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C. May Marston Lecture
Seattle Pacific University
February 27, 1997

Travel! Adventure! Romance!
Imaginative Fiction in the Classical World

by

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1997

The 1997 C. May Marston Lecture

Travel! Adventure! Romance!
Imaginative Fiction in the Classical World

It has been traditional to assert that the modern novel is the product of the last 400 years of literary history. Classicists protested, but were largely ignored. Now, enough fragmentary Greek and Latin novels are known from papyrus discoveries to warrant a fresh appraisal. Even literary critics are taking note: Margaret Anne Doody's new book, The True Story of the Novel, will be released in the fall, and it is already sparking dialogue in the academic world. She is on firm ground to seek the origins in antiquity, for if one defines a novel as an extended prose narrative depicting fictional characters within an organized plot, then classical writers certainly wrote novels. Their works of prose fiction have in fact exerted considerable influence upon European literature.

Judging by the surviving evidence, the imaginative works written by Greek and Roman authors appealed to a wide audience. It was a largely urban audience including both men and women. These readers were literate in all senses of the word, and could be depended upon to recognize echoes from famous works of literature as well as to appreciate the skillful use of rhetorical technique.

Only five Greco-Roman novels survived intact from the late classical period into the Renaissance but with the discovery of papyrus fragments from a number of others it has become clear that the form was well-developed. Many novels--romances, picaresque tales and pure fantasies--once existed, and a large enough sample is now known that conventions can be identified. Dates and sequences can be worked out, and the unique features of several finally appreciated. Nineteen of these novels have been collected and published by B. P. Reardon, and last year an anthology of critical essays edited by J. R. Morgan and R. Stoneman came out as well.

Modern techniques allow the papyrus fragments to be dated quite precisely, while this was not true of the manuscript copies. Thus the intact works can now be placed within their historical context. They can be assessed as a part of the culture of the Roman Empire. Several are written in the koine Greek of the New Testament, and most of the Greek, as well as the Latin, novels are contemporary with the spread of early Christianity. In so far as they shed light on contemporary customs, they can enhance our understanding of their world. They were, however, primarily intended to entertain, and my comments tonight focus upon imaginative elements in these early examples of narrative prose fiction.

As far back as The Odyssey, Greek writers employed imagination and carefully constructed their plots. But the Odyssey is not a work of prose, nor was it written to be read. Its original audience enjoyed it as a series of stories sung to musical accompaniment, and they savored the metrical rhythms of Homer's poetry. The step from poetry as a vehicle for story-telling to lengthy prose fiction was not taken, so far as we can tell, until roughly 150 BC. By that time, the Romans were moving to control the lands bordering the Mediterranean.

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This Hellenistic period was one that embraced diversity and had a rather high tolerance for the foreign. Times were chaotic, and people longed for prosperity and peace and happy endings. It was, in short, a perfect environment for writers of fiction, and somewhere, shortly before the First century BC, somebody invented the romantic adventure novel.

We can now appreciate some of the conventions employed by the new genre. The protagonists are thwarted young lovers separated by mishaps, who experience thrilling adventures in their efforts to find each other. Rivals and temptations arise continually to test their fidelity to each other, but in the end Love is victorious; Tyche (Lady Luck) or a divinity often helps bring about a happy ending.

A number of recent scholars have remarked on the degree to which virtuous behavior is exemplified in these stories. This is a genre in which chastity and fidelity are expected. Sexual promiscuity and irresponsibility are not to be found in the main characters. Instead, a virtuous heroine will endure extraordinary perils to maintain her chastity. The courageous hero, adventuring in exotic locales to find his lost beloved, will welcome imprisonment or death to remain faithful. Murder and rape may be threatened, but most villains are not demonically evil: the heroine's beauty is so compelling that lusty men cannot help wanting to possess her. The familiar Greek theme of Aphrodite's overwhelming power is clearly present.

Right from the beginning readers demanded characters with dimension: heroes and heroines that one could care about and who could remain interesting throughout the course of the story. Their devotion to each other had to endure no matter what catastrophes occurred, and the lovers needed to show initiative and courage; often they are deeply respectful of the old Greek gods, as well.

This evening I want to comment upon two of these romantic adventure novels, noting some intriguing features they share, and then conclude with my favorite example of truly outrageous fantasy. All three are among the five novels that survived in manuscript form and are now enhanced by the 20th century finds.

Leucippe and Cleitophon, by Achilles Tatius, is probably the earliest of the three. The translator in Reardon's edition dates it to between 150 and 175 AD. Seven papyrus fragments prove that it was still being copied (and therefore read) two hundred years later. It is a sophisticated work and deliberately written in a variety of literary styles. Tatius set out to include artful passages that would evoke previous writers.

He set his novel in the historical past of the 3rd century BC, and begins by describing a painting of Europa, princess of Sidon, being abducted by the bull (Zeus in disguise). A bystander named Cleitophon remarks on the way Love causes mortals to suffer, and the novel is the tale of his adventures.

Cleitophon was an impressionable teenager with literary pretensions when he first met his beautiful young cousin Leucippe. A garden-variety courtship conducted with rhetorical flourishes is almost consummated in Book 2, but the plot shifts neatly and the lovers vow mutual devotion with chastity instead. However, their fathers have betrothed them to others, and after a series of mishaps they flee with the help of another cousin, Kleinias. The three find a ship headed for Alexandria and on board they strike up a friendship with a certain Menelaos, who is on his way home Egypt.

Book 3 finds the ship caught in a tremendous storm. Tatius' description is an elegant precis of all the best literary storms, and with the wind howling and the timbers groaning the crew abandons cargo and passengers. The ship breaks up and the lovers are cast up on the Egyptian coast, only to be captured by a famous group of outlaws. These banditti intend slavery or worse for the lovers, but detachments of the Egyptian military appear unexpectedly. Cleitophon is able to escape. He joins the soldiers as they prepare to attack the outlaw camp, but is too far away to prevent the sudden gruesome sacrifice of Leucippe before his very eyes. His horror is matched by that of the reader; neither is consoled by the defeat of the outlaws.

Cleitophon is about to commit suicide over the grave when Menelaos and his servant suddenly appear. They insist that grief is premature. The shock value of the whole passage, for which the reader is utterly unprepared, is considerable.

But there is a rational explanation! Menelaos had come ashore near the outlaw village, and being a native of the area, was not taken prisoner. When the bandits decided to sacrifice Leucippe, he volunteered to conduct the ritual as his initiation into the band. He had spotted an actor's sword, with a disappearing blade, in a trunk of salvage. Entrusted with the preparations, he and Satyros tied an animal bladder, filled with internal organs and blood, beneath Leucippe's gown, "sacrificed" her convincingly and hid her in a coffin. The lovers are bloody but rapturous, and with the outlaws defeated, they all return to the military camp.

Leucippe's beauty, however, is simply magnetic. First the general lusts for her, then a hospitable Egyptian. She suffers a fit of madness, resulting from an overdose of aphrodisiac administered in her food by yet another eager suitor. Hardly recovered from this, Leucippe is abducted by pirates--and decapitated before Cleitophon can rescue her.

Grief-stricken, Cleitophon languishes at Alexandria for six months, where his cousin Kleinias finds him. We last saw Kleinias clinging to a spar; he was found by a Sidonian ship, returned home, and has learned that the lovers are now free to marry. It is, of course, too late for this to comfort Cleitophon.

However, his vow of perpetual chastity to Leucippe is under siege by a rich and beautiful widow from Ephesus, named Melite, who woos him aggressively. (Tatius generously gives her every line of argument customarily used by eager male suitors.) Eventually she coaxes the reluctant Cleitophon into agreeing to "go look at" her estates in Ephesus, but he remains firm in refusing to bed her.

Melite fawns openly over him and Cleitophon seems to be wavering as they tour her impressive estates, when a female slave suddenly throws herself at Melite's feet declaring that she is free-born, and begging for help. It is, of course, Leucippe, but her identity must remain secret if the two lovers are to get any help from the widow. Then Melite's husband suddenly turns up, quite alive and in a rage over her faithless behavior with Cleitophon.

Books 6 and 7 twist both these developments several ways, resulting again in the apparent death of Leucippe. This time the reader is surprised to find Cleitophon readily confessing to her murder.

Up to this point the villains in Tatius' novel have been forgivable, their scruples overwhelmed by our heroine's incredible beauty. Books 6 and 7 now reveal a truly despicable villain in the person of Melite's bailiff; her husband is another ugly character.

Both men are sadistic and without redeeming qualities, though Tatius has made them psychologically believable.

Book 7 ends with Leucippe finally safe from their clutches in a temple of Artemis near Melite's country estate. Unknown to her, her father has arrived in Ephesus, brought by the ever-helpful Kleinias; they have secured Cleitophon's temporary release from prison, since no one can find Leucippe's corpse to substantiate the murder charge against him.

Book 8 treats us to not one but two detailed courtroom scenes complete with vigorous oratory. The husband is determined to convict Cleitophon, Kleinias offers a spirited, logical defense. This judicial trial is followed by a religious trial-by-ordeal which proves Leucippe is still a virgin, and the parallelism with Melite is maintained by a simpler ordeal to verify her innocence. Her despicable husband so exasperates the authorities by his behavior that he is forced into exile. The priests of Artemis provide a feast, everyone explains, and all ends happily.

The pace of the action is punctuated by various digressions that keep the reader in suspense, as well as showing off the author's wide learning. His rhetorical flourishes are well handled, and Tatius avoids being blatant. Leucippe's passionately defiant speech, when all hope seems lost and she faces torture and rape by the bailiff, still has the power to move a modern reader.

Probably the most memorable scene (if not the most tasteful) is the description of Leucippe's sacrifice in Book 3. The dryly matter-of-fact tone Tatius uses in narrating the gross details enhances the shock created by the fact that the scene is completely unexpected. In her subsequent "deaths," Tatius skillfully varies the tone, setting up the decapitation so that even if the reader suspects a con, one is puzzled as to how it was managed. The author makes us wait an agonizing length of time before Leucippe turns up again. The third time she is supposed dead, the jolt is provided by Cleitophon's astonishing behavior in claiming to be her killer. His explanation is a psychologically convincing mix of truth and fiction, and his advocates are hard pressed to create a logical defense.

Realistic touches can be found throughout. The courtroom procedures belong to the author's own time; the behavior of the passengers during the storm, details about the streets of Alexandria--and the stage knife with its blade that disappears into the handle--all lend a convincing immediacy.

Leucippe and Cleitophon entranced readers for generations; when it was rediscovered during the Renaissance readers enjoyed it again, although until the papyrus finds, it was usually dismissed as merely frivolous.

An even more convoluted plot was invented by Heliodorus. His novel, called Aethiopika, or Chariklea, was written at least 100 years later than Tatius and is variously dated between 250 and 350 AD. It too is anchored in real places, but set in an even more remote past, before the founding of Alexandria.

Heliodorus constructed his plot like a set of nested dolls, with the mysterious identity of the lovers and the reason for their hair-raising adventures concealed within a series of plot shifts. The action is delayed repeatedly by stories told within the main narrative. All of these do relate to the central mystery, and each one provides new clues that increase the reader's knowledge of earlier events.

The novel opens with a "word picture" describing a scene of destruction viewed by brigands. The same stretch of Egyptian coast used in Leucippe (a popular location in the adventure novels) is littered with bodies, the remains of a feast, and a damaged ship. The only survivors are a wounded man and a woman dressed like the goddess Artemis with bow and an empty quiver. This heroine will clearly be remarkable: her arrows can be seen in a number of the bodies. Suddenly a second band of outlaws appears. They claim the couple as booty and convey them to their camp, where a young Greek named Knemon serves as interpreter between the Egyptians and their new captives.

The story of Knemon's flight from a scheming stepmother and her accomplice serves to introduce him to the reader and to the main characters, Theagenes and Chariklea. Unfortunately, the young couple have presented themselves as brother and sister, dedicated to chastity, who were taken by pirates while traveling on a religious mission: the outlaw chief, one Thyamis, is soon eager to make the lovely Chariklea his own.

The historical setting is roughly 500 BC, a time when Egypt was part of the Persian empire. Government troops now appear for an attack on the outlaw camp. Thyamis secures Chariklea in a cave for safety, but when the outlaws are dispersed and their camp burned, he returns and kills "a Greek woman" before being captured by bounty hunters: the Persians have put a price on his head.

In Book 2 Theagenes and Knemon sneak back for Chariklea, and are shocked to trip over the body of a woman; Chariklea is alive and well. To Knemon's astonishment, the corpse proves to be the woman who ruined him, his stepmother's accomplice Thisbe. The three separate for their escape and Knemon accompanies an elderly priest to the home of a local merchant. Dinner presents him with a number of surprises, for his host is lamenting the loss of his lover Thisbe, while the old man, Kalasiris, mourns the loss of his charges, Chariklea and Theagenes.

The rest of Book 2 and Books 3 and 4, form "a novel within a novel" told by Kalasiris the priest. He is the father of the outlaw Thyamis. Years earlier in despair over his quarreling sons, he had left Egypt. Eventually he visited Delphi and became acquainted with the lovely Chariklea, whose origins were mysterious. Her guardian had been worried by her refusal to consider marriage, but Love when she first saw Theagenes changed that!

Theagenes was equally smitten, but the two were so modest and virtuous that it took Kalasiris' tactful help plus an oracle from Apollo and Artemis to bring them to admit their love. The oracle was obscure (naturally) but seemed to indicate that the couple should proceed to Egypt, and they piously swore to remain chaste until the gods' will should become clear. Various clues had suggested to Kalasiris that the gods intended the two to be brought to Aethiopia, so he arranged ship-passage for all three of them to Egypt.

Kalasiris' story is interrupted in Book 5 by the merchant's announcement that he has recovered Thisbe. Knemon knows this must be a lie because he found her body, and indeed, the woman is Chariklea. She was captured by the Persian troops and released to the merchant when he claimed she was his missing courtesan. Ultimately the merchant accepts a jewel for her release and Kalasiris can continue his story.

The three (Kalasiris, Chariklea and Theagenes) had suffered one adventure after another as they tried to prevent a succession of authority figures from claiming Chariklea. Finally, Kalasiris' story brings them to that first scene on the Egyptian coast.

We are now half-way in the novel. The flash-backs have established the old Egyptian as an affectionate guardian, and the young couple as brave, ingenious and devoted. Talismans left with Chariklea point to Aethiopia, and although she shows more initiative during their adventures than is usual for a woman, there have been hints that her origins are royal.

Book 6 involves the effort to find Theagenes, who was detained by the Persians. Knemon leaves the story, while Chariklea and the old priest disguise themselves as beggars. They must travel to Memphis, where Thyamis the outlaw is trying to regain the priesthood from his brother by attacking the city. Theagenes is back in his custody.

In Book 7 old Kalasiris succeeds in preventing a duel between his sons, and then he dies of happiness after he is able to reconcile them. The lovers are also reunited BUT a new threat looms. Memphis is the site of the Persian court in Egypt, and the governor's wife is a femme fatale who lusts after both Thyamis and Theagenes.

From here to the end of the novel the plot is darker and the tension high. Twists and turns bring the two lovers close to death before the Persian governor unexpectedly causes their release from prison and they are again on the way to Aethiopia. The Persians prove treacherous and the Egyptians crafty. The Aethiopians struggle heroically to remain independent of Persian domination, and Heliodorus includes a vivid siege description in which the Nile is diverted to undermine a city's fortifications. (The details here are so convincing that one can't help wondering whether the author had experienced it.) At last our heroes reach the capital of Aethiopia for victory celebrations. . . . . which must include their deaths as the victory sacrifice, for ancient customs still demand human sacrifice. King and queen are caught between duty to their people, and their own more enlightened attitude.

The concluding scenes heighten the suspense with one tantalizing shift after another. In the process, Heliodorus allows glimpses of the changed life Chariklea will have when she takes her rightful place as crown princess of Aethiopia. Unlike many heroines, a happy ending will not return her to her starting point: her growth and the changed circumstances imply a new beginning. The king and queen are deftly shown to be parents worthy of their heroic daughter, and the finale delays the resolution almost to the last sentence, as we finally learn why she was sent away as an infant.

Both Leucippe and Aethiopika are carefully developed novels and the romantic characters are believably motivated. Some critics have grumbled about Theagenes' lack of dominance, but part of the problem is discomfort with a woman as the main character. Heliodorus has given us a neat reversal of the usual male-female adventure roles.

Episodes like the besieging of an Egyptian city in the Aethiopika and the storm in Leucippe are alive with realistic details. Neither author resorts to magic or invokes a deus ex machina. Chariklea does have a special gemstone that wards off fire, but such properties would have been accepted as reasonable by most classical readers. (I refer the dubious to Pliny's Natural History.)

Both authors expect authority figures to behave responsibly; political leaders, especially in cities, are normally concerned with justice and the welfare of those governed.

When such figures are shown misusing power, their behavior is clearly inappropriate and they invariably suffer.

There is an undercurrent of sexuality to be found in both works, since Love (or lust) is the motive energy driving much of the action; however, it is carefully controlled by the protagonists, as well as by admirable characters. Clearly, the societal norms are on the side of virtuous behavior, and the licentious eroticism of villains only reinforces this.

Considering that these novels were written during the later Roman Imperial period, a time when other evidence suggests that religious sentiment was fervent but not very profound, the main characters in both novels show a deep knowledge of and respect for traditional Greek religion; the more orgiastic Eastern cults, which we know were historically present, are almost invisible in these works. Oracles, temple personnel, prayers and dream interpretations are all treated seriously, and the Egyptian priest is welcomed at Apollo's temple in Delphi as an esteemed colleague. Sidon and Byblos are shown worshipping not Phoenician gods, but the usual Greek pantheon, and Apollo is as active in Aethiopia as he is in Greece.

I would like to suggest that this can be related to the fact that all ancient romances, both Greek and Latin, are historical novels. By removing the action to a remote past the authors accomplish a number of things.

First and most obviously, this was safer. The early centuries of the Christian era saw much government censorship, heavy at times and unpredictable. Perceived disparagement of an emperor or any comment that could be thought threatening to authority was bound to attract undesirable attention. Thus, authors preferred to place the action distant enough in time that no one would be misled. The Persian occupation of Egypt was some 600 years earlier: few readers would know enough about the period to be troubled by any inaccuracies, and Roman readers could feel comfortably superior. Besides, hostility against Persia was always considered patriotic. Tatius set his work during the time just before Rome controlled the east; his generation was content to suppose that Greek control of most governments implied far more than just the presence of an elite minority; thus the native populations are invisible in his novel.

The distant past always carries a certain sentimental nostalgia, and in a work of escapist fiction, an historical setting is a real advantage. Lots of boring details can be avoided without troubling the reader: literary realities are easier to construct in an historical past.

Furthermore, the treatment accorded to religion in the romantic novels has an interesting relationship to this historical setting. What we are shown is a simpler time in which everyone in the Mediterranean world shares a common belief in the Greek pantheon, and travelers can recognize religious symbols and rituals wherever they may be. Those who are outside this koine are villains: the bandits who make human sacrifices and engage in cannibalism; witches who try to summon the shades of the dead; those who would shelter behind religion in order to defraud or manipulate. The final scenes in the Aethiopika show that even these tribal people, at the fringes of the civilized world, can turn from such barbarian customs as human sacrifice. In fact, one way to identify the "good guys" is that they accept without question classical Greek religious practices.

I find it fascinating that the sentimentalized past enjoyed by readers of these romantic adventures depends upon a homogeneity of religious practice that never existed in actual fact.

Another interesting aspect is that both writers, in different ways, twisted and altered the conventions already established for the novel. B.P. Reardon, in an essay on Tatius' Leucippe and Cleitophon, shows how Tatius plays deliberately with several of these conventions, especially in his use of first person narrative, which seems not to have been usual before him. First the narrator's view of the action creates suspense and a sympathetic identification with him, then this is exploited for sensational effect, and ultimately, when Leucippe is absent from the action, the author introduces a parallel figure in the person of the "widow" Melite; by the time we have reached the final books, the narrator is telling far more than Cleitophon could possibly have known, but the transition has been made while the suspense is very high and the action rapid. The reader can accept the shift, having become accustomed to the many stylistic variations that Tatius employs deliberately.

Morgan, in an essay on the Aethiopika, discusses Heliodorus' use of puzzles. He points out that this allows Heliodorus to avoid what had become the predictability of the conventional romance plot. The use of one riddle after another keeps the reader constantly searching for the next clue: the plot development is completely unpredictable and thus far more interesting. The changing points of view also allow Heliodorus to introduce a new level of reality, for in real life no one person ever has all the facts; we all live wondering about events we cannot understand completely.

Both Tatius and Heliodorus constructed romantic adventure novels that have highly dramatic elements, and in fact all the novels display a connection to the comic theatre.

The humorous elements in the novels I summarized are clear: readers were expected to chuckle here and there. Last year I spoke on the development of comedy from Aristophanes to the situation comedies of Menander, Plautus and Terence, and I find it fascinating that New Comedy, with its stock characters and domestic plots attracted serious critical attention, while prose fiction was either ignored or dismissed. The novels seem equally worthy, since the parallels in theme, technique, plots, dialogue and characterization are manifest. Why no serious attention from critics?

Let me bring in a work of fantasy here first, a spoof of literary fictions, and then return to this question.

Lucian of Samosata lived at about the same time as Achilles Tatius, in the 2nd century AD. He viewed the world around him with a dry wit honed by profound familiarity with classical literature. Satire, the exposure of deception, and a sophisticated mockery of human foibles characterize most of his works. He wrote The True Story as a spoof of all literary liars--like Homer and Herodotus and Plato. To claim the work as science fiction may go too far, but it is certainly fantasy of a high order.

Lucian describes an incredible journey and starts by saying that it is all a lie, and that is the only true statement in the whole story. He proceeds to out-do Odysseus himself in the telling of tall tales, using outrageous exaggeration, pompously constructed epithets (a la epic poetry) and the droll juxtaposition of totally incongruous elements. His trip (to the moon) is accomplished when a storm blows his ship far into the Atlantic.

There it is caught by a gigantic water-spout, carried miles above the earth and finally blown onto the surface of the moon. Here our narrator and his crew meet one monstrous entity after another, parodying material found in Homer, Herodotus, Ovid and dozens of others.

We are treated to an epic battle in the grand style between inhabitants of the moon and those from the sun, who are aided by creatures from all over the astrological map. Duels and truces, treaties and feasts are all set forth before the sailors depart. They sail from the moon with a brisk wind, and pass Aristophanes' Cloudcuckooland before being drawn downward (over several days) by the pull of gravity until they reach the ocean's surface once more. Soon the ship is swallowed by an astonishing whale, and the crew spends months trapped inside with an odd collection of other beings. Eventually they set fire to the creature's insides and manage to escape. Lucian has a wonderful time surpassing every previous adventure yarn, delighting the reader with his spoofs of famous passages as well as his own wild inventions.

It has probably occurred to you that Jonathan Swift's novel, Gulliver's Travels, and the German work The Adventures of Baron Munschausen both owe much to Lucian's tale, and even Pinocchio had a similar adventure. The romantic adventures also had an important influence on later writers. Cervantes (in Spain) and Sir Phillip Sydney (in England) greatly admired Heliodorus' novel, while Racine (in France) was so fond of the Aethiopika that he didn't wish to be without a copy: when his first two copies were confiscated by church authorities, he found a third--and took the precaution of memorizing it! Fielding is another writer (in England again) who thought highly of the classical works, and his countryman Samuel Richardson congratulated himself that his Clarissa was at least as good a heroine as those from antiquity.

These 17th and 18th century authors were neither uncritical nor unintelligent readers, which leads me to return to my earlier question: why have the prose narratives - the novels - been dismissed from serious consideration, while the New Comedy plays were always "important" literature?

For decades, modern scholars assumed that the five surviving novels should be dated to Rome's final decadence and that no really intelligent people ever read them; they were aberrations, like the chance survival of a comic book among works of philosophy. If ancient commentators had ever included them in their discussions of literary aesthetics, such an attitude would have been untenable.

True, the novels are unabashedly entertainment--but so are the comic plays. I think perhaps there is a key in that a stage performance is so clearly a performance by actors. Yes, they create an illusion that draws us in and convinces us that the fiction is real, for a time. Then the play is over, the actors are just people again and we leave the theatre. Drama mimics life, but it is not usually confused with it, and that enhances the cathartic effect, to use Aristotle's terms.

But: a work of literature that is read from a text begins to exist in the mind. The illusion may begin to live after the book has been laid aside, and the story to stimulate imagination to become creative in a very different way. The classical world did not, I think, value the use of imagination itself, simply for the experience. Its use needed to have a more specific goal, a telos to give it meaning. A comic play could be clearly understood,

its purpose was clear by the time Aristotle discussed literary analysis, for spectators left the theatre purged and harmonized, better citizens.

I fear that it was rather harder for sober scholars to see a telos in this genre: the narrative, prose, fictional, novel exists primarily to entertain on a purely individual level. After all, the fantasies that live within one's own imagination cannot be controlled by others, and may even begin to compete with external reality. Then, too, these romantic adventures showed women moving more freely than authority figures wished to encourage. Various devices separated women in the comic plays from real women, and drama does not draw the passive spectator in the way a text engages the reader's active attention. It was much easier to identify with characters in the novels, thus better for many reasons to label them not worth serious attention.

Readers of prose fiction have always known that its real purpose is to entertain in the delightfully private world of one's own mind. Now we'll see, when M.A. Doody's book comes out in the fall, whether modern literary critics will find the evidence compelling enough to allow the novel--this poor cousin of comedy and epic--a classical pedigree after all.

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