

NOTES

PREFACE: RANSOMING A READING NATION

First, a note on notes: this space is where I indulge my working literature professor and sometimes take on the language and lineage of my profession in ways that I work hard to avoid in the body of this book. *The Ulysses Delusion* aims to address simultaneously intelligent and perceptive novel-lovers, like my sisters and friends, and the literary professionals I work with. Because I am a teacher, I suspect the questions I address here in the notes will most often draw English teachers and librarians with comparable concerns. If you are not similarly nerdy (nerdy, yes, my biologist friends, but not similarly nerdy), you may want to skip these; or you may want to join me here as well. Your choice. Be warned, though: I am a literary theorist (I confess!). Here you are in danger of deconstructions and discourses, hegemonies, heterocentrism, and intersectionalities. Here I sometimes get personal, filling in my intellectual antecedents, my foundational texts and ideas, with a bit more precision and care than the broader brushstrokes of my textual arguments allow. I also get snarky, maybe even silly, if editors don't read endnotes.

1. Since I wrote this Preface, I have had to add my daughter, Daley Konchar Farr, to my list of people I know who have read *Ulysses* cover to cover. She read it, first for an English class at Augsburg College and again as she spent her junior year abroad at Oxford (and likely again since), with such joy and engagement that she almost convinces me to rethink my opinion of Joyce's novel. Indeed, I should confess that my resistance to Joyce may be quite specific and situational—more about what he represents than about how his novel works. I submit as evidence that I regularly approach Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* and Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, both equally puzzling modernist challenges to the traditional novel, with the enthusiasm Daley brings to Joyce.

2. Further discussion of the rise of the novel and its threat to received cultural norms, especially for young women, follows in chapter 1; see also Nancy Armstrong's groundbreaking *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*.
3. An elaboration of this point also follows in chapter 1, jumping off from Cathy N. Davidson's influential *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*.
4. I would be the first to admit that I find reading (and rereading) complex novels a pleasure. After studying literature for years, honing my critical skills and practices, I enjoy unleashing them on a text that takes time and effort to work through. There is undoubtedly gratification to be found in that process, as well as sharpened insights and discovered depths. The objection I am forming here, however, is to how this is often figured in critical literary discourse as the only legitimate mode of reading. I elaborate on this objection further throughout (it is, in fact, one of the primary points of this book), but Rita Felski, in *Uses of Literature*, characterizes it succinctly when she describes the way critics read literature "as literature." It means, she writes:

Assenting to a view of art as impervious to comprehension, assimilation, or real-world consequences, perennially guarded by a forbidding 'do not touch' sign, its value adjudicated by a culture of connoisseurship and a seminar-room sensibility anxious to ward off the grubby handprints and smears of everyday life. (8)
5. A discussion of why critics love Franzen is found in the second half of chapter 1; why they disdain Picoult's novels is the subject of chapter 7. Though, to be clear, critics in the most elite places don't pan Picoult's novels; they ignore them.
6. *Ulysses* is, of course, technically a novel. Novels are very generally described as long (one online definition says "book-length") fictional prose narratives. *Webster's Dictionary* (because this book is primarily about the *American* novel) defines it as "an invented prose narrative that is usually long and complex and deals especially with human experience through a usually connected sequence of events" (accessed online at www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/novel on October 30, 2014). More on what makes a novel a novel follows.

7. I will also discuss standards of literary value in more depth later, but for now please note that the characteristics I list here are personal preferences, not professorial pronouncements.
8. My modernist self would add a caveat here, and it requires me to revive Roland Barthes's conceptual dead author. While aspiring to be remembered and significant, Joyce also hoped that his novel would be literarily and figuratively a novel of the Dublin streets. The critics report that he wanted everyday Dubliners to read it. So even Joyce would likely not approve of twenty-first century "Joyce."

Finally, I should note that the following first epigraph is drawn from Annette Kolodny's 1980 essay "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism" which includes a challenge (a serious throw down, really) to feminist critics to rethink aesthetic merit, including (I still love this) "that dog-eared myth of intellectual neutrality" (163). That challenge, its fascination for me in the early stages of my career (as one of the first English PhDs to train formally as a feminist literary scholar), and my now long-held conviction that it is foundational to the feminist re-visioning of our profession, has been, through many twists and turns, the source of inspiration for this book.

1 COME AND GET IT

1. And speaking of interruptions, I want to note at the outset that this book has been six years in the making (and counting). Just in case some of you are unfamiliar with the way the life of a professor in a teaching-centered university plays out, let me explain that during those six years I have been creating and teaching courses (at least seven a year), advising and mentoring students, presenting papers at conferences, working on scholarly and institutional projects, and living a personal life in between. For me, that has meant that parts of this book had to be worked out in bursts of earlier, shorter projects along the way. Throughout this book, then, I "plagiarize" myself, borrowing liberally from previous publications that honed my thinking for *The Ulysses Delusion* and helped sort out some of my ideas, often in the context of my

classroom work. Though I make a point of noting where these borrowings occur, I want to make clear from the beginning that they are a direct result of writing in the whirlwind that is the life of a teacher/scholar. Thus, this book, though original, is in some ways a compilation.

2. My indebtedness to Janice A. Radway for her theorizing about popular reading dates back to the late 1980s in my graduate school days at her (and my) alma mater, Michigan State University. This book, in particular, is deeply influenced by her *A Feeling for Books* in ways I can never completely tease out because it has been such a foundational text for me. Her ideas, about the ways reading functions in our everyday lives, and her methods, of respectful attention to passionate readers, are now my own in the great tradition of intellectual genetics.
3. “Absorption” is not completely absent from critical discourse, however. It is one of the reader responses that Radway develops in *A Feeling for Books*, and Rita Felski, in *Uses of Literature*, cites a similar exchange, calling it “enchantment.” Felski also explores a version of what I’m calling “information,” which she analyzes as “knowledge,” and our studies of “relatability” and “recognition” overlap somewhat.
4. These terms surfaced in the research conducted by my “Women’s Book Club” class at College of St. Catherine (now St. Catherine University), Fall 2008, in their individual and group projects and in our class discussions. I appreciate all these women taught me through their intellectual energy, their insights, and research and would like to acknowledge all of them here: Shannon Backlund, Alex Barnard, Ashley Boatman, Jenna Bowman, Marie-Alix Cave, Debbi Epperson, Angelique Harbin, Rachael Harit, Kelley Holmes, Caitlin Hurley, Jennifer Jaroscak, Riely Jesme, Kelsey Krause, Susan Maldonado, Katie McDonald, Miraf Melaku, Brittany Pearson, Jeannie Pumper, Mandy Rohde, Laura Schenkelberg, Carrie Thurnau, Laura Vitzthum, and Jennie Wolvert.
5. This is a brief summary of Nancy Pearl’s presentation at the College of Saint Catherine in St. Paul on March 30, 2008. It is also the occasional subject of blogs and commentary on nancypearl.com. My several encounters with Pearl in 2008, including a lively lunch conversation during a Minneapolis library convention, redirected my thinking about the relationship between capitalism

- and books. As anyone who has met Nancy can attest, she's read *everything*; her perspective on readers and reading, then, was invaluable to me.
6. Examining one random Sunday's (August 7, 2011) *New York Times* Bestseller Lists demonstrates how some of the lists have been constructed to be more equal than others. Of the top fifteen books on the trade fiction list, nine had been reviewed in the *New York Times*; four of the top fifteen hardcover fiction bestsellers had been reviewed. On the e-book fiction and mass-market lists that week, only two out of the top fifteen had been reviewed.
 7. Nor was this the last time the *Book Review's* Bestseller Lists were revised. When e-books got their own list, the *Times* added a weekly mega-list integrating information from several of the bestseller lists, making it the first time I've seen a book from Harlequin on the *NYTimes* lists. E. L. James quickly followed, with her *Shades of Grey* series opening the floodgates for what people will read when no one can tell what they are reading.
 8. I will note here that while my life experiences have placed me in both categories, avid reader and literary professional, the space I own as I write this book is the latter. My "we" is meant to be slippery, to challenge and elide categories, but generally speaking, my "we" in this text is a "royal we" of literary professionals, mainly English professors. My perspective is inevitably the scholarly one, despite my delight and indulgence in (and respect for) popular reading. Another category I purposefully collapse is "literary professional," which, in this study, includes both college and university scholars and professional critics, usually educated by those scholars. While I realize that work in the media and work in the Academy are quite different, I have generally found their standards of literary merit remain similar. It pains me, again, that professional literary criticism has little to say about the novels that most people value. More on that in chapter 2.
 9. Small pieces of this chapter appeared earlier in "Communion with Books: The Double Life of Literature at the College of St. Catherine" for the college's centennial book project, *Liberating Sanctuary: A Hundred Years of Women's Education at the College of St. Catherine*, a collection of essays from feminist perspectives about the history of our Catholic liberal arts college for women in St. Paul, Minnesota (Lexington Books 2011), and in "It Was

Chick Lit All Along: The Gendering of a Genre” in *You’ve Come a Long Way Baby: Women, Politics, and Popular Culture*, edited by my colleague Lilly Goren (University of Kentucky 2009), where I began to weigh these ideas by writing about them.

10. Both Jan Radway’s and Joan Shelley Rubin’s work on the Book of the Month Club pay careful attention to everyday readers and their love for books, including the motivation toward self-improvement noted here (throughout). Cathy N. Davidson’s work on the novel (and her work since) has this same distinctive tone of deference for what readers love and have loved.
11. Baym notes that the success of the novel comes from its “union of popularity and artistry” (44), and asserts “the explanation for the success of the novel lies in the inherent power of the form to generate reader excitement” (43).
12. Davidson points out in her introduction to the *Columbia History of the American Novel* that some early critics found the novel “precisely what was required to bring together a nation recently fragmented by a Revolutionary War and further divided by the influx of immigrants who did not speak the same language, practice the same religion, or share the same values as those earlier arrived” (3–4).
13. I owe this insight to Tréza Rosado, who writes in her essay “The Generation(s) of Harry Potter: The Boy Wizard and His Young Readers” in *A Wizard of Their Age: Critical Essays from the Harry Potter Generation* (SUNY 2014) of how the increasing darkness of J. K. Rowling’s imagined world across the seven-book series aligns with the post-9–11 sensibilities of its maturing readers.
14. The quest for a national literature became increasingly urgent early in the nineteenth century, when the United States began confidently exerting its nationhood at the end of the War of 1812. As noted in the introduction to the canon shaping *Norton Anthology of American Literature*: “During the 1820s . . . a heroic national myth grew up around him [the ‘American’] that asserted the strength and optimism of the American character and suggested a hopeful trajectory for national literature that concentrated on ordinary people.” Because the most popular writers of the day continued to be British, and most American readers saw themselves as part of a larger Anglo literary tradition, nationalists were determined to intervene. The US authors followed.

- According to the *Norton*: “By and large, though, authors in the 1820s shared a sense of the distinctiveness of the American landscape, its colonial history, and the legitimacy of its traditions, and worked to represent the ways that ordinary Americans were coming to grips with their country’s contradictions.”
15. Philip F. Gura’s outstanding study of the first century of American novels, *Truth’s Ragged Edge* (Farrar Straus 2013), also cites individual free will, as well as religiosity, as parts of the “distinctly American cast” of the nineteenth-century novel.
 16. Today Cooper also represents the morally bankrupt strain of American nostalgia that relegates Native Americans to a heroic past, making invisible their continuing presence.
 17. Lawrence Buell’s absorbing study *The Dream of the Great American Novel* (Harvard 2014) traces the nationalist roots of the “GAN,” as he calls it. Using Ralph Ellison’s statement “The novel has always been bound up with the idea of nationhood” as an epigraph for the introduction, Buell asserts, “the rise of the novel in the early modern West was roughly concurrent and often interlocked with the rise of nationalism” (10). After laying out the GAN’s uniquely American characteristics, Buell finally sidesteps the question of whether “there’s enough cultural glue conjoining the disparate parts of the US nation-state to make for nationally coherent fictional traditions” and soldiers on in his study of 16 proof-texts, eleven by white men (*Moby Dick*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *quelle surprise!*) and two by Americans of color.
 18. In a recent re-reading of Joanna Russ’s early feminist *How to Suppress Women’s Writing* (1983), I was delighted to rediscover in her “Epilogue” an audacious critique of *Moby Dick* as “full of discontinuities, jerks, sudden wrenches, gear-changes” (125). In her “Aesthetics” chapter, a critique similar to Kolodny’s of the idea of “objectivity and absolute standards” is followed by a few of my favorite questions: “This is a good novel. Good for what? Good for whom?” (118). She concludes that there ought not to be a “single center of value and hence no absolute standards.” Instead, we should recognize a multitude of styles and “many kinds of English” (120). And that playful pluralism, that multiplicity, characterized the feminist literary criticism that followed.
 19. I frequently use Tomkins’s “Masterpiece Theater: The Politics of Hawthorne’s Literary Reputation,” an excerpt from *Sensational*

Designs, in my introduction to the English major class. Included in David Richter's *Falling Into Theory*, this essay has become the foundation of arguments for the study of women's writing of the nineteenth century. I heard it cited more than once at the 2012 meetings of the Society for the Study of American Women Writers, for example. Tompkins points out that Hawthorne was appreciated in his time for being similar to the very popular women writers, Susan Warner and Harriet Beecher Stowe, who dominated the literary scene midcentury and were considered excellent writers. Later dismissed as sentimental and moralistic, these writers and others like them were the subject of Ann Douglas's condemnation in *The Feminization of American Culture* and of Lauren Berlant's probing exploration in *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*. They have been generally dismissed as sentimental and just plain bad. My integration of Berlant's negotiation of the value of the work of such women writers reappears in chapter 5.

20. I believe that feminist critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar still have the authoritative word on the "battle of the sexes" in the development of our modern literary studies in their three-volume *No Man's Land*, with its focus on modernism.
21. Among all of the studies and anthologies of the twentieth-century novel, I find Dorothy J. Hale's *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory, 1900–2000*, which I cite here, exceptional. She gathers excerpts from the key theorists of the genre, organizes them thoughtfully into schools and trends, and then provides an astute introduction based on her years of teaching novel theory at Berkeley.
22. Another of my intellectual forbearers is Jane Tompkins, whom I met at the School of Criticism and Theory at Dartmouth in 1989 but had already been reading for several years before that. (Remember how teenage girls responded to the Beatles in that footage from the sixties? Subdue that just a little bit—I was 30 by then—and that's what I felt like when I met Jane Tompkins.) Her book *Sensational Designs* used Susan Warner's *Wide, Wide World* as an exemplar for an argument about the important cultural work novels did for nineteenth-century America. I didn't love Warner's book, but I did love, and was thereafter influenced by, Tompkins's argument. As you will see in the chapters that

- follow, I believe that one way we can judge the value of novels is by the cultural work they perform. But my work has also been concerned with linking cultural value with aesthetic evaluation.
23. Baym also concludes that reviewers and critics were complicit in a redefinition of the novel's value. She asserts, "the novel was recognized to be a woman's form—crucially to involve women readers, authors and characters—yet reviewers continually generalized about novels in ways that made women a special case." Reviewers also praised and preferred "serious" novels until seriousness became "the justification for our enterprises of academic literary criticism and literary pedagogy and is the source of their tension with the general public. . . . novels designed to give pleasure to the smallest number of people are touted as the present age's masterpieces" (24–25).
 24. Again, see Lawrence Buell's serious study of this concept, *The Dream of the Great American Novel*.
 25. For a more careful analysis of Franzen's history on Oprah's Book Club I refer you (unashamedly) to my own *Reading Oprah: How Oprah's Book Club Changed the Way America Reads* (SUNY 2004). This was, however, one of the episodes of Oprah's Book Club that drew the most attention from the Academy. Jim Collins addresses it in *Bring on the Books for Everybody* (Duke 2010), as does Evan Brier in the epilogue of *A Novel Marketplace: Mass Culture, the Book Trade, and Postwar American Fiction* (University of Pennsylvania 2010), and Kathleen Rooney in the updated version of her 2005 *Reading with Oprah* (University of Arkansas 2008). Many scholarly articles examine it as well, including Sarah Robbins's "Making Corrections to Oprah's Book Club: Reclaiming Literary Power for Gendered Literacy Management" in *The Oprah Phenomenon* (Jennifer Harris and Elwood Watson, eds. University Press of Kentucky, 2007), Chris Ingraham's discussion in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, "Talking (About) the Elite and Mass: Vernacular Rhetoric and Discursive Status" (2013; 46.1: 1–21), and William Pritchard's commentary in *Commonweal* ("A world of false choices," *Commonweal* 137.18 (2010): 38+). When the popular novel meets "the high art literary tradition," as it did so dramatically in this incident, critics paid attention. For the same reason, Oprah's "Summer of Faulkner" drew similar, though more muted, attention, as I explore in chapter 4.

26. In a 1996 essay for *Harper's* magazine, "Perchance to Dream: In the Age of Images, a Reason to Write Novels," Franzen laid out his understanding of and ambitions for the novel in the United States.
27. Re: looks like a novelist—Last summer, when my (bicycling) friends and I met at our local Birchwood Café, where, during the Tour de France, bikers and foodies comingle, we observed a guy in a tweed coat (with—I promise I'm not exaggerating—elbow patches), which seemed unusual for summer wear in Minneapolis. He also had dark hair that looked like he'd been running his hands through it in a frenzy of inspiration. We all stopped to look. "I think I know that guy," one woman said. "I think he's a famous writer." But none of us had any idea who he was.

It is also significant that in Michael Schmidt's huge compendium of *The Novel: A Biography* (Harvard 2014), divided thematically, the section on "Portraits and Caricatures of the Artist" features only novelists in this (duck-like) tradition—Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, Anthony Burgess, Donald Barthelme. It also begins, delightfully, with an anecdote about Gertrude Stein's rejection of Joyce as the prototypical modernist.

28. Kant's aesthetic theory, developed in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), significantly influenced (and was influenced by) modernist thinking about art. Here I call on his definitions of taste: "Taste is the faculty of judging an object or a method of representing it by an *entirely disinterested* satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called *beautiful*" (286). And genius: "For *judging* of beautiful objects as such, taste is requisite; but for beautiful art, i.e. for the *production* of such objects, *genius* is requisite" (315). Genius, he writes, is an innate and natural ability "that gives the rule to art" (314). Kant's arguments develop in that lovely, logical philosophical tradition, carefully lead from one "moment" to the next like a perfect geometry proof, never resting on an unfounded assertion. Examining how the aesthetic experience differs from other intellectual, emotional, or spiritual responses, his argument explores the ways the human response to beauty is unique. But in order to sort out the idea of the aesthetic, he uses his own particularity (what we might now call invisible privilege) and defines it as disinterested and universal (I will return to this idea in my analysis

of *Lolita* in chapter 3). Good art, for Kant, is not political, not interested, that is, it reflects his own value system, what we sometimes call “the water we swim in,” meaning that it is so present to us that we become unaware of it. Formalist projects (disinterested, beautiful) are then privileged, and remain privileged, for the most part, throughout most of mainstream modernism and contemporary criticism. White women writers and writers of color are almost never perceived as disinterested because their gender or race or class is inevitably seen as political.

A broader discussion of gendered and multicultural challenges to Kant is found in *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age* (Oxford 2002), edited by Emory Elliott, Louis Freitas Caton, and Jeffrey Rhyne. Rita Felski’s *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Harvard 1989) and Hilde Hein and Carolyn Korsmeyer’s collection *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective* (Indiana 1993), also inform my analysis of Kant here and in my discussion of *Lolita* in chapter 3. I am also indebted to Terry Eagleton’s examination of Kantian aesthetics in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990). Eagleton argues that the aesthetic is located not in the object, which is simply “an occasion for the pleasurable harmonization of our faculties” (96). He asserts, instead, that “judgments of taste appear to be descriptions of the world but are in fact concealed emotive utterances, performatives masquerading as constatives” (93), an idea that matches my understanding of Kant, though Eagleton’s is located in Marxism where mine stands on feminism.

29. Kant also distinguishes between the beautiful, or truly artistic, and the pleasant. In judging the pleasant, there is no accounting for taste—“*everyone has his own taste*”; but in judging the beautiful “we cannot say that each man has his own particular taste. For this would be as much as to say that there is no taste whatever, [that is], no aesthetic judgment which can make a rightful claim upon everyone’s assent” (287). When we call something beautiful, he argues, we expect universal assent. Beauty is “the property of things” not the reflection of individual preference. “Hence he says ‘the *thing* is beautiful’; and he does not count on the agreement of others . . . but he *demand*s it of them” (287). This idea is also further developed in chapter 2.

30. In a course on aesthetics I took in graduate school, I responded to Edouard Manet's "Déjeuner sur l'herbe" by noting the naked women and fully clothed men, when I should have been noting the color, balance and light, and the references to previous paintings (classical nudes via Ingres). I felt the professor actually pitying me for the feminism that kept me from appreciating the beauty of this painting. For many observers, to be disinterested requires us to ignore powerful cultural forces that "interest" us. A purely aesthetic response in this tradition, then, requires power and privilege—or self-erasure.
31. In Hale's compendium of novel theory, nearly the entire second half considers the novel as social discourse, including excerpts from Frederic Jameson, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Edward W. Said.
32. Rhetorical approaches to literature are some of the oldest we have, more familiar to critics of earlier eras than our Kantian modernist aesthetic would be. I found fertile ground for my understanding of the novel in the many (Aristotelian) works of Wayne Booth which have been punctuation marks in my education, from my first encounter with *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* in a seminar with Greg Clark and Grant Boswell in 1986. Booth's insistence on examining the novel primarily as rhetorical rather than aesthetic opens the reader-author-text dynamic in productive ways. I also practice a more contemporary form of the rhetorical or reader-response approach in what we now call reception theory—which is concerned with the variety of exchanges among reader and text. I still revisit Booth's *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* as an old friend every few years.
33. To be fair to the classical tradition, affect always concerned the Greek and Roman thinkers. How an audience reacted to a story was generally more important than the story itself.
34. In the "Investigations" section and in the conclusion I revisit the idea of relatability, but suffice it to say, for now, that relatable characters don't have to be lovable or even similar to their readers. That's why readers talk about relatability rather than the less nuanced "identification."
35. Again, I would reference the generally accepted truth of the book industry that mostly women read mostly novels. Estimates I have

seen fall between 65 and 90 percent of novels bought (and presumably read) by women, though no one has accurately tracked book consumption by gender and genre yet, as far as I can discover. Considering women's interests as special interests in literature is, thus, logically ridiculous, as well as fiscally irresponsible. For further discussion, see chapter 5 in *Investigations*. Baym's contention bears repeating as well: "novels designed to give pleasure to the smallest number of people are touted as the present age's masterpieces" (24–25).

36. Just in case you have been led to believe that the traditional romance plot is dead or only to be found in mass-market paperback racks, note that it's the foundation for the success of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which is really just a Meg Ryan movie plot (awkward girl, confident man, misunderstandings ensue; love triumphs) with a few sadomasochistic shadows; it is also the underlying structure, with a few adjustments, of Chimande Ngozi Aidiche's 2013 National Book Award-winning *Americanah*. And finally, it at least partially explains the cult of Jane Austen, as I discuss in chapter 5.
37. Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin's conception of heteroglossia, anchored in the variety of voices available in the discourses of a novel, underlines this multiplicity that I find so engaging in novels. In fact, for him, it characterizes the novel, as he explains in *The Dialogic Imagination*.
38. The Pittsburgher in me still wants to insist that the standards need "reworked" rather than "reworking," and I haven't lived there since 1984. Behold, the power of language.

2 BRING MONEY

1. I want to affirm that these are actual (and repeated) recommendations from enthusiastic (ardent, avid) readers at book discussions and lectures.
2. The maxim, "There's no accounting for taste" (from the Latin *No de gustibus non est disputandum*) has two possible meanings relevant to my discussion here. The first is that taste is so subjective that preferences will always be wildly different and idiosyncratic, and, thus, can't be explained or examined. I encounter this version often in introductory literature classes. Also represented, with a shrug of the shoulders, as "to each her own." The second

is that disputes involving taste can't be resolved objectively, nor can they be predicted. The "why bother trying" is implied. I will challenge both of these perspectives throughout this book. (The "her own" and the "trying" are the Big Questions for me and the subject of my incessant inquiry.)

3. Since the 2008 recession, the very real *lack* of class mobility in the United States has gotten a lot of press. Joseph Stiglitz, for example, reported in the *New York Times* (February 17, 2013) that, "According to research from the Brookings Institution, only 58 percent of Americans born into the bottom fifth of income earners move out of that category, and just 6 percent born into the bottom fifth move into the top. Economic mobility in the United States is lower than in most of Europe and lower than in all of Scandinavia." This, to me, is shocking, going to the roots of American mythmaking, challenging our foundational beliefs (and my own most cherished values).
4. I feel compelled to add a note here about being the intellectual product of these founding documents. A graduate of "The Bicentennial Class of '76," I won my first writing award for a newspaper column entitled "Tom Paine, PA Patriot." So I have to confess how much I adore those founding documents for being more than what they appeared, much more even than what they aimed to be. I admire them for reaching beyond the moment and inspiring a democratic progression that the founders (except maybe John Adams) could never have predicted and probably wouldn't have wanted. These documents (the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Federalist Papers, the letters of John and Abigail Adams) inspired me to be an Americanist. They continue to encourage my often hard to justify optimism, though, as I was beginning this project, we shared a moment of national optimism after electing our first African-American president (whose campaign posters featured "hope"). That was also, however, in the middle of our Great Recession, when many Americans lost their homes and their jobs.

I would also note that I generally use "America" and "US" interchangeably here, though I wish we had a better word, especially in the adjectival form, that didn't require me to claim two whole continents when I aim only for the small part of North American that is the United States. The French, I understand, are

experimenting with a version of “USian” (*états-unien*) that would be great, if it weren’t so awkward.

5. Joan Shelley Rubin’s middlebrow challenge to Levine’s highbrow/lowbrow categories, her expansion and examination of that genial middle in *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*, is foundational to my understanding of how these “brows” operate in US culture.
6. This division between morality and consumerism, between spirit and capital, was also the foundation of Brooks’s argument. He blamed the Puritans for encouraging America’s duality, our persistent split affinities.
7. The Culture Wars rhetoric has never gone away, though it is more often heard today in politics than in the Academy. For an accounting of those early academic battles, see Cary Nelson and Michael Bérubé’s *Higher Education Under Fire: Politics, Economics, and the Crisis of the Humanities* (Routledge 1995).

I should also note that “The best which has been thought and said in the world,” though often repeated without attribution, is Matthew Arnold’s from his 1869 treatise *Culture and Anarchy* (6). Though its foundations and methods were certainly elitist, it was a call for opening up the best of culture to all Victorians, “to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light.”

8. While “high culture condemns popular culture as vulgar and pathological,” Gans explains, “popular culture attacks high culture for being overly intellectual, snobbish, and effeminate, inventing pejorative terms like ‘highbrow’ and ‘egghead’ for this purpose” (55). When the protectors of high culture play at this game, the accusation of anti-intellectualism is the trump card. Play it, and watch the panic ensue. Every couple of years there is a new version of the hell-in-a-hand-basket tirade about American anti-intellectualism published by another leading intellectual. Susan Jacoby’s *Age of American Unreason* updates a line of similar laments including, perhaps most famously, Richard Hofstadter’s 1963 treatise, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life*.
9. Oprah actually lost money on the Book Club shows, as I noted in *Reading Oprah* (77).
10. The next chapter of this story might have Fox Books going under because of the surprising success of e-books—an ironic twist, given that their love began with the defunct AOL. I imagine a *You’ve Got Mail* 20 years later where he is unemployed (but, like

- most disgraced bank executives and business moguls, still really rich) and she is a popular, albeit whiny, children's book blogger.
11. As Levine points out, highbrow literature found a well-appointed home in twentieth-century America, in college and university buildings and public libraries, especially Carnegie libraries, which, as I have observed on many a road trip, are often the most impressive buildings in small US towns. The other books got supermarket racks, amazon.com, and chain bookstores.
 12. Since I began writing this book, "Middlebrow Studies" as a scholarly field in the United States has grown steadily—well beyond the foundational writers I cite here—Brooks, Greenberg, and MacDonald—and the texts I cut my academic teeth on—Jan Radway's *A Feeling for Books*, Cathy N. Davidson's *Revolution and the Word*, Joan Shelley Rubin's *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*, Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart's *Gender and Reading*, and Jane Tompkins' *Sensational Designs*. These earlier works posed questions that prepared the way for many more studies where what people read for pleasure, entertainment, education, and uplift became the subject of serious scholarly attention in the burgeoning fields of reception theory and the middlebrow in Anglo-American cultures (see, for example, Elizabeth Long's *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life*, Elizabeth McHenry's *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*, Nicola Humble's *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1820s to 1950s*, Faye Hammill's *Women, Celebrity, and Literary Culture Between the Wars*, Jaime Harker's *America the Middlebrow*, Amy L. Blair's *Reading Up*, Lisa Botshon and Meridith Goldsmith's *Middlebrow Moderns: Popular American Women Writers of the 1920s*, Nancy Glazener's *Reading for Realism*, Erica Brown and Mary Grover's *Middlebrow Literary Cultures: The Battle of the Brows 1920 to 1960*, and Tom Perrin's *Remake it New: US Middlebrow Fiction and Modernism in the Early Cold War*). These scholars and others (Yung-Hsing Wu, Erin Smith, Julie R. Enszer, James Machor, Philip Goldstein) examine diverse middlebrow texts and reading practices with depth and insight; I owe much of my understanding of this field to the vital intellectual community I have found among them. The ongoing conversation, through their writing and, with

- some, at conferences, has challenged and improved my thinking over the past five years (but, of course, not eliminated shortcomings I likely hold onto despite their influence). Consider this an academic shout-out to our Band of Merry Middlebrows.
13. This assertion goes to the nature of hegemony, whether the classic Marxist conception via Antonio Gramsci allows for the permeability and challenges (short of revolution) of a more postmodern view advanced by Michel Foucault, as well as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Books have been written. Philosophers and social scientists debate. Literary theorists contribute what we can.
 14. Bestseller lists also represent buyers not readers, numbers of books sold rather than read. Some analysts suggest that book lovers on a budget may pass their copies around more, resulting in more readers per book. This became a convincing argument for me here in the Twin Cities when the noticeable proliferation of front yard Little Free Library book exchanges coincided with the economic recession.
 15. Critics who write about bestsellers often bemoan how unpredictable these categories are: who can know why this or that book shows up on the list? This is just not the case. Korda, for example, notes: “The only thing you can say for sure is that, yes, the ability to tell a story matters a lot, in fiction and in nonfiction, and having something new and interesting to say about familiar subjects is maybe at the heart of it all” (xxvi). That’s a start. But I contend that the factors that predict success can be assessed and evaluated more carefully and respectfully than this. When professionals figure out how to converse with readers about the qualities that make books good, we will more easily recognize potentially successful books.
 16. These statistics are gathered from reports in the *Library and Book Trade Almanac 2013* (formerly the *Bowker Annual*) and from regular reporting of those numbers in the *New York Times*.
 17. For a fuller discussion of Kant, see chapters 1 and 3.
 18. While there is condemnation to be leveled about the snobbery in the way standards of literary merit have been deployed, there really was something distinctively different about *Northanger Abbey*, something more serious and sharp that I recognized immediately and knew I had never seen the like of in a romance novel. It had to do with some of the qualities that traditional literary analysis

- trains us to recognize—complexity, depth, restraint, structure, and craft. More on this, also, in the “Investigations” section.
19. In his discussion of *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, John Guillory uses the phrase “the inevitability of the social practice of judgment” (xiv) as a way into his argument that access to cultural capital guides our literate choices in the United States. I have held onto this phrase as a way of remembering that all readers exercise forms of judgment that make sense in their cultural contexts.
 20. The ever-increasing number of unvaccinated children of privileged, educated parents in the US speaks to the danger of this distrust.
 21. Adam Savage and Jaime Hyneman are special effects experts and science geeks who have hosted *Mythbusters* for the Discovery Channel since 2003.
 22. The language of this sentence references (and is an homage to) Martha Gellhorn, one of the most famous war correspondents of the twentieth century and a fierce advocate for peace. In her introduction to *The Face of War* (first published in 1959), she writes, “I will not be herded any farther along this imbecile road to nothingness without raising my voice in protest. My NO will be as effective as one cricket chirp. My NO is this book” (4).

3 READING *LOLITA* AT ST. KATE’S

1. Nafisi’s collusion with neo-conservatism and Western interests (specifically the CIA and Paul Wolfowitz) was widely discussed in the press (from 2003–2007), most notably for academics in a cover story in *Chronicle of Higher Education* (October 13, 2006) and in the *Boston Globe* (October 29, 2006). Both focused on an article published in the English-language paper Al-Ahram out of Cairo, an attack on Nafisi’s work by Hamid Dabashi, Professor of Iranian studies at Columbia University. Dabashi argued that *Reading Lolita in Tehran* was “partially responsible for cultivating the US (and by extension the global) public opinion against Iran.” (http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2006/10/29/book_clubbed Retrieved July 28, 2014.) At our book discussion at St. Kate’s, several students (most

notably Jordan Arndt, a 2011 graduate, outstanding Honors student, international studies major, and later a Fulbright Scholar) arrived with pages of proof of Nafisi's hidden agenda and insisted that book group consider *Reading Lolita* with that context (See what I mean about women and justice?).

2. I want to believe that these critics mean it's a love story about the novel, that the author loves art and loves novels. Yet, this nuance never suggests itself on the back cover.
3. Nabokov famously stated, "I am probably responsible for the odd fact that people don't seem to name their daughters Lolita any more. I have heard of young female poodles being given that name since 1956, but of no human beings." (Jane Howard, "The master of versatility: Vladimir Nabokov: Lolita, languages, lepidoptery", *Life*, November 20, 1964, 61-.
4. Quoted by Norman Page, editor of Routledge's *Vladimir Nabokov: The Critical Heritage*, Psychology P, 1997 (93-94). Trilling engaged repeatedly with this novel, particularly when it first came out in 1958. He interviewed Nabokov on television, on the program "Close Up" for the CBC (available on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ldpj_5JNFoA) and wrote an enthusiastic review in *Encounter*, both in October 1958.
5. Calling on the common knowledge that *World Book Encyclopedia* used to represent, I will cite Wikipedia's claim that the novel gained "classic status" almost immediately after its publication in the United States in 1958. Again, the Modern Library's 1998 list of the 100 Best Novels in the English language (the one that celebrates *Ulysses* as number one) places *Lolita* at number four—as does the *Newsweek* list I began this study with.
6. Howard (See f3).
7. Note to feminist readers: if you have been resisting reading *Lolita*, I hereby give you leave to accept this discussion as permission to put it off a bit longer and read more books on your list of women writers. You're welcome.
8. A formalist approach is also political, of course, as feminist and Marxist critics have argued for decades; it is generally invested in conservative readings that identify and preserve high culture and uphold structures as they are. To see a formalist reading as apolitical is to miss the underlying (invisible) privilege.

4 OPRAH'S BOOK CLUB AND THE
SUMMER OF FAULKNER

1. An earlier version of this essay, "Faulkner Novels of Our OWN: Oprah's Middlebrow Book Club Meets the Classics" appears in *Mississippi Quarterly* 66.1 (a special issue on Oprah's Summer of Faulkner).
2. Although Oprah is one of those cultural icons known by a single name, my practice is to use "Oprah" to refer to her television persona, "Winfrey" when referencing the thinking, choosing person, and "Oprah!" for the TV show.
3. For further discussion of "*Franzenfreude*" see chapter 1 in this volume and Chapter 4 of *Reading Oprah*.
4. I still can't get over the sheer vastness of the numbers behind Oprah's Book Club success. Nothing we know in the book industry compares with it. Truly millions of people watched the shows, and presumably many of the millions who bought the books also read them. I discuss the extent of this success, with actual numbers, in the context of the Franzen critique and of the publishing industry, in the beginning of Chapter 4 of *Reading Oprah*.

But here let me insert an anecdote. I interviewed Cheryl Strayed in St. Paul a few months after *Wild* was chosen for Oprah's Book Club 2.0. As we talked across a table in a local café, I asked her how that choice had affected her book sales. She asked me to pass her my notebook and said, "Here, I'll show you." She turned the notebook sideways and started at the bottom of the page. The book, she said, did well as soon as it was released. It made it the *New York Times* Bestseller List for nonfiction, and was selling consistently. The pencil mark started flat across the bottom of the page. "I would have been overjoyed to stay there. I would have been as successful as I'd dreamed of being." Pause. "Then Oprah picked it." The pencil line leapt to the top of the page and continued across. "May, June, July, August, it just continued. Phenomenally more successful than I ever could have imagined." No one else can do that, she told me. No one but Oprah.

This huge influence, I should remind you, was when Oprah's Book Club was no longer on network TV, when her viewership on OWN was minuscule by comparison.

5. Massive Open Online Courses. Though there were precursors as soon as there was an Internet, most sources place the first

MOOC in 2007. Online, 2012 was often dubbed “The Year of the MOOC.”

6. Middlebrow, again, is linked to middle-class, as I outlined in chapter 2, but it also has distinct characteristics, delineated meticulously by the scholars of the middlebrow I cited earlier (2.f12). In the context of the methods and aims of Oprah’s Book Club, the following often-cited qualities are relevant: aspirational, referencing the American bootstraps philosophy and the unrelenting desire of those in the middle for self-improvement (thus, also educative or information-filled); consumerist, again that sound of clinking coins that clashes with aesthetic sensibilities; sentimental, including unashamed appeals to emotion and an implication of less rigorous habits of mind; and, of course, feminine (generally in a bad way).
7. For a more in-depth discussion of the Book Club’s history, see *Reading Oprah*, Chapter 1, parts of which I have referenced here.
8. Franzen, shortly after he was chosen to appear on Oprah’s Book Club, in an interview posted on powells.com (October 10, 2006).
9. It wasn’t just Franzen. The US has a history of its high culture being intolerant of popular culture, artists disdainful of audiences, as I outlined earlier, but Herbert has a fine, concise explanation for this, one that works to describe what happened on *Oprah!* He proposes that “Higher culture is creator-oriented and its aesthetics and its principles of criticism are based on this orientation,” thus making the reader’s values “almost irrelevant” and protecting creators from even the idea of an audience. On the other hand, he argues, “The popular arts [viz. *Oprah!*] are, on the whole, *user-oriented* and exist to satisfy audience values and wishes.” That’s why, in his estimation, “high culture needs to attack popular culture” and particularly to condemn its brazen borrowings from high culture—“because borrowing transforms that content into a user-oriented form.” So high culture draws clear aesthetic lines, calling the popular “low quality,” its creators “hacks,” and its audience “culturally oppressed people without aesthetic standards.” He concludes:

If high culture is to maintain its creator orientation, it must be able to show that only it is guided by aesthetic

standards, and that only its creators and audiences are complete human beings, and that for these reasons it has a right to maintain its cultural status and power. The irony is that to defend its creator orientation it requires status, and to claim such status it must compare itself to something lower. This is one reason why the mass culture critique continues to exist. (76)

10. The irony of this shift toward pleasing the critics is that the project could never be nearly as commercially successful as pleasing the women readers. I note in *Reading Oprah* that Franzen's publishers, expecting success with *The Corrections*—it was already being reviewed as “the great American novel”—ran 90,000 copies of the novel, “a generous estimate for a literary novel and almost twice the total sales of Franzen's first two novels combined. And how many more did they have to run when Oprah selected it for her Book Club later that month? More than 600,000, *seven times* as many as the initial release” (76). It brings to mind Nina Baym's observation about how the dominant position of the popular novel in the nineteenth century “represented less a change of taste in an existing audience than a change in the makeup of the audience for the written word” (29).
11. The website lists 75 total selections for Oprah's Book Club, but I count all three children's picture books by Bill Cosby as one selection; Oprah's Book Club counts each of them individually.
12. In Janice Peck's important 2008 study, *The Age of Oprah: Cultural Icon for the Neoliberal Era*, she notes that Oprah's audience was 77 percent female and 81 percent white.
13. The topic of middlebrow women's book clubs is endlessly fascinating to me. They came into being in the nineteenth century when access to education was less open to women, and some of them laid out serious plans of study, even as the ladies in the group put on their white gloves, gossiped, and lunched. And they never stopped—throughout the twentieth century and into the consciousness-raising groups and political collectives of the women's liberation movement on to Oprah's Book Club groups. Their work is always community building, sometimes friendship driven, usually educative, now and then engaged with social justice or compassionate service. And these groups are ubiquitous. I'll bet every one of you reading this has a mother, grandmother,

aunt, or sister in a book club. Some excellent scholarly work has been done on these groups and their influence on American culture, including most notably Elizabeth Long's *Book Clubs: Women and the Uses of Reading in Everyday Life* (Chicago 2003) and Elizabeth McHenry's *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Duke 2002). Lauren Berlant's *The Female Complaint* is also helpful in analyzing the work that women's texts in the sentimental tradition performed for the women who loved them. While appearing and functioning as conventional, these texts, she argues, were a site of negotiation for the women who read them. And loving these forms, women worked them "so that individuals and populations [could] breathe and thrive in them" (3), as I quote her in the epigraph to this section. Again, like Radway, Berlant respectfully interrogates the marginalized traditions that are her subject and finds in them practices that (re)define American culture.

14. I discuss Morrison's visits to *Oprah!* more extensively in *Reading Oprah*, Chapter 2, and *The Bluest Eye* segment in particular in Chapter 3, "The Elegant Balance."
15. Oprah did pack up the talk show and take it to a classroom at Princeton for the Book Club segment on *Paradise*, which she kept calling a "class." While the group of gathered readers (class-sized, not book-club sized, including Oprah pal Gayle King) pushed Professor Morrison for final answers, she kept deflecting, insisting that, "I didn't want to write an essay. I wanted you to participate in the journey." As I write in *Reading Oprah*:

And in that spirit, she never offers an explication of the novel, a final reading that would allow the twenty-two Book Club participants or the millions in the TV audience to say, "I get it. Now let's put the book away." Instead, she insists that she "wouldn't want to end up having written a book in which there was a formula and a perfect conclusion and that was the meaning and the only meaning. There should be several. If it's worth writing, it's worth going back to later." She also concedes that she rarely teaches her own work because she doesn't want "to impose on students" who want a "fundamental and final reading—as though I had it." (48)

- In short, there were no lectures, no definitive answers in the *Paradise* class. This might have turned out quite differently with another writer or literature professor.
16. For publishing statistics I rely on the *Publishers Weekly's* year-end wrap-ups, printed in the library reference resource, *Library and Book Trade Almanac 2013* (formerly the *Bowker Annual*).
 17. There are, of course, many prominent Americans who have recommended books, the latest being Comedy Central's Stephen Colbert (now on CBS), who really can deliver "the Colbert bump" to a novel, as he demonstrated for Hachette (not Amazon) authors Edan Lepucki (*California*) and Stephan Eirick Clark (*Sweetness #9*) in the summer of 2014. Colbert and Jon Stewart are notable for being two talk show hosts who, like Oprah, took books and their ideas seriously, often devoting nearly half their time to interviews with authors—even though both appeared on cable's Comedy Central rather than on "serious" network TV. Though I hope for the best, there is little chance that Colbert can take his book-centered approach to the *Late Show*, where the monologue-celebrity chat-musical guest format is steeped in tradition. See Alter.
 18. From her book *Reading Up: Middle-class Readers and the Culture of Success in the Early Twentieth-Century United States* (Temple 2012).

5 LOST IN A CHICK LIT *AUSTENLAND*

1. If you haven't yet encountered the *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* (LBD) and you are any kind of Jane Austen fan, run, don't walk, to the nearest computer and begin watching this 100-part YouTube series of "vlogs": www.pemberlydigital.com. Hank Green and Bernie Su's insightful adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* in real time ran from April 2012 through March 2013, and was the hands-down favorite of Parrin's and my text selections. It was also the first YouTube series to win a Primetime Emmy—for outstanding creative achievement in interactive media. Its refiguring of Lydia and her relationship with Elizabeth is especially insightful; Lydia has her own spinoff vlogs.
2. Exercising my aesthetic discernment, I would teach Jo Baker's *Longbourn* (2013) or P. D. James's *Death Comes to Pemberly*

- (2011), if I had to do it again, rather than the zombies, *Lost in Austen* (the book), or *Austenland*—though the zombies were a great inroad to discussions of deconstruction.
3. Ferris and Young introduce the delightful phrase “urtext of chick lit,” but for *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. The endurance and insistence of this love plot is examined engagingly in Lauren Berlant’s *The Female Complaint*, where she argues that a women’s culture in the United States survives in part because of this story, one that helps to construct an “intimate public” space, of “gestures, episodes, and other forms of fantasy improvisation,” where femininity is refigured and reasserted in “a vast market in such moments of felt simplicity” (7). See particularly Chapter 5, examining *Now, Voyager*.
 4. Portions of this chapter are extracted, reworked, or quoted directly from a study I did of chick lit for my colleague Lilly Goren’s collection *You’ve Come a Long Way Baby* (Kentucky 2009) (see f1, chapter 1).
 5. Referencing Jane Tompkins’s early work in feminist literary criticism, particularly *Sensational Designs*—see f21, chapter 1.
 6. *Sex and the City* fans wouldn’t settle for that in the TV series or the films, where Big and Carrie had to end up together. And a wedding had to happen, not matter how painfully prolonged the prelude.
 7. I first accessed this *Wikipedia* explanation in 2008 as a way of understanding how our culture generally defined chick lit. I accessed it again on September 22, 2014. Six years later, the quote now reads: “Publishers continue to push the subgenre because sales continue to be high.” Like it’s a surprise or something. Women buy novels directed at them. Alert the media.
 8. In addition to the argument of chapter 2, my thinking about the contrast between commercially successful and critically respected novels first showed up in *Reading Oprah* (SUNY 2004) and in the introduction to *The Oprah Affect: Critical Essays on Oprah’s Book Club* (SUNY 2008), which I co-wrote with Jaime Harker. It continues with a study of consciousness-raising novels and feminist print culture (*This Book is An Action*, UI Press 2015), also co-edited with Jaime. My analysis owes much to Jaime’s thought-provoking questions and her depth of understanding about the tradition of the middlebrow novel in the United

States. But she shouldn't be blamed for the way I represent any of that here.

9. Weiner's campaign for more recognition of women writers has stirred controversy for several years now; similar observations led to the establishment of VIDA: Women in Literary Arts and their influential annual counts of women writers reviewed and published, beginning in 2010 (www.vidaweb.org). See chapter 1.
10. Again, I began developing this list of qualities in an earlier essay, "Communion with Books: The Double Life of Literature at the College of St. Catherine" for the college's centennial book project, *Liberating Sanctuary: Women's Education and Community at the College of St. Catherine*, a collection of essays from feminist perspectives about the history of our Catholic liberal arts college for women in St. Paul, Minnesota. I owe the editors (who are also my writing group colleagues), Joanne Cavallaro, Jane Carroll, and Sharon Doherty, a debt of thanks for the great conversations and thoughtful critiques that led me on the path to this book.
11. There is a longer version of this analysis of how Oprah's Book Club confronts high cultural value throughout *Reading Oprah*.
12. More on this combination of the popular and aesthetic in the classroom in chapter 9: Writing Wizardry.
13. For a more thorough discussion of James Frey's encounter with Oprah's Book Club, see Jaime Harker's "Oprah, James Frey and the Problem of the Literary" in *The Oprah Affect*.

6 WHAT I LEARNED FROM *THE (BOOK) GROUP*

1. They were 1, 2, and 3 in summer 2012, and have, as of September 21, 2014, clocked 124 weeks on the *New York Times* Bestseller List. Note: they climbed up the list again in early 2015 after the release of the first of an impending series of *Fifty Shades* films.
2. They did ride to success on the coattails of the popular novels of the *Twilight* series, beginning, as they did, as *Twilight* fan fiction. This may also explain why the *Fifty Shades* characters are underdeveloped: James began her project with already existing characters.
3. Elizabeth Day in her essay in *The Guardian*, November 28, 2009.

4. See Anna Creadick's fascinating study of the pursuit of "normal" in postwar American life—*Perfectly Average* (University of Massachusetts 2010).
5. See chapter 1 and Nina Baym's description of how novels affected early readers, p. 34.
6. The VIDA count from 2010 at vidaweb.org.
7. As feminist critics (Baym, Davidson, Tompkins, Gilbert and Gubar, Armstrong) have argued for years, including recently (and quite forcefully) my colleague Jaime Harker in *America the Middlebrow*.
8. Again, referencing Jane Tompkins's idea of "cultural work" and the respectful studies of everyday readers by Cathy N. Davidson and Jan Radway (see f19, chapter 1).
9. This quote comes from the introduction to *This Book is an Action: Feminist Print Culture and Activist Aesthetics*, edited by Jaime Harker and me (UI 2015).
10. Kathryn Thoms Flannery writes powerfully about the centrality of literacy and its systems and structures to the feminist movement in *Feminist Literacies, 1968–1975* (UI 2005). In it, she revisits Adrienne Rich's idea of a "university-without-walls" where women would have unfettered access to education. "It could be said," Rich adds, "that [such a] university exists already in America, in the shape of women reading and writing with a new purposefulness, and [in] the growth of feminist bookstores, presses, bibliographic services, women's centers, medical clinics, libraries, art galleries, and workshops, all with a truly educational mission." Quoted in Flannery (6) from Rich's "Toward a Woman-Centered University," 1975.
11. You may also recall that a key aim of Friedan's work was to name "the problem that has no name."
12. Flannery argues from Jameson's "Reification and Media in Mass Culture" (1979) that some texts have "utopian potential" to intervene in contemporary culture if seized by individuals and marginalized groups. But "he also suggests that this potential is possible only to the extent 'to which these forms . . . have not yet been fully penetrated by the market and the commodity system'" (32). See hegemony in f13, chapter 2.
13. Hogeland, too, sets aside aesthetic questions, focusing instead on the cultural work these novels perform: "This study does not

attend to questions of literary quality; whether novels like *Fear of Flying* or *The Women's Room* are 'good' novels is far less interesting to me than the ways these novels shaped and were shaped by feminist ideas and discourses" (x).

7 STORYTELLING WITH JODI PICOULT

1. Debuting at number one means that readers have already bought the book on the strength of Picoult's name and reputation, without respect to the qualities of the novel itself.
2. Goodreads is a social networking site focused on books, where users can catalogue the books they have read, review the ones they have finished, and create groups for book suggestions and discussion. Created in 2006, it was bought by Amazon in 2013. Just before that purchase, Goodreads announced that it had 20 million members; its membership had doubled in the previous 11 months. Today, that number was up to 30 million (goodreads.com/accessed September 27, 2014). Its stated mission is "to help people find and share books they love." Its founder, Otis Chandler, writing in the "About Us" section of the website, introduces his idea of book recommendation: "One afternoon while I was scanning a friend's bookshelf for ideas, it struck me: I'd rather turn to a friend than any random person or bestseller list." As you enter the app, you are greeted with a blank page with only this line: "Meet your next favorite book."
3. Again, "relatability" is not the same as "identification" for the readers I have interviewed. As with the Nazi character in this novel, avid readers appreciate when they are required to stretch to access a character they wouldn't readily identify with. In this way, I find that relatability allows for difference and engages empathy more than identification might. See the discussion of *Beloved* in the conclusion.
4. I encountered this phrase repeatedly in reference to Picoult's novels—on Goodreads, on library recommendation lists, in interviews, and in her own marketing material.
5. I couldn't find sales statistics that go to this level of specificity—the age of the buyer—but, in my experience, the audiences that turn out for her readings skew younger than most, and the given wisdom about her novels among librarians and booklovers seems

- to be that they border on YA or that they are easy transitions from YA to Adult fiction for many young women. More on that in chapter 9.
6. I attended this reading on March 12, 2010 with students in my senior seminar on “The American Bestseller,” who I compelled to attend (a few of them were seriously and volubly disgruntled at the prospect—not to name names, but: Kate Glassman, Tréza Rosado, and Maddie Edwards). It was scheduled to take place at the Barnes and Noble Bookstore in the Galleria Shopping Center, but it had to be moved to the South View Middle School auditorium in Edina to accommodate the huge turnout, including many apparently high-school-aged fans.
 7. My novel-reading, botanical artist, biologist friend (and Renaissance woman) Lynne Gildensoph, who read this manuscript for me more than once, understatedly points out that even when she used *My Sister’s Keeper* for ethics discussions in her Biology classes, the students noticed that the ending “is not very realistic.”
 8. Perhaps in grudging recognition of her popularity, some of these publications have included interviews with Picoult or news stories (or condescending notes) about her success, but no reviews of her books. See, for example, Andrew Goldman’s brief Picoult interview (February 8, 2013) for the *New York Times Magazine* on mobile.nytimes.com or Carole Burns’s in the *Washington Post* (February 26, 2013) at washingtonpost.com. But despite several web searches with increasingly creative combinations of terms, I could find regular reviews of her work only in *Entertainment Weekly*.
 9. I should probably confess that in breaks from my final revision of this manuscript, I was catching up on an iconic feminist pop culture phenomenon that I had missed in a haze of child rearing in the late nineties—*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. References may have crept unnoticed into this text. But not here. There was no screaming from Buffy.
 10. How refreshing was it to get to the end of *Americanah* and realize that its story arc had come back around to romance, to happily ever after, after the complexities of the plot had gone off in many different directions? The narrative was so fascinating that I actually forgot it began as a love story. That “wait, I know this story” feeling at the end was priceless.

11. Volumes have been written on the realist novel, which aims historically to hold a mirror up to life. It is a favorite of middle-brow scholars because of its persistent popularity and its unique aesthetic. The realist novel was a staple particularly of the nineteenth century, pre-modernism. For a thoughtful accounting of this tradition and how it constructed our reading practices, see Nancy Glazener, *Reading for Realism: The History of a US Literary Institution, 1850–1910* (Duke 1997). Wayne Booth's *The Company we Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* was again helpful as I approached Picoult's novel. And finally, Wolfgang Iser's *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Johns Hopkins 1978), particularly "The Reader as a Component Part of the Realistic Novel" (as excerpted in Hale, it is a frequent part of my assigned curriculum).
12. I admit that I came to *The Storyteller* with a bias left over from reading another Picoult novel, *My Sister's Keeper*, with perhaps the most implausible ending in all of literary history. So convenient, as Dana Carvey's Church Lady would say.
13. Theodor Adorno famously wrote of the impossibility of poetry after the Holocaust, an argument he later rejected, though it is still a marker in Holocaust Studies. A German and a cultural critic of the Frankfurt School, he joined with other European philosophers in trying to chart where to go next, in culture and politics, after they had seen the end of civilization. In any event, I can't even begin to do justice to the arguments against Holocaust representation here. Suffice it to say that any historically aware or culturally sensitive writer would approach it with great caution and deference.

8 REREADING RAND

1. It does look like someone might have rallied the troops for a write-in Rand campaign on the Modern Library's list. The website describes their method for collecting reader opinions: "The readers' poll for the best novels published in the English language since 1900 opened on July 20, 1998 and closed on October 20, 1998, with 217,520 votes cast." *Atlas Shrugged* does, however, appear consistently on reader surveys. Notably (perhaps more for

the chapter to come), one more recent list, the Facebook Book Challenge, asked its (younger) readers (with an average age of 37) to choose the ten books that “have stayed with you.” The tallied results didn’t include *Atlas Shrugged*, but the dominance of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Lord of the Rings* as reader favorites continued uninterrupted—they were numbers four and five on the Modern Library’s Readers List and two and three on the Facebook Challenge. *Harry Potter* outstripped every other book by quite a margin on Facebook, which didn’t ask for “best books” but most influential ones, thus inviting children’s and YA books, and probably sidelining aesthetic considerations and mediating the influence of books we’re supposed to like (don’t worry, *Atlas Shrugged*, *Ulysses* doesn’t appear on the 100-book compilation either—though *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, and *The Great Gatsby* make the top 15). The Facebook readers’ list, generated by Lada Adamic and Pinkesh Patel, examined over 130,000 status updates from August 2014 (mainly from the United States, the United Kingdom, and India). Readers’ Favorites lists are easily generated on the Internet now. Informative ones are available at Goodreads, Barnes and Noble, and Amazon as well as many library websites.

2. The blog was first shared on the *rigorousintuition.ca* website, with its author listed as “chlamor” (September 27, 2008). It was forwarded to me then, but I had forgotten about it when one of my very first students (and still my favorite, of course), Doug Anderson, sent it along as I was writing this (thanks, Dug!).
3. This morphed into the idea of eugenics in parts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Progressive Movement in the United States, and many scientists and other intellectuals found it reasonable to judge entire races based on genetic features. Then there was Hitler. Because of these associations, most literary novelists since WWII tend to shy away from reading faces in this manner. For a more complete discussion of the eugenics movement in the United States, its prejudices and practices, see Nancy Ordovery’s *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (U of MN 2003).
4. There’s also Rodrigo Gonzales, the Chilean diplomat who suffers from “a fat, blank face and the eyes of a killer” (792). In this

novel, it's generally acceptable to be an up-from-nowhere Irish immigrant but not a "foreigner."

5. It also brings to mind the fascist fascination for machines. At one point Dagny wonders why she had "always felt that joyous sense of confidence when looking at machines?"

In these giant shapes, two aspects pertaining to the inhuman were radiantly absent: the causeless and the purposeless. Every part of the motors was an embodied answer to "Why?" and "What for?"—like the steps of a life-course chosen by the sort of mind she worshipped. The motors were a moral code cast in steel. (230)
6. For me, this stoops to a level of heartlessness that betrays the novel's better nature, its empathy, its democracy. While *Atlas Shrugged* engages us with Dagny and the good guys (note to self: good name for a metal band), it also invites us to share their disdain for most of the world (all of Europe and most of South America) because it is against them.
7. Like her brother's always pale, fleshy face, Dagny's blouse is continually "thin and white," and Roark and Galt inevitably "hard" (wink, wink).
8. It is racist in its subtle assertion of Aryan superiority, in its eugenic undercurrents, in the almost complete absence of people of color, and, most of all, in the absolute whiteness of its heroes.
9. Jennifer Burns's intellectual history of Rand's novel, *Goddess of the Market* (Oxford 2009), is the best, most balanced study of its politics that I found.
10. Rand also reminds us that the dollar sign represents the initials of the United States. I forgot that tidbit. But if the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Wikipedia* are correct, the historical evidence suggests that the symbol has Spanish origins, and Rand's story is only a plausible alternative.
11. Her "triumph" being that Reardon's desire can reduce her to her body, "and that you want it to serve you is the greatest reward I can have" (236).
12. I also found the novel disturbingly anti-intellectual. Not only does it constantly misrepresent or ridiculously reduce opposing ideas, but it also despises all things academic: "Wesley Mouch came from a family that had known neither poverty nor wealth nor distinction for many generations; it had clung, however, to

a tradition of its own: that of being college-bred and, therefore, of despising men who were in business” (496). Reardon laments “the soft, safe assassins of college classrooms who, incompetent to answer the queries of a quest for reason, took pleasure in crippling the young minds entrusted to their care” (910).

13. Both of these last accessed on October 25, 2014. By comparison, recall that Picoult’s bestselling *The Storyteller* totaled 66,000 ratings on Goodreads—about a third of *Atlas Shrugged*’s—but eight times more than the most successful of Rand’s nonfiction.
14. I use the term “superhero” here in homage to my colleague and friend Dana Nelson, who examines the deeply unAmerican desire to rely on a powerful politician to save us, to rescue us from the messy work of democracy, in her 2008 book, *Bad for Democracy*. As she explains, “putting the president at the center of democracy and asking him to be its superhero works to deskill us for the work of democracy. And, it argues that the presidency itself has actually come to work against democracy.” Rand’s similar move, arguing that the nation should be dominated by a few superior industrialists, is, to my mind, equally unAmerican—and dangerous.

9 WRITING WIZARDRY

1. A nod to Evan Gaydos, who will appreciate that I chose chapter 9 (three threes) for Harry.
2. Again, because I have been writing this book for six years, I have been working it through in all of my writing as I taught, researched, mentored—and parented (see fl, Chapter 1). A version of this chapter appeared first as part of the introduction, written with my daughter, to *A Wizard of Their Age: Critical Essays from the Harry Potter Generation* (SUNY 2015).

I also feel compelled to underline here the interplay of parenting and professing that, in this situation, made me better at both. This doesn’t sound like much of a revelation, but in my profession, still dominated by gender- and class-based assumptions of success, having a child can be an embarrassing indulgence, one we keep quiet and work hard not to let affect our dedicated, scholarly lives (and having two is a dangerous high wire act). Part of the point of this chapter is, as Ursula Le Guin famously argued, that “the hand the rocks the cradle writes the books”

(*NYTimes Book Review*, January 22, 1989). My students often point out that Rowling, too, enjoyed this benefit, living with a daughter “Harry Potter’s age” as she wrote, and addressing the novels so effectively to maturing readers. She got it right, at least in part, they argue (with evidence from her writings), because she was living it as a parent.

3. Yes, this means that for some nurses and teachers and social workers, biology, art history, and philosophy majors, the only exposure to a literature class they would get in college was *Harry Potter*. That, I promise, is some people’s worst nightmare. This investigation is about demonstrating how wrong that assumption is. For further evidence, see *A Wizard of Their Age*—especially the two essays written by nurses—“*Harry Potter* and the Wizard’s Gene: A Genetic Analysis of Potterworld” by Courtney Agar and Julia Terk and “A Nursing Care Plan for Tom Riddle” by Kari Newell.
4. Lennon got an MFA in creative writing and is now a working poet who adjuncts at St. Kate’s. Still intensely intelligent, tattooed, and unconventional, she is even better as a colleague than she was as a student. And that’s saying something.
5. One of the students in that children’s literature group, Jameson Ivey, is now a middle school teacher, and she just emailed me to say that she had started an after school group for her students—focused on *Harry Potter*.
6. SUNY 2015. The student editors included Rachel and Evan, Kalie, Kate Glassman, Jenny McDougal, Sarah Wentz, [Oxford comma] and Tréza Rosado.

10 REDEFINING EXCELLENCE

1. ARDI, again, is my shorthand for readers’ standards of literary merit, as delineated in Chapter 1. Also, see f66, chapter 8 on Ayn Rand’s place at the top of this Reader’s List, and some additional insight on a few other booklists generated on the Internet.
2. A comparative version of the *Newsweek* list is available at www.alistofbooks.com/lists/10-top-100-books-by-newsweek or at the *Newsweek* website. The three (and more) Modern Library lists, in a very accessible, side-by-side format, can be found at modernlibrary.com/top-100.

3. Again, see chapter 8, f66, for further discussion of these four lists (and a few more) and what they reveal.
4. If we're "keeping it one hundred," as Comedy Central's Larry Wilmore urges, I should admit that some of Morrison's novels step over this line for me, being so difficult, so writerly, that at times they seem to disregard the desires of even practiced readers (*Jazz*, *Paradise*). I might suggest that they succumb to the *Ulysses* delusion.

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