



Thérèse et Isabelle

Violette Leduc

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« Isabelle allongée sur la nuit enrubannait mes pieds, déroulait la bandelette du trouble. Les mains à plat sur le matelas, je faisais le même travail de charme qu'elle. Elle embrassait ce qu'elle avait caressé puis, de sa main légère, elle ébouriffait et époussetait avec le plumeau de la perversité. La pieuvre dans mes entrailles frémissait, Isabelle buvait au sein droit, au sein gauche. Je buvais avec elle, je m'allaitais de ténèbres quand sa bouche s'éloignait. Les doigts revenaient, encerclaient, soupesaient la tiédeur du sein, les doigts finissaient dans mon ventre en épaves hypocrites. »

Dans *Thérèse et Isabelle*, longtemps censuré, Violette Leduc tente de « rendre le plus minutieusement possible les sensations éprouvées dans l'amour physique ». Voici des pages âpres et précieuses, d'une liberté de ton qu'aucune femme écrivain n'avait osé prendre en France avant elle.

Thérèse et Isabelle Details

Date : Published October 28th 2000 by Gallimard (first published January 1st 1966)

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Author : Violette Leduc

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Genre : Lgbt, Fiction, Glbt, Queer, Adult Fiction, Erotica, Cultural, France

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From Reader Review Thérèse et Isabelle for online ebook

Holidayre says

Totally boring. It is a short book (120 pages for my French Kindle edition) but it was so long to finish it. I am really disappointed because this wasn't what I expected. It is well written but it's always the same thing, I swear! I am just relieved to be done with this book.

lov2laf says

This is an autobiographical French novella about a schoolgirl lesbian relationship that was written and censored in the 1950s. In present day, we're getting the full text published as intended. I appreciate the courage it took to write the story and I'm glad to get a slice of it now.

As an American reader, I first wondered if the translation was stiff or inaccurate because the word choices and metaphors seemed odd. There's a certain jarring quality to the read. Then I realized that, no, it was more the style of the author's writing in the first place. Somewhere along the way, I caught the rhythm of the prose, though, and went with it.

The story of the relationship is an odd mix: part metaphor, part every day description with poetry and traditional narrative slammed together and interwoven from sentence to sentence. Because of that, in some ways it's hard to follow. Not in the mind numbing academic way but that our brain needs to reconcile the non-explicit, unsaid action and the metaphor, to come up with the layered meaning.

What is absolutely clear, though, is the passion felt by this young couple. In the end, I came away understanding a full story and, I think, the evocative intention of the writing even if I didn't quite get the lines used at the time.

The book does not shy from being sexually explicit but the metaphors act as purple prose on steroids.

There's definitely a lyricism and beauty to the text.

I'm sure those who have a love for poetry or those who are interested in historical accounts of lesbian narratives would enjoy this a great deal. For me, not a follower of poetry, it ended up being an interesting and better than okay read.

3.5 stars

Stewart Home says

Violette Leduc spent three years working on the first part of her novel *Ravages*. When the manuscript of the book was presented to her publisher Gallimard in 1954, her readers there — Raymond Queneau and Jacques Lemarchand — decided the first third of the book should be nixed because it described a torrid lesbian affair between two schoolgirls. *Ravages* was offered around to other French imprints but no one was prepared to issue it without cuts. In the end a censored version of the novel appeared in 1955 under the aegis of Gallimard. Parts of the cut text were reworked and incorporated into Leduc's 1964 memoir *La Bâtarde*. The

success of this mid-sixties autobiography led first to the printing of a limited private edition of the censored opening of *Ravages* under the title *Thérèse and Isabelle*, and then to the novella appearing commercially as a Gallimard book in 1966...

Read my review in full here: <http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/an-ero...>

Teresa says

Violette Leduc, baseada na sua própria experiência, escreve um pequeno romance no qual relata a paixão vivida entre duas adolescentes, que juntas se descobrem e ao amor.

As descrições dos encontros amorosos entre as duas jovens, apesar de explícitas e ousadas, têm passagens de uma grande beleza e ternura - não chocando qualquer mente menos preparada - levando-me a pensar numa frase que ouvi há dias: “O amor não tem sexo...”

Este pequeno livro tem uma introdução bastante interessante - com algumas passagens escritas por Simone de Beauvoir - que nos apresenta a autora, a sua vida e obra.

Warwick says

In the mid-1950s, Violette Leduc wrote a novel called *Ravages*. The first hundred and fifty pages comprised a semi-autobiographical depiction of two schoolgirls in a torrid lesbian relationship, which Leduc said she hoped would be ‘no more shocking than Mme Bloom’. Yes they said Yes it is more shocking yes. Her publishers refused to print it, and the novel appeared without its opening section in 1955 (and did very well). Ten years later, a different publisher agreed to print the excised material as a stand-alone novella, although they still insisted on certain cuts for legality: this was the original 1966 form of *Thérèse et Isabelle*, the fully uncensored version of which did not appear in French until the year 2000, nearly thirty years after its author had died.

It is very explicit in places, but also deeply poetic. Leduc said her aim was to ‘render as minutely as possible the sensations experienced during physical love’ and while at times this feels like a slightly limited goal, she succeeds at it brilliantly. In terms of purely physical sensations, this short book contains the best sex scenes I've ever read. And yet they're not all that sexy - to me, anyway - because it *is* purely physical sensation: there is almost no emotional background, no build-up, no characterisation of either Thérèse or Isabelle that goes beyond each girl's overwhelming desire for the other.

Nevertheless the language is remarkable. Leduc has a tendency to come out with these gnomic, existential remarks, which don't always make perfect sense but which demand to be quoted for their sheer inventive pleasure:

La caresse est au frisson ce que le crépuscule est à l'éclair.
(*The caress is to the shiver what dusk is to the lightning-bolt.*)

Quand on aime on est toujours sur le quai d'une gare.
(*When one is in love, one is always on a railway-station platform.*)

Je la regarde comme je regarde la mer le soir quand je ne la vois plus.

(I watch her the way I watch the sea in the evening when I can no longer see it.)

Ma bouche rencontra sa bouche comme la feuille morte la terre.
(My mouth met her mouth as a dead leaf meets the earth.)

J'entrais dans sa bouche comme on entre dans la guerre
(I entered her mouth the way you enter a war.)

At times these lapidary flourishes work very well; at other times, they topple over into high-flown nonsense ('I was seized by the glove of infinity', and much more in the same vein). There is also something a bit...*oppressive* about the tone for my tastes, with zero sense of humour and much earnestness. Admittedly these characters are only seventeen, and sex does tend to feel like the end of the world at that age, but still, wow!, talk about intense. Just hours after hooking up, Thérèse is already fantasizing about cutting off the hands of everyone else that touches her new lover, while Isabelle is raising the prospect of the two of them jumping off a cliff together so that neither outlives the other. It made me laugh because of the whole running joke in the LGBT world that gay women are super clingy super fast (you remember the classic gag: what does a lesbian bring to a second date? A U-Haul). At the same time I was impressed by it, just because of how few writers are attempting this sort of thing now.

I became fixated on the pronouns. They were still referring to each other by the formal *vous* until nearly halfway through the story! It was blowing my mind. You would think by the time you're knuckle-deep inside another person that one of you would have coughed politely and said, 'Actually, do you mind if we tutoie each other?' It's one of those little things that make me realise how much mental space is separating me from this world of 1950s provincial France.

All the more reason to experience it, though. The book is short and it builds, like a good quickie, to an intense and powerful climax where all of Leduc's characteristics work to best effect. An orgasm is captured in words like you would hardly believe possible (in a riot of synaesthesia: 'my eyes heard, my ears saw'), and there are several more flashes of unexpected simile (Thérèse, trying to learn how to give oral sex, describes her gestures as feeling 'like a scratched record repeating itself' – this is fantastic).

For post-climactic comedown, Leduc leaves us with two final sentences that are the more devastating for being so simple after all the poetry that has gone before. It's a beautiful piece of work – limited in what it sets out to do, perhaps, and a little overblown at times, but nonetheless studded with frantic and extraordinary delights.

(Dec 2013)

la Calamara lit says

'Thérèse e Isabelle' es una novela erótica de 122 páginas sobre el primer amor entre dos adolescentes que estudian y viven en un internado. Desde la focalización de una obsesiva Thérèse, recorreremos, como si estuviéramos en las propias entrañas de la narradora, su intenso despertar sexual y la maraña de emociones propia del descubrimiento del amor por primera vez. Thérèse ama y lo hace con aferra, con entrega y con furia, como una necesidad, con tristeza, con pasión infinita y desilusión frágil.

Si leyéramos el libro de forma descontextualizada, podría parecer un fan fic de shoujo-ai lleno de fan service y extremadamente bien escrito —ojo: yo jamás diría algo así de forma despectiva. Soy consumidora de

shoujo-ai desde hace quince años, y con orgullo—. De hecho, en la película 'Violette' (2013) me pareció muy gracioso el momento en el que Leduc le dice a Beauvoir “Nadie está interesado en dos chicas que se acuestan”. Ay, Madame, if you knew. Si supieras lo prolífera que es la ficción sobre lesbianas colegialas en el siglo XXI (????). Evidentemente el valor agregado es que nadie lo había hecho así antes que ella —Patricia Highsmith escribió 'Carol' también en los cincuenta—: al menos no tan sexual, no tan explícito, no tan íntimo.

Y no lo digo yo: le costó la censura. Originalmente, 'Thérèse et Isabelle' conformaba la primera parte de otro libro, 'Ravages', pero la editorial juzgó que la sección sobre la historia lesbo-erótica era mejor no incluirla en la publicación. Leduc tuvo que esperar hasta 1966 para ver la historia de su amor adolescente en las librerías, 11 años más tarde, y solo después de alcanzar la fama gracias a 'La Bâtarde' (1965).

Además de una obra sincera y erótica hasta decir basta —o hasta sacarte los colores—, 'Thérèse e Isabelle' es un libro de una prosa tan deliciosa como atropellada. El lenguaje es desconcertante; los diálogos, ilógicos; la narración, discontinua. Thérèse, inmersa en sus pensamientos y sentimientos enredados, muchas veces abandona la empresa de narrar la acción, obligando al lector a enterarse de los acontecimientos, casi por accidente, a través de los diálogos, como en una obra de teatro confusa, como andando en la oscuridad con los brazos extendidos, como la propia Thérèse a tientas en busca de la cama de Isabelle, camuflada en la penumbra nocturna. Sin embargo, lo que más llama la atención del estilo es toda la poesía que se intercala entre las palabras en prosa. En cada oración hay una sorpresa, una palabra en el lugar preciso que hace que todo lo demás se tambalee.

"Entré en su boca como se entra en la guerra".

o...

"Perfilé una cierva en hilo de vidrio, la tocaba sin alcanzarla con mi lengua de joven, introduje piedras preciosas en su boca".

Reseña completa en: <https://lacalamaralit.wordpress.com/2...>

Lea Felicitas says

2,5

M. says

From Therese and Isabelle (p. 197):

My blood rushed toward her in jubilation. I turned the flashlight on.

Her pubic hair was not twinkling; it had grown thoughtful. I embalmed Isabelle with my lips, with my hands. Pale sleeping girls were breathing all around her; shades hungry for pallor whirled above her. I opened her lips and killed myself before looking. My face was touching it, my face moistening it. I began to make love to it out of plain friendship.

"Better than that."

I could not do more.

Isabelle thrust my face deep.

"You shall speak, you shall say it," she said.

There was a collision of clouds in my intestines. My brain was wild with greed.

"You are beautiful..."

I was picturing her. I was not lying.

Two petals were trying to swallow me. It was as if the eye of the flashlight saw better because it was the first to see.

Evan says

"I look at her as I look at the sea in the evening when I can no longer see it."

"Perfection is not part of this world even when we come upon it here."

"We are talking. It's a shame. What is said is murdered. Our words that will not grow any bigger or any lovelier will wilt inside our bones."

"What will we do in the night to come? Isabelle knows. Tomorrow; in this class, in front of this desk. I will know what we have done."

"Isabelle was living as she had lived before drawing me into her box. Isabelle was deceiving me, Isabelle fascinated me, Isabelle was starving me."

In 1954, Violette Leduc completed a three-episode novel called *Ravages*. One of the episodes involved the sexual awakening of two young girls, Thérèse and Isabelle, in a French boarding school. Sexuality, heterosexuality and male homosexuality had already emerged in French literature by this time, but this was something new, and the male publishing establishment deemed this story of lesbian desire "scandalous." Leduc, devastated at the cuts she had to make to her book, never really recovered from the experience. Never recovered from the truncation of her art or the overall rejection of the literary establishment.

This edition restores the entirety of *Thérèse and Isabelle* to its original form in what is said to be the finest translation yet, and I have to trust this is so. In the back there are bonus essays on the censorship of this book and of the circumstances of Leduc's own life that inform its pages.

The book is an intensely poetic study in concentrated yearning, simultaneously precise and imprecise, like love. While reading it, I found it both enrapturing and off-putting, not because of the sexual frankness, of course, but because its highly poetic language was just as much a barrier to me as it was an illumination. The book teases, just as its two protagonists do with each other, and it is charming and lovely, but in our age of instant gratification I may have to admit to being spoiled. Overcoming my conditioning toward more transgressive lit is hard.

It is very often swoon-inducing, however, and its descriptions of female orgasm are beautiful and unique. I loved the book's concern with time and memory; the way that Thérèse -- the book's first-person narrator -- relates past, present and future as she places this central moment of her life into that continuum. It's a very French way of doing things.

While living in the moment, both girls consciously express their concern to one another about whether each

will be missed in the future. It's an overriding concern, a fear, and of course each assures the other that they will always be remembered. We believe them but feel a sadness knowing one or the other or both may not, because in our own lives we wonder the same about people with whom we've had deep connections. It's a very touching and authentic conceit in the book.

If you read this, do make sure to get the Feminist Press edition with the cover shown on my review. That is the definitive one to have, and the bonus essays in the back are well worth reading.

(KevinR@Ky 2016)

Claire says

Thérèse and Isabelle is a short but explosive story of the passion between two young women. It was initially censored for profane/immoral content, and given the taboos attached to articulations of female sexuality - especially lesbian sexuality - it is easy to understand why. Without ever using explicit language, and even translated from the original French, this book contains extraordinarily vivid depictions of sex, longing, and desire between women. Violette Leduc captures a great many things without referring to them directly, which adds a certain *je ne sais quoi* to her writing style.

It's a deeply seductive story. But, truth be told, the endless cycle of anticipation and sex got a bit repetitive. And the ending, delivered in two brief sentences, made the narrative feel unbalanced. Still, I'm glad that the unabridged text of Thérèse and Isabelle was finally printed - these stories should never have been hidden in the first place.

Gia says

"Encountering you, I found sense in my abyss". Wasn't expecting my heart to go through a paper shredder when reading this novel falls under 'erotica'. From the beginning I was uncertain but prevalently seduced by the sometimes turbulently translated and sometimes soul caressing prose. I seemed to slip into her abstract but hypnotic rhythm around half way and then lost myself in the miasma of sensual whispers that guide the narrative in. This is the most poetic text I have read of late and the intensity of the relationship was captivating. I lost a sense of distinction between both girls characters but I think that added to the trance-like nature of their entangled lives. I just adored this. I am saddened to think such a craftily constructed literary experience was ever a 'banned book' because of erotic homosexual content.

Emily says

*3.5 stars

I wish I was fluent in French so I could read this in its original form. While some of the translation is absolutely beautiful, some of it ... is not. I also had some difficulties determining tense, which, again, probably had to do with translating it to English.

I also really enjoyed reading the discussion of the censorship of Violette Leduc's work at the end of the book and reading about the attempts to get it published originally. And it infuriates me that people ignore Leduc's self identification as a lesbian (she's often labelled bisexual) because she briefly married a man in an attempt to conform socially - a marriage that led to a suicide attempt and an abortion that nearly to her death. Anyway.

If anyone knows of a good translation of *Asphyxia* or *Ravages*, lemme know.

A.M. Irún says

Me recomendaron leer este libro y no fallaron.

El estilo lírico de Violette Leduc es bestial, si bien es cierto que, en ocasiones, se enreda en sus propias metáforas y entra en bucle.

La historia comienza saltándose los preámbulos de cualquier novela romántica y va directa a la parte sexual. Por eso, es difícil empatizar con el comportamiento caprichoso de *Thérèse e Isabelle*, dos jóvenes de 17 y 18 años que conviven en un internado.

Lo tendré siempre a mano porque una página suya abierta al azar inspira más que libros enteros.

Kevin says

I wasn't so sure about this at the start and even half-way through I was like *What the hell is going on with this language? Is this a bad translation or does the author just play by her own rules?* There are some great sentences and descriptions strewn throughout but then they're followed by something so bonkers, it felt constantly jolting. In sort of a Kathy Acker/William Burroughs/Bataille kind of style. But it also had a Gertrude Stein poetry vibe strumming through it. About 2/3 of the way through this "underground French classic" I was won over and just let the author do whatever the heck she wanted. It basically reads like one epic sex scene between two schoolgirls in 1920s France (the book was first published in the 50s). The afterwords made me further curious about this author (who, go figure, was often called "dramatic" and "difficult") and her often censored work. Now, I want to watch the movie about her life too.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2976920/>

Therese and Isabelle is a memorable burst of dramatic erotic tension.

Jessica says

This book is basically pages and pages of what it feels like to fall deeply in love- the good, the bad, the fear and all the titillating details. Although I struggled with the language from time to time, it is actually a very well translated book, which could not have been easy. No one can really take an extremely passionate love affair and turn into an artistic masterpiece quite like the French.
