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BRITISH LITERATURE: EARLY 20TH CENTURY

B.E.G.C.-112

B.A. English (Hons.) - 5th Semester

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**Sample Preview
of the
Solved
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Papers**

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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2023

(Solved)

BRITISH LITERATURE: EARLY 20TH CENTURY

B.E.G.C.-112

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks : 100

Note: All questions are compulsory.

Q. 1. Explain the following passages with reference to the context:

- (i) “But when Evans (Razia who had seen him once called him “a quiety main”, a sturdy, red-haired man, undemonstrative in the company of women), when Evans was killed just before the Armistice in Italy, Septimus, far from showing any emotion or recognising that here was the end of a friendship, congratulated himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably. The War had taught him. It was sublime.”

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from *Mrs. Dalloway* written by Virginia.

Explanation: All of these are conspicuously absent from Mrs. Dalloway. The novel tells the story of a mental state in which Clarissa finds herself. Many characters in Mrs. Dalloway are dealing with serious issues. An omniscient narrator holds the thread of their thoughts. Time is the common thread that binds those characters to Clarissa. They co-exist with Clarissa in the London of the 1920s. Clarissa is also aware that the world she lives in is complex and fraught with contradictions. She would meet a lot of people she doesn't know on the road. They do, however, exist. This could explain why her life, family, and neighbourhood mirror those of others outside her personal circle.

Septimus Warren Smith and his wife Lucrezia come to mind as an example. Septimus is from England, and his wife is from Italy. Aside from the history of his love affair and marriage, there is a series of events in which he was involved. He was a soldier during the First World War. He had a friend named Evans there. The two fought together on the battlefield until Evans was killed by a gunshot in front of Septimus' eyes. Septimus has been haunted by the guilt of Evans' death. As a result, he has two

personalities. Throughout the novel, he sees the ghost of Evans and enters imaginatively into the scene of the war from a long time ago.

- (ii) “Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight;”

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from ‘The Second Coming’ by W.B. Yeats.

Explanation: The title “The Second Coming,” which just has three letters, makes clear the idea of time span. The poet believes that Christ's second coming will be to save mankind from ultimate devastation as proven by the First Earth War, just as Christ's first entry into the world was to save men and women from their sins and punishments. The poem contains obscurity and imagery. It is both a lament for the passing of the old world and a declaration of optimism for the potential resuscitation of a new one. To illustrate its point, the poem makes use of the apocalypse and the second coming of Christ as symbols from the *Bible*.

The “Second Coming” is merely an event that people hope will happen, and given the reality of the disastrous conflict, only darkness remains where people imagine there would be light. This makes the poem incredibly pessimistic about what will actually happen.

“Yeats believed that history is cyclical, and his poem ‘The Second Coming’— a two-stanza poem in blank verse – with its imagery of swirling chaos and terror, prophesies the cataclysmic end of an era. Critics associated the poem with various contemporary calamities, such as the Easter rising of 1916, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the rise of fascism, and the political decay of eastern Europe.”

(iii) "There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt.
I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different;
this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us,
Like Death, our Death."

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from *Journey of the Magi* by T.S. Eliot.

Explanation: The Magus, the speaker, claims that they would do the same journey again if they had to because going to Bethlehem to see the wonderful event was more than enough. But the encounter raises the question: Did they travel for life or for death? They were present when Jesus was born. However, the birth of Jesus, his death, and the founding of Christianity go far beyond our ridiculous and childish ideas of life and death.

When Jesus was born, their pagan religion perished along with the arrival of the Son of God. They felt foreign to their old pagan environment and that all of their idols were untrue when they returned to their countries.

Jesus' death marks the beginning of a new era and a new religion. The speaker comes to the conclusion that he would be content to experience another death in order to witness such a wonderful birth.

(iv) "Yet he wasn't scab or odd in his views,
For his Union reports that he paid his dues,
(Our report on his Union shows it was sound)
And our Social Psychology workers found
That he was popular with his mates and
liked a drink."

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from "The Unknown Citizen" by W.H. Auden.

Explanation: The poem is straightforward and just has 32 lines. It is simple to understand because the issue pertains to the present, when tension between the State and the people is a common occurrence. The poem is written in the style of a sarcastic elegy, fusing the literary forms of satire and elegy. A song or poem that expresses sadness or lamentation, particularly for a deceased person, is called an elegy. A satire is a literary genre in which human or individual vices, follies, and weaknesses are exposed through mockery, contempt, burlesque, irony, parody, caricature, or other techniques, sometimes with the aim of inciting social reform rather than just mockery. In a sarcastic elegy, the elegy is employed to accomplish a mission

that is completely counter to its original intent. In *The Unknown Citizen*, Auden bemoans the loss of man's uniqueness caused by forcing him to abide by the regulations set forth by the state or society to guarantee its flawless operation. This poem abides by these standards at all times, so the government has no reason to file a complaint against him. They view him as an example of a disciplined citizen, but in truth, a man's life entails much more than simply following laws. Such an existence is incompatible with the exercise of any human faculties, feelings, or desires.

From the wording and subject matter of the poem, it may be inferred that the speaker is a bureaucrat serving as a government spokesperson. The person to whom the elegy is addressed is identified only by the letters and numbers JS/07 M378. The tone of the poem is established by this kind of address by the speaker's voice, which is heard but not seen. It lacks empathy and sensitivity and is impersonal and formal. The speaker stands in for the nameless, heartless, and merciless bureaucracy of the State or Government who exercises power over the unnamed citizens while posing as a sympathetic, helpful, and caring force.

The person (JS/07M378) has been stripped of his individuality to the point where the only people who can identify him are the many government organisations that monitor his life to ensure that he is a compliant and willing subject wholly submissive to the powers above him. The faceless and nameless person is portrayed as an ideal citizen who is prepared to renounce his individuality in order to adhere to the standards established by the State or government in order to preserve its totalitarian control. In essence, this is the ongoing fight between the government and the populace. The divide between the population and the Superpower structures deepens when the latter erects a totalitarian dictatorship.

(v) "I think continually of those who were truly great.

Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history

Through corridors of light, where the hours are suns,

Endless and singing."

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from *The Truly Great* by Stephen Spender.

Explanation: The first line of the poem, "I think continually of those who were Truly Great," gives us a hint that the poet is referring to the historically

SOLVED QUESTION PAPER (EXAM HELD IN JUNE-2023)/3

significant figures and how thinking about them repeatedly suggests that the past and present are always intertwined, making all of those historically significant people related to us across time. As the poem goes on, it becomes clear how closely they resemble perpetual nature, which grants them perpetuity. Their memories are impervious to time. These genuinely great heroes are everywhere and help us understand the relationship between nature, the magnificence of Man, and their perennity. They are like nature, which is constantly present in sunshine, spring blossoms, snowy mountains, and lush green meadows.

Q. 2. Write short notes on the following:

(i) Modern British Drama of the early twentieth century.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 40, Q. No. 1.

(ii) Post-modernism.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 6, 'Post-modernism'.

(iii) British War poetry of the early twentieth century.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-15, Page No. 137, 'Introduction'.

(iv) The stream of consciousness technique.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-9, Page No. 87, Unit End Question.

(v) The early novels of D.H. Lawrence.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-6, Page No. 58, 'Early Novels'.

Q. 3. Answer the following questions:

(i) Discuss how early twentieth century British literature has dealt with the issue of women's rights and the women's movement.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-5, Page No. 53, Q. No. 3.

(ii) How does the novel *Mrs. Dalloway* engage with the trauma caused by the First World War?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-12, Page No. 111, Q. No. 1.

(iii) Explain the significance of the symbols in the poem 'Journey of the Magi'.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-14, Page No. 130, 'Symbolism in the Poem'.

(iv) Discuss the biblical and historical contexts of the poem 'The Second Coming'.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-13, Page No. 118, 'The Historical and the Biblical Contexts'.

Q. 4. Write an essay on the following:

(a) Attempt a psychoanalytic reading of the novel *Sons and Lovers*.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-8, Page No. 78, Q. No. 3.

Or

(b) Write a critical analysis of the poem 'I think continually of those who were truly great'.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-16, Page No. 150, 'Analysis of the Poem'.

Sample Preview of The Chapter

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BRITISH LITERATURE: THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

BLOCK-1: MODERNISM



Introduction to Modernism

INTRODUCTION

The term “Modernism” refers to the literature produced in the first thirty years of the 20th century. Prior to this, the literary styles are categorised under the headings of Classicism, Romanticism, Neo-Classicism, and Victorian. The term “Postmodernism” refers to the literature of the second half, which began at the end of World War II and continued until the 1990s, while “Post-postmodernism” or “Meta Modernism” is used to describe the literature of the last thirty years, which led to the present. This chapter will examine how modernism and post-modernism relate to the literature of the two periods.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

WHAT IS MODERNISM?

In contrast to the distant past, “modern” refers to the current or recent times. Modernism is a rupture with the past and a parallel search for new ways to express oneself through literature, the visual arts, architecture, dance, and music. Modernism in the 20th century denotes a time when all kinds of artistic and aesthetic expression were being experimented with. Although it should be noted that the conclusion of the Victorian era (1900) signalled the beginning of a new style in all disciplines of art and literature, modernism is visible in the writings of the years after World War-I (1914-18).

In England, the Victorian era saw notable scientific and social advancements as well as a rapid expansion of industrialisation, particularly in the latter half of the 19th century. A significant migration from rural to urban areas caused by industrial development resulted

in significant societal changes. In social sciences like psychology, Freud’s theories offered psychoanalysis for the treatment of mental illness and described human behaviour. Alternative ways of expressing new political and philosophical conceptions were required. Modernists had a rising sense of estrangement from Victorian conservatism, which was founded in Victorian morality and in a society based on class and gender hierarchy, optimism and customs.

New concepts in philosophy, psychology, and political theory sparked an interest in finding fresh ways to express oneself. All of these led to a fundamental change in form and content in 20th-century literature and art. The term “modern period” refers to the first three decades of the 20th century (about 1900-1930). After 1945, or around the time World War II ended, the postmodern era began. It lasted approximately three decades in the second half of the 20th century and began to supplant modernism in the 1960s.

THE RISE OF MODERNISM AND POST MODERNISM

The major factors that gave rise to modernism and post-modernism are: (i) the rise of the new modern industrial societies that contributed to the rapid growth of cities, and (ii) the two World Wars which caused great destruction and extensive loss of life. The level of humanity displayed during the two World Wars was not a recent occurrence. Since the time of the *Mahabharata* War, man-on-man violence and cruelty have existed among people who have a shared origin but are separated by race, religion, and civilization. However, the profound shock it delivered to the conventional notion that “God is in Heaven/All is Right with the World” in the 20th century was novel

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and contributed to scepticism regarding the presence and existence of God. The question, "If God is in Heaven, why isn't everything perfect in the world?" caused sceptics to doubt both God's existence and the reassuring truth of religious belief in the rightness of the divine. Man's connection with God evolved from belief to agnosticism to non-belief. There was less reliance on God and His gracious intervention to make things right. On the plus side, this led to a view of human existence and society that was utopian, one that believed in human progress and the ability to move forward without waiting for divine favour. It nearly echoed Zarathustra's prophesied proclamation from the last quarter of the 19th century, "Away with such a God! It is better to have no God, to control one's own fate, to be foolish, and to be one's own God. As the logical next step in the development of the evolutionary order, Nietzsche urged man to become a Superman.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERNISM

In its early stages, modernism was a reaction against established forms of literature, philosophy, culture, and society. It later spread to other aspects of daily life, including architecture, fashion, means of transportation, and connection. The conflict between the ancient and the new was symbolised by modernism. In order to function in the new economic, social, and political environment of a contemporary competitive, industrialised world, it rejected all conventional forms as irrelevant and out-of-date. Ezra Pound's call to "Make it new!" propelled writers and artists to reevaluate long-standing cultural, aesthetic, and religious norms and bring about change in all spheres of life. In literature and the visual arts, aesthetic modernism first emerged in the 20th century. Different art movements, such as: Dadaism, Surrealism, Cubism, Constructivism, Minimalism, Vorticism, Futurism, and Fauvism, emerged in painting between 1890 and 1910, in contrast to earlier styles such as Classicism, Gothic art, Baroque, Naturalism, Realism and Romanticism, to mention a few. In other words, realistic painting or the portrayal of reality in art was dropped. Similar to this, in music, melody and harmony were abandoned in favour of atonalism and indeterminacy, allowing a musical work to be performed in a variety of significant ways rather than just one fixed way. It signalled the end of all prevailing aesthetic traditions and the introduction of complete aesthetic freedom in all facets, including melody, rhythm, harmony and tone.

Instead of the earlier ornamental designs, geometric forms were the new trend in building. The

emphasis was on functionalism and minimalism, and adornment was rejected. It made advantage of open spaces and cutting-edge construction techniques, particularly the use of glass, steel, and reinforced concrete. In literature, experimental forms such as open endings, symbolism, individuality, formalism, and absurdity replaced classic realism, closed endings, chronological storylines, and successive narratives. Thus, modernism brought about transformations in literature, the arts, culture, and society. Modernism had a nostalgic longing for all those lost pieces of the earlier age even as it began on a rebellious note against tradition.

T. S. Eliot expressly states in his poem "The Wasteland" from 1922, "These fragments I have shored against my doom." This one line perfectly captures a dejected melancholy for what has been lost. In the absence of a viable successor, the loss of all the certainties that had hitherto supported society had created a void. Four years after World War I ended in 1918, the novel "The Waste Land" was published. Eliot was impacted by the war's emotional and spiritual dryness, which was both its root and effect. Humans had lost confidence in God and religion, and without a solid foundation to lean on, they were adrift and had even lost their zest for life.

They had no chance of redemption, lived in disillusionment and despair, and had no chance of moral or spiritual regeneration. They were living a life of death. The only things left were the damaged cultural remnants of a long-gone era that could still be repaired and held out a glimmer of hope.

Eliot's "The Wasteland" reflected the period's mental, emotional, and spiritual desolation. The poem's final "Om Shanti" triple repetition comes out more as wishful thinking. Eliot's poetry reflected the sterility of emotions and the paralysis of the mind, where the spirit looked to be defiled and the brain appeared paralysed. We have not perished; we are dead, as one Holocaust survivor remarked.

What is most tragic is that they have succeeded in killing all sense of a human life in our past, all sense of normal human beings endowed with a normal past, up to even the very consciousness of having existed at one time as human beings worthy of this name. They have managed to kill not only our right to life in the present and for many of us, to be sure, the right to a future life. Innovative and experimental in both form and subject, modernist literature. The first three decades saw the peak of these experimental texts, which then gradually decreased during the following two decades.

INTRODUCTION TO MODERNISM / 3

Modernism began to decline during the Second World War (1939-1945), and less than 20 years later, postmodernism took its place as the preeminent theory. Between 1910 and 1930, great English poets, artists, and novelists like: T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Virginia Woolf, Wallace Stevens, and Gertrude Stein, as well as French and German authors like Marcel Proust, Stephane Mallarme, Andre Gide, Franz Kafka, and Rainer Maria Rilke, produced some of the best works in England and Europe. Their writings were notable for:

1. Highlight subjectivity and impressionism.
2. Disliking literary elements that undermine objectivity, such as omniscient external narration, clearly stated moral stances, and set narrative points of view.
3. There is a blurring of genres, with poetry reading more like prose documentaries and novels being more poetic and lyrical.
4. Fragmented shape, sporadic storytelling, mounting of collages made of various materials, and
5. A propensity for reflection, in which books or poems provoke questions about readers' status and nature.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism first emerged in the 1960s. Postmodernism shares many characteristics with modernism, including its eclectic approach, the use of fragmented forms, a propensity for aleatory writing, and the absence of the omniscient narrator. However, the two genres' moods, attitudes and perspectives regarding these three elements differ. Regrets at having lost those remnants from the past era are a hallmark of modernism. The quote from Eliot above expresses a dejected longing for what has been lost. However, the postmodernist rejoices in the fragmentation because it frees him or her from rigid belief systems.

The second distinction has to do with the tone or attitude of the piece. The overly complex art forms of the 19th century were criticised in modern literature, art, and architecture. One of the characteristics of modernism was ferocious asceticism. Modernist designers avoided ornamentation, emphasising that a home is a machine for habitation. The amazing thing about this great idealism was that it still had the ability to move people, despite its ascetic nature and rejection of all aesthetic embellishment. This is mirrored in the minimalism and the reduction of poems to two-word lines in postmodern literature from the 1950s, which

was published just after the end of World War II. The minimalist plays Samuel Beckett created – plays with a stage time of just 13 minutes, plays with just one speaker, plays with no set and the bare minimum of faded and torn jeans and shirts for costumes – contained profound observations on the meaninglessness of life as well as on the futility and absurdity of existence.

POSTMODERN CRITICISM

1. Literary works of the 20th century examine postmodern themes such as the absurdity and meaninglessness of existence, the loss of hope of restoring purpose and order to life.

2. Postmodern identities are not found in one genre that represents a literary work, but rather in the blending of genres in a work of fiction, such as thrillers, myths, psychological novels, and detective stories. This is also evident in how language is thought of. Language is employed by Beckett and other absurdist playwrights to demonstrate its hollowness and vacuity and the fact that it cannot adequately express any transcendental reality.

3. Unlike modernism, postmodernism revisits the past with irony rather than destroying it. In Samuel Beckett's play, the word Godot is a play on the word. The two tramps who act as the play's focal point wait for Godot in a sentimental attempt to recapture the lost wholeness of the past. Another example of a mind trying to recall earlier religious convictions and coming up with a mad outburst of words that mock the clarity of language and faith of the past is Lucky's jumbled speech. Waiting is a pointless action that we engage in throughout our lives in an effort to find a non-existent external saviour or power to lessen our suffering. Aboard Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, the sisters spend 23 hours in a train waiting for an outside force to come and change their small-town, unremarkable life. Their creation of a glittering, glitzy picture of Moscow that combines memories and desires into a sort of hyperreal or simulacra shows their optimism for the future.

POST-POSTMODERNISM IN LITERATURE AND ART

Modernism and postmodernism ruled the 20th century. Post-post modernism, also known as metamodernism, emerged in the final decades of the 20th century as a reaction to and continuation of modernist aesthetics. Later postmodernism in the 1980s criticised modernist asceticism as being elitist and focused on combining elements from different eras in an odd and disorganised manner,

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such as vivid imagery, perspectives, and vocabulary. One such instance is the work of Craig Raine and Christopher Reid, who created what is referred to as “Martian poetry.” The poet uses language in his poem “A Martian sends a Postcard Home” to describe his impressions of humans, and it takes some time to figure out what the poet is getting at before it makes sense. The reader has a lot of fun with this poem while solving the challenges.

A Martian Sends a Postcard Home (1979)

Caxtons are mechanical birds with many wings
and some are treasured for their markings –
they cause the eyes to melt
or the body to shriek without pain.
I have never seen one fly, but
sometimes they perch on the hand.
Mist is when the sky is tired of flight
and rests its soft machine on ground:
then the world is dim and bookish
like engravings under tissue paper.
Rain is when the earth is television.
It has the property of making colours darker.
Model T is a room with the lock inside –
a key is turned to free the world
for movement, so quick there is a film
to watch for anything missed.
But time is tied to the wrist
or kept in a box, ticking with impatience.
In homes, a haunted apparatus sleeps,
that snores when you pick it up.
If the ghost cries, they carry it
to their lips and soothe it to sleep
with sounds. And yet, they wake it up
deliberately, by tickling with a finger.
Only the young are allowed to suffer
openly. Adults go to a punishment room
with water but nothing to eat.
They lock the door and suffer the noises
alone. No one is exempt
and everyone’s pain has a different smell.
At night, when all the colours die,
they hide in pairs
and read about themselves –
in colour, with their eyelids shut.

There are 34 lines in the poem that are not rhymed. It offers a Martian’s perspective of human culture. Here, the term “Caxtons” refers to large birds while simultaneously transporting us to the 14th century, the year that Caxton created the printing machine. The book’s pages are interpreted as the birds’

wings. Reading while holding a book is compared to a mechanical bird perching on a hand. While rain is associated with television, mist is elegantly depicted. The brightness of a TV screen can be altered, rain tends to make colours darker, and the sky is usually gloomy and dull. A car is referred to as a model “T,” much as books are referred to as Caxtons. “A chamber with the lock inside,” is how the car is described. To enter the world, turn the key. The world flashes past as the car travels, and one can rewatch the world “for anything missed” by peering in the rear view mirror. The poem is clearly about perception because of the perplexing references to a watch and a phone. The familiar appears unusual in this context because it is being seen in a very strange way. The Martian is a fictional character that helps the reader “see ourselves as others perceive us” and emphasises how odd some human activities might seem when taken out of context. While the reader can laugh at the Martian, he or she should also keep in mind that anyone, when placed in an unfamiliar situation that isn’t too far from home, could make the same blunders. The poem draws attention to the commonly raised query of whether what we take to be reality is merely an illusion. In his “Allegory of the Cave,” the ancient Greek philosopher Plato describes the world as we see it as a realm of appearances, an imperfect representation of reality. The cultural and social context of our upbringing shapes all we see and feel. The pure forms that exist in the space of thoughts cast a shadow on the human reality. Accordingly, our understanding of the cosmos differs. As a result, we are able to observe how our perceptions are influenced by our wishes and how the things we identify as real are dependent upon our own linguistic and naming traditions. The style of this poetry is postmodern, which is different from modernism.

Jurgen Habermas, a German theorist, viewed modernism as a continuation of the Enlightenment era in 1980 because of its proscriptions as a means of social transformation, its emphasis on reason, its rejection of slavish religious obedience and blind faith in tradition. He believed that French structuralists like Jacques Derrida and Michael Foucault rejected the ideas of the Enlightenment and challenged the concepts of reason, clarity, truth, and progress. In his essay “What is Modernism” from 1982, Jean Francois Lyotard subtly challenged Habermas’s criticism of Modernist aspirations at artistic experimentation and to put an end to “the heritage of avant-gardes.” He said that in regulating our way of life, the Enlightenment had been