Will Barlow

Professor Lovesey

ENGL 433

Midterm Exam

**Section A**

*1. What are 4 models/theories of the novel’s origin in the early 18th century? Explain each in some detail, and point out which you find most persuasive and why.*

The origin of the novel is an obscure concept, yet there are four overarching theories of where it truly comes from. The first of these being an evolutionary theory that argues that the novel is more an amalgamation of narrative, story, and novel. Thus, this theory asserts that the novel has really been around as long as people have been talking and its origins go back to ancient Asia and Greece with *Xing Ping Mai* and Greek Epics. More recently, this theory also argues that *Don Quixote* was one of the first novels. Of course, none of these examples are English novels nor do they originate in the 18th century.

Another theory of the novel’s origin, the “convergent texts” theory, emphasizes that there is something distinct about the works that arose in the early 1800s that we now call novels. This theory argues that the novel is distinct from other readable texts during the time period and throughout history. It further argues that the novel is intertextual and forms such as history, characters and personal/ideological ideas converge.

A third theory of the novel’s origin called the “osmotic” or “social” origin theory purports that the novel is a result of social forces. Some of these social forces are said to be the rise of Protestantism that advocated for more Biblical readership and thus creating an expansion of the reading public seeking other kinds of writing. Additionally, in terms of socio-economics, the beginnings of banking created opportunity for individuals to manifest their own financial wellbeing and potentially adjust their status to their liking. This created a social environment that allowed individuals to purchase novels. These factors coupled with overarching philosophical developments in the early 18th century that emphasized the value of individual experience are the social forces that arose that resulted in the novel’s conception in the 18th century.

The fourth and last theory of the novel’s origin argues that the Theatre Licensing Act of 1737 so greatly restricted known authors from publishing plays that they in turn began writing novels. With a deficit of authors, audiences, and plays, the novel then became a refuge for the ex-theatre-goers. Of these four theories of the novel’s origin, I find the “osmotic” theory to be the most convincing. I find this theory most convincing because it depicts the novel as a natural social manifestation of the era. Though there may have been “novels” in existence well before this time period, there was not much readership of these “novels” and reading them was much more involved when compared to novels that surfaced in the early 18th century.

**Section B**

*1. Discuss the professional woman writer of the early 18th century with specific reference to Eliza Haywood and Aphra Behn, and explain the effects of the Theatre Licensing Act on their careers and also that of Henry Fielding.*

The professional woman writer of the early 18th century can largely be characterized as one who is female, who spends most of her time writing, and she benefits economically from this writing. Some of the earliest professional woman writers, Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood, found their stride in the early 18th century as novelists because the novel’s qualities of requiring little training and economic advancement provided attractive social means for women to write professionally. Though the true nature of this phenomena is much more nuanced and complex, the early 18th century is a context that certainly catalyzed the advent of professional women writers.

Aphra Behn is considered the first professional woman writer despite the more private and religious works of Quaker and renaissance women writers. Her prowess with this title is largely influenced by the fact that she wrote for larger audiences and for economic gain, not to exclusively voice her opinion. Her importance as the first professional woman writer was re-emphasized by the feminist reclamation project of the 1970’s. A notable aspect of Behn’s status as a professional writer is that she wrote popular novels for financial compensation.

Eliza Haywood is arguably the runner-up for the title of the first professional woman writer, had Behn been remiss. Though both prominent early female novelists, Haywood’s writing career began with her acting and then playwriting. After the 1737 Theatre Licensing Act, Haywood in a sense defaulted to novel writing because the Act essentially restricted any works from making it to a live performance. Thus, many theatrical authors took up writing novels as an alternative avenue for expression. Another example of one of the authors who converted from writing for the stage is Henry Fielding. Effectively, if not for the Licensing Act, neither Fielding nor Haywood would have gone on to write and publish the novels we have today.

**Section C**

*3a. Briefly justify your opinion about who is the hero/protagonist of Joseph Andrews, and who are the other contenders?*

It is my opinion that the protagonist of *Joseph Andrews* is in fact Joseph Andrews. I say this because Joseph fits the mold of the protagonist archetype. He is identifiable with the reader, he is morally just, he plays the role of the underdog and thus ascertains the reader’s sympathy. Further, Joseph is the focal point of the novel’s narration as the picaroon of the picaresque. Because of this, it is his story that the reader follows and cares about.

Another candidate for the protagonist of *Joseph Andrews* is Parson Adams. Here, I would say that Adams is a protagonist in the sense that Joseph hands him the protagonist baton as Adams engages on an exploration of his own oversights despite his deep religious countenance. With Adams as the protagonist, the reading begins to become more complex as he is revealed later in the novel and is effectively phased in as the protagonist.

These are the two primary candidates for the protagonists of *Joseph Andrews*. If anything, I would argue that the reader is in fact the protagonist of the novel. This is largely due in part to the metafictional and self-conscious aspects of the text that characterize and interact with the reader. The other part of this proposition is how comic catharsis is so rampant throughout the novel and that it is referenced as medicine for the melancholy. Which demonstrates that Fielding at least intended the reader to be a character of the novel and ultimately reach catharsis by reading the novel.

*3b. What is the meaning and role of comic catharsis in Joseph Andrews?*

Comic catharsis is a term used to describe a sort of healing from laughter: the soul-repairing kind of laughter that feels good. As I have mentioned above, the role of comic catharsis in *Joseph Andrews* in part immerses the reader into the narration of the novel; it manifests the reader as a character with stakes in the plot progression. Through these metafictional cues, the reader becomes bonded to the novel thus revealing another part of comic catharsis’ role in the novel which is to enhance this bond with the reader.

Comic catharsis in *Joseph Andrews* depicts characters in relatable predicaments with comic twists. The amusing and bumbling nature of the predicaments the cast of characters are thrust into builds and eases tension with a laughable result. Fielding, appears to sense a general melancholy among his readers, as the majority of predicaments are quite depressing or melancholy and the humor is quite slapstick or ironic. In this way among the aforementioned reasons, comic catharsis is meant to solidify a bond between the reader and the experience of reading the novel and ultimately heal any of the reader’s melancholy through laughter.