= Quicksilver (novel) =

Quicksilver is a historical novel by Neal Stephenson , published in 2003 . It is the first volume of The Baroque Cycle , his late Baroque historical fiction series , succeeded by The Confusion and The System of the World (both published in 2004) . Quicksilver won the Arthur C. Clarke Award and was nominated for the Locus Award in 2004 . Stephenson organized the structure of Quicksilver such that chapters have been incorporated into three internal books titled " Quicksilver " , " The King of the Vagabonds " , and " Odalisque " . In 2006 , each internal book was released in separate paperback editions , to make the 900 pages more approachable for readers . These internal books were originally independent novels within the greater cycle during composition .

The novel Quicksilver is written in various narrative styles , such as theatrical staging and epistolary , and follows a large group of characters . Though mostly set in late 17th century England , France , and the United Provinces , the first book includes a frame story set in early 18th century Massachusetts . In order to write the novel , Stephenson researched the period extensively and integrates events and historical themes important to historical scholarship throughout the novel . However , Stephenson alters details such as the members of the Cabal ministry , the historical cabinet of Charles II of England , to facilitate the incorporation of his fictional characters . Within the historical context , Stephenson also deals with many themes which pervade his other works , including the exploration of knowledge , communication and cryptography .

The plot of the first and third books focus on Daniel Waterhouse 's exploits as a natural philosopher and friend to the young Isaac Newton and his later observations of English politics and religion , respectively . The second book introduces the vagabond Jack Shaftoe (" King of the Vagabonds ") and Eliza (a former member of a Turkish harem) as they cross Europe , eventually landing in the Netherlands , where Eliza becomes entangled in commerce and politics . Quicksilver operates in the same fictional universe as Stephenson 's earlier novel Cryptonomicon , in which descendants of Quicksilver characters Shaftoe and Waterhouse appear prominently .

= = Background and development = =

During the period in which he wrote Cryptonomicon , Stephenson read George Dyson 's Darwin Amongst the Machines , which led him to Gottfried Leibniz 's interest in a computing machine , the Leibniz ? Newton feud , and Newton 's work at the Royal Treasury . He considered this " striking when [he] was already working on a book about money and a book about computers , " and became inspired to write about the period . Originally intended to be included in Cryptonomicon , Stephenson instead used the material as the foundation for Quicksilver , the first volume of the Baroque Cycle . The research for the sprawling historical novel created what Stephenson called " data management problems " , and he resorted to a system of notebooks to record research , track characters , and find material during the writing process .

= = = Historicity = = =

In Quicksilver , Stephenson places the ancestors of the Cryptonomicon 's characters in Enlightenment Europe alongside a cast of historical individuals from Restoration England and the Enlightenment . Amongst the cast are some of the most prominent natural philosophers , mathematicians and scientists (Newton and Leibniz) , and politicians (William of Orange and Nassau) of the age . In an interview , Stephenson explained he deliberately depicted both the historical and fictional characters as authentic representatives of historical classes of people , such as the Vagabonds as personified by Jack , and the Barbary slaves as personified by Eliza . In his research for the characters , he explored the major scholarship about the period .

Stephenson did extensive research on the Age of Enlightenment , noting that it is accessible for English speaking researchers because of the many well documented figures such as Leibniz , Newton and Samuel Pepys . In the course of his research he noted historiographic inconsistencies regarding characters of the period which he had to reconcile . Especially prominent was the

deification of Newton , Locke and Boyle and their scientific method by Enlightenment and Victorian scholars . He considers the scientific work done during the Baroque period as crucial to the Enlightenment . From his research he concluded that the Enlightenment in general " is and should be a controversial event because although it led to the flourishing of the sciences and political liberties and a lot of good stuff like that , one can also argue that it played a role in the French Revolution and some of the negative events of the time as well . " The portrayal of a confusing and uncertain era develops throughout the book .

Some reviewers commented that Stephenson seems to carry his understanding of the period a little too far at times , delving into too much detail . Nick Hasted of The Independent wrote that this research made " descriptions of Restoration London feel leaden , and intellectual discourses between Newton and his contemporaries textbook @-@ dry . " Despite the thorough examination of the period , however , Stephenson does take liberty in depicting the Enlightenment . Both main and secondary fictional characters become prominent members of society who advise the most important figures of the period and affect everything from politics to economics and science . For example , he repopulates the real Cabal Ministry with fictional characters .

= = Style = =

Quicksilver is a historical fiction novel that occasionally uses fantasy and science fiction techniques . The book is written in " an omniscient modern presence occasionally given to wisecracks , with extensive use of the continuous present " . Mark Sanderson of The Daily Telegraph and Steven Poole of The Guardian both describe the novel as in the picaresque genre , a genre common to 17th- and 18th @-@ century Europe . Humor permeates the text , both situational and in the language itself , which emulates the picaresque style .

The narrative often presents protracted digressions . These digressions follow a multitude of events and subjects related to history , philosophy and scientific subjects . For example , USA Today , commented on the length of discussion of Newton 's interest in the nature of gravity . With these digressions , the narrative also rapidly changes between multiple perspectives , first and third person , as well as using multiple writing techniques , both those familiar to the modern reader and those popular during the Early Modern period . These techniques include letters , drama , cryptographic messaging , genealogies and " more interesting footnotes than found in many academic papers . "

Stephenson incorporates 17th century sentence structure and orthography throughout Quicksilver , most apparent in his use of italicization and capitalization . He adapts a combination of period and anachronistic language throughout the books , mostly to good effect , while allowing diction from modern usage , such as " canal rage " an allusion to road rage . Stephenson chose not to adapt period language for the entire text ; instead he allowed such language to enter his writing when it was appropriate , often turning to modern English and modern labels for ideas familiar to modern readers . Stephenson said " I never tried to entertain the illusion that I was going to write something that had no trace of the 20th or the 21st century in it . "

= = Plot = =

= = = Quicksilver = = =

The first book is a series of flashbacks from 1713 to the earlier life of Daniel Waterhouse . It begins as Enoch Root arrives in Boston in October 1713 to deliver a letter to Daniel containing a summons from Princess Caroline . She wants Daniel to return to England and attempt to repair the feud between Isaac Newton and Gottfried Leibniz . While following Daniel 's decision to return to England and board a Dutch ship (the Minerva) to cross the Atlantic , the book flashes back to when Enoch and Daniel each first met Newton . During the flashbacks , the book refocuses on Daniel 's life between 1661 and 1673 .

While attending school at Trinity College , Cambridge , Daniel becomes Newton 's companion , ensuring that Newton does not harm his health and assisting in his experiments . However , the plague of 1665 forces them apart : Newton returns to his family manor and Daniel to the outskirts of London . Daniel quickly tires of the radical Puritan rhetoric of his father , Drake Waterhouse , and decides to join Reverend John Wilkins and Robert Hooke at John Comstock 's Epsom estate .

There Daniel takes part in a number of experiments , including the exploration of the diminishing effects of gravity with changes in elevation , the transfusion of blood between dogs and Wilkins ' attempts to create a philosophical language . Daniel soon becomes disgusted with some of the practices of the older natural philosophers (which include vivisection of animals) and visits Newton during his experiments with color and white light . They attempt to return to Cambridge , but again plague expels the students . Daniel returns to his father ; however , his arrival on the outskirts of London coincides with the second day of the Fire of London . Drake , taken by religious fervour , dies atop his house as the King blows it up to create a fire break to prevent further spread of the fire . Soon after Drake 's death , Newton and Daniel then return to Cambridge and begin lecturing .

A flashforward occurs in the narration , to find Daniel 's ship under attack by the fleet of Edward Teach (Blackbeard) in 1713 . Then the story returns to the past as Daniel and Newton return to London : Newton is under the patronage of Louis Anglesey , the Earl of Upnor , and Daniel becomes secretary of the Royal Society when Henry Oldenburg is detained by the King for his active foreign correspondence . During his stint in London , Daniel encounters a number of important actors from the period . Daniel remains one of the more prominent actors in the Royal Society , close to Royal Society members involved in court life and politics . By 1672 both Daniel and Newton become fellows at Trinity College where they build an extensive alchemical laboratory which attracts other significant alchemists including John Locke and Robert Boyle . Daniel convinces Newton to present his work on calculus to the Royal Society .

In 1673 , Daniel meets Leibniz in England and acts as his escort , leading him to meetings with important members of British society . Soon , Daniel gains the patronage of Roger Comstock as his architect . While under Roger 's patronage , the actress Tess becomes Daniel 's mistress both at court and in bed . Finally the book returns to 1713 , where Daniel 's ship fends off several of Teach 's pirate ships . Soon they find out that Teach is after Daniel alone ; however , with the application of trigonometry , the ship is able to escape the bay and the pirate band .

= = = The King of the Vagabonds = = =

The King of Vagabonds focuses on the travels of " Half @-@ Cocked " Jack Shaftoe . It begins by recounting Jack 's childhood in the slums outside London where he pursued many disreputable jobs , including hanging from the legs of hanged men to speed their demise . The book then jumps to 1683 , when Jack travels to the Battle of Vienna to participate in the European expulsion of the Turks . While attacking the camp , Jack encounters Eliza , a European slave in the sultan 's harem , about to be killed by janissaries . He kills the janissaries and loots the area , taking ostrich feathers and acquiring a Turkish warhorse which he calls Turk . The two depart from the camp of the victorious European army and travel through Bohemia into the Palatinate . To sell the ostrich feathers at a high price , they decide to wait until the spring fair in Leipzig . Jack and Eliza spend the winter near a cave warmed by a hot water spring . In the springtime , they travel to the fair dressed as a noblewoman and her bodyguard where they meet Doctor Leibniz . They quickly sell their goods with the help of Leibniz , and agree to accompany him to his silver mine in the Harz Mountains .

Once they arrive at the mine , Jack wanders into the local town where he has a brief encounter with Enoch Root in an apothecary 's shop . Jack leaves town but gets lost in the woods , encountering pagan worshippers and witch hunters . He successfully escapes them by finding safe passage through a mine connecting to Leibniz 's . Eliza and Jack move on to Amsterdam , where Eliza quickly becomes embroiled in the trade of commodities . Jack goes to Paris to sell the ostrich feathers and Turk , leaving Eliza behind . When he arrives in Paris , he meets and befriends St. George , a professional rat @-@ killer and tamer , who helps him find lodging . While there , he becomes a messenger for bankers between Paris and Marseilles . However , during an attempt to

sell Turk Jack is captured by nobles . Luckily , the presence of Jack 's former employer , John Churchill , ensures that he is not immediately killed . With Churchill 's help , Jack escapes from the barn where he has been held prisoner . During the escape , he rides Turk into a masquerade at the Hotel d 'Arcachon in a costume similar to that of King Louis . With the aid of St. George 's rats he escapes without injury but destroys the ballroom and removes the hand of Etienne d 'Arcachon .

Meanwhile , Eliza becomes heavily involved in the politics of Amsterdam , helping Knott Bolstrood and the Duke of Monmouth manipulate the trade of VOC stock . This causes a panic from which they profit . Afterwards , the French Ambassador in Amsterdam persuades Eliza to go to Versailles and supply him information about the French court . Eliza agrees after a brief encounter and falling @-@ out with Jack . William of Orange learns of Eliza 's mission and intercepts her , forcing her to become a double agent for his benefit and to give him oral sex . Meanwhile , Jack , with an injury caused by his encounter with Eliza , departs on the slaving trip , the ship filled with cowry shells which he and his accomplices , a Russian fur trader and an English pub owner . The ship is captured by Barbary pirates , and the end of the book has Jack as a captured galley @-@ slave .

= = = Odalisque = = =

This book returns to Daniel Waterhouse , who in 1685 , has become a courtier to Charles II because of his role as Secretary of the Royal Society . He warns James II , still Duke of York , of his brother Charles ' impending death , following which , Daniel quickly becomes an advisor to James II . He continues to be deeply involved with the English court , ensuring the passage of several bills which reduce restrictions on non @-@ conformists despite his detraction from the Francophile court . Meanwhile , Eliza becomes the governess of a widowers ' two children in Versailles . She catches the eye of the king and becomes the broker of the French nobility . With her help , the French court , supported by King Louis , creates several market trends from which they profit extensively . Her active involvement in the French court gains her a title of nobility : Countess of Zeur .

Daniel and Eliza finally meet during a visit to the Netherlands where Daniel acts as an intermediary between William of Orange and the detracting English nobility . Daniel realizes Eliza 's importance during a meeting at the house of Christiaan Huygens . Eliza woos Daniel and uses this connection to gain entrance into the English court and the Royal Society . Daniel also meets Nicholas Fatio while in Amsterdam . Soon after this meeting , Fatio and Eliza prevent the attempted kidnapping of William of Orange by an ambitious French courtier . Upon his return , Daniel is arrested by the notorious judge George Jeffreys , and later imprisoned in the Tower of London . Daniel escapes with the help of Jack Shaftoe 's brother Bob , whose infantry unit is stationed there .

After a brief return to Versailles , Eliza joins Elizabeth Charlotte of the Palatinate at her estate before the invasion of the Palatinate in her name . Eliza informs William of Orange of the troop movements caused by the French invasion which frees his forces along the border of the Spanish Netherlands , a region of stalemate between France and the Dutch Republic . During her flight from the Electorate of the Palatinate , Eliza becomes pregnant by Louis 's cryptographer , though popular knowledge suggested it was the French nobleman Etienne D 'Arcachon 's child . Meanwhile , William takes the free troops from the border on the Spanish Netherlands to England , precipitating the Glorious Revolution , including the expulsion of James II . James flees London and Daniel Waterhouse soon encounters him in a bar . Convinced that the Stuart monarchy has collapsed , Daniel returns to London and takes revenge on Jeffreys by inciting a crowd to capture him for trial and later execution . Though he plans to depart for Massachusetts , Daniel 's case of bladder stones increasingly worsens during this period . The Royal Society and other family friends are very aware of this and force Daniel to get the stone removed by Robert Hooke at Bedlam .

= = Major themes = =

A 2003 interview in Newsweek quotes Stephenson 's belief that " science fiction ... is fiction in which ideas play an important part . " Central to Quicksilver is the importance of the Enlightenment . By placing the reader among a world of ideas that change the course of science , Stephenson explores

the development of the scientific method . One theme Stephenson explores in Quicksilver is the advancement of mathematical sciences which in turn led to important applications : Leibniz 's theory of binary mathematics became the foundation upon which to develop computers . As he did in Cryptonomicon , Stephenson highlights the importance of networks and codes , which in Quicksilver occur against a " backdrop of staggering diversity and detail " , writes Mark Sanderson in his review of the book for the Daily Telegraph . Also , returning to his cyberpunk roots , Stephenson emphasizes the manner in which information and ideas are dispersed in complex societies . Quicksilver uses the " interactions of philosophy , court intrigue , economics , wars , plagues and natural disasters " of the late 17th and early 18th century to create a historical backdrop . From one perspective , the characters are most useful in their roles as " carriers of information " . Although the characters use various techniques to disseminate information , the most prominent is cryptography . Elizabeth Weisse writes in USA Today that the use of cryptography is " Stephenson 's literary calling card " , as she compares Quicksilver to Cryptonomicon .

In Quicksilver Stephenson presents the importance of freedom of thought , the diversity required for new ideas to develop , and the manner in which new ideas are expressed . To explore or accept an idea such as the theory of gravity often resulted in dire consequences or even " grotesque punishment " in the early 17th century . Stephenson also points out that research , particularly as conducted at the Royal Society , resulted in a changing of views in some cases :

If you read the records of the Royal Society and what they were doing in the 1660s , it 's clear that at a certain point , some of these people ? and I think Hooke was one of them ? became a little bit disgusted with themselves and began excusing themselves when one of these vivisections was going to happen . I certainly don 't think they turned into hardcore animal rights campaigners , or anything close to that , but I think after a while , they got a little bit sick of it and started to feel conflicted about what they were doing . So I 've tried to show that ambivalence and complication in the book .

How to exist during a " time of dualities " is another important theme in Quicksilver , especially in their effects on Daniel Waterhouse , who is torn between " reason versus faith , freedom versus destiny , matter versus math . "

Frequent mention of alchemy indicates the shift from an earlier age to a newer transformative age . Newton was an alchemist , and one character compares finance to alchemy : " all goods ? silk , coins , shares in mines ? lose their hard dull gross forms and liquefy , and give up their true nature , as ores in an alchemist 's furnace sweat mercury " . The book focuses on a period of social and scientific transmutations , expanding upon the symbolism of the book 's title , Quicksilver , because it is a period in which the " principles governing transformation " are investigated and established . A commerce of different goods rapidly changing from one into another is a recurrent theme throughout the book . Also , the title Quicksilver connects the book to the method alchemists used to distill quicksilver , " the pure living essence of God 's power and presence in the world " , from , as one character put it , " the base , dark , cold , essentially fecal matter of which the world was made . "

= = Characters = =

= = = Main characters = = =

In order of appearance :
Enoch Root ? an elusive and mysterious alchemist who first appears at the beginning of the book and recurs throughout often in the company of Alchemists such as Newton and Locke .
Daniel Waterhouse ? son of prominent Puritan Drake Waterhouse , roommate of Isaac Newton , friend of Gottfried Leibniz , and prominent member of the Royal Society . Waterhouse is both a savant and a strict Puritan . As Quicksilver progresses he becomes more and more involved in the inner workings of British politics .
" Half @-@ Cocked " Jack Shaftoe ? an English vagabond , known as " The King of the Vagabonds " , who rescues Eliza and becomes the enemy of the Duke d 'Arcachon .

Eliza ? a former harem slave who becomes a French countess , investor , and spy for William of Orange and Gottfried Leibniz . She originally became a slave when she and her mother were kidnapped from their homeland of Qwghlm by a European pirate with breath that smelled of rotten fish .

= = = Historical characters = = =

 Robert Boyle , Irish natural philosopher
 Caroline of Ansbach , an inquisitive child who loses her mother to smallpox
 John Churchill , former employer of Jack and a prominent British politician
 William Curtius , German Fellow of the Royal Society , and diplomat for the House of Stuart .
 Nicolas Fatio de Duillier
 Judge Jeffreys , Lord Chancellor of England
 Robert Hooke , English natural philosopher and biologist
 Christiaan Huygens , continental natural philosopher
 Gottfried Leibniz
 Louis XIV , King of France
 Isaac Newton
 Henry Oldenburg , founding member and secretary of the Royal Society
 Bonaventure Rossignol , a French cryptologist
 James Scott , 1st Duke of Monmouth
 James Stuart , as the Duke of York and as James II , King of England
 Edward Teach , aka Blackbeard
 John Wilkins , Bishop of Chester , founding member of the Royal Society , and advocate of religious tolerance in Britain
 William III of England , as William , Prince of Orange

= = Critical reception = =

 The reception to Quicksilver was generally positive . Some reviewers found the length cumbersome ; however , others found the length impressive in its quality and entertainment value . Paul Boutin at Slate Magazine comments that Quicksilver offers an insight into how advanced and complicated science was during the age of " alchemists and microscope @-@ makers " ; and that the scientists of the period were " the forerunners of the biotech and nanotech researchers who are today 's IT Geeks " . Entertainment Weekly rates Quicksilver an A- , stating that the book " makes you ponder concepts and theories you initially thought you 'll never understand " . The critic finds a parallel between Stephenson 's approach and a passage from the book describing an effort to put " all human knowledge ... in a vast Encyclopedia that will be a sort of machine , not only for finding old knowledge but for making new " .
 The Independent places emphasis on the comparisons between the story that evolves in Quicksilver and Stephenson 's earlier novel Cryptonomicon , with the former " shaping up to be a far more impressive literary endeavour than most so @-@ called ' serious ' fiction . And it ends on a hell of a cliffhanger . No scholarly , and intellectually provocative , historical novel has been this much fun since The Name of the Rose " . Patrick Ness considers Quicksilver to be " entertaining over an impossible distance . This isn 't a book ; it 's a place to move into and raise a family . " His review focuses on the scope of the material and humour inherent in Quicksilver . Mark Sanderson calls the novel an " astonishing achievement " , and compares Quicksilver to " Thomas Pynchon 's Mason & Dixon and Lawrence Norfolk 's Lempriere 's Dictionary . " Although full of historical description and incredibly lengthy , Quicksilver is noticeably full of what Sanderson called " more sex and violence ... than any Tarantino movie " . Stephenson balances his desire to respect the period with a need to develop a novel which entertains modern readers . In The Guardian , Steven Poole commented that ' Quicksilver was : " A great fantastical boiling pot of theories about science , money , war and much else , by turns broadly picaresque and microscopically technical , sometimes over @-@ dense and

sometimes too sketchy , flawed but unarguably magnificent , Quicksilver is something like a Restoration @-@ era Gravity 's Rainbow . "

Polly Shulman of The New York Times finds Quicksilver hard to follow and amazingly complex but a good read . However she notes that the complicated and clunky dialogue between the characters is a distraction . She thinks a full appreciation of the work is only possible within the context of the remaining novels of The Baroque Cycle , and compares the novel to works by Dorothy Dunnett , William Gibson and Bruce Sterling , calling it " history @-@ of @-@ science fiction " . In the post @-@ publication review for The New York Times , Edward Rothstein remarks that the scope of the novel is at times detrimental : " Unfortunately , in this novelistic cauldron it can sometimes seem as if mercury 's vapors had overtaken the author himself , as if every detail he had learned had to be anxiously crammed into his text , while still leaving the boundaries between fact and invention ambiguous " . He considers the novel to be an " experiment in progress " , although the historical background is compelling .

Deborah Friedell disliked Quicksilver . She mentions Stephenson 's poor writing and his lack of knowledge of the literary tradition , which she considers to be because " the greatest influences upon Stephenson 's work have been comic books and cartoons " . She dislikes his use of anachronism , his failure to be literary and his general approach to historical fiction . She writes of Stephenson and the reviewers who reviewed the work in a positive manner :

Stephenson is decidedly not a prodigy ; but his babe @-@ in @-@ the @-@ woods routine has proved irresistible for some , who are hailing his seemingly innate ability to meld the products of exhaustive historical research with what they see as a brilliant , idiosyncratic sense of humor and adventure . Time 's critic has declared that Stephenson has a " once @-@ in @-@ a @-@ generation gift " , and that Quicksilver " will defy any category , genre , precedent or label ? except for genius " . This is promotional copy disguised as literary criticism . There is nothing category @-@ defying about this ridiculous book .

From the foreign press , the review in the Frankfurter Allgemeine points out the historical period of Quicksilver is one of the birth of science which corresponds with a period of language shift as English became the language of science . Moreover , the review focuses on Leibniz 's principles of mathematics which Stephenson claims established the framework for modern computing .

= = Publication history = =

Based on the success of Cryptonomicon , a New York Times bestseller with sales of about 300 @,@ 000 copies , the initial print @-@ run for Quicksilver was 250 @,@ 000 copies . Five months before the release date , a web campaign was initiated to advertise the work . The novel was originally published in a single volume ; in 2006 HarperCollins republished the books in three separate paperback volumes .

= = = Editions = = =

September 23 , 2003 , US , William Morrow (ISBN 0 @-@ 380 @-@ 97742 @-@ 7) , hardback (first edition) , 944 pages
October 2 , 2003 , UK , Willian Heinemann (ISBN 0 @-@ 434 @-@ 00817 @-@ 6) , hardback
2003 , UK , Willian Heinemann (ISBN 0 @-@ 434 @-@ 00893 @-@ 1) , paperback
June 2004 , US , William Morrow (ISBN 0 @-@ 06 @-@ 059933 @-@ 2) , hardback (Special Edition) , 968 pages
September 21 , 2004 , US , HarperCollins Perennial (ISBN 0 @-@ 06 @-@ 059308 @-@ 3) , trade edition , 927 pages
October 2004 , US HarperColllins (ISBN 9780060721619) , CD , abridged audiobook , 22 hours 1 minute , narrated by Simon Prebble and Stina Nielson
November 2004 , US , HarperCollins (ISBN 9780060818043) , MP3 release of the abridged audio CD
Split into 3 volumes in 2006

Quicksilver , January 2006 , US , HarperCollins (ISBN 9780060833169) , mass market , 480 pages

The King of the Vagabonds , February 2006 , US , HarperCollins (ISBN 9780060833176) , mass market paperback , 400 pages

Odalisque , March 2006 , US , HarperCollins (ISBN 9780060833183) , mass market paperback , 464 pages