

Concours normalien étudiant Lettres – Session 2023

Département Littératures et Langage

Commentaire de texte en anglais

Durée : 3 heures

Aucun ouvrage autorisé

Commentez en anglais le texte suivant extrait de *Nice Work* de David Lodge (1988) en portant une attention particulière aux techniques narratives qui expriment l'ironie du narrateur envers son personnage.

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And there, for the time being, let us leave Vic Wilcox, while we travel back an hour or two in time, a few miles in space, to meet a very different character. A character who, rather awkwardly for me, doesn't herself believe in the concept of character. That is to say (a favourite phrase of her own), Robyn Penrose, Temporary Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Rummidge, holds that 'character' is a bourgeois myth, an illusion created to reinforce the ideology of capitalism. As evidence for this assertion she will point to the fact that the rise of the novel (the literary genre of 'character' *par excellence*) in the eighteenth century coincided with the rise of capitalism; that the triumph of the novel over all other literary genres in the nineteenth century coincided with the triumph of capitalism; and that the modernist and postmodernist deconstruction of the classic novel in the twentieth century has coincided with the terminal crisis of capitalism.

Why the classic novel should have collaborated with the spirit of capitalism is perfectly obvious to Robyn. Both are expressions of a secularized Protestant ethic, both dependent on the idea of an autonomous individual self who is responsible for and in control of his/her own destiny, seeking happiness and fortune in competition with other autonomous selves. This is true of the novel considered both as commodity and as mode of representation. (Thus Robyn in full seminar spate.) That is to say, it applies to novelists themselves as well as to their heroes and heroines. The novelist is a capitalist of the imagination. He or she invents a product which consumers didn't know they wanted until it is made available, manufactures it with the

assistance of purveyors of risk capital known as publishers, and sells it in competition with makers of marginally differentiated products of the same kind. The first major English novelist, Daniel Defoe, was a merchant. The second, Samuel Richardson, was a printer. The novel was the first mass-produced cultural artefact. (At this point Robyn, with elbows tucked into her sides, would spread her hands outwards from the wrist, as if to imply that there is no need to say more. But of course she always has much more to say.)