

Lectures | **Reading**
de | ***La Nouvelle***
La Nouvelle | ***Héloïse***
Héloïse | **Today**

publié sous
la direction de

edited
by

Ourida Mostefai

Pensée libre, n^o 4

Association nord-américaine des études Jean-Jacques Rousseau
North American Association for the Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Ottawa 1993

**CANADIAN CATALOGUING IN
PUBLICATION DATA**

**DONNÉES DE CATALOGAGE
AVANT LA PUBLICATION (CANADA)**

Main entry undert title:

Vedette principale au titre:

Lectures de la Nouvelle Héloïse =
Reading La Nouvelle Héloïse today

Lectures de la Nouvelle Héloïse =
Reading La Nouvelle Héloïse today

(Pensée libre ; no. 4)
Text in French and English.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-9693132-3-3

(Pensée libre ; no. 4)
Texte en français et en anglais.
Comprend des références
bibliographiques.
ISBN 0-9693132-3-3

1. Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 1712-1778.
Nouvelle Héloïse. I. Mostefai, Ourida
II. North American Association for the
Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. III.
Title: Reading La Nouvelle Héloïse
today. IV. Series.

1. Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 1712-1778.
Nouvelle Héloïse. I. Mostefai, Ourida
II. Association nord-américaine des
études Jean-Jacques Rousseau. III. Titre:
Reading La Nouvelle Héloïse today. IV.
Collection.

PQ2039.L43 1993
848'.509 C94-900020-5E

PQ2039.L43 1993
848'.509 C94-900020-5F

Ouvrage publié grâce au concours de l'Association nord-américaine des études Jean-Jacques Rousseau, grâce à une subvention des Services Culturels français de Boston, et grâce à l'aide de la Faculté des Arts et des Sciences de Boston College.

The publication of this volume was made possible by the cooperation of the North American Association for the Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, by a grant from the French Cultural Services in Boston and by the support of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Boston College.

© Association nord-américaine des études Jean-Jacques Rousseau / North American Association for the Study of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1993.

ISBN 0-9693132-3-3

Collection « Pensée libre » dirigée par Guy Lafrance.
Revision de textes, typographie et mise-en-page par Daniel Woolford.

Pensée libre series editor: Guy Lafrance.
Text editing, typesetting and layout by Daniel Woolford.

Imprimé au Canada
Printed in Canada

CLAIMING THE PATENT ON AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FICTION

On more than one occasion, Rousseau expressed the wish that *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* be read as “autre chose et mieux qu’un roman.”¹ Better yet, *Julie* would not simply dismiss the novelistic genre out of hand, but revolutionize it, irreversibly, from within. One way for scholars to indulge that wish has been to outfit *Julie* itself for resistance to confinement in Saint-Preux’s category of “la petite littérature” (2:31).² Our avenues of approach are broad in part because the text we approach extends into Rousseau’s two prefaces, his editorial footnotes, the corpus of contemporary and subsequent reader response, and the leisurely genetic narrative that unfolds in Book 9 of the *Confessions* as a kind of third and final preface. The novel’s envelope has been stretched through introjection to the point where Rousseau’s formerly optional glosses are now routinely glossed not so much in isolation as in medias res. And among these glosses, it is the most exorbitant and dubiously introjectable that has exercised the most widespread and productive fascination on recent critics.

Like all the other marginalia, the *Préface de la Nouvelle Héloïse ou Entretien sur les romans* might have been excluded from readings said to be of the novel on the grounds that reading the novel is precisely what the marginalia purport to do. Something is lost in the leveling that skips or fails to acknowledge a step of reading. But the question of incorporation becomes even more pointed when it is recalled that the same *Préface* that now figures with predictable unpredictability as a place in the novel did not figure at all in the apparently complete work that went on sale in January of 1761. Rather, the requirement to preface having been satisfied by a vastly scaled-down, monological reworking, the *Préface de la Nouvelle Héloïse* was initially withheld from publication, and first appeared two weeks later, alone and under separate

1. Michel Launay, ed., *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967), p. xiii.
2. This and all subsequent references in the body of my text are to the Pléiade edition of Rousseau’s *Œuvres complètes*.

cover. The preface entered the public domain as an optional, albeit *Julie*-related, extra. Its would-be readers were required to incur a separate expense, and to invest more mental energy than, to Rousseau's mind, would have warranted publishing the preface in conjunction with the illustrations, whose appeal was more direct and to a more general public.³ The freestanding brochure's claims to autonomy were immediately belied by a title spelling out the affiliation of this *Préface* with *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. But the affiliation was rendered newly tenuous by a subtitle, *Entretien sur les romans entre l'éditeur et un homme de lettres*, promising more discussants and a more general discussion than prefaces could, *stricto sensu*, be expected to deliver. Not only was the preface momentarily inaccessible to a first wave of readers who had no reason even to suspect its existence. The preface remains ambiguously sited with respect to the novel, whose overshooting of generic norms the preface both promotes at the level of manifest content and mimics as a further case in point or more-than-preface.

If these facts have not always been remembered, they have been commemorated in readings of *Julie* that replicate Rousseau's strategy of holding the preface in reserve as a trump card of theoretical rigor and abstraction. In Paul de Man's reading, the preface clinches the novel's claims to intellectual sophistication and makes *La Nouvelle Héloïse* perennially worthy of scholarly attention. The preface becomes the place and the means of de-sentimentalizing the heroine's plight of partial blindness to the post-conversion residue of her passion. From the case study of Julie's writing herself unwittingly back into the metaphors of love, de Man extrapolates a universally valid object lesson about the undecidability of reference and literal meaning. De Man cannot insist enough, however, on the indebtedness of this reading to the preface. By demonstrating and dignifying editor R's inability to say whether or not he is the author of *Julie*, the preface shows us how to take the character of Julie seriously as that best of all readers whose limitations as a reader of her own text can be shown to coincide with those of reading per se.⁴

3. For a more complete account of Rousseau's decision to publish the preface separately, see Susan K. Jackson, "Text and Context of Rousseau's Relations with Diderot," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 20 (1986-87), pp. 195-219.

4. Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale, 1979), pp. 188-220.

It is thus an already degendered Julie as Everyman who qualifies to be subjected to the exemplary dehumanization of inability to control or arrest the play of language. De Man's assuming gender not to be an operative category is, to some extent, underwritten by the preface, which resurrects the locus amoenus of classical dialogue, and pits one man of letters against another in fraternal tête-a-tête. However, in his haste to subsume the question of why Julie can't read in the question of why no Man ever can, de Man overlooks the place *in* the preface that regenders Julie's reading as that of a nothing more or less than *fille*. Not skipping that step here will allow us to see how the fact of publishing his preface belatedly informs Rousseau's understanding of what it would take for his novel to be read as a more-than-novel and to inflect the overall history of reading practices.

Gender is more obviously central to the narrative account of having written *Julie* that Rousseau proposes in the *Confessions*. There, the self-contradiction of censoring novels and writing one is flaunted, as though recklessly, and coded as a threat of irreparable emasculation. Said to be at stake in his writing one of those "livres efféminés" notorious for exuding "l'amour et la mollesse" was Rousseau's reputation for hardheaded philosophizing and civic-mindedness (1:434). But the trap of effeminacy would hardly have been set if the autobiographer did not have a plan at the ready for propelling his novel out of love. *Julie* is elevated in due course to the status of *roman à thèse* through reduction of its message to a plea for pan-European religious tolerance or "paix publique" (1:435). That only partially convincing bottom line completes a conquest of androgyny where the interlude of willingness to risk alienating effeminacy is clearly meant to have won for Rousseau's novel the right to annex an operationally defined and eventually neutralized feminine. As for the erstwhile novelist, the explicitly autobiographical context of the *Confessions* suffices to enforce a metonymical displacement of transcendent humanity from the more than *Lettres de deux amants* onto their author. This retelling of the dream of male-centered androgyny nonetheless oversimplifies the issues of gender involved in Rousseau's wanting to lay claim to absolute originality for *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Everything falls neatly into line when the *Confessions* isolate conventions of subject matter as making the essential generic and generic difference between mere love stories and Rousseau's more-than-love-story.

The plot thickens, however, when the *Préface de la Nouvelle Héloïse* sets Rousseau's sights less directly on personal androgyny than

on the version of transcending literature that Robert Darnton has rightly associated with the modes of reading and writing we now call autobiography.⁵ Odds are that, even had Rousseau not lifted a finger to preface, his past history of highly publicized attempts to mix life and literature would have subjected *La Nouvelle Héloïse* to a more autobiographical brand of reading than eighteenth-century novels generally received. But Rousseau's pride in having paid his own way to autobiographical fiction is evident in the passage from the *Confessions* that gives the "préface en dialogue que je fis imprimer à part" full credit for seducing the ladies into taking *Julie* for the story of his life (1:547-48). However really instrumental, Rousseau's prefatory strategies of accession to autobiography thus bear rehearsing, as evidence of an authorially espoused intent to seduce.

Rousseau knew as well as Laclos that the innate unruliness of the novelistic genre tended to preclude the text proper of any novel from making an adequately convincing case on its own behalf for having broken the rules. Controlling readers' judgments was difficult in direct proportion to the difficulty of controlling the bases for those judgments.⁶ Hence, the stroke of genius involved in rendering *Julie* anomalous by association. The preface's own anomalies of excessive length, dialogism, and seriousness stand in serviceably remarkable contrast to a corpus of prefaces illustrating more perfunctory or playful deployments of novel prefacing's shopworn conceits.

By making no secret of its own fictionality, Rousseau's "Entretien supposé" (2:9) mocks the time-honored prefatory practice of underwriting a novel's truth through recourse to further fictions. But the stage is also being set for the tour de force of rescuing a new compatibility between fiction and truth from the corners of literalness into which man of letters N attempts to paint editor R. Under cross-examination by N, whose promptings relentlessly reinscribe a horizon of limited expectations, R makes a noteworthy point of resistance to parroting or modestly rephrasing the ready-made truth claims at his disposal.

Not that the criterion of truth is rendered inoperative. Rather, what the preface resists is N's assumption that a novel's potential for being true to life could be exhausted by the operational definitions that N, as a man of letters, knows to invoke and R knows to trivialize, in

5. Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), pp. 227-34, 241-49.

6. Choderlos de Laclos, "Sur le roman de: *Cécilia*," in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Maurice Allem (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), pp. 499-500.

the name of some higher truth, as so many red herrings. Given opportunity upon opportunity to vouch in no uncertain terms for the documentary authenticity and authentic polyphony of the correspondence qua correspondence or for the isomorphic referentiality of a standard *roman à clef* where only the names would have been changed, editor R demurs.

Neither possibility is absolutely foreclosed. But it is increasingly beside the point for N to demand to know whether *Julie* is true to extraliterary manuscript sources, or, in the best *moraliste* tradition of French letters, to the sources of observable waking life in some extraliterary social context. R's counteroffensives are aimed at making his evasiveness a matter of conscience. We observers are destined to catch him, a mere prefacer, in the supreme act of willing out loud to speak even prefatory cant from the depths of his being: "être toujours vrai: voilà ce que je veux tâcher d'être" (2:27). Already, Rousseau's having engineered this surprise of self in a context where the self is the last thing we might have expected to encounter makes the thought of thoroughgoing involvement by the novelist in his novel less of a stretch.

Indeed, the truth of the truth of *Julie* is not merely withheld but exchanged for that of "Jean-Jacques Rousseau, en toutes lettres" (2:27). The preface gestures unmistakably at the psychic life of the author as the truly primary source of a novelistic truth that further work of fictionalizing (including the "Entretien supposé" in progress) could not endanger but only extend. Readers wishing to escape the paralyzing literal-mindedness of N and to rise to the occasion of acknowledging the one true source had no choice, as Darnton puts it, but to "make a leap of faith — of faith in the author who somehow must have suffered through the passions of his characters and forged them into a truth that transcends literature."⁷ The preface's originality — and, only in consequence, that of the novel — lies in refusal to take the chance of letting autobiographical readings occur spontaneously or remain superficial. Rousseau's is a self-conscious requirement that *Julie* be read to be holistically, profoundly, dynamically, even inexhaustibly autobiographical. One way of measuring that originality would be to consider how differently the critical dossiers of (Pierre) Marivaux, (Antoine-François) Prévost, and other fellow-novelists of virtually unknown *prénom* would have shaped up had any of them thought to

7. Darnton, pp. 233-34.

preempt Rousseau's move in the *Préface de la Nouvelle Héloïse* to authorize the intimacy of autobiographical readings.

It nonetheless bears asking whether Rousseau would concur with subsequent literary history in describing this dramatic rescue of truth from the confines of convention as unprecedented, unprompted, even "Promethean."⁸ On the contrary, evidence from the novel suggests that Rousseau knew himself to have done a less thorough job of single-handedly reinventing reading practices from scratch than of claiming the patent on autobiographical fiction. Again, the preface follows up, making that evidence germane to the question of why N can't make the requisite leap to reading *Julie* autobiographically. N's limitations as a reader turn out to have less to do with any universally defective paradigm of reading than with his being gender-bound to read as a *man* of letters.

In this confinement, N replicates the posture assumed by Saint-Preux in Letter 12 and placed into a relationship of complementarity with the version of reading assigned by the same letter to Julie. By the time the letter gets around to recoupling the two lovers as readers, the thread of gender has become tenuous. In context, however, it remains graspable, Saint-Preux having leapt at the outset of his letter to comply with Julie's request that she be given *carte blanche* in the conduct of their affair. "Dès cet instant je vous remets pour ma vie l'empire de mes volontés," he writes; "disposez de moi comme d'un homme qui n'est plus rien pour lui même" (2:56). Saint-Preux does not honor with any direct response the assumption on which Julie has based her claim to superior expertise, namely that the high stakes of virginity impelled "les femmes," all women in love, to develop a sixth sense or gender-specific coping mechanism. But Saint-Preux is moved less spontaneously than his letter admits to limit the sphere of influence of this sixth sense by reasserting and reinventing the domain of his own superior competence. Out of the nothingness of the man, a purer state pedagogue emerges than the one whose former lessons had been contaminated by a subtext of passion. Now that Julie has volunteered to take sole charge of passion, the time could not be more right for Saint-Preux to unveil a newly rigorous "plan d'études," and to make some predictions about the course of its implementation. With the substance of the plan having been relegated to the editor's cutting room floor, our attention is

8. *Ibid.*

directed toward the respective contributions that Saint-Preux envisions Julie and himself bringing to their *séances de lecture*.

“[J]e vous dirai ce que les autres auront pensé,” he promises, and then continues, as though empowered to speak for her: “vous me direz sur le même sujet ce que vous pensez vous-même, et souvent après la leçon j’en sortirai plus instruit que vous” (2:58). The terms in which Saint-Preux brings his distribution of roles between teacher and pupil up to and beyond the point of mutual illumination survive in the more or less patronizing expressions of nostalgia for untutored reading that today’s scholar-critics bring to their classrooms. Readers like Julie are still relied upon, even assigned to divert teachers like Saint-Preux from a too alienating preoccupation with what the critics will have said. And it is, of course, the pedagogical context that allows this privileging of reading over criticism to be seen as a clear case of countervalorization or going against the grain of such Enlightenment values as erudition, professionalism, unmediated access to all the organs of culture, and impersonal knowledge as purchase on the material world. But countervalorization also serves to obscure the constraints of intransigence and inevitability that Saint-Preux’s epistolary fantasy is placing, all the while, on the reading practices of his her.

The potential for his learning more than she is tellingly anchored in a play of verb tenses that foresees a certain innate imperviousness on Julie’s part to his lessons and to the books on his reading list. “[J]e vous dirai ce que les autres auront pensé, vous me direz sur le même sujet ce que vous pensez vous-même.” The future perfect rendering Saint-Preux as a perennially up-to-date man of letters is jarringly answered by a present: “vous pensez.” Overtones of eternity beg the question of whether her readings will have left any decisive imprint on Julie’s thinking or whether she does not already think what she will have thought after reading. Grounding his predictions in what he thinks to know from past observation, Saint-Preux proclaims it only typical of Julie to give more than she receives in her encounters with text. He apostrophizes his correspondent as “vous qui mettez dans vos lectures mieux que ce que vous y trouvez, et dont l’esprit actif fait sur le livre un autre livre, quelquefois meilleur que le premier” (2:58). To do so is to congratulate Julie on the palimpsests produced by the irrepressible surfeit of her self. But it is also to erect the hypothesis of that self as an insurmountable natural barrier to the alternative, however unglamorous, of right reading. Julie cannot read with any degree of accuracy only what is really there, or what can be alleged by Saint-

Preux to be really there when a monopoly on subjectivity has been projected onto Julie. What is really there, for better or worse, in the case of Saint-Preux's Julie, is her self. It is this self or "vous-même" beyond contingent subjectivity that her reading and, more important, his presumed purchase on objectivity allow him to read as being really there and as a pendant to his nothingness. He knows to find her in her reading because, unlike her, he is privileged to know what to find in a text where she is not. It is thus a not entirely self-effacing man of the world who further confines the virtuous necessity of Julie's autobiographical activity to rewriting in a predictably major key and in the privacy of her own home.

Saint-Preux's letter is bound to efface gender as a basis for generalization, since any and all generalization is incompatible with monogamous worship of Julie. However, his dichotomy is less original than indebted to received truths about women's inability to get outside or beyond themselves. That same article of faith, to which Domna Stanton has traced the "age-old, pervasive decoding of all female writing as autobiographical,"⁹ is alleged by Laclos, for example, in the correspondence with Mme Riccoboni that he appended to his favorite edition of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. Riccoboni's novels are explicitly complimented there on being womanly, that is, autobiographical. Laclos outdoes Saint-Preux in lavishing praise on the "belle âme" or self at the source he reads into Riccoboni's meliorative distortions of material reality.¹⁰

Like Laclos, Rousseau used a *préface-annexe* to reinscribe feminine variants of literary activity in the margins of the official literary history whose collective wisdom the Saint-Preux of Letter 12 had positioned himself to rehearse. But, in addressing Riccoboni, Laclos remained more faithful than Rousseau to Saint-Preux's chivalrous fictions of separate and, by dint of countervalorization, equal spheres. Laclos went so far as "to annexe the high ground of the 'victim' position,"¹¹ courting sympathy not for Riccoboni's idiosyncratic femininity but for his own biological "confinement" to the impersonal realism of male — or, as might be objected, mainstream — letters.¹²

9. Domna Stanton, "Autogynography: Is the Subject Different?," in *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Domna C. Stanton (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), p. 4.

10. Laclos, *Œuvres complètes*, p. 695.

11. I borrow the phrase from Janet Todd's *Feminist Literary History* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 133.

12. Laclos, *Œuvres complètes*, p. 688.

Rousseau's ambitions extended by contrast to ushering the marginally feminine *into* the mainstream of ongoing discussion among men of letters. He was less interested in out-suffering women as victims than in annexing the self of womanly reading and writing. For that project of annexation to make a mark required that womanly reading retain something of the cachet of inaccessibility ascribed to it by Laclos. It had to look ambitious, original, unprecedented, lest autobiography be assumed to have come to Rousseau, as it had to the likes of Julie, naturally, effortlessly, and as the only accessible option. This drive to make a purposive spectacle (and no mere accident) of reinventing the truth is well served by Rousseau's using the second nature of prefatory conventions as an obdurate frame of reference. For the benefit of literary historians, the point of R's straining to avoid easy answers to N's queries and conceptualizing autobiographical fiction under the duress of man-to-man combat needed to be made.

But so too, apparently, did the point of Rousseau's reliance on fictions of female autobiography to plot the double distance of his autobiographical fiction from culturally coded versions of feminine nature and masculine culture. Rather than leave that reliance implicit, his preface reenacts the *anti*-Promethean gesture of stealing readers' faith in his ubiquitous agency not from the gods but from the girls. When challenged by N to deny that the novel risks setting a bad example for "les filles," R comes up with a two-pronged rebuttal. On the one hand, he puts "les filles" precisely where they would be put by the most enlightened social scientist: at the mercy of their parents' and society's bad example, and too far removed from these seats of power for their own reading to influence their lot one way or the other (2:24). But beyond that, from out of the blue and apparently triggered by the word "filles," comes R's recollection that "Julie s'étoit fait une regle pour juger des livres," and a recommendation to N: "si vous la trouvez bonne, servez-vous en pour juger celui-ci" (2:23).

"Julie s'étoit fait une regle . . ." — how appropriately that pluperfect disrupts the prevailing sequence of tenses and deposits a rule of reading somewhere beyond the pale of general relevance, pending formal endorsement and appropriation by a man of letters: "si vous la trouvez bonne, servez-vous en." Julie's solipsistic gesture of formulating a rule for her private use only is denied access to the simple past of historical events, and is conceived as the antecedent condition of someone else's duly authorized literary history.

In fact, at the time of its formulation, the rule to which one of Rousseau's editorial footnotes challenges us to return had gone unremarked by Saint-Preux. Nor was it even formulated as anything so pretentious as a rule; it was simply the way, as a rule, Julie read. Again we have Rousseau's paternal pride to thank for dignifying a characteristic "maniere de juger de mes Lectures" that, left to her own devices, Julie had evoked in passing and all but buried in the folds of feminine modesty (2:261).

At issue at the time were the relative merits of Pope's epistles and a refutation by Jean-Pierre de Crouzas. The latter had been published too recently to have generated any ground zero of professional challenges or correctives to Julie's reading. All the more reason for her to make an initial disclaimer: "Je ne sais pas, au vrai, lequel des deux auteurs a raison." Julie herself sees to foreclosing the possibility that her untimely judgment might be endowed with any objective truth value or set in independent opposition to that of both authors. One or the other must be right. Trusting herself to know that "le livre de M. de Crouzas ne fera jamais faire une bonne action et qu'il n'y a rien de bon qu'on ne soit tenté de faire en quittant celui de Pope," Julie nonetheless pulls back from the momentary presumption of her "on" into renewed insistence on the peculiarity of this way of reading to her. "Je n'ai point, pour moi d'autre manière de juger de mes lectures que de sonder les dispositions où elles laissent mon ame, et j'imagine à peine quelle sorte de bonté peut avoir un livre qui ne porte point ses lecteurs au bien." We know, from Rousseau's personal and public correspondence, that his judgments of Pope and Crouzas coincided exactly with Julie's.¹³ Spokeswoman though she may be, however, Julie's claim to have but one way of reading takes a turn for the less assertive when that uniformity of approach is suspected to derive from failure to imagine how else or in search of what other goodness she might read. Her suspending critical judgment until it can be tied up with the self-judgment of sounding her soul risks being taken for yet another perennial alibi of the masculine feminine. So too does her insistent recourse to the framing apologetics of ethical self-betterment.¹⁴ What the frame betrays when it overwhelms the picture of Julie's reading is

13. See especially Rousseau's refutation of Voltaire's poem on the disaster of Lisbon: "Rousseau à François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire," Letter 424 (18 Aug. 1756), *Correspondance complète de Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, ed. R. A. Leigh (Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1967), IV, 41-42.

14. See Stanton, p. 14.

a lack of easy familiarity with literary activity. Even the neo-Ovidian self-image of her being “left” by books, as by a lover, to sound her soul participates in this thoroughgoing process of encasing the exemplum or essential kernel of holistically self-involved reading in a chaff of tentative femininity.

There is no need to work at guessing for ourselves how a man of letters would go about extracting the kernel from the chaff. Rousseau went on to do just that in the *Dialogues*, which urge an unattributed version of Julie’s rule on Everyman. By then, the rule had been reduced to soberly aphoristic concision: “consultez la disposition de cœur où ces lectures vous mettent; c’est cette disposition qui vous éclairera sur leur véritable sens” (1:695). For the time being of the *Préface de la Nouvelle Héloïse*, what matters, however, is for editor R to make a truthfully ambiguous spectacle of giving and taking credit for the rule in the same breath. A girl like Julie can be made to know that she reads with the entirety of her being. But she is neither psychologically nor sociologically positioned to take the further step of being heard to proclaim the rightness of her reading. For her description to be marked as prescriptive, it needs to be picked out of a welter of words by a mentoring man of letters. Nor can she argue with whatever self-serving ends that mentor will attach to his presumed ability to read her being into her reading.

It is, in fact, her self that serves — whether the magnitude of that self is glimpsed through the effects of its power to transform texts, as was the case in Saint-Preux’s letter, or through the effects of a power to *be* transformed or not by texts to which her own letter bears witness. What Julie delivers to Rousseau, and through him to his readers, is a reason for believing in the existence of the self and in the essential goodness of its existing. In this instance, female being becomes the enabling fiction of Rousseau’s perennial crusade to leave no corner of literary creation in a state of impersonality or unsuffused by selfhood.

It remained only for Rousseau to read Julie’s right reading as a specular double of his own writing. As we have seen, the preface goes on to derive a writing self — a full-blown, fully autonomous, fully engaged self at the source of writing — from her having called the books of Pope and Crouzas by the names of their authors and defended the integrity of each against the specter of intertextuality. Taking authorship beyond the mere metonyms of publishing conventions to the heart of the author is something Rousseau does matter-of-factly in the *Dialogues*. More suggestively, the *Préface de la Nouvelle Héloïse*

makes his truth the only one for which he can or needs to vouch. The more fanfare, the better, however. The Julie whom the preface strains to hear is extensively precoded for the occasion as a daughter; that places Rousseau squarely in the camp of the “paternal authors,” to whose credit everything in their textual progeny” — including, in this instance, a new model of literary paternity — is supposed by “the literary criticism of patriarchal culture” to redound.¹⁵

But does it? What, beyond a faintly incestuous assurance of filial docility or an emphatic resilencing, is accomplished by R’s sudden impulse to cite his her? Any such move to cite fictional sources — even when the sources themselves provide the wherewithal to argue against their being taken for outside sources — is, after all, strangely reminiscent of the “Prosopopée de Fabricius.” On account of that prosopopeia, we know Rousseau to have been haunted by the possibility that his whole life and corpus may well have turned on a rhetorical figure of authorial absence.¹⁶ Given what he sometimes suspected about the tenuous bases of his humanistic model of authorship, it behooved Rousseau to put enough distance between himself and Julie to let any excesses of wishful essentialism redound to her discredit. For its part, in partial subversion of that essentialism, Rousseau’s fictional “Entretien” would make a point not of *ex nihilo* authoring but of authorizing, or rewriting the already written from a vantage point of authority. Rousseau knew better than some of his champions about the power of gendered fictions and fictions of gender to rewrite the history of literature. What happened in his name to the eighteenth-century novel was a maximally inventive instance of expropriating the invention in order to claim the patent.

Susan K. Jackson
Boston University

-
15. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1982), pp. 60-61.
16. As I have argued elsewhere, Rousseau betrays a perennial need to exorcize the specter of non-involvement by his self in the writing of the *First Discourse*. See *Rousseau's Occasional Autobiographies* (Columbus: Ohio State, 1992), pp. 54-55, 243-44.