

LEM Notes for Best Book Club reading: **Major Pettigrew's Last Stand, Helen Simonson**
Anchor, Canada: 2010

Meeting: April 10, 2012 — 7:30 pm @ Silvija's

25 chapters + an Epilogue wedding

Setting

“Edgecombe St. Mary —a small village in the English countryside filled with rolling hills, thatched cottages, and a cast of characters both hilariously original and as familiar as the members of your own family.”

Main Characters

Major Ernest Pettigrew and Nancy (deceased)

Roger Pettigrew

Sandy Dunn

Bertie Pettigrew (deceased) and Marjorie

Jemima Pettigrew + husband + son, Gregory

Mrs. Jasmina Ali and Mr. Ahmed Ali (deceased)

Abdul Wahid (Paulak) — son of Mr. Ali's brother and his wife who also had three daughters and six granddaughters

Alice Pierce — next door neighbour

Daisy Green, the Vicar's wife (Father Christopher)

Grace DeVere

Alma Shaw (Alec Shaw)

Hugh Whetstone (fellow golfer)

Tewkesbury and Teale — Mortimer Teale

Lord Dagenham

Themes

1. the idea of Englishness

the Major personifies its dynamism — a strong sense of nationalism but in the end is able to accept change in a way that others in the village are not

“The Major's appreciation for the long and enduring history of England and Great Britain is, I think, what gives him the strength to accept change. I also think the Major has a deep connection to the land where he was born... It is an unexplored part of being British that, no matter the rhetoric, we maintain an enduring sense of connection to the Indian subcontinent.

“Perhaps home is more precious to those who leave. ...I miss the English countryside

2. familial love

marriage

parent child — parent –grown child

siblings, young and old

3. community and friendship

“a love-letter to civility and person-to-person conversation about books and ideas”—“I wish we would all do a little more to tone down our own rhetoric and reach out to our neighbours... It seems to me that we communicate much too often but with no depth whatsoever. [HS]

- who belongs and who is excluded and why

4. late in life romantic love

—the agelessness of love

"I started thinking of them as friends, I later realized that this is my view of passion: It is rooted in genuine friendship. Chemistry may be two strangers exchanging smoldering looks—but passion has to be able to survive at least a 20 minute conversation. I feel sorry for young people trying to find a true and lasting love in this age of excruciatingly casual hook-up." [HS]

[Washington Post](#) 4 of 5 Stars

"The result is a smart romantic comedy about decency and good manners in a world threatened by men's hair gel, herbal tea and latent racism. ... Somehow in her first novel [Simonson] already knows just what delicious disruption romance can introduce to a well-settled life." Ron Charles

RE: Is love ageless?

Love is ageless, but different, I believe. As a widow, I could really identify with both characters even though I have not found myself in such a situation. But, I am still such a romantic that such relationships fill me with warm happiness. I think young love is often about looks and sex appeal; older love is about character though I don't discount sex appeal at any age! But, family is a real complication for older love as this book so vividly portrays!

Most definitely. But as we age I think we look for different things in our relationships. Intelligence, kindness, a sense of humor, respect — these are so much more important than the physical appearance.

Most definitely love is ageless, but I do think that certain aspects become more important as time goes on.

I think companionship and the ability to connect on an intellectual level are increasingly key as we age. When we are younger, I think biology and social norms drive our choices far more than when we are older. I think the Major's maturity was what permitted him to really pursue his relationship with Mrs. Ali — I'm not sure he would have done the same as a young man.

Most certainly — and this is the clear and most profound message that this novel provides. There are so seldom stories written about true love striking "senior citizens", or in this case, two mature widowed individuals clearly battling both their own personal grief over their lost spouses as well as their own loneliness. I think the readers will find themselves instantly rooting for Major Pettigrew and Mrs. Ali to get together and make each other happy for the remainder of their days.

5. grief – loss of a spouse, loss of a sibling, end of a girlfriend/boyfriend relationship

6. the guns – inheritance, valuable items, — object of discord: fighting over the guns

- gentle
- likable

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- surprisingly original – moves from stereotypes to fully developed unique characters with original voices
- funny
- would love to see it dramatized –a series that takes its time to develop the subtleties and deliver the dialogue as written

- BUT once read and even though the dialogue was much funnier than I remembered I couldn't get through it a second time. I'm not sure why. It is hopeful and comedic and I usually find I can redo romantic comedies despite their seeming frothiness.