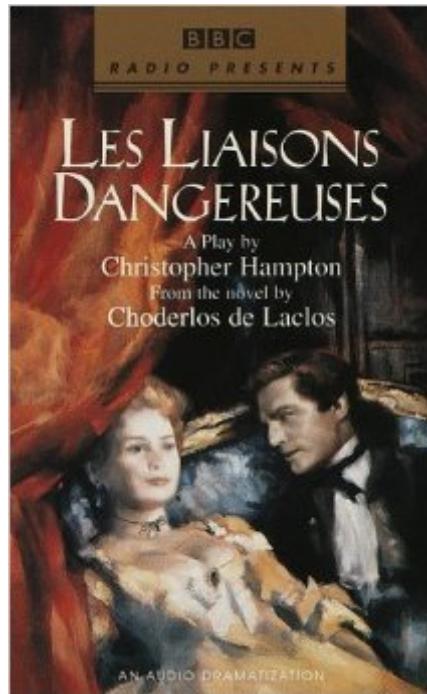


The book was found

Les Liaisons Dangereuses (BBC Radio Presents)



Synopsis

In the decadent and degenerate world of the pre-revolutionary French aristocracy the suave, satanically elegant Vicomte de Valmont (Ciaran Hinds) and his beautiful ex-lover La Marquise de Merteuil (Lindsay Duncan) play an elaborate and cynical game of sexual conquest and emotional sadism. Rejecting the prospect of seducing the fifteen-year-old Cecile as too easy a conquest, Valmont seeks prey more worthy of his talent and reputation. And Madame de Tourvel (Emma Fielding), pious, married and absolutely faithful to both her husband and her God, would be his greatest coup. As Valmont slowly ensnares his victim he becomes, despite himself, increasingly attracted to her - which is not at all to the liking of his ex-mistress. And Valmont finds himself challenged by a woman every bit as capable of double-dealing as himself.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Choderlos de Laclos' epistolary novel has been made into at least three film versions, but none of them come nearly up to the real thing. Laclos' story of evil and depravity, starring a pair of jaded aristocrats so satanic we wonder if they have a human bone in their bodies, is one of the greatest, if not the greatest, novels of the 18th century. In a nutshell, it revolves around the cynical plot to seduce and destroy the reputation of a young girl fresh out of her convent, which they plan and achieve with the icy calm and cynical detachment of a pair of mathematicians solving a calculus problem. The anti-hero and anti-heroine of this book, the Vicomte de Valmont and the Marquis de Merteuil, fascinate and repel us at once by their sheer wickedness. Valmont is a depraved

Casanova, lay-em-and-leave-em, who has lost count of all the broken hearts and destroyed characters he has left in his wake. The Marquise de Merteuil, married and widowed too young, has combined shrewd intelligence with appalling powers of deception to engage a string of lovers whom she uses and casts off at random. Somehow these two find each other and form an unholy partnership. When the book opens, their affair is already spent, but they have remained friends; and the Marquise is infuriated when she learns she is about to be dumped by her current lover, a rich aristocrat named Gercourt, who is about to marry Cecile de Volanges, the most naive teenager who ever emerged from the protective cocoon of convent education. Her main attraction, for him, is her virginity, and it is this the Marquise wants Valmont to do away with so that Gercourt will find out on his wedding night that he didn't get the innocent virgin he was expecting, but an already corrupted young woman, and will become the laughing stock of Paris.

When I read Choderlos de Laclos' 1782 novel, "Les Liaisons Dangereuses" (which retains its French title in the 1961 English translation by P W K Stone), I found myself amazed and thrilled by its absolute excellence of execution. Its energy and spirit, and the seductive and machiavellian - perhaps even diabolical - undertones which whisper throughout the work, urge the reader ever onwards in the best page-turning tradition. It is possibly not for nothing that the book itself was eventually decreed 'dangerous' by French officials a full 42 years after it first appeared, long after it might have been expected to have lost its ability to shock. Even if you have seen the films "Dangerous Liaisons" (dir. Steven Frears) or "Valmont" (dir. Milos Forman) based on the book - and whether or not you liked them - this is an outstandingly good novel which is beautifully served by the precise and graceful prose of its translator, whose subtle range of diction manages to convey the tones and tempers of the characters most convincingly. The written story's chief virtues - a compelling narrative drive, and a skill in characterisation which permit some superbly-observed insights - easily withstand comparison with the screen versions; even today, when we are so fully exposed to the diverse secrets of the psychiatrist's confessional and the details of all the world's vicissitudes and miseries, it would be hard to improve on their portrayal here in print. The book succeeds so well for many reasons.

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