What is ordinarily termed a novel (or roman) is a work of imagination inspired by the most extraordinary occurrences in the lives of men.

But why should this kind of composition be called a roman?

In which nation should we look for its beginnings, and which are the best-known examples?

And what, lastly, are the rules which must be followed if perfection is to be attained in the art of writing them?

These are the three questions with which we propose to deal. Let us begin by considering the etymology of the word.

Since there is nothing to indicate by what name such compositions were known to the peoples of antiquity, we should, it seems to me, attempt to discover why it was first given in France the name we give it still.

As is well known, the Romance language was a mixture of Celtic speech and Latin, and was in use during the first two dynasties of the kings of France.* It is not unreasonable to think that the kind of work we are considering, being written in that language, might well have been named after it, and that the term roman would have been coined to designate works dealing with the adventures of love, just as romance was used for plaintive lays inspired by the same subject. You will seek in vain an alternative etymology for the word, and since common sense offers no other possibility, it seems simplest to adopt it.

Let us now consider the second question.

In which nation should we look for its beginnings, and which are the best-known examples?

Standard opinion attributes its beginnings to the Greeks, from whom it was inherited by the Arabs, who passed it to the Spaniards, who transmitted it to our troubadours, from whom it was adopted by the authors of our old tales of chivalry.

Now while I see merit in this lineage, and sometimes find it convenient to use it myself, I am, however, most reluctant to apply it
strictly. For surely such a linear process is difficult to impose on an age when travel was virtually unknown and communication so uncertain? There are fashions, customs, and tastes which do not need to be transmitted, since they are innate in all peoples and are by nature inseparable from the communities which give rise to them. Wherever men exist there are to be found inescapable traces of the same tastes, customs, and fashions.

Let us be in no doubt: it was in those lands which first acknowledged the existence of gods that novels first emerged, which consequently means in Egypt, patently the cradle of all religions. No sooner did men suspect the existence of immortal beings than they made them act and speak. Hence, from that moment on, all the metamorphoses, fables, parables, and novels—in short, all the works of untruth which took hold once untruth gripped the minds of men. This explains, once such fanciful notions took root, the appearance of books of fables. Once peoples, at first under the direction of priests, began slaughtering each other in the name of their non-existent divinities and then took up arms for king or country, the honour attached to heroism challenged the tribute paid to superstition. Not only were heroes very sensibly raised to take the place of gods, but the children of Mars were immortalized in song as once the children of heaven had been celebrated. The great deeds they had done were greatly exaggerated. Or perhaps when people wearied of them, they invented other personages who resembled them... and surpassed them, so that soon new fictions appeared which were certainly more plausible and infinitely more relevant to men than those which had proclaimed the fame of fanciful spirits. Hercules\(^1\) was a great military leader who assuredly fought valiantly against his enemies: such a hero belonged to history. The Hercules who slew monsters and cleft giants in twain was a god, the fabulous shape and form of superstition—but a kind of superstition which was rational, since its purpose was to reward heroism: it was the gratitude accorded to those who had liberated a nation. Whereas the superstition which spawned non-created beings which had no material shape, grew out of the fears and hopes of deranged minds.*

\(^1\) Hercules is a generic name made up of two Celtic words, Her-Coule, meaning ‘Sir Captain’. Hercoule was the term which designated an ‘army general’, and this gave rise to many Hercoules. Subsequently, fables attributed the miraculous exploits of several to one such man. See Pelloutier’s *History of the Celts.*
In this way, each people had its gods and its demigods, its heroes, its true histories, and its myths. Thus, as we have seen, a thing might be true in terms of its heroes. But the rest was fabricated, legendary, a work of invention, a *roman*, because the gods spoke only through the mouths of certain men who, having much to gain from this absurd business, duly proceeded to invent the language of the spirits out of their own heads, using anything they considered suitable for convincing or frightening, in other words, anything that was mythical. ‘It is widely accepted’ (observes the scholar Huet*) ‘that the term *roman* was formerly given to true histories and was subsequently applied to fictions. Here is irrefutable evidence for concluding that the second are derived from the first.’

Thus were novels written in every tongue, in every nation, which in style and specifics were based upon both the manners of each nation and the opinions adopted by those nations.

Man is subject to two failings inseparable from his very existence which is defined by them. Everywhere he must *pray* and he must also *love*—and there you have the basic stuff of all novels. Men wrote novels in order to show beings whom they *petitioned*; and they wrote novels to celebrate those whom they *loved*. The first kind, composed out of terror or hope, could not be other than brooding, sprawling, full of untruth and invention: such are those which Ezra chronicled during the captivity of Babylon. The second type is marked by refined taste and fine sentiments: such is Heliodorus’ *Theagenes and Chariclea*.* But since man *prayed*, since he *loved* everywhere, novels appeared in every quarter of the globe which he inhabited, that is to say, works of fiction which showed either the fabulous paraphernalia of his particular faith, or the more real world of his love.

So we should not attach much importance to the business of locating the origin of this kind of writing in one nation in preference to another. We must allow ourselves to be convinced by what has just been said, viz., that all nations have used the term and have defined it in various ways according to their preference for love over superstition, or vice versa.

And now we pass to a brief consideration of the nations which have given the warmest welcome to this type of composition, of the works themselves, and of those who composed them. We shall then bring the story up to our own times, so that readers may be in a position to formulate their own views of the matter by comparison.
Aristides of Miletus is the earliest novelist mentioned by the writers of antiquity. Not one of his works, however, has survived. All we know is that his stories were called the Milesian Tales. A passage in the preface to The Golden Ass would seem to confirm that Aristides was a licentious author: ‘It is in this style that I shall write,’ says Apuleius at the outset of his Golden Ass.*

Antonius Diogenes, a contemporary of Alexander the Great, used a more polished style for The Loves of Dinias and Dercillis, a novel full of invention, enchantments, journeys, and very extraordinary adventures which Le Seurre copied in 1745 for an even more curious little work. For, not content with sending his heroes forth to travel through familiar lands, as Diogenes had done, he packs them off to the moon and then to hell.*

Next come the adventures of Sinonis and Rhodanis by Iamblichus; the loves of Théagène and Charicles which we have mentioned; Xenophon’s Cyropedia; the loves of Daphnis and Chloé by Longus; and the amorous dalliance of Ismene and Ismenias, together with many, many more, some of which have been translated while others are now totally forgotten.*

The Romans, more given to censure and malice than to love or prayer, restricted themselves to a handful of satires, such as those of Petronius and Varro, which we should take care not to place in the category of novels.*

The Gauls, more inclined to the two above-mentioned weaknesses, had their bards who may be regarded as the first novelists of the part of Europe which we inhabit today. The business of these bards, so Lucan says,* was to compose poetry celebrating the immortal deeds of their nation’s heroes and to sing them to the accompaniment of an instrument which resembled a lyre. Very few of these works are known today. After them we had the exploits of Charlemagne, attributed to Turpin, and all the romances of the Round Table, Tristan, Lancelot, Perce-Forêts, all written with a view to immortalizing real heroes or inventing new ones based on them who, since they were embroidered by the imagination, outshone the originals in the wonders they performed.* But how great a gap separates these long, tedious works, riddled with superstition, from the Greek novels which had preceded them! What barbarity, what coarseness followed the novels of such taste and agreeable invention for which the Greeks had supplied the model! For while
there may well have been others before them, they are the earliest known to us.

Next followed the troubadours, and although they should be considered poets rather than novelists, the very large number of engaging prose tales which they composed nonetheless justly qualifies them to sit alongside the kind of writers of whom we speak. If confirmation of this is required, the reader has only to glance at the fabliaux which they wrote in the romance language during the reign of Hugues Capet, and which were avidly copied in Italy.*

That beautiful part of Europe, still groaning beneath the Saracen yoke, and still far distant from the time when it would be the cradle of the Renaissance in the arts, had virtually no novelists to speak of until the tenth century. The first appeared in that country at about the same time as our troubadours, whom they imitated, emerged in France. We do not flinch from taking pride in this: it was not the Italians, who were our masters in this art, as La Harpe (p. 242, vol. 3) states. On the contrary, it was in France that they mastered it. It was from our troubadours that Dante, Boccaccio, Tassoni, and even to some extent Petrarch learned to draft the stories they told. Nearly all the tales of Boccaccio were taken from fabliaux written in France.*

The same was not true of the Spanish, who were taught the art of fiction by the Moors, who themselves had acquired it from the Greeks and possessed Arabic translations of all Greek books of this kind. The Spaniards wrote delightful novels which were imitated by our authors. We shall return to them.

As the gallantry of love and war steadily assumed a new face in France, the novel made solid progress, and it was then—by which I mean at the beginning of the last century—that d’Urfé wrote his novel L’Astrée, and persuaded us, quite rightly, to prefer his charming shepherds and shepherdesses on the banks of the Lignon* to the implausible knights of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. A frenzy of imitation then took hold of all those to whom nature had given a taste for this kind of writing. The astounding success of L’Astrée, which still had readers as late as the middle of this century, went to everyone’s head, and it was much imitated but never equalled. Gomberville, La Calprenède, Desmarets, and Scudéry* believed that they had improved the original by putting princes and kings in the place of the shepherds of the Lignon. Mademoiselle de Scudéry committed the same blunder as her brother. Like him, she attempted
to add aristocratic tone to d’Urfé’s creation and, like him, substituted dull heroes for his delightful shepherds. Instead of representing through the character of Cyrus the kind of prince described by Herodotus,* she invented Artamène who was more deranged than all the characters in L’Astrée combined—a lover capable of nothing save weeping from morning to evening, and whose languid posturings weary but do not interest. The same defects recur in her Clélie, where she gives the Romans, whom she misrepresents, all the excesses of the models which she imitated and which were never more garbled than they were by her.*

Here we would ask the reader to allow us to take a step backwards for a moment, so that we may keep the promise we made to cast a glance at Spain.

Certainly, if chivalry had inspired novelists here in France, to what pitch of excitement had it not also made heads spin on the other side of the Pyrenees? The catalogue of Don Quixote’s library, amusingly drawn up by Miguel Cervantès, defines it exactly.* Be that as it may, the fact remains that the celebrated creator of the greatest madman who was ever hatched by the brain of a novelist had absolutely no rivals. His immortal work, known the whole world over, translated into every language, and to be identified as the very first novel of all, possesses to a greater degree than all the rest the art of storytelling, of linking adventures in the most agreeable fashion, and in particular of combining instruction and entertainment. ‘This book’, observed Saint-Evremond,* ‘is the only one which I can reread without becoming bored, and the only one I wish I had written myself.’ The same author’s twelve ‘exemplary’ tales, full of interest, wit, and subtlety, confirm the place of this famous Spaniard in the front rank. Without him, perhaps we might never have had either Scarron’s delightful novel nor most of those of Le Sage.*

After d’Urfé and his imitators, after the Arianes, the Cleopatras, the Faramonds, the Polixandres,* in short, all those sagas in which the hero, sighing through nine volumes, is only too glad to find a wife in the tenth—after, I say, all this nonsense which is quite unreadable today came Madame de La Fayette who, if too taken by the languid tone which she found in what preceded her, at least was much more concise. And in becoming more succinct, she became more interesting. It has been said, because she was a woman (as though her sex, naturally more delicate and more suited for the writing of novels,
could not claim to succeed better than men at this sort of work)—it has been alleged, I was saying, that La Fayette was given unstinting help and wrote her novels only with the aid of La Rochefoucauld for her maxims, and Segrais for her style.* Be that as it may, no novel is more affecting than Zaïde, none more pleasantly written than La Princesse de Clèves. Ah, indulgent, charming lady, since the graces held your pen, why was not Cupid on occasion allowed to direct it?

Then came Fénélon, who tried to make himself interesting by reading a poetic lesson to his sovereigns, who paid no attention to it. Ah! Tender lover of Madame Guyon, your soul needed to love and your mind to write. Had you abandoned pedantry, I mean the arrogant urge to teach kings their business, you would have given us masterpieces instead of one book which no one reads any more.* This cannot be said of you, delightful Scarron, for until the day the world ends your immortal novel will make people laugh and your picturesque scenes will never grow old. Télémaque, which survived for only a hundred years, will perish under the ruins of its century which is now no more; but your actors from Le Mans, dear, kindly child of folly, will amuse even the soberest readers as long as there are men on this earth.

Towards the end of the same century the daughter of the celebrated Poisson, Madame Gomez, composed works which were no less amusing for all that they were written in a very different ink from that used by the writers of her sex who had preceded her. Her Journées amusantes, like her Cent nouvelles nouvelles, despite their numerous defects, will remain the perpetual core of the libraries of lovers of storytelling. Gomez was mistress of her art—no one should refuse her a commendation she so richly deserved.* Subsequently, Mademoiselle de Lussan, Mesdames de Tencin, de Graffigny, Élie de Beaumont, and Riccoboni emulated her. Their writings, brimming with delicacy and taste, unquestionably do honour to their sex.* Graffigny’s Lettres pérusviennes will always be a model of tenderness and feeling, and the missives of Lady Catesbi will be of perennial use to any who aim at elegance and lightness of style. But let us return to the century where we left it, for we felt impelled to praise these admirable women who gave men so many good lessons in novel-writing.

The hedonism of the likes of Ninon de Lenclos and Marion Delorme, of the Marquis de Sévigné and the Marquis de La Fare,
the Chaulieus, the Saint-Evremonds, in short the whole of that charming society which had thrown off the languors of the god of Cythera* and now began to think, like Buffon, ‘that the only good thing about love is the physical’*, soon changed the tone of novels. The writers who came after sensed that insipid adventures would not amuse a century poisoned by the Regent,* a century which had outgrown chivalric follies, religious excesses, and the worship of women. Finding it simpler to amuse or corrupt women than to serve them or place them upon pedestals, they created events, dramatic scenes, and conversations which reflected the spirit of the times more faithfully. They wrapped cynicism and immorality in an agreeable, playful, and sometimes even philosophical style, and at least pleased their readers if they did not instruct them.

Crébillon published Le Sopha, Tanzaï, Les Égarements du cœur et de l’esprit, etc. All were novels which flattered vice and made mock of virtue, yet when they appeared they were able to aspire to the greatest success.*

Marivaux, more original in his approach to painting reality, and more subtle, at least provided fully developed character-types, captivated the soul, and made the tears flow. But how could a writer possess such energy and yet write in such a precious, mannered style? He is the living proof that nature never grants a novelist all the gifts that are necessary for the perfection of his art.*

The aim of Voltaire was very different. Having no other purpose than to insert philosophy into his novels, he neglected the rest to implement his purpose. And how well he succeeded! Despite all the criticisms of them, will not Candide and Zadig always be considered masterpieces?*

Rousseau, to whom Nature had given in delicacy of sentiment what she had granted in wit to Voltaire, approached the novel from a quite different direction. What vigour and energy there are in La Nouvelle Héloïse!* Whereas Momus* dictated Candide to Voltaire, it was the god of love himself who lit up every burning page of Julie with his torch, and it may rightly be said that this sublime book will never have imitators. May this truth make the pens drop from the fingers of the multitude of ephemeral authors who, these last thirty years, have continued unceasingly to churn out bad copies of an immortal original. May they understand that if they wish to match it, they will need a soul of fire like Rousseau’s and a mind as
philosophical as his, two things which Nature never manages to bring off successfully twice in the same century.

Meanwhile Marmontel offered us tales which he dubbed ‘moral’, not (as one esteemed critic has observed) because they taught morals but because they described our mores, even though this was done in a way which sailed a little too close to the manner of Marivaux. But this apart, what are these tales? Ridiculous balderdash written for women and children, which no one would believe came from the same pen which wrote Bélisaire, a work which alone makes the case for its author’s greatness. How could the man who wrote chapter 15 of that book also aspire to the minor glory of furnishing us with sugary, rose-tinted tales?*

And then English novels, the vigorous works of Richardson and Fielding, appeared and taught the French that it is not by describing the tedious languors of love, or reporting the dull conversation of cliques and coteries, that success is achieved in this genre, but by creating strong, manly characters who, as the playthings and victims of that effervescence of the heart otherwise known as love, show both the dangers and miseries it generates. It is the only way to achieve the progression of plot and the workings of passion which are so well depicted in English novels.* It was Richardson and Fielding who taught us that only the deep study of the human heart, one of nature’s most intricate labyrinths, can inspire the novelist whose work must show us man stripped bare, not only as he is or as he appears to be, for that is the task of the historian, but as he might be, as he might become after his vices are corrected and he has been subjected to the commotions of passion. If an author wishes to work in this genre, he must know all the passions and use their full range. From them we also learned that it is not always by showing the triumph of virtue that a writer wins over his reader; that while it certainly is to this that every effort must tend, this rule, which exists neither in nature nor Aristotle but is merely one which we would wish all men would respect for our benefit, is in no sense indispensable to the novel, nor is it even the principle which makes a work of fiction interesting. For when virtue triumphs, things being as they necessarily are, our tears dry up before they even begin to flow. But if, after it has been tested by the most severe trials, we finally see virtue crushed by vice, then our souls will inevitably be torn, and the book, having moved us immoderately and, as Diderot put it, ‘made
our hearts bleed from the back,* will not fail to create the kind of interest which is the only guarantee of success.

Object if you will: what if, after twelve or fifteen volumes, the immortal Richardson had in the end *virtuously* converted Lovelace and made him *sedately* marry Clarissa? Would readers of the novel in this upside-down version then have shed the exquisite tears which it draws from every person of feeling? When a writer works in this genre, he must catch nature, he must capture the heart of man, that most singular of her creations, and not virtue, because virtue, however fine and necessary it may be, is only one of the manifestations of that astounding heart which every novelist must make his deepest study, and because the novel, if it is to be the faithful mirror of the human heart, must of necessity reflect all its crests and troughs.

Learned translator of Richardson, Prévost, in whose debt we stand for having enabled the beauties of that famous writer to pass into our language,* are you not also due on your own account some tribute of no less justified praise? And is it not with good reason that you may be called ‘the French Richardson’? You alone possessed the art of devising intricate plots which keep the reader’s interest over many volumes, by never allowing the main business to flag though it divides and diversifies;* you alone handled these intercalated episodes so skilfully that the main plot always gained rather than lost by their number and complexity. Thus the large number of events, for which La Harpe criticizes you,* is not simply something which enables you to produce the most sublime effects, but is at the same time the best evidence of the gentleness of your mind and the excellence of your genius. ‘Les Mémoires d’un homme de qualité’ (to add to what we think of Prévost what others besides ourselves have thought), ‘Clèveland, L’Histoire d’une Grecque moderne, Le Monde moral, Manon Lescaut above all,¹ are full of affecting, prodigious scenes which strike and irresistibly conquer the mind. The situations found in these works, admirably managed, lead to moments when nature shudders with horror, etc.’ And that is what is called writing a novel, and it is for

¹ What tears do we not shed as we read this exquisite book! How truly nature is painted here, how well the interest is sustained, how it grows by degrees! So many difficulties triumphantly overcome! What depth of philosophy was required to create such interest in a courtesan! Would it be too much to suggest that this book has a good claim to be considered our finest novel? It was in its pages that Rousseau understood that a heroine, for all her rashness and foolish ways, could still be capable of moving us deeply, and perhaps we should never have had *Julie* had it not been for *Manon Lescaut.*
this that posterity has guaranteed Prévost a place beyond the reach of any of his rivals.*

Then followed the writers of the middle of the century: Dorat, as mannered as Marivaux, as cool and with as little claim to be moral as Crébillon, but an altogether more agreeable author than either of those to whom we compare him; the frivolity of his times excuses his own, and he possessed the art of capturing it exactly.*

Charming author of *La Reine de Golconde*, will you allow me to offer you a crown of laurels? It is given to very few to have a more agreeable wit, and the century’s most delightful tales are not as fine as this one story which will ensure your lasting fame. You are more engaging, more ingenious than Ovid, and since the Hero-Saviour of France, by summoning you back to the country of your birth, has demonstrated that he is as much the companion of Apollo as of Mars, strive to fulfil the expectations of this great man by pinning new roses in the hair of your beautiful Aline.*

D’Arnaud, Prévost’s rival, may often be thought to have surpassed him.* Both dipped their pens in the Styx. But d’Arnaud sometimes tempers his with the sweeter flowers of Elysium, while Prévost, more forceful, never diluted the ink in which he wrote *Clèveland.*

R—— inundates the public. Since he needs a printing press at his bedside, it is the only one which is called upon to groan beneath the weight of his ‘stupendous productions’. A style which is crude and pedestrian, nauseating adventures invariably set in the lowest company, and no merit other than a prolixity for which only spice-sellers will be grateful.*

Perhaps at this point we should by rights analyse the new novels whose only merit, more or less, consists of their reliance on witchcraft and phantasmagoria, by naming the best of them as *The Monk*, which is superior in every respect to the strange outpourings of the brilliant imagination of Mrs Radcliffe. But this essay would be too long. Suffice it to say, therefore, that this type of novel, whatever view might be taken of it, is assuredly not without qualities. It was the necessary offspring of the revolutionary upheaval which affected the whole of Europe. To those acquainted with all the evil which the wicked can bring down on the heads of the good, novels became as difficult to write as they were tedious to read. There was hardly a soul alive who did not experience more adversity in four or five years
than the most famous novelist in all literature could have invented in a hundred. Writers therefore had to look to hell for help in composing their alluring novels, and project what everyone already knew into the realm of fantasy by confining themselves to the history of man in that cruel time. But this kind of writing posed many problems, and the author of *The Monk* was no more successful in overcoming them than Mrs Radcliffe. For an unavoidable choice had to be made: either to develop the supernatural and risk forfeiting the reader’s credulity, or to explain nothing and fall into the most ludicrous implausibility. Were a book of this kind to be published that was good enough to achieve its aims without coming to grief on one or other of these reefs, then far from criticizing the means by which it has succeeded, we would hold it up as a model.*

Before we come to our third and final question: ‘What are the rules of the art of writing fiction?’, we should, I feel, respond to the eternal objection raised by those few atrabilious spirits who, to acquire a veneer of moral rectitude from which, in their hearts, they are far removed, are forever asking: ‘What is the point of novels?’

What is their point? you crabbed hypocrites—for only you ask this absurd question. Their point is to portray you as you are, individuals puffed up with vanity who would like to escape the attention of the artist’s brush because you fear the consequences. The novel, if I may express it so, is ‘the picture of the manners of every age’. To the philosopher who seeks to know the nature of man, it is as indispensable as history. The historian’s pencil can draw a man only in his public roles, when he is not truly himself: ambition and pride cover his face with a mask which shows only these two passions and not the man entire. The novelist’s pen, on the other hand, captures his inner truth and catches him when he puts his mask aside, and the resulting sketch, which is far more interesting, is also much truer: that is the point of novels. Frigid censors all, who do not care for them, you are like the legless cripple who said: ‘what is the point of portraits?’

So if it is true that novels are useful, let us not be afraid of setting down here some of the principles which we judge necessary if the genre is to be brought to the pitch of perfection. I am well aware of the difficulty of carrying out this task without drawing the general fire. Do I not make myself doubly vulnerable for not having performed up to standard, if I can demonstrate that I know exactly how
that standard should be reached? But let us put such considerations to one side and subordinate them to our love of art!

The first and most important requirement is an understanding of the human heart. Now all discerning minds will certainly support us when we say that this crucial knowledge is acquired only through suffering and travel. You must have encountered men of all nations to know them, and you must have been their victim to know how to value them. The hand of misfortune, which elevates the character of those it brings low, gives its victim the right perspective from which to study others. He observes them from a distance, just as the passenger observes the angry waves break against the rocks on which the storm has driven his ship. But whatever the vantage-point at which he has been placed by nature or fate, if he wishes to know men, let him speak little when he is in their company. A man learns nothing when he talks; he learns by listening. Which is why those who talk the most are, in the ordinary run of things, fools.

You who would tread this thorny path should never lose sight of the fact that a novelist is a man of nature. Nature created him to be her portraitist. If he does not become the lover of his mother at the moment when she gives him life, then he must never write, for we will not read him.* But if he acquires the burning desire to write about everything, if he experiences a frisson as he unveils nature’s bosom to draw from it his art and his models, if he has the talent and fire of genius, then he should follow wherever the beckoning hand leads him, for he has guessed the human riddle and will paint humanity’s portrait. Governed by his imagination, he must yield to it and embellish what he sees. Any fool can pick a rose and pluck its petals, but the man of genius breathes its scent and paints its forms: that is the kind of author we will read.

But while I advise you to embellish, I forbid you to depart from what is plausible. The reader has every right to feel aggrieved when he realizes that too much is being asked of him. He feels that the author is trying to deceive him, his pride suffers, and he simply stops believing the moment he suspects he is being misled.

This apart, there is nothing to constrain you. Exercise as you see fit your right to make free with all the tales told by history, if jettisoning strict authenticity is necessary for the feast you will set before us. I say again: you are not asked to say what is actually true, only to tell us what seems to be true. To make too many demands of you would
be to interfere with the pleasures we expect you to provide us with. But never replace the true with the impossible, and let what you invent be well expressed. You will be forgiven for substituting your imagination for the truth only on the condition that you observe the explicit injunction to embellish and astound. An author has no right to speak badly if he is free to speak of whatever he likes. If, like R——, you write only to say what everyone knows already, and were you, like him, to supply us with four volumes every month, then it would hardly be worth troubling to pick up a pen. No one forces you to ply the trade you follow. But if you do choose it, then acquit yourself to the best of your ability. And above all, you should not think of writing as a way of earning your living. If you do, your work will smell of your poverty. It will be coloured by your weakness and be as thin as your hunger. There are other trades which you can take up: make boots, not books. Our opinion of you will not be any poorer, and since you will be sparing us acres of boredom, we may even think the better of you.

Once you have laid down the basic lines of your story, you must work hard to develop it, but without feeling that you must remain within the limits it seems at first to impose on you. If you accept those constraints you will produce thin, cold gruel. What we expect from you are flights of invention, not rule-bound exercises. Rise above your material, vary it, expand it: it is only as you work that ideas come. Why do you think that the idea which inspires you as you write is not as good as the idea dictated by your plan? I only ask one thing of you, which is to maintain the interest until the very last page. You will miss your goal if you disrupt your narrative with episodes which are unnecessarily duplicated or unconnected to the main story. But if you do include intercalated stories, you must work hard to see that they are even more polished than your main narrative: this much you owe the reader for taking him away from what interests him and offering him a sideshow. He may allow you to deflect him, but will never forgive you for boring him. And ensure that such episodes grow out of your tale and lead back to it. If you send your characters on a voyage, be sure you are acquainted with the countries where their travels lead them, and spin your tales with such magic that I can identify with them. Remember that I voyage at their side wherever you send them to, and that I may know more than you and will not excuse your errors in reporting manners and
costumes nor forgive a geographical blunder. Since no one has forced you to devise such escapades, then either you must make your descriptions of your chosen localities authentic, or else you should stay at home. This is the only area of what you write where invention cannot be tolerated, unless the lands to which you transport me are imaginary. But even in such cases I still demand verisimilitude.

Avoid any display of moral earnestness. Morality is not something anyone wants in a novel. If the characters required by your plot are sometimes called upon to raise such matters, let them do so unaf-fectedly, without any hint of deliberate moralizing. It should never be the author who preaches, but his characters, and even then only when the circumstances leave him no alternative.

As to your denouement, it must be natural, not forced or contrived, and should emerge from the situation. Unlike the authors of the Encyclopédie,* I do not insist that ‘it should satisfy the expectations of the reader’, for what pleasure is left when he can guess what will happen? A denouement should be determined by the events which lead up to it, by the requirements of verisimilitude, by the working of your imagination. Follow these principles, which I make your wit and taste responsible for implementing, and if as a result you do not perform well then at least you will perform better than I have. For, as you will surely agree, in the tales you are about to read the boldness of invention which I have allowed myself does not always conform to the strict rules of the genre. But I trust that the extreme authenticity of the characters may be some compensation. Nature, far stranger than the moralists would have us believe, constantly overflows the limits which they have a vested interest in imposing on her. Unchanging in her designs, erratic in her manifestations, she is never at rest, and resembles the crater of a volcano which one moment shoots forth precious diamonds for the use of men, and now hurls balls of fire to destroy them. She is noble when she peoples the earth with the likes of Antoninus and Titus, fear-some when she spews forth the Andronics and the Neros,* but remains unfailingly sublime, majestic, and eternally deserving of our study, our pens, our respect, and our admiration, for her purposes are unknown to us and, slaves that we are to her whims and needs, it is not on our reaction to the hardships those purposes inflict on us that we should base our opinion of her, but on her greatness and her energy, whatever the effects they produce.

* An Essay on Novels
While the minds of men grow corrupt and a nation grows old, false ideas are eradicated because nature is more intensely studied and better analysed. Which is why it is so important to make known the lessons which nature offers. This injunction applies equally to all the arts. It is only through practice that they can be made perfect, and they will achieve their goal only through trial and error. It was surely excessive, during those grim centuries of ignorance when men were bowed down by the weight of religion, that he who tried to understand nature was punished by death and that the Inquisition’s stake was the reward for genius. But in our present circumstances let us still take the same principle as our starting point. When man has tested his fetters, when, with fearless eye, he takes the measure of the barriers which impede his steps, when, like the Titans, he dares brandish his fist in the face of heaven and, armed with his passions as they once were with the lavas of Vesuvius,* he is no longer afraid to declare war on those who once made him tremble, when his wrong-doings no longer seem anything more than simple errors in the light of his subsequent discoveries, then should he not be spoken to with the same energy that he himself employs to direct his behaviour? In a word: are the men of the eighteenth century the same as the men of the eleventh?

Let us end with a positive assurance that the tales we publish here are absolutely new and in no way draw upon previously known models. Their originality might well be thought a merit in an age when everything seems to have been done, when the imagination of authors seems exhausted and incapable of creating anything fresh, and the public is offered only compilations, excerpts, and translations. That said, ‘The Enchanted Tower’ and ‘The Conspiracy of Amboise’* have some basis in history. But the reader will see from our frank acknowledgement of the fact how far removed we are from any wish to deceive him. In this kind of writing, authors must be original or leave well alone.

Here to be set against the various tales which follow is what may be found in the sources which we indicate.

The Arab historian* Abul-coecim-terif-aben-tariq,¹ a writer known to very few of our modern-day men of letters, recounts the following in connection with ‘The Enchanted Tower’:

¹ It would appear more likely that the name of this historian, unfamiliar to all the specialists we have consulted, should be written: Abul-selim-terif-ben-tariq.
Rodrigue, a decadent king and much given to the pleasures of the flesh, summoned to his court the daughters of his vassals and there abused them. Among their number was Florinde, daughter of Count Julian, whom he raped. Her father, who was in Africa, received the news by an allegorical letter written by his daughter. He raised the Moors and returned to Spain at their head. Rodrigue knew not which way to turn. His coffer was empty and there was no place to hide. He decided to search the Enchanted Tower near Toledo where he was told he would find vast amounts of gold. He entered and beheld a statue of Time holding a club poised to strike which, by means of words carved in stone, warned Rodrigue of the misfortunes which awaited him. The Prince continued on his way and found an immense tank full of water, but no money. He retraced his steps and ordered the tower to be shut up close and locked. A thunderbolt brought the building tumbling down, leaving only a ruin. Despite these dire portents, the King assembled an army, fought a battle near Cordoba which lasted one week, and was killed. No trace of his body was ever found.

That is what history supplied. Let the reader now peruse our story and he may judge for himself whether or not the multitude of events which we have added to this dry, bald anecdote justifies our contention that the story should be regarded as entirely ours.\textsuperscript{1}

As to ‘The Conspiracy of Amboise’, the reader may turn to Garnier’s account and he will see how little we have borrowed from history.*

We had no source to guide us for the remaining tales. Plots, narrative style, incidents, everything is of our own devising. Perhaps the result is not of the very highest quality, but no matter. We have always believed, and will never cease to be persuaded, that it is better to invent, however feebly, than to copy or translate. He who invents may lay some claim to genius, and has at least some grounds for doing so. But what can the plagiarist claim? I know no viler trade, nor can I conceive an admission more humiliating than the confession

\textsuperscript{1} This story is the same as that which Brigandos begins to tell in the episode of the novel \textit{Aline and Valcour}\textsuperscript{*} entitled \textit{Sainville and Léonore}, but is interrupted by the discovery of the corpse in the tower. The publishers of the pirated edition of this episode copied it word for word, but in so doing also reproduced the first four lines of the anecdote which are spoken by the gypsy chief. It is as important for us at this juncture as it is for those who buy novels to point out that the work published by Pigoreau and Leroux as \textit{Valmor and Lydia}, and by Cerioux and Moutardier as \textit{Alzonde and Koradin}, are one and the same and both literally stolen, sentence by sentence, from the episode \textit{Sainville and Léonore} which fills about three volumes of my novel \textit{Aline and Valcour}. 

\textsuperscript{*} This story is the same as that which Brigandos begins to tell in the episode of the novel \textit{Aline and Valcour} entitled \textit{Sainville and Léonore}, but is interrupted by the discovery of the corpse in the tower. The publishers of the pirated edition of this episode copied it word for word, but in so doing also reproduced the first four lines of the anecdote which are spoken by the gypsy chief. It is as important for us at this juncture as it is for those who buy novels to point out that the work published by Pigoreau and Leroux as \textit{Valmor and Lydia}, and by Cerioux and Moutardier as \textit{Alzonde and Koradin}, are one and the same and both literally stolen, sentence by sentence, from the episode \textit{Sainville and Léonore} which fills about three volumes of my novel \textit{Aline and Valcour}.
such men are forced to make when they themselves acknowledge
that they have no wit of their own because they are obliged to borrow
the wit of others.

As far as translators are concerned, God forbid that we should say
anything to detract from their merits. Yet their sole purpose is to give
comfort to our foreign rivals. Even if it were only for the honour of
our country, would it not be better for those proud rivals to be told: we too can create?

Finally, I must reply to criticisms made of me when Aline and
Valcour was published. It was said that my brush-strokes were too
forceful and that I gave a far too odious picture of vice. Would you
like to know why? It is not my wish to make vice attractive. Unlike
Crébillon and Dorat, I harbour no dangerous plan to make women
love men who deceive them, but on the contrary, to ensure that they
loathe them. It is the only way of preventing them from being
cheated. And with this in mind I have made those of my heroes who
tread the path of vice so repulsive that they will certainly inspire
neither pity nor love. In this I make bold to claim that I am a more
moral writer than those who make their villains attractive. The per-
nicious novels of such authors are like certain fruits of America
which, beneath the most brilliantly enticing exterior, harbour death
in their flesh. Such low cunning on the part of nature, of which it is
not for us to reveal the motive, is not to be imitated by man. In short,
I shall never—I repeat, never—depict crime other than in the most
hellish colours. I want the reader to see its naked face, to fear and
hate it, and I know of no better way of achieving my objective than to
show it in all its native horror. Woe to them who strew vice with
flowers! Their intentions are less pure than mine and I shall never
imitate them. In the light of this philosophy, there should be no more
attempts to lay the novel entitled J——* at my door. I have never
written books of that kind and I surely never will. Only fools or
knaves, despite the truth of my denials, can still suspect me or repeat
their accusations that I am its author. Accordingly, in future the most
utter contempt is the only weapon which I shall use to counter their
slanders.