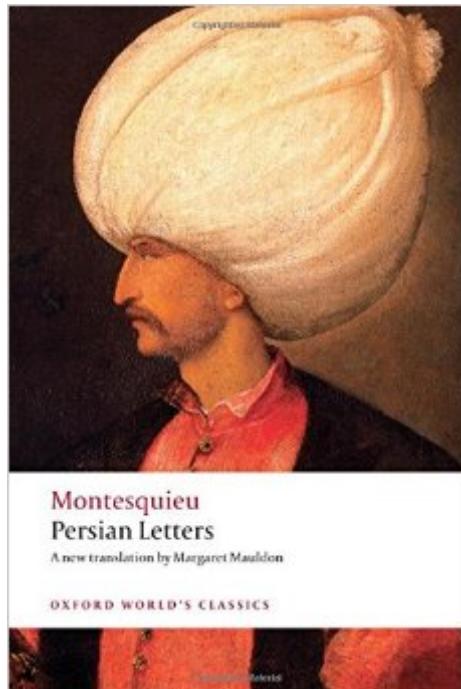


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Persian Letters (Oxford World's Classics)



Synopsis

Persian Letters is a classic of European literature by Baron de Montesquieu, the brilliant thinker who had a huge influence on the Enlightenment. Through the astute observations of his two fictional Persian travelers in Europe--Usbek and Rica--Montesquieu asks fundamental questions about human nature, the manners and flirtations of polite society, the structures of power, and the hypocrisy of religion-all in a witty, inventive satire that combines travel literature and the epistolary genre. Indeed, this pioneering epistolary novel appeared almost twenty years before Richardson's Pamela. This is the first English translation based on the new, definitive edition of the original French text, revealing this lively work as Montesquieu first intended. The book features an engaging and comprehensive introductory essay, covering a wide range of topics, including the novel's fictional techniques and innovations; travel literature as a genre; historical context and Enlightenment ideas; Orientalism; and other issues. The editor has included full explanatory notes, a useful list of characters, and an invaluable appendix featuring excerpts from Montesquieu's most important sources.

About the Series: For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics has made available the broadest spectrum of literature from around the globe. Each affordable volume reflects Oxford's commitment to scholarship, providing the most accurate text plus a wealth of other valuable features, including expert introductions by leading authorities, voluminous notes to clarify the text, up-to-date bibliographies for further study, and much more.

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Customer Reviews

Any book that has the staying power that this title has had will have merit. Published nearly three hundred years ago (in 1721), Persian Letters by Montesquieu is an epistolary novel that traces the fictional correspondence between two eighteenth-century Persians and their countrymen as they travel through the occidental world for the first time, eventually settling in Paris for a decade during the remaining years of Louie XIV's reign. The book illustrates what we would now call today culture shock for the two main characters as they try to make sense of their new surroundings and the colorful people that enliven their day-to-day soirées and sojourns into European life at the onset of the Enlightenment. This compilation has more than a few witticisms and biting criticisms of the times. Reading it today, three-hundred years later, it is obvious that Montesquieu used the fictional characters as a cover for his own criticisms. Though which critiques actually parallel his thoughts is open to question, this ambiguity, I think, actually makes the piece more enjoyable to read. I cannot verify the accurateness of Montesquieu's portrayal of these Persians--would they have really have reacted the way they had?--but a quick glance at the introduction to any modern reprinting of the text will tell you that Montesquieu used the best available resources at the time to capture what they would have likely reacted. Sometimes, you have to wonder though if he is working off imaginative stereotypes more than anything. The character development of the Persians is slight and the plot that Montesquieu throws us is light until the last few letters when events seem to pick up and then rush towards an interesting finale.

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