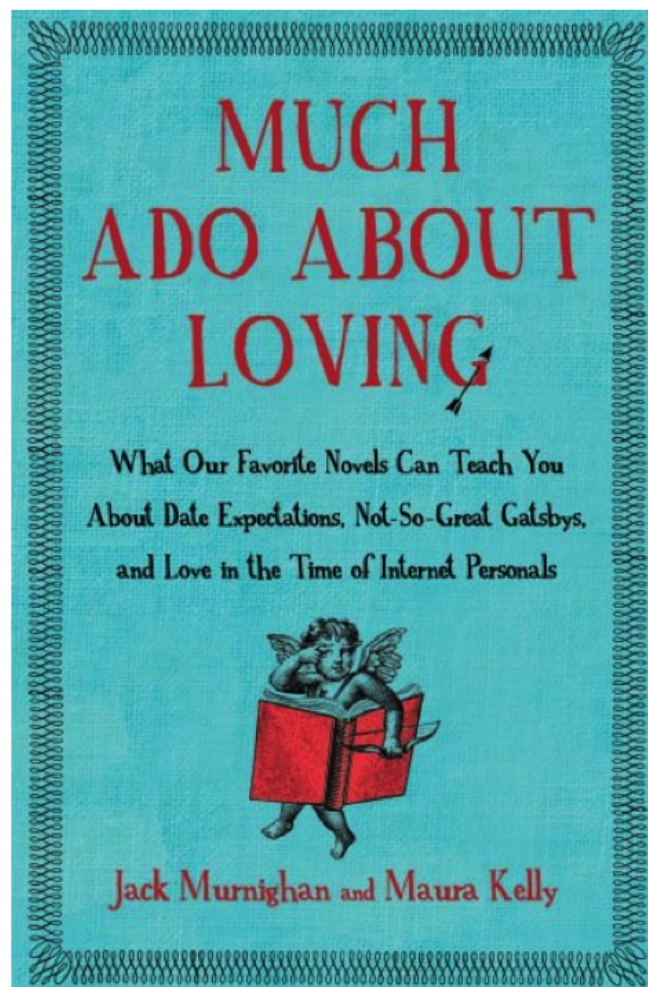


Get Dating Advice From Classic Literature With the Help of 'Much Ado About Loving'



By Michelle Danzig

What does your love life have in common with the love lives of the characters in classic, century-old literary novels? Some of you may be thinking back to your high school and college reading lists when you dreaded those 500-plus page novels assigned to you by an outdated teacher or professor. There couldn't possibly be any similarities between you and those fictional characters, right? Two book lovers and advice columnists challenge that notion. In their new collaborative book, *Much Ado About Loving: What Our Favorite Novels Can Teach You About Date Expectations, Not So-Great Gatsbys, and Love in the Time of Internet Personals*, authors Jack Murnighan and Maura Kelly address today's relationship issues, apply them to the plots and character traits of classic novels and suggest ways that their readers can learn from these stories. In an exclusive interview with CupidsPulse.com, Murnighan and Kelly discuss what sparked the idea for the book, what you can learn from these novels and what they personally discovered while writing.

Jack, Maura's introduction states that you instantly recommended *War and Peace* to help her with her dating troubles. Where did you come up with the idea to learn about relationships from fictional characters in classic literature?

JACK: If you spend a lot of time reading great books, you can't help but learn, feel and grow right alongside the characters; that's much of the joy (and point) of turning those pages. What really separates great literature from merely good is how much it can teach and inspire you. Alain de Botton wrote that Proust can change your life, but that's true of most great writers – and that's why we wrote this book.

In the book, you compare modern-day problems to the plots and characters of fictional literary novels. Which modern-day problem was the hardest one to match?

MAURA: Well, we didn't really say, "Okay, let's take some modern-day problems and look for their analogs in classic novels." We did it the other way around – a more natural approach. As we read novels, we thought, "Hmm! There's a lot in here that sounds familiar. There's a lot here that we can apply to our own dating lives." And then, when I was talking to a friend about how Jack and I were looking for romantic wisdom in novels, she said, "Pass some of that insight over to me!" That's when I began to think that we should write a book.

JACK: I take it as an open dare to find a current life situation that I can't find some analogous set-up in great literature. Even some theoretically contemporary-only situations, like online dating, can be illuminated by quality literature, as in Maura's chapter about *Love in the Time of Cholera*.

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Do you feel that today's generation is facing the same scenarios in love (with the exception of new technology) as what we read in classic novels?

MAURA: Absolutely. One of my favorite proofs that we moderns, living in the age of the iPhone, are facing the same kinds of romantic conundrums that people faced in the time of hunting and gathering – or, at least, in the time of stagecoaches and petticoats – comes from Jane Austen. In *Sense and Sensibility*, there's a great little set piece during which Marianne Dashwood, one of the main characters, sends a note to her crush, Willoughby, through a footman, and then begins waiting, immediately, for his letter back. She waits and waits and waits – and checks at the window and looks at the door and listens for the sounds of a horse's hooves and makes herself sick wondering when she will receive the response she wants. The same kind of thing happens all the time today, even if what we're doing is staring at our computer screens and endlessly refreshing our inboxes.

In your opinion, what are the modern-day catalysts that cause relationships to fail?

JACK: Assuming that you have real chemistry together, in some ways, I think it's all about timing: both parties have to want the relationship to work, and that requires a good time sync. Each party also has to be mature enough to have a sense of what they need and be able to communicate that (and the disappointment of not getting it). That's a fair amount of personal development. I fear most of us, most of the time, brush things under the rug, and eventually, that deteriorates everything.

If you could each chose one fictional character in the novels you studied and give them jobs as relationship experts, who would you pick and why?

MAURA: I don't know if there's a character I would pick. We like characters and relate to them, in large part because they *don't* know everything about relationships and love – and we often read novels to see what they learn about romance. I'll point to Austen again because she's an author so many people know and love. Her characters learn, for instance, that the charming guy whom you just feel so connected to and so passionate about isn't always a good bet for the long haul; sometimes the less dashing – and more cantankerous or even less sexy – guy is the one who's going to make you feel adored and respected.

But if I had to pick an author to be a relationship expert, I'd vote for Tolstoy. That guy really seems to know the human heart inside and out. A "Dear Leo" syndicated advice column? Awesome. Of course, we'd need to do as we say and not as we do – Tolstoy's wife was deeply miserable in their marriage, and I'm sure any of us would've been too. It sounds like Tolstoy was cruel and emotionally abusive.

JACK: Yes, sadly, the wisdom of his books wasn't exactly put

into play in his personal life. Not that either Maura or I have that problem...

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What are some of the biggest lessons that you learned from studying these novels? How do you apply them to your own love lives?

JACK: My favorite lesson comes from Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*, where there's an old married couple, the Bagnets, that provide excellent examples of how to keep love alive. Mr. Bagnet is utterly full of appreciation for his wife, and the palpable love he feels for her, the pains he takes to try to show it and the degree to which he trusts and leans on her all add up to a portrait of an incredible husband. (And all of this occurs in only a few short scenes!) I'd like to marry a woman whom I love as much as he loved Mrs. Bagnet, and then I'd try to be an equally good partner to her.

You can purchase a copy of 'Much Ado About Loving: What Our Favorite Novels Can Teach You About Date Expectations, Not So-Great Gatsbys, and Love in the Time of Internet Personals' in bookstores and online from Amazon. For more information about Maura Kelly, visit MauraKellyWriter.com. For more information about Jack Murnighan, check out his biography [here](#). You can also follow both authors on Twitter: [@jackmurnighan](#) and [@Maura_Kelly](#).