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modern readers will agree with rousseau this novel written by the great philosopher rousseau is a brilliant demonstration of his thesis that everywhere men are born free but live in chains. the protagonists, julie a noble and saint preux her commoner tutor, are two free spirits who live in a society that is a prison. they are profoundly in love but can never marry because such a marriage would be against every rule of society. like the original heloise and her abelard, their love simply cannot be.

modern readers will agree with rousseau but are likely to be appalled by the excesses of his novel. rousseau like most thinkers of his era thought human emotions were powerful and unpredictable forces. to make this point clear he wrote this novel in the epistolary format. like heloise and abelard, julie and saint preux exchange a lengthy series of extravagant and uncontrolled love letters which probably portray accurately the romantic epistles exchanged by young lovers in the 18th century but which to the contemporary adult reader are nothing but pointless babble.

adolescent readers are a different matter. i remember the bizarre craze of the first decade of this century in which teenage girls devoured the incredibly lurid and bloated twilight novels in a state of rapture enjoyed by their appalling length. the absurdly long julie which has the same faults as the twilight series outsold every other book published in the 18th century by a wide margin. then as now young people want their romance novels to gush.

i read rousseau's book because it was on a course i took. i still shudder to think of the experience. however, i was perhaps old before my time. add two more stars to my rating if you are one of this individuals who would like to live in a painting by boucher or fragonard. ...more flag 30 likes · like · see review view all 6 comments aug 28, 2019 lacey rated it really liked it · review of another edition shelves: owned, romance, classics i've read abelard and heloise's letters to each other at least twice a year since my second year of college when i first came across them in my western civ class. there's just something hauntingly beautiful and compelling about a tragic love story, made the even more so when recounted by someone whose writing ability rivals nabokov's. so, obviously, when i learned that rousseau wrote an epistolary novel based on abelard and heloise's romance, i didn't waste any time ordering a copy.

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i think it's probably unfair of me to judge this book in comparison to the original letters, but it's hard not to when the title of the book itself implores readers to draw the comparison. while i really did enjoy rousseau's "retelling," i lacked the desperation and spark that continue to bring me back time and again to abelard and heloise's letters. not to mention--and this is definitely not rousseau's fault--that many of the allusions and references were just totally lost on me, even with the footnotes, because it was written for people in eighteenth century france, and to say my knowledge of french culture at that time is slim would be a bit of an understatement. nevertheless, this was my first rousseau novel and a more than welcome reprieve from his political writings. ...more flag 25 likes · like · see review view 1 comment jan 06, 2013 marc rated it really liked it · review of another edition shelves: french-literature, romantics, enlightenment i read this 15 years ago in the original french, starting with very low expectations, but this was really a surprise! rousseau (1712-1778) used all the possibilities of the "roman à lettres" to tell a romantic story. the young master saint-preux begins an secret relationship with his pupil, the noble mademoiselle julie &etange, but of course it doesn't end very well.

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"heavens! my mother sends for me! whither shall i fly? how shall i support her presence? o that i could hide myself in the centre of the earth! i tremble every limb, and am unable to move one step....o my h only a perverse kind of sado-masochistic determination kept me reading this book to the very end. i feel like the heavy metal fan who banged his head against the wall because he enjoyed the sensation of how it felt when it stopped. why is this book so bad? try this from the pen of the heroine:

"heavens! my mother sends for me! whither shall i fly? how shall i support her presence? o that i could hide myself in the centre of the earth! i tremble every limb, and am unable to move one step....o my heart, how piercing! she waits for me- i can stay no longer - she will know - i must tell her all....write no more - who knows if ever - yet i might - what! - deceive her! - deceive my mother! - alas!....we are undone!"

we are expected to believe the heroine is spending a good ten minutes transcribing this goose (no doubt in beautiful copperplate script with a goose quill) while her mother is yelling at her from down the stairs...and this kind of drivel goes on and on for page after tedious page...hundreds of tedious pages:

perhaps we will get more sense and less melodramatic guff from the hero, do you think? think again - here he is:

"the pen falls from my hand. i have been of late much indisposed...oh! my head! my poor heart! i feel, i feel - i shall faint - no longer have no mercy on my sufferings? i am no longer able to support myself - i will retire to my bed, and console myself with the thought of rising no more. adieu, my only love! adieu, for the last time, my dear, my tender friend! ah! i live no longer for thee! have i not then already ceased to live?"

...and on and on and on he drones for hundreds and hundreds of pages.

the unutterable tedium of a boring lot of old love letters written in an absurdly histrionic and artificial style is not at all relieved by being interspersed with a plot - of sorts - whose dullness is only exceeded by its many absurd contrivances. add to the mix many lengthy "philosophical" discourses - which seem to be an exercise in making a false, stupid or trite point with as much tedious verbosity as possible - and then throw in a few pinches of dismal and cloying sentimentality from assorted devoted servants and small children...and you have all the ingredients for an emetic bore-fest.

i am now going to read emile, partly because i cannot seriously believe anything can be worse than julie, and partly because i have become mentally deranged as a result of spending the last fortnight immersed in this horrible book. ...more flag 8 likes · like · see review view all 8 comments may 23, 2014 olga vallinsgren rated it liked it · review of another edition this is a one long, odd and emotionally mixed read. first of all it would be helpful to have had some experience in volatile emotions, otherwise one will not understand the depth of the experiences that this book conveys. yet reading it without being smitten kind of makes you wonder how such emotions can be possible, or how silly they can seem to be when you are not part of them.

in the middle of the book i began to wish for someone of the main characters to die, so that the whole story would end this is a one long, odd and emotionally mixed read. first of all it would be helpful to have had some experience in volatile emotions, otherwise one will not understand the depth of the experiences that this book conveys. yet reading it without being smitten kind of makes you wonder how such emotions can be possible, or how silly they can seem to be when you are not part of them.

in the middle of the book i began to wish for someone of the main characters to die, so that the whole story would end and spare everyone the misery of going through those experiences. this was when the forced marriage took place and i never perceived julie to have fought against it with all of her might. on second thought, i think she did so, but that she were too weak to win the battle. somehow i also wished that julie's lover would do what he could to save her - but he never did. i really felt that there must be someone to blame here, and eventually i found society that had encouraged odd moral reasoning. this is what you wanted, right, rousseau?

everyone's destiny is different, and here we see a way of making the very best of it even if it does not seem that the best is still possible to have. love can survive even though it remains hidden during all those years, even if it is never expressed with the passion that it holds, and even if everyone is fooled that it has died off. nay, passion knows to hide itself only to make sure that it will not be fought against again. only when it is safe will it show itself fully. ...more flag 4 likes · like · see review view all 3 comments may 31, 2016 martin rated it did not like it · review of another edition usually it takes me about 20-25 pages into a book to know whether it's worthy to continue to the end, or put it down so i don't waste my time. on rare occasions, it'll take 5-10. rarer still is 2. the rarest? one flip of the pages.

that was the case here. i opened the monstrosity and found that it was an epistolary novel. strike 1. between two lovers. strike 2. who write 40-page letters to each because they don't have smartphones and they're bored with their lives.

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that, ultimately, is what did this book in. i've complained about other books in the 1,001 books to read series in which nothing of interest happens. add another to the list.

there was only one thing left for me to do, knowing immediately how much i would hate this experience: practice every speed-reading technique that i know. this way i wouldn't care if i didn't retain everything. my brain doesn't have to get through the entire book, just my eyes, which are so glazed over, it'll take me weeks to recover.

braindead from reading this, i think even if it wouldn't have been translated from the french, i might not have known any better. it's definitely dullsville in that language too.

epistolary novels don't work. they're stilted, numb, boring, and nobody should try it, ever.

please, no more books like it on the 1,001 list. i can't take it anymore. ...more flag 4 likes · like · see review aug 16, 2012 alex marked it as to-read · review of another edition i hear this is maybe like a less shitty version of pamela. flag 4 likes · like · see review view all 3 comments sep 14, 2020 bojana dimitrioska rated it really liked it · review of another edition as someone who doesn't agree with rousseau's philosophy one bit, the fact that i really enjoyed this book took me completely by surprise. masked by a tragic love story, what this book truly reads as is an exposé of xviii century france, and more specifically rousseau's personal views on themes such as virtue, religion, love, family and society. with that being said, seeing how this book is a "retelling", i'm really interested in reading abelard and heolise's original letters. as someone who doesn't agree with rousseau's philosophy one bit, the fact that i really enjoyed this book took me completely by surprise. masked by a tragic love story, what this book truly reads as is an exposé of xviii century france, and more specifically rousseau's personal views on themes such as virtue, religion, love, family and society. with that being said, seeing how this book is a "retelling", i'm really interested in reading abelard and heolise's original letters. ...more flag 3 likes · like · see review jun 08, 2013 jennifer uhlich rated it really liked it · review of another edition shelves: research this review has been hidden because it

contains spoilers. to view it, click here. i have finally finished this monster of a book, foreword, appendices, notes and all. i should say right off the bat that the fourth star up there is solely for the absolute thoroughness of the editorial work on this: the notes are excellent, the translation readable, the index first-rate.

and i must confess(!) that i came into this with a very heavy bias, as rousseau is not my favorite person and i was reading this book in part to flesh out a story idea i'd had, one that was a bit heavy-handed in i have finally finished this monster of a book, foreword, appendices, notes and all. i should say right off the bat that the fourth star up there is solely for the absolute thoroughness of the editorial work on this: the notes are excellent, the translation readable, the index first-rate.

and i must confess(!) that i came into this with a very heavy bias, as rousseau is not my favorite person and i was reading this book in part to flesh out a story idea i'd had, one that was a bit heavy-handed in its anti-rousseau sentiment . . . but i suppose i should give some points to the jerk in that by the end of his *julie* i was actually somewhat moved, and my idea became less, uh, virulent in its sentiments (though he still gets his, trust), and i am more than anything else just relieved to have this brick out of my knapsack.

the story of *julie* is in fact fairly brief; what makes it long is the amount of personal philosophy rousseau crams into the letters, along with long, detailed descriptions of the valais, geneva, and paris--there are pages alone devoted to the dress and manners of paris women. if you haven't read *emile*, you can get the gist here, and some of the text as well--paragraphs are lifted wholesale. and you can also learn every nuance of his personal brand of protestantism, how a nobleman should extricate himself from an ignoble affair, how to produce various flavors of wine from one vineyard, how to train a servant . . . we won't get into the various books the characters quote and advise each other on, because there were so many my head is spinning.

julie herself deserves a place in the family tree of mary sues. while i expected the rapturous descriptions from her lover, as it turns out, everyone loves julie and julie loves everyone--but she loves virtue more, hurrah for her. this is a woman who does everything right, who is able to look back on every blow in her life--even, say, the death of her mother--and see it was all for the best. that doing everything right includes sending her lover away for years at sea, nearly killing him, only to bring him back to her house and make him observe at close detail her new life with her husband and children . . . ugh.

and therein lies the rub, for me. i appreciate the romance in this, the idea of a virtuous love, i can understand the emotion such an idea carries. as, apparently, did most of europe--this book is one of the first runaway bestsellers, perhaps the first bestseller; it made rousseau capital-f famous, deluging him in fanmail and proposals, sending readers by the droves to the little swiss towns he describes.

but like so much of rousseau's work, it's just implausible, and completely at odds with his own less-than-virtuous life experiences. julie is beautiful, everyone loves her; her house is not fancy but still perfectly suited to her station; her servants adore her, her otherwise emotionless husband loves her, her cousin loves her, her perfectly-behaved children love her (so much so that her cousin gives julie her own daughter to raise), and she happily prescribes life choices to everyone around her that they accept like some kind of commandment from a goddess. she is nothing more or less than rousseau's perfect mouthpiece. this is a woman who is granted thirty pages in which to die, so she can demonstrate just how rousseau thinks we should go into that good night--even going so far as to school her own minister on how one should go to god.

for us mere mortals, i'm guessing we're supposed to love her too, and aspire to conduct ourselves like her . . . but quite frankly if her creator couldn't be bothered, why should i? personally, i would have high-tailed it to england with my foxy and adoring tutor, taken the estate his friend offered us for free, and lived happily ever after. dear j-j; you can in fact go through life without the mental hairshirts of virtue and class and still be a good person. trust me.

i had said at the start of this ramble that i was moved at the end, though. and i was. but not by julie's epic death; i was moved by all the people whose lives she had shaped and were now left with the emotional vacuum of her loss. her lover who gave up everything for her, who had denied himself any kind of surrogate happiness (or, ahem, release); her cousin who i suspect might have found other words to describe her love were they alive today . . . those were the plights that moved me, and it seems peculiarly apt that for rousseau it was enough of an end to have these two young adults simply devote their lives towards the raising of julie's children, full stop, when he never even kept his own.

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julie's world and all those who inhabit it are idyllic. it was a lovely what a lovely surprise! i never would have picked julie up this year to read if it were not for the 1001 books to read before you die group. i was not quite sure what to expect except that it would be a series of letters between lovers. at first the flowery language was hard to digest, but after about 100 pages it came easier. the plot was full of twists and turns that i never expected and the ending brought a tear to my eye.

julie's world and all those who inhabit it are idyllic. it was a lovely escape from our culture of base behavior. her world is something i would like to recreate in my own little world. ...more flag 3 likes · like · see review view 1 comment mar 15, 2012 deanne rated it liked it · review of another edition shelves: classicliterature, 1001bookstoreadbeforeyoudie, 1001-books-2008 a book written as a series of letters between 6 characters, a romantic novel, though as it's written in the 1700's there are aspects i find intensely irritating.

rousseau is also one of those writers who seems to profess certain ideas but in real life seems to act differently. the writing is beautiful, but the characters come across as pathetic, though it is the 1700's and women and men are expected to spend a lot of time crying over their correspondence. have to admit though he's a rogue i prefe a book written as a series of letters between 6 characters, a romantic novel, though as it's written in the 1700's there are aspects i find intensely irritating.

rousseau is also one of those writers who seems to profess certain ideas but in real life seems to act differently. the writing is beautiful, but the characters come across as pathetic, though it is the 1700's and women and men are expected to spend a lot of time crying over their correspondence. have to admit though he's a rogue i prefer loveller from clarissa, julie wouldn't know what had hit her if he turned up on her doorstep. ...more flag 3 likes · like · see review mar 24, 2020 julia🎐 · rated it it was amazing · review of another edition shelves: reviews, favorites letters, in life, are wonderful. their tenuous existence between the past and the present makes them both magical and conciliatory. nostalgia is aggravated and mended, as these little time travel agents expand on all the silences and all the time spent. i think it was maeterlinck who said that someone's silence is like someone's laughter : it is unique. a letter is a silence rectified with a footnote. it's a silence that explains itself and names itself, with love and urgency; a silence that wan letters, in life, are wonderful. their tenuous existence between the past and the present makes them both magical and conciliatory. nostalgia is aggravated and mended, as these little time travel agents expand on all the silences and all the time spent. i think it was maeterlinck who said that someone's silence is like someone's laughter : it is unique. a letter is a silence rectified with a footnote. it's a silence that explains itself and names itself, with love and urgency; a silence that wants to keep living with us.

you can build a whole novel around the complex feelings that surround a letter. persuasion, my favorite novel by austen, is a sad automnal novel up until captain wentworth's confession. in less than a page, his passionate words brighten everything that was seething under the surface with true longing.

take call me by your name : it is a nostalgic novel precisely because elio is constant to oliver in his mind. he's trying to be more in tune with him, failing to understand that the height of closeness is precisely in the attempt.

i could go on : portrait of a lady on fire and its use of paintings, le lys dans la vallée and henriette's last letter... art thrives on repressed feelings.

which brings me to rousseau.

julie ou la nouvelle h lo se, letters of two lovers of the alps isn't about one letter : its a novel formed by letters. everything we read and know about these characters is expressed with the need, longing and tenderness of the epistolary form.

it's the only novel rousseau ever wrote and his philosophical ideas and concepts resonate deeply with the form he has chosen.

rousseau believed that we had lost the state of nature and that consequently, true joy will never be ours to keep. society, its laws and virtues, must always control our access to happiness and will deny us our utmost wishes.

hence this story of lovers. first, we read about the birth of their requited feelings, the elation and tender longing of it. then, for several years, they grow together and think together as they make a home out of their love. when separation comes, for it must come, they choose to let go. the last two partners of the novel reunite once again : the last two parted and haunted people, pretending not to feel the bite of what could have been, had the world not separated them. they are good people, made better by the touch of love they once felt, but the generosity of their character stems from grief.

back to the place they fell in love in, the time that has elapsed between joyful youth and guarded adulthood can only be felt in silence. they will never be as they were. that life is lost. another life has taken its place, a good and virtuous one but it is not the one their hearts would have chosen.

it has dry moments. it's an aged novel. it's grandiose and saccharine and breathtakingly sincere.

in the space between the instrumentals of mystery of love and visions of gideon, it became one of the most heartfelt literary and ethical experience i've had the pleasure to experience. and one of the most beautiful novels i've ever read. ...more flag 2 likes · like · see review view 2 comments nov 07, 2013 tej rated it it was ok · review of another edition shelves: 1001-books yuck. my translated version actually cut out all of the intellectual discourse because, as the translator wrote, you can read the same stuff elsewhere in rousseau's non-fiction. part of me thinks i might have liked the book better with it because that's more interesting to me than all the love story nonsense. on the other hand, i can't imagine how much harder it would have been for me to stick with it if it had had several hundred more pages. if you want to read rousseau, i'd suggest you stick w yuck. my translated version actually cut out all of the intellectual discourse because, as the translator wrote, you can read the same stuff elsewhere in rousseau's non-fiction. part of me thinks i might have liked the book better with it because that's more interesting to me than all the love story nonsense. on the other hand, i can't imagine how much harder it would have been for me to stick with it if it had had several hundred more pages. if you want to read rousseau, i'd suggest you stick with the social contract. unlike julie, it's short, to-the-point, and far more interesting. ...more flag 2 likes · like · see review dec 08, 2016 nicole rated it did not like it · review of another edition shelves: classics-others, historical-romance, deal-otd-read, 1001-books-read, renaissance-17th-18th, inspirational i liked it at the beginning. but then it drifted more and more away from a love story to social criticism and a lesson in moral and religion (or more like 20 hours of lessons). incredible boring. compared to this pamela and clarissa are exciting ;) flag 2 likes · like · see review apr 21, 2008 nicki markus rated it it was amazing · review of another edition shelves: read-foreign-language this is a delightful story - full of romance. i love the letter-play between the characters and the writing is excellent. i wanted to be julie the whole time i was reading! flag 2 likes · like · see review dec 27, 2010 dirk rated it really liked it · review of another edition this review has been hidden because it contains spoilers. to view it, click here. wikipedia offers a fine general introduction to this novel. it's a substantial (600 pages in my copy) epistolary novel of the 18th century. it was immensely popular in its time, and is considered by many to have been in his lifetime and immediately after his most influential work.

what i didn't like about this book was letters between lovers that were tedious satires of the parisian upper classes, and of genevan society. nor did i enjoy the letters between lovers that were instruction manuals on wikipedia offers a fine general introduction to this novel. it's a substantial (600 pages in my copy) epistolary novel of the 18th century. it was immensely popular in its time, and is considered by many to have been in his lifetime and immediately after his most influential work.

what i didn't like about this book was letters between lovers that were tedious satires of the parisian upper classes, and of genevan society. nor did i enjoy the letters between lovers that were instruction manuals on how to mange an estate or how to select and train servants. but these problems come from an issue dear to rousseau's heart. somewhere hanna ardent wrote that roseau is the philosopher of intimacy. rousseau is trying to make, or beat to death, the primacy of the domestic life over the public life. this book recounts intimate as opposed to public life. that's one reason the center of the story is julie, not her lover st. preux - : because domestic life is the domain of women.

what i liked about this book is how the characters grow and change. the book covers in thoroughly imagined detail about 20 years, from the first adolescent protestations of passion by the hero to the trembling heroine, through her taking the lead in their affair, through years of family vicissitudes, through her conversion to chastity on her marriage to another man, through the three of them living together in a kind of high-minded, smarmy, unconsummated, m nage   trois, to the unraveling following julies' early death. the book lives up to its title; it is the desires, changes, and images of right action that julie adopts that drive other characters. but all the major characters go through life making the deep changes we associate with real people, slowly and realistically portrayed. it is a rewarding depiction of the way people mature, or at any rate grow older.

i think this very solid portrayal stems form rousseau's concerns with authenticity and virtue. all the characters remain authentically themselves, though they change beliefs and goals in an inward way not possible with stereotypes. it says in the notes-rousseau declared that he liked writing this novel because all the characters were virtuous. it is a little hard for me to know what he means by virtue. he is clearly baiting contemporary notions of virtue, for the unmarried lovers actually get it on and remain virtuous in rousseau's terms. moreover though rousseau is some sort of protestant christian, he paints as very virtuous a character who is an atheist. virtuousness in this sense is part of what allows them

to pursue authenticity.

we associate rousseau with egalitarianism. not is this book. in the essay on handling servants one of the goals is to make life satisfying for them so they will not think or trying to rise above their station. in another case, a nobleman cannot marry a woman he first knew as a sex worker, despite their deep feeling for one another -; rousseau can't quite accept that as virtuous, though he attacks class distinctions in other romantic settings.

the translation read fine (i did not look at the french.) and provides copious and helpful notes.

...more flag 1 like · like · see review sep 05, 2011 ronald wise rated it liked it · review of another edition my first introduction to rousseau. it was originally written in 1861 and published in a way which had his contemporary men of letters debating whether it was a fictional novel, or instead a biography based on a discovered cache of letters. this was the first english translation in many years, translated and annotated by philip stewart and jean vaché. the "letters", from 1732 to 1745, all revolve around a prohibited love affair between a young philosopher/teacher and his teenage student, the daughter of baron d'Étange of the french-cultured vaud canton of switzerland on lake geneva. rousseau annotated the text of the letters as though he was only an editor, though in reality the letters provided a means by which he expounded on his perceptions of 18th-century european religion and politics. of personal interest to me were the reactions of the protagonist when he traveled to the german-cultured canton valais, near where my ancestors were living on lake thun. for most of the book i ignored the numerous translators' notes which, after studying them in the last part, were the source of interesting information and made me regret ignoring them earlier. ...more flag 1 like · like · see review may 02, 2018 paul rated it really liked it · review of another edition shelves: fiction, landmark-books, major-literary-works, romanticism this massive (355,000 words) but fascinating novel, published in 1761, launched the romantic movement. through many stretches of it i felt sure that i would give it 5 stars, and perhaps i should, but in the end i felt that it was just a bit too uneven or too, i don't know, undisciplined. there are long passages of pure philosophizing. but i love rousseau's project here: to write a novel in which all the characters are good. the conflicts--and they are serious--arise because of the natural passio this massive (355,000 words) but fascinating novel, published in 1761, launched the romantic movement. through many stretches of it i felt sure that i would give it 5 stars, and perhaps i should, but in the end i felt that it was just a bit too uneven or too, i don't know, undisciplined. there are long passages of pure philosophizing. but i love rousseau's project here: to write a novel in which all the characters are good. the conflicts--and they are serious--arise because of the natural passions that exist within them, and because of the unbending and often nonsensical strictures that society places on our personal inclinations. ...more flag 1 like · like · see review dec 17, 2011 anne rated it really liked it · review of another edition recommends it for: fans of love novels. wow, that's true, true love. even going further than life, further than the earth, further than any person not involved could ever feel, love is dominating this novel in letters. there are so many things you wouldn't expect at the beginning, but nevertheless, it's exciting until the end, whether they can ever share their lives with each other or not ... wow, that's true, true love. even going further than life, further than the earth, further than any person not involved could ever feel, love is dominating this novel in letters. there are so many things you wouldn't expect at the beginning, but nevertheless, it's exciting until the end, whether they can ever share their lives with each other or not ...

...more flag 1 like · like · see review view 1 comment dec 09, 2010 craig rated it really liked it · review of another edition shelves: 1001-books-to-read-before-you-die reminded me very much of pamel, but much, much better. richardson's prose was formulaic and his loquacity dulled the impact of his work. while rousseau pulled me into this world and didn't tell me everything (even in sentimental works, mystery can be good and effective). reminded me very much of pamel, but much, much better. richardson's prose was formulaic and his loquacity dulled the impact of his work. while rousseau pulled me into this world and didn't tell me everything (even in sentimental works, mystery can be good and effective). ...more flag 1 like · like · see review mar 05, 2009 melanie rated it it was amazing · review of another edition shelves: classic-ish, favorites one of my all-time favorites. a must read in my opinion. flag 1 like · like · see review oct 12, 2018 steve r rated it liked it · review of another edition one of the most challenging books i've ever struggled my way through, i was drawn to reading it by an account of the fervor with which its publication in 1760 was greeted, and the immense popularity it had in the france of the eve of the revolution. however, i honestly feel that it is about four or five times as long as it needed to be, and that the love story's relative triteness is overwhelmed by the heavy-handedness of rousseau's declamations on social and economic issues of his time.

julie, the heroine, falls in love with her tutor. he is only given the name of st. preux, (which is a contrived one at that) about half way through the book. despite a few passionate nights during which they manage to meet, they spend the overwhelming majority of their time apart, thus providing a convenient excuse for the epistolary nature of the novel. in adopting this structure, rousseau was supposedly influenced by the immense popularity of richardson's *clarissa*. aided by her cousin, claire and his mentor, the english lord edward bomston, they manage to scale the heights of histrionic, impassioned professions of undying love for one another.

julie writes to her lover of the time they fell in love with one another: 'the lips were silent, the glance was controlled: but the heart made itself heard; one soon felt between us that ineffable something that renders silence eloquent, makes lowered eyes speak, confers a bold timidity, manifests desire through fear and says all it does not express.' such passages of the purple prose of passion profusely populate page after page of this novel.

their disparity of social class presents a barrier to their possible future together, and despite her mother's relatively positive attitude, her father's adamant wish that she marry monsieur wolmar, a friend of his who is almost thirty years julie's senior has the effect of banishing st. preux from the vicinity. he undertakes a three year round-the-world voyage. suicidal ruminations, a shared encounter with smallpox, many 'never will' and 'until i die' professions accompany this times preparatory to this extended separation.

this trip allows rousseau to express his views on war, slavery and the colonial oppression of native peoples. this after st. preux's visit to paris - as far as jir was concerned, the epitome of urban decadence and hypocrisy - allows him to express his disdain for french society, the coquettish behavior of parisian women, and the superficial artifice of french opera. in contrast, the relatively rural setting of clarens, where julie's eventual family resides, is portrayed as a paragon of simple happiness. extensive chapters are given over to minute descriptions of their mutually respectful relations with their domestic staff, the subsistence-based operation of their domestic economy, the child-centered approach to the education of her children employed by julie, and the irregular design of their garden. julie's heartfelt sense of religious faith is also repeatedly stressed as the basis for almost saint-like positive effect on all those around her.

eventually, st. preux returns and there ensues a poignant denouement to their love story. in one of his footnotes to the letters, in which rousseau allowed himself as 'editor' to speak directly to his readers (as opposed to his indirect writings in the letters of his characters), he claims that he lacked the ability to present villainous characters doing deeds of horror. indeed, all the main personae of this novel: julie, st. preux, claire, milord edward, fanchon, baron d'etange and his wife and wolmar, all behave in strictly honorable, virtuous ways. there is definitely no 'bad guy', as it was rousseau's effort of to represent how virtue, acting through the conscience of honorable, conscience-driven people, can find a way in which to achieve true love.

the subplot of bomston's affairs in italy with the marquesa and laura would seem to contradict this claim, as laura is a wilful adulteress and the latter a plainly labelled whore, but rousseau did confine this episode to a relatively brief appendix to the novel. virtue does motivate all the figures in *julie* (as it did heloise in her love for abelard, a parallel rousseau places directly in his work's title), and virtue would appear to tower even over love as the prime motivating impulse for humanity in its efforts to find true happiness.

the man who wrote 'men are born free and everywhere they are in chains' here presented a novel in which the 'natural' impulses of human nature to do good and be virtuous is shown to have a chance of happiness in a relatively rural setting, as opposed to the urban artificiality of modern society. he also wrote 'nature never deceives us; it is we who deceive ourselves', and it is nature - both externally in the mountains of his beloved switzerland and internally in the heart of his heroine - that rousseau wanted to have his readers see, appreciate and understand as the true basis of a virtuous existence.

a very important and well thought out theme, unfortunately weakened by an overly laid on surfeit of extended verbiage. good, but not great. ...more flag 1 like · see review view all 3 comments jan 31, 2021 david rated it really liked it · review of another edition letters of two lovers of ending in clarens in the southern swiss alps isn't about one letter: its an epistolary novel, formed by years of an exchange of letters. everything we learn about the two principal characters is expressed with the ardor, truth, longing and tenderness expressed in the epistolary form.

the letters reveal rousseau most clearly, confessing in literary form, being conveyed as the fictional "new heloise." first, we read about the birth of their requited feelings, the heartfelt letters of two lovers of ending in clarens in the southern swiss alps isn't about one letter: its an epistolary novel, formed by years of an exchange of letters. everything we learn about the two principal characters is expressed with the ardor, truth, longing and tenderness expressed in the epistolary form.

the letters reveal rousseau most clearly, confessing in literary form, being conveyed as the fictional "new heloise." first, we read about the birth of their requited feelings, the heartfelt feelings, and tender longing of their passion. then, for several years, they grow together and think together as they make a home out of their love. when separation comes, for it must come, they choose to let go.

i'll insert a small exchange from this time in the story. the place they fell in love in, the time that has elapsed between joyful youth and guarded adulthood can only be felt in silence. other lives have taken their place, good and virtuous but not as their hearts would have chosen.

"one day m. de wolmar drew julie and myself [julie's lover] aside, and where do you think he took us? to a plantation near the house, which julie had never entered since her marriage [to wolmar]. it was there that she had first kissed me. she was unwilling to enter the place, but he drew her along with him, and bade us be seated. then he began: 'julie, i knew the secret of your love before you revealed it to me. i knew it before i married you. i may have been in the wrong to marry you, knowing that your heart was elsewhere; but i loved you, and i believed i could make you happy. have i succeeded?' 'my dear husband,' said julie, in tears, 'you know you have succeeded.'"

the last parts of the novel reunite them again; they are aged and haunted people, pretending not to feel the bite of what could have been.

here is the final lines of these good people, made better by the touch of love they once and still felt. it starts with julie's husband wolmar writing saint preux which is the pseudonym of julie's lover (= rousseau): "i have allowed your first hours of grief to pass in silence. i was in no condition to give details, nor you to receive them. now i may write, and you may read. we were on a visit to the castle of chillon after dinner the whole party walked on the ramparts, and our youngest son slipped and fell into the deep water. julie sung in after him. both were rescued; the child was soon brought round, but julie's state was critical. when she had recovered a little, she was taken back to clarens. the doctor told her she had but three days to live. she spent those three days in perfect cheerfulness and tranquility of spirit, conversing with madame d'orbe, the pastor, and myself, expressing her content that her life should end at a time when she had attained complete happiness. on the fourth morning we found her lifeless.

"during the [last] three days she wrote a letter, which i enclose. fulfil her last requests. there yet remains much for you to do on earth. from julie to [her lover] saint preux: all is changed, my dear friend; let us suffer the change without a murmur. it was not well for us that we should rejoin each other. for it is an illusion that my love for you was cured; now, in the presence of death, i know that i still love you. i avow this without shame, for i have done my duty. my virtue is without stain, my love without remorse. come back to clarens; train my children, comfort their noble father, lead him into the light of christian faith. claire, like yourself, is about to lose the half of her life; let each of you preserve the other half by a union that in these latter days i have often wished to bring about. adieu, sweet friend, adieu!"

rousseau's philosophical ideas and concepts are revealed in these emotional letters, and resound deeply in the literary form he has chosen. rousseau is reported to believe that society had lost the state of nature and that consequently, true joy will never be ours to keep. "society, its laws and virtues, must always control our access to happiness and will deny us our utmost wishes."

written in clarens, a village just two kilometers northwest from montreux, it became one of the most famous novels of the 18th century - and it brought renown to clarens. indeed, to some modern readers it became "one of the most heartfelt literary and ethical experience i've had the pleasure to experience. and one of the most beautiful novels i've ever read."

i could not better voice my own reactions after reading this digitally online at project gutenber.

...more flag like · see review jun 18, 2020 rosemary rated it really liked it · review of another edition shelves: 1001-books i'd been planning to read this for years and always putting it onto the back burner because i was afraid it would be like the unbearable clarissa - and maybe it is, if one reads the 18th-century translation that is used in most english editions. but judith mcdowell's version was a nice surprise. there's still a certain amount of wailing and breast-beating, but she cuts a lot of the guff.

unlike richardson's books, and although it is presented as if rousseau were publishing real letters, i don't think i'd been planning to read this for years and always putting it onto the back burner because i was afraid it would be like the unbearable clarissa - and maybe it is, if one reads the 18th-century translation that is used in most english editions. but judith mcdowell's version was a nice surprise. there's still a certain amount of wailing and breast-beating, but she cuts a lot of the guff.

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