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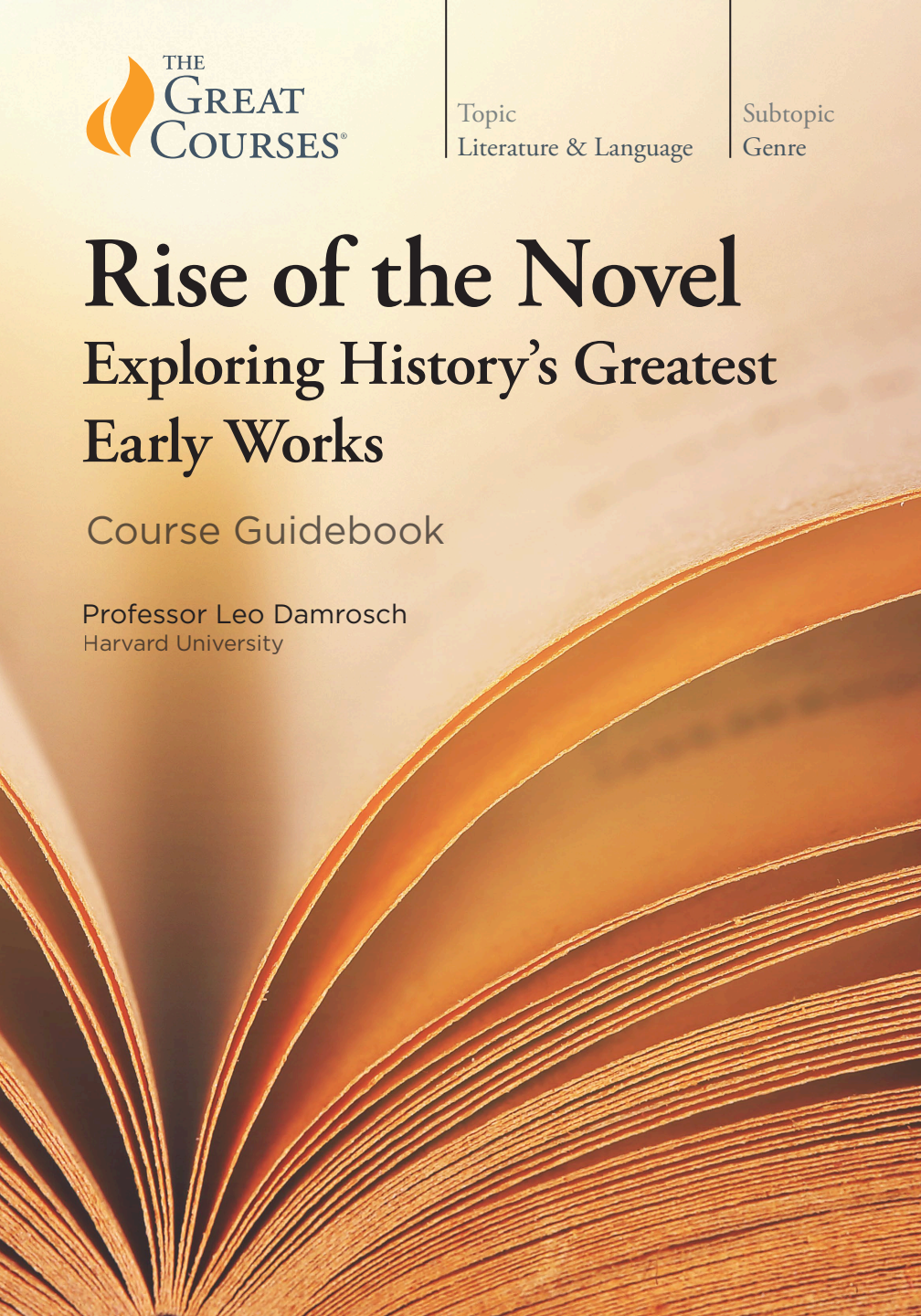
Professor Leo Damrosch
Harvard University



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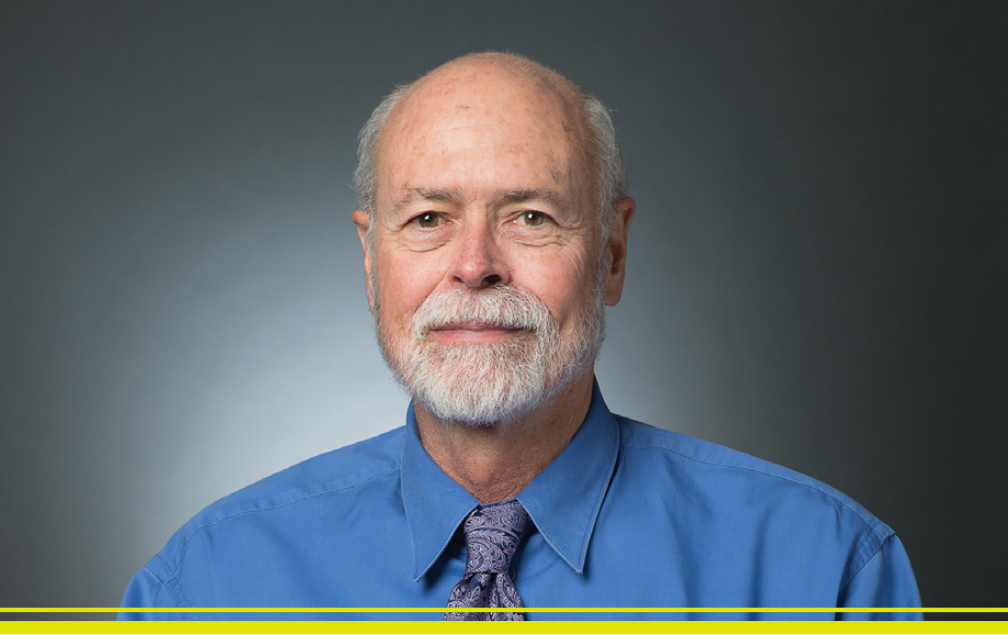

LEO DAMROSCH, PhD

Ernest Bernbaum Professor of Literature Emeritus
Harvard University

Leo Damrosch is the Ernest Bernbaum Professor of Literature Emeritus at Harvard University, where he began teaching in 1989 and continues to teach in the Extension School and Summer School. He also taught in the English departments at the University of Virginia and the University of Maryland at College Park. He earned a BA at Yale University; an MA at Trinity College Cambridge, where he was a Marshall Scholar; and a PhD at Princeton University. He was awarded a Harvard College Professorship for excellence in teaching and served as chair of the Harvard Department of English.

Professor Damrosch has published in numerous academic publications and is the author of several academic books on literary and historical subjects,

including *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Restless Genius*, a finalist for the National Book Award in nonfiction and winner of the PEN New England Award for nonfiction; *Tocqueville's Discovery of America; Jonathan Swift: His Life and His World*, winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award in biography, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in biography, and a finalist for the Kirkus Prize in nonfiction; *Eternity's Sunrise: The Imaginative World of William Blake*, a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in criticism and for the Christian Gauss Award; and *The Club: Johnson, Boswell, and the Friends Who Shaped an Age*. He was also elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Professor Damrosch's other Great Courses are *The Enlightenment Invention of the Modern Self* and *Books That Matter: "The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*."

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RISE OF THE NOVEL

Exploring History's Greatest Early Works

The novel! We take it for granted, don't we? It's the default form of storytelling in our culture and has been for more than 300 years. There are enormously more novels worth reading than many lifetimes would give us time to read, and more good novels keep coming out every year.

But that wasn't always the case. For many centuries in Western culture, there were no novels. Epic poems, yes—works of imaginative history, romantic tales, and stories of chivalry, too—but not novels.

Where did they come from? How did the first novelists figure out what they could do? And how did they become so central to our cultural experience? These are questions that will be explored in this course.

The novel form that emerged in England in the 18th century invented a particular kind of novelistic realism that grew in popularity until it was pretty much the standard form of novels all over Europe. But even in its early days, the realistic novel was never the only form. It immediately provoked counter-novels that deserve to be called metafictional—novels that highlight the voice and individuality of the author and the artificiality of the story art.

It's helpful to think of the development of novels as a kind of double helix. One strand is the type of realism that tries to reproduce the actual world. The other strand is metafiction, which makes us aware of the ways in which language is artistically manipulated to give a version of reality—not reality itself, pure and simple, if there even is such a thing.

The realistic novel emphasizes individual experience. There is often a central character whose name becomes the actual title of the book, such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Tom Jones*, and *Emma*. One of the great pleasures of reading these realistic novels is that they enlarge our sense of psychological interiority; that is, we are made to feel that we know these people in exceptional depth, perhaps even better than we know the real people closest to us.

A great novel can also make sense of human behavior in ways that we may feel life itself does not. As E. M. Forster wrote, "Novels can solace us. They suggest a more comprehensible—and thus a more manageable—human race. They give us the illusion of perspicacity and of power." In a way, a novel becomes an alternate world that we're living in as long as we're reading.

The novel didn't spring full-blown from the 18th century, of course. And through these lectures, you'll examine a couple of interesting proto-novels from ancient Rome as well as the picaresque adventure stories that culminated in the masterpiece of Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* in the early 17th century. From there, you'll experience the extraordinary flowering of the English novel in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, and two of Jane Austen's most famous novels.

Then, you'll cross the English Channel to discover some remarkable French contributions to the genre: Madame de La Fayette's *La Princesse de Clèves*, the Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*, Pierre Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie*. And after reading an 18th-century German smash hit, J. W. von Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*, you'll move into the 19th century to immerse yourself in two of the greatest novels ever written: Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* and George Eliot's *Middlemarch*.

Since the mid-20th century, literary criticism has gone through many academic phases, with names like the New Criticism, Deconstructionism, and the New Historicism. In many academic disciplines, recent is often better; knowledge advances cumulatively. But in understanding and enjoying literature, what is recent has often been worse.

Perhaps the best criticism about literature has always honored the imaginative experience of reading and loving it. C. S. Lewis, who was himself a professor of literature, once said that in a family of literary intellectuals, the only member with a genuine experience of literature might be a child reading *Treasure Island* with a flashlight under the covers.

In this course, you are invited to get your flashlight out for an exploration of some of the earliest—and still some of the greatest—novels ever written.

1

REDISCOVERING THE NOVEL

E. M. Forster, a distinguished novelist himself, gave a series of lectures called *Aspects of the Novel* in 1927. Forster held that there are so many ways of telling a story that it's useless to confine the novel to a definition—or at least to any definition more complicated than the one he gives: "a fiction in prose—of a certain extent." Forster thought that if you had to pin down "a certain extent," you might settle for "not less than 50,000 words." But if we don't insist on seeing the novel as a single category, we can say a lot about particular kinds of novels—and that's what this course will do.

NARRATIVE MODES

The critic Northrop Frye once proposed a way of thinking about types of narrative. He described **five modes** that developed as a chronological sequence in Western culture but often overlap with each other in later narratives:

1. **Myth** tells about the gods—how they created the universe, how they embody eternal forces, and how they relate to us mortals. A myth is supposed to have universal significance. It's not a fairy tale about particular characters.

2. **Romance** does describe particular characters, but they occupy a kind of ideal realm, rather than our own familiar world. Heroes in romance are felt to be superior to ourselves. They are not gods, but

they do have access to magical assistance, often provided by wizards or enchanters, and are often engaged in a quest that is an unambiguous contest between good and evil. Stories of romance were normally told in elevated language, deliberately different from everyday speech.

3. **High mimetic** refers to the sense of nobility that we see in tragedy and epic. They imitate (*mimesis* is the Greek word for "imitation") people who are like us. They are not gods or romantic questers, but nevertheless, they are clearly superior to us. In epic, the hero may lead society to new success; in tragedy, the hero gets isolated from society as a noble victim.

4. **Low mimetic** is Frye's term for comedy—and for most novels. The characters are pretty much like ourselves. Comedies generally have an element of wish fulfillment. Threats and obstacles are overcome; Mr. and Ms. Right get married at the end. Sometimes the difference between the wish fulfillment and ordinary experience is the whole point. Sometimes the happy ending is made to emerge believably, from ordinary interactions that could happen to anybody.

5. **Irony** is seen by Frye as being increasingly dominant in the modern world. The characters are inferior to ourselves, trapped in arbitrary and futile suffering and disappointment. There was plenty of

The word *novel* developed from the word *news*. In fact, many early novelists pretended to be merely reporting factual information.

But before the word *novel* took over, the usual word for any fictional story was *romance*. That derived from an Old French word *romanz*, which meant simply the *Roman* language of popular speech—the Latin that was spoken by ordinary people when classical Latin was evolving into modern French and Spanish and Italian. That's why they're known as the *romance* languages. In French to this day, the normal word for a novel is roman.

suffering and disappointment in tragedy, but there it was felt to have meaning and nobility. Now it's kept at arm's length, with ironic detachment.

- **These are not mutually exclusive categories.** In Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, the last three are all present, and they contribute to the richness of that novel. There is a fair amount of irony directed by Fielding at character types and social behavior that he despises. But the prevailing mode is low mimetic comedy; Fielding called his novels "comic epics in prose." And then there is a further imaginative layer. At its heart, *Tom Jones* is a romance brilliantly transposed into the normal life of 18th-century England.

- Later writers have found that it's even possible to combine romance and novel overtly. That's what makes *The Lord of the Rings* so memorable. J. R. R. Tolkien was a distinguished scholar of medieval romance, and his story is a romance, with a quest and wizards and a magical ring of immense power. But it's also grounded in intensely realistic details—of exactly the kind we call novelistic.

REALISM AND THE NOVEL

- If we accept that the realistic novel is not the only kind of novel—we can still say that within its limits—it has characteristic features that the majority of novels embody.

- In fact, literary critic and historian Ian Watt described specific features as **characteristic of the realistic novel:**

    - **It emphasizes individual experience.** There is often a central character whose name becomes the actual title of the book, such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Clarissa Harlowe*, and *Tom Jones.*

    - **It enlarges our sense of psychological interiority.** In other words, we are made to feel that we know these people in exceptional depth.

- In the 1920s, E. M. Forster proposed a distinction between **two kinds of characterization** that has been invoked over and over again since he made it. Forster distinguishes between what he calls round characters and flat characters:
    - **Flat characters** are basically character types. They are predictable. Part of the pleasure in getting to know them is the comfortable feeling that they will never surprise us.
    - **Round characters** give the illusion of having three dimensions—as being complex and unpredictable, the way we imagine real people are.
- Forster was not making a value judgment; he thought both types of characterization are valuable. And many novels combine them.
- Forster also makes another, less obvious point. It may be that flat characters actually resemble real people—as we experience them in our own encounters—more accurately than round ones do. How many people do we know in the kind of depth that we get to know characters in novels?

A conventional dogma about fiction that is profoundly misguided is the claim that a novelist should always show, not tell. For some reason, it's thought to be artistically better if the reader deduces meaning from what characters say and do, rather than getting any hints from the narrator.

That dogma developed during the 19th century, particularly under the influence of Gustave Flaubert and later of Henry James. But James himself made it very clear that he was describing what he tried to do in his own novels, but not in the least what all novelists had to do.

In his 1961 book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, a critic named Wayne Booth argued that show-don't-tell became a favorite mantra of the modernists, but it really doesn't work for most novels, including many of the greatest. **A really good novelist nearly always shows and tells.**

- A great novel makes sense of human behavior in ways that we may feel life itself does not. So Forster concludes:

> Novels can solace us. They suggest a more comprehensible—and thus a more manageable—human race. They give us the illusion of perspicacity and of power.

- Returning to Watt's account of realism, these highly individualized and in-depth characters are presented as inhabiting a world much like our own. It's not the idealized realm of romance; it's the world of family relationships, and jobs, and the struggle to get enough money.

- That's why the expression *novelistic details* got invented. **The more a story is embedded in concrete details, the more it will seem real.**

- Many novelists fill their stories with things that their readers personally experience every day. One way of thinking about this is that the character has to accommodate him- or herself to society. So these are stories of individual development that is inseparable from the social environment. There didn't used to be any English word for that, so we've taken over the German one: *Bildungsroman*. *Roman* means "novel" while *Bildung* means "formation" or "creation." So these are novels of development, education, coming of age. That will be a central thread running through all the realistic novels in this course.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE NOVEL

- **The language of novels differs from the old epics and romances.** Some narrators do show off rhetorical skill; others pretend to be just writing the way a person might talk. But in either case, there will never be anything like that elevated style of *Le Morte d'Arthur.*

- The Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin coined a useful term in this regard. He called it *heteroglossia*. The idea is that **poetry—and certainly epic poetry—is monoglot. All of the characters in the *Iliad* sound pretty much the same.** Even when they are given speeches to say, their speeches are gathered up into the controlling language of the epic singer or bard.

- **In novels, there is a medley of different modes of language.** Individual characters speak in their own ways. And from the culture beyond the characters, all sorts of other discourses are brought in—newspaper journalism, legal jargon, proverbial sayings, trivializing clichés, and on and on.

- **A novel becomes an alternate world that you're living in as long as you're reading it. And the more you get acclimated in the imaginative world of the novel, it's as if you've become fluent in its particular language.**

- A couple of useful terms that critics have suggested are the *implied author* and the *implied reader.*

    - The **implied author** is never identical with the actual person who wrote the book because it's a narrative stance, or persona, or voice that is intended to affect readers in a certain way.

    - The **implied reader** is less obvious. That's the role that we are invited to play when we get immersed in a novel. If we can't stand the values that are assumed in that novel, or even the language it's

expressed in, we're not going to want to go on reading. We need to be the kind of reader that the novel expects.

- Novelists understand that very well, and they do everything they can to draw readers in—to make them accept the role of being the kind of person who can appreciate this particular book. Some novelists put this relationship right up front, with constant addresses to the reader, even playfully teasing the reader. Others take it for granted but don't emphasize it. Still others refuse to even honor that implied contract between author and reader.

- Watt makes that point that we tend to be suspicious of novels that have overt plots. We want the story to seem to develop naturally, with its own inherent logic. Henry James put it very well: "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" If the plot is overt, we are likely to feel that it's been foisted in—that it makes the story seem that much less real.

2

ROMAN NOVELS: *SATYRICON* AND *THE GOLDEN ASS*

Very little prose fiction survives from ancient times. But two narratives that were widely read later on and influenced many novelists are the *Satyricon* by Petronius and *The Golden Ass* by Lucius Apuleius in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. Neither one of these writers was what would usually come to mind today if you heard the word novelist.

THE *SATYRICON*

- The first thing to say about the *Satyricon* is that most of it is lost. We have two and a half books out of what were originally 16, or maybe even 24. So it's a fragmentary work, and we can only guess at what the rest of it may have been like.

- **Is the *Satyricon* a novel?**

- William Arrowsmith, whose 1959 translation is still one of the most readable, says in his introduction that it is **"visibly a novel, yet somehow not a novel at all."**

- As he comments, **it's a real hodgepodge of different genres**—comic, mock-heroic, satirical, and realistic—with a lot of poems thrown in. Some of the poems are definitely meant to be terrible, but others may be seriously

intended (classicists argue about that). Translators do their best to find English equivalents, but notoriously, poetry is what gets lost in translation.

- There are also lots of parodies, which only work if you know the original—in the original language. Different levels of language are a challenge, too, even for experts.

- When can we be sure that a character is supposed to seem ridiculous for clichés, or pomposity, or vulgarity? Nobody today speaks the colloquial Latin of the 1st century AD.

- **Petronius was obviously an exceptionally sophisticated person, but what goes on in the *Satyricon* is anything but sophisticated.** Drawing on a popular genre known as Menippean satire, its theme is the crudity and self-serving scheming of the culture of his time.

- The genre of fiction that was most popular in those days was Greek romances, in which star-crossed lovers are cruelly separated, experience a long series of melodramatic challenges, and then reunite and live happily ever after.

- The *Satyricon* is nothing like that. It's not set in some idealized realm of romance. And instead of faithful lovers, its three main characters are a pair of homosexual friends who quarrel over the same pretty young man. One of them is the narrator, and his name is Encolpius, which we are told means "Crotch."

- In some way, Encolpius offended the god Priapus, whose emblem is an enormous phallus, and is punished by becoming impotent. An episode in which a eunuch tries in vain to arouse him is typical of Petronius's antiromantic realism:

> A river of sweat and perfume was streaming down his face, leaving his wrinkled cheeks so creviced with powder that he looked like some cracked wall, standing desolate under a pelting rain.

- **It would be hard to say that any of these characters are what we would today call characterized.** They simply observe things that go on and

sometimes participate. There is no moral commentary, not even when their young boyfriend is forced to take the virginity of a seven-year-old girl. We might assume that that's intended to seem dreadful, but not at all. The girl enjoys it immensely, and her name is Pannychis, which means "All Night Long."

Petronius held the role of *arbiter elegantium*, an advisor on sophisticated lifestyle, in the court of the emperor Nero. In other words, he was the expert on pleasure.

- Specialists warn us not to think of the *Satyricon* as a "gay novel." Throughout history, attitudes about same-sex relationships have changed greatly, and one thing seems clear: The Romans despised adult male lovers as effeminate.

- What they thought was normal was pederasty: sexual relations between an older man and a boy. Also, the boy should be a slave; it was wrong if it happened with a freeborn boy. As for women, they don't play much of a role in the *Satyricon*. When they do show up, they are grotesquely sex-crazed. But despite the *Satyricon's* reputation as a dirty book, there's very little sex, and what there is, is discreet.

- **Even if we can't be sure what the missing parts of the *Satyricon* were like, one thing we know for sure is that there's nothing that you would call a plot.** That was clearly deliberate on Petronius's part. The old Greek romances definitely had plots, formulaic though they were. And needless to say, epic poems and dramatic tragedies had plots—and those were the most admired literary works in ancient times.

- Aristotle said that the plot is the soul of a literary work—the animating principle that gives it life. That has continued to be true of most novels.

- **The *Satyricon* is postmodern, with no plot whatsoever.** It's totally skeptical of stories that claim to make sense of our lives.

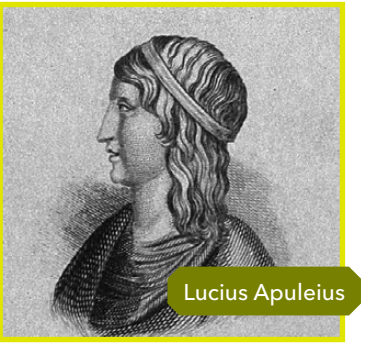
Two 18th-century antinovels that are directly in the tradition of Petronius are *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne and *Jacques the Fatalist* by Denis Diderot, both of which are addressed in this course.

- In many ways, **the *Satyricon* is nothing like mainstream realistic fiction. But that doesn't mean it's not a novel—or maybe it's an antinovel.**

THE GOLDEN ASS

- The other classic work of Roman fiction is *The Golden Ass*, and there is a lot more to say about it, for two reasons. One is that we do have the entire work, so we can experience it as the author intended. And the other is that although it, too, looks like a medley of random events for much of the time, it unexpectedly breaks through to a conclusion that puts everything in a different light. It turns out, in the end, to be **a philosophical novel.**

- **The narrator of *The Golden Ass* is named Lucius, and the author of the book was Lucius Apuleius. It becomes clear that they are essentially the same person.**


Lucius Apuleius

- Unlike the *Satyricon*, the sex here is heterosexual. Lucius becomes the lover of a servant girl named Photis, and they have a great time in bed. But what happens next is the central disaster in the plot.

- Photis's employer is a witch who turns herself into an owl and flies away into the night. Lucius is desperate to see it done—and, if possible, do it himself. It's clear that this is forbidden knowledge, and the central theme of the book is the danger of too much curiosity.

- Photis agrees to supply him with the magic ointment that will turn him into an owl, but she blunders and picks up the wrong jar. The original title of the book was *Eleven Books of Metamorphoses*, and the metamorphosis of Lucius is described in convincing detail:

> I stood flapping my arms, first the left and then the right, but no little feathers appeared on them. All that happened was that the

> hair on them grew coarser and coarser, and the skin toughened into hide. Next, my fingers bunched together into a hard lump, so that my hands became hooves. The same change came over my feet, and I felt a long tail sprouting from the base of my spine. Then my face swelled, my mouth widened, my nostrils dilated, my lips hung flabbily down, and my ears shot up long and hairy.
>
> The only consoling part of this miserable transformation was the enormous increase in the size of a certain organ of mine; because I was finding it increasingly difficult to meet Photis's demands. At last I was obliged to face the mortifying fact that I had been transformed, not into a bird, but into a plain jackass.

- Photis reassures Lucius that he can become human again as soon as he eats some roses, but for various reasons, he can never get ahold of any. The rest of the book is what happens to him, trapped in the body of an ass who can only bray when he tries to talk and is cruelly beaten as a common beast of burden.

- This metamorphosis does have one advantage, though. Because no one realizes that Lucius is a human being in disguise, he gets to see their real behavior in a world that's filled with adultery, and revenge, and death.

- **In one sense, the *Golden Ass* is convincingly realistic, in exactly the way we now use the word *novelistic*. But in another sense, it's no such thing, since there are examples of witchcraft all the way through.**

- **For the original audience, however, maybe this was realism**. People in the ancient world took it for granted that magic existed, just as miracles did. Opponents of the early Christians didn't deny that their miracles happened; they just claimed that they were caused by black magic, not good magic.

The reason the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius are generally known as *The Golden Ass* is a colloquial use of the word aureus, "golden," to mean "first-rate" or "superb." Lucius becomes a splendid ass, or donkey, so the book could also be called *The Wonderful Donkey*.

- In *The Golden Ass*, incidents that might belong in a horror movie are represented as hilarious. And many of the tales are pretty sensational. People get gored to death by wild boars, and one is even eaten by a dragon. An angry slave owner punishes a slave by having him smeared with honey and tied to a tree, where ants gradually eat through his body until there is nothing left but glistening bones. These are all separate ministories, but they run parallel to the experience of Lucius after he becomes an ass—barely escaping getting killed over and over again.

- **The ending of the *Golden Ass* must come as a surprise. It's a kind of religious conversion,** after which Lucius does indeed attain secret knowledge—but only after being **initiated as a priest in the cult of the goddess Isis.** Previously, he tried to get that knowledge through magic, which led to all of his troubles. Back then, his experience was dominated by *Fortuna*—fortune, or luck—and nearly all the time, his luck was really bad.

- Now he is rescued from random fortune by Isis, a nature goddess associated with the moon in the Egyptian myth. The goddess gives Lucius roses to eat—and at last, there's a metamorphosis that reverses the one when Photis gave him the wrong ointment.

- **Up until this point, Lucius has been the victim of random fortune; from now on, his life will be given shape and meaning by the goddess.** Earlier in the story, he wanted to experience transformation—but in the wrong way, through magic. After that backfired, he went through a kind of purgatorial test. Now he gets to experience the right kind of transformation.

- At the time of this classic work, **asses were proverbial for lust,** much like goats in later times, and toward the end of the book, a depraved noblewoman actually insists on coupling with Lucius. What **Isis offers instead is**

Apuleius himself became a priest of the cult of Isis. Since he gives his character his own first name, Lucius, it becomes clear that the whole story is an allegory of his personal spiritual quest.

something totally different—purity. And all of this is a complete contrast with the anything-goes behavior of the characters in the *Satyricon.*

The *Satyricon* and the *Golden Ass* are not like what would become the default form of the novel.

- The characters are not really characterized. We know what happens to them, but we know almost nothing about their personalities. And they don't learn and change.

- The society they live in is realistically described, but not the network of relationships and jobs and expectations that later novels will create.

- There is no chronological timeline—no connected series of events. In fact, there's no plot at all.

3

DON QUIXOTE AND THE PICARESQUE NOVEL

Most of this lecture will be devoted to the foundational novel in the Western tradition, the great *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes. But first let's consider a type of narrative that was immensely popular at that time: the picaresque.

THE PICARESQUE NOVEL

- The term *picaresque* comes from the Spanish word *picarón*, which is generally rendered in English as *picaro*, meaning a "rogue." **A typical picaresque narrative relates a series of encounters or adventures in which the rogue sees society from below.** These are novels, certainly, but they're not essential to the story of this course since they lack at least three things that are considered central:

    - **Plot.** There is never any plot in a picaresque novel, just a series of unconnected events.

    - **Characterization.** The central character may wise up as he or she accumulates experience but is never represented in any depth, and neither are the people he or she runs into.

    - **Overt moral or ethical perspective.** Most novelists want to teach us something meaningful about the world and our place in it. If the

picaresque teaches anything, it's be on your guard all the time—don't let anyone get behind you.

- That's not to say that these are inferior books; it's just that **they don't try to represent reality in the way that most later novels will.**

- There's no plot because in picaresque novels, life is totally random. Life doesn't make sense, so inventing a meaningful plot would be a misrepresentation of reality.

- There's no characterization because in these stories, people see each other totally externally, and the picaro him- or herself, who often tells the story, is never given to introspection.

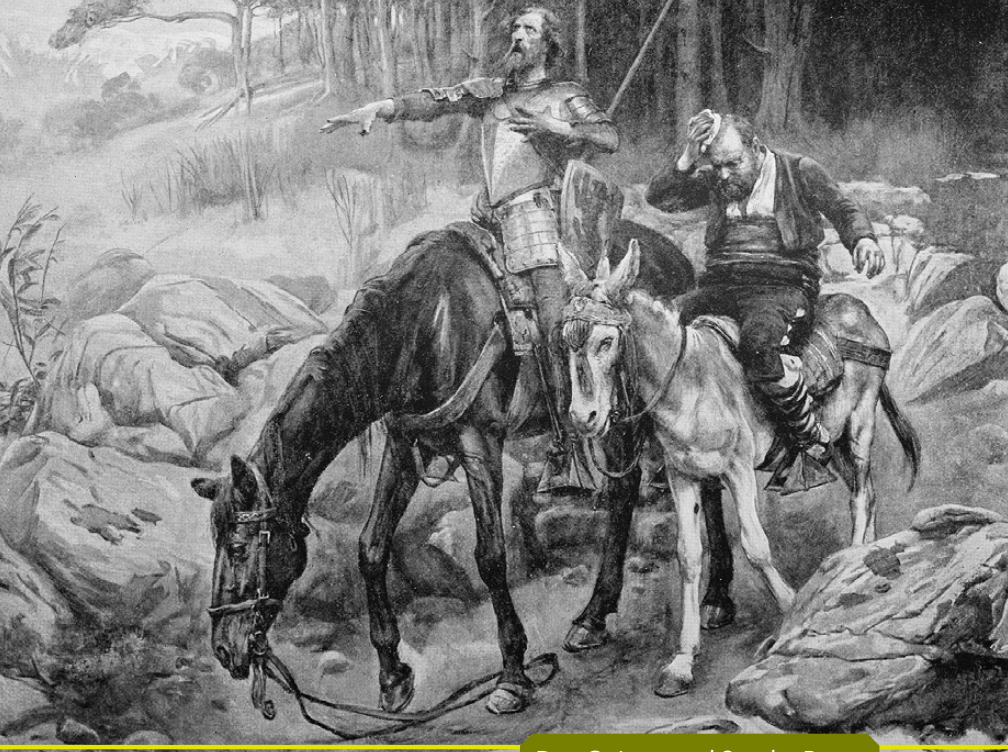
- There is no larger perspective, which means we have to simply guess whether the author who actually wrote the story sees it any differently from the way his or her characters do. There's no explicit critique of society and its injustices. The picaro just has to acquire street smarts.

ROMANTIC PARODY OR SOMETHING MORE?

- Even people who have never read *Don Quixote* probably know what the basic story is: **A small-time Spanish landowner gets so obsessed with romantic tales of chivalry that he fantasizes he's a gallant knight himself and sets forth on adventures, accompanied by Sancho Panza, a peasant whom he calls his squire.** Whenever a political cartoonist shows a skinny man on a skinny horse, charging at a windmill, we know that's Don Quixote.

Cervantes was a very prolific writer, but his breakthrough didn't come until 1605, when he was almost 60. That was the first installment of *Don Quixote*, and it made him famous, though not rich. Until the 19th century, nearly all of the profits went to the publishers, not to authors.

Part two of *Don Quixote* came out 10 years later, in 1615, just a year before Cervantes's death. Shakespeare also died in 1616, so *Don Quixote* was written at exactly the same time as Shakespeare's greatest plays.



Don Quixote and Sancho Panza

- This theme of idealism that's admirable but hopelessly applied gave us the word *quixotic*.

- **Since Quixote and Sancho have a series of adventures on the road, this novel does have roots in the picaresque tradition, but it goes way beyond it to create something altogether new.**

- We're so used to the image of Quixote as a knight-errant that we may not stop to wonder why he does that. The answer is very interesting. It seems that Cervantes began by intending to simply parody the improbabilities in stories of chivalry but ended up admiring the values that they stood for, which were being forgotten in the corrupt and materialistic Spain of his day.

- When the institution of knighthood developed in the feudal system—back in the Dark Ages, when the Roman Empire broke down—knights were just mounted warriors in the service of local warlords who were constantly fighting over territory.

- Back then, everybody hated and feared knights. They would come galloping through your town, raping and pillaging. The word *chivalry* meant merely that they rode on horseback, which made them the superweapons of the time, encased in armor and mowing down people on foot.

- The word *chivalry* comes from *cheval*, which is French for a horse. The German word for a knight conveys the same idea: *Ritter*, which means "rider."

- Later on, in the period that we think of as the High Middle Ages, writers of stories about knighthood wanted to promote an ideal of selfless devotion to worthy causes. Their heroes were independent questers, traveling through the world to vanquish evildoers and rescue good people in distress. That's where the word *freelance* comes from, coined later on by analogy; they carried lances, but they were no longer members of an organized army. Until recently, to call someone *chivalrous* was always understood to be a compliment.

- **Why were these stories called *romances*, which eventually came to mean simply "love stories"?** The modern word for a novel in Spanish is *novela*, but in Cervantes's day, that word didn't exist. There really wasn't any word then to describe what he was doing. The term he himself preferred was *historia*, meaning "history." In modern Spanish, *historia* can mean either a history, in the sense of events that really happened, or it can mean a story of any kind.

Are we supposed to read *Don Quixote* as if it is a history in the usual sense, suspending our disbelief until we're rather like Quixote himself?

- **Cervantes thought, with good reason, that a lot of chivalric romances were unreal in every sense.** The heroes are impossibly noble and selfless, the ladies are impossibly beautiful, and everybody speaks an artificial language that was supposed to be elegant.

- **Cervantes set out simply to make fun of that kind of thing. But he also knew that the best romances were much better than that.**

ILLUSION VS. REALITY

- **At the beginning of the story, Quixote is a modest *hidalgo*—**a member of the minor gentry—with no right to call himself "Don." **He gets so obsessed with the stories of chivalry that he starts to translate everything he sees into their terms.**

- In the novel, he's regularly described as "mad," but it's not mental illness in the usual sense. He's perfectly sensible about nearly everything, except that he's in the grip of what the French call an idée fixe—an obsessive idea he can't get free from. A good term for him would be a monomaniac.

- The region of La Mancha, where Don Quixote lives, is a hot, arid plain, across which shepherds drive flocks of sheep and windmills provide power to grind grain. But Quixote has immersed himself in the romances so deeply that he can't bear to think that those stories are merely imaginary.

- **In Quixote's own mind, he becomes a hero, following a noble ideal of service to those in need.** The critic Roberto González Echevarría says: "He is trying to cast off his earthly, historical existence and live in the rarefied region of poetry."

La Mancha

- He immerses himself so totally in romantic stories that they become more real to him than reality itself. **Even if it is a total illusion, there is also nobility in Quixote's yearning to bring back the ideals of chivalry.** And he has a vision of what real honor should be: risking one's life to help those in distress.

- Having made up his mind to set forth on a quest, Quixote needs to qualify himself as a knight. He needs a more impressive name than his own, which is Quejana or Quijano—the narrator claims to be unsure about that—and he chooses Quixote, which is the name for a piece of armor. (We're not even told his first name, which is Alonso, until much later.) Also, he needs a proper title, so naturally now he is Don Quixote—de la Mancha.

- A knight must ride a noble steed, and Quixote's skinny old horse will have to play that role. He renames it Rocinante—the narrator says, "which struck him as a truly lofty name." This seems to have been Cervantes's joke, since the name combines *rocin*, meaning a worn-out horse, and *antes*, meaning "before." Thus, Quixote's charger was "formerly a wretched hack." It's as if the new name transforms it into a worthy steed. For Quixote, with his brain crammed with books, language has magical power.

- Now he needs a lady, noble and pure, in whose service he will carry out his mighty deeds. He says at one point:

> A knight errant without his lady is like a tree without its leaves, a building without its roof, a shadow without anybody that can cast it.

- Quixote has been attracted to a very pretty peasant girl, though she never suspected it, and he decides that she will be his ideal lady. Her real name is Aldonza Lorenzo (a name suggestive of "noble battle"), but in his mind, she is now Dulcinea, which suggests sweetness.

- And finally, a knight needs a squire to attend him. So that will be the fat, utterly unromantic peasant—Sancho Panza.

- As the novel begins, **the narrator clearly stands at a distance from his characters.** When Quixote rides off on his adventures, the narrator says:

> He rode so slowly, and the sun was glowing with such intense heat, that it would have melted his brains, if he'd had any.

- **One of the fascinating aspects of this novel—one that later novelists would profit from—is the ambiguous relationship of the narrator to his story. Does he mock Quixote, or sympathize with him, or maybe even admire him?**

- **The answer is yes, all of those.** At the end of this course, you'll see Stendhal doing much the same thing in *The Red and the Black*. And he was a huge admirer of *Don Quixote*. Stendhal said, "The discovery of this book is perhaps the greatest epoch of my life."

- What's most interesting about Quixote's adventures, right from the beginning, is his resistance to learning from them. He needs his illusion too badly to give it up.

- When he mistakes windmills for giants and charges at them, naturally the whirling sails fling him to the ground. Sancho had warned him from the start that they were just windmills, but when he picks himself up, he has an explanation for what happened.

- He says it's obvious that some evil enchanter "transformed these giants into windmills in order to deprive me of the glory of vanquishing them." The old stories of chivalry are indeed full of enchanters.

- **Quixote never learns from all the times he gets beaten up because in his own mind, he is an invincible knight.** When he claims that every mishap is the work of an evil enchanter, it's a crucial defense mechanism. It permits him to rationalize every setback so as to hold on to his vision of himself as a fearless, invincible warrior. If he were to lose that, he would be back to his humble status as an unimposing, minor *hidalgo*. All the poetry would disappear from his life—and so would the significance he now believes it has.

Sancho Panza gives Don Quixote the name that everyone knows: the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance—or, more prosaically, the Sad Face (*el caballero de la triste figura*).

4

DON QUIXOTE: A DEEPER LOOK

Ten years went by after part one of *Don Quixote* was published, and then, in 1615, Cervantes brought out part two. It's longer than part one, different, and in many ways deeper. In fact, it's the rare example of a sequel that's at least as good as the original.

FROM THE PICARESQUE TO THE NOVEL

- **What makes part two especially interesting is that many of the people Quixote and Sancho meet have already read part one.** This means that people in part two often welcome Quixote and Sancho, because they look forward to seeing them play their familiar roles. **They deliberately encourage Quixote's dream of knight-errantry.**

- Quixote gets to deliver long discourses on topics like education, poetry, and justice. These are ideas that Cervantes himself clearly cares

Miguel de Cervantes

about, and he makes Quixote thoughtful and wise enough to express them eloquently. And **although Quixote does still have his idée fixe, it's getting less obsessional.** After he misconstrues a situation and causes unnecessary havoc, he's now willing to acknowledge that he was mistaken, though he still blames wicked enchanters for deceiving him.

- **Something else is very different from part one, which was filled with long, interpolated stories—tales about people, usually young lovers, who aren't characters in the novel at all.** Cervantes claimed that those stories were branches on the main trunk, but he evidently realized that most readers thought they were an irrelevant distraction. Modern critics try to prove that they interweave themes from the main story, but most readers probably didn't notice that, or gain much pleasure from being told about it.

- So **in part two, when we do get interpolated stories, the characters in the stories actually meet Quixote and Sancho. They take part directly in the main story.**

- One might say that **just as Cervantes departs from the randomness of the picaresque, he's likewise learning how to construct a novel as a single whole.**

- That doesn't mean that there is a plot, exactly. **Literary critics sometimes contrast plot with story: A story is just whatever happens; a plot is a coherent structure imposed on the story.** That doesn't mean that plot is necessarily better than story; it's just different.

- In this course, you will encounter examples of both. Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* looks like a picaresque story, but at the end, it turns out to have a brilliantly constructed plot. But just a few years after *Tom Jones*, Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy* and Denis Diderot in *Jacques the Fatalist* reject the very possibility of plot—and they suggest good reasons for doing so.

- So **a novel doesn't have to have a plot, in a formal sense, but it does have to feel coherent. And readers have always felt that *Don Quixote* achieves that.** We empathize increasingly with Quixote and Sancho—and probably Cervantes himself did, too. His book **began as a parody of chivalric**

romances, developed into a comedy, and finally took shape as a fully-fledged novel.

TRUTH AND THE NOVEL

- The strangest episode in this novel is Quixote's descent into the Cave of Montesinos (a chivalric character in old ballads and legends). Supposedly, there would be mysterious wonders down there.

- So Quixote gets Sancho and a guide to lower him into the cave with a rope. Later, they pull him up again and find that he is sound asleep. When he wakes up, he relates that down below, he found himself in a beautiful field, in which was a palace of pure crystal, and he spent three days and three nights there. Much to his joy, he beheld Dulcinea there in all her beauty.

There was an actual Cave of Montesinos in the region of La Mancha.

- **It's obvious that this happened in a dream, not in reality, but for Quixote, maybe in a psychological sense it is reality.** He so badly wants Dulcinea to be regal and beautiful that he dreams her into existence and is convinced he really saw her.

- Here, **Cervantes is openly playing with questions about the various ways a story can be "true."** The episode is introduced by an obviously tongue-in-cheek chapter title:

> Chapter 23: The remarkable things the incomparable Don Quixote said he had seen in the depths of Montesinos' Cave, the implausibility and magnificence of which make this adventure seem distinctly apocryphal.

- So **what do we mean by *truth* in a fictional narrative?** A historian describing actual events tries to be factually accurate, though even then it's impossible to tell a story about the past without some element of novelistic imagination. What about an actual novel like this one—even if it pretends to be, in some sense, a "history"?

- **In this context, the appropriate term is *verisimilitude*: not literal factual truth, but something that resembles truth.** As Cervantes knew well, Aristotle in the *Poetics* said that poetry is more philosophical than history because history just tells us what happened, whereas poetry represents the universal rather than the particular. It shows us not just what did happen, but how and why things do happen.

In Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Chief Bromden says: "But it's the truth even if it didn't happen."

- In chapter 47 of part one, there's an interesting discussion of verisimilitude. A cathedral priest says that the trouble with the old romances is that they are just too unbelievable, with towers made of stone that sail on the ocean and knights who single-handedly defeat enormous armies. And then the priest adds:

> If anyone says that people who write such books are creating lying fictions, and don't have to worry about truthfulness, I say to them, the best lies are those that most closely resemble truth. What gives the most pleasure is what seems most probable or possible.

- In *Jacques the Fatalist*, Diderot gives an even more sophisticated version of this idea:

> The person who takes what I write for the truth might perhaps be less wrong than the person who takes it for a fiction.

- **It's not factual truth, but it does have its own kind of truth.**

A novel as we read it today is bound to seem different than it did to its original readers. We don't belong to their culture. Even modern Spanish people live in a very different world from Cervantes. But at least the Spanish have access to the nuances of language that were so important in the original.

Even the best translators are often at their wits' end to say something in English without losing the flavor, and even the meaning, of the original. Ultimately, translations capture the story effectively but inevitably lose some of the linguistic resonance of the original.

THE ENDING

- **As this long novel moves toward its conclusion, there are fewer and fewer episodes of the kind we call quixotic,** and we are taken into a wider world than the dusty roads of La Mancha. In fact, **Quixote is on his way to emerging at last from his delusion.** And the ending of this great novel has extraordinary power, because **it challenges us to think about whether we want him to be undeluded.**

- The final chapter—there are 126 in all—is exceedingly moving. Quixote has taken to his bed with a fever, and the doctor says he seems to be dying "of sadness and regret." Quixote calls to Sancho and then makes this declaration:

> I am in my right mind now, clear-headed and free of the darkness of ignorance that was brought upon me by continual reading of those abominable books of chivalry. Congratulate me, for I am no longer Don Quixote de La Mancha, but Alonso Quijano, whose way of life made people call me "the Good." I recognize my foolishness, and the danger in which I placed myself, reading those books. By God's infinite mercy, I have finally learned from my mistakes, and now I loathe them.

- Sancho, in tears, makes a moving speech:

> Don't die, my lord, but take my advice, and live a long long time, because the worst madness a man can fall into is to let himself die, without anybody else killing him, or by any other hands but those of sadness and melancholy.

- So Quixote does die, and the book ends. If this novel began as mockery and joking, the joking is over now.

- What's extraordinary in this novel is that **Cervantes makes us sympathize deeply with Quixote's need to deny reality in the service of what feels to him like a greater reality.** His delusion allowed him to go on believing in nobler ideals than the real world is ever going to accept. And it also protected him from the humiliation of having to acknowledge that he was deluded.

There is deep pathos when he finally acknowledges that. Maybe it's even tragic. No wonder he can't go on living.

- **The ending that Cervantes wrote is certainly a challenge for readers, and how you feel about it is very much a subjective matter.** Nabokov finds it shocking. "On his deathbed," he says, "he renounces the glory of the mad romance that made him what he was."

- **The significance of a great work of literature can change over time as successive generations bring their own values to it.** It would be mere pedantry to insist that we have to read it exactly the way 17th-century Spanish people did. It's also true that a great work of art can say more than its author consciously intended; it has its own inner logic.

- Northrop Frye once said, provocatively, that if we could find a long-lost critique of *The Divine Comedy* written by Dante himself, he would just be another Dante critic. That's undoubtedly an exaggeration, but Frye has a point.

- Nineteenth-century readers and critics created an image of Quixote as the noble victim of a crass, unfeeling—even tragic—society. Specialists in early Spanish literature tell us that's just plain wrong. But in any sense that matters to readers, it's not wrong at all. **Cervantes created a mythic figure, and myths work to open up our imagination.**

- Reading *Don Quixote* 400 years after it was published, we are bound to bring attitudes and values that its original readers wouldn't have had—and maybe even wouldn't have understood.

- In our own time, Harold Bloom has said:

> Cervantes has in common with Shakespeare the universality of his genius. He is the only possible peer of Dante and Shakespeare in the Western canon.

- People in the 18th century felt something much like that, too. Samuel Johnson wrote:

> When we pity Don Quixote, we reflect on our own disappointments. When we laugh, our hearts inform us that he is not more ridiculous than ourselves, except that he tells what we have only thought.

- That's quite similar to what Freud once said:

> We were all noble knights passing through the world caught in a dream.

- Not surprisingly, a number of authors you will encounter in this course pay explicit tribute to Cervantes.

Freud learned Spanish for the specific purpose of reading *Don Quixote* in the original language.

5

LA PRINCESSE DE CLÈVES AND THE FRENCH NOVEL

Whereas *Don Quixote* is the first great Spanish novel, *La Princesse de Clèves* is the first great French novel. It was published in 1678, more than 60 years after *Don Quixote* and 40 years before anything that we would call a novel appeared in English.

LOVE AMONG NOBLES

- Like *Don Quixote,* ***La Princesse de Clèves*** **is a benchmark from which the story of this course will proceed, but it's very different from the novels you'll discover later** in this course in several important ways:
  - **It was written by a woman**—an extremely privileged woman at the very top of the social pyramid in France. Her intended audience was people like herself: the

Madame de La Fayette

aristocratic class that thought of itself as the heart of French culture. But that class would soon begin to be displaced by middle-class values and expectations.

In the 18th century, the reading public grew dramatically, and for the first time, novels became really viable commercially. There were still female novelists, but as it happens, the major novelists would turn out to be male.

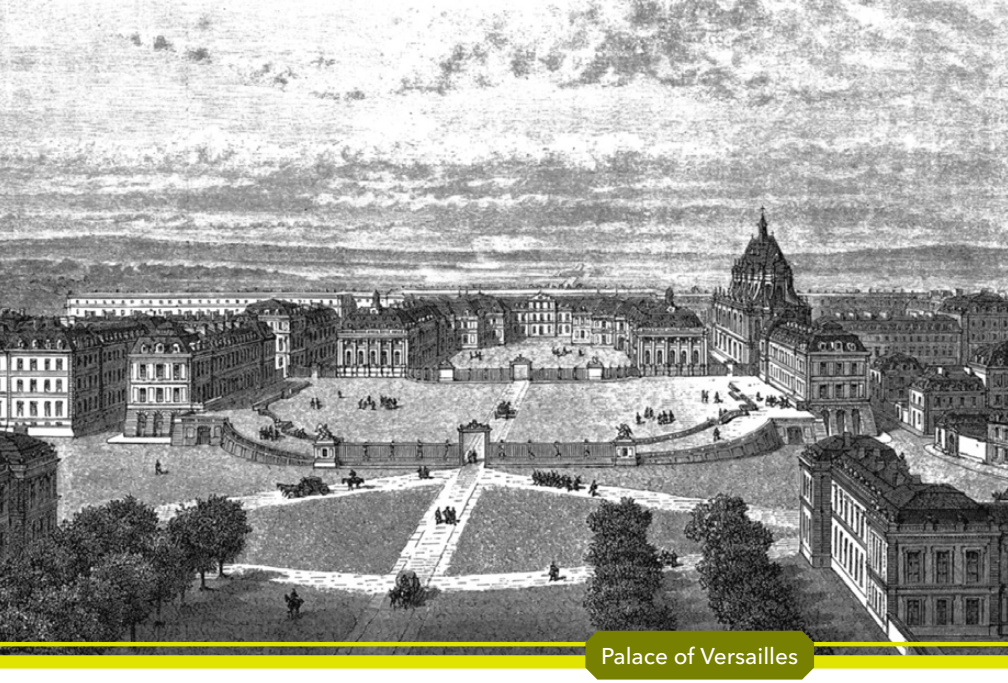
- Related to the culture this novel describes, another difference between this and later novels is **the psychology it takes for granted.**

- **It's a historical novel in a way, but not as that genre would develop much later, in the 19th century,** when novelists like Walter Scott recreated the pastness of the past. The story is set 100 years before the novel was published, and author Madame de La Fayette did some research on the personalities of the court at that time. But we get no sense that the passage of time changes the culture—let alone human behavior.

- In the aristocratic culture to which all the characters in this novel belong, you inherited your status. Your birth defined who you were. Everyone in this novel has a title—marquis, duke, etc. **These nobles live off unearned income from land and rents; it's considered ignoble to have a job or even a profession.**

- When Louis XIV began to consolidate royal power at the beginning of the 18th century, he made a major symbolic move: He created a lavish new palace complex at Versailles, outside Paris, and encouraged the nobles to live there. The idea was to neutralize the nobles politically, taking them away from their power bases out in the provinces.

Madame de La Fayette's full name was Marie-Madeleine Pioche de la Vergne, comtesse de La Fayette—though she published this and later novels anonymously. In her social class, it would have been considered demeaning to be a mere novelist.



Palace of Versailles

- Meanwhile, the government itself continued to be run from Paris, not Versailles, in the hands of a professional bureaucracy whose members were appointed on merit, not birth.

- So in a way, the nobility—though still regarded as the very pinnacle of French society—was becoming increasingly decorative. No longer leading private armies in battle, the nobles at Versailles concentrated on love affairs and on competing for royal favor.

- It was an extremely self-enclosed little world, a kind of biosphere. **The highest value was sophisticated elegance, and people tried to present themselves with total self-control.** Rivalries and jealousies—in fact, powerful emotions of all kinds—had to be disguised and masked.

- **The psychology that members of that class took for granted was very different from the view of human behavior that would develop later in middle-class culture.** Its fundamental axiom was that every single thing people do derives directly from self-interest.

- Relationships are power struggles, pure and simple. Falling in love, therefore, is not imagined as a mutual commitment—an opening up and sharing. It was thought of as a win-lose competition. One person in a love affair will hold the upper hand, and the other person will therefore be subjected—in effect, almost a slave.

- It was also taken for granted that every love affair has an end as well as a beginning. **In this theory of psychology, we desire what we haven't got, because we don't have it. And it follows that if we do get it, we're not going to want it so much anymore.**

- Since, according to this theory, we want what we don't have, what is meant by love is more like what we would call infatuation, or even illusion. It's thought of as something that overwhelms you, breaks down your resistance, makes you terribly vulnerable.

- Another aspect of this is that people tend to fall in love at first sight. That means they're feeling intense desire for someone they do not know.

- As for marriage, in this upper-class world, that was always arranged by families for dynastic reasons. **It was considered pretty much irrelevant whether the couple getting married were attracted to each other.** In fact, it was better if they were not. That way, a husband and wife could each have a lover—perfectly openly—with no danger of stirring up jealousy.

- **The middle-class ethos that would replace this one is that love deepens when people get to know each other better,** and ideally, it endures for both of their lifetimes. This is basically what most people today believe. Love and marriage are supposed to go together like a horse and carriage. For 17th-century French writers, that's just about the opposite of the truth.

- Thanks to the research Madame de La Fayette did, every character in this novel really existed, with the sole exception of the title character herself. Yet it starts out like a fairy tale, describing the French court in 1558:

> At no time in France were splendor and gallantry so brilliantly displayed as in the last years of the reign of Henri II. The monarch

was courteous, handsome, and fervent in love.

- Very soon, events are going to shatter this fairy-tale tranquility. La Fayette's readers would have known that very well.

THE STORY

- **When the story begins, the heroine is a teenaged girl, Mademoiselle de Chartres, whose mother has just brought her from the country up to the court.** She's stunningly beautiful but utterly inexperienced in the ways of the world. (By the way, we are never told her first name! And that's true for pretty much everyone in this novel.)

- One day, when the girl and her mother are in a shop, a gentleman named **Monsieur de Clèves happens to see them—and, sure enough, he falls in love at first sight.** Before long, a marriage is arranged. The emotional situation that that creates is what drives the plot from then on.

- The young bride—who is now known as the Princess of Clèves—has no objection to marrying Monsieur de Clèves, but she is certainly not in love with him. She has never been in love and has no idea what that would be like.

- **However, her husband loves her deeply, and he feels wounded that she can't return his passion.** He doesn't blame her; he just laments the dilemma he finds himself in.

- **Monsieur de Clèves is well aware that he is likely to be tormented by jealousy, so he gets his wife to make an unusual promise.** If she finds herself attracted to somebody else, she must tell him so. She won't have to name the other person, but her husband believes that at least this way, he won't be always wondering if she is thinking about some other man.

La Princesse de Clèves is a short book, and a highly concentrated one. The story is told by an omniscient narrator, who is able to tell us what each character is thinking and feeling at any time but who seems impersonal and remote. This narrator is so impersonal, in fact, that it would be hard to know from the text alone that the author was a woman and not a man.

- **The king holds a magnificent ball, and he tells the princess that she and a gentleman called the Duke of Nemours are the best-looking people there and ought to dance together.** So while her husband looks on from the sideline, they do—and **the chemistry between them is obvious.**

- **But this is not going to be a simple story of adultery. The princess is determined to be faithful to her husband. And Nemours is an honorable man.** What he wants is some sign from her that she wants him. But if she won't give him that, he has no intention of trying to seduce her. That would violate his code of proper behavior.

- Determined to be faithful to her husband, the princess decides to stay at their country estate so that she won't see Nemours and will be safe from temptation. But that shows how compelling this suddenly ignited passion is: She's like an alcoholic who has to make sure there's no liquor in the house.

- What happens next in the story is disastrous. Monsieur de Clèves joins her at the country house, and she confesses to him, keeping her promise, that she is indeed attracted to another man, but she refuses to say who.

- Meanwhile, Nemours just happens to be in the same neighborhood himself, and when he realizes whose house this is, he finds a way to eavesdrop on that very conversation between the husband and wife. Even though the princess doesn't name him to her husband, now Nemours knows for sure that she wants him, and Monsieur de Clèves is going to suspect it increasingly himself.

- This is an excellent example of the **convention of verisimilitude,** as seen in *Don Quixote*. What a coincidence that Nemours should not only happen by accident to find the house where the princess is, but that he should show up at the exact moment that lets him overhear her confession to her husband!

- In the way we ordinarily think about events, this is not likely at all. But it's psychologically right, or symbolically right. It's as if the mutual obsession that has formed between the princess and Nemours generates this encounter out of their own vivid imaginations.

DISILLUSIONMENT IN THE END

- Remember that according to this ethos, falling in love means subjecting oneself to the power of another person. It follows that our modern ideal—love as relationship—is a big threat. You are in the other person's thrall—enslaved, in a way—and you're going to be devastated when he or she drops you, as the person certainly will.

- Love can't be a true giving of self, because in that case, you would lose your power advantage. So it's a game of flirtation and seduction in which the successful lover remains uninvolved, withholding the self.

- **What drives Monsieur de Clèves crazy is precisely that he's in his wife's thrall, but not vice versa.** He's perfectly free to sleep with her, but that's not the point: He wants to arouse her passion. His own power is not being acknowledged, and he now knows for certain that somebody else does have that power over her.

- Remember the concept of desire being aroused by what you don't have. **You want it even more if you can't have it—which is how Nemours feels, so his obsession becomes more and more consuming.** And the same thing is happening to Monsieur de Clèves: He can't have his own wife in the way he wants. She's kind and courteous toward him, but she doesn't desire him.

- **In this dynamic, the princess holds the upper hand, even though she doesn't mean to.** Yet there are no villains in this story. The princess, and her husband, and Nemours are all truly honorable. But **passion is like a dangerous illness, and all three of them are being tormented by it.**

- Monsieur de Clèves had hoped that by getting his wife to tell him if she was attracted to someone else, he would be protected from constantly wondering about it. Instead, he finds that he's absolutely torn apart by jealousy.

- So Monsieur de Clèves falls ill—and actually dies. That's another example of verisimilitude. Maybe people don't really die of a broken heart, but the expression makes sense. It's as if he has been murdered in his own self-love.

- **After Monsieur de Clèves dies, Nemours assumes that now he and the newly widowed princess can get married. But she refuses!** A strong reason she does this is loyalty to her late husband's honor. If Nemours had stabbed him in a duel, she certainly couldn't marry the killer. Well, **it has been a kind of psychological duel, and in that sense, Nemours really did kill her husband.**

- The ending of this novel is startlingly brief and inconclusive. The princess drops out from the court altogether and returns to the remote countryside. Part of each year she spends in a convent; she doesn't become a nun, but she chooses the one mode of life that can give her true peace of mind. Love killed her husband—and has paralyzed Nemours, though we're told eventually he gets over it. As for the princess, she makes sure that she'll never fall into that trap again.

- **In terms of romantic plot, this has to feel like an anticlimax—but that's exactly the point.** Romantic novels end with the union of the hero and heroine, usually their marriage. This novel begins with a marriage and then traces the complications that ensue for the characters involved. **La Fayette was writing in the ethos of a court culture whose hard-edged, disillusioned view of human beings would soon be giving way to very different values.**

6

THE REALISTIC NOVEL: *ROBINSON CRUSOE*

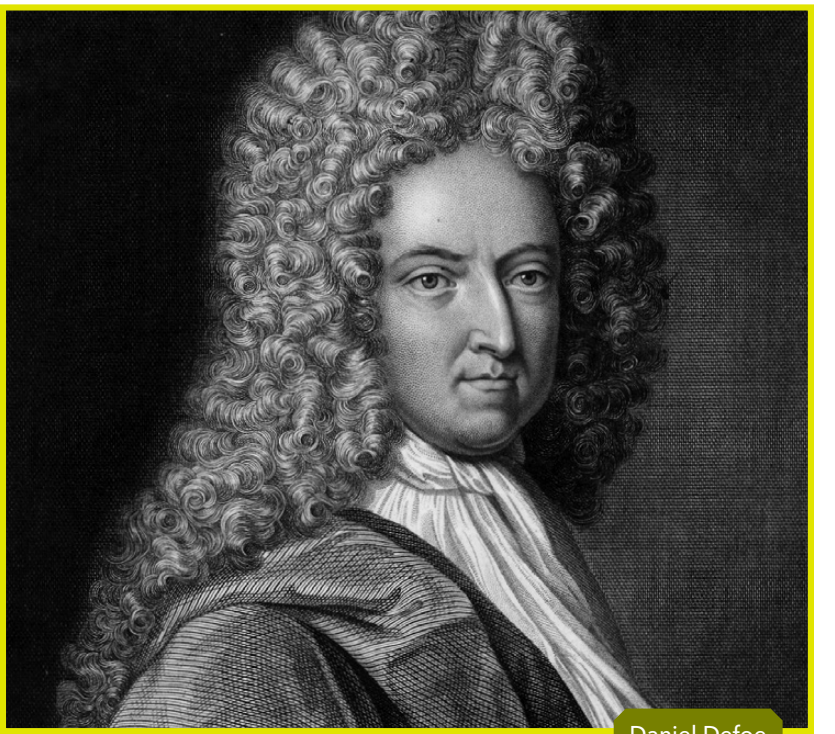
Robinson Crusoe, published in 1719, is set in a totally different world from *La Princesse de Clèves*. That story was set in the French court and centered on the interactions of a group of aristocrats. This story is set on a desert island, where for many years the only inhabitant is the title character. The subject of money never once came up in *La Princesse de Clèves*; in that novel, nobody ever needed to give it a thought. Money—and having to struggle to acquire it—is at the very center of each of Daniel Defoe's seven novels. His other six are all interesting, but not nearly as interesting as this breakthrough novel, which he quite unexpectedly wrote when he was almost 60 years old.

REALISM

- ***Robinson Crusoe* combines two kinds of narrative** that you might not think could ever be combined.
    - **It's the first real example of novelistic realism—**circumstantial, detailed, completely believable.
    - **It's also a total fantasy, cleverly masquerading as realism.** Cast ashore as the sole survivor of a shipwreck, Crusoe constructs a completely viable life for himself and lives peacefully there for 28 years.

Defoe actually interviewed someone who survived on a desert island (though much more briefly), and he knew perfectly well that anyone who was isolated for very long was likely to go completely mad. For Crusoe, it's the very opposite: It's other people that he feels threatened by. For him, solitude means security.

Crusoe is one of just two characters in all of the novels in this course who has no family. He had one, of course, when he was growing up, but not in the story itself. The other character like that is Don Quixote. This sets them free from normal social obligations, though in diametrically opposite ways: Quixote is an idealist, while Crusoe is doggedly pragmatic.



Daniel Defoe

- **A crucial decision that Defoe made in this novel was not to tell the story as an omniscient narrator.** He wanted the immediacy of day-to-day experience as remembered afterward by the very person who lived it. And by making Crusoe the first-person narrator, Defoe conceals his authorship completely. In fact, after the novel was published, he tried hard to keep up a pretense that Crusoe was a real sailor and did write his own true story. So this is not verisimilitude, as seen in *La Princesse de Clèves.* **It's not supposed to be *similar to* reality—it's supposed to *be* reality.**

- When he conceived this novel, Defoe was responding to a developing appetite in a rapidly growing reading public for precisely this kind of autobiography. They sold best if the author was presented as an adventurer, or even a criminal. That no doubt grew out of the picaresque tradition, and increasingly, it appealed to a middle-class audience that needed to be law-abiding but fantasized about escaping from normal routine.

- The style of this novel is altogether different from La Fayette's, who used a formal, balanced style that was obviously carefully shaped and polished. Now consider the first words of *Robinson Crusoe:*

> I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, of a good family, though not of that country, my father being a foreigner of Bremen, who settled first at Hull. He got a good estate by merchandise, and leaving off his trade lived afterward at York, from whence he had married my mother, whose relations were named Robinson, a very good family in that country, and from whom I was called Robinson Kreutznauer; but by the usual corruption of words in England we are now called, nay, we call ourselves, and write our name, Crusoe.

- That's not polished in the least—nor does it pretend to be. It's just a guy talking, and filling in more details than we probably want. Who cares that the family started out at Hull before they moved to York? But that's the genius of Defoe's realism. **You read just those few sentences and feel convinced that**

this has to be for real. You can hear Crusoe practically thinking out loud: "We are now called, nay, we call ourselves, and write our name, Crusoe."

- Right in that very first paragraph, we hear about some **essential matters that figure in most novels—money, family, and social status. But *Robinson Crusoe* will be unique in breaking away from all that.**

- It's relevant that **there are no chapter divisions.** We saw chapters in *Don Quixote*, and we'll see them again in novels such as *Tom Jones*; they signal that the author has packaged the story in meaningful units and given each of those units a title as a guidepost for the reader. *Robinson Crusoe* is an example of a narrative that **just keeps rolling along, the way life itself does.** And that, too, creates an illusion that there has been no shaping and packaging.

- Magnificent though Defoe's achievement is, there are also strange contradictions embedded in it—contradictions that he himself may not have perceived. **His own plan was to convey a religious message in the guise of a realistic autobiography.**

- On his island, Crusoe undergoes a religious conversion, and he comes to understand that everything that happens is directed by God's providence. Readers who would tune out when they listened to a sermon might be inspired by this story to think about how apparently random events might actually represent messages from the Almighty.

- That was Defoe's plan, **but few readers—then or later—have actually responded to the story that way. What they do respond to is the fantasy of complete self-sufficiency in a perfect mini-world under one's total control.**

- In *La Princesse de Clèves*, the passions were a dangerous threat. In some later novels in this course, they get reconceived as positive emotions—instinctual responses that nature gives us to help us live our lives. But **neither passions nor emotions have much of a place on Crusoe's island.** There is no one to cheat in business, no one to try to seduce, no one to be jealous of.

- Alone on his island, Crusoe is immune from all of that. We get the impression, in fact, that Crusoe is an extremely stolid and unemotional personality. The

stolidness—the seeming absence of imagination—helps to confirm the illusion of realism. Crusoe doesn't seem like someone who would even know how to make something up.

- However stolid though Crusoe may be, how likely is it that he could live in perfect contentment, year after year, in this state of total isolation? In a famous meditation, John Donne wrote "No man is an island, entire of itself." We're all part of the human race, mutually dependent on each other. In Defoe's fantasy, Crusoe is an island entire of itself.

Real castaways go crazy—like Tom Hanks in the movie *Cast Away*, in which he ends up talking earnestly to a volleyball named Wilson.

A MYTH OF CAPITALISM

- In real life, Defoe was a businessman and entrepreneur who several times got overextended and ended up in debtor's prison. Writing about this novel after it was finished, he hinted broadly that the desert island was really an allegory for imprisonment. But unlike a real prison, it's a place where Crusoe can enjoy absolute mastery.

- And it's been persuasively argued that **even though there are no other people on the island for many years, this novel can be seen as a kind of myth of capitalism**—that is, with all the competition and temptations magically removed.

- In the story, Crusoe goes to live in Brazil, where he acquires a plantation and gets rich. But when he sets out for Africa to get a cargo of slaves, that's when his shipwreck happens.

- **For a man whose life in England revolved around money, as Defoe's did, the fantasy of an existence in which money had no meaning was clearly alluring.** Among other things, Crusoe rescues from the shipwreck a container full of gold and silver coins—a small fortune.

Daniel Defoe was a strange, secretive individual, about whom surprisingly little is known. Interestingly, his family name was originally Foe, but he thought Defoe sounded more elegant.

- Back home, he would have been practically in love with the money. Here, he almost leaves it behind—until he reflects that if he ever does get rescued, it will suddenly have value again.

- It makes sense to think of this novel as a myth of capitalism—that is, of the values that Western capitalism endorsed but with the downside magically eliminated. In the religious message that Defoe thought he was giving, Crusoe's hunger to get rich by taking financial risks was his "original sin."

- Back in the Middle Ages, financial acquisitiveness was deeply suspect. Lending money on interest was actually a sin, called usury.

- A valuable key to thinking about Defoe's commercial ethic is the Weber thesis, advanced by German sociologist Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* Weber's theme is the development of capitalism as rational, even dispassionate, acquisitiveness. If it's done in the proper frame of mind, it's no longer repulsive greed; it becomes a respected vocation.

- And from this new validation of work developed what Weber calls worldly asceticism. It was good to accumulate wealth, so long as it was not for its own sake. A rich person should live a life that is simple, even self-denyingly ascetic, almost like a secular monk.

- **Crusoe makes his life on the island a true vocation. There is no motivation to do anything to please other people**—no motivation to make unnecessary products because people will buy them. There would be no point in making anything at all that you have no practical use for.

- Conversely, when you do make something, you're not concerned about keeping the costs of production down in order to increase your profit margin. You make it as well as you can.

- Crusoe's lifestyle fits the model of worldly asceticism, too. It's true that there isn't much scope for self-indulgence on the island, but **he doesn't lie around relaxing, like someone on a vacation. Instead, he fills each day with constructive hard work.**

CRUSOE AND THE CANNIBALS

- **This idyllic existence—this realistic fantasy—comes to an end with a bang when Crusoe happens to see a footprint on the beach. That can only have been left there by a cannibal,** and this novel is haunted by thoughts of cannibalism. It's as if people in competitive society back home are devouring each other metaphorically, and in the Caribbean, they do it literally.

- Before long, Crusoe sees a party of "savages," as he regards them, who land on his island to roast and eat a victim. He thinks of this as an abominable sin, and he's tempted to rush forward and mow them down with his gun.

- But then he makes some progress in ethical reflection. **Even if cannibalism is sinful, they don't know that; it's approved of in their culture.** If God wants to punish them, he may, but it would be wrong for Crusoe to do it. He even achieves some measure of cultural relativism: He realizes that they don't eat human beings indiscriminately, but only after defeating them in war. It's a ritual performance.

- Now that there are other people in Crusoe's world, the great fantasy has to come to an end. A gang of mutineers from an English ship arrives, and Crusoe adds them to his colony. And **when another ship shows up, he is finally able to return to civilization.**

- **There, he discovers that he has become incredibly rich.** The income from his Brazilian plantation went on appreciating all these years. Money is no longer useless; it's practically the staff of life.

- **It's a total anticlimax. Crusoe, back in the world of profit and loss, is a diminished and uninteresting figure.** It's the island that has made him a mythic figure—with an imaginative resonance that Defoe probably never anticipated.

QUIZ

LECTURE 1

What did E. M. Forster mean by distinguishing between round and flat characters?

What are Northrop Frye's five modes of narrative?

LECTURE 2

In what ways might the *Satyricon* and *The Golden Ass* be considered not really novels at all?

How does Lucius's conversion to the goddess Isis rescue him from a life of grotesque suffering?

LECTURE 3

How did episodes of violence in *The Golden Ass* and *Don Quixote* strike contemporary readers as hilarious but later readers as disturbing?

How does *Don Quixote* build on, but also go beyond, the conventions of picaresque?

LECTURE 4

In what ways is part II of *Don Quixote* different from part I?

How might the ending of *Don Quixote* be seen as tragic, and how did *Man of La Mancha* reject that possibility?

QUIZ ANSWERS are on page 194

LECTURE 5

How does the psychology of love in *La Princesse de Clèves* differ from the assumptions of later middle-class culture?

How does the principle of verisimilitude (rather than literal realism) operate in *La Princesse de Clèves*?

LECTURE 6

What are some examples of literary realism in *Robinson Crusoe*?

How did Defoe seek to embed a religious message in *Robinson Crusoe*?

7

THE SATIRIC NOVEL: *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*

We're often told that *Gulliver's Travels* can't possibly be a novel, because it's a satire, and that Gulliver is not a novelistic character, but is just a mouthpiece for Jonathan Swift. But readers for nearly 300 years have appreciated *Gulliver's Travels* as a novel. Of course, it's also a satire—and a great one.

REALISM AND FANTASY

- **Some of the time, Gulliver is indeed a mouthpiece.** His name suggests the word *gullible*, and he can seem very naive when he's praising European customs, including some of the most vicious and corrupt. **But much of the time, he is absolutely a novelistic character.** He has experiences, ponders their meaning, and by the end of the story is convinced that he has learned something.

Swift's best-known work besides *Gulliver's Travels is A Modest Proposal*, a satire that begins by pretending to be a straightforward economic plan to deal with Irish poverty and becomes shocking as the plan turns out to be to cook and eat Irish babies.

Swift served as dean of the Anglican St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, a position of great influence in the city, where he was revered for championing Irish rights.

- There's a more immediate reason why *Gulliver's Travels* deserves to be called a novel. When he began writing it, **Swift clearly set out to make fun of *Robinson Crusoe*. Just like Crusoe, Gulliver is a sailor who gets shipwrecked.** And it amused Swift to mimic Defoe's pose of complete veracity. As a preface to the book, Swift makes "the publisher" declare:

> There is an air of truth apparent through the whole; and, indeed, the author was so distinguished for his veracity, that it became a sort of proverb among his neighbors […], when any one affirmed a thing, to say, it was as true as if Mr. Gulliver had spoken it.

Swift was often accused of being a misanthrope, and he didn't exactly deny it. He was the kind of satirist who is a disappointed idealist, much like Mark Twain, who said:

> Let a man be black or white, Christian, Jew, or Moslem—it's all the same to me. All I have to know is that he's a human being. He couldn't be worse.

- **Swift thought that for all the realism of descriptive details in *Robinson Crusoe*, the whole thing was one big, tall story—as indeed it is. So he wanted to see what he could do if he simulated that kind of realistic narrative but put his hero through a series of totally improbable adventures.**

- What happened after Swift got going was that he found himself creating a wonderfully original fantasy. And it's the realism, much as in *The Lord of the Rings*, that makes the fantasy seem to ring true.

- Read the description at the very beginning of the story. After struggling ashore following his shipwreck, Gulliver lies down on some grass and falls asleep. When he wakes up, he's in for a big surprise.

> I was extremely tired, and with that, and the heat of the weather, and about half a pint of brandy that I drank as I left the ship, I found myself much inclined to sleep. I lay down on the grass, which was very short and soft, where I slept sounder than ever I

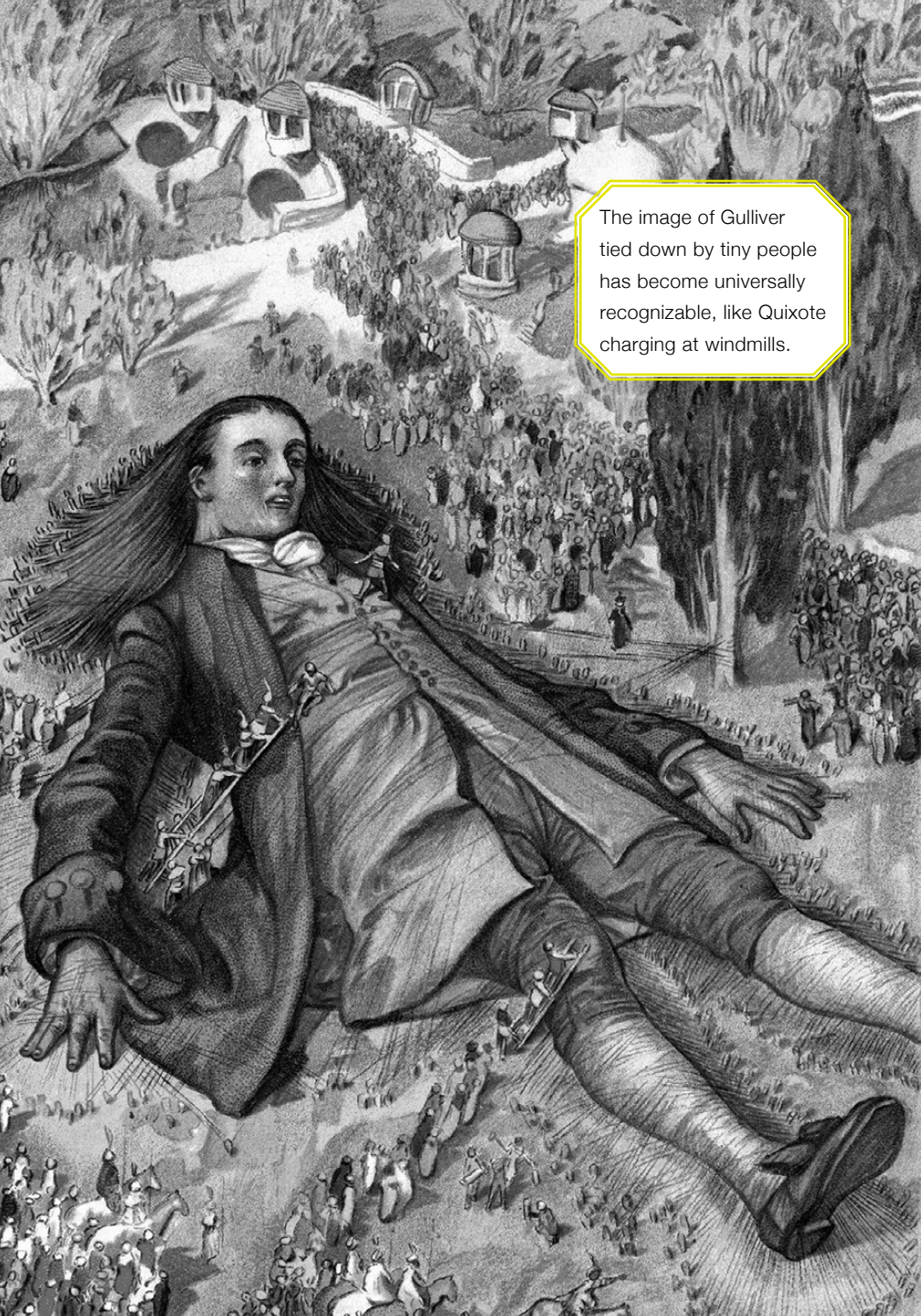
> remembered to have done in my life, and, as I reckoned, about nine hours; for when I awaked, it was just daylight.

The details are very precise. The grass was oddly soft, and he estimates that he slept for nine hours. Gulliver continues:

> I attempted to rise, but was not able to stir: for, as I happened to lie on my back, I found my arms and legs were strongly fastened on each side to the ground; and my hair, which was long and thick, tied down in the same manner.
>
> I likewise felt several slender ligatures across my body, from my armpits to my thighs. I could only look upwards. The sun began to grow hot, and the light offended my eyes. I heard a confused noise about me; but in the posture I lay, I could see nothing except the sky.
>
> In a little time I felt something alive moving on my left leg, which advancing gently forward over my breast, came almost up to my chin; when, bending my eyes downwards as much as I could, I perceived it to be a human creature not six inches high, with a bow and arrow in his hands, and a quiver at his back. In the meantime, I felt at least forty more of the same kind (as I conjectured) following the first.

This is extremely skillful writing disguised as simple reporting. Here, **Swift creates a physical reality as the senses are activated one by one**—first hearing, then touch, and finally sight.

The scale of one to 12 is completely consistent, and that makes all the difference. This is not a dream fantasy like *Alice in Wonderland*, where things get bigger or smaller unpredictably. **In this island of Lilliput, everything is exactly the same as in our world—except consistently tiny.** Because real people are six feet tall or thereabouts, the Lilliputians are six inches tall.



The image of Gulliver tied down by tiny people has become universally recognizable, like Quixote charging at windmills.

GULLIVER'S FIRST VOYAGE

- One of Swift's favorite techniques is **defamiliarizing—imagining what things would look like if we saw them in some hitherto unknown perspective,** such as those tiny people were experiencing when they encountered the enormous Gulliver.

- **In *Gulliver's Travels*, this constantly happens with familiar objects.** After the Lilliputians decide Gulliver is harmless and set him free, they take an inventory of his clothes and possessions. Here's how they describe his pocket watch:

> Out of the right fob hung a great silver chain, with a wonderful kind of engine at the bottom. We directed him to draw out whatever was at the end of that chain; which appeared to be a globe, half silver, and half of some transparent metal; for, on the transparent side, we saw certain strange figures circularly drawn, and thought we could touch them, till we found our fingers stopped by that lucid substance.
>
> He put this engine to our ears, which made an incessant noise, like that of a water-mill: and we conjecture it is either some unknown animal, or the god that he worships; but we are more inclined to the latter opinion, because he assured us, (if we understood him right, for he expressed himself very imperfectly) that he seldom did any thing without consulting it. He called it his oracle, and said, it pointed out the time for every action of his life.

- Of course, Gulliver's watch "point[s] out the time" perfectly literally; it's not an oracle prophesying the future. So there's an element of satire: making fun of our obsession with time management, as if our watches were our gods.

- But at the heart of the description is defamiliarization. If we were really tiny, the ticking of a normal-sized watch would sound like a clattering watermill. If we had no idea what it was for, it could seem like an "engine" with unknown powers. And if we didn't know what glass was, it would be accurate to describe it as a mysterious "lucid substance."

- Throughout Gulliver's first voyage, the same combination of satire and fantastic realism continues. The Lilliputians are not only physically tiny; the size difference stands in for moral tininess. They model human behavior as we might see it from a lofty perspective.

- When a boat of normal size happens to wash ashore, Gulliver escapes, and the episode at Lilliput is over.

SECOND VOYAGE

- After a second shipwreck, Gulliver finds himself in the opposite situation. **This time he's in Brobdingnag—a land of giants.** If the Lilliputians were morally tiny, the Brobdingnagians are correspondingly large-spirited.

- In Brobdingnag, there is a new form of defamiliarization that has nothing to do with political satire. Because the Lilliputians were tiny, they all seemed charmingly attractive to Gulliver. In Brobdingnag, it's just the opposite. The Brobdingnagians are colossally big. **They look just like us, but all their little defects are magnified.**

- More than that, **Gulliver's experiences in Brobdingnag highlight the vulnerability of the body.** At one point, the queen of Brobdingnag has a little sailboat made for him, and while he's in it, a monstrous frog crawls over the side. Gulliver says:

> When the frog was got in, it hopped at once half the length of the boat, and then over my head, backward and forward, daubing my face and clothes with its odious slime. The largeness of its features made it appear the most deformed animal that can be conceived.

- **This is a dramatization of the physicality of human beings.** When Gulliver is struggling with the slimy frog, he is a character in a novel—and a memorably realized one.

THIRD VOYAGE

- In the third voyage of *Gulliver's Travels*, which is generally believed to have been an afterthought, **the central image is a flying island held up in the air by a giant lodestone, or magnet.** The people on it are obsessed with abstract mathematics; they literally have their heads in the clouds.

- But if one of the cities down below should try to assert its independence, the island is maneuvered to hover just above them, cutting off the sun and rain. And if that doesn't make them surrender, then it settles right down on top of them and crushes them.

- In historical hindsight, **this looks prophetic of the way scientific progress can create lethal technologies.** The atom bomb is an obvious example, and there are plenty of others. Already in Swift's day, thanks to advances in weaponry, human beings could kill each other on a scale never dreamt of in so-called primitive societies.

FOURTH VOYAGE

- Gulliver's fourth and final voyage is the most disturbing, and it's intended to be. **This time he finds himself on an island of rational horses, who call themselves Houyhnhnms**, meant to suggest whinnying.

- The Houyhnhnms are so rational that they can't understand the concept of lying. When Gulliver tries to explain it to them, the best they can do is call it "saying the thing which is not."

Yahoos

- In our own real-life experience, it's impossible to imagine what it would be like to not know the meaning of lying. We are so accustomed to it that it's hard not to think the Houyhnhnms are sort of out of it for not getting it. But that's our problem, not theirs.

- For the Houyhnhnms, reason is a simple apprehension of reality, not the pretentious cleverness that humans call reason. All too often, humans use reason to cheat and betray—and to invent technologies that are self-destructive.

- The Houyhnhnms have no technology at all. To travel, they are pulled around on sleds by humanoid creatures called Yahoos—Swift invented the word—that serve them as beasts of burden.

- The Yahoos are totally disgusting. They are constantly fighting with each other over shining stones that they hoard—the way humans compete to get money—and they make a habit of pelting each other with their own excrement. Swift, the satirist, makes Gulliver say:

> But how far this might be applicable to our courts, and favorites, and ministers of state, my master said I could best determine.

- **After a while, the Houyhnhnms hold a meeting and decide that Gulliver must leave.** They help him construct a usable boat, and he sails away—brokenhearted, because he has come to admire them so much. **He would stay there forever if he could.**

- **Clearly, this island is a utopia,** which means "nowhere" in Greek. That term has gotten so debased that many people think it just means a really nice place. More properly, it means **the opposite of everything we know**, a standard to measure our inadequacies against.

Thomas More was a hero of Swift's for standing up to Henry VIII and for his intelligence and wit. More's *Utopia*—he invented the word—lies directly behind Gulliver's fourth voyage.

- When Gulliver gets back to England, he goes around the bend. Life with the Houyhnhnms has disqualified him for ordinary relationships. **Swift seems to be telling us that if we could ever spend time in a utopia, it would ruin our ability to accept the world we normally take for granted.** He's forcing us to think hard about what rationality really is—and still more deeply—what being human really means.

8

MANON LESCAUT: A TALE OF PASSION

The Abbé Prévost, who published *Manon Lescaut* in 1731, first scored a big hit with a serial novel called *Memoirs and Adventures of a Man of Quality*, which he kept adding to until there were six volumes in all. Then, he came out with *Manon Lescaut*—which was more or less artificially tacked on to the *Man of Quality* as its seventh and final volume. It's likely that Prévost only attached this story to the *Man of Quality* series as a hook to attract readers who were already fans. But since he did pitch it that way, there were interesting artistic consequences.

Prévost was in training to be a priest, but at the age of 19, he dropped out and spent two years in the army. He later returned to the church and was ordained as a priest, eventually becoming the abbot in charge of his own monastery—which is one meaning of the word *abbé*.

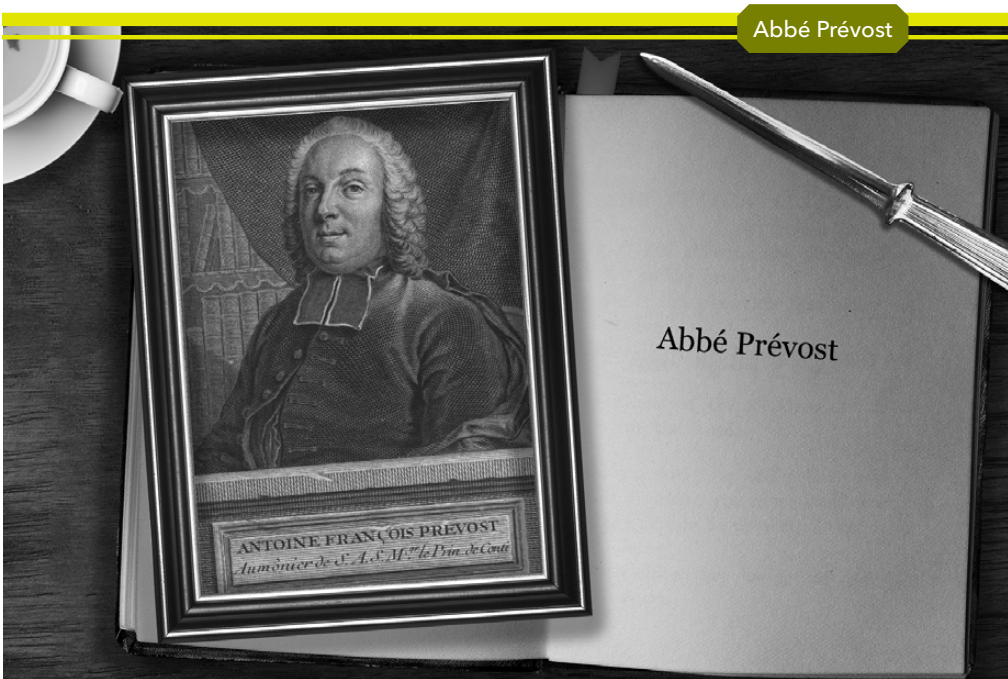
In *Manon Lescaut*, there is a double layer of narration. Des Grieux tells his story in the first person, but he tells it to a sympathetic listener—the Man of Quality—who subsequently passes it on to us, so a layer of ambiguity gets added. There's a constant tension between how des Grieux understands his experiences and how someone else might evaluate them.

THE STORY

- When *Manon Lescaut* begins, the Man of Quality encounters a young gentleman who is trudging along behind a wagon full of prostitutes, who are being deported to the French colony in Louisiana. (That actually happened—in 1719 and 1720.)

- The Man of Quality introduces himself and learns that his new acquaintance is called the chevalier des Grieux. (*Chevalier* can be translated as "knight"; it was the lowest order of French nobility.) The young man's girlfriend, though she's not actually a prostitute, has been convicted of sexual misbehavior, and she's in the wagon.

Prévost's original title was *Story of the Chevalier of Grieux and of Manon Lescaut*, which put the male character first, but people immediately shortened it to *Manon Lescaut*—after all, she is the truly memorable one.



- Touched by his plight, the Man of Quality gives des Grieux enough money to bribe the guards to let him join the group, and he also gives the guards money to make sure they don't renege and leave him behind.

- Two years later, whom should the Man of Quality run into but des Grieux once again. He's now back from the New World, and he tells his full story. That's it for the Man of Quality. He disappears until the very end of the book, which now becomes a first-person narrative in which he plays no part.

In the 19th century, when Manon was seen as a passionate heroine, the story was naturally adapted for opera.

Prévost added a preface declaring piously that the story is "a terrible example of the power of the passions" and that it's intended as "a moral treatise." But the preface was probably included merely to ward off religious condemnation for immorality.

It is, in fact, a tale of passion, and it captivated readers with its tragic intensity.

- **Des Grieux was only 17 when he fell desperately in love at first sight with Manon**, whom he happened to encounter when she's about to be put into a convent, very reluctantly, to become a nun. She was just 15, exceptionally beautiful and with an innate sweetness and charm.

- This love at first sight is what the French call a coup de foudre, a "thunderbolt." It's overwhelming, but it implies powerful attraction to someone who is a complete stranger. **Is it a grand passion that we ought to admire? Or is it passion in the destructive sense**—the way Prévost's preface suggests? **This is a theme that recurs constantly in French literature**, far more than in English.

- The narration is straightforward and clear but totally lacking what we would think of as novelistic details. That's the difference between verisimilitude and realism.

- As with the Princess of Clèves, we know that Manon is breathtakingly beautiful, but we're never told what she actually looked like or in what way

she was so appealing. What makes us believe that she really is those things is the response that other people have to her—other male people, naturally. Not surprisingly, she is well aware of the effect she has and is very willing to take advantage of it.

- **Overwhelmed by his passion, des Grieux schemes to escape with Manon; he abducts her from the religious vocation she never wanted anyway.** At first, they are blissfully happy, but pretty soon they start hitting disastrous setbacks.

- It's always for the same reason. Des Grieux is the younger son of a nobleman, but until his father dies, he won't have much money. He's been trying to choose between joining the church, as his best friend Tiberge does, or becoming a military officer. Those were exactly the choices that Prévost himself had, and he tried both of them.

- Now that des Grieux is living openly with a lover, he can forget about entering the church. As for the army, it's a respectable career, but he needs money to satisfy Manon, and that's not a good way of getting much.

MONEY VS. PASSION

- **For the rest of the novel, money is always going to be the crux.** Unfortunately, **Manon loves money**—not for itself, but for all the pleasures it can make possible. She loves Paris for its exciting possibilities, all of which are expensive.

- **She also loves des Grieux, but in a moderate way. It's nothing like the grand passion he's thrown himself into.** Prévost's preface describes the passion as destructive, the way it was in *La Princesse de Clèves*. But many readers, on the contrary, have been moved by its intensity. So **is it intense and therefore bad? Or is it good because it's so intense?**

- Answering that means invoking values that are pretty much opposite to each other—but are both perfectly possible responses to this remarkable novel.

- And then **there's a third possibility: Is it really an overwhelming grand passion at all? Or is it a kind of theatrical self-indulgence on the part of**

des Grieux? There is more than enough in the story, as he himself tells it, to make that seem right. He may be just flattering himself that he's the hero of a great tragedy and not just a self-indulgent young man born to privilege.

- Manon is well aware that with her terrific good looks, and also her appealing personality, she would have no trouble attaching herself to some rich older man who could set her up in a nice apartment with plenty of money. She would then live as a kept woman—not a prostitute, but an acknowledged mistress.

- From Manon's point of view, that would be no obstacle to also continuing to sleep with des Grieux. That way, they can both be supported on her income, and they can expect the older gentleman to look the other way if she wants to have a boyfriend on the side.

- To Manon, this all makes perfect sense. What's the catch?

- It drives des Grieux crazy. He sees himself as profoundly romantic, an all-or-nothing kind of guy, and he absolutely refuses to consider sharing Manon with anybody.

- Modern feminist critics see Manon as deliberately choosing a life of empowerment, using her beauty and charm to best advantage in a culture that values beauty and charm. From her perspective, why on earth should des Grieux be so possessive? And since he's the one who tells the story, we hear everything from his point of view, not hers.

- Des Grieux is forced to acknowledge that he can only hang on to Manon if he finds some way to support her in the style she demands. But a French nobleman like himself would never stoop to an ordinary job. In figuring out other ways of getting money, he gets coached by a ne'er-do-well brother of Manon's. He learns to cheat at cards, which is obviously dishonest but is apparently thought of as a clever trick if an aristocrat does it.

- **And when Manon does agree to become the mistress of a kindly rich man, des Grieux persuades her to get a big sum of money from him—and then they abscond with it.**

- This happens more than once, and because des Grieux is not as smart as he thinks he is, he always gets caught. He's imprisoned, but because he is the son of a nobleman, his father wangles his release.

- **The vicious cycle goes on and on.** In effect, des Grieux has degenerated into a picaro, exploiting gullible victims by living by his wits, except that his wits turn out to be not all that impressive.

- By now, there's an obvious dissonance between the self-image that des Grieux presents to his patient listener—the Man of Quality—and what is clearly the reality. He has turned into a thoroughgoing rascal, and he always rationalizes his own repulsive behavior.

- Meanwhile, **the rich man whom Manon defrauded gets her arrested**, and she is condemned to be deported to Louisiana. Set at liberty again, des Grieux voluntarily follows her. That was when the Man of Quality first encountered him, accompanying the wagon carrying prostitutes on their way to be put aboard a ship.

- In New Orleans, des Grieux and Manon have further adventures. There's a duel with one of the settlers there who wants her for his wife. Des Grieux wounds him, and he and Manon flee into a sandy wilderness, where **she suddenly collapses from exhaustion and expires**.

- **It's not clear why she dies—except that the story needs her to**. Probably Prévost wasn't worried about making it believable in naturalistic terms. **This is verisimilitude once more**. It's a symbolic death, and it makes sense in terms of the plot.

- Des Grieux mourns upon Manon's grave and then returns to France, which is where the Man of Quality meets him the second time and gets him to tell his story. After that, **des Grieux settles down to the life of a well-behaved aristocrat**—the life his father always expected of him.

CULTURAL UPHEAVAL AND CONFLICT OF WORLDVIEWS

- This brilliant short novel exploits a dissonance between **two radically different worldviews.**
    - The first is **the old religious one**, in which passion is a kind of self-destructive insanity. Within this novel, that view is consistently argued by des Grieux's friend Tiberge, the one who did join the church.
    - Against that interpretation is what would become the standard interpretation in the 19th century. Now passion is seen as virtually the highest good. Des Grieux's willingness to throw everything away, so long as he can have Manon, becomes a heroic assertion of ultimate value against the crassness of ordinary life. This is **the aristocratic code**—according to which his aristocratic blood makes him simply better than other people—that des Grieux takes for granted.
- Some critics say this novel actually has it both ways and gets its power from the tension between them. Des Grieux tells his story so well that it's hard not to identify with him; on the other hand, he can't conceal the fact that he cynically deceives people to get his way and then rationalizes his conduct.
- **But there are really three worldviews,** not just two.
    - The third is Manon's own, and it's the most interesting. This is t**he code of a woman who has beauty and personality but no money and no prospect of getting any by legitimate means**. The only jobs available to women were low-paying ones, and in that culture, no rich man is going to marry a penniless young woman, however attractive and congenial she is.
- So Manon sees her choice as **a simple business proposition**: She will use her sexual attractiveness to secure support from generous older men, and meanwhile she will continue to sleep with des Grieux, sharing the proceeds with him.

- From her point of view, what's wrong with that? From his point of view, love demands absolute fidelity. It's inconceivable for him to share Manon with anybody. In fact, **des Grieux prides himself on throwing everything else away because of his grand passion**.

- **Manon never had a grand passion. As she sees it, she's being entirely practical**—and he's the one who insists on turning their story into a tragedy when it doesn't have to be. She knows very well that he doesn't face the same challenges that she does. He can always fall back on the security of his rank and his inherited social role. It's easy enough for him to indulge in this passion. He'll survive it, as indeed he does. Manon dies, and des Grieux becomes a conventional nobleman.

9

JOSEPH ANDREWS: AN EPIC PARODY

With *Joseph Andrews*, published in 1742, 11 years after *Manon Lescaut*, we leave the world of tragedy and enter the world of comedy. *Joseph Andrews* is told by a genial and witty omniscient narrator who makes it clear that his goal is to entertain his readers and also broaden their perspective on human behavior. The love story is that of a young couple whose mutual commitment is absolute, and after they surmount a series of obstacles, there is a supremely happy ending, after which we can be sure they will live happily ever after.

PAMELA AND *SHAMELA*

- Like *Don Quixote*, which began as a parody of a popular literary form, ***Joseph Andrews*, too, originated in a parody**—which then took off in an unexpectedly creative direction.

- In 1739, a printer and publisher named Samuel Richardson, who had never written fiction before, had the idea to create **a novel made up of letters**. That form became known as the **epistolary novel**. The letters are exchanged between the characters, and that seemed very new and exciting to readers. It gave a sense of real-time immediacy—**people communicating right in the midst of their lives**, not a story told retrospectively, as by Crusoe or des Grieux, and certainly not a story invented and shaped by a novelist.

Richardson's pose was that he was merely an editor who had acquired these letters and gotten them into print.

- Published in 1740, Richardson's novel was entitled ***Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded***. It's a **kind of Cinderella story**, in which Pamela is a servant in the household of a well-to-do squire, known only as Mr. B. Pamela is very pretty, and Mr. B conducts a campaign of seduction, but she bravely resists. In the end, he is so impressed with her wonderfulness that he makes her his wife. The low-born servant girl is now a fine lady.

Pamela wasn't a common name at the time. It came from the old romances, and it was this novel that made it popular.

- It's obvious why middle-class readers would have loved that outcome. Richardson also thought he was teaching important moral lessons. Mr. B is not a bad man, and when Pamela refuses to be seduced, he honors her goodness—thus, the subtitle: *Virtue Rewarded.*

- **Henry Fielding thought all of that was blatantly artificial.** People under stress don't sit down and write long letters about it, even to family or close friends. In addition, he thought that a servant girl who really did behave like Pamela would most likely be playing hard to get until she wins the big prize: marrying up. That wouldn't be virtuous at all in the way that Richardson meant it.

- **So in 1741, one year later, Fielding came out with a clever parody called *Shamela***, in which the heroine cunningly teases and manipulates Mr. B until he gives in and marries her. Fielding gave him a full name, too; now he's Mr. Booby.

- *Shamela* was clever, but in the end, it was only a parody. What's interesting is that **Fielding evidently realized that Richardson had hit on something a large audience was eager to get:**

Daniel Defoe had been the groundbreaking pioneer 20 years earlier, but his novels were regarded pretty much as a form of journalism. Now, in the 1740s, **the modern novel was ready to establish itself as a mainstream form.**

believable stories about contemporary people and the practical and ethical challenges they face.

JOSEPH ANDREWS

- ***Joseph Andrews*, published one year after *Shamela*, began as a parody of *Pamela*, too.** In Richardson's novel, Pamela's last name is Andrews, and Fielding invents a brother for her—that's Joseph. At the beginning of the story, he too is a servant, in the London household of Mr. B's aunt, whose full name is presented as Lady Booby.

- Lady Booby makes repeated lustful advances to Joseph, which he virtuously resists, until she indignantly fires him. **Fielding has fun exposing the hypocrisy of the double standard.** Most of his readers would have believed that a young woman must never yield to sexual temptation, but many of the same readers would take it for granted that a young man would not resist—and maybe even shouldn't be blamed. They would chuckle at Lady Booby's astonished reaction when Joseph refuses her and says, just as Pamela did, that he's defending his virtue.

- **Very early in writing *Joseph Andrews*, Fielding must have realized that he had something much more interesting to say than simply to make fun of *Pamela*.** Joseph may have begun as a simple male counterpart to Pamela, but he soon becomes an interesting character in his own right.

- Joseph doesn't resist Lady Booby simply out of piety; he resists because he wants to be faithful to a young, attractive woman he's deeply in love with, named Fanny Goodwill. (Characters in comic novels often have type names that reflect their natures.)

- When Fanny first enters the novel, Joseph is on the road, making his way from London to his home village. He has stopped at an inn. Coincidentally—comic novels make free use of coincidence—a kindly clergyman named Parson Adams has just rescued Fanny from a would-be rapist and has brought her to the same inn.

- Then, Fanny and Adams hear a beautiful male voice singing in the next room. When it turns out to be Joseph, Fanny exclaims "O Jesus!" and falls back in a faint. When she revives, she finds herself in Joseph's arms. She whispers shyly, "Are you Joseph Andrews?"

> "Art thou my Fanny?" he answered eagerly: and, pulling her to his heart, he imprinted numberless kisses on her lips, without considering who were present.
>
> If prudes are offended at the lusciousness of this picture, they may take their eyes off from it, and survey Parson Adams dancing about the room in a rapture of joy.

- After that, the narrator says:

> O reader! conceive if thou canst the joy which fired the breasts of these lovers on this meeting; and if thy own heart doth not sympathetically assist thee in this conception, I pity thee sincerely from my own.

- **That's a direct challenge by the narrator:** If you are unable to appreciate this romantic scene, which is introduced with the sexy reality of Fanny but also her appealing modesty, then you should not be reading this book at all. **Fielding is appealing to the implied reader**—the kind of reader this novel calls for.

A COMIC EPIC IN PROSE

- During the greater part of the novel, Joseph and Adams are on the road together in a series of amusing episodes that owe a lot to the picaresque novel. In his preface, Fielding calls *Joseph Andrews* "**a comic epic poem in prose.**"

- **This concise description actually tells a lot about the rise of the novel.** It's in prose because verse no longer seemed appropriate for telling a story. It still did in the 16th century, in Edmund

The *Odyssey* is a serious epic, in verse, in which the hero encounters a series of challenges before winning through to his happy ending. *Joseph Andrews* is a comic version of that.

Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and in the 17th, in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. But later attempts to create convincing verse epics all fell flat. Verse is elevated, suited for lofty topics. Prose is what we all speak all the time, and a novel in verse is practically an oxymoron.

- **A popular form in the 18th century was mock-epic: using lofty language and epic similes to describe mundane events.** The mock-epics were usually in verse, such as Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, in which snipping off a lock of a young woman's hair becomes a calamity of epic scope.

- **Fielding often includes mock-heroic descriptions,** which he calls "burlesque." In the *Iliad*, a hero hurls a stone so heavy that a dozen modern men together wouldn't be able to pick up. And when another hero is killed, "he fell thunderously, and his armor clattered upon him."

- In *Joseph Andrews*, this language is applied to a fight in a country tavern. Joseph puts a stop to one bully by lifting not a stone, but a huge chamber pot, which six foppish men couldn't have picked up.

> Joseph discharged it, together with the contents, full in the captain's face. The uplifted sword dropped from his hand, and he fell prostrate on the floor with a lumpish noise, and his halfpence rattled in his pocket.

- The other piece of Fielding's description of his kind of writing is "a comic epic in prose." That mattered a lot to him. *Don Quixote* is comic, but in later novels, **seriousness was increasingly the norm**. It's safe to say that there is not one laugh in *La Princesse de Clèves,* or *Robinson Crusoe*, or *Manon Lescaut,* or *Pamela*.

Don Quixote was divided into separate chapters, with witty chapter titles to prepare the reader for what would be coming next.

Fielding, like Cervantes, sees it as his task to openly shape and package his story. In addition to 64 chapters, *Joseph Andrews* is divided into four books, and at the beginning of each, the narrator has an extended conversation with the reader.

- More than that, those **serious novels avoid what comedy has always provided—not just laughter, but a wish-fulfilling plot that makes everything work out for the best.** Of course, real life is seldom like that. That's what comedy is for.

FROM THE PICARESQUE TO COMEDY, FARCE, AND ROMANCE

- **For most of the time, *Joseph Andrews* is very a picaresque novel**, relating a series of encounters on the road, many of which could just as well occur in some other sequence. **But there is an overall plot.**

- The journey brings Joseph from the corrupt city to his rural home, and after he is joined by Fanny, it brings both of them to a happy resolution in the form of marriage.

- In fact, after all the apparently random events along the way, Fielding pulls everything together. Lady Booby shows up, along with her servant Mrs. Slipslop, because Mr. Booby is her nephew. To get revenge on Joseph for rejecting her in London, she encourages a foppish nobleman named Beau Didapper to sneak into Fanny's bed and ravish her.

- Didapper gets confused, however, and instead of Fanny's bed, he inadvertently gets into the bed of the grotesque Mrs. Slipslop.

- **At this point, we're getting not just comedy, but farce**—a whole series of manic bed mistakes. Trying to get to his own bed, Parson Adams takes a wrong turn, and he, too, shows up in Slipslop's bed. In the dark, he mistakes the slender fop for a woman and starts punching the larger person, who he assumes is a rapist. But the larger person is Mrs. Slipslop.

- When that becomes clear, Adams rushes away, and then he makes another mistake. He ends up this time in bed with Fanny. He's not even aware that she's there, and he sleeps like a baby beside her.

- Fielding is deliberately recalling an episode in *Don Quixote*, in which Quixote at an inn finds himself accidentally in the bed of a servant.

- All through this novel, one man after another has been trying to get into bed with Fanny. Now Adams has actually done it, and not only would he never take advantage of her, but he doesn't even know it happened.

- Finally, **after all the comedy and farce, there is romance in the original sense: a fairy-tale ending.** It turns out that when Fanny was an infant, she was kidnapped from the Andrews family by gypsies. For a moment, this looks like disaster. It seems that Joseph and Fanny must be brother and sister—in which case, they can't possibly get married.

- But then it emerges that Joseph, too, was kidnapped as a baby. His actual father turns out to be a kindly gentleman named Wilson, whom he has recently encountered on the road without either of them suspecting their relationship.

- So after the picaresque story, suddenly we get a denouement right out of romance. It turns out that Joseph was actually wellborn, and now there is no possible obstacle to the happy ending.

- Unlike the Cinderella story in *Pamela*, in *Joseph Andrews*, this element of wish fulfillment is overt. The behavior of the many vicious characters reminds us that real life does not usually produce perfect endings.

10

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL NOVEL: *CLARISSA*


Samuel Richardson

Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, published in installments in 1747 and 1748, is an extraordinary book. But it's a challenge to read: It is dauntingly enormous, and it moves forward very slowly, with the focus on interior psychological experience, not action. Richardson realized that the epistolary form offered a unique window into inner experience, and in *Clarissa*, the characters write letters that reveal their inmost feelings and often suggest motives and perspectives that they themselves don't recognize. Thus, two characters can write about the same situation but perceived in drastically different ways. By the end of this novel, mutual misunderstanding is so profound that it ends in a genuine tragedy.

MARRIAGE AND MONEY

Clarissa Harlowe is 19, intelligent, and beautiful in an extremely wealthy family living just outside of London. Clarissa's brother James is the heir

apparent to the family fortune, and largely for that reason, he is a spoiled bully. Clarissa also has an older sister, Arabella. **The expectation in such a family is that both daughters should marry husbands who will enhance the family fortune or the family prestige.**

- The plan is for Arabella to marry a nobleman, thus uniting the middle-class Harlowes to the aristocracy. As for Clarissa, the goal is to find her a match that will unite her new husband's fortune with the Harlowes'.

- **In the patriarchal model of the family that the Harlowes represent, each member thus has a very specific role to play.** The goal is to work collectively for the family as a whole.

- A nobleman named Robert Lovelace enters the picture as a possible spouse for Arabella. Meanwhile, the Harlowes are delighted to find that the owner of the neighboring estate, Roger Solmes, is willing to merge his estate with theirs. Naturally, they expect Clarissa to marry Solmes.

- That's the plan—but it goes horribly wrong. First of all, Lovelace thought he was going to be wooing Clarissa, and he's annoyed when he realizes they all assume it's Arabella he's interested in. When he backs off from Arabella, naturally that makes her furiously jealous of her younger sister. And then it comes out that Lovelace and James Harlowe have had a bitter quarrel at college, and they nearly fought a duel. Now there's no way Lovelace could be acceptable to the family.

- Meanwhile, Lovelace has started writing letters secretly to Clarissa. She knows she shouldn't accept them, but he makes her believe that if she doesn't, he really will challenge James to a fatal duel. So she tells herself that she's answering his letters just to keep the peace, but by degrees, she begins to feel more interested in him than she should.

- Clarissa's servant tells on her, and the family is outraged. She's confined to her room in a kind of house arrest. But meanwhile, Lovelace has bribed another servant, and their clandestine correspondence continues.

- In **the old patriarchal code** that the Harlowes take for granted, **marriage is a transaction between families, and the wishes of the people actually getting married are not especially important.**

- Very differently, **in a newly emerging ethic that Richardson clearly approves of, marriage should be a choice made by the participants themselves in the hope of a lasting, deeply mutual relationship.** One of his goals in writing this novel was to raise his readers' consciousness about that. It worked. *Clarissa* was a huge hit from the very start, not just in England but all over Europe.

The French translation of *Clarissa* was done by the Abbé Prévost, author of *Manon Lescaut*.

THE WORLD OF INNER EXPERIENCE

- So there is a strong socioeconomic foundation to *Clarissa* that's rooted in everyday experience. But what makes it a great novel is that this theme is fully integrated with a searching exploration of individual psychology.

- Translated into modern terms, **Richardson is showing how much of an individual person's reality is what a psychoanalyst would call projection.** Thus, while it's true that Clarissa is beginning to have romantic feelings for Lovelace, her feelings are still very tentative, but her parents and siblings project their fear that she's passionately in love with him. That leads them to lock her up, which Lovelace takes as a challenge. So the Harlowes inadvertently make it more likely than before that he will make a serious attempt to get Clarissa.

- Lovelace, meanwhile, has a long history of seducing women, and in his libertine ideology, they say no, but they mean yes. He is incapable of imagining what it feels like to be Clarissa. He can't believe she isn't just waiting to be swept away by him. And the fact that she is inexperienced and virtuous only makes her a more exciting target.

- For Lovelace, there's a further incentive. His aristocratic culture regards people like the Harlowes as contemptible money-grubbers. And he rightly perceives that, for them, the reason why a daughter should preserve her so-

called virtue is not serious morality but cynical financial calculation. If she were to lose her virginity, down would go her value in the marriage market.

- So he can get revenge on this family of wealthy upstarts who have insulted him by spoiling Clarissa for anyone else. He leaves open the possibility that maybe he will marry her himself—but only once it's clear that he would be doing it on his own terms.

- **In the world that Richardson creates, not only are people's perceptions of reality subjectively different, but their practical situations are different, too.**

- Clarissa hopes at first that her mother will be her ally against the patriarchal demands. But Mrs. Harlow has been totally co-opted. She commands Clarissa to obey her father, which means marry the revolting Solmes.

- Implicitly, **Richardson is arguing for the modern affective family, as opposed to patriarchy**. In this emerging ethos, parents have to deserve the love of their children; it can't be exacted as a duty. And they should encourage their children to marry for love and happiness, not as pawns in the game of wealth accumulation.

As interesting as many of the characters have been in the novels considered in this course up until now, it's not really possible to imagine them having unconscious motives and feelings. In Richardson, there is an altogether new kind of depth.

SEDUCTION AS POWER

- **Lovelace not only sees sex as power but also as a source of sadistic gratification.** And when the plot takes a huge turn, Lovelace gets his chance.

- Still secretly corresponding with Clarissa, he persuades her to come down to the garden outside the house in the evening for what is supposed to be one last discussion with him to avert the duel with James. When Clarissa shows up, he has accomplices stage a fake burglary. She panics, he seizes her hand, and he hustles her away.

- Clarissa never meant that to happen, but as her best friend Anna Howe emphasizes in subsequent letters, she made it possible for it to happen. At some level, she is complicit in this abduction. If she had been willing to acknowledge her own sexual feelings, she might have been better able to keep them from exposing her to catastrophe. It's not as though she couldn't have suspected an attraction to Lovelace. Anna does suspect it, and tells her so.

- Once Lovelace has gotten Clarissa away from her home, he installs her in London in what he tells her is a boarding house. There are several attractive young women living there who seem to be his friends and also a grossly overweight older woman, who is the landlady.

- That's his story, and with Clarissa's lack of worldly experience, she's naive enough to believe it. Only gradually does she grasp that she is living in a whorehouse. The young women are former girlfriends of Lovelace's—now professional prostitutes—and the supposed landlady is the madam.

- **So Lovelace now has Clarissa in his power, but it's not yet the kind of power that matters to him.** He could easily take her by force, but in the game he's playing, that would mean failure. **He wants to seduce her in earnest**—that is, get her to the point at which she will willingly give herself to him. Only then will he be victorious.

- Thus, for Lovelace, sex is indeed about power. The pleasure it can give is relatively unimportant, as contrasted with the self-gratification of conquest.

- **Richardson captures superbly the utter inability of two people—Lovelace and Clarissa—to grasp what it feels like to be the other person. They live in different imaginative worlds;** they can never make genuine contact with each other.

What people say in letters may not be the whole truth, even if they tell themselves it is. And this is another way Richardson is discovering new possibilities in the epistolary form. There is no omniscient narrator to tell us what to believe. It's more like the self-serving story told by des Grieux in *Manon Lescaut*, but now it's being told as events unpredictably occur, not in retrospect.

- As Lovelace's campaign of seduction slowly progresses, each of them is working from a mental scenario that might indeed lead to a happy ending—though it's clear that neither scenario takes adequate account of psychological reality.

- We know what Lovelace thinks because he writes regularly to a friend named Jack Belford, just as Clarissa writes to Anna.

MUTUAL MISUNDERSTANDING

- **As time goes on, Clarissa, cut off from everything that gave structure to her life, feels increasingly that she no longer knows who she is.** Should she blame herself for what's happening? That question torments her, as she tells Anna:

> I know not how it comes about, but I am, in my own opinion, a poor lost creature; and yet cannot charge myself with one criminal or faulty inclination. Do you know, my dear, how this can be?
>
> Yet I can tell you how, I believe—one devious step at setting out!—that must be it:—which pursued, has led me so far out of my path, that I am in a wilderness of doubt and error; and never, never, shall find my way out of it.

- **This is the pattern of tragedy, in which a single mistake can precipitate catastrophe.** But in classical tragedy, it was fate that was to blame. Oedipus had no intention of killing his father and marrying his mother. He did it unknowingly—because an oracle had prophesied it before he was even born. In Richardson's novel, **it's the consequences of character that bring about disaster.**

- **Lovelace is capable of cruelty when he gets frustrated, but he thinks of himself as an honorable person**—and plenty of the original readers of this novel accepted that.

- **As for Clarissa, if she had possessed more self-knowledge, she might have been safe.** If she could have admitted her real attraction to Lovelace, instead of believing that a good girl would never have sexual feelings, she might have resisted better. And if she had grasped that total passivity, far from being

virtuous, was the worst way of dealing with her family's bullying, she might have saved herself.

- **But she is who she is. She has been conditioned all along to see herself that way,** and Richardson means no criticism of her in showing that she is unable to break free from her conditioning.

- Eventually, Lovelace reluctantly realizes that Clarissa is never going to give herself to him, and in a kind of desperation, he gets her to drink some drugged wine. While she is unconscious, he rapes her.

- The actual event is not described at all. Clarissa can't describe the rape, since she was unconscious when it happened. She only knows that afterward she feels defiled, and she can't help blaming herself for having gotten into a situation where that could happen.

- As for Lovelace, he feels something close to shame. This is not the triumphant conquest he was counting on. What he writes to Jack is as curt as it could be: "The affair is over. Clarissa lives." She's not dead, that's true, but Lovelace has murdered her self-respect.

- As this long novel draws to a close, Clarissa turns to religion—not just as a consolation, but as a way out of this hopelessly damaged life. **She falls ill and is clearly wasting away.** Richardson probably expected his readers to think of tuberculosis, which did indeed kill many young people at the time. **But if Clarissa doesn't exactly choose to die, she certainly accepts death willingly.**

- **It's Lovelace who is the true tragic figure.** He has devoted his life to a libertine ethos that leaves him empty and even despairing. At the very end, he grasps that it is Clarissa who has conquered him, and he is unable to face the hollowness of who he has turned out to be.

Richardson would say that even though Clarissa dies undeservedly while she is still very young, she dies in full acceptance. She's through with her body, whose beauty had proved to be so dangerous for her. Her body's integrity has been violated, but her soul has not.

11

THE GREAT COMIC NOVEL: *TOM JONES*

In 1749, Henry Fielding published his masterpiece, *Tom Jones*. Full of activity and movement, the novel's central episodes take place on the road, in the picaresque tradition that Fielding had already adapted in *Joseph Andrews*. An immensely enjoyable read, *Tom Jones* is also remarkably rich, and it is therefore worth considering at some length.

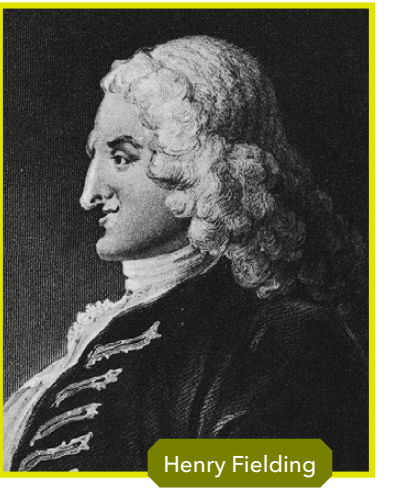
If you haven't read *Tom Jones* and would like to, consider reading it before this lecture and the next one to avoid spoiling the ending—and the subtle clues that Fielding skillfully plants along the way. The novel seems to have no plot for most of the time, and then, at the very end, the entire story turns out to have been a masterfully constructed plot.

POSITIVITY AND EXTERIORITY

- Something *Tom Jones* has in common with *Joseph Andrews* is a positive vision of human nature that's very different from Samuel Richardson's puritanical distrust not just of human nature, but of the human body itself. **The masterful plot of *Tom Jones* suggests that life makes sense.** The implication is that a tragic vision, which Richardson handled so powerfully in *Clarissa*, is one lens through which to view life, but not the only one.

- In *Clarissa*, the psychology was profoundly introverted. That was the whole point, and Richardson explored it with great originality. **The psychology of**

Tom Jones, by contrast, **is extroverted and other-directed.** There are some individuals who are capable of selfishness and malice, but **Fielding believes deeply in the essential goodness of human nature.**


Henry Fielding

In Fielding's world, sex is not an ominous moral test; it's one of the things that makes life enjoyable. And in *Tom Jones*, its positive aspect is no longer confined to the shy and earnest attraction of two young people to each other. **Sex takes many different forms in this novel, and sexual desire is not seen as virtually a sin to be repressed.** Rather, it is a natural impulse that can liberate the best in human beings.

In *Clarissa*, religion is a refuge from the sufferings in this vale of tears. Its ultimate fulfillment can only come by dying. In *Tom Jones*, religion can be misused hypocritically by some characters, but fundamentally it implies a recognition that a benevolent God watches over us. This God expects us to demonstrate our belief not by introspective self-criticism, but by positive generosity toward other people.

All of the characters in *Tom Jones* are what E. M. Forster would call flat. Fielding acknowledges this openly, at one point saying that he has no intention of invading the "inmost recesses" of his characters' minds. Admirers of *Clarissa*, by contrast, had expressly praised it for what they called "the recesses of the heart." One reason Fielding refuses to follow suit is that he doubts that in real life we ever can penetrate to people's inmost selves.

Fielding, working in the comic mode, is not interested in interiority. He's interested in what we learn about people from the outside, by watching them interact. He believes that a stylized, two-dimensional method is closer to

what life is really like. **Seeing people from the outside, we have to guess, weigh evidence, and reach provisional understanding. How we do that is a central theme in *Tom Jones*.**

As a character, Tom is charming and lovable, but not deep. Henry James shrewdly commented that Tom really has no mind at all—but then, Fielding has more than enough mind for both of them. Not only does Fielding create type characters, he likes to pair them in interesting ways, as comic writers always had. In the first part of *Tom Jones*, there are several significant pairs, including Tom and Blifil; Thwackum and Square, the boys' tutors; and Squire Allworthy and his neighbor, Squire Western.

ATTITUDES TOWARD SEX

Another significant pair involves Squire Western's beautiful daughter, Sophia. She and Tom wish they could get married, but they know the social gap between them makes that impossible. She is the heir to an estate. He is an illegitimate foundling, and the heir to Allworthy's estate, Paradise Hall, is Blifil, not Tom. Sophia's counterpart is the gamekeeper's daughter, Molly Seagrim.

Molly gets pregnant, and this shocks Sophia when she finds out about it. Molly has assured Tom that he is the only man who ever touched her, so he accepts that he must be the father of the child she's carrying. But when he calls unexpectedly at her house, she seems rattled at seeing him there. Behind her bed is a rug, hanging to serve as a curtain, and while she is berating him for not taking care of her, this happens:

> [T]he wicked rug got loose from its fastening, and discovered everything hid behind it; where among other female utensils appeared—(with shame I write it, and with sorrow will it be read)—the philosopher Square, in a posture (for the place would not admit his standing upright) as ridiculous as can possibly be conceived.

This is a splendid example of the **witty, playfully ironic style of Fielding's narrator.** Some might regard what just happened as shameful, but the narrator obviously doesn't, and Fielding suspects the reader won't either.

- Square, terrified that Tom will tell what he saw, argues solemnly that "fitness is governed by the nature of things, and nothing is indeed un-fit which is not unnatural." Tom laughs heartily and replies:

> Well reasoned, old boy! But why dost thou think that I should desire to expose thee? I promise thee, I was never better pleased with thee in my life.

- Tom is pleased for two reasons. First, Square has shown himself to be a normal human being, not a talking head. Second, Tom no longer has to believe that he himself must be the father of Molly's baby. It's clear that she sleeps around.

- Tom enjoys sex, but he is no seducer; he has nothing in common with Robert Lovelace. Tom's intentions are always good, and whenever he does get involved with a woman, she's the one who makes the first move.

- In *Clarissa*, just as in *La Princesse de Clèves*, sexual desire was pretty much the same in everyone—an irrational passion that is better repressed than yielded to. In Fielding's ethical world, it takes many forms. It can be selfish, even sadistic, though since this is a comic novel, there are only oblique hints about that. But it can also be quite unconflicted—good in and of itself.

If both people want to have sex—and if it does no one else any harm—Fielding can't see what possible objection there could be. At one point, he refers to sex outside of marriage as "tolerated in some Christian countries, connived at in others, and practiced in all."

SOPHIA VS. CLARISSA

- At this point in the story, Tom feels what he thinks of as love for two different young women. The narrator distinguishes deftly between the two kinds; it's the narrator who needs to do that, since, as Henry James said, he has the capacious mind that Tom does not.

- Tom does feel a kind of love for Molly. She's sexy, and very willing. But the narrator describes this kind of love as "more properly hunger."

- **Toward Sophia, Tom feels something far deeper.** It's unquestionably based in sexual attraction, but as in Plato's theory of love, it builds on that to achieve something deeper and richer. Tom would never dream of trying to seduce Sophia. **He would only sleep with her if she could freely unite herself with him.**

- **Sophia, though virtuous and modest, is a sexual being just as Tom is.** Fielding suggests her feelings magnificently in a little episode that, among other things, is a rejoinder to the assumptions of Richardson's novel.

- Sophia has a favorite muff that she knows that Tom, when he was calling at their house, likes to surreptitiously handle and even kiss. So it takes on added value for her. At one point, her father flies into a rage over something and petulantly throws her muff into the fire. Sophia leaps forward and rescues it. Tom is there at the time and naturally he is deeply affected by seeing that.

- After Tom has been expelled from Paradise Hall, Squire Western commands Sophia to marry Blifil. That will unite his estate with Allworthy's—which is exactly the motive that made the Harlowes try to force Clarissa to marry Solmes.

- Sophia doesn't know everything we know about Blifil, but she certainly understands that he is a nasty hypocrite. Yet for a moment, she is tempted to obey. This is how the narrator describes her thinking:

> The extreme piety of such an act of obedience worked very forcibly, as she had a very deep sense of religion. Lastly, when she reflected how much she herself was to suffer, being indeed to become little less than a sacrifice, or martyr, to filial love and duty, she felt an agreeable tickling in a certain little passion, which though it bears no immediate affinity either to religion or virtue, is often so kind as to lend great assistance to the purposes of both.

- The "little passion" must mean a masochistic desire to feel virtuous through self-denial, very much as Clarissa would. Of course, marrying Blifil would ruin the rest of her life, but that would make the martyrdom all the more noble. How deftly Fielding indicates what changes her mind!

> Sophia was charmed with the contemplation of so heroic an action, and began to compliment herself with much premature flattery, when Cupid, who lay hid in her muff, suddenly crept out […] and kicked all before him.

- The word *muff* had the same suggestive double meaning in the 18th century that it still does today.

- As for Blifil, he wants Sophia for her estate, but for another reason as well. And **Fielding makes it clear that if this was a different kind of novel—a darker and less comic novel—he could tell us a lot about Blifil in this regard.**

- When Sophia bursts into tears at the prospect of marrying him, we're told that Blifil looks at her "with the same desires which an ortolan inspires into the soul of an epicure." An ortolan was an expensive delicacy, a small songbird prepared as a gourmet treat. This is indeed hunger—not love.

- Here's what comes next:

> Now the agonies which affected the mind of Sophia, rather augmented than impaired her beauty; for her tears added brightness to her eyes, and her breasts rose higher with her sighs.

- **Lovelace reacted in exactly that way to Clarissa's grief.**

- The narrator continues:

> Blifil therefore looked on this human ortolan with greater desire than when he viewed her last; nor was his desire at all lessened by the aversion which he discovered in her to himself. On the contrary, this served rather to heighten the pleasure he proposed in rifling her charms, as it added triumph to lust; nay, he had some further views, from obtaining the absolute possession of her person, which we detest too much even to mention.

- That's very diplomatically put, but the meaning is unmistakable: **Blifil is a sadist.** He looks forward to "rifling her charms," like a burglar going through bureau drawers. And after marriage gives him "absolute possession of her

person," he looks forward to physical cruelty that the narrator refuses even to talk about.

- **But Sophia is not Clarissa. She takes matters into her own hands:** She makes a rope out of sheets and escapes from her bedroom window. With her servant for a companion, she hits the road, intending to seek refuge in London with a relative there.

- **Meanwhile Tom, too, has hit the road. Now will begin the picaresque element in this novel**—but also the carefully structured plot through which Tom and Sophia will be reunited in the end.

12

PLOT AND STRUCTURE IN *TOM JONES*

Once Tom hits the road, a series of more or less random encounters happen, very much in the picaresque mode. But unexpectedly, at the exact center of the novel, his journey is interwoven with Sophia's in a memorable way.

COMPANIONS OF SOPHIA AND TOM

- Soon Tom acquires a sidekick, which adds variety and interest to his journey—for which he has no particular destination in mind. This is a schoolmaster named Partridge whom he had known back home. **For a brief moment, Tom imagines that he has met up with his own father,** since Jenny Jones, from whom his name was taken, had been a boarder in Partridge's house and was suspected of having been his mistress.

- **Partridge assures him, however, that that's totally untrue. So the mystery of Tom's parentage remains.** In a comic novel like this, we can be confident that the secret eventually will be revealed—but only eventually.

- Sophia likewise acquires a companion: a cousin of hers named Harriet Fitzpatrick, who is also on the way to London. Harriet gives Sophia a drastically slanted explanation of what she's up to. She is running away from her husband, Mr. Fitzpatrick, who is hot on her trail. It's understandable that she did that, since he was both unfaithful and abusive. But thanks to the

sexual double standard, Harriet conceals the fact that she, too, has a lover—and is planning to join him in London.

- This interpolated story interacts with the main story in two ways: to contrast the sincerity and openness of Sophia with the duplicitous cunning of Harriet and to make us think about the limitations of first-person narration. Harriet reveals only as much as she chooses to, but **Fielding's omniscient narrator can give us information that Sophia has no way of suspecting.**

- Still continuing on his own journey, Tom encounters a shocking scene. In an isolated spot, a soldier is about to ravish a frightened and helpless woman. Tom rushes in, and with just his walking stick, disarms the swordsman and rescues her. She is deeply grateful—and interesting also for another reason. Although middle-aged and not especially beautiful, she has her attractions.

- She identifies herself as Mrs. Waters, and Tom accompanies her to an inn in a village called Upton. This is another case in which Tom—not the woman—is the one being seduced.

- At dinner, they begin exchanging suggestive looks. And in due course, Mrs. Waters makes her intentions clear:

> The lady unmasked the royal battery by carelessly letting her handkerchief drop from her neck. The heart of Mr. Jones was entirely taken, and the fair conqueror enjoyed the usual fruits of her victory.

- Discreetly, the narrator concludes: "Here we think proper to end the chapter."

- There is also a surprising plot twist. **Before she was Mrs. Waters, she informs Tom, she used to be Jenny Jones.** Having briefly believed that Partridge was his father, Tom now fears that he has slept with his mother. But like Partridge, she disabuses him: **She is not his mother. What she doesn't reveal at this point is that she knows**

In 1963, the director Tony Richardson made an excellent film version of this novel, with a script by the playwright John Osborne. Tom was played by the young Albert Finney, and Sophia by Susannah York.

who Tom's real mother was. But that won't come out until the very end of the story—and the narrator doesn't tell us, either.

At many points along the way, the narrator makes clear that when he withholds information, he does it for our benefit. Partly, that gives us the enjoyment of waiting to see how things will work out. And partly, it reflects a determination to educate us to evaluate appearances and suspend judgment if the evidence is uncertain.

THE PLOT THICKENS

- It's at Upton that **the strands of the plot converge and then break apart again.** Sophia, too, shows up at the inn, and because Partridge has been blabbing to the staff in the kitchen, she realizes that the servants are aware of her name. Naturally, she assumes that Tom himself has been boasting about her, which she feels as a callous betrayal. And then, on top of that, she learns that Tom is at that very moment in a woman's bedroom.

- Outraged, Sophia gets a servant to put her muff on Tom's bed, knowing that he will be thunderstruck when he sees it, and she departs.

- **By now, the plot is thickening in many ways.** Mr. Fitzpatrick, Harriet's husband, shows up in pursuit of her and gets the mistaken impression that she is the person in bed with Tom. After that gets sorted out, who should appear but Squire Western, in pursuit of Sophia. Finding that Tom is at the inn, he has him arrested, but a magistrate easily establishes that Tom has had nothing to do with Sophia at this time.

- **With a kind of centrifugal force, everybody heads out in various directions, and the picaresque mode resumes.** Western, in particular, gets distracted from his quest by happening upon a fox hunt in full cry, which he can't resist joining.

- **Fielding is making it clear that a fundamental theme of this novel is this: It's all very well to be spontaneous, as Tom is**—that demonstrates that he possesses good nature. **But in addition, he needs to learn prudence.**

Otherwise, people will interpret his behavior in the wrong light and believe he's worse than he really is.

- Back at Paradise Hall, Blifil made it his personal mission to put Tom in the worst possible light. Now Blifil is out of the picture, but Tom still needs to get some perspective on himself.

- Rescuing Mrs. Waters from the rapist was an instance where spontaneity was admirable. Getting involved with Mrs. Waters, on the other hand, was foolish, if not worse. Tom knows nothing about her, and although she turns out to be a very good person, she might easily not be.

- And although he couldn't have foreseen that Sophia would show up at just this time, he certainly made it possible for her to think badly of him. She had hoped to be reunited with him, but now she leaves him behind, and he's the one who has to set out in pursuit of her.

- That's why **a central theme of this novel is prudence: Learn to seem to be what you really are.** That may not be an exciting theme, but it's very important for life.

Throughout this novel, there are allusions to the *Odyssey*—that archetypal story about a wandering hero trying to get back to his native place and to the woman he really wants.

THE COMIC, ROMANTIC ENDING

- **As this novel draws to a close, the anticipated happy ending seems very much in peril.** A naval press gang seizes Tom to carry him off to be a sailor. That intervention is averted, however, by another one: Mr. Fitzpatrick attacks Tom in the street, believing once again that he has been sleeping with Mrs. Fitzpatrick, and in self-defense, Tom wounds him severely. He is thereupon arrested for attempted murder.

- **Now comes a flurry of incidents.** Allworthy, Blifil, and Western all arrive in London. And Western locates his daughter.

- Meanwhile, Fitzpatrick recovers from his wound, and he is now satisfied that Tom was never involved with his wife, so the charge of attempted murder is dropped.

- **At this point, an extraordinary revelation comes out: Mrs. Waters, the former Jenny Jones, declares that she knows who Tom's mother was.** Tom was conceived when **Allworthy's sister Bridget** was not yet married and had an affair with a young clergyman who subsequently died. Since Allworthy was away on a trip for several months during the end of her pregnancy, he never suspected it. Bridget put the infant Tom into Allworthy's bed and paid Jenny to take the rap.

- **So Tom is still illegitimate—but he is the blood nephew of Allworthy, just as much as Blifil is. Tom and Blifil had the same mother, but Tom is by nature good, and Blifil is wicked.**

- At this point, a very minor character has an equally startling story to tell. This is a lawyer named Dowling, who has become the steward in charge of Allworthy's estate. It was Blifil who urged Allworthy to give him that appointment.

- **Suddenly, we understand much that we never did before, just as the characters themselves do.** One of the great pleasures in rereading *Tom Jones* is detecting **the clues that Fielding has planted all along the way** but, like a skilled magician, has distracted our attention from.

- **Here's an example of a hidden clue.** Tom got into trouble for being drunk when Allworthy was dangerously ill. When Allworthy recovered, Blifil kept back that information. If Allworthy had heard about it at the time, he could have easily learned why Tom got drunk—it was joyfully celebrating his recovery.

- Blifil cunningly saves up that story until much later, when Allworthy is upset by other things Tom has done and thinking of kicking him out. That's when Blifil describes the drunken performance, but he claims that what Tom was celebrating was the prospect of Allworthy's death, after which he would expect to receive a bequest.

- That's vicious enough in itself, but when we reread the story, we realize it's even worse. At the very moment when Allworthy was lying in his sickbed, Lawyer Dowling arrived with a letter that his sister Bridget had written to him on her deathbed. She was traveling at the time and received a terrible injury when her carriage overturned. In the letter, she confesses to Allworthy what she always meant to tell him some day: that Tom is her son. Blifil told Dowling that he would personally give Allworthy the letter—but he never did.

- And here is the worst part. When Tom is reveling, Thwackum tells him it's very wrong to carry on that way since Blifil has just lost his mother. Thwackum doesn't know—any more than Tom does—that Bridget was also Tom's mother. Tom immediately apologizes and tries to take Blifil's hand.

> Blifil scornfully rejected his hand; and, with much indignation, answered, "It was little to be wondered at, if tragical spectacles made no impression on the blind; but, for his part, he had the misfortune to know who his parents were, and consequently must be affected with their loss."

- Tom indignantly seizes Blifil by the collar and exclaims:

> Damn you for a rascal! Do you insult me with the misfortune of my birth?

- When we read that the first time, it did seem highly insulting. But on rereading, it's diabolical. When Blifil says that, he has just read the letter containing their late mother's confession—which he is never going to give to Allworthy. He not only knows who his parents were, but he also knows who Tom's parents were.

- Many pages later, Lawyer Dowling turns up again very briefly in a way that would make little impression on a reader at the time. Tom happens to encounter Dowling at an inn, and they fall into conversation. Dowling casually mentions "your uncle Allworthy," and Tom replies, "Alas, Sir, you do me an honor to which I have no title. I assure you I am no relation of Mr. Allworthy." Since Dowling knows the truth—having delivered Bridget's deathbed letter—he inquires cunningly:

> I protest, Sir, […] you talk very much like a man of honor; but instead of giving me any trouble, I protest it would give me great pleasure to know how you came to be thought a relation of Mr. Allworthy's, if you are not.

- Tom inadvertently reveals to Dowling that Allworthy never got Bridget's letter—which means that nobody but Blifil knows what was in it!

- So why did Blifil push Allworthy to hire Dowling as his steward? The answer is obvious, now that we know the truth. Dowling must have blackmailed Blifil to do it. But naturally, Dowling would only keep that secret so long as it was to his own advantage.

- **The whole truth comes out at the very end in one of those masterful connections of different threads that Fielding brings off**. In London, Blifil has finally overreached. Someone recognizes Lawyer Dowling as having been seen with the naval press gang that nearly snatched Tom right out of the story. Now Allworthy's suspicions are finally aroused. He commands Dowling to tell him the truth, and Dowling quickly grasps that he has nothing to gain anymore by protecting Blifil. So he does tell the truth.

- **That leads to one of the most satisfying moments in all of literature.** Allworthy has ordered a sedan chair, one of those little enclosed conveyances carried by two men holding it up with poles, and Blifil politely comes to the door to see him off.

> He asked his uncle if he was going out, which is a civil way of asking a man whither he is going: to which the other making no answer, he again desired to know when he would be pleased to return?—Allworthy made no answer to this neither, till he was just going into his chair, and then, turning about, he said,— "Harkee, sir, do you find out, before my return, the letter which your mother sent me on her death-bed."

- **Once Squire Western understands that Tom really will inherit the estate, there are no hard feelings anymore.** There's a fine moment of heteroglossia—dissonance between very different ways of speaking—when Lord Fellamar introduces himself to Western. Western demands:

> "Why, who the devil are you?"
>
> "Sir, I am Lord Fellamar," answered he, "and am the happy man whom I hope you have done the honour of accepting for a son-in-law."
>
> "You are a son of a bitch!" replied the squire, "for all your laced coat. You my son-in-law, and be damned to you!"

- Crude and often drunk though Western is, his bluntness is a breath of fresh air in this sophisticated London milieu.

- **When Sophia tries to act modestly, insisting that it is much too soon to marry, Western bursts in as Tom is kissing her passionately**—which he has never done before.

> With his hunting voice and phrase, [Western] cried out, "To her, boy, to her, go to her."

Fielding based the character of Sophia on his own wife, who died much too young.

So we have had two different narrative modes all along, deftly nested into each other.

- One is the picaresque, which so much of the story is. It is certainly a coincidence that Tom and Sophia—and Squire Western, and Mr. Fitzpatrick, and Mrs. Waters—should all turn up at once at the same time and place.

- The second mode is comedy: a structured story in which obstacles are overcome and young lovers gain their heart's desire. That has been the function of the plot—the very thing picaresque stories usually don't have.

- And as in *Joseph Andrews*, there is actually a third mode as well: the mode of romance. Tom is, after all, a foundling, like a prince in disguise. But whereas that denouement seemed pretty artificial in *Joseph Andrews*, in *Tom Jones* it emerges plausibly from everything that went before, in an extraordinarily satisfying way.

QUIZ

LECTURE 7

Why does Gulliver's experience among the Houyhnhnms spoil him for life back home in England?

How is the episode of the flying island prophetic of the dangers of modern technology?

LECTURE 8

What aspects of des Grieux's and Manon's characters undermine their roles as tragic romantic lovers?

How does the narrative point of view affect our experience of *Manon Lescaut*?

LECTURE 9

What character in earlier literature is Parson Adams modeled on in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, and what traits do they share in common?

What is a mock epic, and what is one example of it from *Joseph Andrews*?

LECTURE 10

Why does Clarissa feel guilty for her abduction and rape, and what does that suggest about Richardson's moral assumptions?

What is an epistolary novel, and what are some advantages and disadvantages of that form in *Clarissa*?

QUIZ ANSWERS are on page 194

LECTURE 11

In what ways are *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* picaresque novels, and in what ways do they depart from picaresque?

In what ways is *Tom Jones* a comic alternative to the tragic story of *Clarissa*?

LECTURE 12

In what way can *Tom Jones* be considered a romance in the traditional sense?

How does the denouement of *Tom Jones* suddenly expose hidden connections that reveal a highly crafted plot?

13

PHILOSOPHICAL SATIRE IN FRANCE: *CANDIDE*

Whereas Swift was a clergyman in the Anglican church, Voltaire was a skeptic—a founding member of the great movement of ideas known as the Enlightenment.

Together with *Gulliver's Travels, Candide* is one of the greatest satires ever written. They are totally different, however, in style and in thematic message. As an implied critique of *Robinson Crusoe, Gulliver's Travels* pretends to be totally realistic; *Candide* is overtly artificial, with an ironic narrator and a series of bizarre incidents from which the characters implausibly survive. Thus, the mordantly witty narrator of *Candide* is pretty much the opposite of the earnest first-person narrator of *Gulliver's Travels*. And that's because although both books are satiric, their targets are very different. Swift is exposing the limitations of the recently invented realist novel; Voltaire is exposing a then-fashionable philosophy that claimed to explain why there is suffering and cruelty in the world. For Swift, it was the consequence of original sin, but Voltaire didn't believe in original sin. *Candide* is a covert attack on political and religious authority, whereas Swift strongly supported both kinds of authority.

VOLTAIRE'S PHILOSOPHY

- **As a narrative, *Candide* has the crazy momentum of farce.** Characters keep getting disemboweled, or hanged, or burned at the stake—yet they always

survive and come back for more. The greatness of this novel is its exhilarating prose style; it's rapid, concise, elegantly structured, and irresistibly witty.

> If you can read French, read *Candide* in the original. There are many good English translations, but every translator confesses to a kind of despair at trying to capture the driving energy and crystalline clarity of the original.

- When the story begins, Candide is a handsome young man living in a castle in Westphalia, Germany, which belongs to a baron with the preposterous name of Thunder-ten-tronckh. Candide is the illegitimate son of the baron's sister, and he is strongly attracted to the young daughter of the family, whose name is Cunégonde (in French, this has mildly indecent connotations). Their tutor is a philosopher named Pangloss, whose name means "all tongue"—lots of words, not much insight.

- One day, Cunégonde happens to see Pangloss in the bushes with an attractive servant named Paquette, doing what is wittily described as giving her a lesson in experimental physics. Cunégonde watches "breathlessly the repeated experiment" and decides that she would like to do some experiments with Candide. The baron catches them kissing and drives Candide out of the castle "with vigorous kicks on the backside."

- **Voltaire's critique of philosophy is already underway, because according to Pangloss, we live in the best of all possible worlds. Voltaire's target was a philosophy that was widely espoused at the time.** It was known as **optimism**, but that word was understood in a very specialized way. Pangloss, right at the beginning, defines it accurately:

> "Those who say that all is well are stupid. They should say everything is for the best."

- **What's at stake here is nothing less than the problem of evil. If an all-wise and all-good God made the universe, why are there so many terrible things in it?** For traditional religious thinkers like Swift, the answer was simply original sin. Voltaire was taught that by the Jesuits. But by now, many thinkers no longer believed in original sin, and many other aspects of orthodox theology, though they did want to go on believing in a benevolent deity.

- This is the point of Pangloss's distinction. To say "all is well" would imply that everything is wonderful. Nobody could believe that. Instead, this so-called optimism holds that everything is for the best—that is, optimal.

- Somehow, in the overall workings of the universe, it's necessary for the good of the whole that some of the parts may suffer. Any other possible universe would be worse. This may not be the best world we might want, but it's the best of all possible worlds.

Voltaire had been educated by the Jesuits and had a lifelong grudge against them; they come in for some trenchant satire in *Candide*.

- **This philosophy was associated in particular with Leibniz**, whose big book was *Theodicy*, which means a proof of the goodness of God and a solution to the problem of evil. In it, he begs a very big question: to take it as a given fact that God is good. Once you accept that, of course you will agree that everything in the universe is as it has to be. But if you don't accept that as axiomatic, then it becomes hard to claim that everything is for the best—in the best of all possible worlds.

In the proper meaning of *begging a question*—which people often use to mean just raising a question—it means circular reasoning. It means taking as given the very thing an argument is claiming to prove.

- This is not to deny that Leibniz had a brilliant intellect, but his philosophical ideas no longer seem compelling, in the way that Plato's or Kant's do.

SATIRIC EPISODES

- Voltaire makes Candide meet a character named Martin, who calls himself a Manichaean. (There haven't been any actual Manichaeans since the first centuries AD, because the Christian church stamped them out.) Their heresy was to deny that God was omnipotent as well as good, and they based their reasoning on this simple pair of alternatives: **Either God wants to prevent evil but isn't able to, or God could prevent evil but chooses not to.**

- The Manichaean position was that a God who could prevent evil but won't is really a kind of devil. They didn't think much of the theological explanation that it's our own fault, for misusing our free will, so they settled for the alternative: The universe is divided between equal forces of good and evil. Now it's possible to argue that God is indeed good—he just doesn't have enough power.

- Voltaire probably thought that if you had to choose, Manichaeism made more sense than Orthodox Christianity, but he wasn't recommending it as a philosophy. ***Candide* is a satire on the whole notion of seeking truth by philosophizing.**

- Pangloss is an extreme optimist—at the cost of redefining optimism to make room in it for horrible things. Martin is an extreme pessimist. He always sees the worst side of everything, even though there is plenty of good in this life. Both of them are prisoners inside their own intellectual systems. This may not be the best of all possible worlds, as Pangloss claims, but Martin's philosophy is like Woody Allen's *My Speech to the Graduates:*

    - More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction.

- **Voltaire himself was quite taken with Leibnizian optimism until real-world events**—such as the Seven Years' War, which was ongoing when *Candide* was published in 1759 and cost the lives of many thousands of innocent civilians and countless troops—**made it seem increasingly shallow.**

- Not long after he's kicked out of the baron's castle, Candide gets railroaded into the army of the Bulgars, who represent Frederick the Great's Prussia. When he tries to run away, they catch him and give him 2,000 lashes that lay open every muscle and nerve.

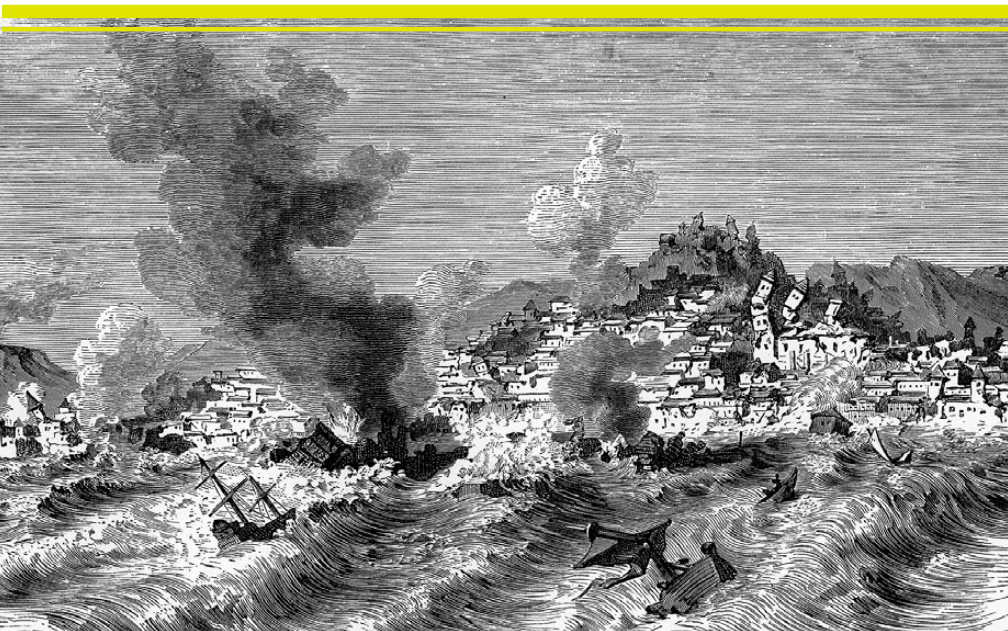
- After Candide recovers, he witnesses a battle in which 30,000 men are "removed from the best of worlds." He then comes to a village, in which mutilated men watch the death throes of their butchered wives and "disemboweled girls, who had first satisfied the natural needs of various heroes, breathed their last." With mordant irony, Voltaire mentions that their village was demolished "in strict accordance with the rules of international law."

- Voltaire brings Candide briefly to England so that he can glance at a notorious incident there: the execution of an admiral named Byng. A sea battle had gone badly for the British, and they needed a scapegoat—though in fact Byng was not to blame. Voltaire knew about his trial while it was going on and had campaigned to try to save him. Candide watches Byng being executed, and when he asks why, he gets a reply that became famous:

  > In this country, it's good to kill an admiral from time to time, to encourage the others.

- So the cruelty of war was one of the factors that made Voltaire question philosophical optimism. Another was an entirely natural event that happened in 1755, just four years before *Candide.*

- That was a massive earthquake in Lisbon, which was especially terrifying since earthquakes happen so seldom in Western Europe. As a result, as many as 60,000 people perished. Nobody at the time had any notion of the real physical cause of earthquakes, and preachers seized on it as proof of divine wrath. They declared that God had punished Lisbon for its appalling



wickedness, and to appease God, some heretics were burned at the stake. Voltaire has Candide on the scene to witness that.

- By now, Candide has been joined by Pangloss, who assures him that all of this is still somehow for the best. They are overheard talking by a spy from the Inquisition, who accuses them—accurately enough—of not believing in original sin. Accordingly, Candide is viciously flogged "in cadence to a beautiful concert of plainsong," and Pangloss is hanged.

- **Voltaire clearly believes, as his fellow Enlightenment thinkers did, that a natural event like an earthquake must have causes that science would someday figure out.** What it does not have is moral significance. Lisbon wasn't destroyed because it was wicked; it was destroyed simply because it was constructed in a geological danger zone of some kind.

Candide was immediately banned in France. The Catholic church had the power of censorship, by which no book could be legally published without prior approval. But France was not a modern police state, and *Candide* was an underground best seller—reprinted 17 times in the first year alone.

THE FAMOUS CONCLUSION

- At the end of this incredibly packed short novel—less than 100 pages in most editions—the main characters end up on a little farm near Constantinople. On the way, they encounter a wise dervish and ask him why there is so much evil in the world. The dervish answers:

> What does it matter whether there is evil or good? When the Sultan sends a ship to Egypt, does he care whether the mice in the ship are comfortable or not?

- Pangloss asks, "Then what should we do?" The dervish replies, "Shut up."

- Sure enough, after everything that's happened, he still believes in the best of all possible worlds. Or more accurately, he hangs onto his philosophy because that's who he is, whether or not the philosophy makes sense. The narrator says:

> Pangloss admitted that he had always suffered horribly, but having once maintained that everything was wonderful, he still maintained it, and believed not a bit of it.

- **Random as the events in *Candide* are, there is a kind of framing motif. There are three gardens:**

  1. First, there is a parodic sort of Garden of Eden in Westphalia, where **Candide acquires forbidden sexual knowledge**, though it is just a kiss, and is expelled by the baron as an angry Jehovah.

  2. In the middle of the story is El Dorado, where **life is perfect, but perfectly boring**. Voltaire may have intended to suggest conventional accounts of the Christian heaven.

  3. Finally, there is the garden that will now support **the group, in a kind of commune**. There's no hierarchy here, just various kinds of people.

- **Candide, the bastard aristocrat, is finally united with the noblewoman Cunégonde. He has pursued her through the world, as in a conventional romance**, but now that he finally has her, she has grown disagreeably ugly. But she turns out to be an excellent pastry cook, so she will pull her weight in the commune.

- **At the very end of the novel, Pangloss declares that it must be the best of all possible worlds** because if they had not endured so much awful suffering, "We would not be here, eating candied citron and pistachios."

- **Candide gets the last word:**

  That is well said, but we must cultivate our garden.

- **Voltaire leaves it up to us to decide what we think that means.** It might mean a simple, self-sufficient life apart from the competitive world. That was the ancient philosophy of Epicurus and of Thoreau at Walden Pond. Or it could mean doing something constructive, whatever that means for you.

14

COMIC TRAVEL LETTERS: *HUMPHRY CLINKER*

Tobias Smollet

In 1771, Smollett published his final novel, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*. It was a completely different kind of novel than his previous novels—deeper, more mellow, and more generous in representing human behavior. Like *Clarissa, Humphry Clinker* is an epistolary novel, told in letters by the principal characters. But unlike in Clarissa, they don't correspond with each other; instead, each writes letters to a friend during the course of an eight-month journey they take together. Clearly, Smollett chose the epistolary form not because he wanted to explore psychological depths, but to give multiple perspectives on shared experiences.

Like all of the writers in this course so far, Tobias Smollett didn't start out as a novelist. That was not yet a career description; novels were just one of the many things a writer might try.

A TRAVEL NARRATIVE

- **The central character is the patriarch of the group, Matthew Bramble**, who has been living in retirement on his estate in Wales. He's as prickly as his name suggests, yet he is kind and generous underneath the gruffness. Accompanying Matthew are his niece and nephew.

- The niece is Lydia Melford, still in her teens, with a romantic temperament that is ignited when she glimpses a handsome traveling actor. Matthew says affectionately, "She is as soft as butter, and as easily melted." After a while, it becomes evident that the actor, whose name is Wilson, is covertly following the party in order to be near Lydia. That plants a plot element that is sure to be developed in due course.

- Lydia's brother is an Oxford student named Jery, who is confidently judgmental in an undergraduate sort of way. Still, Jery is perceptive, and early in the story he is able to say that Matthew only pretends to be a misanthrope in order to conceal "a heart which is tender, even to a degree of weakness."

- **Completing the family group** is Matthew's unmarried sister, Tabitha Bramble. She's fussy, and demanding, and a general pain in the neck. **Yet as we get to know her, our understanding of her character deepens, as it does of the others**. She's fond of Matthew, but frustrated at being his dependent. Tabitha wants desperately to get married—to set up a life of her own—and she is undoubtedly sexually frustrated, too, though that's only hinted at. During the journey, she sets her sights on one potential spouse after another, but they fall through when they discover she's not as rich as they assumed she was.

- **Jery refers to the traveling party as "a family of originals"—a term that was popular at the time. That means they all have idiosyncrasies that make them interesting as well as amusing.**

- **In addition to the family members, there are two servants**. One is a young man who is barely mentioned and will soon be replaced. The other is

Tabitha's attendant, named Winifred Jenkins. She resembles her employer in being keenly interested in finding a husband—hopefully one who can raise her above her servant status.

- **In one sense, *Humphry Clinker* is a travel narrative, a genre that was very popular at the time**. Sometimes the characters stay at inns, with mishaps and adventures much like those in the novels of Fielding. At other times they are guests at country houses, which gives Smollett a chance to extol the virtues of a well-run estate. He shares with Fielding an idealization of country life as against the conspicuous consumption and greed of London.

A COMIC NOVEL

- Again and again, there are amusing contrasts between the way the grumpy Matthew feels about places where they stay and the cheerful reactions of his niece and nephew. He is what used to be called a valetudinarian—basically, a hypochondriac—and when they spend some time at Bath, which was a fashionable health resort, he is revolted by vulgarity and grossness. In his opinion, the celebrated medicinal waters are no better than pestilential, and the people who flock there are dreadful phonies.

- Jery doesn't entirely disagree, but his attitude is much more tolerant. He writes from Bath to a college friend, "This chaos is to me a source of infinite amusement" and says that the goings-on "serve to heighten the humor in the farce of life, which I am determined to enjoy as long as I can."

- Meanwhile, Jery's sister Lydia, fresh from boarding school, tells a friend who is still there: "Bath is to me a new world—all is gaiety, good humor, and diversion."

- Matthew, as a disillusioned old man, is fed up with life as a farce. The characterization of Matthew is a wry self-portrait of Smollett himself, seeing his own foibles with ironic detachment.

- ***Humphry Clinker* is generally regarded as a comic novel, and Smollett certainly intended it to be**. But just as with *Don Quixote*, there's a good deal of cruel

Smollett did the standard English translation of *Don Quixote*.

practical joking that struck contemporary readers as funnier than it probably does today.

- **To some extent, the humor must have appealed to contemporaries' sense of social behaviors and regional stereotypes that are no longer familiar to us.**

WHO'S HUMPHRY CLINKER?

- **Why haven't we met the character from whom the novel gets its title?**

- Humphry is a naive and well-meaning young man who is encountered during the journey and gets taken on when their original servant misbehaves and has to be fired. **He's never a major character**, and he never writes a letter of his own, so it's not quite clear why Smollett gave him the title of the book—though at the end, he definitely has a role to play in the plot. In a way, this is a picaresque novel with no picaro—no clever rogue scheming his way through life. Humphry is a touching innocent.

If *Humphry Clinker* is mellower than Smollett's previous novels, which are all pretty dark, it's only relatively mellow compared, for example, with Fielding. Fielding openly acknowledged—in fact, he boasted—that his comic romances provide a happy alternative to the disappointments of actual life. Smollett is less tolerant than Fielding, and more satiric—more Swiftian, one might say.

- One suggestion is that since **Humphry never gets to speak for himself, we know him entirely as a composite picture built up from the subjective impressions of the others. Smollett probably thought of life like that.** Each of us constructs our own subjective reality, and then, through what modern psychologists call intersubjectivity, we develop a mutual reality based on shared impressions.

- **Humphry first shows up 70 pages or so into the story** as a ragged young fellow with training as a blacksmith who begs to be taken on as a postilion (who would ride on one of the horses drawing the carriage if there wasn't a coachman seated on top) to replace the one they've just fired.

- Humphry gives offense because when he mounts a horse, his rear end is showing. He explains that a dangerous bout of fever left him penniless, and he had to pawn most of his clothes in order to survive.

- At an inn, the landlord declines to help Clinker, condemning him as an "idle vagrant." At this, Matthew says:

> Hark ye, Clinker, you are a most notorious offender. You stand convicted of sickness, hunger, wretchedness, and want.

- Matthew then gives Humphry a guinea, a very generous sum, with which to reclaim his clothes.

- **Once he gets properly dressed, Humphry is entirely presentable. It's an implicit statement that most people let external impressions dominate** and also that they have no concern for Christian charity.

- Matthew is recalling the Gospel of his namesake Saint Matthew:

> For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Smollett has a lot of fun with Tabitha's and Winifred's malapropisms. Often these take the form of sexual double entendres—such as when Tabitha writes to the housekeeper back home and says, "Let Roger search into the slit holes which the maids have in secret."

THE DENOUEMENT

- Every novel has to have an ending—even one as apparently episodic as *Humphry Clinker*—and **its ending is the most interesting thing about it.** There is a denouement of sorts in *Humphry Clinker*, but it strikes us as a direct critique by Smollett of the happy-ending convention that Fielding exploited in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones.*

People often use the word *denouement* to mean nothing more than an ending, but in its origin in French, it carries a subtler meaning. The word *noeud* means "knot," and the denouement is the untying of a knot.

- The world of this novel is a dangerous place. At one point, the coach carrying the group overturns in a stream, everybody scrambles to get out, and Matthew would drown if Humphry didn't courageously rescue him. And then comes the surprise denouement.

- The travelers are taken in at the nearby estate of an old friend of Matthew's, who recalls that back when they were in college, he went by the name of Lloyd, not Bramble (he changed his name after he inherited his estate from a relative named Bramble).

- **This revelation prompts Clinker to produce a memento he has been carrying—a note from his dead mother—confirming that he is the illegitimate son of Matthew Lloyd!** His mother had been a barmaid with whom Matthew had an affair in his youth, but he never found out that the affair produced a son.

- **This might look like the romance denouements of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, but Smollett isn't interested in the theme of a prince in disguise**. Humphry is a good person, and Matthew cheerfully acknowledges paternity, but he is still what he always was.

- Winifred, who has romantic feelings for Humphry, assumes that he will never condescend to marry a servant after this ascent in the world. But there is no Sophia Western for Humphry, and he doesn't expect any such thing. He tells Winifred:

Remembering that this is an epistolary novel, with no Fielding-like narrator to comment and explain, Smollett's achievement is very impressive. Our appreciation of the characters emerges from what they themselves say—and from what their companions gradually come to understand about them.

> Whenever I seem proud, Mrs. Jenkins, I beg of you to put me in mind of the condition I was in when I first saw you between Chippenham and Marlborough.

- That was when his clothes were so ragged that his naked rear end was visible.

- However, it was that stimulating sight that first attracted Winifred to Humphry. And conversely, when she was being extricated from the overturned coach in the river, it was her own rear end that especially struck Humphry.

- **Smollett put in a playful little joke:** When Humphry's posterior was exposed, his skin was described as "fair as alabaster." In a traditional romance, that would be a giveaway that he is really a prince in disguise. Here, it proves nothing of the sort. It's true that he's the son of Matthew Bramble, but that doesn't make him a prince.

- **One more coincidence:** The mysterious wandering actor, Wilson, who had been pursuing Lydia, turns out to be the son of Matthew's old friend, so they will get married, too—along with Humphry and Winifred, and Lismahago (a retired soldier they met in Scotland) and Tabitha. Here, it's the artificiality of comedy that Smollett is emphasizing. Jery actually says: "The comedy is near a close, and the curtain is ready to drop."

- **The comic romance ending has a kind of inevitability in a literary sense, but that doesn't mean it isn't still arbitrary.** Just like Smollett's previous novels, this one is governed by chance. How likely is it that Matthew's illegitimate son—at a time when neither of them knew that they even had a relationship—should happen to become his servant during the course of a journey?

- In comedies, **marriage traditionally provides a satisfying ending**, a destination that we are encouraged all along to hope for. That was true in *Tom Jones.* **But here, we don't feel that kind of happy fulfillment. It's just a clearing up of loose ends—maybe even an implicit mockery of the conventions of comedy.**

15

ENGLISH METAFICTION: *TRISTRAM SHANDY*

In 1759, a most eccentric and original book came out. Written by Laurence Sterne, it was called *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman,* as if it was a conventional autobiography—however, it was anything but. It's a metafiction, foregrounding its artificiality. The chapters are usually short, sometimes just a few sentences, and they veer unpredictably from one topic to another. The prose is broken up by dashes, suggesting a conversational style, rather than formal punctuation. The narrator doesn't just talk to the reader, the way Fielding did; he often imagines the reader talking back. And there is no plot at all. It's not so much a novel as an antinovel, and it throws into question the whole convention by which readers immerse themselves in a story as if it were real.

Over a decade, Sterne brought out successive volumes of *Tristram Shandy*. A poignant theme in all of them is that he suffered from advanced tuberculosis—or consumption, as it was called at the time. This meant that each successive installment of the novel was one more victory in the author's race against death.

THE STORY, IF THERE IS ONE

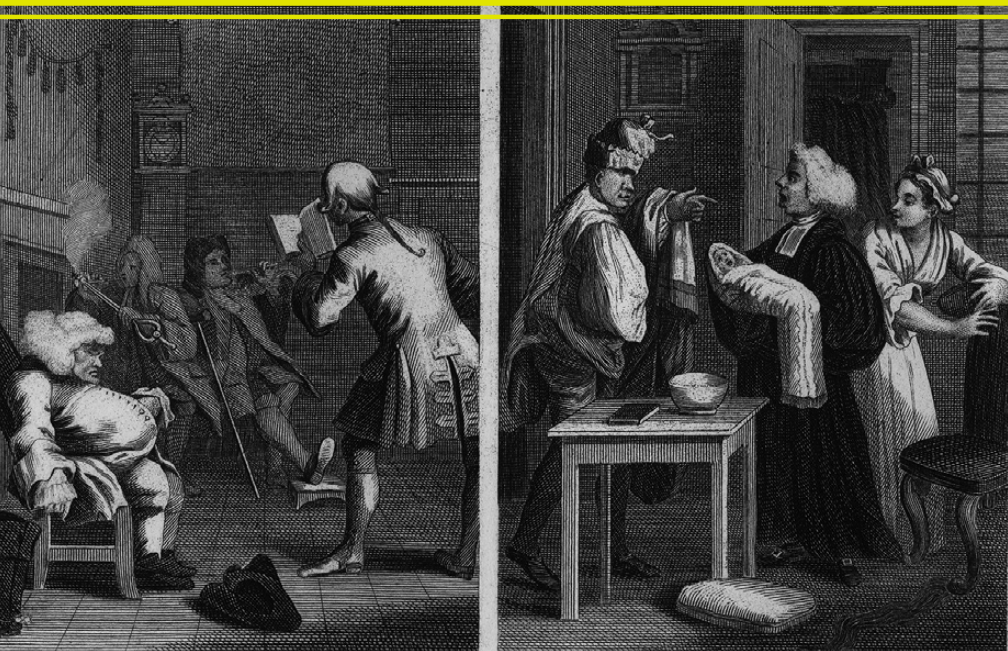
- The novel centers on the Shandy family, who live in an estate in the northern county of Yorkshire. Walter Shandy is the head of the family, with an affectionate wife Elizabeth and an unmarried brother Toby.

- Various household servants appear frequently—in particular Trim, a former corporal when he and Toby were together in the wars of the late 17th century. Toby retired from service after receiving a serious wound in 1695, and Trim has been his faithful attendant ever since.

- **We gather that Tristram Shandy is now middle-aged, remembering his family several decades previously, so unlike the English novels that have been considered in this course so far, it's not set in the present time.**

- **Tristram is the speaker throughout, but it would be hard to call him a narrator.** There are constant digressions—some of them many chapters long—and embedded documents that come from outside the story altogether.

- The digressions are in fact so overwhelming that for much of the first part of the book, Tristram can't even manage to get to his own birth, which happened in 1718; circumstances before he was born keep getting in the way. **This mode of whimsically scrambling narration gave rise to a popular adjective: Shandean**.



- Sterne values the spontaneity in which the words on the page flow directly from the free associations of his mind.

Nobody has ever been able to create a successful film version of *Tristram Shandy*. If you did try to unscramble the fragments of story and line them up consecutively, they wouldn't amount to much.

LANGUAGE

- **A recurring theme in *Tristram Shandy* is the slipperiness of language, which often blunders into double meanings or simply makes no sense to the people trying to understand it.** And a related theme is that everyone has a personal hobbyhorse; the name comes from toy horses that small children would pretend to ride. Sterne uses it as a metaphor for translating everything into some idiosyncratic way of thinking.

- Walter Shandy's hobbyhorse is philosophizing—treating language as if it were reality. His brother Toby's hobbyhorse is a kind of war gaming, reproducing battles that are reported in the newspaper on a miniature fortified landscape that he has constructed on a bowling green.

- Whenever the brothers converse, they are hopelessly at cross-purposes. Here's a good example. Walter mentions the usefulness of auxiliaries, by which he means auxiliary verbs that help to give grammatical structure to a statement. Toby, naturally, thinks he's talking about auxiliary troops.

- To illustrate his meaning, Walter asks Trim, who is waiting on a table at the time, whether he has ever seen a white bear. When Trim says no, Walter replies triumphantly that he could discourse about one all the same.

> A white bear! Very well. Have I ever seen one? Might I ever have seen one? Am I ever to see one? Ought I ever to have seen one? Or can I ever see one?

- That makes grammatical sense—but only grammatical. It's a fine case of language totally unconnected with any external reality.

- **Most novelists do their best to make language seem like a window into reality; Sterne forces us to recognize the self-enclosed logic of language.**

- Walter constantly tries to master the complications of life through logic, but all he ends up with is words. As for Toby, he knows very well that he's not equal to arguing with his brother. So whenever Walter goes off on some rhetorical fling, Toby sits back patiently and whistles "Lillibullero," a popular song that went back to the 17th-century civil wars. Sterne could be confident that his readers would know the tune, and they would hear it in their heads as they were reading, or they might actually whistle it themselves. That's a fine example of a nonverbal response trumping the verbal.

THE THEME OF DEATH

- As with Don Quixote's idée fixe, the hobbyhorse serves as a defense against too much reality. In a real war, Toby got the dangerous wound from which he still suffers. Corporal Trim, too, was wounded in the knee and never entirely recovered. Handicapped by their military service, they can replay warfare on a miniature scale with no possibility of injury, let alone death.

- Toby's bowling green converts what is dreadful in reality into a form of play. He has an Olympian view from above of the tiny tin soldiers performing their maneuvers. And when you're absorbed in a game, you step outside of ordinary clock time into a subjective space that feels timeless.

- **Not surprisingly, there's some direct homage to *Don Quixote* in *Tristram Shandy*.** The playful narrator has a good deal in common with Cervantes's narrator. There's even a character who rides a gaunt horse that immediately recalls Rocinante.

- He's the local parson, named Yorick, and he greatly resembles Sterne himself. Yorick acknowledges that he could afford a more robust horse but says he doesn't want one, because he knows he's dying of consumption.

- Sterne took the name Yorick from Hamlet, and the implications are moving—even profound. When Hamlet says "Alas, poor Yorick," he is holding the skull of the court jester. Now, the great comic is reduced to a smelly death's-head.

- **Sterne was well aware that the race against death was a race he was certain to lose. Joking—indeed, humor in general—can be a way of coping with that terrifying fact.**

- Because *Tristram Shandy* is a book that foregrounds its status as a book as nothing more than printed words on paper, **Sterne includes a remarkable stroke of bookmaking to emphasize the unknowable reality of death.**

- Just a few chapters in, we're told that Yorick is dead, and the only three words on his tombstone are the quotation from Hamlet: "Alas, poor Yorick!"

- **Immediately after that comes a page that is completely black. And that's what death is: the unknown, the unknowable.**

- But as the ancients used to say, though life is short, art is long. Sterne's alter ego Yorick is dead and buried, but *Tristram Shandy* still has hundreds of pages to go. And **because the time scheme is frequently scrambled**, Yorick himself will show up repeatedly later on. **Fiction can bring the dead back to life.**

DEALING WITH SEX

- **Another theme in this novel is sex—or, all too often, the lack of it.** Whereas Richardson treated sex as a grim moral test and Fielding treated it as basically a lot of fun, *Tristram Shandy* is haunted by the threat of impotence and disappointment.

- We're told in the very first chapter that Walter and Elizabeth Shandy have intercourse just once a month, and that sets up the first of many mishaps that created Tristram's eccentricity.

- There was a medical theory that the mother's state of mind at the moment of conception could have decisive consequences for her child. So as not to forget his monthly duty, Walter has a custom of winding up the great grandfather clock on the same day. And at the very instant when Tristram is being conceived, Elizabeth asks him in a matter-of-fact way: "Pray, my dear, have you not forgot to wind up the clock?"

- Badly disconcerted, Walter exclaims, "Did ever woman, since the creation of the world, interrupt a man with such a silly question?" Immediately after that, we get the first of many imagined exchanges between the narrator and the reader. "Pray, what was your father saying?" To which the answer is "Nothing."

- There are many hints throughout the novel that Tristram is fascinated by sex, but impotent.

- **There's still another aspect of sexuality that Sterne exploits: a continual eruption of double entendres.** Many modern readers find it entertaining, contemporaries tended to be rather shocked, and the Victorian novelist William Thackeray said that Sterne was like somebody "who sidles up to you and whispers a nasty story."

- Sterne's double entendres reflect his serious belief that **language can indeed be manipulated to mean more than one thing at a time, and it can liberate things in our heads that we may not care to acknowledge openly.**

- There are similarities in *Tom Jones* (with Sophia's muff, for example), but there it was a discreet way of indicating healthy sexuality. **In *Tristram Shandy*, it's all about disappointment and failure.**

SENTIMENT

- But metafictional game-playing and verbal wit are not by any means the whole of *Tristram Shandy*, and it wouldn't have won such huge popularity if it were. **Sterne also tapped into an appetite at the time for what was known as sentiment.**

- What that meant was **heartfelt emotion**. In the older psychology, the passions were irrational and dangerous. Now they were being redefined as emotions, and the more deeply felt, the more they were a source of positive value.

- What contemporary readers most loved in *Tristram Shandy* was the emotional bond between Walter and Toby, together with Walter's bond with Elizabeth, and Toby's bond with Elizabeth as brother and sister-in-law.

- Considered at the verbal level, Walter and Elizabeth could hardly be worse suited to each other. Though not stupid, she has no interest whatever in ideas as such, and she just humors him quietly while he spins his theories. The narrator remarks at one point that she has been told over and over again that the earth revolves around the sun, but she always forgets it.

- Readers were especially affected by a passage near the middle of the book, by which point Toby has been fully established as a lovable character. Tristram mentions the gravestone of Corporal Trim, whom he remembers affectionately as "a man of goodness." And that leads him to recall a previous death:

> But what,—what is this, to that future and dreaded page, where I look towards the velvet pall, decorated with the military ensigns of thy Master,—the first,—the foremost of created beings; where,—I shall see thee, faithful servant! laying his sword and scabbard, with a trembling hand, across his coffin […] —where all my father's systems shall be baffled by his sorrows; and, in spite of his philosophy, I shall behold him, as he inspects the lacquered plate, twice taking his spectacles from off his nose, to wipe away the dew which Nature has shed upon them.—When I see him cast in the rosemary with an air of disconsolation, which cries through my ears,—O Toby! in what corner of the world shall I seek thy fellow?

- If Fielding had lived long enough to read *Tristram Shandy*, he would probably have said that this is not sentiment, but sentimentality. And indeed, the word *sentimental* was acquiring its modern meaning at just this time—not just a synonym for *emotional*, in a positive sense, but reveling in too-easy emotion for its own sake.

- It's a matter of taste whether one finds the death of Uncle Toby deeply moving or something of a tearjerker. It might well be both.

Perhaps the most affecting aspect of *Tristram Shandy* is the depth it gains from being overtly Sterne's own unwinnable race against death. When he got into the pulpit in real life, there was no joking there.

- At the heart of *Tristram Shandy* is a conviction that **affection, not a quest for meaning, is what makes life bearable—and along with that, an ever-present awareness that life is much too short.**

16

FRENCH METAFICTION: *JACQUES THE FATALIST AND HIS MASTER*

Not long after Sterne began publishing the successive installments of *Tristram Shandy*, the French philosophe Denis Diderot was inspired by that novel to create a brilliant metafiction that went way beyond it, in ambition and achievement. The title, *Jacques the Fatalist and His Master*, suggests one reason why it was never published in the author's lifetime. To speculate about fatalism, or determinism, would have been anathema to the church censors in France.

Denis Diderot

Diderot was editor in chief of a collective project, the great *Encyclopédie*, that undertook to cover the whole range of human knowledge. He had already been imprisoned once for subversive ideas, and the price of regaining his freedom was to promise never to publish anything like that again.

This was by no means a drawback. It meant that he could go on thinking and working on *Jacques the Fatalist* for the last 30 years of his life, which ended in 1784.

PHILOSOPHICAL AND SOCIAL THEMES

- *Jacques the Fatalist and His Master* follows a servant named Jacques and his employer during the course of a journey with various encounters they have along the way. They have a companionable relationship, but it quickly becomes clear that **the servant is the savvy, competent one and the master would be pretty much helpless without him**. **Yet he is the master, simply by virtue of social status**. He's never even given a name. As for Jacques, that was a generic name for a servant; he is a Jacques.

- **That social critique, like the philosophical one, would have been considered very subversive by the authorities. *Jacques the Fatalist* was never published until after the French Revolution.**

- Like *Tristram Shandy*, *Jacques the Fatalist* **has no plot**, as such. But it's very different from the endless free associating of Sterne's narrator. **It's held together by the continual presence of the two main characters**. They definitely share coherent experiences, but those experiences refuse to add up to any kind of conclusive meaning.

- **The first words of the novel establish that this is a narrator who will tease us, and also make us think.**

> How did they meet? By chance, like everyone else. What were their names? What's that got to do with you? Where were they coming from? From the nearest place. Where were they going to? Does anyone ever really know where they're going to?

- We normally expect a novel to begin by telling us the characters' names—and, if they are traveling, giving some sense of where and why. Diderot turns these routine questions into philosophical puzzles.

- Instead of specifying how they met, he makes the thought-provoking comment that most meetings in our lives, even ones with long-term consequences, tend to happen by chance.

- As for their names, that's none of our business! We're not the privileged recipients of a narrative; we're simply overhearing a conversation between two people, whom we will get to know in due course.

- In the same way, where they were coming from really doesn't matter. It's enough to say it was "the nearest place"—which is obvious, after all.

- And in answer to "Where were they going to?", we expect a particular destination. But instead of an answer, we get a question—a question that goes to the heart of how we live our lives: "Does anyone ever really know where they're going to?"

THE ROLE OF THE NARRATOR

- The basic setup is that to while away the time on the road, the master encourages Jacques to tell him stories. **One story the master is eager to hear is how Jacques fell in love. But with one thing and another, it never does get told until the end of the book—250 pages further on.**

- **Every now and then, the reader is imagined complaining about this endless postponement, and the narrator responds with a challenge:**

> I can hear you, Reader! You are asking me, What about the story of Jacques' loves? Since I am writing for you I must either go without your applause or follow your taste, and you have shown a decided taste for love stories. […] Nearly all your poems, elegies, songs, comedies, tragedies, and operas are love stories. […] Love stories have been your only food ever since you existed, and you show no sign of ever growing tired of them. To be truthful, it is really very strange!

- **This outburst splendidly captures the implied contract between author and reader**. If the author wants readers, he or she has to write so as to please them. And it's quite true that for most of Western history, love stories have played a prominent role, far more so than most people probably experience in real life.

- **But where does the authority of an author come from that gives him or her total control of a story?**

- At one point, Jacques and his master arrive at a town, and the narrator says:

> There I heard an uproar.

- At that, the Reader exclaims:

> You heard? You weren't there… It's got nothing to do with you at all.

- The narrator apologizes:

> You're quite right. Well, Jacques… His master… there was a terrible uproar… I saw two men.

- And now the Reader is exasperated:

> You saw nothing. We're not speaking about you. You weren't even there.

- That's one way **the narrator blurs the boundary between his story and himself.** At other times, **he will cheerfully exploit the fact that he's making it all up—and no one can stop him.**

- For quite a while, Diderot keeps undermining his narrative, reminding us that he's just making it up. But he must have seen that it's a real limitation in *Tristram Shandy* that we never get anywhere. There's a reason we like plots. There's a reason we want a story to have a meaningful end, and not just a continuous middle.

- Accordingly, Diderot starts including embedded stories that do have a more conventional shape. Cervantes and Fielding did that, of course, but their embedded stories were presented as self-contained. **Diderot's innovation is to make his characters not only tell their own stories, but comment on each other's stories—and even argue about them.**

Diderot's larger view of human psychology, in essence, is that all of us are the roles we play. Like other 18th-century thinkers, Diderot simply doesn't believe that we have a core of true self. What is true is what feels true at a given time.

FATALISM

- Another major theme in this novel is **the fatalism announced in the title.**

- Right after the first sentences of the book ("How did they meet? […] Where were they going to?"), here's what comes next:

> What were they saying? The master wasn't saying anything and Jacques was saying that his Captain used to say that everything which happens to us on this earth, both good and bad, is written up above.

- Jacques used to be a soldier. Diderot deliberately gives him some things in common with Sterne's Corporal Trim. And he goes on:

> My Captain used to add that every shot fired from a gun had someone's name on it.

- That's the fatalism by which a soldier deals with the constant possibility of sudden death. A bullet travels so fast that it's no use trying to dodge it. So you're better off not thinking about it. If it has your name on it, it will find you. Trim, at one point, invokes a proverbial expression: "Every bullet has its billet."

- So **as Jacques interprets this philosophy of fatalism, our lives are acting out a narrative that's written on a great scroll "up above."** That makes it sound purposive. We may be ignorant of the story line, but there is one, all

the same. **Whether you call it fate or destiny, the implication is that it has meaning.**

- **From other writings by Diderot, we know that he rejected that implication. What he's trying to formulate is what Immanuel Kant would later define as determinism.** That's not purposive—not meaningful. It's simply the cause-and-effect sequence that makes everything that happens the inevitable consequence of what happened just before.

- At stake is a paradox that Diderot freely acknowledged: Determinism is the conclusion to which reasoning comes—or so he believed. **Free will is the subjective experience that feeling keeps asserting.**

- At one point, Jacques says to his master that when they are conversing, the words that come out of their mouths have to come out because "we are nothing but two living and thinking machines." We know that Diderot believed that, but he also knew that **to believe something theoretically is very different from feeling it emotionally.**

- **Determinism and free will are what philosophers call antinomies: two things that are mutually incompatible, yet both are felt to be true.**

- A materialist thinker like Diderot believes that existence has no meaning; it's just the endless action and reaction of material phenomena in the human mind, just as much as in the solar system. But Diderot also acknowledges that it's impossible emotionally for anyone to truly accept that.

- Jacques's metaphor of the great scroll "up above" is insidiously seductive. It suggests that here, where we live, is "down below," whereas the real story is up. And if there's a scroll, someone must be writing it.

- According to Christian teaching—and Diderot had studied at the Sorbonne and was educated by the Jesuits—it's God who writes the scroll. Our lives are the story of his Providence. But there have also been impersonal versions of that. Pagan astrology saw our lives as determined by the stars up above.

- Very early in the novel, the narrator says that Jacques and his master were arguing about fatalism like a couple of theologians. Theology is certainly a familiar way of trying to establish meaning, but so is astrology—and so is any philosophy that claims to have answers. Like Voltaire satirizing Pangloss, Diderot wants us to accept that there aren't any answers.

- In *Jacques the Fatalist,* Diderot never lets us forget that he made up all of the supposedly real stories. **You might say that Diderot himself is writing from "up above."** He's the foregrounded artist of modernism—not holding up a mirror to a stable reality, but creating a reality of his own.

- And that is what stories are for. The universe may have no meaning, but in us it has produced creatures who create meaning and can't live without meaning. No wonder, then, that we want stories to have plots. Diderot knows we do, which is why, unlike Sterne, he inserts stories with plots in this novel. But in his opinion, that is the problem. **We can't stop yearning for coherence and closure, even if those are only imaginary**.

Diderot, like his fellow Enlightenment philosophes, believed that it was certainly not the will of nature that some people are born to be masters and others to be servants. It only seems natural because people take as given the rules of society that define master and servant. But society can—and should—change the rules.

THE ENDING

- **Lacking a plot, how might *Jacques the Fatalist* end?** Diderot found a clever solution for that. We finally, at long last, do get the story of Jacques's loves. He had a wounded knee, just like Corporal Trim did, and a pretty farm girl named Denise nursed him back to health. At one point, she started to rub his leg, and soon she was rubbing more than his leg.

- But what happened then? **We're given our choice of three possible endings.**

    - In one of them, Denise begins to fear that Jacques no longer loves her. But he kisses her lovingly and successfully reassures her.

- In a second ending, Jacques and Denise get married. But pretty soon she's cheating on him—with his former master.
- And a third ending stops short right after the rubbing of the leg, leaving what comes afterward untold. The narrator says cheerfully that he copied that ending word for word from *Tristram Shandy.*

Diderot's own last words are splendidly ironic, in a way that's very much like his view of life. Despite being much weakened by illness, he greedily devoured some soup and boiled mutton, and followed that with apricots, despite his wife's protests. His last words were: "Good God, what harm do you think it can do me?"—after which he fell over dead.

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THE FRENCH ROMANTIC NOVEL: *JULIE*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's only novel, *Julie; or, the New Eloise*, was published in 1761, just two years after *Candide*, but they come from different imaginative universes. *Julie*, written during the period in Rousseau's life when he was most intoxicated with ideas, tells the story of a passionate love affair that mutates into deep friendship, and it presents that change as very much for the better. It was a sensational success from the moment it was published and became the best-selling novel of the entire 18th century.

In 1782, four years after Rousseau's death, his *Confessions* were published. Many people consider the *Confessions* the greatest autobiography ever written. As soon as it was available to readers, it became obvious that *Julie* had grown directly from its author's lived experience, recreating his own story in a wish-fulfilling way.

ROUSSEAU'S PHILOSOPHY

- Rousseau once remarked that he had just one significant idea and that it underlay everything he ever wrote. That's pretty much true, and it matters because the idea was so rich with implications.

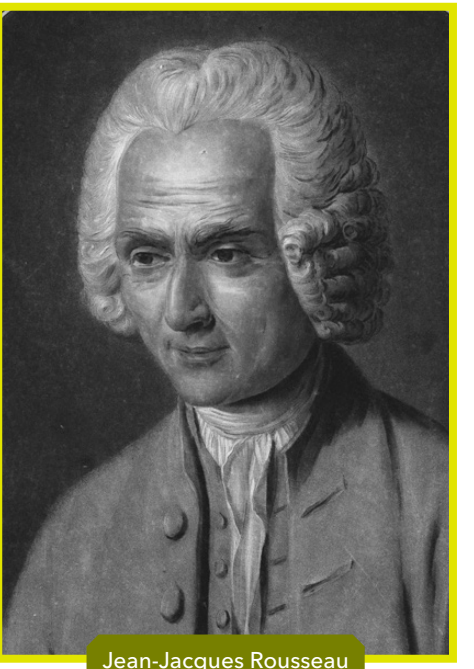
- **Rousseau's foundational idea was this: "Our natural impulses are healthy and good; it is society that makes us wicked."** Far from celebrating the life of savages as noble, he held that every known

culture, including so-called primitive ones, has already been socialized in ways that deform our true nature.

- In the presocial "state of nature" that he imagined, people didn't feel divided within themselves, they weren't conflicted, and above all, they were not conditioned to gain their sense of self-worth from the expectations of others. In Rousseau's opinion, civilization is a poisoned gift because it teaches us to do that. The poison comes in the inauthenticity with which we live our lives.

- **Rousseau also held that natural man and woman didn't fall in love**—not in the emotional way that most people regard as wonderful, even transcendent. He knew very well what falling in love is like, and he recounted his own experiences in depth in his *Confessions*. But like earlier writers in the French tradition, he thought that **we fall in love with a projection of our own desires, not with the individual person we're falling for.**

- Natural man and woman felt sexual desire, of course. They mated, and mothers brought up children until they were able to fend for themselves. But fathers moved on, which meant that patriarchy couldn't exist. Natural woman was just as free and independent as natural man.



Jean-Jacques Rousseau

- Those earliest humans didn't brood about mistakes they had made in the past, as Rousseau definitely did and wrote the *Confessions* to try to resolve. And they weren't consumed with anxiety about the future. They lived in the present moment, not

complicating their lives with thinking, but immersed in what Rousseau calls *le sentiment de l'existence*, "the feeling of simply being."

- And by not living together, those early humans were spared all the complications that fill up love stories. They weren't possessive, they didn't feel jealousy, and they didn't take advantage of being loved to control and manipulate each other.

- Rousseau made it clear that this vision of the "state of nature" was a thought experiment—not necessarily what actually occurred in an anthropological sense. Its value as an idea was to **force us to recognize how we have been socialized and to try to recover as much of our true self as possible.**

- Rousseau thought that our true self is the one we have at birth. But from early childhood on, that self is increasingly overlaid with social expectations. We say "we want," and we do what the others want.

ORIGINS OF THE STORY

- **Rousseau began writing his novel without any clear plan in mind,** mainly as something to do when his theoretical work was fatiguing. **It was inspired**, he says in the *Confessions,* **by regret that in his midforties he had never yet experienced a truly fulfilling love relationship.** His various liaisons over the years had mostly been brief, and they always ended in disappointment.

- So Rousseau brought together aspects of all the women he had ever fallen for in the past and created a story in which an idealized version of himself could have a profoundly satisfying love relationship.

- The hero of the novel is called Saint-Preux; that's a name out of the old romances that suggests a noble knight. He's noble in spirit but not in social reality. At the beginning of the story, **he's a young tutor who falls in love with Julie, his teenaged pupil**, and she confesses that she feels the same way. But her parents belong to the Swiss nobility, and marriage is impossible.

- In inventing this relationship, **Rousseau was inverting one that he really had in his youth.** In his teens, he had been the protégé of a beautiful older

woman named Madame de Warens. She not only introduced him to books, but initiated him sexually.

- From another point of view, **Rousseau's novel is an updated *Romeo and Juliet***, with the obstacle no longer family rivalry, but social disparity. Julie's father clings to the hollow prestige of a Swiss aristocracy that has lost any real importance. But here there is no tragic mistake, no poison. Although Julie and Saint-Preux still desire each other more than they want to admit, they stop believing that they would have been happier if only they could have married each other.

- Rousseau had learned from reading Richardson's *Clarissa* that an epistolary novel has great advantages. Even though Julie and Saint-Preux are living near each other, they are seldom free to express their feelings openly, so they explore them in an intoxicating correspondence. And as with *Clarissa*, readers are made to feel that they are taken right inside the emotions that the characters experience.

The subtitle of the novel—*la nouvelle Héloïse*, or "the new Eloisa"—recalls the medieval theologian Abélard, who married his pupil Eloisa and was brutally castrated by hit men working for her infuriated father.

But the original Eloisa became a nun, tormented by hopeless yearning for the emasculated Abélard. What is different about Rousseau's Julie is that she gets married to someone else, has children, and learns to relate to her former lover in an entirely new way.

LOVE AND PASSION

- **At the beginning of the story, passion is overwhelming.** It feels all the more genuine because the young lovers are completely inexperienced, responding to feelings they never had before. When they shyly permit themselves a first kiss, Julie faints dead away, and Saint-Preux writes to her the next day:

> No, keep your kisses, I wouldn't be able to bear them—they're too acrid, too penetrating, they pierce, they burn to the marrow—they would drive me mad.

- That may seem over the top, but it captures the feeling of thrilled amazement in a first-time experience of love.

- Intense passion, together with diffidence and innocence, were a heady brew for 18th-century readers.

- **When the lovers actually sleep together, it's Julie who makes it happen, which prudish critics considered outrageous.** Even then, what the lovers relish most is the communion of souls.

- As so often in the French tradition, pleasure is intense, but by its nature brief, and often followed by suffering. Happiness, as contrasted with pleasure, is potentially a lasting state. But by its very nature, it can't be intense.

- Romantic love therefore has to be outgrown, lest it become, as Julie says, "the poison that corrupts my senses and my reason." Years later, she will tell Saint-Preux:

> Love is accompanied with a continual uneasiness of jealousy or privation, ill suited to marriage, which is a state of enjoyment and peace.

- When Saint-Preux surrenders abjectly to Julie's erotic power, he is adoring an idealized image of her. He's a romantic swain, with poor qualifications to be a spouse.

- As Rousseau rather proudly acknowledged, ***Julie*** **doesn't have much of a plot, but there is one decisive turning point, provoked by an upsetting event.** Julie discovers that she is pregnant and briefly allows herself to hope that she might be allowed to marry Saint-Preux.

- Unfortunately, her parents discover her secret correspondence with him. Her enraged father strikes her violently, and as a result, she miscarries, and her grieving mother succumbs to a fatal illness.

- Saint-Preux is then obliged to leave. He joins a ship setting out on a voyage of exploration, and he won't return for fully six years.

- At this point, Rousseau had completed two books of what would eventually be six. What would happen when Saint-Preux came back? He had no idea. **He was making it up as he went along.**

- When Saint-Preux finally returns, he discovers that Julie has been married for several years to an older man her father chose for her. The husband's name is Wolmar. He is judicious and kind, but utterly unemotional. Julie has grown accustomed to this new life and has become an exemplary wife and mother.

- **Now the story springs a big surprise:** Instead of being jealous of his wife's former lover, Wolmar invites Saint-Preux to stay with them at their estate on the shores of Lake Geneva. He knows he is taking a risk, but he believes it is the only way to cure Julie and Saint-Preux of a destructive passion.

- So he actually encourages them to kiss, in the very garden where the first shattering kiss once took place. Then he goes off on a trip so that their desire will no longer be inflamed by the obstacle of his being there. It's a calculated process of deprogramming, and the cure is a success. As Saint-Preux puts it:

> It's over. Those times, those happy times are no more, they have vanished forever. Alas, they will never more return.

- **In Rousseau's opinion, it's friendship—not romance—that provides the basis for happiness.**

- The novel has a tragic ending, however. One of Julie's children accidentally falls into the lake. She succeeds in rescuing the child, but her health is impaired, and soon she dies. This death allows the story to end without fully facing the uneasy situation of a ménage in which the former lover has become just a family friend.

SOCIAL IMPACTS

- From the moment it was published, **Rousseau's novel was a fantastic success. Its theme of passion liberated and then overcome was deeply attractive in a culture that was beginning to glorify emotion, but also to fear its destructive potential.** Likewise, the forbidden love of two people

from different social classes spoke to a widespread concern, but so did the way passion was overcome rather than indulged.

- Some earlier novels, certainly, had become cultural phenomena. There was quite a cult of *Clarissa* in France as well as England. But ***Julie*** **represented something new: the experience of reading a novel as direct spiritual contact with the author.** Rousseau has been described as the first celebrity, in the modern sense. All of his writings are highly personal, and readers felt that they knew him as a person.

- It was common to refer to him not by his last name, but simply as Jean-Jacques. His counterculture philosophy and his commitment to a life of great simplicity made him a kind of sage or guru.

- The theme of ideal yet impossible love—indulged but also overcome—was deeply appealing at a time when social constraints on marriage remained powerful.

- If Rousseau had exalted passion as the ultimate good, he could never have been so successful. **The secret of *Julie* is to cool down sexual love even while seeming to fan it, producing a mood that is more elegiac than inflammatory.**

Most novels were published anonymously, but Rousseau proudly put his name on the title page: "Jean-Jacques Rousseau spelled out in full," as he declared in his preface.

Soon he was receiving voluminous mail from people who testified that *Julie* had changed their lives. They fell in love with his characters as if they were real people.

- Still more profound, and probably not entirely grasped by Rousseau himself, must have been the intuition that **although Julie accepts her role as wife and mother, it remains a role.** Gazing into her eyes as she lies on her deathbed, her husband Wolmar exclaims:

> Julie, my dear Julie! you have wounded me to the heart … You are rejoicing to die, you are glad to be leaving me.

- And he is right about that, for she has left a letter to be read when she is gone. In it, she discloses that her love for Saint-Preux is still powerful and might still have impelled her to do something unforgivable.

- According to the mores that Rousseau shared with his readers, it would have been unacceptable for Julie to leave Wolmar for Saint-Preux, and even less acceptable to conduct an adulterous affair. It would also have been unacceptable for her to choose to die.

- But **by accepting death when an accident occasions it**—an accident, of course, created by Rousseau's plot—**she escapes the intolerable pressure of repressing her deepest feelings in order to be a good wife and mother.**

- **That pressure was all too familiar to many readers,** and they must have been gratified when Saint-Preux refuses to fulfill Julie's dying wish: that he should marry her cousin Claire.

- He might have been happy with Claire in a way, but it would have been the wrong kind of happiness. So even if duty, family, and morality win out, romantic love wins out, too, with all the poignancy of concealing its secret until death.

- ***Julie* is about society and its demands, but Rousseau's deepest insights are always about aloneness.**

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THE AMORAL NOVEL: *LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES*

Les Liaisons dangereuses, published in 1782, is yet another epistolary novel, and an extraordinarily original one. In the examples in this course thus far, the whole point of a novel told in letters was to create a sense of immediacy—of direct access to what the characters are thinking and feeling. Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, the author of the *Liaisons,* saw a very different possibility. Letters, after all, are inert documents, just words on the page. What if we can never be sure they do reflect any kind of truth, especially if the principal characters are determined not to reveal the truth?

THE PLOT

- In the *Liaisons*, a rakish seducer, the Marquis de Valmont, sets his sights on a virtuous young wife, Madame Tourvel—not so much because she's attractive, though she is, but because she presents a formidable challenge. **The situation was clearly inspired by *Clarissa***, but whereas Lovelace thought of himself as honorable in his own way, Valmont is utterly cynical and takes pride in being cruel.

- Another great difference between the two novels is that **Clarissa retains her virtue to the very end.** Being raped while unconscious was nothing like yielding to Lovelace. And although she reluctantly admits that she was attracted to him, she certainly never fell in love. Valmont's game is to induce Tourvel to fall desperately in love and to give herself of her own free will.

- Also, Laclos introduces a third major character, who had no equivalent in *Clarissa*. This is the Marquise de Merteuil: Valmont's former lover and now his collaborator in treachery. Valmont never wanted their relationship to end. She was the one who dropped him, which he felt as humiliating, as he was meant to. **For these people, as in *La Princesse de Clèves*, love is a power trip. But there were no villains in *La Princesse*. Valmont and Merteuil are both villains.**

- There's a specific reason why Valmont targets the unsuspecting Tourvel. He gets Merteuil to promise that if he can actually get this paragon of virtue to bed, Merteuil herself will sleep with him once again.

- Lovelace did want Clarissa, however wrongly he went about trying to get her. Valmont doesn't even want Tourvel; she's just a pawn in the game he's playing with Merteuil. The more we see of Valmont and Merteuil, the more we realize that they are a couple of sociopaths.

This novel is almost the only thing Laclos ever published. By profession, he was a military officer and specialized in supervising the construction of fortifications. In 1779, he was given the task of fortifying a small island off the western coast of France. Life was boring there, naturally, and to occupy his spare time, he began writing *Les Liaisons dangereuses*.

AN AMORAL BOOK?

- Here's another important difference from *Clarissa*. That novel had a clear moral standpoint. It's constantly clear that Clarissa's values are the correct ones, and when Richardson realized that readers were still succumbing to Lovelace's charm, he added lots of explanatory footnotes to make sure they got the moral message.

- In the *Liaisons*, there is no moral message. **It's not even an *immoral* book, which would imply overt defiance of conventional morality. It's a frighteningly *amoral* book—**it never gives the reader any ethical standpoint.

- We know from external evidence that Laclos himself was not a cynical Valmont. His purpose in writing the book was to expose the selfishness, even willful cruelty, of the French aristocracy.

- **Valmont and Merteuil are like a deadly virus against which this society has no antibodies.** And that's surely the point of Laclos's subtitle: *A Collection of Letters from One Social Class Published for the Instruction of Others.*

- Most French people might still take the privileges of the aristocracy for granted, but it's time for that to stop. The French Revolution was just seven years away when the *Liaisons* was published, and when it arrived, Laclos supported it enthusiastically.

VALMONT AND THE ART OF SEDUCTION

- Valmont first meets Tourvel at the country house of his aunt, Madame de Rosemonde. She's perfectly aware of the way he treats women, but she indulges him in it. She could have saved Tourvel right at the start by exposing what her nephew is really like, but she doesn't. However passively, she is thus a facilitator in his campaign against Tourvel.

- The reason Tourvel is so challenging a target is that she is genuinely devout and never dreams of betraying her husband, a judge much older than herself who is away presiding over trials elsewhere.

- Valmont quickly perceives something that will give him a chance: the young Tourvel has clearly never experienced sexual passion. If he can ignite that in her, her resistance may collapse.

- His strategy, therefore, is to convince her that although he has been a worldly playboy, her goodness and integrity are awakening something new in him. He declares that he loves her with all his heart and longs for her to rescue him from his former self.

- This is a very effective strategy. The temptation that Valmont holds out is for the devout young woman to be the agent of saving a bad man and bringing him back to the paths of virtue. He tells her earnestly that he is offering "utter

submission to your will." He's doing exactly the opposite, of course, but that's what keeps happening in this novel. **Words hardly ever mean what they seem to say.**

- **And not just words, but deeds.** Valmont becomes aware that when he goes off by himself for part of each day, Tourvel probably suspects that he has a girlfriend in a neighboring village. When she orders a servant of hers to follow him, he immediately sees that and leads the spy to a farm where he knows the family is about to be evicted for inability to pay their rent.

- With a theatrical flourish, he gives them the money they need, and they fall on their knees in gratitude. Naturally, this touching scene gets reported to Tourvel, and it plays a big role in convincing her that he is a good man at heart.

- That's a simple enough piece of plotting, but Laclos does something much subtler with it as well. Writing to Merteuil, Valmont describes his own reaction when the farmers were thanking him:

> My eyes were moist with tears and I felt within me an unwonted but delightful emotion. I was astonished at the pleasure to be derived from doing good.

- Valmont cynically set up a tear-jerking scene, and to his surprise, he found his own tears being jerked. But that doesn't make the tears sincere, as they would have been in *Julie*. It was just a behaviorist response—no evidence at all of some inner core of goodness in Valmont. The whole episode was a deliberate hoax. It achieved its goal of impressing Tourvel, to which the farmers were otherwise irrelevant.

- **Plenty of 18th-century novels were full of this kind of sentimental scene, and Laclos is calling the bluff of the cult of feeling.**

- **There is a perennial question in ethics: Should we be judged by our motives or by our actions?** In Laclos's cunning example, maybe neither. Valmont's action was objectively good, if you go by its result. But rescuing the poor family was not its only result. Its real purpose was to facilitate the seduction of Tourvel.

- And it works! Tourvel is so moved that she bursts into tears. Valmont seizes her hands, and like an accomplished actor, produces tears of his own. He realizes that if he wanted to, he could probably get her to yield to him right then and there. But he doesn't!

- If Valmont did seduce her at this moment, the result would be grief and recrimination. What he wants is not so much Tourvel's body, as her total and deliberate surrender. So his libertine code compels him to refuse the sexual gratification, which is only a means to an end.

- A bitter irony is that Valmont's suspicion about Tourvel was right. Without suspecting it herself, she turns out to be capable of intense passion. But Valmont is unpassionate, and so is Merteuil.

THE ROLE OF MERTEUIL

- **The greatest of Laclos's achievements in the *Liaisons* is the character of Merteuil.** Valmont is clever, but in completely predictable ways. As Merteuil rather insultingly reminds him, he's just playing the role of a conventional rake.

- **She herself faces different challenges, thanks to the double standard. She must always seem to be virtuous, and if she ever does get caught in a sexual affair, her reputation will be trashed.** Valmont, on the other hand, can score points by being wicked. Merteuil puts it very concisely:

> For you men, defeat means only one victory the less. In this unequal contest we are lucky not to lose, you unlucky when you do not win.

- Right at the center of the novel is a long letter in which Merteuil spells out her personal philosophy. Even in her teens, she says, she made it her mission to learn how to manipulate other people by achieving perfect control of her voice and facial expressions—behind which no one would ever be able to really see her.

- **In a universe that she regards as totally amoral, Merteuil wants to be the one person who successfully escapes social mediation of her desires and actions**—just the kind of mediation that Rousseau complained is

conditioned in us by society. But Rousseau's solution was to withdraw, as far as possible, from other people. Merteuil's is the opposite: to attack other people—to be at war with the entire human race.

- When Tourvel does surrender to Valmont, it fulfills the condition that he set for himself. She does it deliberately, with her eyes open. All the same, it feels traumatic. Valmont reports it to Merteuil in a long letter that reveals uneasy ambivalence on his part. He begins by celebrating a literal conquest:

    - Well, there she is, defeated, this arrogant woman who dared to think she could resist me!

- That's really true. She has given not just her body, but her soul.

- What makes Valmont uneasy, though, is a fear that maybe Tourvel is now gaining power over him. What if he is actually starting to love her? Can this mean that he is actually vulnerable to passion, instead of cynically arousing passion in others? He immediately resists that possibility; he can't let that happen to him. So he decides that the happiness he feels is not love at all. It's "the sweet sensation of glory," a term that was associated with victory in battle.

- After the seduction, Tourvel is stiff and motionless, with no expression on her face, in the dissociated state of a trauma victim. Facing the implications of what she has done, Tourvel resolves to commit herself totally to Valmont. Either she has betrayed everything she ever stood for, or it was worth it. That's certainly all or nothing—and inevitably she is going to end up with nothing.

- **Isn't it possible that Tourvel is unconsciously attracted by the temptation to violate the taboo?** Maybe she was finding the role of virtuousness just too exhausting, and she was ready to commit a wild, total act of free will—except it was never free in the least! The entire thing was stage-managed by Valmont. The love Tourvel feels is real, but it has been behavioristically conditioned in her. And there is not going to be a happy ending.

- The denouement comes when Merteuil refuses to honor their bet. Valmont writes to say that having conquered Tourvel, he's on his way to sleep with

Merteuil once more, as she had promised. She scrawls on his letter: "Very well: war."

- Now things happen fast. After being abandoned by Valmont, Tourvel falls ill with despair and will soon expire. And Merteuil reveals to the boyfriend of Cécil, a naive girl whom Valmont seduced, that Valmont took Cécil's virginity. The boyfriend, Danceny, challenges Valmont to a duel and wounds him fatally. As a final counterattack against Merteuil, Valmont gives Danceny her letters.

- **Until now, Merteuil has successfully preserved a spotless reputation, but her own words—in writing—will demolish that.**

- When she goes to the opera, a thousand eyes stare accusingly at her, and then the whole audience begins to hiss. Soon afterward, she falls ill with smallpox, which ravages her former beauty, and she leaves Paris forever. This is a novelistic ending—punishing the villains—but it's only novelistic. Lots of wonderful people got smallpox, not just bad people.

- **And there is another unresolved ambiguity.** Just as it's not clear in what way Valmont may have been in love with Tourvel, it's never clear whether Merteuil becomes deeply jealous of Tourvel, which would help explain the harshness of her revenge.

- **We're accustomed to art helping resolve ambiguities, but this is one novel that insists on being just as baffling as life itself.**

There have been several movie versions made of this novel. One, with a script by Christopher Hampton and directed by Stephen Frears, is called *Dangerous Liaisons*. Another, directed by Milosz Forman, is called *Valmont*.

QUIZ

LECTURE 13

In what ways do *Gulliver's Travels* and *Candide* add novelistic elements to their foundation of satire?

Name some of the targets of Voltaire's satire in *Candide*.

LECTURE 14

In both *Tom Jones* and *Humphry Clinker*, a foundling unexpectedly turns out to be the illegitimate son of a family member, thus changing his social status. In what ways might Smollett be critiquing the way Fielding treated this plot motif?

How does Smollett's use of the epistolary novel in *Humphry Clinker* differ from Richardson's in *Clarissa*?

LECTURE 15

What is metafiction, and what aspects of *Tristram Shandy* make it a metafictional novel?

What saves *Tristram Shandy* from being an abstruse intellectual exercise and a crashing bore?

LECTURE 16

What is the significance of Jacques's great scroll "up above" and the philosophical implications of determinism that Diderot wants to explore?

How is the relationship of Jacques and his master an implicit critique of French culture at the time?

LECTURE 17

Why does Rousseau think it's a good outcome when Saint-Preux and Julie end up as good friends and no longer as lovers?

What was Jean-Jacques Rousseau's foundational idea?

LECTURE 18

How does Laclos exploit the intrinsic unreliability of written texts, and how does that contribute to a sense of moral ambiguity in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*?

How does the idea of sexual passion in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* differ from that in *La Princesse de Clèves*?

QUIZ ANSWERS are on page 194

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PRIDE AND PREJUDICE: THE BEST ENGLISH NOVEL?

Some of the breakthrough techniques that Jane Austen developed in *Pride and Prejudice*, published in 1813, are so deftly handled that they may seem effortless—even invisible. The advance that had greatest value for subsequent novelists was an entirely new way of merging two perspectives that, until then, seemed like opposites: the overview of an omniscient narrator and the consciousness of an individual character.

Austen's novels culminate the 18th-century English tradition, and although the Romantic movement was in full flower at the time, they show hardly any influence from it.

THE NARRATOR AND THE PROTAGONIST

- *Tom Jones* has an omniscient narrator with a very Olympian perspective. He's in the foreground much of the time, chatting and commenting and joking, and his stance toward all of his characters is consistently ironic.

Austen's values are conservative, and her novels ratify the status quo. But they also show very powerfully the emotional price of learning to live with the status quo. *Pride and Prejudice* brings to life the challenge for an intelligent and exceptionally perceptive person to create a life of authenticity.


Jane Austen

- In *Clarissa* and the *Liaisons*, we had psychological interiority, but with the drawback for Richardson of losing authorial control of his story. Laclos turned that into an advantage by exploiting our frustration at not being guided, but that wasn't a solution that other novelists could rely on regularly.

- Austen's solution turned out to be enormously fruitful. ***Pride and Prejudice* does have an omniscient narrator, and one who is witty and ironic, but it also has a central consciousness: Elizabeth Bennet.** We are taken inside Elizabeth's head much more than any other character's. And that feels convincing because Elizabeth and the narrator have so much in common—similar keen intelligence, similar ironic wit.

- Take the famous first sentence of the novel:

> It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.

- In a BBC version of this novel, those words are spoken by Elizabeth herself—and well they might be. Her perspective on the society she lives in is very much that of the narrator.

- **To make this work—this doubling of narrator and character—Austen invented a technique that has been imitated ever since.** Or if she wasn't its only inventor, it certainly doesn't appear in English fiction before her novels.

- This is what has become known as **free indirect discourse**. It's a way of folding a character's thoughts into the narrator's presentation.

- Here's a simple example from chapter 4. A "single man in possession of a good fortune" has just rented an estate close to the village of Longbourn, where the Bennet family lives. His name is Bingley, and he has taken an immediate interest in Elizabeth's older sister Jane. Jane is lovely in a conventional way, and very sweet and kind, but no match for Elizabeth in what their father approvingly calls "quickness."

- However, living with Bingley are his friend Fitzwilliam Darcy and Bingley's snobbish sisters. They are immediately alarmed at the possibility that he might marry down, into an ordinary middle-class family.

- After the Bennets pay them a visit, Jane says cheerfully, "I am much mistaken if we shall not find a very charming neighbour in [Miss Bingley]." Elizabeth is too tactful to comment on that, but here is what the narrator goes on to say:

> Elizabeth listened in silence, but was not convinced; … and with more quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper than her sister, … she was very little disposed to approve them. They were in fact very fine ladies; not deficient in good humour when they were pleased, nor in the power of making themselves agreeable when they chose it, but proud and conceited.

- Those are the narrator's words, but they are Elizabeth's thoughts.

- **It's important to stress how effectively this technique works—unobtrusive as it is, and should be.**

- **What this dual perspective makes possible is to encourage us to sympathize deeply with Elizabeth**—plenty of readers fall in love with her—**but also to see her assumptions and misjudgments in a larger perspective**. She will come to understand those herself, of course, and feel humiliated about it. We will sympathize with that very humiliation, because we know and understand how it happened.

PSYCHOLOGY AND EMOTION

- In its original form, drafted around 1796, this novel was called *First Impressions*. Austen was 21 at the time, almost the same age as Elizabeth Bennet. No one knows how much of that early version survived in *Pride and Prejudice*, but the revised title crystallizes **the theme of psychological blindness, even in highly intelligent and sensitive people.**

- Bingley's friend Darcy is proud, but what Elizabeth mistakes for arrogance is really shyness—and also a loathing of social hypocrisy that she herself shares.

- Likewise, her prejudice against him is founded on too little real knowledge, as well as on lies told by an attractive young man named Wickham, who claims that Darcy treated him very badly in the past.

- In an obvious sense, ***Pride and Prejudice*** **is a Cinderella story.** In due course, **Elizabeth unexpectedly receives a proposal of marriage from Darcy**, who is an aristocrat and fabulously wealthy. **But unlike Cinderella, she will turn him down!**

- **Yes, they will get married in the end**, and every reader must want that to happen. **But it will only be possible when they ruefully admit to themselves the depths of their own misjudgment of the other person.** They have to open up inwardly as well as outwardly.

- For this reason, Charlotte Brontë's often-quoted put-down of Austen's novels is terribly unjust. She described them as "a carefully fenced, high-cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers." More crushingly, Brontë added that Austen knows nothing about "what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through."

- It's true that Austen's characters don't express themselves in emotional rhetoric, but that doesn't mean that they're not emotional. And it's true that they accept the limitations of social decorum, but that only makes them more interesting, because their deepest feelings have to be masked from other people most of the time.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES

- **Another theme—that of socioeconomics—is so fundamental to the story that it likewise keeps this from being a simple wish-fulfilling Cinderella fantasy.**

- Just as in *Clarissa,* **economic circumstances have everything to do with a young woman's prospects in life.** But in that novel, the Harlowe family was extremely rich. The problem was that they were determined to marry off their daughter to someone as rich as themselves in order to make the family's wealth even greater.

- In *Pride and Prejudice,* we are given very exact figures on people's incomes, and we know that the Bennets have 2,000 pounds a year. That's a very considerable amount in a small town; it makes them the leading family there.

- A typical clergyman—such as Austen's own father, who had died by the time she was writing—might expect 150 pounds a year. Mr. Bennet's inherited income means that he has never had to hold a job; he lives comfortably as a well-off gentleman of leisure.

- But there's a catch. By a legal provision known as an entail, a bequest could specify into the indefinite future which types of descendants would be permitted to inherit. It was common, as has happened in this case, to limit inheritance to males.

- The Bennets have five daughters, but no sons. As Mr. Bennet mentions at the end of the novel, he always expected to have a son and therefore never gave much thought to providing for his daughters. Now it's clearly time to think about it, but he has grown accustomed to passivity, evading difficulties by withdrawing into his library.

- **There were no well-paying careers for women in those days.** Governesses were treated like household servants and trades like seamstress work were poorly paid, too. **One respectable way a woman could make money was by writing novels—as Austen herself was doing.** And of course, there remained the possibility of a financially advantageous marriage with "a single man in possession of a good fortune."

- Gossip in the village of Longbourn soon establishes that Bingley has an annual income of 5,000 pounds, which puts him very much in the upper crust. Darcy has twice that much.

- Before Elizabeth shockingly turns down Darcy's marriage proposal, she had already turned down a proposal from a clergyman named Collins, who showed up to introduce himself as the male heir to the family fortune. Marrying Collins would certainly make financial sense for Elizabeth, but he is a pompous fool, and she refuses to consider it. That makes two men who can't believe she would turn them down.

The members of the Bennet family are an ill-assorted group, but in the way real families often are—not in the melodramatic contrasts of saintly Clarissa, malicious Arabella, bullying James, and so on.

- Elizabeth is the outlier among her sisters, and the only one her father can really communicate with. Yet she loves her family and accepts, as most people do, that we must get along with people we might never have chosen to be with.

- The oldest sister, Jane, is appealing and lovable, just not very interesting. Elizabeth always feels close to her.

- There are two interchangeable airheaded flirts, Lydia and Kitty, whom their mother favors but who will cause big problems later on.

- The youngest sister, Mary, overcompensates by intellectual pretentiousness. She is constantly uttering sententious pearls of wisdom. In fact, nobody—even once—responds to anything Mary says in the novel.

FALLING IN LOVE

- **The heart of *Pride and Prejudice*, of course, is the way Elizabeth and Darcy come to understand that they belong together.** And as with every great novel, rereading it is an even deeper pleasure than reading it the first time. That's when you see all the subtle stages of the relationship developing and the gradually changing awareness of the characters themselves.

- **Conversations in Austen's novels are full of hints and things unsaid. Coming right out and saying what you mean is felt as risky.** It's only shallow characters like Mrs. Bennet who babble and blurt. And the intelligent characters are particularly skilled at veiling their meaning with indirections.

- When Elizabeth and Darcy are still just beginning to know each other, Elizabeth walks three miles in the mud to see her ill sister Jane. Bingley

and his sisters greet her, and Darcy is there, too, and the narrator gives us a glimpse into his mind:

> Mr. Darcy said very little …. [He] was divided between admiration of the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion, and doubt as to the occasion's justifying her coming so far alone.

- Darcy is far from indifferent, even though he doesn't say anything. He is genuinely concerned that Elizabeth may have overtired herself. And more importantly, he's admiring her glow. Austen's language is always discreet, but the point is that Elizabeth is looking very sexy. So we realize that Darcy is attracted to her, while she doesn't perceive it at all.

- Soon afterward, the two of them have a conversation, in which he admits that he's not quick to forgive offenses against himself:

> My temper would perhaps be called resentful. My good opinion once lost, is lost forever.

- Elizabeth exclaims, "That is a failing indeed! Implacable resentment is a shade in a character." When she adds that he evidently has a tendency to hate everybody, he replies "with a smile" that her defect "is willfully to misunderstand them."

- **Many times in the story, we're told that Darcy smiles at Elizabeth, but thanks to her prejudice against him, she never picks up on that.**

- When Elizabeth and Darcy finally make their heartfelt avowals to each other, it happens at his estate. Elizabeth has been taking a trip with her aunt and uncle, and as was common at the time, they had asked to see the great mansion while its owner was away.

- His old housekeeper speaks so warmly of his generosity and kindness that Elizabeth is startled into a new perspective on his character. And when she happens to see a portrait of Darcy, their earlier conversation comes back to her with new force:

> She beheld a striking resemblance of Mr. Darcy, with such a smile over the face, as she remembered to have sometimes seen, when he looked at her.

- **As in *Tom Jones*, this novel is all about reevaluation, seeing apparent evidence in a different light.** But there, the evidence was more external, managed entirely by the narrator. Here, it emerges within the characters themselves.

- And then Darcy unexpectedly shows up, and soon they make their crucial avowals. Strikingly, we don't get to hear the words. It's characteristic of Austen to withdraw discreetly at these moments.

- Why don't we get to hear how Darcy expressed himself? We can only guess about that. It might be that Austen doubted her own ability to represent passion convincingly. It might be that even if the characters are passionate in their souls, they would go on speaking in formal language, which wouldn't do justice to what is happening to them.

- **It's a Cinderella story in a superficial way, but how much deeper than that!** It wasn't love at first sight, but very early on, there was a spark between Elizabeth and Darcy. When she later asks him when he first realized he was falling in love, he answers, "I was in the middle before I knew that I had begun."

- **They didn't really know each other for a long time. That had to develop gradually.** Neither of them revealed their true feelings at first, though they never expressed false feelings. And it's clear that they won't have the kind of simple, shared compatibility that Jane and Bingley will. **They'll be complementary, and they'll always have to keep negotiating their relationship, because that's what real people do.**

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EMMA: BETTER THAN THE BEST ENGLISH NOVEL?

As was previously done with Fielding, this lecture will consider a second novel by the same author that builds on techniques developed in the first but extends them in new ways. *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* are both masterpieces, but in *Emma*, published three years later, Jane Austen set herself up for a more formidable challenge and surmounted it magnificently. As in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma* takes place in a tiny world, geographically and socially. It's a little town called Highbury, in which everybody knows everybody else. That's the very opposite of the epic scope of Fielding's novels, but it resembles the worlds that most people actually live in—not on desert islands, or imprisoned in whorehouses, or rambling through the countryside for months on end.

Virginia Woolf made a memorable observation in her book *A Room of One's Own*:

> Towards the end of the eighteenth century, a change came about which, if I were rewriting history, I should think of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses. The middle-class woman began to write.

A BILDUNGSROMAN

- Austen once commented that *Pride and Prejudice* was maybe "too light, and bright, and sparkling." **In *Emma*, she created a different kind of heroine, who, as she said with some irony, "no one but myself will much like."**

- Here is the first sentence of *Emma*, the threshold we're invited to cross when we open the book.

> Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.

- Emma has everything going for her, but that telltale word *seemed* in "seemed to unite the best blessings" tells us that the narrator knows more than Emma does.

- **This novel is a highly accomplished example of the bildungsroman.** It's the story of the character's education—not just in the ways of the world, but in self-knowledge.

- Elizabeth Bennet was handsome and clever, but not rich. **Emma is the only child of a wealthy widowed gentleman who dotes on her and who does indeed let her have her way.** She has been growing up as a spoiled princess.

- In her rather claustrophobic little world, Emma always wishes that more would be happening. And to make up for the tedium of life in Highbury, she is what the narrator calls an "imaginist."

- She fancies herself a shrewd matchmaker, and she keeps playing games with other people's lives, imagining relationships that don't actually exist and trying to make them happen herself.

- **In her own case, she believes she will never get married, or even want to.** Her fortune is spectacular, 30,000 pounds, and her father gives her complete

authority over their estate, which is known as Hartfield. **Marriage would mean no longer always getting her way.**

- During the course of the story, Emma will gain important insight in two ways:
  - Getting her way is self-indulgent and often leads to treating other people as pawns, rather than trying to know them for who they really are.
  - She needs to learn that she has limitations of character that marriage with the right person could help her overcome.
- **So this novel, too, will have a marriage plot—but just as in *Pride and Prejudice*, it has to be the right kind of marriage, and once again, the heroine needs to learn a lot about herself before she'll be ready for it.**

THE SUBPLOT OF FRANK AND JANE

- Emma's relationship with a young man named Frank Churchill is interesting. Frank had been adopted into the family of his late mother since they had no male heir of their own—remarkably, the same thing happened to one of Jane Austen's own brothers. Frank is now visiting Highbury to stay with his real father.
- Someone suddenly showing up from outside in Highbury, especially a dashingly attractive one like Frank, is like a thrilling meteorite shaking up this static little world.
- **Frank cheerfully flirts with Emma, and other people are sure their interest in each other is deep. But really, both of them are just playing games.**
- Emma's game is to see if she can turn Frank on, with no intention of letting it go very far. Frank's game is kept a mystery by the narrator until late in the story. There are a number of clues along the way that hint at the truth, much in the same way that Fielding drops clues. But although Emma is highly intelligent, she's too absorbed in her game to pick up on the clues.

- What we eventually learn is that Frank has been having a passionate love affair all along with a young woman named Jane Fairfax, though they have to keep it secret because Jane has no money or social standing and Frank's adoptive family might disown him if they found out.

- The reason Frank is in Highbury is not to see his father; it's because Jane is staying with relatives there, so it's a chance to be near her, if not with her. And since their relationship has to be kept secret, Frank pretending he's interested in Emma provides ideal cover.

- **At some point, every reader is bound to suspect that it's really Jane, not Emma, that Frank is interested in. And on rereading, the clues are right there from the start.** But Emma is enjoying his playful attentions too much to realize how insincere they are.

THE NARRATOR AND THE GUIDE

- During the course of the story, we are often shown the worst in Emma. She is self-centered and self-satisfied. As the narrator told us right at the start, she's inclined to think too well of herself. And because the sleepy little town offers so little to stimulate her, she counteracts boredom by stirring up complications in other people's lives.

- No wonder Austen thought this was a heroine that people would not like very much! It is in this way that she set herself a big challenge.

- The way Austen conquered the challenge was to employ, still more subtly, the technique she invented in *Pride and Prejudice.* **This narrator is more judgmental—more detached from the heroine—than the narrator in the earlier novel was.**

- But even so, as with Elizabeth Bennet, **we are taken inside Emma's consciousness much more often than that of any other character.** We also get to understand, from inside, that Emma is a fundamentally good person.

- **Emma also has a valuable guide within the story.** The owner of a neighboring estate, George Knightley, frequently helps her acknowledge

where she has gone wrong, and she's chagrined and repentant when he does. Knightley is 16 years older than Emma; he has known her all her life and is deeply fond of her. So it's out of affection that he reproves her.

FLIRTATION, LOVE, AND MARRIAGE

- Though determined not to have a serious relationship herself, Emma enjoys flirting with various men. Emma tells her protégée, a naive schoolgirl named Harriet Smith:

> I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry.

- **Emma says she would only consider marriage if she were to fall truly in love,** and it's clearly appropriate for her to feel that way.

Austen never married but is known to have turned down proposals.

- As a wealthy unmarried woman, Emma has a kind of independence that no married woman in that culture could expect. But **the price for Emma's independence is heavy.** For one thing, she shows little self-knowledge when she declares to Harriet:

> I never have been in love; it is not my way, or my nature; and I do not think I ever shall.

- The game of harmless flirtation is all very well for the time being—Emma is not yet 21—but it's a failure of self-knowledge to imagine that it's not in her "nature" to ever be in love. And of course, there is no acknowledgment of sexual desire, which is never explicitly addressed in Austen's novels but is certainly felt to be powerful, as it was between Elizabeth and Darcy.

In the village culture in which Austen spent her own life, tact was obligatory and boring people had to be humored. From this perspective, Austen's novels give her an outlet—even a safety valve—for the self-repression that must never be violated in her own life.

- It must strike most readers that instead of taking up with the docile, spaniel-like Harriet, Emma should have made friends

with Jane, who is genuinely her equal. George Knightley tells her as much. But Emma is accustomed to always being treated as superior, and she can't bring herself to get close to Jane.

The only way Jane—to whom Jane Austen gave her own name—is not Emma's equal is in economic circumstances. She is an orphan who has no choice but to provide for herself in a competitive world.

- It's of course because of her hidden relationship with Frank Churchill that Jane has to behave in a reserved and distant way. Knightley begins to guess the truth about that long before Emma does. Emma is too busy imagining that Frank must be in love with bland little Harriet—a preposterous idea—or else with herself.

THE LESSONS OF LOVE

- Throughout the novel, Frank has enjoyed dropping meaningful remarks in Jane's presence that only she will understand. Whenever he is flirting with Emma in some social situation, he throws out comments that are really intended as messages to Jane.

- And not kind messages, either. Feeling his power, Frank is practically tormenting Jane, knowing she has no choice but to keep quiet and take it. He has a mean streak, if not a sadistic one. But it has been a passionate affair—maybe they have even slept together, though Austen would never tell us that. And we know from the story of Lydia and Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice* how distrustful Austen is of passionate love.

- Jane might well repent ever having lost her heart to this willful man. But love him she does, and since his haughty stepmother, who would have prevented the match, has just died, we understand at the end of the story that they will indeed get married.

- As for Emma, she is getting a better understanding, at last, of her own heart. **By now we are realizing that Knightley isn't just fond of her. Now that she has grown into a woman, he is truly in love with her.** And what made him realize that, with great psychological truth, is that he was deeply jealous when he thought Emma was in love with Frank.

- Exactly the same thing happens to Emma herself. Knightley is kind enough to dance with Harriet at a ball. And the impressionable Harriet is now sure that Knightley is in love with her.

- Modestly, Harriet confesses to Emma that she believes Knightley feels the same way about her. Emma's instantaneous reaction is to reject such a possibility—and she asks herself why.

> It darted through her with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!

- That's an age-old metaphor—Cupid's arrow!

- It's clear that **Austen regards this as the ideal outcome.** Knightley is representative, as Fielding's Squire Allworthy was, of the old country house ideal: managing his estate wisely and doing good for all his neighbors.

- Yet the ending may seem surprisingly low key. **Knightley and Emma will complement each other well,** with his judiciousness and her quick wit, **but it does promise to be a comfortable marriage, rather than a stimulating one.**

- Mr. Woodhouse, predictably, does his best to keep it from happening. Why should Emma get married at all when she is so happy with him?

- So Emma warns Knightley straight out that she could never leave Hartfield during her father's lifetime. And amazingly enough, Knightley commits himself to leaving his much-loved estate to move into Hartfield. Woodhouse accepts this plan, for the rather absurd reason that thieves have broken into his chicken house and he wants another man on hand to protect him.

- **This ending may seem like a real diminuendo, if not an actual downer.** For the accomplished, active, intelligent Knightley to spend his days being told "an egg boiled very soft is not unwholesome" seems a rather grim prospect. **But Austen likely saw it as fundamentally positive.** It's a sign of his generosity of spirit that he's willing to make this sacrifice for the woman he loves—and of Emma's generosity, that she will continue to honor her loyalty to her father.

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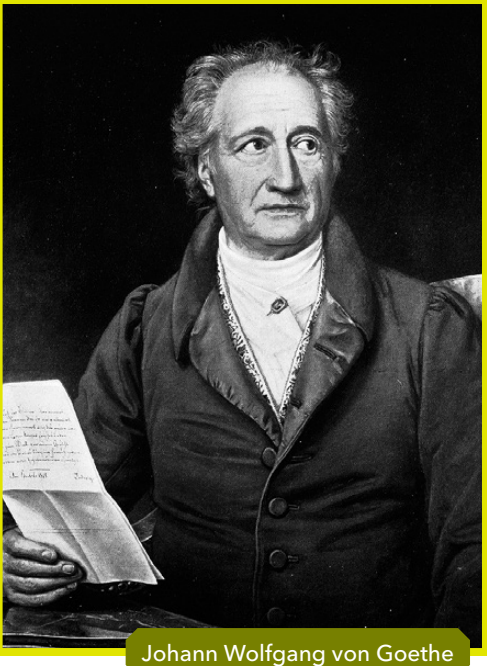
THE GERMAN ROMANTIC NOVEL: *THE SORROWS OF YOUNG WERTHER*

These days, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is thought of as the grand old man of German literature. He invented the expression "world literature," and his tragedy *Faust* is one of those works that have achieved archetypal significance. Goethe was only 25, however, when his short novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* was published, in 1774. The book became a Europe-wide sensation and created something altogether new in the developing genre of the novel.



Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

A ROMANTIC PLOT

In the 1770s, when Germany was not yet a unified nation but dispersed among scores of petty principalities, young adults shared a feeling of maddening frustration in a stultifying society that seemed to have no use for their talents and ideals. They were experiencing alienation from their society and even from existence itself. There was a pervasive mood of Weltschmerz, or world-weariness. It was in this context that **Romanticism was born, with *The Sorrows of Young Werther* as one of its foundational texts.**

Romanticism was a rebellion not only against social conformism, but against what was perceived as the smug, emotionless rationalism of the 18th-century Enlightenment. The Romantics celebrated intensity of feeling, union with nature, and commitment to ideals that were all the more powerful for being unrealizable in mundane reality. It was the Romantics who began to imagine Don Quixote as a tragic hero.

In Germany, where the Romantic movement began, it got the name Sturm und Drang. The phrase is usually translated **"storm and stress,"** though *Drang* is closer in meaning to "urge" or "drive." It refers not to pressure from without, but energy from within. **The hallmarks of early Romanticism were individualism, intuition over reason, and extremes of emotion.**

The plot of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* begins with the title character's arrival at a town called Wahlheim following a disappointing love affair in which he broke someone else's heart. It's late spring, and Werther rhapsodizes about the lovely landscape and about feeling that he is at one with the unity of living nature.

It was a favorite device of Romantic writers to make external phenomena mirror a character's psychological state. Throughout this novel, the landscape and the changes in weather reflect Werther's emotions. And

In addition to Romanticism, there was also a strong influence from the German Pietist tradition. Pietism was a movement within Lutheranism that stressed personal transformation through spiritual rebirth and renewal. Many people who were no longer orthodox believers transmuted that attitude into secular form.

although he yearns to live fully in the present moment, Werther is obsessed with self-analysis. He never can surrender totally to the moment or feel for any length of time that he really is at one with nature.

- ***The Sorrows of Young Werther* is an epistolary novel, but not in the sense of letters exchanged among multiple characters. In this novel, the only letters are by Werther himself,** nearly all of them addressed to a friend about whom we know hardly anything. That allows the story to emerge entirely from his personal response to events, with no connecting framework of narrative.

- Soon after arriving at Wahlheim, Werther encounters a charming young woman, Charlotte—known by her nickname, Lotte. He is immediately smitten, and they become close friends. But she is about to marry a man named Albert, who also becomes Werther's friend. Although Werther's passion is overwhelming, Lotte is loyal to Albert, and **there is no prospect of altering the balance in this rather painful triangle.**

- Werther leaves town for a while to take up a bureaucratic post in a small city, but he feels undervalued and insulted by his aristocratic superiors. After a few months, he resigns and returns to Wahlheim. By now, Lotte and Albert are married. **Werther is determined not to make any move that would jeopardize their marriage, and he grows more and more desperate until he takes his own life.**

PASSION AND SORROW

- *The Sorrows of Young Werther* is divided into two books. Book One ends when Werther says goodbye to Lotte and Albert, as he prepares to take up his appointment in the city. They are in a garden at dusk. Lotte is moved to tears recalling her mother on her deathbed, kissing the children one by one and telling Lotte that she must be their mother now.

- Lotte's mother had asked to see Albert. She told him that she knew he and Lotte would be happy together. Unusually moved, Albert threw his arms around her neck, kissed her, and cried, "We are! We shall be!" In the darkness,

Werther grasps Lotte's hand tightly, and she pulls it away. The chapter ends on an elegiac note:

> Lotte and Albert went out along the tree-lined avenue. I stood, gazed after them in the moonlight, and threw myself on the ground and wept. Then I jumped up, and ran out onto the terrace and still saw, in the shadow of the tall linden trees, Lotte's white dress shimmering at the garden door. I stretched out my arms, and it vanished.

In the original German, the sentence flows by unceasingly, with no punctuation at all.

- After a few months of employment, Werther returns to Wahlheim. Lotte and Albert are married now, and they treat him as a valued friend, but there is always an unspoken uneasiness caused by his obvious intoxication with her.

- **Lotte certainly loves Werther, in a way.** Albert is stable and judicious, the life partner she wants to be with. But he could never be her soulmate, as Werther is. She does permit herself little gestures, such as affectionate touching with her hand, that practically drive Werther wild.

- At one point, Werther exclaims:

> I cannot understand how someone else can love her, is allowed to love her, when I love her so exclusively, so intensely, and recognize nothing, and have nothing, but her!

- **But the intensity of Werther's feeling can't cancel out the existence of Albert**—not just as a rival, but as the spouse Lotte genuinely wants.

- **With his all-or-nothing emotionality, Werther can't accept the passage of time.** He's trapped in an illusory condition, in which he loves an ideal image that is largely imaginary. From this point forward, an attentive reader will perceive that Werther's understanding of what's happening is increasingly solipsistic.

- Lotte is not the goddess Werther wants her to be, but she's much better adapted for real life than he is. She understands clearly that he's in love with

a fantasy, not with her as a person. With Albert she can begin a family, which for many people is the best defense against the anomie and isolation of the modern world. Werther revels in his Weltschmerz, and he will soon end up in literal self-destruction.

- As Book Two draws to a close, **Werther's writing becomes disconnected and even chaotic.** We know from Goethe's own comments that **we are watching Werther go mad.** It's symptomatic that his feelings about nature have changed, in keeping with his tormented mental state. Where he once felt transported by the unity of life flowing through all things, he now sees nature as an abyss, a universal grave in which everything is devoured.

- **When Werther's letters cease, a so-called editor shows up to complete the story.** There is a pretense of working from documents and other information, but we are also given access to what people were thinking and feeling. In effect, **the epistolary novel gives way to a conventional narrative**. The editor does not claim to be omniscient, however; we still have to decide for ourselves what to think.

- Toward the end, Werther frequently expresses a kind of identification with Christ. But the identification doesn't take the form of grandiosity. What attracts Werther is the image of Christ as a sacrificial victim who confronts the threat of an ultimate emptiness.

- As reconstructed by the editor, Werther's final encounter with Lotte is filled with significance. She has no idea it's the last time she will ever see him, but he knows it. Feeling awkward and finding conversation difficult, she asks him to read aloud from a favorite book. It's a poem about suffering and loss, set in a brooding, melancholy, shadowy landscape.

- Werther and Lotte both find the reading so moving that he flings his arms around her and kisses her for the first time ever—and not discreetly, either, as "he covered her trembling, stammering lips with furious kisses." Lotte tears herself away and cries out, "This is the last time! You will never see me again!" Then, "with the fullest look of love at the wretched man, she hurried into the next room, and locked the door behind her."

- The suicide later that night is carefully stage-managed by Werther. He knows that Albert has a pair of pistols, such as gentlemen often carried when traveling, as protection against thieves. He sends a note telling Albert that he himself is about to make a journey and would like to borrow them. A messenger arrives to pick them up, and Albert calmly asks Lotte to hand the pistols over. She trembles as she does so, suspecting that Werther means to take the long journey out of this life.

- **The editor comments that Lotte might have been able to save Werther, if only she could have expressed her true feelings to Albert.** But that would blow up their carefully managed relationship, and she can't bring herself to do it. When the pistols are delivered to Werther, he is overjoyed to hear that it was she who gave them. He leaves her a note: "You, Lotte, are handing me the implement, you from whose hands I wish to receive my death."

- Werther botches his suicide; although he's mortally wounded, he doesn't die immediately. He is unconscious, but still gasping on the floor, when he is found the next morning. At noon he finally dies. Neither Lotte nor Albert can bear to attend the burial, and the editor's final words are these: "They feared for Lotte's life. Workmen carried him. No clergyman attended."

WERTHER AND GOETHE

- **When the novel was published, Werther was seen as a kindred spirit by many sensitive young men.** The novel became a cult book, a badge of recognition for insiders. **Werther's suicide could be felt as liberation from the prison of an unworthy world.** Many young men affected the same costume that Werther wears, and there were rumors of actual suicides in imitation of the story.

- **Goethe himself deplored this interpretation. He intended to demonstrate the self-destructive tendencies in the cult of emotion,** not to recommend Werther as a role model. In one of the earliest reprints of the novel, Goethe added warning verses at the beginning: The spirit of Werther says, "Be a man and do not follow after me."

- Just two years before *The Sorrows of Young Werther* was published, Goethe himself had fallen for a young woman whose name was Lotte and who was engaged to one of Goethe's friends, Johann Christian Kestner. Like Werther, Goethe felt drawn to a woman whose calm stability contrasted with his own emotional turmoil. **Unlike Werther, Goethe was able to break free from his intense feelings.**

- Kestner and his wife were not happy when people assumed that they were identical with Albert and Lotte. Goethe insisted that the fictional characters were completely transformed from their real-life counterparts. In addition, a different story came to light, one that had given Goethe the immediate inspiration for his novel.

- A young man Goethe and Kestner both knew, Karl Wilhelm Jerusalem, shot himself in despair after falling in love with a woman who was engaged to another man. The woman was not Kestner's wife, but Jerusalem did borrow Kestner's pistols, just as Werther borrows Albert's. Kestner sent Goethe a full account of what had happened, and many details of Jerusalem's suicide are directly echoed in Werther's.

Goethe once told an interviewer that Werther was really two people. One of them went under, and the other survived to write the story. But even if he did feel free after writing it, Goethe never denied that it was still part of him, saying that "one could not write such a thing and escape unscathed."

22

THE HORROR NOVEL: *FRANKENSTEIN*

Frankenstein is one of those stories that have become world myths, and in this case, the myth that most people think of is very different from the actual novel. It's based on movie versions that completely alter what Mary Shelley was doing. Still, *Frankenstein* always was a myth, right from the start. Most novels are about the necessity of accommodating oneself to the demands of society, even when the demands are perverse and unfair. This symbolic novel leaves society for barren mountains and icy polar wastes. It takes place in a theater of the spirit, where psychology can be given a narrative embodiment.

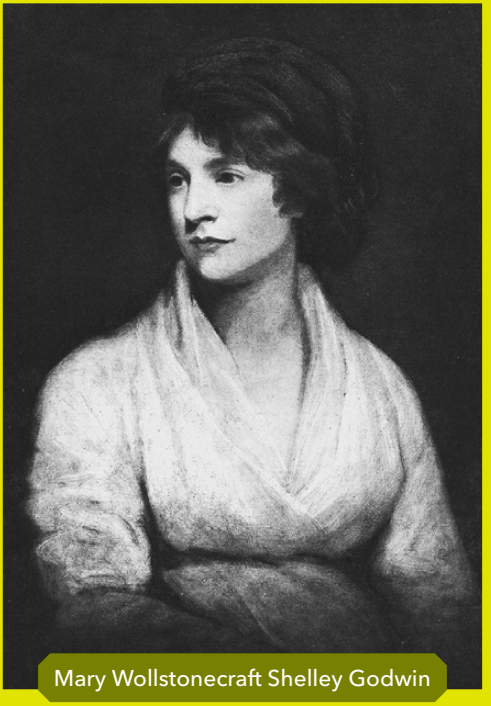
"SO VERY HIDEOUS AN IDEA"

- In a preface to the revised 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, Mary—who was only 18 when she began writing the horror novel—undertook to answer "the question, so very frequently asked me—'How I, then a young girl, came to think of, and to dilate upon, so very hideous an idea?'"

In 1812, Mary was 15 when she met the 20-year-old Percy Shelley, who would become a major Romantic poet, and soon they were lovers. Mary got pregnant and gave birth to a premature daughter who died.

In 1816, when Mary was 19, she married Percy, and their son William was born. By 1818, Mary had another child, a daughter, who died at the age of one. And then, the following year, her son William also died, at the age of three.

All of these pregnancies and deaths had deep implications for her novel.



Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley Godwin

She explained that **the story came to her unexpectedly, as a result of a casual social game.** The Shelleys and their friends were living in a villa on the shore of Lake Geneva, and to pass the time during a rainy spell, they agreed to make up ghost stories. **That night, Mary had a disturbing dream, in which the idea for *Frankenstein* came to her—from her unconscious:**

> I saw—with shut eyes, but acute mental vision,—I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion.

- In Mary's dream, the scientist falls asleep himself, and when he wakes up:

> Behold, the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains, and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes.

- Mary Shelley adds:

> I opened my eyes in terror.

- **As she developed the story that was inspired by that dream, it, too, became an extended nightmare.**

NARRATION AND THE CREATION OF THE MONSTER

- In *Frankenstein,* **there are no fewer than three narrators.** At the beginning, we are reading **letters written by an explorer named Robert Walton to his sister in England.** He is voyaging into the Arctic Ocean in hopes of discovering the long-sought Northwest Passage.

- While his ship is trapped among ice floes, he is astonished to see a solitary traveler approaching on a dogsled. Walton takes him on board and learns that he is Victor Frankenstein. What follows is the second narration, in which **Frankenstein tells his own story and Walton writes it down.**

- Frankenstein relates that he came from a well-to-do family in Geneva. With dreams of becoming a great scientist, he enrolled in a university at Ingolstadt in Germany, where he became interested in galvanism—using an electric current to cause muscles to contract.

- Scientists at the time were speculating that it might be possible, by this means, to bring a dead organism back to life. Sure enough, Frankenstein discovers a method by which he can combine dead body parts to create an artificial human being and, using an electrical device of some kind, bring it to life. The moment when that happens is brilliantly described:

> It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted

> to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

- There is the Romantic use of nature that is also used in *The Sorrows of Young Werther.* The darkness and the dismal rain mirror Frankenstein's psychological state.

- Frankenstein had expected his creation to be beautiful, but for convenience in assembling it, he made it much too large, and it turns out to be hideous and misshapen. Horrified, he rushes out of the room, throws himself on his bed, and falls into an uneasy sleep.

- That produces a shocking dream. He attempts to kiss his fiancée, Elizabeth, but she is suddenly transformed.

> I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window-shutters, I beheld the wretch, the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks.

- Frankenstein rushes outdoors into a pouring rain, and when he returns, the monster has disappeared.

Although the prose in this novel is sometimes clumsy and wordy, that's not the fault of Mary Shelley. It was the result of revisions made by her husband Percy. Though he was a brilliant poet, his prose tended to be labored.

THE MONSTER'S REVENGE

- The period of tranquility that follows Frankenstein's recovery from sickness comes to a shocking end. A letter from his father, back home in Geneva, tells him that his little brother William has been found strangled to death. A valuable locket was taken from William's neck, and it is found in the possession of a young woman named Justine, who had been treated like a member of their family. The circumstantial evidence seems convincing, and Justine is executed.

- Soon after that, Frankenstein makes a trip up Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in Europe, covered in ice. There, the monster suddenly appears, and he turns out to have acquired language by now, with which he reproaches Frankenstein for creating and then abandoning him. **The monster now becomes the third narrator of the story:**

> I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.

- It turns out that the monster—he's never given a name—took refuge in a shed next to the cottage of an elderly blind man and his loving son and daughter. By spying on these people, the monster learned not only to speak, but to read.

- At one point, when the two young people are away from the cottage, the monster gets up his courage to knock on the door and talk to the blind man, who treats him courteously. But when the son and daughter return, they scream in terror. **His horrible appearance condemns him to be a pariah rejected by the human world, though he longs to join it.**

- The monster now acknowledges that it was he who killed little William. He had tried to befriend the boy, but William screamed and cried out that his father was Monsieur Frankenstein of Geneva. The monster exclaimed:

> Frankenstein! you belong then to my enemy,—to him towards whom I have sworn eternal revenge; you shall be my first victim.

- So he strangled William and then happened to find the innocent Justine asleep nearby. Impulsively, he tucked William's locket into the folds of her dress, which is why she was later convicted of the murder.

- **Now the monster's part in the narration is over, and Frankenstein's account resumes—as recorded by Walton in the ship.** Frankenstein says that he traveled to Scotland with his best friend, Henry Clerval, but didn't tell what his intention was. He was going to do what the monster begged him to do back on Mont Blanc: **create a female companion for him. With her, the monster said, he wouldn't be solitary anymore.** They would go and live in the South American wilderness and never threaten anyone again.

- Clerval remains in Edinburgh while Frankenstein goes to a small, barren island in the Orkneys north of Scotland, where he sets up his equipment to fabricate the female monster. But once he gets started, he panics and can't bear to keep going. **What if this leads to a race of dreadful offspring that will terrorize the world?**

- **There is great pathos in Frankenstein's decision to stop making the female monster, since by now it's clear that the monster is sensitive and honorable—just despairing at the empty, loveless life he's condemned to.** That's what the movie versions totally lose. They turn him into the lurching hulk that he has remained ever since in popular imagination, starting with Boris Karloff's famous interpretation.

- **Mary Shelley's monster is superbly articulate. The monster with whom most people are familiar can't talk at all.** Victor Frankenstein in the novel is romantic and idealistic; he hopes to do something wonderful for the world by creating new life.

In the movie versions, Victor Frankenstein is a mad scientist with a demonic laboratory. He is also given a farcical servant Fritz or Igor, who didn't exist in the novel.

- Just as Frankenstein is deciding to destroy the unfinished female, the monster appears once again, with the inevitability of a nightmare. He exclaims furiously:

  > You are my creator, but I am your master; obey!

- When Frankenstein refuses, the monster says ominously:

  > It is well. I go; but remember, I shall be with you on your wedding-night.

- Frankenstein sets out in a small boat, but a storm blows up—strangely prophetic of the one that would drown Percy Shelley a few years later. He is washed ashore in Ireland, and what should he encounter on this unfamiliar beach but the still-warm body of his friend Clerval.

- The monster has been there, too, and has strangled one more victim. In a realistic novel, that would be a preposterous coincidence. **In this symbolic novel, it makes imaginative sense. It's the logic of nightmare, not normal life.**

In 1822, when Mary was still just 24, Percy took a sailboat out to sea near Genoa, expecting a pleasant outing. But a storm suddenly blew up, and he drowned.

- Grieving bitterly for the death of his friend, Frankenstein returns to Geneva, where he marries Elizabeth. He assumes, egotistically, that the monster's threat meant that he himself would be attacked on his wedding night. Instead, when he leaves Elizabeth alone for a moment, the monster strangles her—just as he had strangled William and Clerval.

- With nothing left to live for, Frankenstein pursues the monster, who deliberately leads him onward into the icy northern sea, and that's how he came to meet Walton and tell his tale.

- **Walton now concludes the narration,** describing Frankenstein's exhaustion and death. And then the monster appears one last time, and when he sees his dead victim, he repents:

> O Frankenstein! […] what does it avail that I now ask thee to pardon me? I, who irretrievably destroyed thee by destroying all thou lovedst. Alas! he is cold; he may not answer me.

- **What is Walton doing in this story, anyway? Maybe he represents a kind of parallel to Frankenstein, seeking glory in a dangerous and even transgressive way. But he learns from Frankenstein's tale.** At the end of the novel, he is ready to return to civilization—to be integrated into the social world that Victor Frankenstein exiled himself from. Walton's letters to his sister, which is how his narrative is presented, have been his ongoing connection with that world.

- Meanwhile, the monster continues onward into the ice, intending to destroy himself on a funeral pyre. He will thus unmake himself at that northern extremity of the earth that Walton had been exploring.

- **A frequent Romantic image for consciousness is a fire burning itself out. That will happen literally in the monster's self-immolation, and his remains will be dissolved in the primeval waters.**

In psychoanalytic terms, the monster can be seen as Frankenstein's id. It acts out his own unacknowledged aggressive impulses by murdering everyone close to him. Indeed, in popular usage, when people hear the name *Frankenstein*, they often think it means the monster, not his creator. And in a deep sense, the monster and Victor Frankenstein are indeed two aspects of the same consciousness.

THE PERILS OF PROGRESS

- **Victor Frankenstein has arrogantly interfered with the normal processes of nature, and he pays for it.** He thinks he is an idealist, making a great contribution to science, but his goal is a solipsistic paternity that totally bypasses the order of nature—since in nature, it's mothers who give birth. At one point, Frankenstein says explicitly that he wants to be the "father" of a new race.

- At Ingolstatd, he worked in his laboratory in complete isolation—from nature and from his loved ones—and their deaths would result from his miscreation.

- Many thoughtful people in the 19th century were beginning to ponder the downside of scientific progress, which back in the 18th-century Enlightenment was hailed as the path to a wonderful future. **Beneath the idealistic dream of mastering nature are aggressive impulses that the rational mind doesn't want to face.**

As a child, Percy had a private name for himself—Victor.

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A FRENCH MASTERPIECE: *THE RED AND THE BLACK*

There are several ways in which *The Red and the Black*—Stendhal's first great novel, published in 1830—seemed startlingly new when it came out. First, it is totally embedded in a specific historical moment: France in 1829 and 1830. Up until 1830, there was a massive effort to undo the effects of the French Revolution and the rule of Napoleon that followed it, but in 1830, there came a new, much less violent revolution in which French culture was trying to convulsively restabilize itself. Second, the principal characters are always taking their own emotional temperature but often don't actually understand their feelings, despite the self-scrutiny. Beyond that, their feelings change all the time, creating psychological complexity. Third, the omniscient narrator is deeply engaged in his story—present all the time, commenting on all the characters' behaviors and even their thoughts—but is also ironic about it.

At this point in the course, it's clear that the novel as we know it today is reaching maturity. There would always be further innovations, of course, but the most fruitful possibilities had all been invented by now and would remain standard for generations to come.

Two final masterpieces, one French and one English, illustrate what great writers could do with this now-mature form.

Stendhal was one of several pen names used by Marie-Henri Beyle, who had been an administrator in Napoleon's army. After the fall of Napoleon, he served as a diplomat in Italy and devoted himself mainly to love affairs—in fact, he wrote an aphoristic book called *De l'amour* ("On Love").

Napoleon Bonaparte

THE STORY

- The hero of the story, Julien Sorel, is a teenaged peasant in a little village called Verrières, near the Swiss border of France. He is exceptionally intelligent, and that prompts a kindly priest to give him a good education.

- Secretly, **Julien studies the history of the great days of Napoleon,** which had ended when he was a little boy. He has to do it secretly because open admiration of Napoleon would be politically disastrous. Julien feels that if he could have lived in those days, **he might have been a hero on the battlefield.**

- Now, with the monarchy and the Catholic Church restored, he sees that the most promising career is the priesthood. **In the novel's title, that's the black of priestly garments, as opposed to military red.** If Julien plays his cards right, **he could become a bishop one day** and live like a nobleman on a big income.

- Julien impresses everybody by memorizing the entire New Testament in Latin. **But actually, he doesn't believe one word of the Bible.** Nobody suspects the truth, which is that he is a total hypocrite—in fact, an atheist. **He sees hypocrisy as the game that everyone is playing, and he's determined to beat them at their own game.**

- As a bright young intellectual, Julien gets taken on as tutor of the wealthy mayor's children. The mayor's beautiful young wife, Madame de Rênal, falls deeply in love with Julien, and they have a secret affair. After a while Julien, too, finds himself in love. In a way, **Mme de Rênal is like Mme de Tourvel in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, and Julien is like a young and inexperienced Valmont.**

- When they get to the point of sleeping together, Mme de Rênal throws caution to the wind. She tells Julien to prop a ladder against the house, which might easily be seen, and come in through her bedroom window. For her, this is a passionate surrender—a total giving of herself. Julien, at first, is too self-conscious to let himself go, but sure enough, he does. "Within a few days," the narrator says, "Julien was desperately in love."

- Soon after this, Julien leaves the town of Verrières to prepare for his chosen career by enrolling in a seminary. Mme de Rênal is heartbroken at losing him, and when they sleep together one last time, he is shocked by "the icy kisses of this living corpse."

The problem French people face in the 1820s is the essential hollowness of the attempt to recreate the ancien régime, the old French society before the revolution of 1789.

The nobles before the Revolution were complacently self-indulgent. They felt free to be transgressive with impunity, and they looked down with contempt on the conventional bourgeoisie. In the 1790s, many thousands of those aristocrats died beneath the guillotine. Now, the aristocracy has been reestablished, but the aristocrats are terrified of what could happen if they behave outrageously, the way their ancestors did. So now they act exactly like the bourgeoisie.

- At the seminary, Julien quickly grasps that he's in a snake pit. His fellow seminarians are crude peasants who just want a comfortable situation in life. They immediately perceive his intelligence, and they hate him for it. The narrator comments that even skillful hypocrisy can only go so far:

> It was useless for Julien to make himself humble and stupid; he could not please. He was too different.

- After a while, Julien escapes from the seminary, thanks to a superior who appreciates his quality and sets him up with a position in Paris. Julien becomes the private secretary of a nobleman, the Marquis de la Mole, who is impressed with his intelligence and talent.

PLAYACTING PASSION

- **At the center of this new phase of the story is Julien's relationship with his employer's haughty daughter, Mathilde,** who can't help being attracted to this handsome young outsider. Once again, though, it's hardly love at first sight. But **eventually, the two of them begin to realize that they are strongly drawn to each other.**

- But we're not going to see the total giving of self that happened with Mme de Rênal. Mathilde has strong class prejudices against a love affair with a mere peasant's son. And on Julien's side, the last thing he wants is to be in the power of a privileged young woman. But it turns out they do share something that makes a love affair appealing. **They both have a hunger for serious risk-taking—doing something that's exciting just because it's dangerous.**

- But whereas the risk-taking of Julien and Mathilde is very real, the love isn't real in the same way. It's not unreal, but it's made up of complex elements in both of them, and it keeps evolving in a kind of love-hate relationship.

- The next phase of the relationship confirms Stendhal's extraordinary originality in teasing out different strands of motivation. Read Mathilde's thoughts as she thinks about what's happening:

> Suddenly an idea struck her: "I must be in love," she said to herself, in a transport of incredible delight. "I'm in love, I'm in love, it's clear! At my age, a girl who is young, beautiful, intelligent, where can she find sensations, if not in love?"

- Then, Mathilde thinks about some romantic novels that provide models for her feelings and, acting like a character in one of them, writes Julien a letter. She tells him to get a ladder and come to her bedroom at one in the morning. Although she doesn't know it, that will be a reprise of what he previously did with Mme de Rênal. Mathilde adds, "There will be a full moon—no matter." The whole idea is to maximize risk. **The way out of boredom is to create excitement artificially.**

- Julien fears that he's being set up. Maybe it's a trap. Maybe she has accomplices waiting inside who will beat him up or even kill him. But he, in turn, can't permit himself to be cowardly. Just like Mathilde, he's totally up for the risk. **So here, once again, each of them is playing a part.** The narrator says:

> Their transports were a bit conscious. Passionate love was more a model for them to imitate, than a reality.

- So they do go to bed together, and after Julien goes back down his ladder, the chapter ends with Mathilde asking herself, "Was I mistaken? Don't I love him at all?"

- After this, Julien makes up his mind to climb the ladder again—uninvited this time. He taps on her window, and she's thrilled by his daring act. She opens the window, and when he gets inside, she throws herself into his arms and cries, holding him tight:

> You are my master, I am your slave!

- That sure looks like victory—but not in this wonderfully subtle novel. Julien makes a big mistake. Instead of acting like her imperious master, **he reveals that he's deeply in love. No! In Mathilde's fantasy life, she wants to play the role of his slave.** He's gotten it all wrong; *he* is acting like *her* slave. So now, she turns cold and aloof.

- Julien feels desperate, but a friend coaches him on what to do: pretend to be interested in somebody else. So Julien makes sure that Mathilde overhears him talking earnestly with a married friend of hers, Mme de Fervacques.

The critic René Girard coined the concept of mimetic desire: We want something because somebody else wants it; it's the competitive triangle that stimulates desire.

- Mathilde can tell very well that he doesn't mean a word he's saying to this Mme de Fervacques. It's all calculated hypocrisy. Mathilde is impressed. She admires Julien for seeing through the phoniness of the culture and for being clever enough to manipulate it for his own purposes.

- Soon, **Mathilde realizes she is pregnant,** and she's joyful. She tells Julien:

> Now do you have any doubts about me? Isn't this a guarantee? I am your wife forever.

- **At this point, the plot takes a very big twist.** Mathilde's father is badly upset, of course; he assumed that his daughter would marry a nobleman. However, he likes and respects Julien, and he is willing to work things out. So he conjures up a **new fake identity for Julien**, as the illegitimate son of an actual nobleman, and **the marriage is planned. In this milieu, appearances count more than realities.**

- **This could well have been the ending of the story—at least the story Julien thought he was living.** He has hit the jackpot: marriage to a beautiful, wealthy noblewoman. He sees it that way himself. He says, "My novel is finished."

CHOOSING DEATH

- But Stendhal's novel is not finished!

- **Now comes another, completely unexpected kind of plot twist.** Back in Verrières, Mme de Rênal has fallen under the influence of a moralistic priest who dictates a letter for her to send to Mathilde's father. It reveals her

own affair with Julien and makes a damning claim: that he cynically seduces women merely to get their money.

- Furious, **Julien rushes to Verrières, finds Mme de Rênal praying in church, and shoots her.** At first, he assumes she's dead, but it turns out she is only wounded, and she recovers. Meanwhile, he's locked up awaiting trial.

- **While he's in his prison cell, both women visit him every day** (not at the same time, of course). They're both still in love with him. Mme de Rênal deeply regrets having been bullied by the priest into denouncing Julien, and she forgives him. Mathilde is thrilled that he performed an act of spontaneous vengeance to vindicate his honor, like one of those characters in the old heroic days.

- Julien has powerful patrons who are sure they can get him acquitted, but the jury foreman is an old rival of his for the love of Mme de Rênal. At the trial, Julien makes a big speech, declaring that he will never be acquitted because he's an upstart from peasant origin, and he shows utter contempt for the bourgeois jurors. **In effect, he is choosing to die.**

- What that suggests is that **Julien finally sees through his own illusions.** He could never have been a Napoleonic hero. And with both of these women who love him, he could never trust his own feelings enough to love them back spontaneously. **His whole life has been an act, but now he ends it by doing something that's real—all too real.** To choose death is to do something irreversible.

- **In prison, Julien finally feels free**—no longer subjected to the expectation of others, no longer trying to influence or manipulate them. Mathilde and Mme de Rênal want to save his life, but he no longer wants that. Dying is an ultimate existential act, the way the 20th-century existentialist philosophers talked about it: doing something that, for once, is freely chosen. **After all the self-analysis, Julien is finally at peace within himself.**

- The jury does indeed bring in a guilty verdict, and **Julien gets ready to be executed.** When the time for that comes, **there's a surprising blank in the narration—no description at all.** We are told that he is executed at the

guillotine, but the narration jumps forward to right after that, with Mathilde solemnly kissing the brow of her decapitated lover.

- The ending of the novel is extremely abrupt and strangely underexplained. Stendhal must have wanted it that way. **This is not a novel that ties up the loose ends, the way the older ones used to do. It's more like life itself, which veers unpredictably.** We had what looked like a normal novelistic ending when Julien and Mathilde were about to get married; now that's been completely blown up.

- Julien's best friend Fouqué and Mathilde carry Julien's remains to his chosen spot, and she herself buries his head with her own hands. As for Mme de Rênal, she expires quietly, having lost what gave her life meaning.

- **Stendhal leaves us with more questions than answers, but not in a teasing way.** They are the kinds of questions that haunt a perceptive person at any time but that many novelists claim to have answers for. Stendhal didn't have the answers in his own life, but he does share with us his questioning, probing intelligence.

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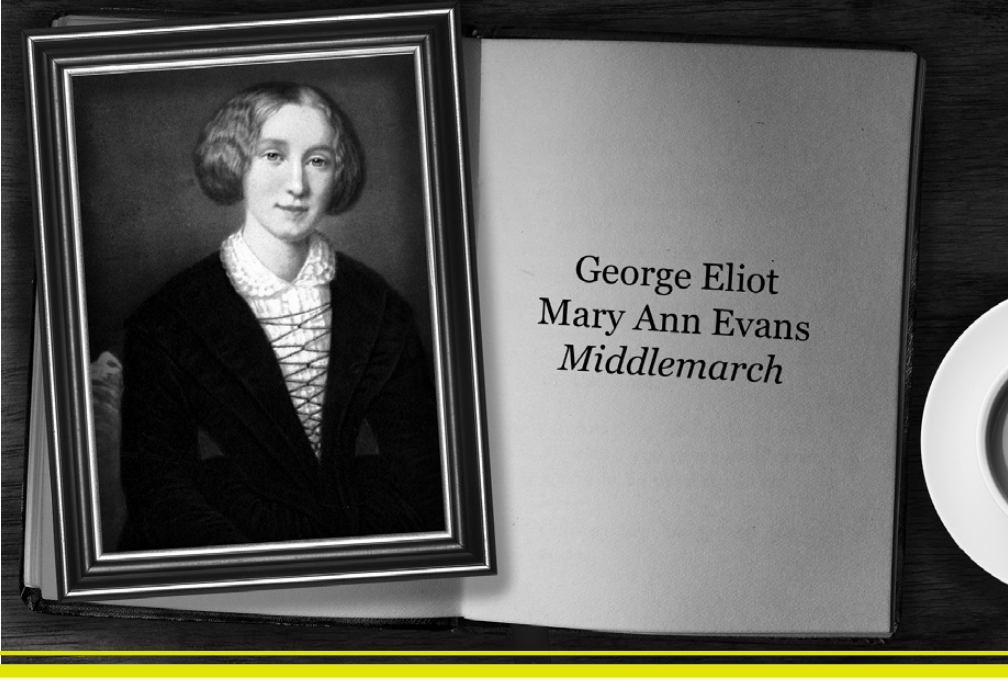
AN ENGLISH MASTERPIECE: *MIDDLEMARCH*

Regarded by many as the greatest novel in the English language, *Middlemarch* begins where many novels end: with people getting married. Who is going to fall in love with whom is not the key to this story. Instead, it's how people's choices—all kinds of choices, not just in love—determine what happens to them. Also, we often realize in hindsight that those were hardly choices at all. Even when people try their hardest to shape their lives, they have only the most limited scope for doing so. In the end, *Middlemarch* is a majestic tragedy, not in the classic sense of particular mistakes leading to disaster, but in the sense of a tragic condition that underlies life itself.

George Eliot was born in 1819 as Mary Anne, or Marian, Evans. She chose a male pen name for two reasons. One was to avoid the condescension that generally went along with the description *lady novelist*. The other was that after a number of disappointing attachments, she formed a lifelong alliance with an important writer named George Henry Lewes. He was separated from his wife, but since divorce was nearly impossible at the time, she had to live with him in what was regarded as a shockingly immoral relationship, even though they both thought of it as a genuine marriage. Not publishing under her real name was a way of disguising her identity.



INTERESTING ORIGINS

- *Middlemarch* owes its exceptional richness to that fact that it's really **two stories that George Eliot began to write separately** until she suddenly realized they would be even better if they were merged.

- One was to be called *Middlemarch*. It was about a young doctor, Tertius Lydgate, who arrives in the town of Middlemarch and sets up a practice. He has been trained in advanced medical ideas, and the local doctors and their patients are suspicious of him as a flashy upstart.

- The other story was called *Miss Brooke*. Dorothea Brooke is the orphaned ward of a genial but shallow country gentleman, her uncle Arthur Brooke.

- **The finished novel *Middlemarch*, in which the two stories are combined,** is set just before the passage of the great

Victorian novelists were interested in being true to the incredible complexity of life. They realized that art can't always reduce life to meaning.

Reform Bill of 1832, which opened up the franchise for the first time and was a turning point in the modernization of England. At the same time, the Industrial Revolution was beginning to bring its changes about; the establishment of the first railways also has a role to play in this novel.

- So in a real sense, ***Middlemarch* is a historical novel** set in the England of Eliot's youth, 40 years before the novel was published. *The Red and the Black* was grounded in a very specific historical moment. Middlemarch has the **dual perspective of two historical moments:** the 1830s and the 1870s.

DYSFUNCTIONAL MARRIAGES

- **Dorothea is deeply religious**—as Eliot was in her own youth—**and eager to find a way to be of use in the world. But all too clearly, society has not yet developed many ways for a woman to do that.** Dorothea concludes that her best course will be as the helpmeet of an accomplished husband.

- Very unfortunately, the man she is smitten by is Edward Casaubon: an aging, dry, pedantic clergyman who thinks of himself as a profound scholar. For years, Casaubon has been accumulating notes for a masterpiece with the ambitious title *The Key to All Mythologies*. Dorothea is thrilled to be the collaborator of this great man.

- But **not long after marrying Casaubon, she becomes bitterly disillusioned.** He is self-centered and remote. He wants her to act merely as a secretary. And it becomes clear that he has no ideas of his own. He'll just accumulate notes until the day he dies and never write the book at all.

- **Yet with extraordinary sympathy, Eliot never satirizes Casaubon.** At one point, her narrator surprisingly calls him "poor Mr. Casaubon." We are made to see that he is suffering inwardly, suspecting all too correctly that he is not a great scholar and that this life work of his is a complete waste of time. Like everybody, he is trapped in being who he is, and **the narrator genuinely pities him.**

- **But that does not mean we should like him.** He is married to a beautiful and intelligent young woman, and he is so afraid of emotion that he never

allows her to get close to him, let alone participate in his intellectual life, such as it is.

- And the narrator pities Dorothea, too. She pays a dreadful price for the illusions she had about Casaubon when she married him. **We may not get what we deserve in life, but we certainly have to pay for what we do get.**

- **That's one marriage that turns out badly. The other is Lydgate's.** He falls for a very pretty young woman, Rosamond Vincy, the daughter of a local merchant. When it's too late, they both realize how profoundly incompatible they are.

- Rosamond is narcissistic and self-indulgent, and she imagines that by marrying a doctor, she will be rich. **She is completely indifferent to Lydgate's dream of achieving scientific advances. He, in turn, falls for his image of Rosamond and is blind to what she's really like.**

THE WEB OF RELATIONSHIPS

- **The omniscient narrator regularly comments on the characters and their actions, often with profound reflections suggested by them.**

- Here is a fine example. When Lydgate and Rosamond meet each other for the first time at a party, they are both preoccupied with their own attractiveness, neither one really registering what the other person is like. Yet they will soon decide that they are "in love," and that will lead to their disastrous marriage.

- Here's what the narrator says when they first meet:

> Destiny stands by sarcastic with our dramatis personae folded in her hand.

- Eliot acknowledges that her model for this kind of commentary is Fielding. But she adds that back in his day, he had the leisure to push back his easy chair and chat with the reader. Her task, she says, is different:

> I at least have so much to do in unraveling certain human lots, and seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe.

- In other words, ***Middlemarch*** **is a capacious story, with lots of characters and lots of subplots. But its purpose is to show how all of them, at a deep level, are interrelated.** It was with this in mind that Eliot had the inspiration of merging the two separate story lines she started out with.

- **The idea of a network, or web, was common among intellectuals at the time.** And Eliot's goal in *Middlemarch* is to show the complex interweaving of phenomena that needs to be grasped as a living whole. More largely, in her political thinking, there is the hope that the entire society can make slow but sure progress.

- ***Middlemarch*** **is fundamentally tragic,** and there's a famous statement of that in the novel itself. The more we come to understand the complex web, the more we see how people are trapped within it. The statement comes when Dorothea has returned from her honeymoon in Italy and bursts into helpless tears:

> That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.

- **Life is tragic not just in dramatic crises, but in the steady state of suffering and loss in human life.** No one could bear to think about that all the time, which is why even the quickest of us have to be "wadded with stupidity."

CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

The Victorians were great reformers, and they were committed to finding ways to make society better for everyone. Right at the beginning of the novel, the narrator mentions that back in the 16th century, Saint Theresa could found a new religious order and have immense influence on other people. **Dorothea is poignantly described as "a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing."**

> The world of *Middlemarch* is filled with the different points of view of its many characters, but the whole thing is held together—made into a unity—by the imagination and intelligence of the author.

It was George Eliot's mission to raise her contemporaries' consciousness—and in particular, to see how unjust it was that a talented young woman like Dorothea could find no worthy channel for her gifts. Eliot herself, of course, had had a long struggle to get there.

> For Eliot, language, like everything else, is part of the complex web of social interactions—a shared medium for communication and change.

While *Middlemarch* focuses on that pair of intertwined stories—Dorothea and Casaubon; Lydgate and Rosamond—it is also about an entire society at a particular historical moment. That was true of *The Red and the Black,* too, but unlike Stendhal, Eliot is deeply concerned with contemporary ideas not as abstract theories, but as ways of making sense of a world undergoing rapid change.

For the original readers of *Middlemarch*, its intellectual up-to-dateness was very apparent. A literary critic named Sidney Colvin said:

> What she writes is full of her time […] all saturated with modern ideas and poured into a language of which every word bites home with peculiar sharpness to the contemporary consciousness.

- Specifically, this refers to a philosophy (really more like a sociology) known as *positivism*. One often hears the word positivist referred to dismissively, as meaning the reduction of everything to mere facts. But what Eliot took from positivism was that **if there is no ultimate meaning in the universe—if traditional religion is an illusion—then it's all the more important for human beings to create meaning in their own interactions.** She urged her readers to open their minds, and their hearts, to what she called "the religion of humanity."

- That early critic picked up on this and expressed Eliot's thinking very well:

> [P]hilosophy which declares the human family is deluded in its higher dreams, dependent upon itself, and bound thereby to a closer if sadder brotherhood.

A (RELATIVELY) HAPPY ENDING

- As *Middlemarch* draws to a close, the many subplots work themselves out in interesting ways, including the stories of many characters other than the main ones.

- As for the principal characters, **what happens to Lydgate is both predictable and distressing. It reflects that element of tragedy in everyday life that is gradual and undramatic but bitter all the same.**

- Lydgate's idealistic dreams are shattered by two forces. One is his marriage to a selfish and materialistic wife who has no respect for his ambition to do important research. But the other is Lydgate's own sense of entitlement. Coming from a well-to-do family, he takes having plenty of money for granted. And not only does he spend more than he can afford—Rosamond helps with that, of course—he has the privileged gentleman's habit of gambling, which gets him so deeply in debt that his best course is to sell out and start over.

- Still worse, in trying to get support for an up-to-date hospital he's founding, Lydgate relies on a banker who turns out to be corrupt, and that disgrace likewise helps drag Lydgate down. He leaves Middlemarch and settles for a

life as an ordinary physician in a resort town—a far cry from the high hopes he began with.

- **Dorothea's story is different. Fortunately for her, Casaubon dies of a heart attack, and she has a sufficient inheritance to choose her own life.** What she chooses is to get married to an appealing young man named Will Ladislaw, a distant relative of Casaubon's who is regarded with suspicion in Middlemarch because of his foreign name.

- Having once thought of himself vaguely as an artist, Will accepts a job as a speechwriter for Dorothea's uncle, Mr. Brooke, who has decided to run for Parliament. Brooke is an absolute duffer and loses the election, but Will discovers that he enjoys politics and has a gift for it. By the end of the novel, he himself has been elected to Parliament, and Dorothea is at his side.

- **So this is a relatively happy ending—but only relatively. Dorothea can never be a modern Saint Theresa,** founder of a great institution. Still, as a member of Parliament's wife, **she can at least have indirect influence in the world.** Here is the last sentence of the whole novel:

> The effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

- Notice that the phrase is "half owing," not owing altogether. And because people like Dorothea live hidden lives, they will be interred in unvisited tombs.

With the great Victorian writers, the many experiments and innovations of the novel form since the time of Cervantes have arrived at maturity. The 20th century, as well as the 21st, would see still further innovations and experiments, but the novels examined in this course remain foundational benchmarks—a living heritage that continues to give pleasure to everyone who loves them.

QUIZ

LECTURE 19

What does the first line of *Pride and Prejudice*—"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife"—tell us about the novel?

How does Austen employ free indirect discourse to create a new way of relating the narrator to the principal character?

LECTURE 20

What makes *Emma* a fine example of the bildungsroman?

What hints of feminism, if any, do we see in *Emma*?

LECTURE 21

What are some of the different ways in which Richardson, Smollett, Laclos, and Goethe use the epistolary form?

How and why did Goethe incorporate real-life experiences in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*?

LECTURE 22

In what ways should *Frankenstein* be regarded as a myth, and what are some of its implications for our culture?

How is the character of Frankenstein's monster different in Mary Shelley's book from the way it appears in movies and in popular culture?

LECTURE 23

What are the different implications of passion in *Manon Lescaut* and *The Red and the Black*?

In what ways is *The Red and the Black* embedded in its social and historical moment?

LECTURE 24

Is *Middlemarch* more overtly feminist than Austen's novels, and if so, why?

What makes *Middlemarch* a fundamentally tragic novel?

QUIZ ANSWERS are on the next page

QUIZ ANSWERS

LECTURE 1

What did E. M. Forster mean by distinguishing between round and flat characters?

Flat characters are predictable character types; round characters are complex and unpredictable. Main characters tend to be round; minor characters tend to be flat.

What are Northrop Frye's five modes of narrative?

Myth, romance, high mimetic (epic and tragedy), low mimetic (comedy and novels), and irony.

LECTURE 2

In what ways might the *Satyricon* and *The Golden Ass* be considered not really novels at all?

Both lack a plot and developed characters.

How does Lucius's conversion to the goddess Isis rescue him from a life of grotesque suffering?

First, she gives him roses to eat, which change him back to his human form; second, his belief in her religious cult gives his life shape and meaning.

LECTURE 3

How did episodes of violence in *The Golden Ass* and *Don Quixote* strike contemporary readers as hilarious but later readers as disturbing?

The different cultures of those times seemed to have a different sense of what was funny, at least as long as it happened to someone else.

How does *Don Quixote* build on, but also go beyond, the conventions of picaresque?

Like the picaresque, *Don Quixote* tells a series of episodic adventures. But unlike the picaresque, there is a moral basis in Don Quixote's quest for noble action in a corrupt world. Also, the characters of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza develop and mature over the course of the two parts, unlike the picaresque rogue, who remains a flat character throughout.

LECTURE 4

In what ways is part II of *Don Quixote* different from part I?

Part II is longer than part I, and in some ways, it is more like what we have come to expect from a novel. For one thing, the characters are more developed—rounder—in part II. Don Quixote is wiser and less obsessional. Sancho Panzo's earthy humor begins to show its own kind of earthy wisdom and good sense. There are also metafictional elements in part II, as characters in the story have often already read part I!

How might the ending of *Don Quixote* be seen as tragic, and how did *Man of La Mancha* reject that possibility?

In the novel, Don Quixote returns to his senses and renounces the foolish idealism of his quest. In the musical, his foolish idealism becomes a kind of inspiration for his creator, Miguel de Cervantes, who is facing trial by the Inquisition—and, by extension, for all of us trying to live up to our own ideals in a mostly greedy and corrupt world.

LECTURE 5

How does the psychology of love in *La Princesse de Clèves* differ from the assumptions of later middle-class culture?

The psychology of love in *La Princesse de Clèves* is aristocratic and French. Love in that culture is a power struggle, with a clear winner and loser, rather than a relationship of mutual commitment. It is based on a premise of self-interest and on the assumption that you want what you don't have, and when you have it, you don't want it anymore. Hence, every love affair has a definite end, three or four minutes after it's consummated.

How does the principle of verisimilitude (rather than literal realism) operate in *La Princesse de Clèves*?

There are coincidences in the story that would not be believable in literal realism but make sense in the context of the novel because they are psychologically or symbolically right.

LECTURE 6

What are some examples of literary realism in *Robinson Crusoe*?

Defoe strove to make *Robinson Crusoe*, as outlandish as the story is, as real as he could possibly make it. To give it this air of reality, he uses the first-person point of view, ordinary (not elevated) language, and a mass of realistic details, even some irrelevant ones, to bring Crusoe's world vividly alive.

How did Defoe seek to embed a religious message in *Robinson Crusoe*?

Defoe uses typology—biblical analogies to an individual's life—to embed a religious message in *Robinson Crusoe*. He uses the story of the prodigal son and the story of Jonah as analogies to Crusoe's situation. He also shows Crusoe practicing a Protestant work ethic—working hard to make "common objects beautiful"—and disparaging the hoarding of gold and silver (though he does it nonetheless!).

LECTURE 7

Why does Gulliver's experience among the Houyhnhnms spoil him for life back home in England?

The Houyhnhnms are sane and rational beings whose company Gulliver genuinely enjoys. Back at home, his own kind are too much like the Yahoos, and he feels repelled by them.

How is the episode of the flying island prophetic of the dangers of modern technology?

The advanced technology of the flying island can literally crush any rebellion from the cities below, just as the atom bomb could force an entire country into submission. Advanced technology allows the government that controls it power over others—the modern version of might over right—regardless of the moral issues at stake.

LECTURE 8

What aspects of des Grieux's and Manon's characters undermine their roles as tragic romantic lovers?

For all his belief that he is in the throes of a grand passion, des Grieux is a spoiled aristocrat who takes advantage of others by cheating at cards, stealing, and even killing a man—but his social class and his father's influence always get him off the hook. Manon, though she is fond of des Grieux, is not really in love with him at all. She wants money so she can enjoy the pleasures of Paris, and she doesn't scruple to steal from her elderly admirers to support her lifestyle with des Grieux.

How does the narrative point of view affect our experience of *Manon Lescaut*?

Des Grieux tells his story to the Man of Quality, who tells it to us. We can see that des Grieux is putting his best foot forward to win the sympathy and financial support that the Man of Quality offers, so he may not be telling the whole truth. We can only see Manon herself

through the cracks, so to speak. This means that readers, rather than being guided by an authoritative omniscient narrator, must make their own judgments about the story—a situation that has probably led to the wide variety of its interpretations!

LECTURE 9

What character in earlier literature is Parson Adams modeled on in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, and what traits do they share in common?

Parson Adams is modeled on the character of Don Quixote and shares his naivete, fearlessness in the face of danger, and noble ideals.

What is a mock epic, and what is one example of it from *Joseph Andrews*?

A mock epic uses lofty language and epic similes to describe mundane events, with humorous effects. Joseph stops a bully by hurling a chamber pot, rather than a stone, and when his adversary falls to the ground, the halfpence in his pocket rattles, rather than his armor.

LECTURE 10

Why does Clarissa feel guilty for her abduction and rape, and what does that suggest about Richardson's moral assumptions?

Clarissa feels guilty for her abduction and rape because she knows that at some level, she felt attracted to Lovelace. Richardson seems to believe that sexual attraction is an evil to be avoided—at least by women—a Puritanical attitude that Fielding would challenge in *Tom Jones*.

What is an epistolary novel, and what are some advantages and disadvantages of that form in *Clarissa*?

An epistolary novel is written in letters from one character to another. One advantage is that we are allowed to look deeply into the characters' thoughts and feelings. Another is that it feels very immediate; we are constantly in the midst of the action, not knowing what will come next. One disadvantage of

the epistolary form is that there is no overarching viewpoint—or, if there is, it's harder to get at, because we only have conflicting and possibly unreliable individual views to work from. For example, to Richardson's surprise and consternation, readers kept being attracted to Lovelace and hoping that he would marry Clarissa! Another disadvantage is that at the height of frenzied and dramatic action, the characters must find time and opportunity to sit down and write long letters.

LECTURE 11

In what ways are *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* picaresque novels, and in what ways do they depart from picaresque?

Joseph Andrews and *Tom Jones* have aspects of the picaresque in that both involve journeys by the title characters with many episodes along the way. However, unlike the earlier picaresque novels, both of Fielding's novels have a coherent plot, and there is more character development, especially in *Tom Jones*. Also, though both main characters have their roguish moments, they are essentially good at heart. This is not a requirement for most picaresque heroes.

In what ways is *Tom Jones* a comic alternative to the tragic story of *Clarissa*?

In *Tom Jones*, a father also commands his daughter to marry a man she loathes, but instead of passively resisting, Sophia runs away and takes her life in her own hands. The action takes place mostly outdoors, in contrast to the claustrophobic interiors of *Clarissa*. Sex is considered one of the pleasures and enhancements of life, not something to be feared and resisted. There is plenty of humor and even farce in *Tom Jones*. And the two lovers, in spite of obstacles both exterior and interior, end up together.

LECTURE 12

In what way can *Tom Jones* be considered a romance in the traditional sense?

Tom Jones can be considered a romance in the traditional sense because it deals with two star-crossed lovers who face many obstacles along the way.

The difficulties are swept away at the end by the discovery that Tom is a foundling and the nephew of Squire Allworthy, thus a suitable match for Sophia Western. Because there is genuine passion and love between Tom and Sophia, the ending is extraordinarily satisfying.

How does the denouement of *Tom Jones* suddenly expose hidden connections that reveal a highly crafted plot?

Numerous characters that we have met casually along the way show up to reveal important plot points and coincidences, and facts that have only been hinted at now take center stage to create a delightfully happy ending to the novel. Such hidden connections have been carefully planted all along and contribute greatly to the pleasure of rereading this novel.

LECTURE 13

In what ways do *Gulliver's Travels* and *Candide* add novelistic elements to their foundation of satire?

Gulliver's Travels adds hundreds of realistic details to an otherwise fantastic story that give it an air of familiarity and solidity more common to novels than satire. *Candide*, in spite of its completely unbelievable events and escapes, has a kind of zany plot or through line, complete with a theme or moral, and characters who recur throughout the story and ultimately gain our sympathy.

Name some of the targets of Voltaire's satire in *Candide*.

Targets of Voltaire's satire in *Candide* include the philosophy of optimism, the hypocrisy of the church, the injustices of the law, and the cruelties of war.

LECTURE 14

In both *Tom Jones* and *Humphry Clinker*, a foundling unexpectedly turns out to be the illegitimate son of a family member, thus changing his social status.

In what ways might Smollett be critiquing the way Fielding treated this plot motif?

The coincidences at the end of *Humphry Clinker* seem artificially tacked on for the sake of humor and surprise, rather than carefully set up in the novel. Also, the coincidences don't have as much impact on the ending compared to the wonderful sense of resolution and triumph at the end of *Tom Jones*. Even though Humphry's social class has improved, he still marries Winifred.

How does Smollett's use of the epistolary novel in *Humphry Clinker* differ from Richardson's in *Clarissa*?

The purpose of the epistolary form in *Clarissa* is to reveal the psychological depths of the characters, whereas in *Humphry Clinker*, the letters from the travelers to their friends give a wide variety of viewpoints on the places they visit and the experiences they have. For example, Matthew Bramble sees London as a pit of filth and barbarism, whereas his niece Lydia finds it full of interest and excitement.

LECTURE 15

What is metafiction, and what aspects of *Tristram Shandy* make it a metafictional novel?

Metafiction is fiction that reflects on itself, playing with language, revealing artificiality, and upending novelistic traditions. Metafiction throws into question the whole convention by which readers immerse themselves in a story as if it were real. In *Tristram Shandy*, the narrator (Shandy himself) frequently pops out of his narrative to chat with the reader or to note that he's going off on another digression and that his idea of the perfect novel would be nothing but digressions. He has trouble getting his story started, and we are well along before he even manages to get himself born. He disparages the whole idea of the traditional plot and then trumps that by having no plot at all in his own story.

What saves *Tristram Shandy* from being an abstruse intellectual exercise and a crashing bore?

> The author's preposterous and often bawdy sense of humor keeps *Tristram Shandy* rattling along at a good pace, but what finally wins us over is how humanly appealing the characters are—Tristram's eagerness and confusion in trying to get his story told, Uncle Toby's eccentricities and his very real kindness, Corporal Trim's loyalty, and the fraught but loving relationship between Tristram's parents find their way into our hearts even as we are still laughing at them.

LECTURE 16

What is the significance of Jacques's great scroll "up above" and the philosophical implications of determinism that Diderot wants to explore?

> Jacques's great scroll "up above" refers to the idea of a Divine Providence with a purpose for us humans—really the Calvinist idea of predetermination. Diderot would agree that our actions are determined—but scientifically, by the action of cause and effect, not by divine purpose.

How is the relationship of Jacques and his master an implicit critique of French culture at the time?

> French social classes were distinct and static at that time. Aristocrats were in one class (the best one), and servants were in another (much lower) class. However, Jacques, like the servants in ancient Roman plays, is much cleverer than his master, and Jacques even claims that his master needs him more than Jacques needs him! This challenges the social order in France in a way that the French Revolution will soon put into action.

LECTURE 17

Why does Rousseau think it's a good outcome when Saint-Preux and Julie end up as good friends and no longer as lovers?

Through the French novel tradition, in such works as *La Princesse de Clèves* and *Manon Lescaut*, as well as through painful personal experience, Rousseau was well aware of the destructive potential of sexual passion. In *Julie*, he glorified deep friendship between the sexes over sexual affairs and even over marriage, considering friendship both more lasting and more genuine than sexual passion.

What was Jean-Jacques Rousseau's foundational idea?

The foundational idea underscoring works by Rousseau like *Emile*, *The Social Contract*, and *Julie* is that "man is naturally good, it is society that makes us wicked."

LECTURE 18

How does Laclos exploit the intrinsic unreliability of written texts, and how does that contribute to a sense of moral ambiguity in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*?

In *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, the epistolary novel takes on an unnerving aspect. Rogues are writing letters to rogues—boasting, challenging, and often deliberately trying to deceive one another. And because we have no genial, omniscient narrator like Fielding to guide us, it's easy for our moral compass to go awry. We find ourselves rooting for Valmont to pull off his daring project and then for Merteuil to outwit him. The pat ending—Valmont is killed in a duel and Merteuil's beauty is destroyed by smallpox—does little to assuage our uneasiness at having participated, however passively, in their evil machinations.

How does the idea of sexual passion in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* differ from that in *La Princesse de Clèves*?

In *La Princesse de Clèves*, passionate love is seen as a destructive force, and it does ruin people's lives, but the actors all mean well—they are not trying to hurt each other. In *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, sexual passion is used as a tool to demonstrate power over others. Valmont tries to incite

passion in Madame Tourvel to win a bet with the Marquise de Merteuil. The cruelty here is deliberate and unmitigated by noble intentions.

LECTURE 19

What does the first line of *Pride and Prejudice*—"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife"—tell us about the novel?

First off, we know we are in good hands, because the narrator is both insightful and witty. Second, it tells us that this is, in one sense, a story about economics: that young women in this society are on the lookout for a man who can support them in the style to which they wish to become accustomed. It also tells us that marriage is the only option in this narrowly constructed universe and that single men with good fortunes had better be on guard if they are not to be prematurely snapped up by an unsuitable but persistent admirer. That's a lot to accomplish in one sentence!

How does Austen employ free indirect discourse to create a new way of relating the narrator to the principal character?

In free indirect discourse, we hear the character's thoughts and feelings directly, even though they are filtered through a third-person omniscient narrator. We can slip in and out of a character's consciousness as needed. This works well only if the narrator and the character are similar, as Elizabeth is similar to her narrator in *Pride and Prejudice*—both ironic and witty, with a similar worldview.

LECTURE 20

What makes *Emma* a fine example of the bildungsroman?

A bildungsroman is a novel about the psychological and moral growth of a character from youth to adulthood. Emma Woodhouse begins in this novel as a spoiled rich girl and grows through her own experience and the censure of a dear friend into a wiser and more compassionate adult.

What hints of feminism, if any, do we see in *Emma*?

Money, as always, is the issue. Emma herself, who has solid financial backing from her father, paints quite a rosy picture of life without a husband: She has a fortune, employment, and consequence and is supreme mistress of her little world at Hartfield. She can marry for love if she wishes, but she doesn't need to. Jane Fairfax, without Emma's advantages, faces a grimmer future. If Frank abandons her, her options are limited. One of the few ways an educated woman could earn a meager living was as the role of governess, which she compares to slavery.

LECTURE 21

What are some of the different ways in which Richardson, Smollett, Laclos, and Goethe use the epistolary form?

Telling a story through letters written by its characters can take many different forms. Richardson's *Clarissa* used letters to explore the psychological and emotional depths of his characters, Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* to afford multiple perspectives on places and events, and Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* both to hide and to reveal the machinations of his scheming villains. In Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*, the letters aren't even sent! They're more like a diary of the tormented lover's descent into despair and suicide.

How and why did Goethe incorporate real-life experiences in *The Sorrows of Young Werther*?

The real-life backstory to *The Sorrows of Young Werther* is that Goethe himself had recently fallen passionately in love with a woman also named Lotte, the fiancée of a friend of his. Lotte married the friend, and Goethe got over it, partly by writing this novel! He said that he "had transformed reality into poetry." Werner commits suicide in the novel, but Goethe went on to be a great writer, poet, and statesman.

LECTURE 22

In what ways should *Frankenstein* be regarded as a myth, and what are some of its implications for our culture?

Frankenstein can be regarded as a myth of the dangers of scientific progress. Victor Frankenstein is a scientist with a grand ambition: to create life from nonliving materials, an ambition that scientists today still share. Frankenstein succeeds, but he hasn't thought through the consequences. The monster says, "You are my creator—but I am your master." In a similar way, modern scientific advances—the internet, nuclear bombs, cloning, plastics, fossil-fuel–burning engines—are having consequences that run far beyond anything we have planned for. The monster ultimately destroys Frankenstein. Will our inventions do the same to us?

How is the character of Frankenstein's monster different in Mary Shelley's book from the way it appears in movies and in popular culture?

Popular culture has made Frankenstein's monster into a figure of terror and destructiveness against humans. What is so surprising and touching about the monster in Mary Shelley's novel is how human and decent he is, at least until he is so badly mistreated. In the novel, it is Victor Frankenstein, the rational scientist, who becomes the real monster, denying love and compassion to his creation.

LECTURE 23

What are the different implications of passion in *Manon Lescaut* and *The Red and the Black*?

In *Manon Lescaut*, des Grieux falls madly in love with Manon—or at least persuades himself that he has. Passion is the grand object of life for him. For Julien Sorel in *The Red and the Black*, passion is merely a role that he plays. Although he is concerned to do it well, for him it has more to do with power than with love. He is too self-absorbed for any genuine mutuality.

In what ways is *The Red and the Black* embedded in its social and historical moment?

The subtitle of this novel is *A Chronicle of 1830*, but the story takes place in 1829. France was still recovering from the French Revolution and the reign of Napoleon Bonaparte, but readers would be aware that 1830 was bringing another revolution, though a milder one, as France attempted to restabilize its culture. The protagonist, Julien Sorel, often looks back nostalgically to that more heroic age, in which he felt he would be able to show his true merit as a soldier (the Red). Now he is forced to settle for the priesthood (the Black) as a way of advancement.

LECTURE 24

Is *Middlemarch* more overtly feminist than Austen's novels, and if so, why?

Both Jane Austen and George Eliot feel the unfairness of their societies toward women, but there was more agitation about women's rights in Eliot's time, and that may be one reason her novels are more overtly feminist. In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea Brooke has noble ambitions, but there is no scope in her world for them. She decides to devote herself as helpmeet to a man who can make a genuine contribution, but she chooses the wrong man and finds herself researching a dull tome that she knows will never see the light of day. Fortunately, her husband dies before the end of the novel, giving Dorothea another chance. This time she chooses more wisely and marries a man who will make a career as a politician—and perhaps, with her help, as a statesman.

What makes *Middlemarch* a fundamentally tragic novel?

What makes *Middlemarch* tragic is that basically decent, intelligent, well-meaning people, some with very high ideals—through misunderstanding or a youthful error in judgment—somehow manage to screw up their lives forever.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

EDITIONS

There are many excellent annotated editions of most of the novels highlighted in this course; the Penguin and the Oxford World's Classics editions can all be recommended.

However, as is true even of the sometimes-daunting plays of Shakespeare, one gets the greatest enjoyment by simply reading, without having every reference and allusion explained. For those who like to read in Kindle format, perfectly good editions are available online that are inexpensive or even free.

For works not in English, recommended translations are listed under each novel's title below. But there are many other good translations, too; these are not meant to be the only acceptable ones.

For critical commentary, the selections of essays in the Norton Critical Editions series are generally excellent. These editions are not, however, as well suited as some others for pleasurable reading, because the type face is small and the pages are congested.

GENERAL STUDIES

An informal and engaging study by a distinguished novelist is E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel*, originally given as a series of lectures in 1927 (Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1954). Among academic studies, two especially influential ones are Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* (Chatto & Windus, 1957, reprinted by Penguin, 1963) and Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (University of Chicago, 1961). The very different ways in which novelists sought to embed religious messages in their works are explored by Leo Damrosch's *God's Plot and Man's Stories: Studies in the Fictional Imagination from Milton to Fielding* (University of Chicago Press, 1985).

Especially stimulating is Erich Auerbach's classic *Mimesis*, written when the author was waiting out the Second World War in Istanbul and published in 1953. Subtitled *The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, it's a brilliant study of selected works illustrating the development of realism from the *Odyssey* to Virginia Woolf. Concerning books in this course, Auerbach has individual chapters on the *Satyricon*, *Don Quixote*, and *The Red and the Black*.

ROMAN FICTION

The most readable translations of the *Satyricon* are by William Arrowsmith (1959) and Sarah Ruden (2000), and those for *The Golden Ass* are by Robert Graves (1951) and Sarah Ruden (2011).

From the enormous number of specialist studies, several may be especially interesting for general readers: P. G. Walsh's *The Roman Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 1970); *Latin Fiction: The Latin Novel in Context*, edited by Heinz Hofmann (Routledge, 1999); *The Cambridge Companion to the Greek and Roman Novel*, edited by Tim Whitmarsh (Cambridge University Press, 2008); *Petronius: A Handbook*, edited by Jonathan Prag and Ian Redpath (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); and James Tatum's *Apuleius and The Golden Ass* (Cornell, 1979).

DON QUIXOTE

There are many good translations, but these lectures follow the version by Burton Raffel, which is the text in the Norton Critical Edition. Another excellent translation is by Edith Grossman (HarperCollins, 2003).

The essays in this Norton Critical Edition are less useful than in most books in the series. They are heavily theoretical in an academic sense, with a mostly psychoanalytic emphasis. Two more helpful collections are *Miguel de Cervantes,* edited by Harold Bloom (Chelsea House, 2005), and *Cervantes' Don Quixote: A Casebook*, edited by Roberto González Echevarría (Oxford, 2005).

There are several good introductions to this novel—notably E. C. Riley's *Don Quixote* (Allen and Unwin, 1986) and A. J. Close's *Don Quixote* in the Landmarks of World Literature series (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

A longer *Companion to Don Quixote* (Tamesis, 2008), also edited by Close, discusses many of the principal episodes in detail and has helpful material on language and style. Riley's earlier *Cervantes' Theory of the Novel* (Oxford, 1962) describes the existing narrative modes, and contemporary thinking about them, that were in Cervantes's mind as he developed his groundbreaking fiction.

LA PRINCESSE DE CLÈVES

The Penguin translation by Robin Buss is especially good. There are useful essays in the Norton Critical Edition, edited by John D. Lyons (1993).

ROBINSON CRUSOE

There are valuable essays in the Norton Critical Edition, edited by Michael Shinagel (1993), and John J. Richetti's *Defoe's Narratives* (Oxford, 1975) is a fine survey of all of Defoe's novels. G. A. Starr's *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton, 1965) is an important study of Defoe's religious agenda.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELS

There is a good selection of essays in the Norton Critical Edition, edited by Albert J. Rivero (2002). Swift's challenging satiric mode is illuminated in Claude Rawson's *Gulliver and the Gentle Reader: Studies in Swift and Our Time* (Routledge, 1973); other works by Swift are conveniently available in Rawson's Norton Critical Edition of *The Essential Writings of Jonathan Swift* (2009). On political and social contexts, see Leo Damrosch's *Jonathan Swift: His Life and His World* (Yale, 2013).

MANON LESCAUT

There is an excellent translation by Angela Scholar (Oxford World's Classics, 2004).

Two short, helpful introductions are Vivienne Mylne's *Prévost: Manon Lescaut* (Edward Arnold, 1972) and R. A. Francis's *Prévost: Manon Lescaut* (Grant and Cutler, 1993).

JOSEPH ANDREWS

The Norton Critical Edition edited by Homer Goldberg (Norton, 1987) has a good selection of articles. An interesting book-length study, also by Goldberg, is *The Art of Joseph Andrews* (University of Chicago Press, 1969).

CLARISSA

The one-volume Penguin edition (1,500 pages long!) is based on Richardson's first edition. His later revised edition is no longer in print but was published in four volumes by Dent in the Everyman's Library collection (1962). Valuable individual studies include William Warner's *Reading Clarissa: The Struggles of Interpretation* (Yale, 1979), Terry Castle's *Clarissa's Cyphers* (Cornell, 1982), and Tom Keymer's *Richardson's "Clarissa" and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (Cambridge, 1992).

TOM JONES

Two interesting and readable studies of Fielding's novels, with excellent chapters on *Tom Jones*, are Robert Alter's *Fielding and the Nature of the Novel* (Harvard, 1968) and John Preston's *The Created Self: The Reader's Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Heineman, 1970). There is also a good selection of essays in the Norton Critical Edition, edited by Sheridan Baker (1994).

CANDIDE

There is an especially sprightly translation by Theo Cuffe in the Penguin edition, edited by Michael Wood (2005), and an excellent selection of essays in the Norton Critical Edition, edited by Nicholas Cronk (2016). The political and intellectual contexts are explored in I. O. Wade's *Voltaire and Candide* (Princeton, 1959). And there is an excellent biography by Roger Pearson, *Voltaire Almighty: A Life in Pursuit of Freedom* (Bloomsbury, 2005).

HUMPHRY CLINKER

There are two Norton Critical Editions of this novel, the first edited in 1983 by James Thorson and an updated version edited in 2015 by Evan Gottlieb. Many readers may find the older edition more helpful, because the new one stresses theoretical approaches of current academic interests that have less to say about what happens in the novel itself.

There are good chapters on *Humphry Clinker* in two overviews of Smollett's work: Robert Donald Spector's *Tobias George Smollett* (Twayne, 1989) and Jerry C. Beasley's *Tobias Smollett: Novelist* (University of Georgia Press, 1998).

TRISTRAM SHANDY

An especially stimulating study is Richard Lanham's *Tristram Shandy: The Games of Pleasure* (University of California Press, 1973). More technical, but also interesting, is James E. Swearingen's *Reflexivity in Tristram Shandy: An Essay in Phenomenological Criticism* (Yale, 1977). The most recent Norton Critical Edition is edited by Judith Hawley (2018).

JACQUES THE FATALIST AND HIS MASTER

An excellent short introduction is *Diderot: Jacques the Fatalist* by Geoffrey Bremner (Grant and Cutler, 1985). The full range of Diderot's thought is explored in Andrew S. Curran's *Diderot and the Art of Thinking Freely* (Other Press, 2019). And a fascinating complement to *Jacques the Fatalist* is Diderot's dialogue *Rameau's Nephew*; the Penguin translation by Leonard Tancock (1966) is recommended.

JULIE

All translations from Rousseau in the lecture are Leo Damrosch's, but the translation of *Julie* by Philip Stewart and Jean Vaché (University Press of New England, 1997) is also recommended. If you're interested in reading Rousseau's *Confessions*, by far the best translation is by Angela Scolar (Oxford, 2000). The real-life relationships that underlay *Julie* are described in Damrosch's *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Restless Genius* (Houghton Mifflin, 2010).

Two stimulating critical studies are Thomas M. Kavanagh's *Writing the Truth: Authority and Desire in Rousseau* (University of California Press, 1987) and Philip Stewart's *Half-Told Tales: Dilemmas of Meaning in Three French Novels* (Chapel Hill, 1987).

LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES

The Penguin translation by Helen Constantine (2007) is especially recommended. There is no Norton Critical Edition and no collection of essays

in English; a classic study of the social context is Peter Brooks's *The Novel of Worldliness* (Princeton, 1969). Joan DeJean's *Literary Fortifications: Rousseau, Laclos, Sade* (Princeton, 1984) makes a convincing case for Laclos's military profession as a direct analogue to the psychology of his characters.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

The best collection of essays is the fourth edition in the Norton Critical Editions series, edited by Donald Gray and Mary Favret (2016). Among biographical studies, Claire Tomalin's *Jane Austen: A Life* (Knopf, 1997) is lively and insightful. An interesting general study is Claudia L. Johnson's *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (University of Chicago Press, 1990). Alex Woloch's *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton, 2004) offers a brilliant interpretation of the characterization of the Bennet family.

EMMA

The fourth edition in the Norton Critical Editions series, edited by George Justice (2016), has a valuable selection of essays. The chapter on *Emma* in Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (University of Chicago, 1961) marked an important advance in criticism of this novel.

THE SORROWS OF YOUNG WERTHER

The fourth edition in the Norton Critical Edition, edited by Stanley Corngold (2013), has excellent critical materials, including a fine overview of the novel by Harry Steinhauer and imaginative commentary by Roland Barthes. Also first-rate is a brief introduction in Martin Swales's *Goethe: The Sorrows of Young Werther* (Cambridge, 1987).

FRANKENSTEIN

The text and interpretive essays are well presented in the Norton Critical Edition, edited by J. Paul Hunter (2012). Anne K. Mellor's *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (Routledge, 1988) places the novels in illuminating biographical contexts, as does Mary Poovey's *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (University of Chicago, 1984).

THE RED AND THE BLACK

The lecture in this course follows the excellent translation by Robert M. Adams in the Norton Critical Edition (revised, 2008). This volume has truly excellent critical essays, perhaps the most impressive in any of the books in this series, and they can be warmly recommended. It also has excellent notes. Many novels are best enjoyed without notes, but this one is so embedded in a particular historical moment that they are really helpful.

Several of the essays were originally chapters in important books that deserve to be read in full: Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* (Princeton, 1953); René Girard's *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (Johns Hopkins, 1965); Victor Brombert's *Stendhal: Fiction in the Themes of Freedom* (Random House, 1968); Peter Brooks's *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Knopf, 1984); and Sandy Petrey's *Realism and Revolution: Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, and the Performance of History* (Cornell, 1988).

MIDDLEMARCH

There is a good Norton Critical Edition, edited by Bert C. Hornback (1999). Among general studies, an especially fascinating one is Andrew Welsh's *George Eliot and Blackmail* (Harvard, 1985), relating George Eliot's effort to conceal her identity to a parallel theme in *Middlemarch*. Gillian Beer has a good, concise introduction in her *George Eliot* (University of Indiana, 1986), and her *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) establishes important connections between Eliot's fiction and contemporary thought.

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