

I. Memoir or Confession?

Foucauldian accounts of the novel often emphasize how fiction induces readers to accept as natural ideological fictions whose effect is to constrain their ideas and actions. Nancy Armstrong argues, for example, that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the novel helped to create the middle-class fiction of separable public and private spheres of life.¹ The novel constituted itself as a domain of feminine authority over matters of the heart and the household and helped create a new concept of identity, according to which individuals could define themselves in terms of their inner qualities rather than social status. Although this new sense of identity at first enfranchised people by helping to create concepts of individual rights and offering a rationale for modern social institutions, Armstrong asserts, it eventually became repressive.² Social conflict was displaced onto sexual difference and thereby contained. Novels contributed to this trend by implying that love and marriage could and should resolve class tensions, thereby not only obfuscating social inequity but also enforcing a sexual contract.³ On women, especially, novels came to have an oppressive effect: the household became women's domain, but that domain was sequestered from the larger political world, which was the province of men.⁴

Armstrong suggests that Jean-Jacques Rousseau played an important role in separating the private from the public sphere through the use of language. By promulgating the idea that individuals could reconstitute society according to their own ideas of natural right, Rousseau helped to “usher[] in an age dominated by the power of discourse rather than force, by cultural hegemony rather than revolution.”⁵ Ultimately, Rousseau's model of the social contract “offered a private solution for problems that were inherently political.”⁶ Rousseau's “strange autobiographical narratives” also took part in this privatization of the subject: in the Confessions and the Reveries, Rousseau helped to create a private sphere in which “thinking might proceed

uninhibited by history and where writing itself appeared to rise from sources within the individual that were independent of the political world.”⁷ In Armstrong’s view, the division between Rousseau’s political and personal writings is itself evidence of the growing separation between private and public spheres.

This account of Rousseau concurs with that of many feminist scholars. Joan Landes, for example, argues that Rousseau sought to deprive women of the public influence they wielded under the ancien régime. His vitriolic attacks on eighteenth-century salonnières helped bring about the rigid post-Revolutionary separation of public and private spheres and their characterization as masculine and feminine, respectively. Integral to Rousseau’s strategy was an attempt to prescribe not only what women should and shouldn’t do but also what they should and shouldn’t read: women should read virtuous, domestic romances, while men should read more arousing romances featuring female characters consenting to men’s sexual advances. Novels are thus meant to enforce gender norms and encourage marriage and procreation.⁸ Furthermore, literature in general is to be purged of “feminine” lawlessness and sophistication:

[Rousseau’s] ideal reader would divest himself or herself of the conventions of literature and the trappings of society—would turn innocent eyes on the text. In this state of natural innocence, far from the fashionable salons of society, Rousseau promised his readers that they would find truth, for it was this that mattered, not style. . . . Rousseau asked his readers to jettison all their cultural baggage, to join in a journey toward a transcendent truth beyond literature—but also . . . beyond the artificiality that women especially represented.⁹

It is true that in his political writings Rousseau strenuously advocates separating private from public affairs and confining women to the former. In his published manifesto against the theater, for example, Rousseau argues that no theater should be built in the virtuous republic of Geneva because at the theater women mingle promiscuously with men and lead the latter to

forget their manhood.¹⁰ Under the spell of the private, feminine world of the passions, the public, masculine world of reason and virtuous action is overpowered by idle and seductive fantasy. In the dangerously alluring moral penumbra of the theater, essential distinctions are lost: women become dominant and men effete, reality and illusion change places, and vice masquerades as virtue. In particular, Rousseau inveighs against actresses, who in daring to parade themselves publicly induce mères de famille to become Petites-Maîtresses and young ladies to become courtesans, inspire young men to seek mistresses rather than wives, are inevitably prostitutes, and parody in their vicious lives the virtue they portray on stage (Md'A, 82–83). “The disorder of Actresses” leads not only to “the disorder of Actors” but also to the disorder of the whole state (Md'A, 83–84).¹¹

In Rousseau’s more fictional texts, however, the separation and hierarchization of genders, genres, and spheres of life is less rigorously maintained. Or rather, it is both maintained and subverted—indeed, it is partly maintained in order to be subverted. Furthermore, real and imaginary women, together with ideas of the feminine, are the key figures in this double movement. And in making it possible, women—or woman¹²—help engender a radically new and unstable form of narrative that contests oppressive either/or oppositions formally as well as thematically. Such, at least, is the argument of this essay. I want to focus on the Confessions, because there the conflict in Rousseau’s intentions emerges most clearly and produces the greatest effects.

In the opening paragraphs of his autobiography, Rousseau describes his work in sexually and generically ambiguous terms. On one hand, it is to be a public monument (monument) that will testify to his truthfulness, win him honor, and “serve as a first piece of comparison for the study of men.”¹³ It is a memoir worthy of a place in an august tradition of famous autobiographies and will serve as Rousseau’s testimonial at the Last Judgment (C, 5). Its exemplary candor is meant to be useful to its reader (C, 3). But Rousseau also describes the Confessions as a novelistic diary that is not shaped by moral purpose. It describes a unique being who, far from being able to serve as a model of anything, can be understood only on his own

terms. It appeals less to the reader's judgment than to his or her sympathy. Its truth may be more imaginative than factual. And it is without example and will have no imitator (C, 5).

This ambiguity about the purpose and nature of the Confessions turns on two different notions of truth, which we may call prescriptive and descriptive, or ideological and empirical. It also turns on distinctions between literary genres and between genders. Prescriptive, or public, truth is associated with morality, tradition, public deeds, masculinity, and works of history or philosophy. Descriptive, or private, truth is associated with empirical facts, modernity, everyday actions, personal emotions, femininity, and novels. This opposition emerges clearly in the first few pages of the Confessions, where Rousseau describes his early reading. He laments that his character has been permanently deformed by the pernicious influence of his mother's novels. Having died giving birth to him, Rousseau explains, Suzanne Rousseau left behind her library of novels (Romans) (C, 8). Rousseau's earliest memories are of reading these novels compulsively late into the night. The result of "this dangerous procedure" was that his emotions contaminated his reason and gave him "bizarre and romantic ideas about human life, of which experience and reflection have never been able to cure me" (C, 8).¹⁴ In fact, this nocturnal reading helped make Rousseau a singularly unstable character:

Thus began to form or to display itself in me that heart at once so proud and tender, that effeminate but nonetheless indomitable character, which, floating always between frailty and courage, between softness and strength, put me always in contradiction with myself . . . (C, 12)¹⁵

Novels, Rousseau writes, made him conscious of himself; thus, he came to know himself by imagining himself as another. From the start, boundaries between self and other, fiction and truth, licit and illicit, masculine and feminine, that ought to have been clear were made unstable by his mother's legacy.

Fortunately, his maternal grandfather's library was also accessible. It contained such "worthy books" (bons livres, C, 8) as le Sueur's History of the Church and the Empire, le Bossuet's Discourse on Universal History, Plutarch's Lives, and Nani's History of Venice. This salutary reading "cured me a bit of novels" (C, 9)¹⁶; in fact, Rousseau implies that once he exhausted his mother's store of novels at the age of 7, he never returned to them. Now, instead of being immersed in a confusing world of passion and fantasy, he hotly debated political ideas with his father, and thus was formed in him his noble republican character (C, 9).

Rousseau thus makes a concerted effort in the early pages of the Confessions to use gender and genre help him distinguish between the transgression of boundaries (the fictional and feminine) and adherence to them (the historical and masculine). But his own account shows that novels and histories, public and private affairs, and masculine and feminine roles cannot be so easily distinguished. He acknowledges, for example, that he got addicted to reading novels not under his mother's influence but under his father's (C, 8). Moreover, reading histories such as Plutarch's Lives caused Rousseau to lose sight of the line between reality and fiction just as novels did. Furthermore, as Rousseau barely concedes, both the novels and the histories came to him through his mother.¹⁷ Most important, Rousseau's supposedly regrettable generic/sexual equivocality is precisely what makes his autobiography worth reading. As he expresses it in the first paragraph: "I am not made like anyone else I have seen; I dare to believe that I am not made like anyone else who exists. If I am no better, at least I am different. Whether nature did well or ill to break the mold in which she cast me, that is something that one can only judge after having read me" (C, 5).¹⁸

Rousseau's description of his project thus oscillates between a "manly" version, in which he will clarify ambiguous aspects of self, text, and world and eliminate the conflicts between them, and a "womanly" version, in which such conflicts and ambiguities will persist—and even be exacerbated. Critics of the Confessions have tended to focus only on the first of these versions.¹⁹ In contrast, I will argue that although Rousseau begins the Confessions by proclaiming his intention to reconcile public and private selves and texts, he fails to do so not

only because he cannot but also because he does not entirely want to. In fact, Rousseau's Confessions is a duplicitous text, in which a scandalously private narrative of self-exposure remains partially concealed within the framework of a memoir-like public accounting of the self, which, however, it continually disturbs. Indeed, the title of Rousseau's autobiography alludes to this duplicity with the image of the veil or curtain that separates the penitent/exhibitionist from the confessor/voyeur (and each half of such antitheses from the other). Rousseau originally planned to title his autobiography either Mon Portrait or Les Mémoires; his chosen title alludes more clearly to the Confessions' double identity as penitential rite/scandalous self-exposure. This conflict between public and private narratives puts the reader in a double-bind: he or she is caught between genders and genres, authorial intentions, versions of Rousseau, and modes or aspects of reading that seem mutually exclusive and yet cannot be kept safely apart.

I will show that women play a crucial role in this evolution of a new, duplicitous form of narrative. For Rousseau, the feminine is the place where original unity and containment give way to a divided world of promiscuous "commerce" (Rousseau's term)²⁰ between public and private selves, worlds, and texts. In woman, the intact male self, world, and text suffer the fall from the pure eternity of Eden into the corrupt particularity of time that produces individuation. But although Rousseau usually portrays this loss of original unity as a terrible—but perhaps remediable—catastrophe, in the Confessions this corruption of the feminine matrix is also an intoxicating opportunity. The special duplicity of the Confessions depends on Rousseau's strategy of playing the phantasms of the chaste and the unchaste woman off against each other. His enterprise thus requires him to appeal to the very worldly woman reader he frequently decries. Indeed, he imagines this reader as a powerful, androgynous figure capable of penetrating his alternately seductive and prohibitive veils of concealment and revelation.

II. Maman, Anet, and "Petit"

Before we consider the role of the woman reader, whose specter, I am arguing, mediates between and also holds apart the two aspects of Rousseau's divided text, I want to show that the

“two-faced” role the woman reader plays on the periphery of the narrative is analogous to the parts that are played in that narrative by significant female figures. The homology between life and text itself demonstrates that woman is the crucial link between private man and public writer. I will focus on Madame de Warens, the Swiss divorcée who took Rousseau in after he ran away from Geneva at the age of 16,²¹ because she is the central figure of the first half of the Confessions. Indeed, Rousseau divides his autobiography in half based on the date of his separation from his beloved “Maman,” as he called (and calls) her. This catastrophe occurred after Rousseau had lived with Maman for nine years, when she suddenly and inexplicably took up with a younger man. Ostensibly, this separation caused Rousseau to become someone other than the person he was meant to be. It divided the private world from the public world and drove him out into the latter. This expulsion led to all his subsequent misfortunes, including his having become a writer.

Until Maman betrayed him, Rousseau claims, she was perfectly contained and perfectly containing. He describes her as an enclosed natural sanctuary especially dedicated to nurturing and protecting him. As long as he remained within her sphere,²² his public and private selves coincided, because time, history, money, fame, and even society itself did not exist. The emotional and structural center of the Confessions²³ describes the period Rousseau spent with Maman in the isolated alpine valley of Charmettes, where “in the most beautiful season of the year and in a place that [Maman] filled with enchantment,” Rousseau was free “to enjoy the charm . . . of a society as free as it was sweet—if one can give the name ‘society’ to such a perfect union.” (C, 235).²⁴ Rousseau implies that one cannot give the name society to such a perfect union, because (as the Confessions will go on to lament at length) society is the site of raucous discord among competing parties. Charmettes was the antithesis of this: it required neither action nor speech and excluded conflict because its inhabitants were not individuals.

Even the sexual relation that Maman and Rousseau came to share is presented to the reader as neither possessive nor erotic. According to Rousseau, Maman originally suggested that they make their relationship a sexual one solely in order to keep him from being tempted to

seduce his young lady music pupils (C, 191). Sexual desire played no part in Maman's decision to admit her protégé to her bed (C, 196). Rather, her sexual generosity was only one aspect of her infinite beneficence: she gathered people around her, and her singular gift was to be able to create a perfectly harmonious and wholly satisfied unity out of what might otherwise have been a cacophony of competing claimants (C, 178). But because Fate had inexplicably decreed that Rousseau should suffer a catastrophic expulsion from nature into culture and from eternity into time, this sublime cocoon was tragically destroyed when a rival suddenly appeared on the scene. Or, so Rousseau would have the reader believe; he tries to fix in biographical time his personal version of the expulsion from Eden.²⁵ When Rousseau returned from a trip to Montpellier and discovered he had been supplanted in Maman's household and affections by a younger rival, he experienced an apocalypse that destroyed all possibility of future happiness because it made it permanently impossible for him to coincide with himself:

What a sudden and complete upheaval of my whole being! . . . In a moment I saw vanish forever all the future happiness that I had painted for myself. . . . I saw nothing more before me than the sad remainder of an insipid existence, and if occasionally some image of happiness brushed the surface of my desires, that happiness was no longer the one that was right for me, and I sensed that even if I attained it I would not be truly happy. (C, 263)²⁶

Rousseau writes, that is, as if Maman were responsible not only for expelling him into this fallen world, but for creating it. Henceforth, he would persistently try to repair this breach in the world—and in himself—by repairing it in (a) woman.

But for the reader of the Confessions, Rousseau's edenic myth has already been disrupted. The ode to bucolic seclusion and permanent infancy is regularly troubled by a discordant novel-in-the-making about a young man caught between conflicting desires and fears. Rousseau covertly divulges that he wanted to remain within Maman's safe abundance but also

longed to escape into the larger social and intellectual world. However, he focuses on the contradictions in Maman's character rather than in his own, so that behind the myth of Maman as perfect mother emerges a more realistic portrait of an unstable, manipulative, ambitious, imprudent, and greedy woman who was highly sociable, sensual, promiscuous, unpredictable, unreliable, and dishonest. She was also by no means impermeable to the outside world. On the contrary: she admitted into Rousseau's world both "good" and "bad" influences of every kind. Indeed, Maman's accessibility to the world made her as attractive—and repulsive—to her incubus as her ability to block out the world, because Rousseau's own desires and motives were complex. It was at Maman's hands that Rousseau received much of his education, as he himself proclaims. He boasts of her cultivation and social skills and mentions more than once the "profit" he derived from the many acquaintances he met through Maman and from the studies he pursued while she supported him (C, 215, 223, e.g.).²⁷ On the other hand, what Rousseau describes as Maman's public qualities also threatened him. Maman was constantly distracted from single-minded devotion to her charge by her compulsive involvement in a plethora of business enterprises and scientific experiments. Indeed, Maman's "fantasy for enterprises and systems" of every kind was never exhausted; her entanglements "came from an inexhaustible source of activity that ceaselessly desired occupation. It was not women's intrigues that she needed, but enterprises to undertake and direct. In her place Mme de Longueville would only have been a meddling gossip; In Mme de Longueville's place, Maman would have governed the State" (C, 203, 51).²⁸ Besides being the perfect mother, that is, Maman was also perilously—and wonderfully—androgynous, and in this way, she mirrored Rousseau's own complexity. But besides disturbing his peace, Maman's projects also ate up the pension she had been granted by the King of Sardinia, which paid for Rousseau's education and upkeep.

Beneath its mythic surface, then, the Confessions reveal a psychologically—and financially—complex narrative. Far from being an unchanging, peaceful state of mutual benevolence completely secluded from the social world and devoid of individual interest, Rousseau's relation with Maman was from the beginning a tense and complicated web of

conflict and mutual accommodation. But the myth that Rousseau constructs in order to simplify this complex story retroactively by separating it into distinct phases attributes the collapse of the idyll world to feminine sexuality. Maman's decision to invite him into her bed in the first place, Rousseau eventually claims, was responsible for eventually destroying their perfect union (C, 264). This original sin was only compounded by her ostensibly inexplicable and unprecedented affair with Rousseau's rival. However, Rousseau originally claimed that his sexual intimacy with Maman was integral to their perfect self-containment. Furthermore, the reader learns that when Maman proposed to make "le petit" her sexual partner, she was already sleeping with her steward, Claude Anet, and Rousseau knew it. In fact, the ménage à trois that ensued suited Rousseau quite well, because it was both entirely contained and completely permeable. The threesome at once allowed Rousseau to remain protected within a maternal enclave and to keep his options open.²⁹ Anet did all the things Rousseau didn't want to do, such as supervise Maman's household affairs, help her manufacture herbal remedies (and probably, sleep with her), which left Rousseau free to study, socialize, go for walks, and dream about his brilliant future.

Although Rousseau claims that this utopian arrangement was perfectly harmonious, the Confessions reveal that the triangle was heavily charged with tension, which Maman had to work hard to defuse. Indeed, the triangle itself involved complicated duplicities. Rousseau explains: "I don't know whether Claude Anet realized the intimacy of [my] commerce³⁰ [with Maman]; I have reason to think it did not remain hidden from him. He was an extremely perceptive young man but very discreet, who never spoke in contradiction to his thoughts, but did not always reveal them. Without giving me the least indication that he was aware [of it], by his conduct he seemed to be so" (C, 201).³¹ Rousseau hints that each member of the trio knew what was going on, but refrained from acknowledging it openly. Private and public knowledge and licit and illicit behavior were thus only versions of each other, and they remained concealed from each other by the thinnest of veils. When the veil was torn away, indeed, the consequences were grave. Anet was so devastated at an insult he received from Maman that he attempted suicide (C, 177). The

insult may have been the news that she was proposing to share her favors with Rousseau—or had already done so. Anet’s death, which followed soon after Rousseau’s sexual initiation, may also have been a suicide.³²

As long as the fictitious curtain of mutual deceit/mutual recognition remained in place, however, the internal tensions within the triangle permitted Rousseau to walk a thin line between remaining within the protective maternal sphere and venturing outside of it into the frightening but alluring world of public action and discourse. That public world was also the world of patriarchal authority and paternal prohibition. In the *ménage à trois*, Anet played the role of the stern, reproving father: “As he was serious, and even grave, and since I was younger than he, he became for me a sort of governor, who saved me from many follies; because his presence imposed itself on me, and I never dared to forget myself in front of him” (C, 177).³³ Anet occupied the powerful but also excruciating position of knowing but having to seem not to know that his younger rival shared Maman’s sexual favors. Rousseau could thereby at once flout paternal prohibition and secure paternal absolution—while continuing to enjoy Maman’s benevolence.

Unfortunately—but also fortunately—for Rousseau, the same arrangement did not work with Maman’s younger lover, Jean-Samuel-Rodolphe Wintzenried. Whereas Anet was older than Rousseau, reserved in character, and a servant, Wintzenried was younger than Rousseau, better born, more active, more brash, and much more interested in Maman’s enterprises (and presumably, her sexual favors) than he. The balance of power and distribution of roles that had been precariously maintained in the first triangle did not succeed in the second one. The *Confessions* thus reveal that it was neither Maman’s sexuality nor her “infidelity” that ruined Rousseau’s paradise. Rather, the conflict between Maman’s desires and needs and Rousseau’s, which had been slowly increasing over the several years of their frequently interrupted cohabitation,³⁴ simply erupted irreparably when Maman found one person who could fill the role that had previously been filled by Anet and Rousseau together.

It is also evident that Rousseau was at least as responsible for this cataclysm as Maman, and that Maman's "duplicity" was matched by Rousseau's own. For Rousseau's account of his return from Montpellier and his discovery that he had been replaced by Wintzenried is preceded by a lengthy account of a six-week affair he himself had with a married mother of ten who was twenty years older than he. Like Maman, Madame de Larnage served as a movable barrier, which Rousseau used to control the relation between public and private selves and narratives. She serves the same function in the text itself. But whereas Maman is mythologized as a pastoral maiden, Madame de Larnage plays the role of a femme galante, part of a "fine company" (bonne compagnie) of "glamorous women" (femmes brillantes) traveling in the cortège of a newly married friend (C, 249). These clever society women are described as audacious and shameless: Rousseau claims that he tried to avoid their attentions and was ignorant of Madame de Larnage's designs on him. But he also slyly reveals that he covertly invited Madame de Larnage's conquest. Indeed, as the affair progresses, Rousseau is gradually transformed from a shy and retiring invalid who shrinks away from the "chaos" (fracas) caused by "these naughty flirts" (ces coquines de femmes) into a witty conversationalist and a robust lover (C, 249). As he coyly puts it, "All that was needed was for Madame de Larnage to take me in hand, and goodbye poor Jean-Jacques—or rather, goodbye fever, vapors, polyp—[all my symptoms] vanished in her company, with the exception of certain palpitations of which she did not wish to cure me" (C, 249).³⁵

Once separated from Maman, that is, Rousseau no longer had to constrain his personality in order to preserve his safe haven with her. Indeed, he literally became a different person: when he met Madame de Larnage and her friends, he had the brilliant idea of introducing himself by a false name. "I don't know by what bizarre³⁶ notion I decided to pretend to be English. I gave myself out to be a Jacobite, and that's what they took me for; I called myself Dudding, and they called me Dudding" (C, 249–50).³⁷ By pretending to be an English aristocrat, Rousseau could become a "public" character: he could freely indulge in all the social pleasures for which heretofore he has professed to have little aptitude and less liking. Not only did he delight in

riding in a comfortable carriage and eating rich meals; he was even—uncharacteristically—able to enjoy sex, and “gorged himself” on the “delicious” erotic fare (C, 253).³⁸

By choosing a woman who would mirror back to him a different version of himself, Rousseau was able to transform himself. But he seems confused about which version of himself was—and is—the real one. On one hand, Madame de Larnage “gave me that confidence whose lack had nearly always prevented me from being myself. I was myself then. Never had my eyes, my senses, my heart and my lips spoken so well . . .” (C, 252).³⁹ But even as he claims that Dudding represents his real self, Rousseau also describes his new identity as if it were an artifact:

[I was] very proud of honoring myself in Madame de Larnage’s eyes for the lively wit that she had given me. I was no longer the same man. . . . With Madame de Larnage . . . , filled with pride for my manhood and my success . . . , I shared in the impression that I was making on her senses; I was present to myself enough to contemplate my triumph with as much vanity as pleasure, and to extract from that the wherewithal to redouble it. (C, 253–54)⁴⁰

Here Madame de Larnage seems to enable Rousseau to experience the pleasure of contemplating an artificial version of himself rather than to simply become himself. Furthermore, Rousseau’s ability to “become himself” with Madame de Larnage clearly depended on the inherent ephemerality of the affair as well as the pseudonym. Although the two planned to reunite at Madame de Larnage’s house the following spring,⁴¹ Rousseau implies that he was calculating the duration of their affair before it had even started (C, 251). As he puts it, “Travelers’ love affairs are not made to last” (C, 254).⁴² Not surprisingly, then, once he has separated from her on the journey, he is no longer so confident that Dudding is the real Rousseau. When he begins to think about rejoining Madame de Larnage, he begins to have doubts. A careful calculation ensues, in which Rousseau weighs the pleasure he might gain from revisiting Madame de Larnage (and from meeting her young daughter, whom she has described) against his fondness for Maman, his

fear that he may be unmasked as an imposter by one of Madame de Larnage's acquaintances or fall in love with her daughter and cause a scandal, and his sense of compunction about betraying Maman. Rousseau devotes the most space to the latter motive, but we sense nonetheless—or, rather, for this very reason—that moral regrets were probably the least compelling among his many almost comically ill-assorted reasons for abandoning his plan to rejoin Madame de Larnage. Rousseau spends several sentences trying to convince the reader that he had a real change of heart:

After the pure principles that I had adopted a short time since, and after the rules of wisdom and virtue that I had made for myself and that I was so proud of having followed, the shame of being so inconsistent, of betraying so soon and so obviously my own maxims, carried the day over pleasure. . . . Full of worthy sentiments and sound resolutions, I continued on my way with the good intention of expiating my wrongdoing, thinking only of how I could henceforth school my conduct according to the laws of virtue, consecrate myself without reserve to the service of the best of mothers, swear as much fidelity to her as I felt attachment to her, and listen no more to any other love except for that of my duties. (C, 260)⁴³

Rousseau's highly rhetoricized narrative, becomes as "two-faced," as it were, as Rousseau himself. The reader cannot tell which version of himself Rousseau believes in—or wants the reader to believe in. The reader is thus caught in a generic interstice between the public and the private versions of the hero and his text, whose contradictions are as troubling—and hilarious—as the two versions of Maman.

Rousseau's gambit with women is thus very like his gambit as a writer, and the two are related. Rousseau's frames his whole story of himself around his relationship to women, including especially Maman, and, in part two, Thérèse Levasseur, his mistress and later wife, but also many others who, like Madame de Larnage, figured more briefly in his life.⁴⁴ From all of

these women, Rousseau sought empathy, but also (in a literal sense) admiration: they were invited/required to reflect back to him whatever version of himself he happened to be believing in/trading in at the moment. Rousseau's presentation of himself to women was always theatrical, though not always so obviously so as when he became Dudding.⁴⁵ This dynamic of admiration inherently required that the woman be able to reflect all the complexity of Rousseau himself. But as we have seen, Rousseau usually conceals this complicated dynamic beneath the recurring myth of the fall. In the first stage of this myth, both Rousseau and the woman who admires and pities him are portrayed as inviolate; next, the woman is somehow corrupted; finally, Rousseau is "forced" to expose himself to public scrutiny and opprobrium. He is then left to mourn the catastrophic violation of his sanctuary, which, he asserts, ineluctably led to his extravagant foray into the public realm. But some of the most striking passages in the Confessions reveal that despite his lamentations and protests to the contrary, Rousseau orchestrated this loss of control of the public/private boundary through woman. They also suggest why he did so, for in their complex instability they exemplify the literary innovation that made his autobiography so important to the development of the modern novel.

III. Corrupting an Incorruptible Reader

Projecting the public/private opposition onto feminine sexuality and manipulating it thus enabled Rousseau to manage his evolution from private to public man. This dynamic is also evident in his development as a writer. When he began to make the transition from what he saw as strictly public, masculine works such as The Social Contract and the Discourses to more thematically and generically complex texts such as La Nouvelle Héloïse and the Confessions, he did so by imagining an ambiguous woman reader who could mediate between the double aspects of these new works, and in so doing, complement his own "generic" ambiguity. This equivocal woman reader may be said to be figuratively veiled: the disguise she wears at once guarantees her innocence and suggests her duplicity.

Rousseau himself describes his turn toward narrative fiction as a shocking and inexplicable act of pandering to women readers and indulging his own feminine qualities.⁴⁶ He declares that he was embarrassed to write and publish La Nouvelle Héloïse because its “effeminacy” violated his own recently adopted “austere maxims”:

After the severe principles that I had just established with such a great noise, after so many biting invectives against effeminate books that exuded love and languor, could one imagine anything more unexpected, more shocking, than to see me suddenly inscribe myself by my own hand among the authors of those books that I had so harshly censured? I felt this inconsistency in all its force, I reproached myself for it, I blushed for it, I was annoyed with myself; but all that did not suffice to restore me to reason. (C, 434–35)⁴⁷

Rousseau claims that he wrote La Nouvelle Héloïse only because he was so utterly seduced by the two heroines of his novel that he had no choice “but to run every risk, and resolve to face down what everyone would say, but also to weigh later on whether I would resolve to show my work to the public or not, for I did not yet think that I would come to publish it” (C, 435).⁴⁸ With its “gothic tone,” he confesses in the preface to the novel, La Nouvelle Héloïse is suitable mainly for women readers.⁴⁹ Rousseau was so embarrassed of his effeminate work that he declined to add his chosen epithet, “Citoyen de Genève,” or his motto, vitam impendere vero (“to devote one’s life to truth”) to its title page.

However, as William Ray has pointed out, *La Nouvelle Héloïse* is a novel that tries to “denovelize” and “defeminize” itself. Although the first half is a scandalous fiction of illicit love, the second half is a moralizing work of philosophy and social comment that seems to expunge unregulated desire.⁵⁰ Indeed, Rousseau declares in the Preface that although La Nouvelle Héloïse will scandalize virtuous women, it may restore femmes galantes to virtue with its startling portrayal of characters who care deeply about moral principles. After having read the first half, he admits, an “austere man” (un homme austere) would be well justified in tossing the book

angrily aside and remonstrating indignantly with its author (LNH 6). But once he has read the whole book, such a man would have no right to attack him for having published it (LNH, 6). The amorous and aesthetic pleasures of the novel are only a kind of drug (drogues bonnes) administered to bring the sick back to health (LNH, 25).

At the same time that he disparages his feminine text and its frivolous women readers, however, Rousseau fails, as Ray notes, to declare a solid victory for a serious, masculine, moralizing resolution to the novel by having the heroine die an ambiguous death. Although as she dies Julie proclaims her readiness to sacrifice herself to the rule of her husband, father, and God, she also reasserts her illicit desire for her lover, which most of the narrative has been devoted to sublimating. Furthermore, the very distinctions between masculine readers and genres and feminine ones that Rousseau invokes cannot stand, because La Nouvelle Héloïse is a hybrid text that requires men to read like women and vice versa.⁵¹ Thus, it is as licentious as it is repressive; as Rousseau himself declares in the preface, while La Nouvelle Héloïse “may be useful to [women] who, amid a disorderly existence, have preserved some love of virtue,” it will certainly ruin chaste maidens:

As for young ladies, that’s another matter. No chaste young lady has ever read a novel, and I have given this one a title that is clear enough so that in opening it anyone should realize what sort of book it is. Any young lady who dares, in spite of this title, to read a single page, is ruined; but let her not impute her ruin to this book, for the evil was already done. Since she has begun, let her finish; she has nothing more to lose. (LNH, 6)⁵²

For a woman, reading a novel is not only figuratively but even literally equivalent to losing her virginity. Rousseau insists that he will not be held responsible for corrupting virgins, because in his title he has attached a warning label to his book. Despite the disclaimer, however, La Nouvelle Héloïse requires at least an imaginatively corruptible reader, for only such a reader can, like the heroine, be subjected to and conquered by temptation as a prelude to being

reformed. Also, Rousseau's own description of virgins implies that they do not really exist, since any woman ruined by reading a book must already have lost her innocence. This is equivalent to saying that women are always already corrupt, and therefore, that there is ultimately no difference between a chaste and an unchaste woman. Women readers of La Nouvelle Héloïse are thus in a double-bind that mirrors Rousseau's ambivalence toward the conflict between desire and the law: they must be innocent, but they cannot be. Rousseau mischievously hints that he is aware of his inconsequentiality when he writes, "Since she has begun, let her finish; she has nothing more to lose." Like his declaration earlier in the preface that "I don't want to seem better than I am" (LNH, 5),⁵³ Rousseau's injunction comically suggests that he is writing exactly the kind of scandalous narrative that he disclaims.

Like La Nouvelle Héloïse, the Confessions is, as we have seen, a generic hybrid in which Rousseau juxtaposes the "masculine" form of the memoir with the "feminine" forms of novel and diary. As we have seen, too, he alleges that he will remove the barrier that separates these genres and show that they are not incompatible. I have argued, however, that he also preserves this barrier and even manipulates it in order to heighten the scandalous pleasure of the text. Indeed, because the Confessions is autobiographical, it can play with the boundaries between fact and fiction and publicity and privacy in a way that La Nouvelle Héloïse cannot. As a result, it is a more radical work. Furthermore, Rousseau's invention of the autobiographical novel as a deliberately duplicitous form depends on his act of imagining an equivocal woman reader who can mirror his equivocal text and self, just as Rousseau required women such as Maman and Madame de Larnage to mirror his complex identity.⁵⁴

Actual glimpses of the woman reader's crucial role emerge in the text of the Confessions itself. Notably, when conflict between public and private genres and aspects of Rousseau's character erupts, it is woman readers whom Rousseau accuses of generating it—but also of perceiving it. For example, when the tensions in the account of the ménage à trois with Maman and Anet rise too close to the surface, Rousseau accuses woman readers of reading too suspiciously:

Since [Maman] knew that I neither thought, nor felt, nor breathed apart from her, she would show me how much she loved [Anet] so that I would love him as well How many times did Maman soften our hearts and make us embrace with tears, telling us that we were both necessary to her happiness! —And let the women who read this refrain from malevolent smiles. With her temperament, this need was not equivocal; it was solely a need of the heart. (C, 201)⁵⁵

Presumably, every reader will do what Rousseau both wants and does not want him or her to do: unfold the Confessions' various layers of meaning and read across genre boundaries. But Rousseau writes as if only women readers will read on both sides of the veil that separates memoir from confessional novel. By implication, then, imagined women readers occupy the “fault” (or wear the veil) that separates the two versions of Rousseau and of his narrative.

We see this again in another passage, in which Rousseau describes one of his favorite memories.⁵⁶ During a period of estrangement from Maman, Rousseau went on a picnic with two attractive and aristocratic young ladies. One of them, Mlle de Graffenried, invited Rousseau to jump up on her horse and ride with her. When Rousseau complied, his heart began to pound wildly. His companion noticed this, and she flirtatiously confided to Rousseau that her heart was beating too—but hers was palpitating, she claimed, because she was afraid she would fall off her horse. As a narrative—or theatrical—aside, Rousseau comments, “In the position I was in, this practically amounted to an invitation to verify the fact. I couldn't bring myself to do it, and during the whole trip my arms were wrapped around her waist—very tightly, to be sure, but they didn't budge for a moment. A woman reading this might willingly box my ears—and she would not be amiss” (C, 136).⁵⁷ It is not clear whether Rousseau means that he deserves to have his ears boxed because he is implying that Mlle de Graffenried desired him or because he refused to respond to her hint. But in this playful moment, Rousseau acknowledges what he strenuously

denies elsewhere: that he and his ladyfriends felt any form of “illicit” desire. Rousseau also acknowledges that although he felt this desire, he neither admitted it nor acted upon it. He preferred to remain in suspense—and to leave Mlle de Graffenried in suspense as well. Similarly, in relation to the woman reader, Rousseau at once acknowledges his willingness (and even his desire) to be seen as licentious, as well as the reader’s desire (and right) to read with license, but also denies both. With his double negative (et n’auroit pas tort), Rousseau coyly solicits the reader’s desire but fails to satisfy it.

Rousseau thus sexualizes the barrier between what is admissible and what is not admissible in public. He himself makes this barrier movable, but he insists that it is women, not he, who have made it so. Furthermore, he not only ascribes sophisticated reading practices to women; he also alludes to such practices only in relation to scenes describing sexual desire—which is attributed to women. For example, when Rousseau is discussing his initiation—or rather, his non-initiation—into sexuality, he claims that unlike many women, he remained ignorant of sexual matters until an advanced age: “I was more than thirty before I laid eyes on any of those dangerous books that a beautiful lady of the world finds awkward, as she says, because they can only be read with one hand” (C, 40).⁵⁸ Rousseau has been describing how being oppressed by his engraving master led him to become a liar, a thief, and finally a voracious reader; lying, stealing, and reading are all suspect activities because they toy with the boundary between what is overt and what is covert. Pornography takes this ambiguity to an extreme: it reverses the “proper” hierarchy between the public and the private by allowing (or compelling) life to imitate art. For this reason, Rousseau finds it at once terrifying and exhilarating. When he wants to disavow guilty knowledge of such movable boundaries, as he does here, he displaces it onto “a beautiful woman of the world” who reads dirty books and masturbates. It is women, that is—and specifically worldly women—who indulge in the secret and guilty pleasure of crossing the boundary between public and private. At the same time, however, Rousseau reveals that his own reading was, precisely, “pornographic”: he was so addicted to novelistic illusion that it became his reality. Like Emma Bovary, he read insatiably, especially when he was hiding from

his cruel apprentice master, who (like Julien Sorel's master) tore up his books and beat him for reading "books of every kind"—including, presumably, pornographic ones. For Rousseau takes care to inform us that his favorite booklender, the "famous" La Tribu, "furnished me with books of every sort" (C, 39).⁵⁹ "Furnished" and "of every sort" depict La Tribu as a procuress. Once again, however, transgressive reading is linked to feminine sexuality.

The imagined woman reader thus emerges as the crucial mediating figure between the Confessions' oppositions of gender and genre. The woman reader's "perverse" ability to penetrate Rousseau's dance of veils makes her a powerful androgynous specter that complements Rousseau's portrait of himself as a mixture of womanly deception and manly truthfulness. By following his conflicting commands, the woman reader violates them—but in violating them, she is following them. Moreover, this woman reader also serves as both a barrier from and a conduit to the male reader, whose specter lurks on the other side of her. The male reader, whether human or divine, is typically figured as a stern judge, as on the opening page, where Rousseau addresses himself to God: "Let each [of my fellows] in turn unveil his heart at the foot of your throne with the same sincerity, and then let even one say, if he dares, I was better than that man" (C, 5).⁶⁰ Like the "austere man" whom Rousseau imagines angrily tossing aside La Nouvelle Héloïse, the male reader of the Confessions is expected to respond with "public speeches, . . . the severity of judgments pronounced aloud," as Rousseau puts it in an early preface to the Confessions.⁶¹ But even though Rousseau does not dare to imagine (or at least to suggest) that male readers will shift between the various levels of his text with as much agility, shock, and delight as women readers, his descriptions of scenes of self-exposure suggest that he always envisaged a powerful and stern male on the other side of the woman observer whom he also aimed to place in a compromising position. Anet is one such figure; as we saw earlier, Rousseau describes him as a severe authority figure, a "governor" who at once prohibited, tolerated, and enjoyed the intimacy between Maman and Rousseau which, on the other side of the curtain dividing public from private knowledge, he supposedly did not see at all.

Another such figure is the Marquis de Torignan, a third party to Rousseau's amour de voyage with Madame de Larnage. The Marquis is an equivocal figure: he seems to have desired Madame de Larnage for himself but nonetheless preferred to participate in Rousseau's conquest of her (or her of him) by delivering alternately sarcastic and flattering remarks to Rousseau on the subject of his seduction. Like Anet, the Marquis feigned ignorance of the affair but also evinced his knowledge of it. Similarly, Rousseau pretends not to have known that the Marquis knew but hints that he did know that the Marquis knew—and that the Marquis' participation in his affair with Madame de Larnage heightened his own pleasure:

[My liaison with Madame de Larnage] did not escape the Marquis de Torignan. He didn't tease me any the less; on the contrary, he treated me all the more like a poor betrayed lover, a martyr to the rigors of his lady. Never did a word, a smile, or a glance escape him that could have made me suspect that he had guessed our secret, and I would have thought that he was our dupe, if Madame de Larnage, who saw more clearly than I, hadn't told me that he was not a dupe but a gallant man; and, indeed, no one could have shown such estimable attention, or have behaved more politely, than he always did, even to me, except for his jokes, especially after my success (C, 252–53)⁶²

Although the Marquis supposedly preserved a courtly silence, he also made repeated barbed references to Rousseau's dalliance. He also made a point of always sending a footman ahead of the carriage in which the three were traveling to secure rooms in advance, such that “either by the footman's own doing, or by the order of his master,” the Marquis always got a room next to Madame, while Rousseau was lodged at the other end of the house. “But,” Rousseau adds, “this scarcely interfered, and our rendezvous were only all the more piquant” (C, 253).⁶³

Similarly, when he describes the brilliant reception at court of his opera Le Devin du village, Rousseau focuses on the tears, smiles, and praise bestowed on him by the elegant ladies in the audience, and he even asserts that sexual pleasure played a greater part than vanity in his

feelings of exaltation, for “surely if there had only been men present, I would not have been devoured, as I was, by the desire to gather up with my lips the delicious tears that I was causing to flow” (C, 379).⁶⁴ But the presence of the king looms over the whole scene, even though Rousseau nowhere directly describes the king’s person or his reaction to the performance. No one is allowed to clap while the king is in attendance; he thus presides, as eye of authority, over each courtier’s experience of the opera—and over Rousseau’s experience of his own opera. Indeed, Rousseau is so terrified—and perhaps excited—by the idea of receiving direct attention from the king that he fails to turn up for an audience with him the day after the performance, as the king had requested.

These examples suggest that Rousseau sought to put his male reader, like his female reader, in a compromising position. The male reader is made to play the role of the judge and guardian of morality, but he is also turned into a voyeur who witnesses but may not acknowledge witnessing the blurring of boundaries between public and private knowledge and actions. Though he exists at a further remove from Rousseau’s self-representation than the female admirer, he too is divided from himself by the experience of witnessing and compelled to coexist uneasily on both sides of this division. But the female reader plays the crucial mediating role between Rousseau and his male reader.

Far from restricting female readers to a purely domestic sphere, the Confessions both depend on and liberate women as readers by placing them on the boundary between public and private spheres and modes of reading. The “private parts” of the Confessions—which, I have argued, are aimed initially at women readers—are a scandalous and highly artful realistic narrative, contained within the framework of a historical memoir. Even though Rousseau does not directly acknowledge his ingenious disingenuousness in crafting the Confessions, instead displacing it onto various guilty female parties, he lets the reader perceive that, at least some of the time, he knew exactly what he was doing. “Privately,” Rousseau did not want to restrict the female reader, because liberating himself as the sexually ambiguous originator of a new, ambiguous genre required him to exploit women’s sexual/intellectual ambiguity, both real and

symbolic. By imagining a virtuous/licentious woman reader who could mirror his fantasy of himself as an androgynous équivoque, Rousseau profoundly destabilized the boundary between private and public life, masculine and feminine roles, and fiction and history. Under the pressure of the double-bind, this woman reader oscillates uneasily but daringly across the same boundaries between genders, genres, and spheres of action as Rousseau himself. She thus emerges as a powerful party to the intrigue—and a harbinger of a future that is at once conflicted, frightening, forbidden, and exhilarating.

¹ Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 9–10.

² Armstrong, 98.

³ Armstrong, 41–2, 252.

⁴ Armstrong, 51.

⁵ Armstrong, 33.

⁶ Armstrong, 36–8.

⁷ Armstrong, 36.

⁸ Landes, Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 88.

⁹ Landes, 64. Cf. Linda Zerilli, Signifying Woman: Culture and Chaos in Rousseau, Burke, and Mill (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994). Like Landes, Dena Goodman sees the salonnière as the ground of contestation between ancien régime and bourgeois concepts of the relation between the public and private spheres and the gendering of each. However, she argues that distinctions between public and private life were unstable in eighteenth-century discourse and that “there was no such thing as a ‘public’ woman in eighteenth-century France” (“Public Sphere and Private Life: Toward a Synthesis of Current Historiographical Approaches to the Old Regime,” History and Theory 31 (1) (1992), 19. Rather, “most women, like most men,

functioned within a private realm that also had a public face” (ibid.). Goodman’s description of the public/private opposition as more ambiguous and paradoxical than Landes’ simple binarism is more consonant with my own view, as will become clear in what follows. For another recent treatment of Rousseau’s political theory that contrasts with Landes’, see Mira Morgenstern, Rousseau and the Politics of Ambiguity (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), especially 181–234.

¹⁰ Rousseau, A.M. d’Alembert (hereafter abbreviated as Md’A). In Oeuvres Complètes (OC), eds. Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, [1782] 1959–95), 5: 1–125.

¹¹ “Après ce que j’ai dit ci-devant, je n’ai pas besoin, je crois, d’expliquer encore comment le désordre des actrices entraîne celui des acteurs.” This and all subsequent translations of Rousseau are my own.

¹² Teresa de Lauretis defines “woman” as “a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western cultures (critical and scientific, literary or juridical discourses), which works both as their vanishing point and their condition of existence.” Women, on the other hand, are “the real historical beings who cannot as yet be defined outside of those discursive formations, but whose material existence is nonetheless certain.” Alice Doesn’t (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 5.

¹³ “. . . un ouvrage unique et utile, lequel peut servir de première pièce de comparaison pour l’étude des hommes” Rousseau, Les Confessions, 3. In OC, 1: 1–656. Hereafter referred to as C.

¹⁴ “En peu de tems j’aquis par cette dangereuse methode . . . une unique intelligence sur les passions. . . . Ces émotions confuses . . . me donnerent de la vie humaine des notions bizarres et romanesques, dont l’expérience et la réflexion n’ont jamais bien pu me guerir.”

¹⁵ “. . . ainsi commençoit à se former ou à se montrer en moi ce coeur à la fois si fier et si tendre, ce caractère efféminé mais pourtant indomptable, qui, flottant toujours entre la foiblesse et le

courage, entre la mollesse et la vertu, m’as jusqu’au bout mis en contradiction avec moi-même”

¹⁶ “. . . me guérit un peu des Romans”

¹⁷ Rousseau tries to distinguish his “mother’s” library, consisting of novels, from his “mother’s father’s” library, consisting of history and philosophy. But as Gagnebin and Raymond point out, all of Suzanne Rousseau’s books were part of one collection, which she had inherited not from her father but from her uncle, who raised her after her father died. See Gagnebin’s and Raymond’s notes in C, 1234, n. 3, and 1237, n. 1.

¹⁸ “Je ne suis fait comme aucun de ceux que j’ai vus; j’ose croire n’être fait comme aucun de ceux qui existent. Si je ne vaux pas mieux, au moins je suis autre. Si la nature a bien ou mal fait de briser le moule dans lequel elle m’a jetté, c’est ce dont on ne peut juger qu’après m’avoir lu.”

¹⁹ For example, Jean Starobinski argues in La Transparence et l’obstacle that by making himself an exemplary incarnate martyr to the transcendental truth of just divine and human laws, Rousseau tries to amend the fall from grace that created the private individual and to restore a collective state in which the private self does not exist (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 32. Similarly, in Writing the Truth: Authority and Desire in Rousseau, Thomas Kavanagh argues that Rousseau tries to reconcile authority with desire (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 25, 34. Likewise, Jean-Marie Goulemot contends that in the Confessions, “the barrier between public and private life has ceased to exist, as the private is exhibited in public.” “Literary Practices: Publicizing the Private,” in The History of Private Life, eds. Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1989), 3: 392.

²⁰ See note 30, below.

²¹ A similar analysis could be done of the roles of Thérèse Levasseur, Rousseau’s mistress and later wife, and of Nature, as she is evoked in the Ile de Saint Pierre section in the last book of the Confessions.

²² In 1738, the Mercure de France published a Reponse de M. Rousseau to a treatise entitled Si le monde que nous habitons est une sphère, published in a previous issue. At an unknown date Rousseau also wrote an essay entitled Traité élémentaire de sphere. He clearly imagined problems of unity, containment, and separation in terms of the feminine figure of the sphere.

²³ Huntington Williams, Rousseau and Romantic Autobiography (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 145.

²⁴ “Deux ou trois mois se passèrent ainsi à tâter la pente de mon esprit et à jouir dans la plus belle saison de l’année et dans un lieu qu’elle rendoit enchanté, du charme de la vie dont je sentois si bien le prix, de celui d’une société aussi libre que douce, si l’on peut donner le nom de société a une aussi parfaite union”

²⁵ In Rousseau’s political writings, the collective version of this expulsion from Eden is responsible for turning the pure state of Nature into the corrupt modernity of Paris. There, it is the salonnière who has fallen from grace and dragged society down after her.

²⁶ “Quel prompt et plein bouleversement dans tout mon être! . . . En un moment je vis évanouir pour jamais tout l’avenir de félicité que je m’étois peint. . . . Je ne vis plus devant moi que les tristes restes d’une vie insipide, et si quelquefois encore une image de bonheur effleura mes desirs, ce bonheur n’étoit plus celui qui m’étoit propre, je sentois qu’en l’obtenant je ne serois pas vraiment heureux.”

²⁷ The poem “Le Verger de Madame de Warens,” which Rousseau wrote during this period, describes his ostensibly simple pastoral life with Maman in rhapsodic terms. But it also contains an extensive catalogue of what Rousseau read as he lounged in Maman’s orchard, including works by Locke and Descartes, the astronomers de la Hire and Cassini, and the court historians Barclay and St. Aubin. Furthermore, the poem’s elaborate neoclassical style undercuts its claims to simplicity. See OC, 3: 1123–29.

²⁸ “La pauvre Maman n’avoit point perdu son ancienne fantaisie d’entreprises et de systèmes” (203). “Ses erreurs lui vinrent d’un fonds d’activité inépuisable qui vouloit sans cesse de

l'occupation. Ce n'étoient pas des intrigues de femmes qu'il lui falloit, c'étoient des entreprises à faire et à diriger. A sa place Mad[am]e de Longueville n'eut été qu'une traccassière; à la place de Mad[am]e de Longueville, elle eut gouverné l'Etat" (51).

²⁹ Kavanagh notes the importance of erotic triangles in Emile: Sophie and Emile must seduce the tutor, Emile and the tutor must seduce Sophie, the tutor and Sophie must seduce Emile. This scenario is "an affective paradise in which all three parties draw maximum pleasure from oscillating between the ambiguities of their respective positions" (94). Multiple triangles are also, of course, present in La Nouvelle Héloïse.

³⁰ Elsewhere in his writings, Rousseau associates commerce with the corrupt Parisian world of financiers and salonnières; his use of the word commerce to describe his perfect union with Maman thus belies his claim that it was pure.

³¹ "J'ignore si Claude Anet s'aperçut de l'intimité de notre commerce. J'ai lieu de croire qu'il ne lui fut pas caché. C'étoit un garçon très clair voyant mais très discret qui ne parloit jamais contre sa pensée, mais qui ne la disoit pas toujours. Sans me faire le moindre semblant qu'il fut instruit, par sa conduite il paroissoit l'être."

³² As has been suggested by several scholars: for citations, see Gagnebin's and Raymond's comments in C, 1329, n. 1 to p. 206.

³³ "Comme il étoit sérieux, même grave, et que j'étois plus jeune que lui, il devint pour moi une espèce de gouverneur qui me sauva beaucoup de folies; car il m'en imposoit, et je n'osois m'oublier devant lui."

³⁴ Although Rousseau implies that he and Maman were always together, his account makes it clear that they spent much time apart. Even when they were together, he reveals, he often preferred to think about her than to be with her (C, 181).

³⁵ ". . . voila Mad[am]e de Larnage qui m'entreprend, et adieu le pauvre Jean Jaques, ou plustot adieu la fièvre, les vapeurs, le polype, tout part auprès d'elle, hors certaines palpitations qui me restèrent et dont elle ne vouloit pas me guérir."

³⁶ In Rousseau's lexicon, "bizarre" always indicates the outbreak of a transgressive fantasy. In "Le Verger de Madame de Warens," for example (see above, note 27), Rousseau exclaims that he will no longer waste his precious moments in the garden on indulging in the bizarre projets and soucis superflus that literally and figuratively threaten the sanctity of the garden (literally, projets and superflus both mean to exceed boundaries). Rousseau, "Le Verger de Madame de Warens," 1128.

³⁷ "Je ne sais par quelle bisarrerie je m'avisai de passer pour Anglois. Je me donnai pour Jacobite, on me prit pour tel; je m'appellai Dudding, et l'on m'appellait M. Dudding."

³⁸ "Cette vie delicieuse dura quatre ou cinq jours pendant lesquels je me gorgeai, je m'enivrai des plus douces voluptés."

³⁹ "Elle m'avait donné cette confiance dont le défaut m'a presque toujours empêché d'être moi. Je le fus alors. Jamais mes yeux, mes sens, mon coeur et ma bouche n'ont si bien parlé"

⁴⁰ " . . . tout fier de me faire honneur auprès de Mad[am]e de Larnage de l'esprit qu'elle m'avoit donné. Je n'étais plus le même homme. . . . Près de Mad[am]e de Larnage . . . , fier d'être homme et d'être heureux . . . , je partageois l'impression que je faisais sur [ses sens]; j'étois assez à moi pour contempler avec autant de vanité que de volupté mon triomphe, et pour tirer de là de quoi le redoubler."

⁴¹ Madame de Larnage lived apart from her husband.

⁴² "Les amours de voyage ne sont pas faits pour durer."

⁴³ "Après les principes si purs que j'avois adoptés il y avoit peu de tems; après les règles de sagesse et de vertu que je m'étoit senti si fier de suivre; la honte d'être si peu consequent à moi-même, de démentir si tôt et si haut mes propres maximes l'emporta sur la volupté. . . . Plein de bons sentimens et de bonnes resolutions je continuai ma route dans la bonne intention d'expié ma faute; ne pensant qu'à regler desormais ma conduite sur les loix de la vertu, à me consacrer sans reserve au service de la meilleure des mères, à lui vouer autant de fidelité que j'avois d'attachement pour elle, et à n'écouter plus d'autre amour que celui de mes devoirs."

⁴⁴ Such figures include Madame Basile in Turin, Zulettia in Venice, and in France, Sophie d’Houdetot, Madame d’Epinay, Madame Dupin, Madame de Créqui, and the Countess of Luxembourg. Nature is another such figure.

⁴⁵ When he first met Maman, for example, Rousseau presented her with a “fine letter” that he had written “in the style of an Orator, in which, stitching together phrases from books with expressions of a novice, I employed all my eloquence in order to win over Madame de Warens’ benevolence: “. . . je fis une belle lettre en style d’Orateur, où cousant des phrases des livres avec des locutions d’apprentif, je déployois toute mon éloquence pour capter la bienveillance de Mad[am] de Warens” (C, 48).

⁴⁶ Rousseau alleges that this struggle between “maxims” and “languor” was particular to the period of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, but see “L’Allée de Sylvie,” a poem written ten years earlier: “Une langueur enchanteresse / Me poursuit jusqu’en ce séjour; / J’y veux moraliser sans cesse, / Et toujours j’y songe à l’amour” (1148). In *OC*, 3: 1146–49.

⁴⁷ “Après les principes sévères que je venois d’établir avec tant de fracas, après les maximes austères que j’avois si fortement prêchées, après tant d’invectives mordantes contre les livres efféminés qui respiroient l’amour et la molesse, pouvoit-on rien imaginer de plus inattendu, de plus choquant, que de me voir tout d’un coup m’inscrire de ma propre main parmi les auteurs de ces livres que j’avois si durement censurés? Je sentois cette inconsequence dans toute sa force, je me la reprochois, j’en rougissois, je m’en dépitois: mais tout cela ne put suffire pour me ramener à la raison.”

⁴⁸ “Subjugué complètement il fallut me soumettre à tout risque, et me résoudre à braver le qu’en dira-t-on; sauf à délibérer dans la suite si je me résoudrais à montrer mon ouvrage ou non; car je ne supposois pas encore que j’en vinsse à le publier.” Although (and because) they are not merely fictional extravagance, the *Confessions* inspired Rousseau with a similar hesitation regarding publication. In the early preface to the Neuchâtel ms. of the *Confessions*, Rousseau says he did not plan to have them published until after his death (*OC* 1: 1154), and in fact they

were not published until several years after he had died. But Rousseau clearly intended that they be published, and even while he was alive he could not restrain himself from giving dramatic readings of the Confessions to private audiences in Paris that lasted as long as seventeen hours and caused a sensation. See Gagnebin's and Raymond's comments to C, 1611–14, nn. 3 and 4.

⁴⁹ “Ce recueil avec son gothique ton convient mieux aux femmes que les livres de philosophie.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse, 6. In OC, 2: 1–745. Hereafter referred to as LNH. The view that novels were suitable reading from women, books of history and

philosophy for men, was common in the eighteenth century. William Ray cites an early example of this notion from 1738: “Les femmes, surtout, aiment beaucoup les livres, qui saisissent leur attention par quelque aventure extraordinaire. Aussi voit-on qu’elles aiment beaucoup plus la lecture des romans, que des livres d’histoire” (Jean-Baptiste Boyer d’Argens, Lettres juives, ou correspondance philosophique, historique, et littéraire [La Haye: Pierre Paupie]). “Reading Women: Cultural Authority, Gender, and the Novel. The Case of Rousseau,” Eighteenth-Century Studies 27 (3) (1994), 421.

⁵⁰ Ray, 429–30.

⁵¹ Ray, 441.

⁵² “Quant aux filles, c’est autre chose. Jamais fille chaste n’a lu des Romans; et j’ai mis à celui-ci un titre assés décidé pour qu’en l’ouvrant on sut à quoi s’en tenir. Celle qui, malgré ce titre, en osera lire une seule page, est une fille perdue; mais qu’elle n’impute point sa perte à ce livre; le mal étoit fait d’avance. Puisqu’elle a commencé, qu’elle achève de lire: elle n’a plus rien à risquer.”

⁵³ “Je ne veux pas passer pour meilleur que je ne suis.”

⁵⁴ The central and complex role played by the imaginary woman reader of the Confessions (and La Nouvelle Héloïse) helps answer the question posed by Mary Seidman Trouille in her recent book, Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers Read Rousseau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997). Seidman asks why, despite Rousseau’s “reactionary, paternalistic, even blatantly

misogynistic views of women, some of the most progressive and politically active women [of the eighteenth century] . . . became such fervent admirers and defenders of his character and writings” (3).

⁵⁵ “Comme elle savoit que je ne pensois, ne sentois, ne respirois que par elle, elle me monroit combien elle l’aimoit afin que je l’aimasse de même Combien de fois elle attendrit nos coeurs et nous fit embrasser avec larmes, en nous disant que nous étions nécessaires tous deux au bonheur de sa vie; et que les femmes qui liront ceci ne sourient pas malignement. Avec le temperament qu’elle avoit ce besoin n’étoit pas équivoque: c’étoit uniquement celui de son coeur.”

⁵⁶ This episode from Rousseau’s youth was an important source for La Nouvelle Héloïse.

⁵⁷ “ . . . c’étoit presque dans ma posture, une invitation de vérifier la chose; je n’osai jamais, et durant tout le trajet mes deux bras lui servirent de ceinture, très serrée à la vérité; mais sans se déplacer un moment. Telle femme qui lira ceci me souffletteroit volontiers, et n’auroit pas tort.”

⁵⁸ “ . . . j’avois plus de trente ans avant que j’eusse jetté les yeux sur aucun de ces dangereux livres qu’une belle Dame de par le monde trouve incomodes, en ce qu’on ne peut, dit-elle, les lire que d’une main.”

⁵⁹ “La Tribu, fameuse loueuse de livres m’en fournissoit de toute espèce.”

⁶⁰ “Que chacun d’eux découvre à son tour son coeur aux pieds de ton trône avec la même sincérité; et puis qu’un seul te dise, s’il l’ose: je fus meilleur que cet homme-là.”

⁶¹ “Je m’attends aux discours publics, à la sévérité des jugements prononcés tout haut”
Rousseau, [Preface to the Neuchâtel ms. of the Confessions], 1155. In OC, 1: 1148–55.

⁶² “Notre intelligence n’échappa pas au Marquis de Torignan. Il n’en tiroit pas moins sur moi; au contraire il me traitoit plus que jamais en pauvre amoureux transi, martyr des rigueurs de sa Dame. Il ne lui échapa jamais un mot, un sourire, un regard qui put me faire soupçonner qu’il nous eut devinés, et je l’aurois cru notre dupe, si Mad[am]e de Larnage qui voyoit mieux que moi ne m’eut dit qu’il ne l’étoit pas, mais qu’il étois galant homme; et en effet on ne sauroit

avoir des attentions plus honnêtes, ni se comporter plus poliment qu’il fit toujours, même envers moi, sauf ses plaisanteries, surtout depuis mon succès”

⁶³ “ . . . il envoyoit devant son laquais pour retiner [nos chambres], et le coquin, soit de son chef, soit par l’ordre de son maître, le logeoit toujours à coté de Mad[am]e de Larnage, et me fourroit à l’autre bout de la maison; mais cela ne m’embarrassoit guères et nos rendez-vous n’en étoient que plus piquans.”

⁶⁴ “ . . . surement s’il n’y eut là que des hommes, je n’aurois pas été dévoré, comme je l’étois sans cesse du desir de recueillir de mes levres les delicieuses larmes que je faisois couler.”

Kavanagh notes that Rousseau habitually moves from mother toward the father and the “provocation of judgment” (1). However, his analysis of Rousseau focuses on the male symbolic as an interference to union with the feminine imaginary, rather than, as mine does, on the reverse. See Kavanagh, 40–41.