

# PARNASSUS ON WHEELS

## The Art of the Novella Series

Christopher Morley

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“Don't let its small size deceive you..the story of a traveling bookseller and the unexpected love he finds when selling his bookmobile packs a big heart.”

– **Martha Stewart Weddings, 10 Classic Love Stories to Add to Your Reading List**

Praise for the Art of the Novella Series

“I wanted them all, even those I'd already read.”

– **Ron Rosenbaum, *The New York Observer***

“Small wonders.”

– ***Time Out London***

## NOTE TO THE READER

### The Art of the Novella Series

Too short to be a novel, too long to be a short story, the novella is generally unrecognized by academics and publishers. Nonetheless, it is a form beloved and practiced by literature's greatest writers. In the Art of the Novella series, Melville House celebrates this renegade art form and its practitioners with titles that are, in many instances, presented in book form for the first time.

*I imagined him in his beloved Brooklyn, strolling in Prospect Park and preaching to chance comers about his gospel of good books.*

"When you sell a man a book," says Roger Mifflin, the sprite-like book peddler at the center of this classic novella, "you don't sell him just twelve ounces of paper and ink and glue—you sell him a whole new life." In this beguiling but little-known prequel to Christopher Morley's beloved *Haunted Bookshop*, the "whole new life" that the traveling bookman delivers to Helen McGill, the narrator of *Parnassus on Wheels*, provides the romantic comedy that drives this charming love letter to a life in books.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does the novella start with a letter from the author that says “the real author of this book is Miss Helen McGill?” What do you think Morley’s intention was by inserting himself into the story? Why would he speak on behalf of Helen?
2. What is Helen’s relationship with books at the beginning of the novella? How has her brother, Andrew, impacted this view on books?
3. Describe the Professor’s view of literature? What role does he believe books play in people’s everyday life? Do you feel this opinion has changed in modern times? Why or why not?
4. What is Helen’s relationship with life on Sabine Farm?
5. Explain the dynamic between Andrew and Helen. Does their relationship influence her attitude towards others and towards life?
6. Describe the power of literature in *Parnassus on Wheels*? How does the Professor use literature to get by and cultivate relationships with others?

PARNASSUS  
ON WHEELS

CHRISTOPHER  
MORLEY

THE ART OF THE NOVELLA



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7. On page 33, Helen sees Andrew's magazine with "The Revolt of Womanhood" printed across it in red letters. "Here goes for the revolt of Helen McGill," she thinks, and begins her letter to her brother. What kinds of revolts are women doing today? For what reasons?
8. In the book, the Professor states "Reading is not a mere activity, it is an adventure." Explain what this quote means. How has reading led to adventure in your own life?
9. In Greek mythology, Parnassus was the site where the muses of poetry, music, and literature resided. Explain why the author chose to name the Professor's moving bookstore Parnassus. What are the parallels between the mythological site and the moving bookstore?
10. After the Professor sells Parnassus to Helen, he reappears after promising to let Parnassus go and work on his book in Brooklyn. Why do you think it was so difficult for the Professor to let go of Parnassus?
11. While the Professor is briefly in prison, he is able to write about fifty pages of his book, something he struggled to begin while on Parnassus. Why do you think the Professor was able to complete more of his book in prison than he was able to before? What are the environmental factors that you require to start a project and feel inspired?



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Christopher Morley** (1890-1957) was a New York newspaper columnist who wrote over one hundred books, including the bestselling novels *The Haunted Bookshop* and *Kitty Foyle*, which sold over a million copies and was made into a hit Hollywood movie.

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