

Characters/Plots

1. Auction Plot — Characters who are ‘desperate’ to trade (buy and sell) the painting

Seller

Earl Beachendon — Chief auctioneer and mastermind of the sale by auction house Monachorum & Sons (est. 1756)

Potential Buyers

- Vlad Antipovsky — Russian oligarch who owns a tin company —employs Barty — falls in love with Grace Spinetti-Winkleman
- Dmitri Voldakov — controls 68% of the world’s potash and is worth several 10s of billions of pounds — and his girlfriend Lyudmila
- Their Royal Highnesses, the Emir and Sheikha (Midora) of Alwabbi
- Mr. Lee Lan Fok
- The President of France
- The Right Honourable Barnaby Damson, UK Minister of Culture
- Mr. M. Power Dub-Box—“the world’s most successful rapper”
- Stevie Brent — US hedge fund manager — “don’t let Stevie buy” —wants it for his new casino in Vegas
- **Mrs. Appledore** — born Inna Pawlokowski in Poland in 1935 — when she married Yannic they changed their names to Melanie and Horace Appledore and never again uttered a word of Polish — Patroness of the Appledore Museum of French Decorative Arts — dies of a heart attack during the auction

Art Experts Sub-Plot(s)

Septimus Ward-Thomas – Director of the National Gallery— p106 “There is no machine to measure the transformative effect of beauty, or the importance of contemplation, or even the amount of happiness inspired by coming here.”

Delores Ryan (59 yrs. old)— one of the greatest experts in French 18thC art who had held the work in her hands and dismissed it as a poor copy p15 – friend of Barty’s — p 160 her thesis is based on identifying the artists’ models. She has built an enormous database around who they were and when they sat for particular artists.

Trichcombe Abufel — art historian and Delores’s rival —(Anvil Face) p160: “His work is based on careful scholarship and provenance. He forensically examines every aspect of the painted surface and every place that picture might have hung.”— works for Winkleman but is fired after he sees TOIL on Memling’s desk and ‘devours it with his eyes. I should have pretended not to see it.’ P486” — assassinated by Rebecca Winkleman for uncovering and exposing her father’s deception.

Maurice and Delia Abufel —Trichcombe’s relatives to whom he sends hard copies for safe keeping

Agatha — Restorer at the National Gallery — Jesse’s father’s former assistant for 20 years

David, Jesse’s father — p161 working on an ingenious scientific analysis project when he died. ...found a way of fingerprinting paint in much the same way that we fingerprint a criminal. Found under the Bettersea Bridge —only his computer and notebooks were missing. Police claimed it was suicide ...My guess though I have never been able to prove it, is that there were people in the art world who were terrified of his discover. There’s a lot more money in fakes than there is in proving authenticity...”

Fixer Sub-Plot

Barthomley Chesterfield Fitzroy St. George (Barty) — (Pierrot figure? See p193)
69 yrs. old — born Reg Dunn —left Keddlesmere at 15yr knowing there was no future for queers in K — a ‘life-enhancer’ — strictly word of mouth — Vlad Antipovsky becomes his client

2. Annie McDee Plot —Characters who are (on Annie’s part reluctantly and disinterestedly) in possession of the painting and attempting to determine its provenance and value

Annie McDee — Chef for Carlo Spinetti, a well-respected film director in London —previously owned a specialty cheese shop and café in a west country market town.

Robert — Annie’s first foray into dating since she was a teenager — a solicitor from Crouch End whose wife ran off with his best friend —Annie buys the work as a BD gift for Robert from Bernoff’s

Ralph Bernoff — owner of Bernoff’s Antiques, Reclamation and Salvage — dies in arson fire set by Memling Winkleman’s bodyguard/chauffeur Ellis after finding the painting he has come to buy for Memling is gone

Desmond — p 43Annie’s only lover, her best friend and her business partner who broke up their relationship — he marries and has a child: p499 — After four years of marriage, Desmond’s wife left him, citing “unreasonably controlling behaviour.”

Mrs. Eve (Evie) McDee — Annie’s alcoholic mother who on first seeing the work says, “it’s beautiful...It reminds me of those lovely pictures in the Wallace Collection.” P58

Jesse — “painter by night, guide (at the Wallace Collection) by day” p148

Larissa Newcombe— p436 ...a colleague (at the Wallace Collection) and friend of Jesse’s who tells him that Trichcombe Abufel left all his research papers to the Courtauld but when someone went to collect his files nothing was left and his hard drive had been wiped. —“Larissa ...who swept through life swathed in brightly coloured silks ...navigating the art world like a ship in full sail followed by a flotilla of admirers ... Her subject, the depiction of music and musical instruments in 17th and 18th century art was rarefied but Larissa’s enthusiasm was boundless and infectious.

3. The Painting [TIOL] Plot —18” x 24” and covered in “layers of dirt”

TIOL’s master— Antoine Watteau: profiled C15 pp. 219 - 224

- “ a libertine more in spirit than in action”
- an intellectual, wonderfully well read and thoughtful.
- Aside from drawing and painting, reading and music were his twin passions. The only thing he disliked deeply was himself.”

Watteau’s 3 protectors:

- Dealer: Monsieur Julienne
- Principal collector: Pierre Crozat
- Biographer: Comte de Caylus

—Agatha: p195 Beneath these layers of grime and varnish, I think there is something fine, very fine. P196 —My hunch is this picture is approximately 250 to 300 yrs. old (1703) ...likely French or Flemish

Composition:

P159 ” —Jesse to Annie: “The composition is lovely, **a glade in a park, a dancer, a man at her feet**. There are trees overhanging, sunlight coming from top left, but it’s so dirty that it’s difficult to make out their faces or the brushstrokes the painter used.

P211 Abufel has found and shows Annie in the first volume of Julienne’s catalogue at the British Library an engraving by Benoit Audran the Younger in 1731 of “*L’improbabilité d’amour*” clearly resembling her painting— strange white cloud on the left was a downcast clown who appeared to have been kicked out of a charming glade by the dainty foot of the woman. Behind her there was a classical fountain and a nymph astride a column laughing.

Dancer:

P163 “her face is made up of four major strokes—three delicate slices of pink and a dash of pale lemon. Yet in those subtle, gentle marks you get an idea of her character. She’s feisty, uncompromising. You can tell, can’t you, by the curve of her mouth, by the direct way she looks at you.”

P194 What they did not know yet was that my master had painted another face over her face at a later date. It was his way of managing rejection. He could not bear to part with her; he could not cope with seeing her. ...The face on top belonged to a prostitute; it was as near to a joke as my master got.

P223 Give it to me, she demanded...No, he said. It will be my present to you the day you agree to marry me. Until then, it will never leave my side. The company fell about in mirth. ...Gillot came running and it “took only a glance to realize the younger man was by far the superior painter. ...I can’t teach you anything more ...”. ...To try and expunge the hussy’s memory, he painted over Charlotte’s face ...Then he added the clown, a ghostly figure in the gloaming: a Pierrot, the embodiment of pathos and derision. It was a self-portrait he returned to over and over again for the rest of his short life.

White smudge in the corner:

P192 Agatha/Jesse/Annie It’s a man dressed all in white. In fact, if my hunch is right, it could be Pierrot. ...A character made famous in the late 16th century by the Italian *commedia dell’arte*. Sometimes Pierrot was portrayed as a wise clown or a buffoon, but he was always the innocent.

Why would anyone put a clown into a love scene? Annie asked.

Pierrot was also the hapless and unsuccessful rival to Arlequine for the love of Columbine. ...So rather than being a painting about love on a summer’s day, this might be saying the very opposite? It could be that all-too-familiar tale of its cruelty? Annie said.

Or just love’s unlikelyness, Jesse added, gazing wistfully at Annie.

The first and most famous Pierrot was by Antoine Watteau, done in about 1718 and now in the Louvre. It’s a character so full of pathos and melancholia, so twisted with sadness, that most find it moving rather than ridiculous.

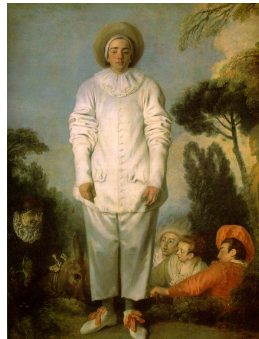
I like the picture much more now that I see its darker side, Annie said....

All good works of art are about complexity and emotion, Jesse said. That’s their power. They say something that we can’t quite put into words. ...

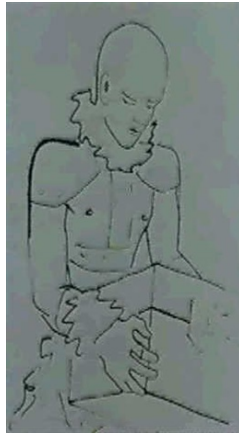
Why have so many generations painted this figure? He asked...

Pierrot has become a universal symbol. From Cocteau to Picasso, Hockney...Juan Gris, Sickert, Matisse, Modigliani, Max Beckman, Chagall, Paul Klee

Watteau



Cocteau



Picasso



Hockney



Juan Gris



Sickert



Matisse



NATIONAL GALLERIES SCOTLAND

L'enterrement de Pierrot [The Burial of Pierrot], 1947, Henri Matisse
© Succession H. Matisse / DACS 2018.

Modigliani



Max Beckmann



Chagall



Paul Klee (*Head of a Young Pierrot*)



...At the time of your picture there were only 20 artists painting Pierrot. Watteau was probably the first and best and then there were his followers Lancret and Pater.

Style of painting:

P221 “look at the trees, admire the sunlight, the pointillism, blurred edges, the informality and you will see the birth of Impressionism, though it took the rest of the world some 150 years to catch up. I am the representation of his impassioned, deranged, inflamed desire. *I am l’amour fou. La gloire d’amour.* I the literal exemplification of utter mortal madness.

P223...in his hurry to capture love he had found his métier and a new way of painting. I was the canvas that launched a career. I was the painting that started a movement, the rococo.

Subject:

P223 and P286: I was painted to celebrate the wild cascades of love (*amour*), the rollicking, bucking, breaking and transformative passion that inevitably gives way to miserable, constricting, overbearing disappointment.

P262 The missing painting was tangled up with her family’s (Winkleman’s) history—as a protagonist, a witness, a cypher.

4. Rebecca Winkleman Plot— Characters who know the provenance and are desperate to re-obtain the painting by whatever means

Rebecca Winkleman-Spinetti — Carlo Spinetti’s wife who becomes Annie’s employer on Carlo’s recommendation when her chef suffers a stroke — CEO (in name only) of Winkleman Fine Art. PhD in Renaissance painting from the Courtauld and author of 4 books on Florentine painting. Methodical, organized and highly knowledgeable.

Memling Winkleman (p 254 Heinrich Fuchs, the youngest member of the Fuchs family who were apartment caretakers, the only non-Jews in the building) — her (91 yrs. old) father and the owner of Winkleman Fine Art Ltd. — p125 “looked more like an emperor than the grandson of a Frankfurt rabbi.” —gave the painting to his mistress **Marianna** who promised to burn it when Memling died, but who died before him. After she died her family sold all the contents of her house as a job lot to a house clearance firm P265 —Memling finds it in Bernoff’s after 16-1/2 yrs. of searching but Annie buys it the day before he burns the shop down. —Dies in prison by his own hand.

Pearl Winkleman — Rebecca’s deceased Jewish mother from Verona

Tiziano —Memling’s white huskie

Carlo Spinetti (54 yr old) – Rebecca’s husband — film-maker

Grace Spinetti-Winkleman — Rebecca’s daughter whom Vlad falls in love with—persuaded by Barty to try to buy TIOL for her as proof of his love

Marty —Rebecca’s deceased brother — p121 “the son and heir [who] would take over the business” — p232 his dream was to tell the history of the demise of German Jews via the chattels they owned. Memling had been passionately against the idea; the war and its aftermath were still far too recent for him. It was one of the areas that father and son clashed on. — Died by falling over the railings of the Newhaven to Dieppe ferry on New Year’s Day.

Frau Danica Goldberg—96 yrs. old former neighbour of the Winkleman family and still living in the same apartment block. P252 “I thought the whole Winkleman family died, but no. I asked him (Marty) to ask my old friend Memling to visit. But he has not as yet.” Shows Rebecca a photograph of the Winkleman family with Heinrich Fuchs, and a photograph of the family

standing in front of TIOL hanging over their fireplace. P260 To Rebecca: Are you a Fuchs? ...It doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile—what matters is doing the right thing.

Winkleman family of 6 — Esther Winkleman, an art teacher and the father, a lawyer, four children including Memling and Joanna who died later from being overfed by the rescuing Allies. P 257

They had a loft so people hid things up there —the odd painting, pieces of jewellery but mostly family mementos. ...Heinrich had a job working for the Führer's personal art squad ...came one day and helped themselves to some paintings. Esther Winkleman wept with shame; she had taught little Heinrich what was good. She had never told him the meaning of evil.

Tomi Horshaft — grandchild of Ezra and Esther Winkleman—Joanna's child—who ultimately is determined to be the owner of TIOL — “The people of Great Britain clubbed together to purchase moi ... for ...(a fraction of my estimated value) — voted best British National Treasure every year since the purchase p497

Structure

- 10 chapters narrated in 1st person voice by the painting (TIOL)
- 28 chapters in 3rd person voice

Prologue — The Auction (3 July)

C1 – Six months earlier (11 Jan)

C2 – TIOL

C3 – C5

C6 – TIOL

C7 – 10

C11 – TIOL — “Hello. I am still here.”

C12

C13 – TIOL — “Imagine my horror...the young man has found a restorer.”

C14

C15 – TIOL — Restoration underway. P219 “It’s time to tell you about him, Antoine and the love of his life. My master...”

C16 – 18

C15 – TIOL — “As you may have noticed the young curator is in love with my mistress; thank goodness she is done with all that.” P285

C20 – 23

C24 – TIOL — “I am back in the plastic bag ...”

C25 – 27

C28 – TIOL — p368 “Jesse needs to wake up: get off the fence.”

29 – 32

C33 – TIOL — p427 “I have been rediscovered.”

C34 – 35

C36 – The Day before the Sale — 2 July

C37 – 4 July – From *The Daily Shout: Art and Arrests: The Improbability of Anything*, By Our Chief Arts Correspondent Arthur Christopher

C38 – TIOL — “As you have probably guessed, it was an entirely put-up job by the young government operative, Mr. Darren Lu, posing as a porter.”

Works of art

P68 Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* — Annie's first themed dinner party for Rebecca to introduce this painting to Melanie Appledore

P75 Frans Hals' *The Laughing Cavalier*

P78 Bouche's *Madame de Pompadour*

P78 Jean-Baptiste Pater's *The Ball*

P78 Antoine Watteau —the painter who started the genre known as the fete galante
Annie's second themed dinner party, a fete galante for Dolores" 60th BD party —“The date is the first of April but don't make a fool out of me.”

P99 Canaletto's Venetian landscapes

P134 Ludovico Carracci's *Moses with the Golden Calf*

P149 Jesse to Annie: Delacroix became obsessed by one particular landscape, as did Constable, Bonnard and Cezanne. Not that I'm comparing myself to them, he added quickly.

P172 Vlad sees retrospective of Damien Hirst at the Tate Modern — Like Hirst, Vlad had just been repeating the same thought over and over again, ... For Vlad the artist's message was simple: you can encase anything, add jewels and precious metals, but it's still the same old shit.

P186 Duccio di Buoninsegna's *Madonna and Child*

P196 Veronese, Grossart, Giorgione — in Agatha's studio at the National Gallery

P197 Agatha's list: Watteau, Lancret, Pater, Boucher, Fragonard.

P202 Holbein's *Ambassadors*

P205 Picasso drawing of a priapic satyr with a ravishing young woman

P205 Jim Dine drawing of a single plait hanging down a girl's back

P210 Watteau: *The Embarkation to the Isle of Cythera*

P218 Diego Velázquez, Albrecht Dürer, Giovanni da Rimini

P268 Vlad buys a Warhol *Elvis* and a *Chairman Mao*

Themes

Art

P18—The value of a work of art is set by desire—who wants to own it and how badly

P19 loving art is irrelevant these days ... owning pictures has become another way of displaying wealth

P97 (Barty to Vlad) Modern art equals fun, light and colour. Old art is all warm wine and cheese, thick ankles and flat shoes. The modern art world is martinis and sushi, Azzedine and Louboutin.

P99 TIOL: A great picture is the distillation of emotion, offering an empathetic hand across time and circumstance. A wonderful composition inspires sympathy and harmony. No wonder mortals fight to possess us.

P135 Annie wondered if her inability to decode the painting mattered or if it were acceptable just to like something without truly understanding its hidden messages. ... Art, she thought, is a different language and one that she did not particularly want to learn. ...Overhearing the conversation at dinner...had only reinforced Annie's love of cooking. For just a few pounds, she could transform humble ingredients into an extraordinary experience that didn't need prior knowledge or insight or investment. Eating was an essential, sensual and communal activity requiring nothing more than taste buds and an open mind.

P160 Jess to Annie: Art is big business but ultimately authenticity is subjective and the only way to prove that a picture is 'right' is through circumstantial evidence. The older the painting, the harder it is to identify. Most of the time it's guesswork...

P192 All good works of art are about complexity and emotion, Jesse said. That's their power. They say something that we can't quite put into words. ...

P222 There have been other painters and muses. One thinks of Rembrandt and Hendrickje, Modigliani and Jeanne Hébuterne, Dalí and Gala, Bacon and George Dyer, but I propose that it was my master's demented love for Charlotte that imbues my canvas with added unmatched fervour.

P222 More importantly, he [Watteau] understands mankind, and he can, like great artists, translate our innermost joy and fear into something tangible.

P227 The one area that Winkleman avoided was ...contemporary art, which Memling described as "shooting poisonous snakes with a water pistol." The company's cut-off point was 1973, the year of Picasso's death.

P279 It partly explains why people want to own great works. It connects them to a glorious heritage and magnificent rulers, Agatha said.

P286 As the decades rolled by, as I was passed from one illustrious owner to another, my value increased. Who wouldn't want to own something precious to a great emperor or king?

P287 My master had the one thing most powerful people want: creative talent. I have noticed that the moment people become rich and achieve their earthly desires they enter a painful, spiritual vacuum. Few wealthy people turn to religion. ...Instead they often look to the soothing power of beauty. Art makes mortals feel closer to heaven. ...collectors buy ...: partly for investment, partly to big it up with their friends, partly to decorate but mainly in the hope that the cloak of creativity could extend to cover their shoulders. Beauty has an intrinsic value. [Throughout history]...men have believed that beauty makes them better, lifts them from the morass of their sordid business deals to a higher plane.

P494 TIOL...look around at this crazy, godless, cynical world and ask in what and where can mankind put its trust? ...in a declining, degenerate, money-obsessed era, where even Mammon lets most down, art has become a kind of religion and beauty offers a rare form of transcendence. Like other successful religions, art has evolved and offers glorious temples and learned high priests as well as covenants and creeds. The new churches are known as museums, in which the contemplation of art has become a kind of prayer and communal activity. The very wealthy can create private chapels stuffed with the unimaginable rarities and guarantee a front seat. It was ever thus.

P440... the difference between a good and a great work of art was down to an almost indistinguishable series of largely unidentifiable factors: the élan of a brushstroke; the juxtaposition of colours; the collisions in a composition and an accidental stroke or two. Like a rolling stone gathering moss, a painting gathered history

Love

P46 Loneliness and grief — How did people get together, create unions, and fall in love?

P185 “One of the good things about falling in love, Larissa commented, is that it makes you open and vulnerable; you end up in unexpected places.”

P205 Evie’s adage: Just because someone loves you, you don’t have to love them back. She [Annie] wondered if the whole world was caught on a merry-go-round of unrequited love.”

P224 TIOL: If I were to offer a soupçon of criticism against my master it would be in the field of courtship: love is as much an art as painting or living; it requires practice, finesse, determination, humility, energy and delicacy. ...he saw his “problem” as not being loved, when really it was the inability to give love. ...It never occurred to him, after that first rejection to earn Charlotte’s respect or her heart. He flounced off to his studio. I’m sorry to say that some find the agony of rejection far sweeter than the ecstasy of consummation.”

P266 ...that painting said everything he (Memling) believed but could never articulate about love. For the first 16 years of his life, it had belonged to the only person (Esther Winkleman) who had shown him true, unconditional kindness. This, Memling assumed, was what love was all about. When he met Marianna, his understanding of love changed: he was, simultaneously, the impassioned happy man lying at the feet of his beloved and also the morose clown standing in the background of the picture. Being in love pitched him, moment by moment, between waves of ecstasy and misery. Like every other person, he believed his predicament was unique. ...Being with Marianna was the only time Memling was granted a respite from self-disgust and shame. ...he knew deep down that he was just a lucky thief.

P286 This is the great tragedy of love—even if you are lucky enough to stumble on it, it never lasts.

P288 TIOL: My composition is about the fleeting, transformative respite over aloneness that love offers despite the cold certainty that this reprieve is only transitory.

P499 TIOL: {last word] All that matters is that artists keep reminding mortals about what really matters: the wonder, the glory, the madness, the importance and the improbability of love.

Hope

P58 remaining hopeful — One of her mother’s endearing qualities was the ability to see hope in any situation.

P259 Danica to Rebecca: I will never forgive them but I couldn’t allow their cruelty to take over my entire life; that would have sealed their victory. I had to find a way of living with those memories, but I also don’t want anyone to forget what happened. By listening to my story you are helping me and others. People must know what occurred so that history does not repeat itself. ...what matters is doing the right thing.

Problems/Questions

1. Plot pacing — too long in the set up; too quick in the wrap up
2. Uneven writing is distracting.

- Plodding, flabby, tautological to the point of fuzziness and ambiguity
- Lots of details that often don't seem to matter, which causes distrust and tries the reader's patience
- Conversely... vague where detail could add focus and clarity and set up expectations thereby creating more suspense.
- Clichés that annoy —What else do you find in junk stores but other people's 'flotsam and jetsam'?
- Conversations don't sound real. Syntax doesn't match the description of the voice or manner of delivery.

P23 Though she often passed Bernoff and Son, Annie had never been tempted to explore the junk shop; there was something uninviting about the dirty window piled high with other people's flotsam and jetsam. ...Etc.

Though the junk shop, Bernoff and Son was located on Annie's regular commuting route, its dirty front window filled with piles of tired cast offs made it unenticing and uninviting. So when she did finally go inside one Saturday morning this was part whim, part mission-driven: a search for a gift for Robert, the man she was sleeping with but hardly knew. They had met five weeks ago at an "Art of Love" singles night at the Wallace Collection in Manchester Square. She had gone with low expectations on the dating front—it was, after all, her first try at dating since her teenage years— but hoping at least to learn something about art.

P24 A telephone rang. The man snatched it up.
"Bernoff's Antiques, Reclamation and Salvage," he said in a flat south London accent. "Ralph Bernoff speaking." His voice was surprisingly high-pitched and young. He looked fifty but was probably only thirty."

The phone rang. "Bernoff's," he said in a surprisingly youthful voice with a flat south London accent. He looked fifty but probably wasn't.

P25 "No one is going to buy anything," he whined into the telephone, "No one ever does. Just a load of bored Saturday-morning time-wasters," he lamented, casting a look in Annie's direction.

"No one's gonna buy, ... bored time-wasters," he whined looking sideways at Annie.

P133 Looking around the room, Annie got her first glimpse of Memling Winkleman: there was something transfixing and unsettling about the man's intense watery blue-eyed stare. Annie made a mental note to avoid him at all costs.

Under this spotlight, Annie, in turn, surveying the crowd of appreciative guests locked eyes with Memling Winkleman, her first sighting of him. His blue-eyed stare, while watery with age remained intense and, even at this distance, transfixing. Best to stay clear of him, she thought.

3. Cliché (a phrase or opinion that is overused and betrays a lack of original thought) overload...
 - in conversation between characters
 - in internal monologues — Annie's thoughts are introduced as her making "mental notes"
 - in description
 - in character types —so many stereotypical characters—although this may be deliberate

Wikipedia: A cliché is an expression, idea, or element of an artistic work which has become overused to the point of losing its original meaning or effect, even to the point of being trite or irritating, especially when at some earlier time it was considered meaningful or novel. The French poet Gérard de Nerval once said,

"The first man who compared a woman to a rose was a poet, the second, an imbecile." Various dictionaries recognize a derived adjective clichéd, with the same meaning.

In phraseology, the term has taken on a more technical meaning, referring to an expression imposed by conventionalized linguistic usage. The term is frequently used in modern culture for an action or idea that is expected or predictable, based on a prior event. Typically pejorative, "clichés" may or may not be true. Some are stereotypes, but some are simply truisms and facts.

A cliché is often a vivid depiction of an abstraction that relies upon analogy or exaggeration for effect, often drawn from everyday experience. Clichés can be employed for comic effect, typically in fiction. But generally, the use of a cliché in writing, speech, or argument is considered a mark of inexperience or a lack of originality.

The word cliché is borrowed from French, where it is a past passive participle of "clicher" 'to click'... cliché is attested from 1825 and originated in the printing trades. The term "cliché" was adopted as printers' jargon to refer to a stereotype, electrotype, cast plate or block print that could reproduce type or images repeatedly. ...

Thought-terminating clichés, also known as thought-stoppers, or semantic stopsigns, are words or phrases that discourage critical thought and meaningful discussion about a given topic. They are typically short, generic truisms that offer seemingly simple answers to complex questions or that distract attention away from other lines of thought. They are often sayings embedded in a culture's folk wisdom tempting to use because they sound true or good, 'the right thing to say'. Some examples are: "Stop thinking so much", or "here we go again."

The term was popularized by psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton in his 1961 book, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of "Brainwashing" in China*. Lifton wrote, "The language of the totalist environment is characterized by the thought-terminating cliché. The most far-reaching and complex of human problems are compressed into brief, highly reductive, definitive-sounding phrases, easily memorized and easily expressed. These become the start and finish of any ideological analysis". Sometimes they are used in a deliberate attempt to shut down debate, manipulate others to think a certain way, or dismiss dissent. However, some people repeat them, even to themselves, out of habit or conditioning, or as a defense mechanism to reaffirm a confirmation bias.

Examples

... including tautologies, i.e. useless restatement, or saying the same thing twice using different words. The noun **tautology** originates from the Greek word tautologos, **meaning**, "repeating what is said." 'Speedy sprint', 'round circle' etc. Tautologies can be clichés reflecting conventionalized linguistic usage, which a writer may or may not want to echo. If HR is doing this deliberately it is unclear whether and how this 'technique' adds to the work.

- wildest dreams
- he was still unable to shake off a feeling of unease and dissatisfaction
- endless monotony
- twitch of desire
- felt his heart harden
- bathed in the glow of street lamps
- Her exile was self-imposed
- This abandonment of time felt almost wicked; a new and entirely foreign thought occurred to her—perhaps there were other ways to live. P142 She meandered around India for the next four months, whimsically deciding where to go, what to visit, when to eat and where to stay.
- Two people living in unconnected parallel universes
- Annie lost in the forest in India: p145 Behind her was a crackle of twigs, An animal? A snake? She turned around to see a wizened old woman dressed in a long tunic holding a

staff and a torch. Her face was as wrinkled as a walnut but her eyes were as shiny as newly minted copper coins.

- Tiny shoebox
- Fresh start
- A weekend of nothingness hung like a heavy cloud on the horizon
- Careworn chesterfield sofa made of leather with curly wisps of horsehair exploding from various parts
- His ambivalence and inability to commit
- Decent bottle of wine
- P183 She flung the ingredients together in the same way as she dressed, extravagant dashes of colour and textures mixed together.
- Twisty corridors, ...Cavernous groaning lift, ... Narrow staircase
- Brushes stood to attention in metal pots
- The library was an oasis of calm and contemplation

4. Why so many extraneous characters? — in the style of restoration comedy?

5. The Annie and Jesse cringe-inducing love story

6. Creativity in art making and creativity in cooking/food presentation —insights/ originality?

7. Is Barty a Pierrot? Does he connect in any significant way with the two main plots— Annie and Rebecca? ...or even with the Auction plot?

Is Memling a Pierrot?

Is Jesse a Pierrot?

Good Bits

P 101 (TOIL) Antoine has...never been equalled when it comes to piquancy of pencilling. He had an unrivalled freedom of hand and lightness of touch. With a few flicks of red, black and white chalk, usually on grey paper, he captured the fineness of a person's profile and made their cheeks sing with purple blushes and their eyes vivid with a radiant gloss. Another incandescently brilliant effect was to run white along the side of black, adding charming radiations and illuminations.





P150 Do you know that Thames means ‘dark river’ from the pre-Celtic *tamasa*?

P151 “Stevedores—a great word. Comes from the Saxon, *stevadax*.”

P151 Do you know the lowest suicide rates come from those who live near water? The highest is people who live near railway lines.”

P176 Vlad: Money could buy him a smart car and a chauffeur but it couldn’t clear the roads. In Moscow every person worth anything had police outriders to clear the way. London, Vlad thought, is so backward.

P196 British Museum holds the British collection of drawings and etchings —the *catalogue raisonné*...inventories of someone’s work normally captured around the time of their life in etchings...an almost unrivalled collection of drawings and etchings dating back from the early Renaissance.

“P232 Marty’s dream was to tell the history of the demise of German Jews via the chattels they owned. Memling had been passionately against the idea;”

Telling stories via chattels = animating chattels/giving chattels a ‘voice’

Wikipedia: Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities. It is considered to be an innate tendency of human psychology. **Personification** is the related attribution of human form and characteristics to abstract concepts such as nations, emotions, and natural forces, such as seasons and weather. Both have ancient roots as storytelling and artistic devices, and most cultures have traditional fables with anthropomorphized animals as characters. People have also routinely attributed human emotions and behavioural traits to wild as well as domesticated animals. ...

From the beginnings of human behavioural modernity ... about 40,000 years ago, examples of zoomorphic (animal-shaped) works of art occur that may represent the earliest evidence we have of anthropomorphism. One of the oldest known is an ivory sculpture, the Löwenmensch figurine, Germany, a human-shaped figurine with the head of a lioness or lion, determined to be about 32,000 years old.

In **religion and mythology**, anthropomorphism is the perception of a divine being or beings in human form, or the recognition of human qualities in these beings. ... Ancient mythologies frequently represented the divine as deities with human forms and qualities. They resemble human beings not only in appearance and personality; they exhibited many human behaviours that were used to explain natural phenomena, creation, and historical events. The deities fell in love, married, had children, fought battles, wielded weapons, and rode horses and chariots. They feasted on special foods, and sometimes required sacrifices of food, beverage, and sacred objects to be made by human beings. Some anthropomorphic deities represented specific human concepts, such as love, war, fertility, beauty, or the seasons. Anthropomorphic deities exhibited human qualities such as beauty, wisdom, and power, and sometimes human weaknesses such as greed, hatred, jealousy, and uncontrollable anger. Greek deities such as Zeus and Apollo often were depicted in human form exhibiting both commendable and despicable human traits. Anthropomorphism in this case is, more specifically, **anthropotheism**. ...

Both Judaism and Islam reject an anthropomorphic deity, believing that God is beyond human comprehension. Judaism's rejection of an anthropomorphic deity grew during the Hasmonean period (circa 300 BCE), when Jewish belief incorporated some Greek philosophy. Judaism's rejection grew further after the Islamic Golden Age in the tenth century, which Maimonides codified in the twelfth century, in his thirteen principles of Jewish faith. Hindus do not reject the concept of a deity in the abstract unmanifested, but note practical problems. Lord Krishna said in the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 12, Verse 5, that it is much more difficult for people to focus on a deity as the unmanifested than one with form, using anthropomorphic icons (murtis), because people need to perceive with their senses. ... There are various examples of **personification as a literary device** in both Hebrew Bible and Christian New Testament and also in the texts of some other religions.

... Anthropomorphism, also referred to as personification, is a well-established literary device from ancient times. The story of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" in Hesiod's Works and Days preceded Aesop's fables by centuries. Collections of linked fables from India, the Jataka Tales and Panchatantra, also employ anthropomorphized animals to illustrate principles of life. Many of the stereotypes of animals that are recognized today, such as the wily fox and the proud lion, can be found in these collections. Aesop's anthropomorphisms were so familiar by the first century CE that they colored the thinking of at least one philosopher:

And there is another charm about him, namely, that he puts animals in a pleasing light and makes them interesting to mankind. For after being brought up from childhood with these stories, and after being as it were nursed by them from babyhood, we acquire certain opinions of the several animals and think of some of them as royal animals, of others as silly, of others as witty, and others as innocent. — Apollonius of Tyana

In fairy tales... Anthropomorphic motifs have been common from the earliest ancient examples set in a mythological context to the great collections of the Brothers Grimm and Perrault.

... Building on the popularity of fables and fairy tales, specifically children's literature began to emerge in the nineteenth century with works such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) by Lewis Carroll, *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (1883) by Carlo Collodi and *The Jungle Book* (1894) by Rudyard Kipling. ... This

continued in the twentieth century ... examples being *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1901) and later books by Beatrix Potter; *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame (1908); *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928) by A. A. Milne; and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950) and the subsequent books in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series by C. S. Lewis. In many of these stories the animals can be seen as representing facets of human personality and character.

The **fantasy genre** developed from mythological, fairy tale, and Romance motifs and characters, sometimes with anthropomorphic animals. The best-selling examples of the genre are *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955), both by J. R. R. Tolkien, books peopled with talking creatures such as ravens, spiders, and the dragon Smaug and a multitude of anthropomorphic goblins and elves. John D. Rateliff calls this the "Doctor Dolittle Theme" in his book *The History of the Hobbit* and Tolkien saw this anthropomorphism as closely linked to the emergence of human language and myth: "...The first men to talk of 'trees and stars' saw things very differently. To them, the world was alive with mythological beings... To them the whole of creation was "myth-woven and elf-patterned".'

In film... Some of the most notable examples are the Walt Disney characters the Magic Carpet from Disney's Aladdin franchise, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy, and Oswald the Lucky Rabbit; the Looney Tunes characters Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, and Porky Pig; and an array of others from the 1920s to present day. In the Disney/Pixar films *Cars* (2006), *Cars 2* (2011), *Planes* (2013), *Planes: Fire & Rescue* (2014) and *Cars 3* (2017), all the characters are anthropomorphic vehicles, while the Toy Story movies are anthropomorphic toys... Other Pixar films like *Monsters, Inc.* (2001) and *Monsters University* (2013) are anthropomorphic monsters, and *Finding Nemo* (2003) and *Finding Dory* (2016) are anthropomorphic marine life creatures (like fish, sharks, and whales).

In visual art ... Claes Oldenburg's soft sculptures of oversized common household objects—classified as Pop Art—are commonly described as anthropomorphic. Their anthropomorphic qualities are mainly in their sagging and malleable exterior mirroring the not so idealistic forms of the human body. For example, in "Soft Light Switches" Oldenburg creates a household light switch out of vinyl. The two identical switches, in a dulled orange, suggest human nipples. The soft vinyl echoes the aging process as the sculpture wrinkles and sinks with time.

For branding, and merchandising, figures known as mascots are now often employed to personify sports teams, corporations, and major events such as the World's Fair and the Olympics. These personifications may be simple human or animal figures, such as Ronald McDonald or the ass that represents the United States's Democratic Party. Other times, they are anthropomorphic items, such as "Clippy" or the "Michelin Man".

...

Modern psychologists generally characterize anthropomorphism as a **cognitive bias**. That is, anthropomorphism is a cognitive process by which people use their schemas about other humans as a basis for inferring the properties of non-human entities in order to make efficient judgements about the environment, even if those inferences are not always accurate. Schemas about humans are used as the basis because this knowledge is acquired early in life, is more detailed than knowledge about non-human entities, and is more readily accessible in memory. Anthropomorphism can also function as a strategy to cope with loneliness when other human connections are not available. ...Psychologist Adam Waytz and his colleagues created a three-factor theory of anthropomorphism to describe these aspects and predict when people are most likely to anthropomorphize. The three factors are:

- Elicited agent knowledge, or the amount of prior knowledge held about an object and the extent to which that knowledge is called to mind.
- Effectance, or the drive to interact with and understand one's environment.
- Sociality, the need to establish social connections.

When elicited agent knowledge is low and effectance and sociality are high, people are more likely to anthropomorphize. Various dispositional, situational, developmental, and cultural variables can affect these three factors, such as need for cognition, social disconnection, cultural ideologies, uncertainty avoidance, etc. ...

Developmental perspective

Children appear to anthropomorphize and use egocentric reasoning from an early age and use it more frequently than adults. Examples of this are describing a storm cloud as "angry" or drawing flowers with faces. This penchant for anthropomorphism is likely because children have acquired vast amounts of socialization, but not as much experience with specific non-human entities, so thus they have less

developed alternative schemas for their environment. In contrast, autistic children tend to describe anthropomorphized objects in purely mechanical terms because they have difficulties with theory of mind.

Effect on learning

Anthropomorphism can be used to assist learning. Specifically, anthropomorphized words and describing scientific concepts with intentionality can improve later recall of these concepts.

In mental health

In people with depression, social anxiety, or other mental illnesses, emotional support animals are a useful component of treatment partially because anthropomorphism of these animals can satisfy the patients' need for social connection.

In marketing

Anthropomorphism of inanimate objects can affect product-buying behaviour. When products seem to resemble a human schema, such as the front of a car resembling a face, potential buyers evaluate that product more positively than if they do not anthropomorphize the object. People also tend to trust robots to do more complex tasks such as driving a car or childcare if the robot resembles humans in ways such as having a face, voice, and name; mimicking human motions; expressing emotion; and displaying some variability in behaviour.

LEM: Other examples of anthropomorphic stories/films

King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table — the sword Excalibur

One Thousand and One Nights — a collection of Middle Eastern folk tales compiled in Arabic during the Islamic Golden Age, often known in English as the Arabian Nights, from the first English-language edition (c. 1706 – c. 1721), which rendered the title as *The Arabian Nights' Entertainment*. The work was collected over many centuries by various authors, translators, and scholars across West, Central, and South Asia and North Africa. Some tales themselves trace their roots back to ancient and medieval Arabic, Persian, Indian, Greek, Jewish and Turkish folklore and literature. In particular, many tales were originally folk stories from the Abbasid and Mamluk eras, while others, especially the frame story, are most probably drawn from the Pahlavi Persian work *Hezār Afsān*, *A Thousand Tales*, which in turn relied partly on Indian elements. What is common throughout all the editions of the Nights is the initial frame story of the ruler Shahryār and his wife Scheherazade and the framing device incorporated throughout the tales themselves. ...Some of the stories commonly associated with The Nights, in particular "Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp", "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves", and "The Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor", were not part of The Nights in its original Arabic versions but were added to the collection by Antoine Galland and other European translators.

Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein** — Wikipedia: "Part of Frankenstein's rejection of his creation is the fact that he does not give it a name, which causes a lack of identity. Instead it is referred to by words such as "wretch", "monster", "creature", "demon", "devil", "fiend", and "it". When Frankenstein converses with the creature in Chapter 10, he addresses it as "vile insect", "abhorred monster", "fiend", "wretched devil", and "abhorred devil"."

Film: **Pulp Fiction** - The mysterious 666 briefcase—The combination of the mysterious suitcase lock is 666, the "Number of the Beast". Tarantino has said there is no explanation for its contents – it is simply a MacGuffin, a pure plot device.

Film: **The Red Violin**

Reviews

www.washingtonpost.com/

By Joanna Scutts, Nov 23, 2015

Hannah Rothschild, a scion of the banking dynasty, wrote her first nonfiction book, “[The Baroness](#),” about the life of her great-aunt Pannonica, a rebel who abandoned her notorious family to become a passionate patron of jazz. That story was complex, unpredictable and enriched by a serious consideration of the human impact of vast wealth. By contrast, Rothschild’s first novel, “[The Improbability of Love](#),” is an exuberant, **uneven satire of consumption and corruption in the London art world**. This is fiction aimed at readers who find “Downton Abbey” too bleakly realistic. The cast of caricatures is blessed with deliciously absurd names ranging from Liora van Cuttersman to M. Power Dub-Box — a cliché of a rap star who shows up at the art auction that opens the novel with a posse of writhing, nearly naked women.

At the heart of the silliness, however, lies a serious question about the value of art in a market that has become a species of commodities trading and a convenient way for unsavoury billionaires to bury their wealth and burnish their reputations. Given this cutthroat game that governments and public museums can barely afford to play, a cynic would conclude that there’s no such thing as inherent value: A painting is only worth what someone will pay. **“The Improbability of Love” is not quite so cynical, although plenty of its characters are.** The exception is our struggling heroine, Annie, who stumbles across a grubby but entrancing painting in a junk shop and impulsively buys it as a gift for a man she’s been dating. He promptly dumps her, leaving her stuck with what turns out to be a lost masterpiece by an 18th-century rococo painter. This small work of art depicts lovers in a sylvan glade, and apparently it possesses the power to drive its owners and admirers into paroxysms of desire. **At several points in the book, the painting itself addresses the reader, expanding the story’s historical reach while stretching our tolerance for whimsy.**

Annie, pretty as a picture under her baggy pants and Doc Martens boots, is an outsider to the art world and naive to its machinations. Newly arrived in London with a broken heart, she’s saddled with a mess of an alcoholic mother who is nevertheless very effective at advancing the plot. Annie attracts the attention of a sweet-natured guide at London’s Wallace Collection who helps her sleuth out her painting’s provenance while — surprise! — falling in love. But unfortunately, Annie has just taken a job as the private chef for Britain’s most powerful father-daughter art dealers, and all is not what it seems with the 91-year-old patriarch. He will go to any lengths to cover up his past, in which Annie’s painting plays a crucial role.

Rothschild has so much fun mixing up her colorful characters — like the self-styled Barthomley Chesterfield Fitzroy St. George, Svengali to the nouveaux riches — that the **plot is slow to get going and its denouement somewhat slapdash**. But as befits a novel by the chair of the National Gallery and a trustee of the Tate, “The Improbability of Love” is **enlivened by insider knowledge** that’s too juicy to be entirely fictional.

www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/20

The opening pages puzzled me. Reading the **cavalcade of clichés** in the prologue, I couldn’t perceive any quality that caused this novel to be elevated to the shortlist of the Baileys prize this month. Could it be that after the success of Ali Smith and Eimear McBride, the judges had been told to throw in some middlebrow contenders? **Or could the clichés have something to do with the subject matter, a society auction of a newly discovered old master – a satiric comment on the nullity of the characters on parade?** For rocking up the steps of the auction house is a murky array of Russian billionaires, rap stars, hedgies and sheikhs, all keen to get hold of a 300-year-old oil sketch, *The Improbability of Love*.

This is **a lengthy, baggy book that takes 100 pages to get going**. Once it does, its sweep is almost Dickensian, taking us from high to low in society – though Rothschild is clearly more comfortable at the top end. Below the wealthy collectors and skint aristocrats are would-be chef Annie and her alcoholic mother, Evie, and Ralph Bernoff, luckless owner of the junk shop where Annie picks up a grubby oil painting for a song. Even lower down is the underclass, glimpsed in silhouette, flicking V-signs and keying expensive motors.

The grimy canvas turns out to be a lost Watteau, and **Rothschild is fascinating on the arcana of art restoration, valuation, attribution and sale**. Describing such things, her prose becomes crisp and crystalline. But we have a romance to get through first: that of dull Annie and smitten Jesse, who works at the [Wallace Collection](#). **The painting of a dancer, a lover and a clown that is “capable of inspiring love” ironically has no effect on Annie.**

The canvas itself is given a voice, relating its provenance in arch, self-satisfied tones: “Anyway, back to the important issue: *moi*.” It remembers its poor creator’s early death and its many subsequent adventures, including being lugged to Paris as Napoleon’s war booty: “It was quite fun really, being with so many great paintings ... it was the first time I had met Jan van Eyck’s Ghent Altarpiece [and] the Apollo Belvedere.” Once owned by Voltaire and Catherine the Great, it deplores its relegation to a poky London flat.

But powerful and sinister forces mean it can’t stay in a plastic bag forever. The same canvas is being ardently sought by Memling Winkleman, a terrifying 90-year-old international art dealer. His browbeaten daughter Rebecca has no idea why the lost painting means so much to her father, who survived Auschwitz and has shown little emotion since. Tracking its whereabouts, she discovers something truly horrible, both about Memling and the art world itself.

Rothschild is a trustee of Tate and chair of the National Gallery (scenes at the latter show it to be peopled by saintly scholars) and her depiction of the rarefied art world is gripping. **Some scenes don’t advance the plot but amuse nonetheless.** The ineffectual Earl Beachendon, a director at Monachorum, risks the sack unless he can bring in a huge sale. Vulture-like, he descends on a decrepit collector, only to face a newly installed, much younger and extremely sharp wife. Then there’s Janacek, the Auerbach-like painter whose dingy studio is filled with masterpieces that he doesn’t need to sell, so austere is his lifestyle.

Also dancing through the plot is the delightful society fixer Barty Chesterfield Fitzroy St George (ne Reg Dunn), who has taken Vlad, a lugubrious thug of a Russian billionaire, under his wing. For all his frivolity, Barty has a kind and sensitive heart. Meanwhile, Vlad attempts to placate his far-off but all-knowing leader to chilling effect. The result is **a slightly odd mixture of whimsy, horror and humour.** But as Annie the caterer says, “When I can persuade three different random ingredients to go together and create something delicious, I am overcome by waves of happiness.”

www.nytimes.com/2015/12/03/books/

“The Improbability of Love” is the name of both Hannah Rothschild’s debut novel and the masterpiece at its heart. **The painting in question is fictional; the painter, Jean-Antoine Watteau, is not.**

Watteau is credited with the creation of the 18th-century **fête galante** painting style, defined primarily by **costumed figures flirting and cavorting in parklands.** Ms. Rothschild’s book, though set in contemporary London, is done in more or less the same idiom — it’s a frolicsome art-world caper whose extravagant personalities tear boisterously through manicured worlds (without realizing that dark clouds are accumulating in the distance, just as they do in some of Watteau’s works).

The book may on occasion be **silly and over-the-top, even for a satire.** But Ms. Rothschild writes with such exuberance and spins such a propulsive yarn that you happily accept these excesses as part of the package, the same way you happily accept the frippery of Elton John. ...

The plot. Lord, where to begin. Annie McDee, a struggling chef, is 31 and reeling from a catastrophic break-up. She buys a painting at a junk shop for a fellow she met at a speed-dating wingding; he stands her up for dinner. Annie now looks at this painting as a jeering reminder of her impetuosity, but Evie, Annie’s mother and unwanted houseguest (lush, goes through boyfriends like popcorn), sees something of value in it, stuffs it into a plastic bag, and forces her daughter into an excursion to the [Wallace Collection](#).

There, as her mother brazenly compares and contrasts the painting to Rococo masterpieces on the walls, Annie meets an adorable guide and struggling artist, Jesse. He offers to help determine the painter and provenance of Annie’s mysterious purchase — as a pretext for courtship, of course.

Poor lambs. They have no idea what lies ahead. This lost work is in fact a foundational piece in Watteau’s oeuvre, one that’s had pride of place in almost every palace listed in Baedeker’s and is currently of keen (and inconvenient) interest to Winkleman Fine Art Ltd., where Annie works as a lowly chef.

The reader suddenly enters London’s outrageous art scene, whose gallery of divas and miscreants includes a Russian billionaire thug named Vlad; an American dowager socialite named Melanie Appledore; and most deliciously, a 69-year-old gay Svengali and fixer named Barthomley Chesterfield Fitzroy St. George, né Reg Dunn, who never met a wig or paparazzo he didn’t like. A typical exchange between Barty and one of his assistants: “Dmitri Voldakov wants to know if you can organize a chalet in Gstaad that sleeps 30?”

“Tell him of course — even if I have to build it with my bare hands.” You grow so accustomed to these ridiculous — and for the most part, lovable — characters that it doesn’t seem at all strange when a luckless earl throws himself at the mercy of a contemporary artist named Blob.

It helps that [Ms. Rothschild](#), a descendant of the wealthy banking family, knows a great deal about art. (She’s made several documentaries about painters and recently became the first female chair of the National Gallery in London.) Her erudition — about restoration, authentication, art history in general — comes through on page after page, and it’s one of the incidental pleasures of reading “The Improbability of Love,” as are her mouth-watering descriptions of the feasts Annie makes.

Some of the best disquisitions about art come from the painting itself, which, yes, is a character, and a very refined one at that. “His beauties,” says the painting of its master, Watteau, “had a sort of *désinvolture* (get a dictionary).” —[flippancy, perkiness, airiness]

This is probably the time to note that the painting’s first language was “pre-revolutionary French.” The Watteau’s hauteur is justified. It possesses magical, almost aphrodisiacal, powers. Practically every man who has ever seen this masterwork has felt instantly compelled to give it to his beloved. “I was painted to celebrate the wild cascades of love,” explains the painting, “the rollicking, bucking, breaking and transformative passion that inevitably gave way to miserable, constricting, overbearing disappointment.” I circled that sentence as I was reading, thinking it a nice distillation of both love’s folly and the mood of the fantastical Watteau. Unfortunately, Ms. Rothschild must have liked that sentence, too, because it shows up again, almost word for word, 50 pages later.

While we’re on the subject of textual glitches: Jesse, the struggling artist, has “tawny-colored eyes” when he and Annie first meet cute on Page 63; “deep-set green eyes” on Page 120; and “summer-blue eyes with dark edging” on Page 168. The blue eyes finally stick. “His deep-blue eyes,” she writes again on Page 296, “were flecked with tiny gold and black streaks.”

I chalked up these inconsistencies to the author’s obvious enthusiasm. I suspect that Ms. Rothschild, after decades of contemplating art, is also in the habit of describing people in painterly detail. (Watery eyes, high cheekbones, smatterings of freckles, curls of hair — they all get top billing in her character sketches.) But as the painting might say: The state of publishing these days! Would such copy-editing mistakes have happened in a Thomas Wolfe novel edited by Maxwell Perkins? *Non*.

There’s not much more I can say about the intrigue of “The Improbability of Love” without being a rotten spoiler. What I can say is that Ms. Rothschild makes an impassioned case for art — as a companion to the lonely, as a restorative to those in pain — and leaves us with the unambiguous impression that it speaks with equal power to angels and demons. One character muses that “there were paintings to suit every predicament. No emotion, however base or delicate, had been considered too petty or panoramic.” Beauty inspires both passion and violence; in “The Improbability of Love,” you get a generous helping of both.