

**R421 Aspects of the Novel**  
**OLLI Spring Session 2015 – Reston**  
**Kay Menchel**

**Class 1 – Thursday 26 March**

***David Copperfield* Charles Dickens (1850)**

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anyone else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously.

***Midnight's Children* Salman Rushdie (1981)**

I was born in the city of Bombay... once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947. And the time? The time matters, too. Well then: at night. No, it's important to be more... On the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instance of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. There were gasps. And, outside the window, fireworks and crowds. A few seconds later my father broke his big toe; but his accident was a mere trifle when set beside what had befallen me in that benighted moment, because thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country.

***Keep the Aspidistra Flying* George Orwell (1936)**

The clock struck half past two. In the little office at the back of Mr. McKechnie's bookshop, Gordon – Gordon Comstock, last member of the Comstock family, aged twenty-nine and rather moth-eaten already – lounged across the table, pushing a fourpenny packet of Player's Weights open and shut with his thumb.

The ding-dong of another, remoter clock – from the Prince of Wales, on the other side of the street – rippled the stagnant air. Gordon made an effort, sat upright and stowed his packet of cigarettes away in his inside pocket. He was perishing for a smoke. However, there were only four cigarettes left. Today was Wednesday and he had no money coming to him till Friday. It would be too bloody to be without tobacco tonight as well as all tomorrow.

Bored in advance by tomorrow's tobaccoless hours, he got up and moved towards the door – a small frail figure, with delicate bones and fretful movements. His coat was out at the elbow in the right sleeve and its middle button was missing; his ready-made flannel trousers were stained and shapeless. Even from above you could see that his shoes needed re-soling.

***The End of the Affair* Graham Greene (1951)**

A story has no beginning or end: arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead.

***Daisy Miller* Henry James (1879)**

At the little town of Vevey, in Switzerland, there is a particularly comfortable hotel; there are indeed many hotels, since the entertainment of tourists is the business of the place, which, as many travellers will remember, is seated upon the edge of a remarkably blue lake – a lake that it behoves every tourist to visit. The shore of the lake presents an unbroken array of establishments of this order, of every category, from the “grand hotel” of the newest fashion, with a chalk-white front, a hundred balconies, and a dozen flags flying from its roof, to the small Swiss pension of an elder day, with its name inscribed in German-looking lettering upon a pink or yellow wall and an awkward summer-house in the angle of the garden.

***To The Lighthouse* Virginia Woolf (1927)**

“Yes, of course, if it's fine tomorrow,” said Mrs. Ramsay. “But you'll have to be up with the lark,” she added.

***Let the Great World Spin* Colum McCann (2009)**

Those who saw him hushed. On Church Street, Liberty. Cortlandt. West Street. Fulton. Vesey. It was a silence that heard itself, awful and beautiful. Some thought at first that it must have been a trick of the light, something to do with the weather, an accident of shadowfall. Others figured it must be the perfect city joke – stand around and point upward, until people gathered, tilted their heads, nodded, affirmed, until all were staring upward at nothing at all, like waiting for the end of a Lenny Bruce gag. But the longer they watched, the surer they were. He stood at the very edge of the building, shaped dark against the gray of the morning. A window washer maybe. Or a construction worker. Or a jumper.