The Cambridge Introduction to
The Novel

Beginning its life as the sensational entertainment of the eighteenth century, the novel has become the major literary form of modern times. Drawing on a wide range of examples of famous novels from all over the world, Marina MacKay explores the essential aspects of the novel and its history: where novels came from and why we read them; how we think about their styles and techniques, their people, plots, places, and politics. Between the main chapters are longer readings of individual works, from *Don Quixote* to *Midnight's Children*. A glossary of key terms and a guide to further reading are included, making this an ideal accompaniment to introductory courses on the novel.

MARINA MACKAY is Associate Professor of English at Washington University in St. Louis. Her publications include *Modernism and World War II* (Cambridge, 2007) and, as editor, *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II* (2009).

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MARINA MACKAY

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St. Louis, May 2009

About this book

Many of the eighteenth-century critics who observed the appearance of this new literary species would have been astounded to learn that the frivolous, fashionable "novel" so beloved of silly females would eventually be considered deserving of a scholarly introduction (with the Cambridge University Press imprimatur, no less!). And not even the novelists themselves could have imagined that they were contributing to what would ultimately become the major literary form of modern times, both inside and outside the university. This book begins by telling the story of that extraordinary rise, before going on to describe in more detail the particular formal characteristics and qualities we associate with the novel. Later chapters are concerned with *types* of novel: the genre novel, the experimental novel, the novel of nation and community.

Each chapter addresses a formal or historical aspect of the novel, drawing examples and illustrations from a range of novels often from very different times and places. Between these main chapters are more sustained readings of individual works, intended to suggest how the generalizations of the summary chapters might be put to specific uses. Arranged mostly in the order of their publication, these interchapters collectively offer, well, certainly not *the* story but *one* story of the novel running from Cervantes to Rushdie. But these should be considered optional reading, and, if the main chapters work as they were intended, student readers will be able to think of favorite novels with which to replace mine. Although the book's broad drift is historical, moving closer to the present day as it proceeds, the main chapters are fairly self-contained, and can be read selectively and/or out of order.

When what may be an unfamiliar term appears in **bold** on its first use you will find it defined in the glossary at the end of the book – there is very little jargon in what follows, but sometimes the precise terminology can be genuinely clarifying because it allows you to see things you might not notice if you didn't have the language to describe them. Also at the end of the book is a short list of supplementary reading arranged by chapter headings: this names the scholarly works to which individual chapters are most indebted.

The novels and novelists discussed here were chosen primarily for the familiarity attendant on their cultural stature, in some cases positively monumental; my hope was to find the common ground that comes of a shared body of reading. Listing what has been left out would be more than a life's work, but there are novels I eventually decided not to write about because I thought them too hobbyhorsical (as Tristram Shandy would say), many more I would have written about if I had space to include them, and, above all, countless novels I might have included had I ever encountered them in the first place. Needless to say, the limitations of *The Cambridge Introduction to the Novel* reflect the limitations of its author's knowledge.