



les Liaisons Dangereuses

Field Guide

ARE THEY ...or AREN'T THEY!?

- Late night visits
- Scores of letters
- Valmont's servant tells all!



SLAMMED!
Obscure French poet lambasts the King's mistress!



ROCOCO:
In or out this year?

SCANDAL WATCH

EXCLUSIVE!



Cecile Volanges passing letters with her teacher?

REMY BUMPPPO
think theatre

Contents

- 1 People Watch! Life of the Times **2**
- 3 Liaisons Through The Ages Entertainment **5**
- 6 Pamphlets Letters **7**
- 9 Style Guide

Life of the Times

Life in France in the 1770's was all about social class. The social organization of Europe, which dated back to the Middle Ages, was in full swing at this time. The French society of this time was called the *ancien regime*, meaning "old order." Under this regime, everyone in the country belonged to a province and estate and everyone was a subject of the King. Because of this, each person in France was not a national citizen, but instead, fell under one of three categories: clergy, nobility, or the Third Estate, which included the bourgeoisie and the peasant class.

The Monarchy

In the late 17th century, France became an absolute monarchy under Louis XIII. Louis XIV centralized his power at the lavish Palace of Versailles and kept all the local princes and lords occupied by elaborate and frivolous court life, which prevented them from coming together and challenging his power. His great-grandson, Louis XV, was a deeply unpopular king. His ill-advised financial policies damaged the power of France, weakened the treasury, discredited the monarchy, and led to the French Revolution, which broke out 15 years after his death.

His grandson, Louis XVI, inherited these problems and found the entrenched sense of privilege of the nobility an impossible barrier to reform. He seemed to lose interest in government and his wife, Queen Marie Antoinette, became aggressively social, attending the opera and throwing lavish parties at Versailles. Social unrest grew, and the royal family

attempted to flee in 1791. They were captured and executed for treason. This ended the reign of the French monarchy.

The Nobility

The dawn of the Age of Enlightenment began eroding the power of the divinely-appointed monarchy, and the French nobility-- always conscious of

The 18th century is generally known as the Age of Enlightenment, in which reason was advocated as the primary source and legitimacy for authority

their place as an aristocracy-- began taking over governmental power. Nobility was based on heredity and land ownership, and marked the nation's elite. Only about 2% of Europe's population

were considered nobles at this time. There were never any official records of who was a noble and who wasn't, and it was quite easy to be come ennobled if you had money and knew the right people.

Nobles were granted all manner of unique rights and privileges. They were exempted from severe punishment, did not have to pay most taxes, had the sole right to carry a sword, were granted special pews in church,

and had a dictated style of dress to indicate their nobility. They owned elaborate country homes where they could not only entertain guests but find privacy, as the second floors of these homes were built specifically for the privacy of the home's owner and family. The houses contained many wings so their servants could be kept at a distance.

The nobility kept itself private and aloof in a more national sense as well. A Revolution was brewing and yet the nobility paid more attention to their pamphlets, which acted like the tabloids of today, and to the current fashion trend at Versailles.

The Bourgeoisie

The social climbing middle class both hated and wanted to break into the nobility, and because of this, they followed the latest fashions and adhered obsessively to all the nuances of etiquette. It was only by being seen at social events and cultivating important acquaintances that one could hope to break into the second establishment.



1745- Madame de Pompadour becomes mistress of Louis XV

1751- First volume of Diderot's *Encyclopedia* published

1754- The Seven Years War begins between France and Great Britain

1757- Robert-François Damiens attempts to assassinate Louis XV, who by now is deeply unpopular

1758- Voltaire completes *Candide*

1766- Seven Years' War ends; France loses most of its colonial possessions

1774- Louis XVI becomes king of France

1776- American War of Independence begins, France sides with the colonies

1781- Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* published

1782 - *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* first published

1783- Treaty of Versailles ends American War of Independence

1789- French Revolution begins with storming of the Bastille

1792- King Louis XVI and his Queen Marie Antoinette ousted from power when angry rioters storm the palace. They are executed by guillotine



Liaisons Through the Ages

How we look at Laclos's "diabolical" novel tells us more about our own morals than the French nobility's

With the publication of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, Choderlos de Laclos developed an unsavory reputation that followed him for the rest of his life, reinforced by his image as a dark, revolutionary conspirator. His novel stayed alive through many pirated editions, plays based on its characters were staged, and novelists exploited its notoriety by including the words "Danger" or "Liaison" in their titles. By 1814, however, when the conservative order was restored after the fall of Napoleon, Laclos was identified as one of the dangerous rakes and revolutionaries who had brought down the *ancien régime*. In 1823, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* was banned by a Paris court "for outrage to public morality"

Laclos's name continued to be associated with "systematic licentiousness" and "the most odious immorality," and, in 1865, the court which had prosecuted Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* extended the same treatment to *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. In Great Britain, its author was almost unknown, and when it was finally translated in to English by Ernest Dowson in 1898, it was only printed privately.

But by the end of the century, Laclos was finally beginning to find defenders on both sides of the Channel who looked beyond the "second-rate Machiavelli" and "consummate immorality" of academic criticism. His essays on women's education, his verse, and his correspondence were published and they showed a new side to him. He found an influential champion in Paul

Bourget, while the publication in 1903 of Baudelaire's enthusiastic notes for a study of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* added considerably to his stature. His biography was written and, after the horrors of the Great War had taught Europe to look on human nature with a cooler eye, Laclos's novel seemed to articulate very modern concerns. The Surrealists saw him as a paler version of Sade the Liberator; Andrew Gide included *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* in his list of the ten greatest novels; and Andree Malraux, novelist and man of action, saw in Laclos a triumphant demonstration of the "eroticism of the human will." The

English began to discover him at about the same time, in spite of the arch pronouncements of the critic George Saintsbury, who relegated *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* to an "outhouse" in his *History of the French Novel* (1917). Laclos was admired by writers as different as Arnold Bennett, Virginia Woolf, and Aldous Huxley, and Richard Aldington's translation, first published in 1924, made him available at last to a wider Anglo-Saxon audience.

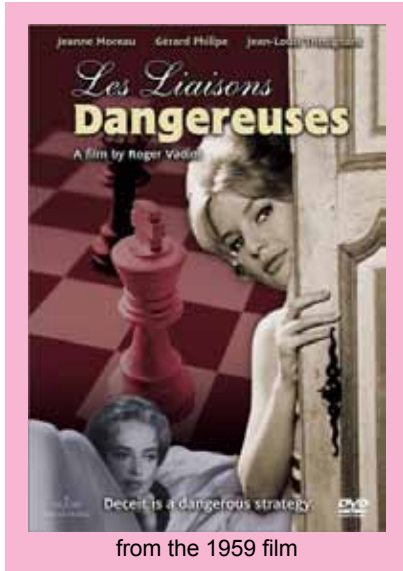
Yet the rehabilitation of Laclos proceeded slowly. The 19th century, for all its doubts, had expressed broad confidence in social and moral values which, if prop-

erly managed, could yet make men good. In such an age, a writer like Laclos, who showed such scant belief in the prospect of human goodness, spoke with a discordant and disturbing voice. But by the 1920s, the Great War had destroyed the old world order and Marx and Freud were shaking the established verities by showing that social justice and the distribution of power were unrelated, and that behavior is the product of subconscious motivation, most of it far more admirable. In this new intellectual climate, Laclos appeared more honest than scandalous. Subsequently, the Nazi terror and the Holocaust revealed new depths to which the human spirit could sink, and in their aftermath, which brought the Cold War, the threat of global destruction, the increased use of torture, and the apparently unstoppable rise of new dictators, it became increasingly difficult to argue that the health of societies could be maintained on the basis of the old ethical values which seemed irksome, ineffective, and irrelevant. Despite this, attempts were still made to hold the old moral pass. In 1960 Roger Vadim's modern screen version of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* was challenged

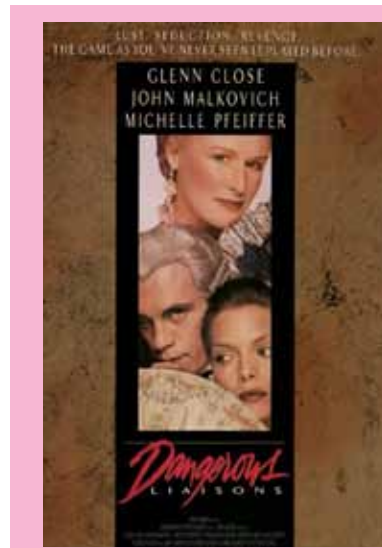
in the courts and, though his film was granted a certificate, it was denied an export license.

By this time, the literary critics had ensured for Laclos a measure of intellectual and artistic respectability. But their efforts were much less significant in promoting his cause than was the liberalization of attitudes which took place in the 1960s. Thus, when Vadim's film was shown on network television in 1974, it caused no outcry among the French, who were by then accus-

tomed to material so explicit that the government introduced measures to limit the



from the 1959 film



from the 1985 film

Review Roundup

"I do not think it possible for a young person of the fair sex to encounter any connections as dangerous as a perusal of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*."

- *Correspondance littéraire*, 1782

"I cannot commend him for employing his talents, his inventions and his elegant pen to furnish foreigners with so appalling a notion of the manners of his nation."

-Mme Riccoboni, 1782

"A daring outrage on every law of virtue and decorum... The scenes of seduction and intrigue are laid open with such freedom, that for one who will be 'instructed' by the catastrophe, a thousand will be corrupted by the plot."

-*Monthly Review*, 1784

"A tissue of horrors and infamies."

-*Mémoires secrets*, 1782

growing sexploitation of screens small and large. In this new, more liberal climate, Laclos's novel finally dislodged Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* as the greatest of 18th century French novels, and it became widely available in many forms: unexpurgated, bound or paper-covered, annotated or left to speak for itself. "Classic" status was confirmed when Laclos became a prescribed author for French university students. And, more significantly, Laclos passed an essential modern test: it was discovered that his book transferred well to other media.

The 1952 stage adaptation of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* by Paul Achard and Vadim's film had merely paved the way. In 1974, Claude Prey turned Laclos's novel into an "epistolary opera," with recitatives doing duty for the exchange of letters, and two years later Vadim extracted from the book a second film entitled *Une Femme Fidèle*, set in 1826, which proved much less stylish and went unnoticed. In the same year, Alerto Cesare Alberti freely transposed the text for the stage as *Amor di guerra, Guerra d'amore*, which made use of the characters (including Laclos himself) to dissect the sexual warfare relationship between men and women. In Germany, Rudolf Felck's play *Gefährliche Liebschaften* (1979) was followed by Hiner Muller's *Quartett* (1981), which again cast Laclos's characters in roles designed to convey an avant-garde and highly personal view of the war of the sexes. But it was Christopher Hampton's stage version, first performed at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1985, which turned Laclos into an unlikely star, even in Paris. The process was completed by a film, *Dangerous Liaisons* (1989), directed by Stephen Frears from Hampton's script, which pleased both reviewers and the general public. Milos Forman's *Valmont* (1991), though less well received, served to maintain the momentum. After a decade of exposure to unaccustomed limelight, Laclos had taken his place alongside Alexandre Dumas and Victor Hugo in the ranks of classic French authors who travel well.

But it is rare that adaptations and continuations do not show their age sooner or later. The postface added to the German translation of 1798 follows Madame de Merteuil to Holland where she reforms and devotes herself to the pursuit of Virtue, a projection of her character which tells us more about the reaction against 18th century libertinism than about *Les*

Liaisons Dangereuses. Attempts to modernize Laclos invariably repaint his face in colors which fade, in some cases rather badly. Vadim's first film now seems rooted in its period. His *Valmont* and Merteuil belong to the international set and they stalk their prey in the swinging Paris and fashionable ski-resorts of 1960, but their cynicism now seems as dated as the jazz on the soundtrack. Alberti made Laclos rather more aphoristic and systematic than he was, while Muller shows, with an explicitness of language quite foreign to *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, the squalor that lies at the heart of desire. Even Hampton's brilliantly executed play ends with an

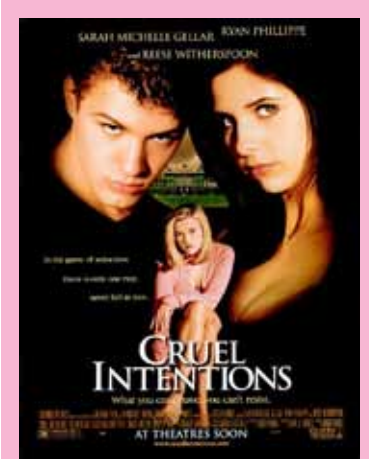


from the 2003 French miniseries

evocation of the guillotine which imposes a political reading: the decadent behavior we have observed is a prelude to its own destruction in the revolution to come. On the other hand, his film restores Laclos's ending and leaves the ambiguities intact: indeed, *Dangerous Liaisons* is by far the most faithful in letter and spirit of all attempts to re-create the novel. In compari-

son, Forman's *Valmont* is an altogether jokier affair, which sacrifices the subtleties to the requirements of drama and action. Laclos's modern mouthpieces must, of course, be judged on their own merits, for they do not pretend to be faithful translators or guardians of the sacred memory. Nevertheless, Laclos has been reprocessed many times, gaining here, losing there, but always manicured to suit the taste of passing fashions. Laclos in modern times has become a manufactured product, all style, gloss, and cynicism.

(from David Coward's introduction to *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1995) translated by Douglas Parmée)



from the 1999 film based on *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*



To carry out the responsibilities of running France, Louis the XIV established a system of royal intendants, which were appointed royal officials stationed in each of the country's provinces and responsible for carrying out royal orders. Subordinate officials extended the intendants' reach to smaller towns and villages. France's system of administration was considerably more centralized than that of most other European states; in theory, royal power could be applied more evenly throughout the king's vast territories. In practice, however, the sale of these government posts helped make up for the monarchy's limited sources of revenue. These posts were hot commodities because they conferred social prestige and often nobility status. Jobs purchased this way became family property and could be passed down to heirs, regardless of their qualifications for the post, or sold off for a profit.

- ☞ **Duke** (*duc*): the governor of a province, usually a military leader
- ☞ **Count** (*comte*): an appointee of the king governing a city and its immediate surroundings, or else a high-ranking official in the king's immediate entourage (the latter referred to as "palace counts" or "counts Palatine")
- ☞ **Marquis**: a count who was also the governor of a march, a region at the boundaries of the kingdom that need particular protection against foreign incursions
- ☞ **Viscount** (*vicomte*): a lieutenant of a count, either when the count was too busy to stay at home, or when the county was held by the king himself
- ☞ **Baron**: originally a feudal lord like a duke or a count. Feudal landholders were entitled to style themselves "baron" if they were nobles; a *roturier* or commoner could only be a *seigneur de la baronnie* (lord of the barony). The title was assumed to be *titre de courtoisie* or a courtesy title by true nobles
- ☞ **Castellan** (*chatelaine*): the commander in charge of a castle. A few castellanies survived with the title of "sire"

Essential Etiquette

Members of the bourgeoisie utilized fashion to mimic the air of the aristocracy, outings to the theatre and the opera to inflate their public images, and appearances at restaurants and casinos to demonstrate their economic status and aristocratic taste. In addition, members of the bourgeoisie spent many hours promenading through gardens. But in all places, a social climbing bourgeoisie must behave with grace in order to fully mimic the noble image. This high society aspiration forms the essence of the bourgeoisie.



The Salon

Though both sexes could attend, the salon was the only social club where it was permissible for ladies to attend. The salon

was a haven for those who craved intellectual conversation, but the best salons were the ones that were frequented by those of exemplary manners.



The Prom

For the Bourgeoisie who frequented the beautiful gardens of France, the promenade was a place to demonstrate their social superiority. There, amidst the beauty of nature, the social climbing bourgeoisie's clothes, their jewels and their impeccable manners could be seen and hopefully admired by others.

Etiquette of the Promenade

While strolling, a gentleman should always acknowledge an acquaintance; it is rude not to. That acknowledgment should be quiet and courteous, for a gentleman should not be loud and obnoxious. If the acquaintance is a lady he should bow, but only after she has acknowledged him. After a brief conversation with a Lady on the street, a gentleman should bow and then raise his hat.

While strolling, a lady should be reserved and demure; it is not proper to talk or laugh loudly as it attracts negative attention. If a lady passes a female friend she should acknowledge her with slight bow and smile. Since it is the lady's place to choose who she will and will not recognize, she should first bow to the gentlemen she wishes to acknowledge.

Shake Your Bustle

The dance most revered at this time was the minuet. A complicated but beautiful dance, it was the hallmark of a refined member of society. Just as with every other encounter, there was a certain accepted way to begin the dance:

A lady usually never asks a gentlemen to dance, instead she waits for an invitation from him. A man must first ask permission of the lady herself, or her chaperone, to dance and if granted he must keep his appointment.

In round dances, the man supports the woman with his right arm around the waist, taking care not to hold her too closely. Her right hand is extended, held by his left hand, and her left hand is on his arm or shoulder, her head erect.

At the end of the dance, the lady's partner will offer his arm and conduct her to her seat, then bow, and she releases him from further attendance, as he may be engaged for the next dance.



Dinner Party

"Never forget that at a dinner, as on all occasions of hospitality, it is your chief duty to relieve the hostess from every annoyance or care. It must not be imagined that the dinner is simply given for the purpose of giving a gross and purely material pleasure. It puts you in company with persons of consideration, and gives you an opportunity to display your intelligence, or to cause your good qualities to be appreciated." - Baron De Mortemat Boisse



- ☞ As soon as seated, remove your gloves, place your table-napkin partly open across your lap, your gloves under it, and your roll on the left hand side of your plate.
- ☞ Ladies seldom take cheese at dinner parties, or wine at dessert. Cheese is eaten with a fork, and not with a knife.
- ☞ Never play with food, nor mince with your bread, nor handle the glass and silver near you unnecessarily.
- ☞ The mouth should always be kept closed in eating; both eating and drinking should be noiseless.
- ☞ A soup-plate should never be tilted for the last spoonful
- ☞ Vegetables are eaten with a fork.
- ☞ Fish and fruit are eaten with silver knives and forks. If silver fish-knives are not provided, a piece of bread in the left hand answers the purpose as well, with a fork in the right.
- ☞ Asparagus can be taken up with the fingers, is so preferred. Olives and artichokes are always so eaten.

Pamphlets

THE QUEEN (to Madame de Polignac who steps aside to let the Queen go)
Come, come in my good friend.

THE COUNT OF ARTOIS (slightly pushing the Queen, and pinching her buttocks)
Come in too (whispering to the Queen) What a nice bottom! So firm!

THE QUEEN (whispering to the Count of Artois)
If my heart was as hard, wouldn't we be good together?

THE COUNT OF ARTOIS
Be quiet you crazy woman, or else my brother will have another son tonight.

THE QUEEN
Oh, no! Let's have some pleasure, but no more fruits.

THE COUNT OF ARTOIS
All right. I will be careful, if I can.

THE QUEEN
Let's sit down.

MADAME DE POLIGNAC
Where is the King?

THE QUEEN
What do you worry about? Soon he will be here to annoy us.

THE QUEEN
When I see around me pleasure, love and Graces, fixing me on their tracks, what happiness it is to obey the law.

"The Royal Orgy" (1789)

This light opera, with raunchy lyrics set to popular tunes, was not intended to be performed, but the pamphlet spoofs Queen Marie Antoinette's great interest in opera and her supposedly even greater interest in the sexual prowess of some of her courtiers. These printed accounts of her trysts with the Count of Artois and the Duchess of Polignac had no basis in fact, but they were consistent with the popularly held view of Marie Antoinette as out of touch with her people, self-interested, and a hindrance to the proper government of France, because of her uncontrollable lusts for power, luxury, and sex.

"Do Queens Just Wanna Have Fun?" "Consummation Conundrum: Trouble in the Royal Bedroom!" "Does the Queen Have a Swede on the Side?" "King's brother caught with Queen!"

Headlines ripped from today's tabloids, tattling on lusty celebrities and rambunctious royals? Or is this gossip a few centuries old? Rumors have always been useful for those who wanted to sow discord and trouble, and this was never more true than in 18th-century France. The hothouse atmosphere of the royal court, where factions and rivalries operated secretly to shape policy and undermine sometimes tenuous royal power, created a ripe environment for a thriving gossip mill, presented mostly in the form of cheap, widely-distributed pamphlets that were the equivalent of today's tabloids.

Hired by powerful leaders of court factions, the pamphleteers themselves were often down-and-out writers who cared less about politics and more about earning a fast buck. The printers and sellers of pamphlets operated outside the law and had no qualms about spreading the most salacious rumors, often accompanied by lewd, pornographic pictures. The French public, like the printers, pamphleteers, and those who paid them, had a seemingly unlimited amount of ire for Marie Antoinette, who became symbolic of all of France's ills.

Printed secretly, the pamphlets were too plentiful to be squelched by the French government. The graphically illustrated scandal sheets accused the Queen of crimes ranging from hopeless stupidity all the way to adultery, sexual deviance, and even treason. Despite the claims of modern scholars to objectivity, these pamphlets continue to shape historical views of the French Queen, her society, and the aristocracy — just as they did for her contemporaries.

"Rumors and Revolution." PBS. David Productions, Inc., 2006



HE SAID WHAT!?

Your Guide to 18th Century Slang

The vernacular of 18th century courtly life could be as complicated as the etiquette rules. Here is some courtly jargon translated into 21st century slang.

You are a swell gent You're the best

You are all the go Props to you

You are a diamond of the first water You're da bomb

You are exceedingly obliging You're a star

Believe me, dear sir, your obliged and faithful humble servant Miss you

He has at least ten thousand a year He's got mad chips

Capital Cool

Topping Wicked

Ben coze BFF

Debutante Newbie

Haut ton Classy

Extremely diverting

Wondrous

Rusticating

Flash fawney

Starved

Leader of the Ton

Completely overthrown

LOL

Awesome

Chilling out

Bling

Size zero

'It' girl

Totally gutted

I am sensible of the honour of your proposals but I am afraid I must decline You're dumped

Frittering one's time on inessentials Chillaxin

First rate Lush

Time to pay the piper Fess up

Having a very agreeable time Off the hook

MY DEAREST MOTHER,

I absolutely blush for your kindness to me. The day before yesterday Mercy sent me your precious letter, and yesterday I received a second. That is indeed passing one's fête day happily. On Tuesday I had a fête which I shall never forget all my life. We made our entrance into Paris. As for honors, we received all that we could possibly imagine; but they, though very well in their way, were not what touched me most. What was really affecting was the tenderness and earnestness of the poor people, who, in spite of the taxes with which they are overwhelmed, were transported with joy at seeing us. When we went to walk in the Tuileries, there was so vast a crowd that we were three-quarters of an hour without being able to move either forward or backward. The dauphin and I gave repeated orders to the Guards not to beat any one, which had a very good effect. Such excellent order was kept the whole day that, in spite of the enormous crowd which followed us everywhere, not a person was hurt.

When we returned from our walk we went up to an open terrace and stayed there half an hour. I cannot describe to you, my dear mamma, the transports of joy and affection which every one exhibited towards us. Before we withdrew we kissed our hands to the people, which gave them great pleasure. What a happy thing it is for persons in our rank to gain the love of a whole nation so cheaply. Yet there is nothing so precious; I felt it thoroughly, and shall never forget it.

MARIE
ANTOINETTE
(1773)



The Vicomte de Valmont to Madame de Tourvel
20 August 17--

For pity's sake, Madame, relent and relieve my troubled spirit; relent and tell me what I may hope or fear. I'm tortured by uncertainty: do I face happiness beyond my dreams or calamity? Why did I speak out? Why was I overwhelmed by your charm and forced to open my heart to you? As long as I was content to worship you in silence I could at least indulge my feeling of love, my happiness was untroubled by the sight of your distress and this chaste feeling was joy enough. But ever since I saw you crying, this joy has turned to despair. Why does Fate seem to have ordained that love, that gentlest of feelings, fills you only with fear? But I misread your heart: you're not made for love; I am the only one with a loving heart, even though you constantly misrepresent it. Indeed, your heart is pitiless, how else would you be able to refuse someone a word of comfort when he'd revealed the extent of his misery..



To Josephine, 1796

I have not spent a day without loving you; I have not spent a night without embracing you; I have not so much as drunk one cup of tea without cursing the pride and ambition which force me to remain apart from the moving spirit of my life. In the midst of my duties, whether I am at the head of my army or inspecting the camps, my beloved Josephine stands alone in my heart, occupies my mind, fills my thoughts. If I rise to work in the middle of the night, it is because this may hasten by a matter of days the arrival of my sweet love.

Yet in your letter of the 23rd and 26th Ventose, you call me *vous*. *Vous* yourself! Ah! wretch, how could you have written this letter? How cold it is! And then there are those four days between the 23rd and the 26th; what were you doing that you failed to write to your husband? ... You love me less; but you will get over the loss. One day you will love me no longer...

Farwell, my wife: the torment, joy, hope and moving spirit of my life; whom I love, whom I fear, who fills me with tender feelings which draw me close to Nature, and with violent impulses as tumultuous as thunder...

Napoleon Bonaparte



Letters

Paris, December 3, 1791.
My Brother,



I have learned through M. du Moustier of the interest which your Majesty has expressed not only in my person but also in the welfare of my kingdom. In giving me these proofs, the attitude of your Majesty has, in all cases where your interest might prove advantageous to my people, excited my lively appreciation. I confidently take advantage of it at this time when, in spite of the fact that I have accepted the new constitution, seditious leaders are openly exhibiting their purpose of entirely destroying the remnants of the monarchy. I have just addressed myself to the emperor, the empress of Russia, and to the kings of Spain and Sweden: I am suggesting to them the idea of a congress of the chief powers of Europe, supported by an armed force, as the best means of checking seditious parties, of establishing a more desirable order of things, and of preventing the evil which afflicts us from reaching the other states of Europe.

I trust that your Majesty will approve my ideas, and that you will maintain the most absolute secrecy about the proposition I am making to you. You will easily understand that the circumstances in which I find myself force me to observe the greatest caution. That is why no one but the baron of Breteuil is informed of my plans, and your Majesty may therefore communicate to him anything you wish. . . .

Your good brother,
Louis

Les Liaisons Dangereuses is an epistolary novel, which was by far the most popular kind of fiction at the time. Two of the most celebrated novels, Richardson's *Clarissa* and Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloise*, were also told only in letters between the main characters.

Letter writing was the only form of long-distance communication in the 18th century. As with all other parts of courtly life, there were rules and etiquette to be observed in letter writing, and the composition of a good letter was considered an art form.

The receipt of a young woman's first letter and the composition of a reply was an important moment in her life. It was crucial that she should not disgrace herself, that she should not give over-hasty consent to a walk which might turn out to be dangerous; but it was also important that she should not come across as utterly sanctimonious. A maid usually served as the girl's confidante in all matters of love and, being experienced in such matters, would be indispensable in crafting an appropriate reply.



Send Contacts Spell Attach

From: Mark Sanford

To: Maria

Subject:

Date: Thu, 10 Jul 2008 00:24:54 -0400

Sweetest,

I have been specializing in staying focused on decisions and actions of the head for a long time now — and you have my heart. You have oh so many attributes that pulls it in this direction. Do you really comprehend how beautiful your smile is? Have you been told lately how warm your eyes are and how they softly glow with the special nature of your soul? I remember Jenny, or someone close to me, once commenting that while my mom was pleasant and warm it was sad she had never accomplished anything of significance. I replied that they were wrong because she had the ultimate of all gifts — and that was the ability to love unconditionally. The rarest of all commodities in this world is love. It is that thing that we all yearn for at some level — to be simply loved unconditionally for nothing more than who we are — not what we can get, give or become. There are but 50 governors in my country and outside of the top spot, this is as high as you can go in the area I have invested the last 15 years of my life — my getting here came as no small measure because I had that foundation of love and support so critical to getting up in the morning and feeling you could give and risk because you already had a full tank of love in the emotional bank account.

Since our first meeting there in a wind swept somewhat open air dance spot in Punta del Este, I felt that you had that same rare attribute. Above all else I love that inner beauty about you. As I mentioned in our last visit, while I did not need love fifteen years ago — as the battle scars of life and aging and politics have worn on this has become a real need of mine. You have a particular grace and calm that I adore. You have a level of sophistication that is so fitting with

Style Guide



Rococo: Frivolity Rules!

The most distinctive art movement of the 18th century was Rococo, which was both an evolution from and a reaction against the “grand manner” of ornate Baroque art and the formality and the rigidity of court life. The term was apparently coined from the French words *rocaille* and *coquille* (meaning, respectively, “rock” and “shell,” which were the formations used to decorate Baroque gardens).

By the end of Louis XIV’s reign, rich Baroque designs were giving way to lighter, more charming elements with emphasis on delicate curves and natural patterns. After the king’s death in 1715, court life moved away from Versailles and into private homes, and this Rococo became well established. Although less formal, it was essentially an art of the aristocracy and emphasized what seems now to have been the unreflective, impure, and indulgent lifestyles of the aristocracy rather than the piety, morality, self-discipline, reason, and hero-

ism found in Baroque art. This delicacy and playfulness is often seen as perfectly in tune with the indulgences of Louis XV’s regime.

Rococo is known for excessive ornateness, delicate colors, and curving forms. Painting and sculptures were replete with cherubs and myths of love. Portraiture was popular among private collectors. Landscapes were pastoral and often depicted the leisurely outings of aristocratic couples. Rococo rooms were designed as total works of art with elegant and ornate furniture, small sculptures, ornamental mirrors, and tapestry complementing architecture, reliefs, and wall paintings.

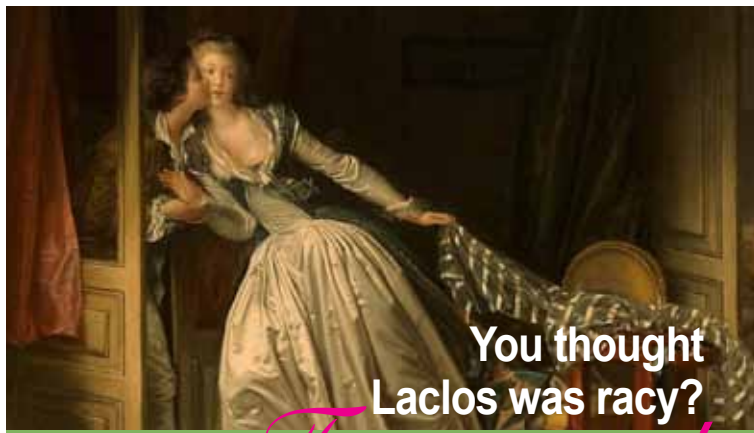
Rococo was supplanted by the more serious Neo-classical style, which was associated with the French revolutionary movement of the late 18th century.



Fun Facts

Madame de Pompadour, mistress of Louis XV, had so much influence over her lover that she’s responsible for one of the most disastrous conflicts in history. In 1755, she convinced Louis to shift his alliances from Prussia to Austria, which precipitated the catastrophic Seven Years’ War. The blood-fest, which grew out of the French and Indian War in North America, extended across Europe, Africa, and India, and cost more than 1 million lives. In fact, some scholars believe it should have been deemed the First World War.

In a completely unrelated note, her exceptionally tall hairstyles also eventually influenced the popular pompadour hairstyle of the 1950s. Go figure!



You thought
Laclos was racy?

Try some

Fragonard

The French Enlightenment and the ornate Rococo movement were both in full swing when Jean-Honoré Fragonard hit the Paris scene in 1761. Prolific and innovative, Fragonard found an eager market for his cabinet pictures in Paris, which melded the influences of Italian Baroque painting and 17th century Dutch landscape painting. The spectacular critical success of *Coresus and Callirhoë*, which he submitted to the Royal Academy in 1765, led to high hopes that he would be the salvation of history painting in France. However, it was a promise he chose not to fulfill, neglecting the traditional path of royal commissions in favor of working for private patrons.

Fragonard's masterpiece, *The Lover Crowned* (below), was commissioned by Madame du Barry, the official mistress of Louis XV, for the château de Louveciennes. The lovers of the painting, seen in various stages of romantic involvement in lush, overgrown gardens full of mythological statuary, potted plants, and cascading flowers, were the perfect example of the Rococo style. Unfortunately, times were changing, and a dispute with the patron led to the paintings being returned to the artist in favor a Neoclassical-style series by Joseph-Marie Vien. After this disappointment, Fragonard made various attempts to remake his style in the newly popular Neoclassical manner with its planar compositions and smooth surfaces, but the tide of changing taste was ultimately too strong for him. After the French Revolution, his work fell from favor and he died in relative obscurity in 1806.



The Higher The Hair The Closer To God


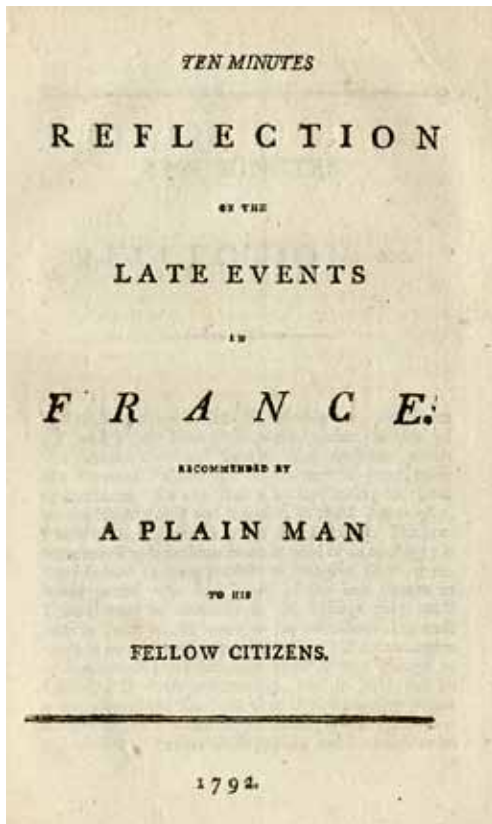
France during the 18th century was the undisputed leader of world fashion. At Versailles, nobles vied with one another to wear the latest styles. These included coiffures so high that while riding in carriages, women were forced to kneel or to travel with their heads pointing out the window. There were even towering head-dresses that often incorporated decorative objects (sometimes symbolic, as in the case of the famous engraving *Coiffure à l'Indépendance ou le Triomphe de la liberté* depicting a lady wearing a large ship in her hair with masts and sails to celebrate naval victory in the American War of Independence).



Women's clothing styles remained confining and cumbersome for most of the period. Skirts in the early part of the century were so wide that short women looked like balls, tall women looked like bells, and staircases actually had to be redesigned in order to accommodate them. The aesthetic of a narrow inverted conical corseted torso above full skirts prevailed during most of the period.

In the last half of the century, the usual fashion was a low-necked gown worn over a petticoat. If the bodice of the gown was open in front, the opening was filled in with a decorative stomacher, pinned to the gown over the laces or to the corset beneath. Tight elbow-length sleeves were trimmed with frills or ruffles, and separate under-ruffles called *engageantes* of lace or fine linen were tacked to the smock or chemise sleeves.





les Liaisons Dangereuses

presented by
Remy Bumpo Theatre Co.

March 17 - May 2, 2010

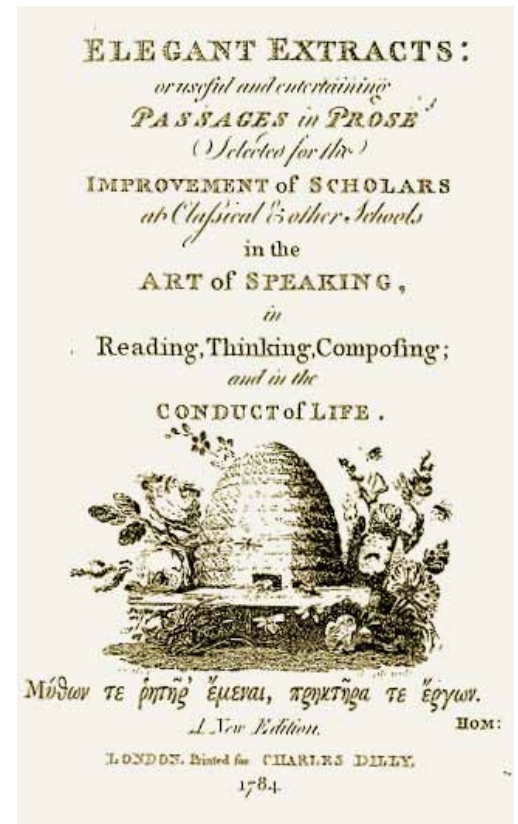
Written by Christopher Hampton
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Choderlos De Laclos

Directed by David Darlow

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Annabel Armour, Linda Gillum,
and Nick Sandys

Field Guide created by
Charles Riffenburg IV with research
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Edited by Susan Padveen



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