



# The True Story of the Novel

*Margaret Anne Doody*

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## **The True Story of the Novel** Margaret Anne Doody

Twentieth-century historians and critics defending the novel have emphasized its role as *superseding* something else, as a sort of legitimate usurper that deposed the Epic, a replacement of myth, or religious narrative. To say that the Age of Early Christianity was really also the Age of the Novel rumples such historical tidiness—but so it was. From the outset of her discussion, Doody rejects the conventional Anglo-Saxon distinction between Romance and Novel. This eighteenth-century distinction, she maintains, served both to keep the foreign—dark-skinned peoples, strange speakers, Muslims, and others—largely out of literature, and to obscure the diverse nature of the novel itself.

This deeply informed and truly comparative work is staggering in its breadth. Doody treats not only recognized classics, but also works of usually unacknowledged subgenres—new readings of novels like *The Pickwick Papers*, *Puddn'head Wilson*, *L'Assommoir*, *Death in Venice*, and *Beloved* are accompanied by insights into *Death on the Nile* or *The Wind in the Willows*. Non-Western writers like Chinua Achebe and Witi Ihimaera are also included. In her last section, Doody goes on to show that Chinese and Japanese novels, early *and* late, bear a strong and not incidental affinity to their Western counterparts. Collectively, these readings offer the basis for a serious reassessment of the history and the nature of the novel.

*The True Story of the Novel* marks the beginning of the twenty-first century's understanding of fiction and of culture. It is essential reading for anyone with an interest in literature.

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