

Julie, or the New Heloise

Jean-Jacques Rousseau , Philip Stewart (Editor) , Jean Vache (Editor)

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An elegant translation of one of the most popular novels of its time.

Rousseau's great epistolary novel, Julie, or the New Heloise, has been virtually unavailable in English since 1810. In it, Rousseau reconceptualized the relationship of the individual to the collective and articulated a new moral paradigm. The story follows the fates and smoldering passions of Julie d'Etange and St. Preux, a one-time lover who re-enters Julie's life at the invitation of her unsuspecting husband, M. de Wolmar.

The complex tones of this work made it a commercial success and a continental sensation when it first appeared in 1761, and its embodiment of Rousseau's system of thought, in which feelings and intellect are intertwined, redefined the function and form of fiction for decades. As the characters negotiate a complex maze of passion and virtue, their purity of soul and honest morality reveal, as Rousseau writes in his preface, the subtleties of heart of which this work is full.

A comprehensive introduction and careful annotations make this novel accessible to contemporary readers, both as an embodiment of Rousseau's philosophy and as a portrayal of the tension and power inherent in domestic life.

Julie, or the New Heloise Details

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
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From Reader Review Julie, or the New Heloise for online ebook

Jennifer Uhlich says

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.

Nicole says

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 ;)

Monty Milne says

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 dross (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 - Will heaven 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.

Michael says

i'm not gonna finish this for a while, or maybe ever. but in case anyone else out there is curious about the 18th century epistolary-novels-about-virtuous-girls-being-seduced genre, this is DEFINITELY the one to read. the big british author in the genre, samuel richardson, is incredibly dull. if we had literature departments instead of english departments, no one would read richardson. they'd read this book. it's dripping with pathos.

Deanne says

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 Lovelace from Clarissa, Julie wouldn't know what had hit her if he turned up on her doorstep.

AGamarra says

"¡Cuántas tristes reflexiones me asaltan! ¡Cuántos obstáculos me hacen prever mis temores! ¡Oh Julia! ¡Qué fatal presente del cielo es un alma sensible! Quien lo reciba, que se espere a no tener sino dolor y desdichas en la tierra"

Me enteré de esta obra tan escasamente traducida al español en un pasaje de "Rojo y Negro" cuando Stendhal contando sobre Julián decía: "recurrió a su memoria, como en otro tiempo, y recitó las frases más hermosas de la Nueva Eloísa"

A partir de ahí esperé más de 10 años para poder adquirir la obra e incluso en el trayecto traduje algunas frases de una versión en francés pero veía que la labor era demasiado extenuante, nada menos que 1200 páginas y muy eruditas.

Me hubiera gustado leerla en la adolescencia, y es que en Francia probablemente era una lectura obligada, encargada no sólo de contarnos una historia sino de instruir a los jóvenes. Y es así cómo leyendo sé que en su juventud Stendhal, Napoleón, Madame Roland y tantos otros personajes célebres han sido cautivados por esta gran "novela francesa".

Me ha hecho remontar a mi juventud, y la verdad encontré muchas semejanzas entre mis cartas amorosas de adolescente y la pluma de Rousseau (obviamente salvando grandes distancias), en la manera un poco rebuscada y exuberante de las descripciones, pero también en la sencillez y en la honestidad de lo que se siente. No sólo te expresan las cartas sensaciones o deseos incomprensibles, te explican por qué tanto te atrae la otra persona, en realzar no sólo el sentimiento sino en lo que esperas de él, en el cambio que opera en tu persona, en tu estilo de vida, en tus ilusiones y sobre todo le da una gran importancia a la virtud. El amor

sirve para hacerte más grande y la devoción que se percibe sobre todo en las primeras partes es gran prueba de ello.

Me tomó mucho tiempo terminarla pues no sólo leí la historia en sí sino resalté muchas frases que fueron de mi gran gusto y analicé el gran impacto filosófico que le da Rousseau a todo el escrito (las notas de mi edición me ayudaron en gran medida), pues la "Nueva Eloísa" no se puede leer sólo como la historia de dos jóvenes habitantes de los alpes suizos sino como un verdadero tratado filosófico de temas recurrentes en Rousseau, como el verdadero amor, la virtud, la pasión, pasando incluso por la libertad de los pueblos, la servidumbre, el lujo y muchos otros temas puntos de debate del siglo de las Luces.

Esto quizás no les pueda gustar a muchos, pues aunque este conjunto tan heterogéneo de cartas puede marear si no sigues el hilo de la historia en sí, por momentos desvía claramente la acción y Rousseau aprovecha algunos detalles para explayarse de temas que claramente tiene él la intención de analizar mediante sus personajes.

Muchas de sus ideas hoy pueden tomarse como equivocadas, y es que Rousseau en la novela pretende también aleccionar a la juventud sobre sus opiniones sobre diversas cosas, esas divergencias pueden hacer también que la obra se vuelva un poco pesada, pero al fin y al cabo, la manera de pensar siempre ha sido diferente a través de generaciones y es reconfortante conocer algunas ideas de ese siglo ya tan lejano.

Es una novela como digo a todas luces aleccionadora, se puede calificar de simbólicos muchos de sus personajes: Julia d'Étange, alma pura (para algunos tal vez no tanto) y sensible, Clara, su prima, vivaz y elocuente, Saint-Preux, el maestro sensible y honorable, Milord Eduardo, un extranjero amigo, y un largo etcétera. Pero aún así ha sido para mí una obra muy romántica y campo de diversas frases enternecedoras.

Hay una maestría incomparable en Rousseau en hacer una novela llena de cartas de los diferentes personajes, en distintos estilos (aunque a veces sí se puede criticar cierta "erudición" de todos ellos) y que por añadidura cuenta una historia en cierto grado intrigante. Sí debo mencionar que las últimas partes pierden cierto interés y sobre todo la historia no fue de mi agrado en ese punto como lo fue en las primeras.

No puedo recomendarla a todos pues es una novela larga, muy filosófica, llena de rasgos de moral y virtud (creo que esto último ha sido tergiversado en la actualidad y hasta cierto punto enterrada), aunque claro que no faltan algunas dosis de hipocresía, de explicaciones amplias y demasiado idealista, tanto que puede parecer ridículas algunas escenas a la hora actual.

Termino diciendo que nunca usé tantos marcadores de páginas como con este libro y no es sólo por su extensión de seguro.

Amandine says

Je ne note pas cette lecture, car elle n'a pas toujours été faite dans les meilleures conditions : interrompue par diverses obligations extérieures, elle a été longue, parfois pénible. Tantôt, je m'ennuyais ferme, vite lassée par les interminables réflexions philosophiques des personnages, mais à d'autres moments, plongée dans ce récit et les malheurs des personnages, je tournais les pages avec plaisir, ravie par le style de Rousseau. Bref, une lecture très inégale pour moi. Sans doute à retenter une prochaine fois, plus tard, dans de meilleures conditions, avec davantage de temps libre.

Ayant beaucoup entendu parler/lu sur ce livre, je connaissais déjà l'intrigue, ainsi que son issue (révélée sur la 4e de couverture pour les ignorants éventuels... Ce que je regrette et reproche à l'édition Livre de poche), et avais une série d'attentes. Celles-ci ont été déçues pour la plupart, positivement ou négativement. J'avais notamment de grandes espérances quant à la forme : grande admiratrice du roman "Les Liaisons dangereuses", que je savais héritier de cette œuvre de Rousseau, j'apprécie particulièrement les romans épistolaires du 18e siècle. J'aurais dû m'en douter, mais Rousseau exploite moins les possibilités du genre que son successeur (mieux que certains de ses prédécesseurs, néanmoins) : les lettres y sont un très bon support pour laisser les personnages exprimer leurs sentiments et s'épancher, mais c'est tout. Elles n'ont pas d'autre rôle que la narration à la première personne, et les différences de style ne sont guère marquantes : on

y lit bien davantage Rousseau que les personnages mêmes. Ce sentiment est d'ailleurs renforcé par une série d'idées que je sais propres à l'auteur et développées dans d'autres de ses œuvres (sur l'éducation et sur la religion, par exemple) que j'ai retrouvées dans le discours de quasi tous les personnages, dans les passages philosophiques évoqués plus haut. J'ai donc été assez déçue par l'exploitation insuffisante des potentialités du roman épistolaire et par le manque de différenciation des personnages.

Ce qui m'a agréablement surpris par contre, c'est la dimension sensuelle de l'amour : elle n'est absolument pas niée, ni absente, contrairement à d'autres romans sentimentaux comme Delphine de Madame de Staël. Julie et Saint-Preux sont vertueux, mais n'en sont pas moins en proie aux affres du désir. De même, tous les sentiments qui peuvent être liés à l'amour sont exploités par Rousseau dans ce roman. Une réussite complète de ce point de vue, pour moi, même si cela dépeint un amour très utopique.

Yann says

Rebuté au début par le style, j'ai été gagné par degrés par la sincérité des personnages. Moi qui ne suis pas particulièrement sujet à la sensiblerie, la fin m'a presque tiré des larmes. Rousseau peint un idéal, c'est une belle œuvre.

♥ Ibrahim ♥ says

We should follow our authentic feelings rather than society's norms. This is one of the books that inspired Napoleon as a teenage boy who had always believed in himself.

Martin says

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.

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.

Kecia says

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.

Czarny Pies says

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 but which to the contemporary reader are nothing but pointless babble.

Unquestionably the distance created by time makes matters worse. I remember the bizarre craze of the first decade of this century in which teenage girls devoured the incredibly turgid and bloated Twilight novels in a state of rapture overjoyed 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.

Pierre E. Loignon says

Voilà un des livres que j'aime le plus à offrir à mes amies.

Je trouve que les romans par lettres constituent des phénomènes artistiques vraiment intéressants.

De prime abord, entrer dans une correspondance d'inconnus ne me semble pas très intéressant et mon

indifférence est encore accentuée lorsque je sais que ces personnages sont fictifs. A priori, je n'aime donc pas trop et pourtant, sitôt que j'arrive à m'imposer l'effort de lire quelques dizaines des premiers épîtres, me voilà entraîné irrésistiblement jusqu'à la dernière missive. Cela s'explique, je crois, du fait que le lecteur d'un roman par lettre doit faire l'effort de reconstruire l'histoire et les personnages à partir des indices qu'on lui donne exclusivement dans les billets échangés par les personnages. Cela implique un effort et prend un certain temps d'adaptation, mais une fois que les fondations nécessaires à la reconstruction sont en place, le lecteur participe à l'écriture, se prend à rêver à ce qui se produit et aux personnages comme si tout cela existait réellement et c'est pourquoi ces romans si ardu à aborder laissent souvent, lorsqu'ils sont réussis, comme c'est le cas pour *La nouvelle Héloïse*, les souvenirs les plus indélébiles dans l'esprit de leurs lecteurs. Dans le cas de ce roman par lettre en particulier, l'approche des personnages est légèrement facilitée au lecteur puisque Rousseau y présente une Héloïse nouvelle, personnage idéalisé à partir de la maîtresse du grand Abélard dont la tragique histoire d'amour a été immortalisée dans un échange de lettre authentique du XIIe siècle. Si on fait abstraction de la médiocrité de Saint-Preux par rapport à Abélard, le portrait général de la situation dans le roman reproduit assez bien l'horizon historique où les destins d'Héloïse et d'Abélard se sont croisés, et cela permet à Rousseau de mettre génialement en contraste le progrès offert par ses idées morales par rapport à celles qui ont fait le malheur de la véritable Héloïse. En effet, l'Héloïse de Rousseau trouve une douce sérénité rendue possible par l'acceptation de son repentir et l'accomplissement de la vertu que l'ancienne, malgré tous les efforts d'Abélard, n'arrivera jamais à atteindre. Ce succès n'a évidemment rien d'une démonstration, mais il donne envie au lecteur de croire en sa possibilité. La conclusion est en effet sublime, autant sur le plan artistique que moral. Rousseau, cet homme de cœur aux belles idées et à la sensibilité communicative, est ici au sommet de son art, accomplissant l'exploit trop rare d'une synthèse intellectuelle parfaite entre formes romanesque et philosophique.

Olga Vallinsgren says

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.

Alex says

I hear this is maybe like a less shitty version of Pamela.
