foot swung. His foot kicked. The object gave a dull clink and slid off in darkness.

25 He stood very straight and listened to the person on the dark bed in the completely featureless night. The breath coming out of the nostrils was so faint it stirred only the furthest fringes of life, a small leaf, a black feather, a single fibre of hair.

He still did not want outside light. He pulled out his igniter, felt the salamander etched on its silver disc, gave it a flick...

30 Two moonstones looked up at him in the light of his small hand-held fire; two pale moonstones buried in a creek of clear water over which the life of the world ran, not touching them.

"Mildred!"

Her face was like a snow-covered island upon which rain might fall; but it felt no rain; over which clouds might pass their moving shadows, but she felt no shadow. There was only the singing of 35 the thimble-wasps in her tamped-shut ears, and her eyes all glass, and breath going in and out, softly, faintly, in and out of her nostrils, and her not caring whether it came or went, went or came. The object he had sent tumbling with his foot now glinted under the edge of his own bed. The small crystal bottle of sleeping-tablets [585]

Annotations

8 tallow - hard animal fat used to make candles (Germ. Wachs) **12** thimble - metal cap used to protect your finger when you are sewing **19** French windows - a pair of doors made mostly of glass, usually opening onto a garden or balcony **30** moonstones – eyes

Assignments:

1) Give a summary of the scene and put it into the context of the novel. [16 points]

2) Work closely on the text to characterize Montag's wife. Draw conclusions about the way of life of ordinary citizens in the world of *Fahrenheit 451*. [22 points]

3) On the basis of this extract and your knowledge of *Fahrenheit 451* as a whole, give an assessment of Bradbury's qualities as a writer of dystopian literature. Consider the aspect of technophobia in your answer. [22 points]