

1998 ENGLISH LITERATURE

Question 2

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

2. Read carefully the following passage from George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch* (1871). Then write an essay in which you characterize the narrator's attitude toward Dorothea Brooke and analyze the literary techniques used to convey this attitude. Support your analysis with specific references to the passage.

Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress. Her hand and wrist were so finely formed that she could wear sleeves not less bare of style than those in which the Blessed Virgin appeared to
(5) Italian painters; and her profile as well as her stature and bearing seemed to gain the more dignity from her plain garments, which by the side of provincial fashion gave her the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible, — or from one of our elder poets, — in a paragraph of today's
(10) newspaper. She was usually spoken of as being remarkably clever, but with the addition that her sister Celia had more common-sense. Nevertheless, Celia wore scarcely more trimmings; and it was only to close observers that her dress differed from her sister's, and had a shade of coquetry in its
(15) arrangements; for Miss Brooke's plain dressing was due to mixed conditions, in most of which her sister shared. . . .

Dorothea knew many passages of Pascal's *Pensées* and of Jeremy Taylor¹ by heart; and to her the destinies of mankind, seen by the light of Christianity, made the solitudes of
(20) feminine fashion appear an occupation for Bedlam. She could not reconcile the anxieties of a spiritual life involving eternal consequences, with a keen interest in guimp² and artificial protrusions of drapery. Her mind was theoretic, and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the
(25) world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there; she was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing whatever seemed to her to have those aspects; likely to seek martyrdom, to make retractions, and then to incur martyrdom after
(30) all in a quarter where she had not sought it. Certainly such elements in the character of a marriageable girl tended to interfere with her lot and hinder it from being decided according to custom, by good looks, vanity, and merely canine affection. With all this, she, the elder of the sisters,
(35) was not yet twenty, and they had both been educated, since they were about twelve years old and had lost their parents, on plans at once narrow and promiscuous, first in an English family and afterwards in a Swiss family at Lausanne, their bachelor uncle and guardian trying in this
(40) way to remedy the disadvantages of their orphaned condition. . . .

¹ Blaise Pascal (1623-1662): French philosopher

Jeremy Taylor (1613-1677): English clergyman and writer

² A yoke of lace, embroidery, or other material worn with a dress

The rural opinion about the new young ladies, even among the cottagers, was generally in favour of Celia, as being so amiable and innocent-looking, while Miss
(45) Brooke's large eyes seemed like her religion, too unusual and striking. Poor Dorothea! compared with her, the innocent-looking Celia was knowing and worldly-wise, so much subtler is a human mind than the outside tissues which make a sort of blazonry or clock-face for it.
(50) Yet those who approached Dorothea, although prejudiced against her by this alarming hearsay, found that she had a charm unaccountably reconcilable with it. Most men thought her bewitching when she was on horseback. She loved the fresh air and the various aspects of the country,
(55) and when her eyes and cheeks glowed with mingled pleasure she looked very little like a devotee. Riding was an indulgence which she allowed herself in spite of conscientious qualms; she felt that she enjoyed it in a pagan sensuous way, and always looked forward to renouncing it.
(60) She was open, ardent, and not in the least self-admiring; indeed, it was pretty to see how her imagination adorned her sister Celia with attractions altogether superior to her own, and if any gentleman appeared to come to the Grange from some other motive than that of seeing Mr. Brooke, she
(65) concluded that he must be in love with Celia: Sir James Chettam, for example, whom she constantly considered from Celia's point of view, inwardly debating whether it would be good for Celia to accept him. That he should be regarded as a suitor to herself would have seemed to her a ridiculous irrelevance. Dorothea, with all her eagerness to know the truths of life, retained very childlike ideas about marriage. She felt sure that she would have accepted the judicious Hooker,³ if she had been born in time to save him from that wretched mistake he made in matrimony; or John
(70) Milton when his blindness had come on; or any of the other great men whose odd habits it would have been glorious piety to endure; but an amiable handsome baronet, who said "Exactly" to her remarks even when she expressed uncertainty, — how could he affect her as a lover? The
(75) really delightful marriage must be where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it.

³ Richard Hooker (1554-1600): Oxford theologian

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