

**MEG - 03:BRITISH NOVEL
ASSIGNMENT 2017 - 2018
(Based on Blocks (1 - 9))**

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1 Ans.

The dominant genre in world literature, the novel is actually a relatively young form of imaginative writing. Only about 250 years old in England—and embattled from the start—its rise to preeminence has been striking. After sparse beginnings in seventeenth-century England, novels grew exponentially in production by the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century became the primary form of popular entertainment.

Elizabethan literature provides a starting point for identifying prototypes of the novel in England. Although not widespread, works of prose fiction were not uncommon during this period. Possibly the best known was Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, a romance published posthumously in 1590. The novel also owes a debt to Elizabethan drama, which was the leading form of popular entertainment in the age of Shakespeare. The first professional novelist—that is, the first person to earn a living from publishing novels—was probably the dramatist Aphra Behn. Her 1688 *Oronooko, or The Royal Slave* typified the early English novel: it features a sensationalistic plot that borrowed freely from continental literature, especially from the imported French romance. Concurrent with Behn's career was that of another important early English novelist: John Bunyan. This religious author's *Pilgrim's Progress*, first published in 1678, became one of the books found in nearly every English household.

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the novel genre developed many of the traits that characterize it in modern form. Rejecting the sensationalism of Behn and other early popular novelists, novelists built on the realism of

Bunyan's work. Three of the foremost novelists of this era are Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, and Samuel Richardson. Defoe's name, more than that of any other English writer, is credited with the emergence of the "true" English novel by virtue of the 1719 publication of *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. In the work of these three writers, the realism and drama of individual consciousness that we most associate with the novel took precedence over external drama and other motifs of continental romance. Contemporary critics approved of these elements as supposedly native to England in other genres, especially in history, biography, and religious prose works.

A number of profound social and economic changes affecting British culture from the Renaissance through the eighteenth century brought the novel quickly into popular prominence. The broadest of these were probably the advances in the technology of printing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which made written texts—once the province of the elite—available to a growing population of readers. Concurrent changes in modes of distribution and in literacy rates brought ever increasing numbers of books and pamphlets to populations traditionally excluded from all but the most rudimentary education, especially working-class men and women of all classes. As the circulation of printed material transformed, so did its economics, shifting away from the patronage system characteristic of the Renaissance, during which a nation's nobility supported authors whose works reinforced the values of the ruling classes. As the patronage system broke down through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, authors became free agents in the literary marketplace, dependent on popular sales for their success and sustenance, and thus reflecting more and more the values of a predominantly middle-class readership. The demand for reading material allowed a greatly expanded pool of writers to make a living from largely ephemeral poetry and fiction.

These monumental changes in how literature was produced and consumed sent Shockwaves of alarm through more conservative sectors of English culture at

the beginning of the eighteenth century. A largely upper-class male contingent, reluctant to see any change in the literary status quo, mounted an aggressive "antinovel campaign." Attacks on the new genre tended to identify it with its roots in French romance, derided as a sensationalistic import antithetical to English values. The early targets of these attacks were those writers, including Behn, Eliza Haywood, and Delarivier Manley, who had produced original English prose "romances" based on the conventions of the French style. At the same time, however, more women in particular were writing novels that made a display of decorum and piety, often reacting to detractors who charged that sensationalistic tales of adventure and sexual endangerment had the potential to corrupt adult female readers and the youth of both sexes. The outcome of this campaign was not the demise of the novel, but the selective legitimization of novels that displayed certain, distinctly non-romantic traits. These traits became the guidelines according to which the novel as a genre developed and was valued. Most venerated by this tradition are the three leading eighteenth-century male novelists: Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding. Modern students of the novel are often unaware of the tumultuous controversy that attended its first steps at the end of the seventeenth century. For the most part, feminist scholars have been responsible for generating the recovery of the novel's earliest roots and for opening up discussion of its cultural value in its many different forms.

2 Ans.

For Jane Austen love was absolutely necessary for a good marriage. However, in English society at the time, which is depicted in the novel, love is not the greatest consideration for marriage. The ideal goal for marriage is to marry someone financially capable of supporting you. Love is secondary. Austen mocks this practice in the book.

For example, Mrs. Bennett is constantly reminding her daughters about the rule that since there is no male heir among her children, that their home will pass out

of their family to the next male in the family, Mr. Collins. The Bennetts will be homeless when Mr. Bennett dies. So it is imperative that the girls, especially Jane and Lizzy, find husbands who can provide them with a home and possibly their mother and sisters as well.

Marriage is considered an arrangement between parties who occupy the same social level. Love is certainly a necessary consideration, but not required for a good match. For example, Darcy has been promised to Lady Catherine Debourgh's daughter since birth.

Even though he does not love her, he is supposed to marry her. Darcy is an exception, since he does fall in love with Lizzy, but is reluctant, at first to court her because he believes that her family is socially inferior. Darcy and Lizzy's marriage is an example of both love and financial security coming together. She and Jane both marry men who not only love them but can support them well.

Austen, through the image of Lizzy, projects her opinion on love and marriage: she is clearly a woman who believes in marrying for love and I expect that many of her personality traits are possessed by Lizzy, perhaps it is with this level of intimacy and openness that she has discretely (and perhaps subconsciously) projected herself into a character so as to make Elizabeth a reflection of herself. It is within the physical form of Lizzy that the authorial view is made clear.

I suppose I shall have to follow suit in the beginning of an essay of *Pride & Prejudice*. Where else could I start, other than one of the most famous quotes ever:

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a large fortune must be in want of a wife."

This practically sums up everything that any gentleman or gentle lady living in the late 1790's and onwards would have had to have known. It

is to them, what the 10 commandments are to Christians, what nuts are to squirrels, what a mouse is to a cat- something that they (apologies for generalisations!) would follow and believe religiously. It is a rather frivolous and pointless expression; that no rich man should be without a wife at home or by his side, answering to his 'beck and call'- feminists would have a field day if they were to travel back to this period!

There are many examples of 'good' and 'bad' marriages, unfortunately, more 'bad' in regards to the lack of basic marriage components in the relationship. For example, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, who demonstrate how not to marry for lust, let alone without true understanding of each other. Throughout the novel we are presented with incidences whereby they expose their incapability to parent, their lack of control and, specifically directed at Mrs. Bennet, her immaturity and frivolity: "A single man of large fortune; four or five thousand a year. What a fine thing for our girls!"

3 Ans

A major theme in George Eliot's novel, *Middlemarch*, is the role of women in the community. The female characters in the novel are, to some extent, oppressed by the social expectations that prevail in *Middlemarch*. Regardless of social standing, character or personality, women are expected to cater to and remain dependent on their husbands and to occupy themselves with trivial recreation rather than important household matters. Dorothea and Rosamond, though exceedingly dissimilar, are both subjected to the same social ideals of what women should be.

Dorothea and Rosamond are on different levels of the intricate social spectrum in *Middlemarch*. As a Brooke, Dorothea's connections "though not exactly aristocratic, were unquestionably good". Although Dorothea and Rosamond

enjoy similar amenities such as servants, the detailed social continuum of Middlemarch separates them.

Dorothea Brooke — An intelligent, wealthy woman with great aspirations, Dorothea avoids displaying her wealth and embarks upon projects such as redesigning cottages for her uncle's tenants. She marries the elderly Reverend Edward Casaubon, with the idealistic idea of helping him with his research project, *The Key to All Mythologies*. However, the marriage was a mistake, as Casaubon does not take her seriously and resents her youth, enthusiasm, and energy. Her requests to assist him makes it more difficult for him to conceal that his research is years out of date. Because of Casaubon's coldness during their honeymoon, Dorothea becomes friends with his relative, Will Ladislaw. Some years after Casaubon's death she falls in love with Will and marries him. Dorothea's marriage and early days with her husband, Lydgate's words of proposal to Rosamond. But Eliot is marvelous, once again, in probing the psychological depths within a character. Dorothea is struggling to resolve two questions just before she learns of Casaubon's , death. One posed by her husband is asking for her unconditional, blind surrender to his will, whatever that may be. The other is a self questioning whether she can any longer, believe and trust in "The Key" and its author that she had considered her duty in marriage. (519) "She simply felt that she was going to say "Yes" to her own doom (522) but she never says it. Casaubon is found dead in the garden. In principle, the romantic individualism of Dorothea tries to exercise a choice in preserving some independent space for herself, knowing as she does the harsh appropriating nature of Casaubon. The romantic is in conflictual relation with "the immutable social laws" (Eagleton's phrase) of mid-Victorian ideology. An over expression of free spirit will cause ethical imbalance and social disharmony - tear the fabric of society upon which the 'laws' of institutions such as marriage are grounded. The institution gives authority to the husband. Casaubon's will contained dreadful codicil that casts an ugly shadow upon

Dorothea's friendship with Ladislaw. A personal matter is subjected to open scrutiny, an individual joy and innocence turns into public humiliation. The conflict between 'duty' and freedom finds expression in one of the finest passages in *Middlemarch* in Chapter 50, beginning, "Her world was in a state of convulsive change. . . ."

4 Ans.

There is a definite sense in which in this text there is equal presentation of material that could be considered comic as well as as cosmic. There is definitely lots of comic material in the collision between West and East as depicted in the attempts of the British to understand, or not understand, the Indians they live alongside and rule. Consider for example the Bridge Party that is organised apparently to help bring the two races closer together. In the end, it only serves to highlight the differences between the English and the Indians and make them more profound. The uneasy coexistence between these two races and the misunderstandings made, mostly on the part of the British, is something that dominates the novel.

However, what is also apparent is the very real sense in which Forster in this novel explores the cosmic. This sense of the divine is shown to transcend any individual religion and go beyond and above such limiting factors. Note for example what Mrs. Moore experiences as she goes into the cave:

The crush and the smells she could forget, but the echo began in some indescribable way to undermine her hold on life. Coming at a moment when she chanced to be fatigued, it had managed to murmur, "Pathos, piety, courage-- they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value." If one had spoken vileness in that place, or quoted lofty poetry, the comment would have been the same--"ou-boum."

As she enters the cave, the sounds that Mrs. Moore hears diminishes her world view and her beliefs about religion, the world and morals to nothingness. She

loses "her hold on life" and forces her to question the meaning in what she thought she believed. As this comes just after her championing of Christian values to Ronny, it is clear that Forster is juxtaposing these two experiences to highlight the sense of the cosmic in this text and the way that it challenges narrow notions of God and religion. Both humour and an overarching sense of the divine are therefore explored.

Forster's "A Passage to India" is a window to India and Indian culture at a time it was reeling under the British rule. The novel highlights several salient issues including the menace of imperialism that was destroying the cultural wealth of the British colonies. However, the damage was deeper Foster highlights in his novel which became clear with the Indian partition. The British are a comic institution, occupying others' land by force, playing Gods for them. Forster's description of the Indian culture in his novel is particularly notable. The Britishers speak of India as a lesser nation and culture that they hold by force for its benefit. Forster's India opens with a description of the locale Chandrapore where most of the initial tale is set. It is a small, nondescript town. There is nothing notable about it except that nature decides its shape and form. The town keeps changing its form with the changing tide of the river. It is just like another piece of earth, rising here and falling there. As far from clamor Chandrapore may appear, it is just as alive inside. Despite its lack of significance, Chandrapore is important. In Forster's novel, Chandrapore represents a mini India. Forster highlights how the Indians are reeling under the British rule, being treated as an inferior race and culture. He also highlights the inner divisions of the Indian society. Still, however, prominent these divisions be, India is one and unique in itself. Forster's intention also is to portray the many India's that exist within India. The British occupation is the most miserable part of the Indian story. For the British imperialists, India is nothing but a piece of land to be occupied by force and ruled. The British imperialism

had affected Indian socio-cultural fabric. The comic attitude of the British characters portrayed in the novel is not a bit exaggerated.

A major concern of *A Passage to India* is the cultural clash between imperial British and native Indians. Forster presents grave social and political commentary with his depiction of the wardens of the British Empire, and he captures the public and personal chaos evoked by the unraveling practice of conquest and domination. Where a pre-Conrad novel might approve of men willing to leave the comforts of home to convert pagans or to forge new paths toward wealth and colonization, Forster does not. Instead, the text mocks the chilling arrogance of such a notion and shows how such folly cannot be sustained. Even Adela, who arrives in India with pure intentions, slips gradually from her higher purpose to seek the "real India" into the herd mentality of people like her fiancé Ronny and the other British colonialists who are members of the whites-only Club. In the novel's opening pages, native Indians discuss the recurring phenomenon of "acquired disillusionment," foreshadowing the novel's later moral crisis by stating, "They all become exactly the same, not worse, not better."

5 Ans.

Miss Brodie is a spinster school teacher at an exclusive school for "young ladies" in Scotland (The Marcia Blaine School for Girls). Her fiancé has been killed in World War I, so Miss Brodie has devoted herself to "her girls" - the Brodie Set, as they are called. She is a non-conformist teacher who believes the curriculum at Marcia Blaine is dull and boring, so she teaches her girls much more exciting things - like theatre, poetry, history, art - all with a flair for the dramatic. The girls learn to pretend to be doing "maths" or some dull history lesson when the headmistress walks in, when in fact, they are studying something much more avant garde and exciting.

She is also non-conformist in her personal relationships. As a single, female teacher at a girls' school in post WWI Europe, she would be expected to be

prim, proper and chaste. Miss Brodie is none of these things. In fact, she has sexual relations with two male teachers at the school, one of whom is married. She is fond of telling her girls that she is "in her prime" which has much more of a sexual meaning than the girls realize at first.

Miss Brodie is also somewhat nonconformist in her political views. She is very naive. She admires the order that she sees in the fascist countries of Spain (under Franco) and Italy (under Mussolini), but is apparently ignorant of the oppressive nature of such governments. While the rest of Europe was looking in fear at the rising powers in Spain, Germany and Italy prior to WWII, Miss Brodie has just the opposite views of these regimes, which ultimately proves her undoing as she is dismissed from her position because of her views.

The Dangers of Social Conformity Exposed in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*
Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* depicts the coming of age of six adolescent girls in Edinburgh, Scotland during the 1930's. The story brings us into the classroom of Miss Jean Brodie, a fascist school teacher at the Marcia Blaine School for Girls, and gives close encounter with the social and political climate in Europe during the era surrounding the second World War. Spark's novel is a narrative relating to us the complexities of politics and of social conformity, as well as of non-conformity.

Their desire to achieve autonomy is concealed by their conformity to the dictates and prophecies. Miss Brodie's demands and prophecies, after all, offer the girls thrilling visions of adulthood — running away, illicit sexual identities, earning money, and adventuring. As the girls perceive increasingly Miss Brodie's constricting rather than enlarging effects, the motives for maintaining their loyalty become considerably strained. According to Auerbach, Miss Brodie's innovative vision of female community selectively appropriates patriarchal strategies of group formation and power. The set thrives "not because it withdrew from men and history, but because it assimilated them" (188). The Brodie girls' self-regard as an élite, or as Miss Brodie puts it

repeatedly, “the crème de la crème,” gives them secure identities and life narratives that accord with Miss Brodie’s own unusual conceptions, a security that creates an ultimately dangerous and “fascinating satisfaction” (Deleuze and Guattari 225). In other words, the Brodie set deterritorializes older patriarchal conceptions of femininity in order to reterritorialize women’s bodies with an even more pervasive network of power relations. The ways in which the set operates resonate with British fascist policy’s patriarchal address of “modern women.”

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