

**GOLDIE ALEXANDER.**

**“BODY AND SOUL: Lilbet’s Romance”**

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**Talking points for Book Groups.**

“Body and Soul” is eighteen year old Lilbet Marks’ 1938 account of the love affair between Felix Goldfarb, a recent migrant to Melbourne, and her twin-sister Ella. As she records the day to day events that occur in Adeline Terrace, she explores Australia heading towards World War 2, the intolerance once shown towards the disabled, the ambivalence she feels towards her family, and the double edged sword of love and envy.

But is Lilbet as badly done by, as she would have us believe?

Some background to this novel may interest readers.

The author’s husband had four ‘maiden’ aunts who lived together until they died well into their nineties. Spanning most of the 20th Century, these sisters loved and squabbled and protected each other with equal determination. One aunt was mildly spastic and deeply resentful of both her affliction and the treatment she received. She often said that she wished that she had never been allowed to survive. The character Lilbet in “Body and Soul” is very loosely based on her.

Until quite recently many disabled folk were perceived as mentally retarded and institutionalised, or stranded in a permanent childhood with never any hope of independence. Intimacy with the opposite gender was discouraged. Sexual needs perceived as distasteful. The author Alan Marshall was a pioneer in an area that needed a lot of rethinking.

Lilbet is manipulative and often disagreeable. However she lives in a frighteningly constricted environment. She must control her family to suit herself – a task she accomplishes altogether too successfully.

Because Lilbet’s family are altogether too trusting and innocent - like many Australians were in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century- they are totally charmed by the sophisticated and worldly wise Felix.

Some further questions you might like to explore:

Though this novel is labelled as a ‘Romance’, the term is ironic as Lilbet does her very best to destroy her sister’s budding relationship.

Do you enjoy reading novels that contain ‘unreliable’ or ‘unpleasant’ narrators? Or must you always feel sympathy and liking for the main character?

Do you find this novel ‘politically incorrect’? Or is Lilbet a more fully rounded character that steps aside from the conventional view that anyone disadvantaged will always be ‘nice’.

This novel explores the impact of some of the 1st wave of migrants on rather unsophisticated Australians. Much has been written about what the migrants felt on landing here. Not all that much from another perspective. Thus another politically incorrect ‘hot potato’ that a migrant must always be honourable is questioned in this narrative.

“Body and Soul” involved much research into pre WW 2 Australia. Delving into old newspapers preserved in our State Public Library on microfiche, uncovers a very different world. This novel contains actual snippets from *The Argus*, *The Sun*, *The Herald* and *The Age* (September 1937- June 1938). If you have elderly friends or relatives they may recall many of these events.

How much has Australia changed? In your opinion for the better? Or for the worse?