

**ASSIGNMENT**  
**THE AUSTRALIAN NOVEL**  
**(MEG 19)**

**Programme: MEG/2024/2025**  
**Course Code: MEG 19**  
**Max. Marks: 100**

**Answer all questions in this assignment.**

1. Explain with suitable examples, how nineteenth century women novelists of Australia created a space for themselves within the patriarchal culture and society of their times.  

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2. Critically examine the significance of Joseph Furphy's novel *Such is Life*, in the history of the Australian novel.  

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3. Explain the significance of the title *The Tree of Man*.  

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4. Consider *Schindler's Ark* as a story of the triumph of humanity.  

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5. Explain how writing becomes a political act in *True History of the Kelly Gang*.  

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**Answer all questions in this assignment.**

**1. Explain with suitable examples, how nineteenth century women novelists of Australia created a space for themselves within the patriarchal culture and society of their times.**

In the nineteenth century, women novelists of Australia made significant strides in creating a space for themselves within the predominantly patriarchal culture and society of their time. Through their literary works, they challenged societal norms, addressed women's issues, and carved out a unique voice in the literary world. Their efforts were not only acts of creative expression but also forms of social and cultural resistance. Here's an exploration of how they achieved this, with suitable examples.

### **Historical Context**

The nineteenth century in Australia was a period of significant social and cultural development. The discovery of gold in the 1850s led to rapid population growth and urbanization, which brought about changes in social structures and cultural norms. Despite these changes, society remained largely patriarchal, with women often relegated to secondary roles in both the public and private spheres. In this context, women novelists began to emerge, using their writing as a means to assert their identity and address the issues they faced.

### **Literary Contributions and Themes**

#### **1. Challenging Gender Roles**

Women novelists of the nineteenth century often wrote about the limitations placed on women by society. Their works frequently featured strong, independent female protagonists who defied traditional gender roles. For example, Catherine Helen

Spence's novel "Clara Morison: A Tale of South Australia During the Gold Fever" (1854) portrays a young woman who emigrates from Scotland to Australia in search of a better life. Clara Morison's journey highlights the challenges and opportunities for women in a new land, showcasing their resilience and capability.

## **2. Addressing Social Issues**

Women writers used their novels to bring attention to social issues, particularly those affecting women. Ada Cambridge, one of the most prominent Australian women novelists of the time, addressed issues such as marriage, motherhood, and women's education. Her novel "A Marked Man" (1890) explores the constraints of marriage and the limited options available to women. By highlighting these issues, Cambridge's work contributed to the broader social discourse on women's rights and roles.

## **3. Creating Female Networks**

Novels by women often depicted the formation of supportive female networks, which provided an alternative to the patriarchal structures of society. These networks were essential for survival and personal growth. For instance, in "The Australian Girl" (1891) by Ethel Turner, the protagonist forms strong bonds with other women, which help her navigate the challenges of life in a male-dominated society. These relationships offered a sense of community and empowerment, reinforcing the idea that women could rely on each other for support and solidarity.

## **Strategies for Literary Success**

### **1. Utilizing Pseudonyms**

To gain acceptance in the male-dominated literary world, some women wrote under pseudonyms. This strategy allowed them to bypass the gender biases of publishers and readers. For example, Louisa Atkinson published her early works under the name "L.A. Meredith," which helped her gain a foothold in the literary market without the immediate prejudice against female authors.

### **2. Engaging with the Literary Community**

Many women novelists actively engaged with the literary community, contributing to magazines and journals, which were crucial platforms for writers at the time. Catherine Helen Spence, for instance, wrote extensively for newspapers and journals, using these platforms to reach a wider audience and establish her reputation as a writer. This engagement also allowed women to form connections with other writers and intellectuals, furthering their literary careers.

## **Literary Legacy and Impact**

The efforts of nineteenth-century Australian women novelists had a lasting impact on literature and society. They paved the way for future generations of female writers and contributed to the gradual shift in societal attitudes towards women's roles and rights.

Their works remain an important part of Australia's literary heritage, offering insights into the lives and struggles of women during that period.

### **1. Influence on Later Writers**

The pioneering work of nineteenth-century women novelists influenced later Australian writers, both male and female. Their exploration of women's issues and social justice themes resonated with subsequent generations, encouraging more writers to tackle these subjects. This legacy is evident in the works of later Australian authors such as Miles Franklin and Henry Handel Richardson, who continued to explore themes of gender and identity in their novels.

### **2. Cultural Recognition**

The literary contributions of these women have been increasingly recognized and celebrated in contemporary times. Scholarly works and literary anthologies now often include their writings, acknowledging their role in shaping Australian literature. This recognition has helped to ensure that their voices and experiences are not forgotten, providing valuable perspectives on the cultural and social history of Australia.

### **Conclusion**

Nineteenth-century Australian women novelists created a space for themselves within a patriarchal culture by addressing gender roles, highlighting social issues, forming female networks, and strategically engaging with the literary community. Through their works, they challenged societal norms and provided a voice for women's experiences and struggles. Their legacy continues to influence and inspire, underscoring the importance of their contributions to Australian literature and society.

### **2. Critically examine the significance of Joseph Furphy's novel *Such is Life*, in the history of the Australian novel.**

Joseph Furphy's novel "Such is Life," published in 1903, holds a significant place in the history of the Australian novel. Written under the pseudonym "Tom Collins," the novel is a complex, multi-layered work that provides a unique and insightful portrayal of Australian life in the late 19th century. Through its innovative narrative structure, thematic depth, and vivid depiction of the Australian landscape and its people, "Such is Life" stands out as a seminal work that has influenced subsequent Australian literature. Here, we critically examine the significance of "Such is Life" in the history of the Australian novel.

### **Narrative Structure and Style**

One of the most remarkable aspects of "Such is Life" is its unconventional narrative structure. The novel is presented as a fictionalized diary of Tom Collins, a government official who travels through rural New South Wales and Victoria. The narrative is episodic and digressive, often straying from the central plot to explore various tangents and anecdotes. This fragmented structure mirrors the chaotic and

unpredictable nature of life, reflecting the novel's title and its philosophical underpinnings.

Furphy's use of language is also noteworthy. He employs a distinctive, colloquial style that captures the vernacular of the Australian bush. His prose is rich with humor, irony, and wit, making the narrative engaging and lively. This stylistic choice not only adds authenticity to the depiction of rural life but also challenges the more formal, literary conventions of the time. Furphy's innovative approach to narrative and language set "Such is Life" apart from other contemporary works and has had a lasting impact on Australian literature.

### **Thematic Depth**

"Such is Life" delves into a range of themes that are central to the Australian experience. One of the primary themes is the exploration of identity and self-perception. Tom Collins, the narrator, often reflects on his own identity and the nature of his existence, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. This introspective quality adds a philosophical dimension to the novel, inviting readers to contemplate the nature of life and human experience.

The novel also addresses social and political issues of the time. Furphy critiques the colonial government and its treatment of the working class, highlighting the struggles and injustices faced by rural laborers. Through the depiction of various characters and their interactions, Furphy exposes the inequalities and hardships of life in the Australian bush. This social commentary is woven seamlessly into the narrative, providing a nuanced perspective on the socio-political landscape of the period.

### **Depiction of the Australian Landscape**

Furphy's detailed and evocative descriptions of the Australian landscape are a defining feature of "Such is Life." The novel captures the vastness and diversity of the Australian bush, portraying it as both a beautiful and challenging environment. Furphy's deep appreciation for the natural world is evident in his lyrical prose, which brings the landscape to life and immerses the reader in the setting.

The landscape in "Such is Life" is not merely a backdrop but a character in its own right. It shapes the lives and experiences of the characters, influencing their actions and interactions. Furphy's portrayal of the bush reflects the unique relationship between Australians and their environment, highlighting the significance of the landscape in shaping national identity. This vivid depiction of the Australian landscape has become a hallmark of Australian literature, influencing subsequent writers and contributing to the development of a distinct Australian literary tradition.

### **Influence on Australian Literature**

"Such is Life" has had a profound impact on the development of Australian literature. Furphy's innovative narrative techniques, thematic depth, and authentic portrayal of



the Australian experience set a new standard for literary excellence. His work paved the way for later writers to explore similar themes and styles, contributing to the evolution of a uniquely Australian literary voice.

The novel's influence can be seen in the works of subsequent Australian writers such as Henry Lawson, Miles Franklin, and Patrick White. These writers, like Furphy, sought to capture the essence of Australian life and identity, drawing on their own experiences and the distinctive features of the Australian landscape. "Such is Life" served as a source of inspiration and a benchmark for literary achievement, encouraging a generation of writers to push the boundaries of narrative form and thematic exploration.

### **Critical Reception and Legacy**

Upon its publication, "Such is Life" received mixed reviews. Some critics praised its originality and depth, while others found its unconventional structure and digressive narrative challenging. Over time, however, the novel has gained recognition as a landmark work in Australian literature. Its complexity and richness have attracted scholarly attention, leading to numerous studies and interpretations.

"Such is Life" is now regarded as a classic of Australian literature, celebrated for its contribution to the national literary canon. It has been included in academic curricula and continues to be studied and appreciated by readers and scholars alike. The novel's enduring legacy lies in its ability to capture the spirit of the Australian experience, offering a window into the lives, struggles, and aspirations of its people.

### **Conclusion**

Joseph Furphy's "Such is Life" is a significant work in the history of the Australian novel. Its innovative narrative structure, thematic depth, and vivid portrayal of the Australian landscape distinguish it as a pioneering work that has left a lasting impact on Australian literature. Through his exploration of identity, social issues, and the relationship between people and their environment, Furphy created a novel that resonates with readers and continues to inspire and influence writers. "Such is Life" remains a testament to the richness and diversity of the Australian literary tradition, underscoring the importance of storytelling in shaping national identity and cultural heritage.

### **3. Explain the significance of the title The Tree of Man.**

"The Tree of Man," a novel by Australian author Patrick White, holds a title rich with symbolism and layers of meaning that deeply resonate with the themes and narrative of the work. Published in 1955, the novel explores the lives of Stan Parker and his wife Amy as they build a life in the Australian bush. The title, "The Tree of Man," encapsulates the essence of human existence, growth, and the connection to nature and the divine. This essay delves into the significance of the title, examining its symbolic, thematic, and philosophical dimensions.

## **Symbolic Interpretation**

### **1. The Tree as a Symbol of Life and Growth**

The title "The Tree of Man" immediately invokes the image of a tree, a universal symbol of life, growth, and endurance. Trees are often seen as representations of the life cycle, with their roots grounded in the earth and branches reaching towards the sky. This duality reflects the human condition, where individuals are rooted in their immediate realities and daily struggles while simultaneously aspiring towards higher ideals and spiritual fulfillment.

In the novel, Stan Parker's life parallels the growth of a tree. Starting with the humble beginnings of clearing land and building a home, Stan's journey through life's stages—from youth to old age—mirrors the stages of a tree's growth. Just as a tree withstands various seasons and environmental changes, Stan endures the trials and tribulations of life, growing stronger and more resilient over time.

### **2. Connection to the Land**

The tree also symbolizes the deep connection to the land, a recurring theme in Australian literature. For Stan and Amy, the land is both a source of sustenance and a canvas for their life's work. Their relationship with the land reflects their struggles, successes, and the passage of time. The tree, firmly rooted in the soil, represents their enduring bond with the land and their commitment to making a life in the harsh yet beautiful Australian bush.

## **Thematic Significance**

### **1. Human Existence and the Quest for Meaning**

"The Tree of Man" explores profound themes of human existence, the search for meaning, and the passage of time. The title evokes the biblical "Tree of Life" and "Tree of Knowledge," suggesting a spiritual and existential dimension to the narrative. Just as the biblical trees represent the dual aspects of human experience—life and knowledge—the novel delves into the complexities of human existence, the pursuit of understanding, and the quest for spiritual fulfillment.

Stan's life is marked by routine and labor, yet it is through these ordinary experiences that he seeks and occasionally glimpses moments of transcendence. The title suggests that, like a tree, man's life is an ongoing process of growth, struggle, and aspiration towards something greater. It underscores the idea that the significance of life lies in the journey itself and the continuous pursuit of meaning.

### **2. Isolation and Community**

The novel also addresses themes of isolation and community, both of which are embodied in the symbolism of the tree. While trees can stand alone, they are often part of a larger forest, interacting with and depending on their environment. Similarly, Stan

and Amy's lives are marked by moments of profound isolation as they carve out their existence in the bush. However, they are also part of a broader community, with relationships that shape their experiences and provide a sense of belonging.

The tree, therefore, symbolizes the balance between individual isolation and communal connection. It reflects the dual nature of human existence, where personal struggles and achievements are intertwined with the lives and stories of others.

## **Philosophical and Existential Dimensions**

### **1. The Cycle of Life and Death**

"The Tree of Man" encapsulates the philosophical contemplation of life and death. Trees are perennial symbols of the cycle of life, with their annual shedding of leaves and subsequent renewal. This cyclical process mirrors the human experience of birth, growth, decay, and death. Throughout the novel, the characters confront mortality, experiencing the deaths of loved ones and contemplating their own finite existence.

The title suggests a philosophical reflection on the nature of life and the inevitability of death. It invites readers to consider the transient yet enduring aspects of human life, much like the perennial cycle of a tree. This contemplation is central to the novel's exploration of existential themes and the search for meaning in the face of mortality.

### **2. Spiritual Aspiration**

The tree's vertical growth, from earth to sky, symbolizes spiritual aspiration and the human desire to connect with something beyond the material world. In "The Tree of Man," Stan's life is punctuated by moments of spiritual insight and existential questioning. His relationship with the land and his labor become acts of devotion, through which he seeks a sense of purpose and connection to the divine.

The title evokes this spiritual dimension, suggesting that man's life, like the growth of a tree, is a journey towards greater understanding and fulfillment. It highlights the tension between the mundane realities of daily life and the deeper, often elusive, spiritual aspirations that drive human existence.

## **Conclusion**

The title "The Tree of Man" holds profound significance in Patrick White's novel, encapsulating the themes of life, growth, connection to the land, and the quest for meaning. Through the symbolism of the tree, White explores the complexities of human existence, the balance between isolation and community, and the philosophical contemplation of life and death. The tree stands as a powerful metaphor for the enduring yet transient nature of life, inviting readers to reflect on their own journeys and the search for meaning within the broader tapestry of human experience.

### **4. Consider Schindler's Ark as a story of the triumph of humanity.**



"Schindler's Ark," a novel by Thomas Keneally, is a compelling narrative that delves into one of the darkest periods of human history—the Holocaust—while simultaneously highlighting the extraordinary acts of humanity that can arise in the face of unimaginable evil. The story centers on Oskar Schindler, a German industrialist and member of the Nazi Party, who becomes an unlikely hero by saving the lives of over 1,200 Jews during World War II. The novel is a testament to the triumph of humanity, showcasing the power of compassion, moral courage, and the capacity for change. This essay explores how "Schindler's Ark" embodies the triumph of humanity through its characters, themes, and narrative structure.

### **The Transformation of Oskar Schindler**

At the heart of "Schindler's Ark" is the remarkable transformation of Oskar Schindler. Initially portrayed as a businessman driven by profit and a member of the Nazi Party, Schindler undergoes a profound change as he witnesses the atrocities committed against the Jews. His journey from a profit-driven opportunist to a selfless savior illustrates the potential for moral awakening and the human capacity for redemption.

Schindler's transformation is not depicted as a sudden epiphany but rather as a gradual process influenced by his growing relationships with his Jewish workers and the increasing brutality of the Nazi regime. His actions, such as bribing Nazi officials and falsifying records to protect his workers, demonstrate his commitment to humanity over self-interest. Schindler's evolution highlights the novel's central message: even in the darkest times, individuals have the power to make a difference and uphold human dignity.

### **Acts of Compassion and Moral Courage**

"Schindler's Ark" is replete with acts of compassion and moral courage, not only from Schindler but also from other characters who risk their lives to save others. Schindler's secretary, Itzhak Stern, plays a crucial role in convincing Schindler to employ Jews in his factory, thereby saving them from deportation and certain death. Stern's quiet determination and strategic thinking exemplify the collective effort and courage required to resist oppression.

The novel also portrays the bravery of Jewish workers who, despite facing constant threats, maintain their dignity and solidarity. Characters such as Poldek Pfefferberg and Mietek Pemper demonstrate resilience and ingenuity in their efforts to survive and help others. Their stories underscore the strength of the human spirit and the importance of solidarity in the face of dehumanization.

### **The Triumph of Humanity in the Face of Evil**

One of the most striking aspects of "Schindler's Ark" is its juxtaposition of the banality of evil with extraordinary acts of humanity. The novel does not shy away from depicting the horrific realities of the Holocaust—the systematic extermination, the brutal conditions in the ghettos and concentration camps, and the pervasive fear

and suffering. However, within this context of overwhelming darkness, the actions of Schindler and others shine as beacons of hope and resistance.

Keneally's narrative emphasizes that the triumph of humanity is not about grand gestures but about the cumulative impact of individual acts of kindness and courage. Schindler's factory, often referred to as "Schindler's Ark," becomes a sanctuary where Jews are treated with dignity and respect, in stark contrast to the inhumanity of the Nazi regime. This sanctuary represents a microcosm of humanity's potential to uphold moral values even when societal structures collapse.

### **The Power of Individual Agency**

"Schindler's Ark" underscores the significance of individual agency in shaping history. Schindler's decision to save Jews was not driven by external forces but by his own moral convictions. This emphasis on personal responsibility and the impact of individual choices is a powerful reminder of the role each person can play in confronting injustice.

The novel also challenges the notion of passivity in the face of evil. While the scale of the Holocaust might suggest the futility of individual actions, "Schindler's Ark" demonstrates that even small acts of resistance can have profound consequences. Schindler's story is a testament to the idea that one person's actions can indeed make a difference, inspiring others to act with courage and compassion.

### **Historical and Ethical Reflection**

Beyond its narrative, "Schindler's Ark" invites readers to reflect on broader historical and ethical questions. The novel prompts an examination of the conditions that allow atrocities to occur and the moral responsibilities of individuals and societies. It raises important questions about complicity, the potential for change, and the enduring impact of moral choices.

Keneally's meticulous research and attention to historical detail lend authenticity to the story, grounding it in the real experiences of those who lived through the Holocaust. This historical context enhances the novel's emotional and ethical impact, reminding readers that the triumph of humanity is not just a literary theme but a lived reality with enduring lessons.

### **Conclusion**

"Schindler's Ark" is a powerful exploration of the triumph of humanity amidst the horrors of the Holocaust. Through the transformation of Oskar Schindler, the acts of compassion and moral courage displayed by various characters, and the novel's emphasis on individual agency, Thomas Keneally illustrates the profound capacity for goodness and resilience inherent in humanity. The novel serves as a poignant reminder that even in the darkest times, the light of human decency and compassion can prevail.

By depicting the ways in which ordinary individuals can make extraordinary differences, "Schindler's Ark" not only honors the memory of those who suffered and survived the Holocaust but also inspires readers to uphold the values of humanity in their own lives. It is a testament to the enduring power of moral courage and the belief that, despite the presence of evil, humanity's potential for goodness can ultimately triumph.

## **5. Explain how writing becomes a political act in True History of the Kelly Gang.**

Peter Carey's "True History of the Kelly Gang" transforms the act of writing into a powerful political statement. By reimagining the life of the infamous Australian outlaw Ned Kelly through a first-person narrative, Carey not only gives voice to a historical figure often maligned by official accounts but also critiques the socio-political structures of 19th-century Australia. The novel explores themes of identity, colonialism, class struggle, and resistance, positioning Kelly's writing as a form of rebellion against oppressive authorities. This essay examines how "True History of the Kelly Gang" turns writing into a political act by analyzing its narrative style, thematic content, and historical context.

### **Narrative Style and Perspective**

#### **1. First-Person Narrative**

Carey employs a first-person narrative, presented as Ned Kelly's autobiographical account. This narrative choice is crucial for transforming the act of writing into a political act. By giving Kelly his own voice, Carey challenges the official histories and portrayals of Kelly as merely a criminal. Instead, Kelly emerges as a complex character, shaped by his environment and circumstances. This perspective allows readers to see the injustices and hardships he faced, providing a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse.

#### **2. Epistolary Form**

The novel is structured as a series of letters or "parcels" written by Kelly to his daughter. This epistolary form enhances the political nature of writing by emphasizing the personal and intimate nature of Kelly's story. It also highlights the act of writing as an attempt to preserve his legacy and truth, countering the distortions of official records. Kelly's writing becomes a means of asserting his identity and humanity, making his personal history a political statement against the erasure and vilification by the state.

### **Thematic Content**

#### **1. Resistance Against Oppression**

One of the central themes of "True History of the Kelly Gang" is resistance against oppression. Kelly's writing documents his and his family's struggles against systemic injustice, from the targeting and harassment by the police to the broader societal

prejudices against the Irish and the poor. Through his narrative, Kelly exposes the corruption and brutality of the colonial authorities, turning his story into a form of protest and resistance. Writing becomes a way to fight back, to claim agency, and to challenge the power structures that seek to silence him.

## **2. Class Struggle and Social Injustice**

The novel vividly portrays the class struggle and social injustice prevalent in 19th-century Australia. Kelly's writing illuminates the harsh realities faced by the lower classes, particularly the Irish immigrant community. His descriptions of poverty, exploitation, and the arbitrary exercise of power by the wealthy and the authorities paint a stark picture of a deeply divided society. By documenting these injustices, Kelly's writing serves as a critique of the socio-economic system, making it a political act aimed at exposing and challenging the status quo.

## **3. Colonialism and Identity**

"True History of the Kelly Gang" also addresses themes of colonialism and identity. Kelly's Irish heritage places him and his family in a marginalized position within the British colonial framework. His writing reflects the cultural and racial tensions between the colonizers and the colonized. By asserting his Irish identity and recounting the discrimination and hardships faced by his community, Kelly's narrative becomes a statement against colonial oppression. His defiance against British authorities and his embrace of his outlaw status can be seen as acts of cultural resistance, further politicizing his writing.

## **Historical Context and Political Implications**

### **1. Revisionist History**

Carey's novel engages in revisionist history by reinterpreting the story of Ned Kelly from a sympathetic perspective. This approach challenges the traditional historical narratives that have often depicted Kelly as a villain. By presenting Kelly's own account, Carey invites readers to question the reliability and bias of historical records, especially those written by the victors. This act of rewriting history is inherently political, as it seeks to give voice to the marginalized and contest the dominant narratives imposed by those in power.

### **2. Critique of Authority**

Throughout the novel, Kelly's writing serves as a critique of authority, particularly the colonial government and the police force. His descriptions of the injustices perpetrated by these institutions reveal their corrupt and oppressive nature. By documenting these abuses, Kelly's narrative challenges the legitimacy and morality of the colonial authorities. This critique extends to the broader colonial project, questioning the ethical foundations of British rule in Australia. Writing thus becomes a tool for undermining and exposing the failures and injustices of the colonial regime.



### **3. Empowerment Through Storytelling**

For Kelly, writing is an act of empowerment. It allows him to take control of his own story and present his version of events. In a society where the voices of the marginalized are often silenced, Kelly's act of writing is a declaration of his right to be heard. It is an assertion of his humanity and individuality in the face of dehumanizing forces. By telling his own story, Kelly claims his place in history and resists the erasure and misrepresentation by those in power. This empowerment through storytelling is a fundamental aspect of the political significance of writing in the novel.

### **Conclusion**

In "True History of the Kelly Gang," Peter Carey transforms the act of writing into a potent political act. Through the use of a first-person narrative and epistolary form, Carey gives voice to Ned Kelly, allowing him to tell his own story and challenge the dominant historical narratives. The novel's thematic exploration of resistance, social injustice, and colonialism underscores the political dimensions of Kelly's writing. By documenting his experiences and critiquing the authorities, Kelly's narrative becomes a form of protest and empowerment, highlighting the power of storytelling as a means of political resistance. Through "True History of the Kelly Gang," Carey not only reclaims the story of Ned Kelly but also illustrates the broader significance of writing as a tool for challenging oppression and asserting human dignity.