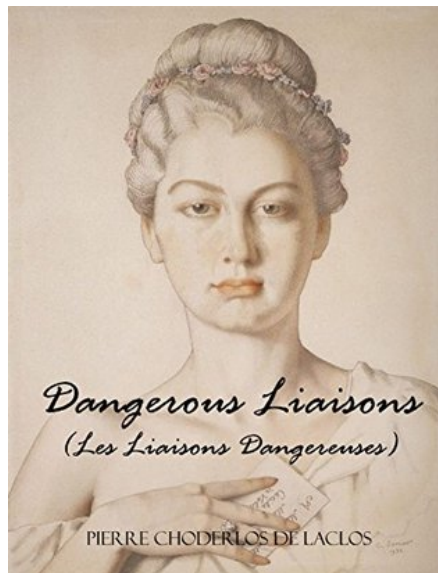




# Dangerous Liaisons (Les Liaisons Dangereuses)

*Pierre Choderlos de Laclos , Thomas Moore*

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**Dangerous Liaisons (Les Liaisons Dangereuses)** Pierre Choderlos de Laclos , Thomas Moore

Dangerous Liaisons = Les Liaisons dangereuses is a French epistolary novel by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos, first published in four volumes by Durand Neveu from March 23, 1782.

It is the story of the Marquise de Merteuil and the Vicomte de Valmont, two rivals (and ex-lovers) who use seduction as a weapon to humiliate and degrade others, all the while enjoying their cruel games and boasting about their manipulative talents. It has been claimed to depict the decadence of the French aristocracy shortly before the French Revolution, thereby exposing the perversions of the so-called Ancien Régime.

The complex moral ambiguities of seduction and revenge make Les Liaisons dangereuses (1782) one of the most scandalous and controversial novels in European literature. The subject of major film and stage adaptations, the novel's prime movers, the Vicomte de Valmont and the Marquise de Merteuil, form an unholy alliance and turn seduction into a game - a game which they must win.

"In a pair of sumptuous drawingrooms, one in a Parisian mansion, the other in a chateau on a luxurious estate in the countryside surrounding Paris, two aristocrats are very bored. The Marquise de Merteuil decides, therefore, to construct a little intrigue for her own amusement and the amusement of her former lover, the Vicomte de Valmont. The Marquise is aware that a young girl of good family, Cécile Volanges, has only just left the convent so that she can be married to the Comte de Gercourt. Now, the Marquise has a bone to pick with this particular Comte, and so she suggests to the Vicomte that he seduce and debauch Cécile to create a scandal and humiliate Gercourt. Valmont accepts the Marquise's proposal..."

...Young men will find in this novel easy means of seduction; young women will here see portraits of embellished vice; and old libertines will be amused by the exploits of Valmont...

## Dangerous Liaisons (Les Liaisons Dangereuses) Details

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## From Reader Review Dangerous Liaisons (Les Liaisons Dangereuses) for online ebook

### MJ Nicholls says

If I were the sort of boner who ran a creative writing night class I might level that grievous accusation at this Gallic favourite—how it “tells” everything and doesn’t “show.” And if you were a frightfully witty sort, you may reply: “Duh. It’s written in letters.” And such a Daria-strength comeback would be entirely appropriate: this is an epistolary novel where effusive aristocrats compose long-winded letters about their schemes and feelings and dire circumstances, with little for the reader to cling to except the inevitable moral corruptions as promised in the blurb and the flashy period prose. I slightly recoil. The epistolary form is so frightfully dull. Regardless how many naïve virgins may lose their maidenhead to unscrupulous bounders. This stream of melodramatic back-and-forth plot-explaining missives lacked any real narrative drive for me, as bitchily funny as the two corrupt lovers were on occasion. I got enough from 100pp or so. Enough for me. You don’t need to finish *everything* you read, right? I mean I don’t get all obsessive about these things. (Er . . . much). And I suppose you won’t ever catch me reading the unabridged *Clarissa* (according to this novel’s preface the characters in *Clarissa* would have to have spent eight hours per day composing their letters for the timeframe to work). Yowza. Cheeses. Wow-wee. Etcetera. By the way the movie version of this is terrific, featuring the hammy delights of a youngish John Malkovich and the nubile breasts of a younger Uma Thurman. Perfick.

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### William2.1 says

An absolutely magnificent novel! To think that it was published in 1782, seven years before the French Revolution. *Liberté égalité fraternité!* It has been argued that the novel thus caught a doomed aristocracy distracted by decadent and libertine ways that would soon be its undoing. The gift the novel's main characters display for casuistry, calumny, prevarication and cynical self-involvement takes the breath away. The novel is so tightly wrapped, so self-referential, that I doubt I will find an extraneous word on this third reading, though I shall try. I bought this Folio Society edition—crushed carmine silk over boards— some years ago to commemorate past readings and carry me through future ones. A stunning novel. A book for real readers.

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### K.D. Absolutely says

When you rate a book, do you consider the introduction (written by a different person), appendices, blurbs and entries in Wikipedia? I mean do you consider the historical background of the story? the life story of the author? it's impact to whatever since its first publication?

Or you ignore all of them and just rate the story as if you do not know anything about those?

Two schools of thought. I know some people just read and then rate the story only. I know some who read not only the whole book but everything interesting about it aside from what is provided in their book's edition.

I belong to the second one and this is one of the reasons why I like historical, biographical or biblical

fictions.

That is also the reason why I am giving this book, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (Dangerous Liaisons) by Choderlos de Laclos (first published as a book in 1782), a 4-star rating (I really liked it).

There is **almost**\* nothing to like about the story *if you read it from the perspective of a 21st century reader*. The despicable, cunning, conniving, wicked, inutile, gullible characters are definitely not new to any of us, regular fiction readers. We all know those from the myriad of characters in novels and other forms of literature. The epistolary form of storytelling is not new to me too. Think *84, Charing Cross Road* or *Clarissa*. A novel originally written in beautiful language like French is common now.

But check this novel's history:

- 1) Laclos (1741-1803) wrote this to depict the corrupt and *squalid nobility* of Ancien Regime (the life of the royalty, kings, queens and their court members and aristocrats before the French Revolution (1789-1799).
- 2) Laclos was a military man and this was his only famous (never out of print since it was first published and has been translated into several languages) novel.
- 3) Laclos wrote this while there was an on-going war and he was allowed to spend time writing this instead of manning his post as a general.
- 4) Prior to writing this novel, Laclos had "planned" to come up with a work *"that departs from ordinary, creates a lot of noise, and will remain on earth even after his death."* **This book obviously achieved all those for him.** For more than 2 centuries, people are still reading this book and not few have this in their top 10 favorite novels. Check Top 10 Novels by your favorite authors here. For example, Emma Donoghue listed this book as her no. 7 among her Top 10.

\* - I said **almost** because I liked and enjoyed the following:

A) The poetic even though lengthy way the characters express themselves in the letters. I think the fact that it was originally written in French, which I have no knowledge of, affected the prose now that it is in English. It is flowery and vague at times but I find it strangely different, thus interesting, compared the standard style of our contemporary novelists.

B) The cunning and despicable characters are so dubious and evil that I was full of hatred while reading. Reminded me of the libertines in Marquise de Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*. Now that I know that the authors', i.e., De Sade and now Laclos, only intention was to show the excesses of the royal people, then I already know that there is nothing to react violently on.

C) The imagination of De Laclos and the way he interwove the lives of the characters were just awesome. The changing of the hearts, the treachery, the turning of the tables, e.g., those wicked characters either died or disappeared in the end, just got me hooked and pushed me to finish reading all the 175 long letters.

I just feel happy having read this book. Now I just don't rely my knowledge of this work on the two movie adaptations. I have read the real stuff and not many of readers nowadays have the patience to read and appreciate a classic though archaic work like this.

Thank you to my reading buddy **Regine** for not giving up on me and Laclos. I have to admit that I thought of dropping this book when we were halfway but she said that she would go on and so I just continued. I am happy I did. :)

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°°°.°..°-°..\_.. ?????? Ποζουλ? Εωσφ?ρος .\_-°-°..°° .°°° ★.~.~.★ ?????? ????????

## ?????? Ταμετο?ρο Αμ says

«Η επαν?σταση ?γινε απο τους φιλ?δονους».

«-?χει αναβαθμιστε? η ηθικ?;

-?χει υποβαθμιστε? η ενεργητικ?τητα του κακο?;

-Η μωρολογ?α ?χει αντικαταστ?σει το πνε?μα;

"Το γαμ?σι και η δ?ξα απο το γαμ?σι ε?ναι ?ραγε πιο αν?θικα

απ'τον σημεριν? τρ?πο με τον οπο?ο λατρε?ουμε και με τον οπο?ο αναμειγν?ουμε το ιερ? με το

αν?ερο; Τ?τε κατ?βαλαν τερ?στια προσπ?θεια για να αποκτ?σουν κ?τι που ομολογο?σαν πως ?ταν

μια σαχλαμ?ρα,και δεν καταδικ?ζονταν γι'αυτ? περισσ?τερο απ'?σο σ?μερα.

Καταδικ?ζονταν ?μως λιγ?τερο βλακωδ?ς,δεν εξαπατο?σαν ο ?νας τον ?λλον».

Πρωτοεκδ?θηκε στο Παρ?σι το 1782, αντιμετωπ?στηκε ως «σκ?νδαλο» και μπ?κε στη λ?στα με τ'

«απαγορευμ?να» το 1825, ?που και παρ?μεινε ?ως το τ?λος του 19ου αι?να. Δυο αι?νες και κ?τι

μετ? την πρ?τη ?κδοσ? του, παραμ?νει ?να αρχετυπικ? ερωτικ? μυθιστ?ρημα? στα ερωτικ?

παιχν?δια και στη θυελλ?δη σχ?ση αγ?πης-μ?σους-προδοσ?ας αν?μεσα στο αρχ?γονο

π?θος -μ?σος,

αρσενικ? - θηλυκ?.

"Και ο Σαταν?ς ηττ?θηκε. ?μως δεν περιορ?στηκε η λαμπρ? σταδιοδρομ?α του".

"Επικ?νδυνες σχ?σεις" το επιστολογραφικ? μυθιστ?ρημα του Λακλ? που αποτελε?ται απο την ?λη

μιας ανθρ?πινης εμπειρ?ας, με πολλ? μυστικ? κρυμμ?να αν?μεσα στο μυθολογικ? και το

ψυχολογικ? στοιχε?ο του ?ργου.

Ε?ναι η ?λη απ?ναντι στο μ?θο,χωρ?ς ρητορικ? ? αισθηματικ? τακτικ?.

Πρ?κειται για ανταλλαγ? επιστολ?ν αν?μεσα σε μια ομ?δα ανθρ?πων της αριστοκρατικ?ς τ?ξης.

Τα πρ?σωπα που αλληλογραφο?ν σχεδ?ν στερο?νται φυσικ?ς οντ?τητας,υπ?ρχουν σαν μυθικ?

πρ?σωπα που κατευθ?νονται απο τον συγγραφ?α.

Ο Λακλ? κυριαρχε? στα πρ?σωπα αυτ? και τα απομακρ?νει απο το ψ?μα του ?φους της εποχ?ς του.

Με αυτ? τον τροπο η ψυχολογ?α τους συνδ?εται με τον καταναγκασμ? και τον ερωτισμ? εν?ς

σκοτεινο? ηθικολογικο? κακο? με βαθι?ς ρ?ζες.

Η δομ? του βιβλ?ου ?γκειται στην ταυτ?χρονη αφ?γηση τρι?ν ιστορι?ν με πολλ?ς ?λλες

συνυφασμ?νες.

Τρεις κεντρικ?ς γυναικε?ς φιγο?ρες του βιβλ?ου: η Τουρβ?λ,η Μερτ?ιγ και η Καικιλ?α.

Τα σημαντικ?τερα πρ?σωπα ε?ναι

η Μαρκησ?α ντε Μερτ?ιγ κι ο

υποκ?μης ντε Βάλμ?ν.

Πρ?ην εραστ?ς ?κλυτου β?ου,ανηθικ?τητας και φαυλ?τητας.

Ε?ναι και οι δυο κυνικο?,αμοραλιστ?ς,

ψ?χραιμοι ανατ?μοι των διαπροσωπικ?ν σχ?σεων και ορθολογιστικο? παρατηρητ?ς των ερωτικ?ν παθ?ν.

Προσπαθ?ν μ?σα απο ?να επικ?νδυνο και θαν?σιμα προκλητικ? παιχν?δι να αποπλαν?σουν,να εξαπατ?σουν και να διαφθε?ρουν τα αθ?α θ?ματα τους προς τ?ρψιν προσωπικ?ν μνησ?κακων ενστ?κτων.

Μ?σα σε αυτ? την ?ντριγκα παθ?ν και λαθ?ν οι δυο εραστ?ς επικοινωνο?ν συνεχ?ς μ?σω επιστολ?ν καταστρ?νοντας το διεστραμμ?νο σχ?διο τους.

Το επιστολογραφικ? μυθιστ?ρημα ?χει διπλ? σημασ?α για τον αναγν?στη.  
Αφεν?ς,σε πρ?το πλ?νο παρουσι?ζεται η αριστοκρατικ? συμπεριφορ? της εποχ?ς μ?σα στα σαλ?νια ?που τα π?ντα κρ?νονται απο την καλ? φ?μη και τους ευγενικο?ς τρ?πους.

Αφετ?ρου,σε δε?τερο πλ?νο μ?σω της ανταλλαγ?ς προσωπικ?ν επιστολ?ν αποκαλ?πτεται η αλ?θεια.

Στα γραπτ? τους κε?μενα εκφρ?ζονται χωρ?ς τυπικ?τητες και ενδοιασμο?ς. Η ευπρ?πεια και η πνευματικ? καλλι?ργεια της αν?τερης τ?ξης καταρρ?πτεται και ανακαλ?πτουμε το πραγματικ? πρ?σωπο των ευπρεπ?ν,ε?πορων αριστοκρατ?ν.

Μ?σα απο τις επιστολ?ς τους δ?νεται το βαθ? ν?ημα του ?ργου αφο? τα πορτρ?τα των ευγεν?ν ξεσκεπ?ζονται ?ταν απουσι?ζει ο φ?βος της κοινωνικ?ς κατακραυγ?ς.

Το αξιοθα?μαστο και πρωτ?τυπο αυτ? δημιο?ργημα μας οδηγ? στο συμπ?ρασμα πως ε?ναι μ?ταιο και περιττ? να αναζητ?σουμε το ν?ημα μ?σα απο το δρ?μα που εκτυλ?σσεται.

Μας δ?νει το ν?ημα η ?δια του η ?παρξη επειδ? ουσιαστικ? αρχ?ζει η ιστορ?α της ζω?ς εκε? που στην πραγματικ?τητα τελει?νει η πλοκ? και η αφ?γηση.

Μια ψε?τικη λογοτεχνικ? αλ?θεια...

Καλ? αν?γνωση!!

Πολλο?ς ασπασμο?ς!!

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## Lady Izumi says

I'm amazed, these two principal characters that are the very incarnations of malice have incredibly salient and correct anecdotes about love and the beauty of sex considering they use it to humiliate others. While the woman (Merteuil) is an expert in deciphering and deconstructing human emotions and its repercussions, Valmont is a virtuoso of reading human reactions even in the slightest form of subtle and heavily-attempted hidden gestures; which enables him to translate it to the emotions of his hapless victims thereby making him a virtual mind reader that aids him to know what should be his next move. As incrementally subtle and as enormously persuasive he is in the arts of rhetorics and inconspicuously obsequious seductions, he invariably wins their confidence until he met his match in Madame de Tourvel who possesses all the qualities he lacks (virtue) but is most sought after of, for which he will use it to keep her conscious of how depraved her

submissions to Valmont are but will still leave her unchecked that she still wouldn't be able to stop herself.

Apart from this, Choderlos' work is a reflection of how abusive and oppressive the French aristocracy was, with notable real life examples as Marquis de Sade and the Earl of Rochester. This also gave us a look of how the French monarchy was gradually declining in popularity until such reasons, with the latter as the catalyst, helped in fuelling the revolution.

Read it. And anyone else who would who love to see the insights of love and relationships, politics and pragmatism would be very interested to know how we could understand that even the slightest mistakes we so avoid in accomplishing our tasks will only add to the beauty of completing them. Knowing that in life, two factors that are of striking contrast will only enhance the candor and realistic nature of actions, whether in human nature or in words of love, when one professes it to someone personally that incoherency of words will only add to its coherence.

Thank you for your time. *Salamat po!*

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### **Michael Finocchiaro says**

One of my all time favourite books, Les Liaisons dangereuses is a tour de force written entirely in letters. It is the only literature that nobleman Laclos ever wrote but he hit a grand slam with this one. Intrigue, sex, betrayal - it is a gripping story told in the margins between the written word and the gaps between the letters. Hard to describe without spoiling the pleasure of potential readers, suffice it to say that the movie (as awesome as Uma and Clooney and Malkovich were in the 1988 film version) is not even close to as exciting and gripping as the original.

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### **Dolors says**

Definitely the best epistolary book I have ever read and probably one of the best novels displaying the double morale in the eighteenth century Paris.

Monsieur de Laclos masters the style, creating two hero-villain characters whom, although monsters without scruples, one can't help to admire. They are playful, amusing, witty and skillful in the art of deception. They are also vain, prideful creatures who seek their own pleasure without caring for the outcome of their poor victims.

Marquise de Merteuil and Vicomte de Valmont are incredibly wealthy and bored to death . So they play dangerous games for entertainment, imposing challenges to each other, seducing young virgins, making adulterers out of prude virtuous women, taking revenge of former lovers ruining their reputation... and they succeed in doing all the mischief they want without being discovered. What's more, they are honourable and well received in society!

Imagine their mirth when they accomplish every evil scheme they propose while they become their victims' only friends and saviours.

But apart from the elaborated style and the amusing display of strategic tactics which thread the story, one can't miss the allusion to the thin line of what's morally right or wrong. Is "what is socially accepted" the true and only way?

Marquise de Merteuil and Vicomte de Valmont are not exemplary models of sincerity or frankness, but they challenge the imposed rules somehow, they outwit hypocrisy, the problem is that they only do it to achieve personal gratification, corrupting their souls and everyone who dares to trust in them.

In my opinion, it's incredible that a novel written more than 180 years ago, might still stir deep emotions in those who can invest a moment of their time to think about the possible reasons that led a man like M. de Laclos to write this controversial story.

Don't take this novel only as a mere diversion, it's much more than that. It's about recognising that each of us has some of the Vicomte or of the Marquise in us, we are all vain and proud and think ourselves superior to the rest. That's why I value this work, because it reminds us of what wretched and capricious creatures we humans can become.

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## Rowena says

This is one of the most intriguing classics I've read in a long time. At first glance it didn't seem to me as though a book that consists entirely of series of letters written between various people would be interesting, but this was the 18th Century, when letter-writing among the French aristocracy was obviously an art form so each letter is written in beautiful language with such detail and emotion, each with the unique tone of its author.

At the centre of this novel are the main characters, the lothario Vicomte de Valmont, and his former lover the widow Marquise de Merteuil. De Merteuil orders de Valmont to seduce a 15 year old girl, Cecile, who the Marquise's former lover threw her over for, just for her amusement. At the same time, the Vicomte tries his hand at seducing the prudish married Presidente de Tourvel. To Valmont and de Merteuil, it's all a game. As de Valmont says regarding de Tourvel, "I shall possess this woman; I shall steal her from the husband who profanes her: I will even dare ravish her from the God whom she adores. What delight, to be in turns the object and the victor of her remorse! Far be it from me to destroy the prejudices which sway her mind! They will add to my happiness and my triumph. Let her believe in virtue, and sacrifice it to me; let the idea of falling terrify her, without preventing her fall; and may she, shaken by a thousand terrors, forget them, vanquish them only in my arms."

Valmont and de Merteuil are depraved, manipulative and very calculating. The amount of detail that they put into their game is truly astounding. Forget Iago, these two are devil incarnates; very Machiavellian. Despite how evil these two are, they are at the same time fascinating. The book did have a Cruel Intentions feel to it but it only makes sense that such a book would provide inspiration to Hollywood.

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## Anne says

**I love this book to distraction.** Quite literally. It has almost exclusively occupied my every thought ever since I started it, and undoubtedly wins the Book That Has Affected Me The Most in 2015.

Simply put, it is wonderfully twisty, delightfully witty and shockingly scandalous. It will make you laugh, sigh, wonder, exclaim, and, if you're anything like me, hold you under its spell for a long time.

Set in 18th century France before the Revolution and written in epistolary form, *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is an epic tale of seduction, deceit, love and revenge, as well as an excellent portrait of the moral corruption of the time. Although written over 200 years ago and aimed at mirroring the society's ugly reflection, it was fascinating to see all the parallels that can be made with our society today. We live our lives so differently that it almost seems as though we were not of the same planet, yet the basic principles and fatal human tendencies portrayed in the story are as much true and applicable today as they were in the 18th century.

The novel centers around two very bored, very jaded, very wicked French aristocrats, the Marquise de Merteuil and the Vicomte de Valmont, former lovers, but forever accomplices, best friends and confidantes, who have nothing better to do with their time and intelligence than scheme and manipulate others for their own amusement. Masterminds of the first order, they read, decipher and interpret human ways to such a degree that, for all their outrageous depravity, one can't help but admire them. Any villainous project they have in mind is sure not only to succeed at the complete detriment of others and in the utter ruin of their victim for their own benefit, but to be undertaken in such a way as to make them look like veritable heroes and the sole friends and saviours of their innocent victims. Seriously, the way they work is so mind-bogglingly amazing that I had to put my book down several times to assimilate all the glory of what had just happened. Vicious and evil to the core, the Marquise and the Vicomte are truly dangerous, and the best villains I have encountered so far in any book.

*"En vérité, plus je vais et plus je suis tenté de croire qu'il n'y a que vous et moi dans le monde, qui valions quelque chose."*

Personally, I have found that of the two, Merteuil has more worth than Valmont, if for the sole fact that she is female and he is male, and therefore must work twice as hard to hide her game and maintain a spotless image. While the Vicomte is publicly recognized as a dissolute and nefarious rake yet still accepted and received in society, Mme la Marquise cannot and does not have that luxury, and although she is as reprobate as he is, she has successfully maintained a wise and righteous façade and reigns as the Toast of all Paris. Completely ahead of her time, she refuses to mould herself to the social norms, and becomes her own creation. Seriously, that woman is incredible, and I find her endlessly fascinating. I could expand about her all day long, but instead I will simply direct you to Marquise's review, where she explains everything perfectly.

When Merteuil learns that Mlle Cécile de Volanges is to be married to a former lover who'd cheated on her, she decides to revenge herself on him by deciding to pervert Cécile before her marriage. She enlists the help of the Vicomte, but that one has decided that first and foremost, he must seduce the virtuous Présidente de Tourvel...

Here is an inkling of what the book is like, in classic Anne style\*:

### **Letter 1**

*La Marquise de Merteuil au Vicomte de Valmont*

My dearest Vicomte!! At last, I have found something to alleviate my boredom! LET'S PERVERT A PERFECTLY INNOCENT GIRL! It'll be soooo much fun for us both; you get to enjoy her, and I get to laugh incessantly as I think about her husband finding out that she's unchaste. What do you say?! Isn't it brilliant!? It'll be way better than being shut up in the country with nothing whatsoever to do!

### **Letter 2**

*Le Vicomte de Valmont à la Marquise de Merteuil*

Hello my lovely, you are mistaken dearest, I am having the time of my life in the country, because I have found a project that's EVEN MORE brilliant than yours! I am going to seduce l'Austère Dévote Mme de Tourvel. It's going to be awesome!! I will have the unequalled pleasure of seeing her betray everything she believes FOR ME. SHE WILL FALL MADLY IN LOVE WITH ME, AND BEG FOR ME, AND I WILL POSSESS HER!!

### **Letter 3**

*La Marquise de Merteuil au Vicomte de Valmont*

You cannot be serious, Vicomte! My project is way more awesome! But fine, if it amuses you, go for it, and bring me back the proof that she gave herself up completely to you. Then, you and me can get some action going ;)

### **Letter 4**

*Mme de Volanges à la Présidente de Tourvel*

Dearest!!! What is this I hear! You are staying at Mme de Rosemonde's with le Vicomte de Valmont??!  
BEWARE, OH BEWARE MY POOR DEAR! Valmont it a MONSTER OF THE WORST KIND! Don't say I didn't warn you!

### **Letter 5**

*Le Vicomte de Valmont à la Marquise de Merteuil*

Hey! Some b\*tch has been talking shit about me to Mme de Tourvel, and now she doesn't want to speak to me! Darn it, I didn't need that. But I shall find a way, hahahaha!!

### **Letter 6**

*Le Chevalier Danceny à Cécile Volanges*

CÉCILE!! OH MA TRÈS JOLIE CÉCILE!! I LOVE YOU SO MUCH I CAN'T BEAR IT ANYMORE!!  
WRITE TO ME! CONSOLE ME! COMFORT ME!

### **Letter 7**

*Cécile Volanges à la Marquise de Merteuil*

Dearest friend who loves me so much and who only wants my best, do you think it's okay if I do write to Danceny? I don't want to do anything wrong, but I do so want to write to him and not see him being miserable because of me!

### **Letter 8**

*La Marquise de Merteuil à Cécile Volanges*

Mais bien sûr chérie, write to him and tell him you love him :) You have my blessing!!

### **Letter 9**

*La Marquise de Merteuil à Mme Volanges*

You better watch your daughter my dear, she and Danceny are engaged in a liaison dangereuse!!!! Thought you should know they've been writing letters to each other!

### **Letter 10**

*Le Vicomte de Valmont à la Présidente de Tourvel*

I CANNOT KEEP IT IN ANY LONGER, ooooh I love you SO much madame! I beg of you, alleviate my suffering! Tell me you love me too! Don't make me unhappy!

### **Letter 11**

*La Marquise de Merteuil au Vicomte de Valmont*

Soooo...any success yet? When are you coming back? Are you dead? Why don't you reply? That Présidente must be something indeed, but make a move already, and get back here!!

### **Letter 12**

*Le Vicomte de Valmont à la Marquise de Merteuil*

J'aime les lenteurs, ok? Let me work, and don't worry. The Devoted Prude cannot resist me much longer. Who could? I am so irresistible. Hey don't forget you have promised to sleep with me when I get back ;) ;)

### **Letter 13**

*La Présidente de Tourvel au Vicomte de Valmont*

Just WHAT on earth ARE you talking about?! LOVE ME??? I cannot love you back, and you know that! Don't even try! Don't torment me! I can be your friend though :)

### **Letter 14**

*La Présidente de Tourvel à Madame de Volanges*

Oh my God, I am being harassed by Valmont! You were right, he truly is horrible! He won't leave me alone!!

### **Letter 15**

*Madame de Volanges à la Présidente de Tourvel*

Que vous avais-je dis?! IGNORE THE STALKERS!!! I told you he was top-of-the-top dangerous! Tell him to go away already! Don't stay there with him, everybody will think you are being compromised.

### **Letter 16**

*Le Vicomte de Valmont à la Marquise de Merteuil*

WOOO! I am getting me some Présidente, FOR SURE THIS TIME!! Tomorrow I am SURE she will consent!! Wee, weeeeeee!! Don't forget that you promised to sleep with me when I get back ;) DON'T FORGET!

### **Letter 17**

*Le Vicomte de Valmont à la Marquise de Merteuil*

OH MY GOD, SHE IS GONE!!!!!!!!!!!!!! SHE LEFT, SHE HAS DESERTED ME!!

**Letter 18**

*La Marquise de Merteuil au Vicomte de Valmont*

Hahahaha!! Ohhhh Vicomte, je vous aime à la folie! You are so cute! :P What fools men are! Honestly, I have to manage everything if I want it to be done right. When you bungle folly after folly, you come running back to me each time, and I'm always the one who has to take you out of scrapes. En vérité, c'est bien trop drôle! I was definitely born to dominate your sex and avenge my own.

\*\*\*

At first, I found myself incredibly amused by the wickedly witty letters exchanged between the Vicomte and the Marquise. In truth, the only times they were completely honest and true to themselves were by writing to each other. They are heinous, to be sure, and their behaviour is despicable, but it was so engrossing to follow their progress and to be surprised by all the twists and turns that ensued. Valmont made me laugh out loud several times with the tactics he employed with Mme de Tourvel, and Merteuil was simply glorious in her expert manipulation and toying of everyone's confidences and affections. And for all their evilness, those two really and truly comprehended human nature and, when taken out of context, wrote some truly beautiful passages on love, character and relationships. It really showed how well they understood everything, and only rendered it more afflicting that they should use their talents to torment others.

As the story progresses and the plot thickens, I became more and more shocked at their audacity, and in the end, one cannot but feel that they well and truly deserved the terrible endings they suffered. Typically, I try to avoid books with unhappy and tragic endings. I'm a rainbows-and-sunshine type of girl who delights in happily-ever-afters and evil villains redeemed, but as *Les Liaisons dangereuses* is not a fluffy historical romance where all's well that ends well, the ending, I must admit, greatly affected me and left me more than a little distressed. Somehow having the two leads unmasked and their perfidy revealed made me doubly realize just how vile and rotten they were, and their antics, previously captivating and delectable in all their perverted glory, now seen through the eyes of the victims have lost much of their charm, and are seen in their rightful disgust and contempt. Such is the power of this book, that you love the villains but agree they deserve the ending they get, and their true nature revealed and all the consequences it encompasses leaves you torn between your previous admiration of their wicked minds, and your newly-found realization of the disgust of their behaviour.

This is a book that messes with you, I warn you! Or maybe it's just me being overly sensitive and dramatic, that's a huge possibility too ;)

Now, I am in awesome-book-is-over-I-can't-stop-thinking-about-it mode, where I go about my daily functions like a robot, not seeing, hearing, or understanding anything save what has to do with *Les Liaisons*. Such a wonderful state, yet one you can't wait to get over, right?

Definitely one of my top favourite books of all time!

\*To be taken incredibly lightly, and with a heavy dose of salt, but I assure you that in this case, I haven't exaggerated the melodrama and woeful expressions. In fact, it's even worse in the book! ;)

## Lisa says

Oh the painful brilliance of these letters!

Someone recently said to me that it is sad that people have stopped writing old-fashioned letters, being so much more personal and private than the frequently impolite, monosyllabic insults people tend to spit out on Twitter, Facebook and in various comment threads on the internet. I agreed, but continued to think about it, and all of a sudden, this epistolary novel came to my mind in all its passionate evil power.

Choderlos de Laclos certainly is a perfect example of the "good old times" that were not really better, and that featured the same hateful, jealous, treacherous, spiteful characters, happy to engage in intrigues and dangerous games with high stakes, always exposed to the threat of publication of (written) evidence.

Sex and power, twisted love and betrayal: those ingredients make up the plot of this exquisite, polyphonic selection of letters written between various protagonists, playing a game of seduction with each other in different formations.

In the end, they all pay the price for their game. There is one letter especially that reminds me of what teenagers thoughtlessly do today: copying, spreading or retweeting evil comments without thinking of the consequences until they feel the effects like a boomerang coming back full speed.

The evil, jealous Marquise de Merteuil challenges her lover, the Vicomte de Valmont, to break up with a virtuous lady he has seduced as part of a cruel entertainment. She writes the most horrible, yet eloquent letter imaginable, and the Vicomte copies it word for word and passes it on to Madame de Tourvel, the victim of the intrigue. As expected by the Marquise, this breaks the tender woman. It has another victim as well, however. The Vicomte realises that he has grown to love the lady he played with, and regrets his own cruelty when it is too late. And this sets in motion a disastrous chain of events leading to the spreading of all letters relating to the scandalous behaviour of these representatives of the highest social layers in French society.

If you play in the highest league of society, every secret you share is a potential liability, and that is just as true now as it was in the 18th century. The famous letter in question repeats the typical excuse you will hear whenever a person in power behaves badly: "Ce n'est pas ma faute!"

Don't blame me! I just reacted to my instincts and needs. Don't blame me!

But Choderlos de Laclos remains a classical author in one respect: he is careful to let poetical justice prevail in the end! None of the evil players of games is let off the hook. Once publicly exposed in their evil plotting, the main characters are punished.

The ominous letter is well worth reading in its entirety. It contains all ingredients of a brutal public dumping of a faithful, caring lover, - out of boredom and satiation. Rarely has copy and paste cruelty been expressed in more beautiful language:

"On s'ennuie de tout, mon ange, c'est une loi de la nature; ce n'est pas ma faute.

Si donc, je m'ennuie aujourd'hui d'une aventure qui m'a occupé entièrement depuis quatre mortels mois, ce n'est pas ma faute.

Si, par exemple, j'ai eu juste autant d'amour que toi de vertu, et c'est sûrement beaucoup dire, il n'est pas étonnant que l'un ait fini en même temps que l'autre. Ce n'est pas ma faute.

Il suit de là, que depuis quelque temps je t'ai trompée: mais aussi ton impitoyable tendresse m'y forçait en quelque sorte! Ce n'est pas ma faute.

Aujourd'hui, une femme que j'aime éperdument exige que je te sacrifie. Ce n'est pas ma faute.

Je sens bien que voilà une belle occasion de crier au parjure: mais si la Nature n'a accordé aux hommes que la constance, tandis qu'elle donnait aux femmes l'obstination, ce n'est pas ma faute.  
Crois-moi, choisis un autre amant, comme j'ai fait une maîtresse. Ce conseil est bon, très bon; si tu le trouve mauvais, ce n'est pas ma faute.  
Adieu, mon ange, je t'ai prise avec plaisir, je te quitte sans regrets: je te reviendrai peut-être. Ainsi va le monde. Ce n'est pas ma faute."

Oh the brilliance! Humanity is equally cruel nowadays, but what on earth happened to eloquence?

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## Marquise says

*Come back, my dear Vicomte, come back.*

Thus starts this tale of deceit and corruption through seduction, with a summons from the Marquise de Merteuil to her confidante and former lover, the Vicomte de Valmont.

Unknown to Madame la Marquise, this seemingly innocuous petition will set the snowball in a downwards motion, because M. le Vicomte is at present visiting his aunt, where he'll meet and become half-obsessed and half-enamoured with the virtuous and too melodramatic and hand-wringing Présidente de Tourvel, a beautiful married woman he wants to seduce, but who resists him.

Valmont decides to not hurry up back to Paris as his former mistress wishes, and decides to share his devious plans for Madame de Tourvel with her by letter. Unamused, the Marquise throws in a challenge, daring him to give sound proof of his success in seducing the devout woman, which seems doubtful according to her. Pricked in his vanity, Valmont accepts the dare and makes use of all his tricks to get into the Présidente's good graces, going so far as faking piousness. To no avail, because the woman is keeping correspondence with another lady that's aware of Valmont's ill reputation as one of the biggest rakes to afflict France, and her warnings have made her moderately wary of him. But not so wary enough that she doesn't take enough precautions and little by little her resistance is eroded.

Valmont, not to be trifled with, revenges himself on the gossipy confidante of Tourvel's by agreeing to Merteuil's proposal to seduce la petite Volanges, her daughter, which the Marchioness hopes to corrupt and convert into another woman like herself, a seductress. On her part, she also undertakes the seduction of Danceny, the man she loves and that loves the girl in return. It's a complicated love "quadrangle" that can be dizzying: Valmont wants de Tourvel who loves Valmont who lusts for Merteuil who lusts for Danceny who lusts for Cécile who lusts for Valmont... But in this apparent tangle, there are only two players, the Queen de Merteuil and the King de Valmont, everybody else is a pawn. And as pawns, they are moved across the chessboard and sacrificed on the players' whim, with dire consequences for everyone. Everyone is punished in this story in one way or another.

I can see why the preferred character could be Valmont, in all his rakish glory. But to me, the most interesting character has always been the Marquise de Merteuil since I first saw the film and read the book after, and on this reread, she's still the most compelling. Female villains are thin on the ground, and female villains who are brilliant and on par with or superior to their male counterparts or allies are scarcer. Both she

and Valmont are self-centred and often heartless, uninterested in anything but their pleasure and the amusement of their games and outwitting everyone for entertainment, regardless of who they may hurt. But in some ways, she's better than Valmont, certainly brighter and a more masterful player, and she has no illusions about human nature nor any desire to delude herself about deep emotions, like love, as Valmont does. And, I am sure this will raise eyebrows, I find her actually more sympathetic than Valmont.

Yes, she's not supposed to incite any sympathies, as the cruel woman she truly is. But here's the thing: much of her acts are dictated by her womanhood. Both she and Valmont are equally cruel, equally decadent, equal libertines, equally in love with themselves, they share the same principles and ideas, the same cynicism, etc. And yet, only Merteuil is forced to be a hypocrite in addition to all that, only she has to feign to be caring and virtuous, only she has to worry about her reputation and defend her virtue, only she has to put up with the old matrons for the sake of her social standing. You know why? Because she's a woman, and a woman cannot be allowed to be a libertine and to enjoy sex and dalliances like a man. Just look at Valmont. Everyone knows he's a seducer, both men and women know he's perpetually going after bedsport, he doesn't have to hide it and pretend, and although the high society may be divided amongst those who want to taste him and those who want to dump him in a lake, he isn't shunned by society, he's received at the homes of the nobility, even at the home of people who despise him due to his rogue ways, like Madame de Volanges. Why? Because he's a man, he's noble, he has money. In the words of Madame de Volanges, she cannot afford to show him the door. A man can sleep round all he wants, and he won't be condemned. Au contraire, the rakish reputation may even give him an air of enticing danger and "forbidden fruit" in the eyes of the ladies.

Indeed, the only difference between Merteuil and Valmont is their genre. She has to be a hypocrite in order to enjoy life as she wants, she has to bow down to social norms imposed on women and manoeuvre within these restrictions, or lose all. She plays a game of deception on three fronts: before the women, before the men who want to seduce and use her and before the men she wants to use and seduce. Valmont doesn't even have to bother. The author has him state this fact in a letter to the Marquise:

Whereas you, wielding skilfully the weapons of your sex, triumph by subtlety, I, rendering his imprescriptible rights to man, subjugated by authority.

That's the touch of tragedy for Merteuil. She's truly intelligent, more so than the average man, and certainly more observant and a keener connoisseur of human nature, its foibles and the subtlety of emotions than Valmont. She self-educated alone, studied on her own and perfected her art on her own thanks only to her bright mind, curiosity, and powers of observation, and it's a real waste that she had to focus her brilliance on evil when such a mind could've been put to better use. Boredom, combined with her desire to enjoy her dissolute ways and not be subjugated to any man—she never remarried for that reason—leads her to become as she is. And, although both she and Valmont are duly given their just deserts in the end, one cannot shake off the uncomfortable feeling that the Marquise was punished extra as happens with women who dare colour outside the lines. Valmont can find some "redemption" of sorts by his last-breath deeds, but she's utterly destroyed in life in a way that targets her womanly weapons specifically, her beauty for one. And when the scandal explodes on her letters becoming known, she's reviled for ruining a man that had been betting on sleeping with her to ruin her reputation socially, who's promptly reinstated to his former post and even applauded publicly for that. She's the one vilified more than Valmont, who's as guilty and in some ways even more as it was him who insisted in the course that ultimately had fatal consequences, against the Marquise's warnings, because of his vanity. It's she who first says they should part ways once she realises Tourvel has enslaved him, because "two sharpers" cannot win and have to divide winnings and part ways amiably, and he doesn't listen out of pride.

To me, she's simply amongst the best villainess-heroines in literature.

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## Manny says

Letter 94. *Viscomte de Rayner to the Goodreads Community*

This morning, I thought of M. de Laclos's charming novel for the first time in years, when an interfering busybody saw fit to edit my Quiz question about it. I was forced to spend an hour checking the text, so that I could thoroughly refute her misconceptions about Cécile's role in the story, and I trust I shall hear no more from the vile creature. But, none the less, I am grateful to her, since she reminded me that I should read it in the original French. I fail to understand how I can have postponed this pleasant task so long.

**The rest of this review is available elsewhere (the location cannot be given for Goodreads policy reasons)**

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## Bill Kerwin says

*Dangerous Liaisons* improves as it progresses. I was tempted to abandon it, but I persisted and am glad, for--although this epistolary novel of the last days of the *ancien regime* initially appears to be stylish but superficial--it soon grows in both subtlety and power.

Many of the difficulties of the book are perhaps inevitable in any work that chronicles seduction in epistolary form. The letters of the wicked are elegant, the letters of the good are instructive, but the letters of the naive and innocent are by necessity simple and ingenuous, and their lack of awareness both taxes the patience and dissipates the interest of the reader, all the more so because they aggravate his sympathies and frustrate his moral impulses at the same time. Moreover, once we accustom ourselves to the novel's stylistic beauties, we become aware that the other literary pleasures we receive from it are not only emotionally coarse and morally perverse, but also devoid of suspense, as we watch those who are invincible in wickedness debauch the defenseless and the good.

A third of the way through, however, we learn more about our depraved aristocrats, and our interest in the novel grows. We learn that the Vicomte de Valmont can enjoy a philanthropic pleasure while failing to appreciate its intrinsic value, seeing it merely as one step on the path of Madame de Tourvel's seduction. This makes him appear less innately evil, and thus--perhaps paradoxically--more thoroughly damned.

Then, almost halfway through, the Marquise de Merteuil tells Valmont the story of her self-imposed "moral" education in emotional control and duplicity, and--although we cannot bring ourselves to like her--we come to sympathize with any woman like herself, born with a commanding character and prodigious appetites, who must strive to preserve her respectability in a ritualized patriarchal society.

In the novel's second half, the plot gets thicker, the dupes grow wiser, and the games that once appeared witty and decadent now seem pointless and destructive. In the end, the plot veers sharply from the amoral toward the moralistic, but keeps itself from plummeting into sanctimony by the absurdity of the punishments

allocated for the wicked. This formal resolution--like the endings of *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well that Ends Well*--fulfills without satisfying, and therefore leads us to continue to question the moral lessons we already thought we had learned.

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## Edward says

*Chronology*

*Introduction*

*Further Reading*

*Translator's Note*

--Dangerous Liaisons

*Appendix 1: Additional Letters*

*Appendix 2: Selected Adaptations of 'Dangerous Liaisons'*

*Notes*

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## Yann says

[

(hide spoiler)]

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