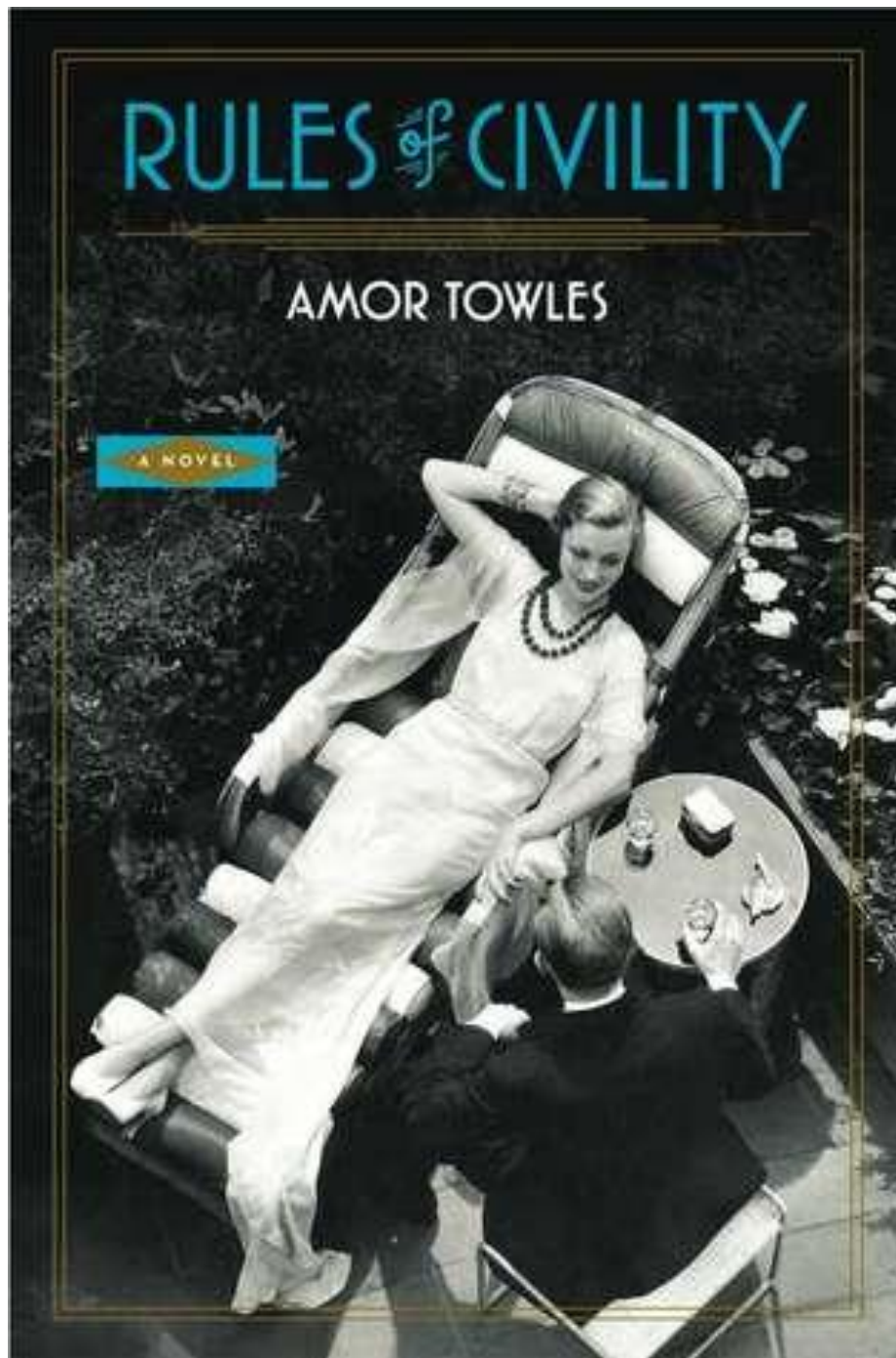


About the book...



[Rules of Civility](#) is a dramatic historical novel from debut author Amor Towles. In 1938, 25-year old Katy Kontent and her best friend, Evelyn Ross, leave behind their small town for the bright lights of New York City. A chance meeting with a wealthy and handsome banker has Katy reconsidering her station in life. Eager for more of what life has to offer, Katy begins desperately trying to work her way up the social ladder. She leaves behind her secretarial job in search of a more promising career among Manhattan's elite, but as Katy infiltrates the top tier of New York's high society, she gets a firsthand glimpse at the manipulation, insecurity, and treachery that often guides the wealthy.

-Books & Authors

About the Author...



Born in 1964, Amor Towles was raised in a suburb of Boston, Massachusetts. He graduated from Yale College and received an M.A. in English from Stanford University where he was a Scowcroft Fellow. He is a principal at an investment firm in Manhattan, where he lives with his wife and two children. He is on the boards of the Library of America and the Yale Art Gallery.

Mr. Towles is an ardent fan of early 20th century painting, 1950's jazz, 1970's cop shows, rock & roll on vinyl, manifestoes, breakfast pastries, pasta, liquor, snow-days, Tuscany, Provence, Disneyland, Hollywood, the cast of *Casablanca*, 007, Captain Kirk, Bob Dylan (early, mid, and late phases), the

wee hours, card games, cafes, and the cookies made by both of his grandmothers.

His novel, *[Rules of Civility](#)*, was published by Viking/Penguin in July 2011 and reached the bestseller lists of *The New York Times*, the *Boston Globe* and *Los Angeles Times*. The book was rated by *The Wall Street Journal* as one of the ten best works of fiction in 2011. The book's French translation received the 2012 Prix Fitzgerald. The book is being published in 15 languages.

Writings

- *The Temptations of Pleasure*, a short story cycle published in 1989

Reviews

Publishers Weekly

In his smashing debut, Towles details the intriguing life of Katherine Kontent and how her world is upended by the fateful events of 1938. Kate and her roommate, Evelyn Ross, have moved to Manhattan for its culture and the chance to class up their lives with glamour--be it with jazz musicians, trust fund lotharios, or any man with a

hint of charm who will pay for dinner and drinks. Both Kate and Evelyn are enamored of sophisticated Tinker Grey, who they meet in a jazz club; he appears to be another handsome, moneyed gent, but as the women vie for his affection, a tragic event may seal a burgeoning romance's fate. New York's wealthy class is thick with snobbery, unexpected largesse, pettiness, jealousies, and an unmistakable sense of who belongs and who does not, but it's the undercurrent of unease--as with Towles's depiction of how the upper class can use its money and influence to manipulate others' lives in profoundly unsavory ways--that gives his vision depth and complexity. His first effort is remarkable for its strong narrative, original characters and a voice influenced by Fitzgerald and Capote, but clearly true to itself.

Library Journal

On New Year's Eve 1937, at a jazz bar in New York's Greenwich Village, Katey and Eve are charmed by the handsome and successful Tinker Grey. The three become fast friends and spend early 1938 exploring the town together, until a car accident permanently injures Eve. Feeling guilty, Tinker, the driver, takes care of Eve and unsuccessfully tries to love her. Despite the presence and initial impact of Tinker and Eve,

though, this first novel is about Katey's 1938. Eve moves on, and Tinker fades, but Katey, the narrator, stays to challenge the New York bourgeois unwaveringly with her acerbic wit, capturing the attention of several doting men. She quits her job as a typist and pursues a career as editor of a respected, if risqué, society magazine. And Katey does it without a handout (she thinks). VERDICT Historical love story. Snappy dialog and sophisticated characters. A romantic look at the difficulties of being a New Yorker. But not, as the publisher suggests, reminiscent of Fitzgerald, though similar themes (class, betrayal, despair) arise. This novel would, however, make a nice (contemporary) companion to novels like *The Great Gatsby* and is thusly recommended. [See Prepub Alert, 1/17/11.]--Stephen Morrow, Ohio Univ., Columbus

Kirkus Reviews

Manhattan in the late 1930s is the setting for this saga of a bright, attractive and ambitious young woman whose relationships with her insecure roommate and the privileged Adonis they meet in a jazz club are never the same after an auto accident.

Towles' buzzed-about first novel is an affectionate return to the post-Jazz Age years, and the literary

style that grew out of it (though seasoned with expletives). Brooklyn girl Katey Kontent and her boardinghouse mate, Midwestern beauty Eve Ross, are expert flirts who become an instant, inseparable threesome with mysterious young banker Tinker Grey. With him, they hit all the hot nightspots and consume much alcohol. After a milk truck mauls his roadster with the women in it, permanently scarring Eve, the guilt-ridden Tinker devotes himself to her, though he and she both know he has stronger feelings for Katey. Strong-willed Katey works her way up the career ladder, from secretarial job on Wall Street to publisher's assistant at Conde Nast, forging friendships with society types and not allowing social niceties to stand in her way. Eve and Tinker grow apart, and then Kate, belatedly seeing Tinker for what he is, sadly gives up on him. Named after George Washington's book of moral and social codes, this novel documents with breezy intelligence and impeccable reserve the machinations of wealth and power at an historical moment that in some ways seems not so different from the current one. Tinker, echoing Gatsby, is permanently adrift. The novel is a bit light on plot, relying perhaps too much on description. But the characters are beautifully drawn, the dialogue is sharp and Towles avoids the period nostalgia and sentimentality to which a lesser writer might succumb.

An elegant, pithy performance by a first-time novelist who couldn't seem more familiar with his characters or territory.

Discussion Questions (www.litlovers.com)

1. At the outset, [Rules of Civility](#) appears to be about the interrelationship between Katey, Tinker, and Eve; but then events quickly lead Eve and Tinker offstage. Are Dicky Vanderwhile, Wallace Wolcott, Bitsy, Peaches, Hank, and Anne Grandyn as essential to Katey's "story" as Tinker and Eve? If so, what role do you think each plays in fashioning the Katey of the future?
2. Katey observes at one point that Agatha Christie "doles out her little surprises at the carefully calibrated pace of a nanny dispensing sweets to the children in her care." Something similar could be said of how Katey doles out information about herself. What sort of things is Katey slow to reveal, and what drives her reticence?

3. After seeing Tinker at Chinoiserie, Katey indicts George Washington's "Rules of Civility" as "A do-it-yourself charm school. A sort of How to Win Friends and Influence People 150 years ahead of its time." But Dicky sees some nobility in Tinker's aspiration to follow Washington's rules. Where does your judgment fall on Tinker? Is Katey wholly innocent of Tinker's crime? Where does simulation end and character begin? Which of Washington's rules do you aspire to?

4. A central theme in the book is that a chance encounter or cursory decision in one's twenties can shape one's course for decades to come. Do you think this is true to life? Were there casual encounters or decisions that you made, which in retrospect were watershed events?

5. When I told my seven-year-old son that I had written a book that was going to be published, he said: That's great! But who is going to do the pictures? While the Walker Evans portraits in the book may not meet my son's standards of illustration, they are somewhat central to the narrative. In addition, there are the family

photographs that line Wallace Wolcott's wall (including the school picture in which Tinker appears twice); there are the photographs of celebrities that Mason Tate reviews with Katey at Condé Nast; there are the pictures that end up on Katey and Valentine's wall. Why is the medium of photography a fitting motif for the book? How do the various photographs serve its themes?

6. One of the pleasures of writing fiction is discovering upon completion of a project that some thread of imagery has run through the work without your being aware—forming, in essence, an unintentional motif. While I was very conscious of photography as a motif in the book, and the imagery of fairy tales, here are two motifs that I only recognized after the fact: navigation (expressed through references to the *Odyssey*; to the shipwrecks of the *Titanic*, *Endurance*, and *Robinson Crusoe*; and through Thoreau's reckoning and pole star metaphors); and the blessed and the damned (expressed through scattered references to churches, paradise, the inferno, doomsday, redemption day, the *pietà* and the language of the Gospels). What role do these motifs play in the

thematic composition of the book? And if you see me in an airport, can you please explain them to me?

7. Upon completion of this book, one of my guilty pleasures has been imagining how Eve was doing in Hollywood. When Eve says, "I like it just fine on this side of the windshield," what does she mean? And why is the life Tinker offers her so contrary to the new life she intends to pursue? If you register at my Web site, <http://amortowles.com/contact/> , on the first of the year I will send you a short story on Eve's progress.

8. When Tinker sets out on his new life, why does he intend to start his days saying Katey's name? What does he mean when he describes Katey as someone of "such poise and purpose"? Is the book improved by the four sections from Tinker's point of view, or hindered by them?

9. T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is referenced in the book's preface and its epilogue. Why is that poem somehow central to Katey's 1969 reflections on her 1938 experiences?

10. Please don't answer this last question until the wine bottles are empty and the servers are waiting impatiently to clear your table: In the epilogue, Katey observes that "Right choices are the means by which life crystallizes loss." What is a right choice that you have made and what did you leave behind as a result?

(Questions by the author, issued by the publisher.)

Read-Alikes

Paula McLain, [*The Paris Wife*](#) (2011)

Paula McLain's *The Paris Wife* brings to life the often-overlooked adventures of Ernest Hemingway's devoted spouse, Hadley Richardson Hemingway. Injured as a child, Hadley never thought she had many prospects in the way of marriage, but when she meets a charismatic Ernest Hemingway, her entire life changes. The two travel the world together and gather research for Hemingway's novels, though it is Hadley who takes center stage in this story of a woman who, though eventually spurned, provided great love

and support to one of the greatest writers of the 20th century.

Susan Fales-Hill, [*One Flight Up*](#) (2010)

In *One Flight Up* by Susan Fales-Hill, a friendship among four women forged at the Sibley School for Girls in Manhattan endures divergent lifestyles, careers, and personal drama. India Chumley, an attorney, has just moved in with her longtime boyfriend when a lover from her past resurfaces. Abby Rosenfeld Adams is an artist and gallery owner, married to her college boyfriend, whom Abby suspects is being unfaithful. Esme Sarmiento Talbot is living a comfortable life in Connecticut but steals to the city when she wants to spice up her sex life. Monique, a gynecologist married to a successful, boring investor, is tempted by the attention of a coworker.

Pete Hamill, [*North River*](#) (2007)

Dr. James Finbar Delaney, is a G.P. serving New York City's destitute during the depression. When he saves the life of gangster Eddie Corso, things become dangerous for Delaney whose only solace is his grandson, Carlito, and his Sicilian

housekeeper, Rose. Delaney's complicated and tormented life is anchored by a wonderful evocation of period New York.

Bobbie Ann Mason, [*The Girl in the Blue Beret*](#) (2011)

Marshall Stone is a US fighter pilot based in England during World War II. After being shot and forced to crash-land over enemy lines, Marshall meets a group of Resistance members who help him escape Nazi capture. Marshall returns to the scene of his crash-landing years later, looking to thank those who helped him for their bravery and sacrifice, particularly a girl in a blue beret whom he cannot get out of his head decades later. Bobbie Ann Mason is also the author of *In Country* and *Clear Springs: A Family Story*.

Deborah Lawrenson, [*The Lantern*](#) (2011)

When Eve meets a lover named Dom, she is immediately swept off her feet, and they retreat to the countryside splendor of Provence, France. There, they purchase an old home with the intention of restoring it back to its former glory. Meanwhile, a woman who lived generations before in that very same house begins telling of her own story about life in the old home. Soon Eve's life intermingles with the former owner's as she begins

to unravel the mystery of the house and the horrible secrets that occurred there.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, [*The Great Gatsby*](#) (1925)
Jay Gatsby had once loved beautiful, spoiled Daisy Buchanan, then lost her to a rich boy. Now, mysteriously wealthy, he is ready to risk everything to woo her back. Bathtub gin, flappers and house parties that last all week enliven Fitzgerald's classic tale, a startling portrait of Gatsby's search for meaning in his opulent world.
Note: this is also a Book Clubs To Go pick

Watch-Alikes

[*Miss Pettigrew Lives For A Day*](#) (2008)

In 1939 London, Miss Guinevere Pettigrew is a middle-aged governess who finds herself once again unfairly dismissed from her job. Now she must seize the day if she wants a job. She does this by intercepting an employment assignment outside of her comfort level as social secretary. Arriving at a penthouse apartment for the interview, Miss Pettigrew is catapulted into the glamorous world and dizzying social whirl of an American actress and singer, Delysia Lafosse. Suddenly, Miss Pettigrew finds herself swept into the world of high society. Within hours she is living

it up. Taking the social secretary designation to heart, she tries to help her new friend Delysia navigate both a love life and career. This is complicated by the three men in Delysia's life: devoted pianist Michael, intimidating nightclub owner Nick, and impressionable junior impresario Phil. Miss Pettigrew herself is unexpectedly drawn to the gallant Joe, a successful designer who is tenuously engaged to haughty fashion maven Edythe - the one person who senses that the new social secretary may be out of her element and schemes to undermine her. Over the next 24 hours, Guinevere and Delysia will empower each other to discover their romantic destinies.

[Wall Street](#) (2007)

Tired of the view from his one-bedroom apartment, Bud Fox dreams of the luxury and power at the pinnacle of Wall Street investment banking. Charming his way into the tutelage of Gordon Gekko, the best of the best, Fox is soon rubbing shoulders with friends in the highest places. But in a world that values high-risk greed over low-yield ethics, Fox will soon find himself in a most precarious position.

[*The Good Guy* \(2010\)](#)

Ambitious New Yorker Beth wants it all: a good job, good friends, and a good guy to share the city with. But when she falls hard for Tommy, a handsome young Wall Street hotshot, she discovers that the last one is trickiest of all. Just as everything seems to be falling into place, Beth meets Tommy's shy, clumsy co-worker, Daniel, and soon learns that the game of love in the big city is a lot like Wall Street: high risk, high reward, and everybody has an angle. Includes commentary and trailer.

[*The Great Gatsby* \(1976\)](#)

[*The Great Gatsby* \(2000\)](#)

[*The Great Gatsby* \(2013\)](#)

In 1920s Long Island, a mysterious American millionaire's efforts to recapture the sweetheart of his youth result in tragedy.

Everyone Says I Love You (1999)

It's the fun-filled story of one wealthy, eccentric and romantically challenged extended family from New York's Upper West Side.

Listen-Alikes

The author put together a playlist of music from this era. You can find more information and a link to the iTunes playlist for download here:

<http://amortowles.com/music/>

For a direct link for streaming some of the music in the playlist above, visit this link:

http://www.playlist.com/playlist/21972856331#a/r_02/WTC/

- [Benny Goodman and His Orchestra, 'Greatest Hits'](#) (1996)
- Fred Astaire, ['The Essential Fred Astaire'](#) (2004)
- Dizzy Gillespie, [Diz and Getz](#) (2001)
- Billie Holiday, [The Best of Billie Holiday](#) (2002)
- Charlie Parker, [The Genius of Charlie Parker](#) (1995)



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