

Brick Lane – Monica Ali (Bangladesh – England)

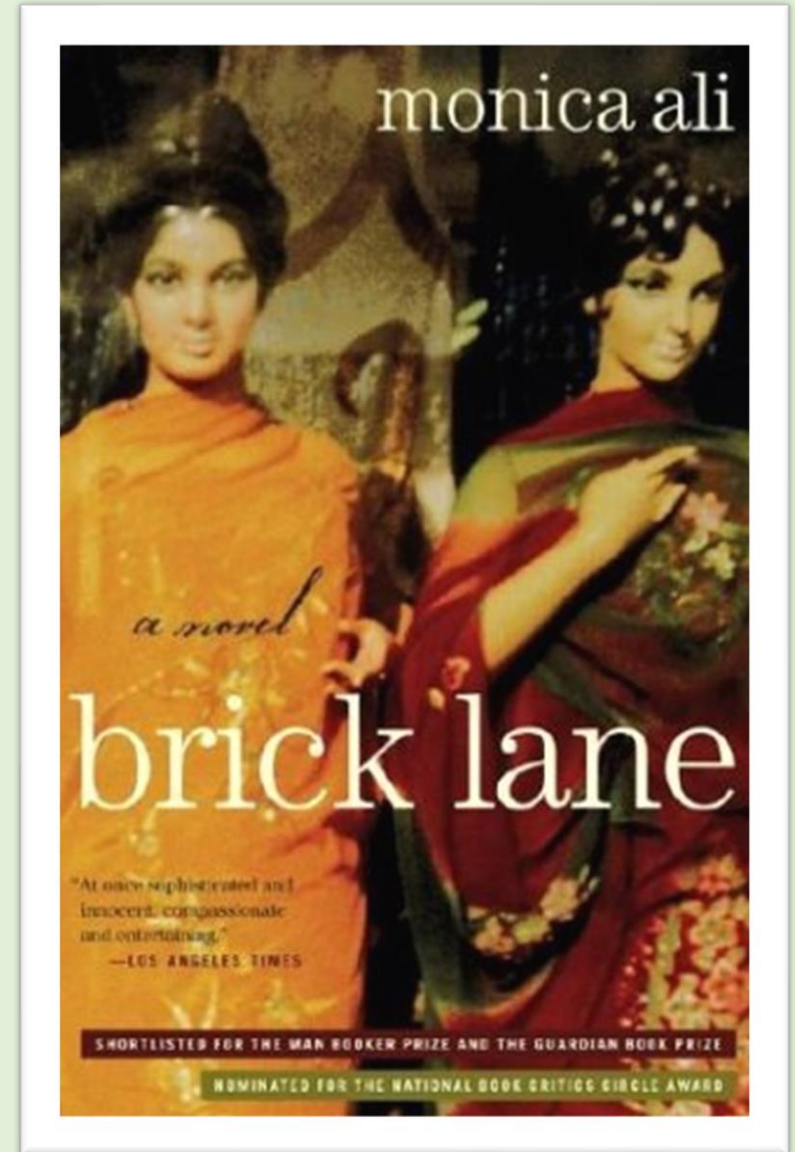
Task: Approaching a contemporary piece of prose.

How does Monica Ali present ideas about the immigrant experience in Brick Lane?

Read the extract, and consider:

- What impressions are created of Nazneen?
- How are these impressions created (select and analyse evidence)?

Write up a response to this question over the summer. Use the same structures you used for GCSE English Literature.



Brick Lane

Nazneen pulled the end of her sari* over her hair. At the main road she looked both ways. To get to the other side of the street without being hit by a car was like walking out in a monsoon and hoping to dodge the raindrops. A space opened up before her and she ran. A horn blared, stretching its vocal chords to the limit. The car skidded to a halt in front of her and the driver got out and began to shout. She ran again and turned into a side street, then off again to the right onto Brick Lane.

The side streets were stacked with rubbish, entire kingdoms of rubbish piled high as fortresses. Small patches of mist bearded the lampposts and a gang of pigeons turned weary circles like prisoners in an exercise yard. A pair of schoolchildren, pale as rice and loud as peacocks, cut over the road and hurtled down a side street, galloping with joy or else with terror. Otherwise, Brick Lane was deserted.

Nazneen walked. Four blocks down she crossed the road (she waited next to a woman and stepped out with her, like a calf with its mother) and took a side street. She looked up at a building as she passed. The entrance was like a glass fan, rotating slowly, sucking people in, wafting others out. Nazneen craned her neck back and saw that the glass above became dark as a night pond. The building was without end. Above, somewhere, it crushed the clouds.

Every person who brushed past her on the pavement seemed to be on a private, urgent mission to execute a precise and demanding plan: to get a promotion today, to be exactly on time for an appointment, to buy a newspaper with the right coins, to walk without wasting a second and to reach the roadside just as the lights turned red. Nazneen, hobbling and halting, began to be aware of herself. Without a coat, without a suit, without a destination. A leafshake of fear - or was it excitement? - passed through her.

But they were not aware of her. In the next instant she knew it. They knew she existed, but unless she did something they would not see her. She enjoyed this thought. She began to scrutinize. She stared at the long, thin faces, the pointy chins. The women had strange hair. It puffed up around their heads, pumped up like a snake's hood. They pressed their lips together and narrowed their eyes as though they were angry at something they had heard, or at the wind for messing their hair.

Someone tapped her gently on the shoulder and she leapt like a dog away from a snake. It was a man in a dark coat and tie. His glasses had lenses as thick as pebbles. He said something in English, but she could not understand him. She shook her head and said 'Sorry.' He nodded and solemnly walked away. It rained then. And in spite of the rain and in spite of the fact that she was lost and cold, Nazneen began to feel a little pleased. She had spoken one word, in English, to a stranger, and she had been understood. It was very little, but it was something.