

TEACHING  
**CONFESSIONS  
IN WISCONSIN**

# Teaching Rousseau's *Confessions* in Wisconsin: A Guide for Educators

2014-2015 Great World Texts Program  
of the Center for the Humanities



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## How to Use this Guide

### Reading Across Time and Space

Rousseau's *Confessions* is an autobiography. Autobiographies are hybrid genres. On the one hand, they are historical documents: Rousseau did exist, as did the people whom we meet, through him, as we read this text. On the other hand, autobiographies are also works of fiction, in that they represent certain versions of events, while excluding other versions of the same event, represent certain selves while excluding others, and so forth. While the historical and sociocultural contexts of the *Confessions* were and are integral to its impact and to our own critical reflections, it is important to make clear to students that the *Confessions* does not consist of historical facts, artfully represented. In addition, while literature can help us teach culture, history, politics and so forth, no one text can bear the burden of representing an entire nation, culture, or people. As you teach this work of autobiography, please keep in mind and emphasize where you can the cultural and historical specificities that make this book unique. Doing so in a clear and explicit way will also help you and your students appreciate the text's ability to speak across time and space.

### How to Use this Guide

The material in this guide is intended to provide all you will need to teach Rousseau's *Confessions* and its many contexts. We believe that the historical and cultural background is necessary for understanding this work, the characters presented therein, and their decisions, but we encourage you to teach the text thematically as well, tying it into other disciplinary issues and regular features of your core curriculum wherever possible.

*Readings, reviews and handouts:* The readings in the guide are intended for teachers, but many should also be accessible to students. These include readings that provide further background information for instructors as well as a variety of materials that might aid instructors in creating handouts. You are encouraged, where possible, to use the materials in this guide as handouts for your students, and to adapt the handouts available for student use. All materials are available electronically at the Great World Text website: <http://humanities.wisc.edu/public-projects/gwt/the-confessions-in-wisconsin-2014-2015/teaching-resources3/>

*Preparatory Reading* indicates readings and resources essential for the Unit under consideration. *Additional Readings and Resources* indicates recommended readings and resources that *may* be of interest should a particular topic intrigue you or your students or seem particularly interesting in terms of how *you* are trying to teach the text. The latter is often substantially longer than the former; please don't be overwhelmed by this. All you really need are the sources listed under *Preparatory Reading*.

*Lesson plans and suggestions for discussion:* The lesson plans and activities provided in this guide are designed to allow you the opportunity to tailor the way you teach the text to your own course, time constraints, interests, and goals. The individual units could be taught over one or several days or over the course of a few weeks, and you can mix and match ideas from the various sections to create your own syllabus. Each section includes a theme, followed by a set of discussion questions, suggestions for close reading, and specific quotes from the text or other readings that might be used to further discussion. Each section also includes suggested preparatory readings and a list of additional recommended resources.

## Close Reading Strategies

The guide assumes that you will have read the entire text, but all units also offer suggestions for specific passages within the text that would benefit from careful and attentive reading, analysis and discussion; these will be areas in the text from which the major ideas and themes of that unit are drawn. During discussion and for assignments, students should be encouraged to support their interpretations with evidence from the text. Close reading lends itself well to both group work and small-group discussions, and is an excellent way for students to develop their critical thinking skills as they make connections, use evidence to support their views, and discuss the impact of various literary techniques. For close reading to work successfully, it's important that the teacher always remind the students to point to the passage, line, or occurrence that supports their position when they're sharing their ideas. Close reading teaches students the difference between "opinion" or "personal reaction" and "analysis." It also helps teach students to assess the texts on its own merits, and avoid essentializing the cultural components of the text or stereotyping based on generalizations.

Reading a portion of text out loud as a class or small group, followed by discussion, can be an excellent way to develop close reading skills in the classroom. The guide includes a [handout on close reading](#) that we encourage you to use in your classes.

## Teaching Toward the Student Conference

Your students will come to Madison in the spring of 2015 to present their work to their peers, listen to lectures from experts on the text, and workshop with faculty, graduate students and undergraduates from UW-Madison. At the conference, they will have the opportunity to meet and listen to a scholar, writer, activist or other expert on Rousseau's *Confessions* (TBA). Unit 8 in this guide is explicitly devoted to preparing students for this visit and for the student conference. Prepare them for a successful conference by encouraging them to challenge themselves with projects that provide critical interpretations of the text in unique and complex ways. There is no limit to the type of project they might prepare. Past projects have included essays, painting, sculpture, weaving, culinary projects, photography, film and other multimedia, dramatic performances, song, dance, and more. The only requirement is that the students' projects must present a critical analysis of the text. Students will be required to write a short summary of their projects, which will be due to Devin Garofalo ([greattexts@humanities.wisc.edu](mailto:greattexts@humanities.wisc.edu)) one month before the student conference.

Each school will select one student, or group of students, whose work is exemplary, to present at the **plenary session** on stage. It's recommended that the students themselves select (by voting) the "best" project for this presentation, which will be about 5 minutes in length. It is our expectation that these presentations will be polished, rehearsed and timed, and that they will provide an opportunity for your school to feel pride and investment in its participation in the program. *All other students* are expected to present their work in poster sessions during the conference, and will have the opportunity to stand next to their projects and answer questions about them from other students and conference participants. Every student who attends the conference should present his/her work at the conference.

## TEACHING ROUSSEAU'S *CONFESSIONS* – A FEW INITIAL NOTES

This section includes advice and information particular to teaching the *Confessions*. Teachers should rest assured that it is entirely possible to teach only Book I, for instance, or only Books I-II, or any variation thereof. Each Book *can* stand alone, as long as some connecting explanations are provided to students.

### *Teaching Books I-VI (Part I)*

The Oxford World's Classics edition that Great World Texts has selected for 2014-2015 includes both Part I (Books I-VI) and Part II (Books VII-XII) of the *Confessions*. Many teachers, however, including many college teachers at UW-Madison, teach only Part I; indeed, many French editions of the *Confessions* only include Part I of the text.

There are many good reasons for choosing only to teach Part I. Part I is generally agreed to possess the greatest literary merit; for reasons having much to do with the conditions during which Rousseau composed the *Confessions*, he remembers and is able to recreate the tastes, sounds and intense feelings of his childhood and youth, and reflect on them and on himself as a child and adolescent, with greater perspicacity and affectionate distance, than he is able to offer to his later self and to the people who surround him once he leaves "Maman" for Paris and philosophy at the end of Book VI. Part I is also more tightly constructed, with a stronger sense of plot and development, and is therefore arguably easier to read, than many parts of Part II. Part II meanders – and, perhaps least appealingly, is frequently pervaded by the paranoia that would distort Rousseau's thinking in his later years. (As Eagleton notes, Rousseau was that most dangerous of paranoiacs: he actually *was* persecuted).

### *What you learn in Part II*

However, there are drawbacks to only focusing on Part I: we miss Rousseau trying to justify why he abandoned his children (one of his crucial and most peculiar "confessions"); we miss his meeting Diderot, d'Alembert and Condillac; we miss his "revelation" on the road to Vincennes, which generated his first philosophical *Discourse*; we miss his awkward and irritated attempts (to judge by his own account) to navigate the Parisian social scene; we miss his time in Venice and his descriptions of the "voluptuous" wonders of Italian music. We miss his flight from France after the publication of *Émile* and the *Social Contract* and his decision to take up ribbon-making and the wearing of Armenian dress, much to the horror of the villagers with whom he lived in exile. We get little sense, in other words, of how and why and when the feckless, uneducated, dreamy thief and overall do-nothing we meet in Part I becomes Rousseau, writer, philosopher and "prophet of the Revolution."

### *What you don't learn in Part II*

That said, Part II of the *Confessions* is *not* a good guide to the revolution of ideas and exchange of thought, wit and gossip that constituted the life of the Parisian *salons*, coffeehouses, theaters and

operas during the Enlightenment. Yes, Rousseau meets Diderot and d'Alembert and attends the salons of Mme. Dupin and Mme. d'Epinay and the Baron d'Holbach; he writes operas, plays, a novel and works of philosophy. But in his representation of this time in the *Confessions*, Rousseau is throughout far too preoccupied *with* Rousseau to really convey what it was like, say, to be in Paris during this vibrant intellectual moment. For that, one must turn to other sources. Rousseau may have been a remarkably astute observer of others in the abstract, but he was not so in the particulars, at least if we judge by Part II of the *Confessions*.

### *Suggestions*

My own recommendation would be, if you have the time, to teach Books I-VI, and then select excerpts from Books VII-Books XII; thereby you get the best of both worlds. You will also encounter frequent suggestions throughout the Guide on how to incorporate excerpts from Rousseau's philosophical work into your curriculum. If you do not have the time to even teach Books I-VI, some of the most significant moments in the *Confessions* occur in Books I and II: Rousseau's childhood, initial experiences of injustice, his departure from Geneva, and his betrayal of Marion. If you only teach these two Books, you will have given your students a strong flavor of the *Confessions* as a whole.

### *Sex*

It is difficult to teach the *Confessions* – particularly Part I – without also teaching and talking about sexuality. Arguably, it is also useful for students to know, for instance, that homosexuality is not a 21<sup>st</sup> century invention, or that people who lived hundreds of years ago had sexual appetites and desires that were no more “normative” than ours are today. That said, no one should be dissuaded from teaching the *Confessions* because of its frequent references to sex or desire. This may be where the fact that the text is an autobiography is helpful: you can teach Book I, for instance, simply by skipping over Rousseau's description of enjoying being spanked by Mlle. Lamercier and his analysis of why he enjoyed it: doing so still leaves you with plenty of material to read, discuss and analyze with your students, such as the incident with the comb and Rousseau's unhappy apprenticeship. Because the incident with Mlle. Lamercier is not a *plot* point, it can be skipped over without undue damage to our insight into the text – even if it does leave us with somewhat less insight into Rousseau.

## UNIT 1: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

**Objective:** To introduce students to Rousseau, the *Confessions* and the eighteenth century.

This Unit aims to introduce readers to Rousseau, the *Confessions*, and the eighteenth century world that produced them both. Why read Rousseau? Why read the autobiography of an eighteenth century Genevan philosopher? Why does the past matter? How can we attempt to understand and describe it, without ending up erasing what makes it different?

### Handouts:

- Society and Government in Eighteenth Century Geneva and Savoy
- Key Excerpts from Rousseau's Philosophical Work
- The *Confessions* in Translation

### Preparatory Reading and Listening:

- Patrick Coleman, "Introduction." Rousseau's *Confessions*. (Available in our Oxford World's Classics edition of the *Confessions*). Coleman is an authority on Rousseau, and the introduction is intended for a general audience and accessible to students. An informative and useful beginning.
- Leo Damrosch, "Chapter 12: Beginnings of Fame" and "Chapter 21: In a Strange Land." *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Restless Genius*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.  
Very good, lively, readable, even funny account of R's life. Definitely indebted to Maurice Cranston (among others), but compresses Rousseau's life into one rather than three volumes. The entire biography is a fun and useful read for anyone planning on teaching Rousseau; the excerpts are those thought most pertinent to teaching the *Confessions*.

### Films

Many movies have been set in the eighteenth century; these are merely two recommendations suggested to help get your students interested in the period and in Rousseau's critique of it. For additional recommendations, see "Teaching the Eighteenth Century through Film, Music and Art," as well as suggestions within individual units, especially Units 4, 6, and 7. See also discussion questions.

- Dir. Patrice Leconte. *Ridicule*. 1998. In French, with subtitles.  
Plain-spoken country nobleman arrives at Versailles to try to convince the king to save his village. Comedy/satire. Some nudity and sex.
- *John Adams*. Part III. HBO. 2008.  
Starring Paul Giamatti as John Adams, Laura Linney as Abigail Adams, Tom Wilkinson as Ben Franklin. Part III contains a humorous, if somewhat historically inaccurate, depiction of Adams and Franklin in Versailles, seeking French support for the Revolution, with varying degrees of success. Could be shown successfully in excerpts.



## Additional Resources

### Rousseau

- New York Public Library, *Occupy Rousseau: Inequality and Social Justice*. March 10, 2012. (Audio and video). <http://www.nypl.org/events/programs/2012/03/09/occupy-rousseau-inequality-and-social-justice>  
Interesting, if messy attempt to combine Rousseau scholars (Gourevitch) with politicians (Spitzer), intellectuals (Khalil Gibran Muhammed, Benjamin Barber) and activists (*Occupy Wall Street* organizer Amin Hussein) around the question, "What would Jean-Jacques Rousseau say about our democracies if he were among us today?"
- Terry Eagleton, "What would Rousseau make of our selfish age?" *The Guardian*. 27 June 2012. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jun/27/rousseau-our-selfish-age-philosopher> Short, accessible, good if basic intro. Eagleton is an eminent literary scholar and critic.
- Theo Hobson. "Jean-Jacques Rousseau: As Relevant as Ever – Part 1." *The Guardian*. 20 January 2014. First part of a four-part series about Rousseau's relevance as a thinker for our own present; Parts II-IV are easily accessible from there if you choose to continue reading. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2014/jan/20/rousseau-compassionate-intense-relevant-philosopher>
- Bertram, Christopher. "Jean-Jacques Rousseau." *Stanford Online Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 2010. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rousseau/>  
Excellent, concise entry with a focus on Rousseau's political philosophy.
- Rousseau Association <http://www.rousseauassociation.org/>  
Site maintained by the Rousseau Association/Association Rousseau, formerly the North American Society for Rousseau Studies. Numerous links to all things Rousseau, of interest to both academics and general readers. In French and English.
- Takuya Kobayashi. "Chronologie de Rousseau." <http://www.rousseau-chronologie.com/index.html> In French.  
Photo-album of every place across Europe that Rousseau visited or lived, even for short periods of time, compiled by Takuya Kobayashi. Gives a strong sense of Rousseau as a traveler. 1,000 pictures. In French, but possible to navigate even without the language.
- Maurice Cranston, *Jean-Jacques: The Early Life and Work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1712-1754*. Norton, 1983.  
*The Noble Savage: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1754-1762*. Chicago UP, 1991.  
*The Solitary Self: Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Exile and Adversity*. Chicago UP, 1997.  
Classic by eminent scholar. Excellent and highly readable. (But long).

### The Eighteenth Century

- *Historical Text Archive: France*.  
<http://historicaltextarchive.com/links.php?action=links&cid=9&sid=40>  
Compiled by Don Mabry; great site, provides links to a vast array of useful online sites and material devoted to French history, politics and culture, most available in English.
- *Eighteenth Century Sources*. <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/18th/index.html>

Website maintained by Jack Lynch of Rutgers. Great place to start for links to all things eighteenth century: history, literature, philosophy, art. Predominant focus is on British history and literature, but there are plenty of excellent references for French and general European history and literature as well.

- *The Encyclopedia of Diderot and d'Alembert: A Collaborative Translation Project*. Ed. Dena Goodman. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/did/>  
Online, searchable access to the famous *Encyclopédie* edited by *philosophes* Diderot and d'Alembert from 1751-1777, and including entries by Rousseau. Subjects ranges from asparagus to giraffes to "the white of the eye," and "the Philosophy of Canadians."  
Includes link to "Teaching Resources" that may be of particular interest.
- *18<sup>th</sup> century everyday life*. <http://www.pinterest.com/lucindabrant/18th-century-everyday-life/>  
Pinterest collection of 18thc artistic depictions (paintings, engravings, ceramics) and objects (deeds, snuff-boxes, a mouse-trap) that collectively paint a portrait in objects of everyday life in eighteenth century France, England and elsewhere in Europe.

### Map of Europe

- *Images of Early Maps on the Web: Continental Europe*.  
<http://www.maphistory.info/imageeurcont.html>
- *Interactive Map of Eighteenth Century Europe*.  
[http://www.worldology.com/Europe/europe\\_history\\_lg.htm](http://www.worldology.com/Europe/europe_history_lg.htm)

### France

- David A. Bell, "Culture and Religion." *Old Regime France, 1648-1788*. Short Oxford History of France. Ed. William Doyle. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. 78-99.
- Gail Ossenga, "Society." *Old Regime France, 1648-1788*. Short Oxford History of France. Ed. William Doyle. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. 78-99.
- *France: The Official Website of France*. <http://www.france.fr/en.html>
- *Versailles*. <http://en.chateauversailles.fr/homepage>

### Paris

- Louis-Sébastien Mercier. "Excerpts" from *Panorama of Paris: Selections from Le Tableau de Paris*. Trans. Helen Simpson and Jeremy D. Popkin. Ed. Jeremy D. Popkin. Penn State UP, 1999.  
From one of the most astute observers of Parisian life.
- "Paris: A City Divided." [https://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwartz/hist255-s01/mapping-paris/City\\_Divided.html](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwartz/hist255-s01/mapping-paris/City_Divided.html) Maps and explanations of political divisions in Paris in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This page, from a well-researched site set up by students at Mt Holyoke, provides links to additional pages, frequently illustrated, on such everyday Parisian matters as "pavement," "sanitation," "housing," "cultural Paris," "streets of Paris," and so forth. The site is mostly focused on 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris, but it contains frequent references to and information about 18<sup>th</sup> century Paris as well. If you refer students to this site, however, do stress that the centuries are *not* the same thing!
- "Paris: Life and Luxury." [http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/paris\\_lifeluxury/](http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/paris_lifeluxury/) J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA. March, 2011.  
Link to slideshow from 2011 J. Paul Getty Museum exhibit on the Paris of the rich and powerful. Also contains curated blogs on watches, the 18thc toilette, elaborate cuisine and the workings of a mechanical table.

[http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/paris\\_lifeluxury/slideshow.html](http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/paris_lifeluxury/slideshow.html)

This slideshow, also part of the Getty Museum exhibit, tells a story in objects (paintings, porcelain, tables) of the elaborate semi-public process of getting dressed in the morning in an elite Parisian household.

- David Garrioch. "The Poor You Have with You Always." *Making of Revolutionary Paris*. UC Press, 1994. Poverty in eighteenth century Paris.
- Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment*. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Harvard UP, 2000.  
An excellent history of its subject, but a difficult book to excerpt. If you want to know more about France in the period, it's a great place to start.

#### *Food, Dress and the Fork Revolution*

- Peter McNeil, "Appearance of Enlightenment." *The Enlightenment World*. Eds. Martin Fitzpatrick, Ian Calman, Knellwolf, et al. Routledge, 2004. What people wore and why.
- *Eighteenth Century Fashion*. Victoria and Albert Museum. <http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/0-9/18th-century-fashion/> Focus on Britain but useful for France and elsewhere. Interactive site.
- Jean-Louis Flandrin, "Distinction through Taste." *A History of Private Life, Vol III*. Ed. Roger Chartier. Bellknap, 1993. What the seventeenth century invention of forks did for culinary history.
- Susan Pinkard, "Simplicity and Authenticity," and "Recipes from the Early Modern French Kitchen." *A Revolution in Taste: The Rise of French Cuisine from 1650-1800*. Cambridge UP, 2010. Note: There are *many* histories of French cuisine; this is only one. Selected for its references to Rousseau, whose influence is felt even here.

#### Discussion Questions

##### *Why read literature? Why read autobiography?*

- Why read literature? What does it offer that other mediums do not? For instance, can we imagine literature as casting well-known events in a new light, as suggesting alternate visions of history, or as shedding light on how individuals (might have) felt about different events?
- Why read autobiography? Ask your students how they would define the experience or knowledge gained from reading autobiography. How does autobiography differ from other genres – fiction, history, poetry, a mathematical formula? In what does its value lie? How much of autobiography is factual and how much is fictional? Note: See the handout, "What is Autobiography?" and Unit 2, for more on this topic.

##### *Why read literature from another part of the world? Why read literature in translation? Why read literature written hundreds of years ago?*

- Why read literature from another part of the world?
- Ask students if they can think of any works of American literature that might have resonance in the rest of the world, and why? What might people who've never been to the US learn from such literature? What might they *not* learn?
- Introduce/discuss the close reading and critical thinking skills that students will be practicing, using the "What is Close Reading" handout.

*What do students know about Geneva and France? What do they know about the eighteenth century?*

- Ask students what comes to mind when they hear the word “Paris,” or “France.” Discuss. Ask them what comes to mind when they hear “Geneva” or “Switzerland.”
- What do students think Parisians or the French thinking when they think of Americans? Consider mapping the varying cultural stereotypes. Where do they come from?
- Watch a short clip from *John Adams*, Part III, with Adams and Ben Franklin at Versailles. How is Adams represented, in contrast with the French aristocracy? Who does the French aristocracy seem to think that John Adams is? Who do the *show’s creators* seem to think that the French King and Queen and the Versailles aristocracy *were*? How much of the intensified cultural stereotypes that we witness in this scene – of Adams as the plain-speaking, simple, brusque yet virtuous American at the decadent, sex-addled French court – have persisted to this day when Americans think of contemporary France vs. the contemporary US, or even of French-US relations? Note that historians have critiqued the HBO show’s portrait of Adams as wholly lacking in diplomatic skill. Why might the filmmakers have wanted to do so? What does the contrast reveal that’s ironic or dramatically interesting? What’s problematic – if anything – about altering history, however slightly, in TV or film adaptations of historical events? Explain Rousseau’s biography and *his* critique – as a self-professed proud, republican, plain-speaking and simplicity-loving “citizen of Geneva,” of French society (well, of society in general, but certainly of elite French society in particular.)
- Using GoogleEarth (or some other software/hardcopy), map out Rousseau’s travels in the *Confessions* to help orient your students. Start with Geneva (where Rousseau was born; then an independent city-state, now a part of Switzerland – Book I), move on to Annecy and Chambéry (where Rousseau ends up spending much of his adolescence; then a part of the Duchy of Savoy, now a part of France – Book II-Book VI), Turin (where Rousseau converts to Catholicism and briefly works as a servant and secretary; then a part of Savoy, now a part of Italy – Book II), Venice (where he falls in love with Italian opera and awkwardly visits prostitutes; then its own city-state, now a part of Italy – Book VII), to Paris and France, where he becomes a philosopher (Book VII-XI). Have students map out the geography of Rousseau’s travels; tell/show them what that map would have looked like in the eighteenth century.

### **Suggestions for Close Reading**

- *Confessions* is a complicated text. To get started, consider reading, carefully analyzing and discussing *only* the first sentence of the *Confessions* with your students. Consider comparing it to other famous first sentences students may be familiar with, such as “Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams to find himself transformed into a gigantic insect,” from Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*. Consider: What is the *work* of a first sentence? What does it do? How might a first sentence anticipate the rest of the text? What do we learn from it?
- As a variation, ask students to paraphrase, or re-write, the first sentence of the *Confessions* in their own words, trying to arrive at as many variations as they can. Discuss as a class or small group, then return to the sentence Rousseau wrote. Why did he write this sentence in *this*

particular way, rather than any other? (If this seems like too much attention to one sentence, work with the first three paragraphs.)

- Alternately, use both the first sentence of the *Confessions* and another famous first sentence Rousseau also wrote, such as “Man is born free, but is everywhere in chains,” from the *Social Contract*.
- What changes in our interpretations, if anything, when we remember that the *Confessions* is a text in translation? Here, consider sharing the different English-language translations of an excerpt from the *Confessions* made available on the website. What do your students notice?
- Ask your students what comes to mind when they think of the word “confession.” What does it evoke? Crime shows on TV? Redemption? The Catholic confessional booth? What does the fact that Rousseau’s *Confessions* ostensibly consists of the *author’s* “confessions” suggest about the work they’re about to read? (If you have French-speaking students, you can ask if the word has different connotations in French; multi-lingual students in your classroom might wish to contribute as well.)

To expand this discussion, consider looking at the website *PostSecret* (people send in anonymous postcards “confessing” their secrets). What do people seem to conceive of as “confessions?” What is secret, shameful, or hidden? Compare these secret, anonymous confessions to the posts, “likes,” etc., that populate most social media sites. What’s the difference? What might account for that difference? What does that difference tell us about secrecy, self-construction, about how much of ourselves we really *do* put online? Where might Rousseau’s *Confessions* fit in, and what does that tell us about Rousseau’s purpose in publishing the *Confessions*? \*Note: Some of the posts on PostSecret are highly graphic.

- Read the first page of Rousseau’s *Confessions* out loud with your students. What reactions do they have? What do they make of his tone – aggressive, challenging, extravagant, narcissistic, and even funny (depending on your sense of humor). What do these opening statements tell us about what R claims he wants to do in the *Confessions*? What kind of relationship does R seem to want to establish with his readers, to judge from his opening statements?

### Assignment, Activity and Project Ideas

- Ask your students to keep a **reflection journal** in which they respond to the text and material covered in class. You might ask them to write 1-2 pages of personal response to the text, find points of identification, or highlight confusing or problematic passages. Or you could use the discussion questions in these lesson plans to create your own **guided journal** – a hand-out of prompts to which you require students to respond when reading the novel. This could be an ongoing project, a group activity, or an in-class writing assignment at the end of each class period.
- Choose a scene from Book I, divide students into groups, and then ask each group to choose a particular line, and as a group then interpret and recreate the line in still scene (courtesy of Doris Sommer). Each group of students will then perform their scene, while the rest of the class guesses which line they’re enacting. An excellent way of getting students to read closely and attentively while still having fun.
- Send your students out to record the sounds of their street(s) or of their living room or bedroom. Listen to the sounds they collected as a class; discuss what *kinds* of sounds they



heard. What is the “soundscape” of our 21<sup>st</sup> century lives? Then ask students to listen to this 2009 *To the Best of Our Knowledge* interview with historian Richard Rath about the sounds of America in 1776: <http://www.ttbook.org/book/richard-rath-how-early-america-sounded> What differences are there between then and now? What similarities, if any? What might this tell us about historical *distance*?

- Many movies have been made about Marie Antoinette; choose two of them – perhaps Sofia Coppola’s *Marie Antoinette* and Jacquot’s *Farewell, My Queen*, both made in the 2000s; or the 1938 *Marie Antoinette* compared to Coppola’s or Jacquot’s. What different representations of the queen and/or of the eighteenth century emerge in either cinematic portrait? What might this suggest about how a particular moment in time determines historical interpretation? In other words, do we see the past only as a reflection of ourselves? The 1938 *Marie Antoinette*, for instance, is rather different from either Jacquot’s or Coppola’s; then again, Jacquot’s is also different from Coppola’s.
- As a class, read about meals and eating habits in France in the eighteenth century (Pinkard and Flandrin), the age “when the world spoke French” and what we now know as French cuisine was born. Choose and prepare a meal, as a class, based on one of the “Early Modern Recipes” that Pinkard provides. Suggest students write a short narrative afterwards, reflecting on the experience.

## UNIT 2: READERS, WRITERS AND CONTRADICTION SELVES – AUTOBIOGRAPHY, 1770-2014

**Objective:** To explore the *Confessions* as autobiography, in addition to providing background resources on print culture in eighteenth century Europe.

If the *Discourse of Inequality* was written in response to the question, “what is the origin of inequality among men,” the *Confessions* was written so Rousseau could resolve the troubling question of his own origins, development and identity as he brooded in cold and paranoiac exile amid rain and Yorkshire pudding in England. It is the question all autobiography seeks to resolve: who am I, and how did I become *this* particular person, rather than any other?

In seeking to answer this question, autobiography raises numerous questions regarding identity, truth, knowledge, memory and history; indeed, some critics claim that Rousseau inaugurates modern autobiography precisely because he explores these questions *as* questions rather than as predetermined truths. This Unit explores Rousseau’s *Confessions* with a focus on genre and the questions the genre of autobiography raises, while also providing historical background information on authorship and the reading public in eighteenth century Europe. Assignment and project ideas, meanwhile, ask students, among other things, how our own virtual, networked world changes how we construct our own identities and how we experience time and remember history. What might the *Confessions* have looked like if it was written today?

### Handouts:

- What is Autobiography?
- Group and Classroom Activities (from Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*)

### Preparatory Reading:

- Rousseau, “Preface to the Neuchâtel Edition of the *Confessions*” (Available in the Appendix). Essential additional reading, accessible to students.
- Rousseau, “Fourth Walk.” From *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*.  
Fourth chapter, fourth walk of R’s last autobiographical work; here Rousseau returns to the *Confessions* and wonders whether he did, in fact, tell the truth.

### Historical Background: Authorship and the Reading Public in the Eighteenth Century

- Carla Hesse, “Print Culture in the Enlightenment.” *The Enlightenment World*. Eds. Martin Fitzpatrick, Christa Knellwolf, Peter Jones and Iain McCalman. New York and London: Routledge, 2004. 366-380.  
Good, general introduction to pre-Enlightenment and Enlightenment print culture. Importantly situates Rousseau’s self-examination and authorship in the *Confessions* within broader cultural shifts.
- Ourida Mostefai. “The Author as Celebrity and Outcast: Authorship and Autobiography in Rousseau’s *Confessions*.” *Approaches to Teaching Rousseau’s Confessions and Reveries of a Solitary Walker*. MLA, 2003.

- Short, illuminating essay on Rousseau as author and celebrity and the effect of these personas on the writing of the *Confessions*. Briefly discusses the history of authorship in the mid-late 18<sup>th</sup> century as well. In its brevity and clarity, accessible to students.
- Robert Darnton, “Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity.” *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*. 1984. Rpr. 2009.  
Fascinating account of how one prosperous bourgeois provincial read and responded to Rousseau – or “l’ami Jean-Jacques,” as he called him – and the broader historical implications of this. Classic essay, clearly and concisely written, crucial for understanding authorship in the eighteenth century, Rousseau’s impact on his readers and his autobiographical project in the *Confessions*, even if Darnton mostly focuses on *Julie*.

### Additional Readings and Resources

- Michel Foucault, “Confession.” Brief excerpt from *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Vol. 1. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1990. 57-62.  
Illuminating analysis of confession, sexuality and the production of truth and power by one of the most influential philosophers of the latter half of the twentieth century. Accessible to advanced, engaged students who enjoy a challenge.
- Philippe Lejeune. “Rousseau and the Autobiographical Revolution.” Video Lecture. 2011 International Auto/Biography Association Conference, May 18-20, 2011. Tallinn University, Estonia. In English. <http://vimeo.com/24003895>  
Lecture by one of the preeminent authorities on life-writing and Rousseau’s contribution to the genre. Not exactly action-packed, it may not be accessible to students; it is, however, illuminating and helpful, as little of Lejeune’s written work on Rousseau is available in English.
- Jean Starobinski, “The Problem of Autobiography.” *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction*. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1988.  
Starobinski is one of Rousseau’s great readers, and *Transparency and Obstruction* his masterpiece; he is especially good on Rousseau’s paradoxes. The arguments he puts forth have, of course, been criticized, and should not be taken as gospel truth.
- *Six-Word Memoir* <http://www.sixwordmemoirs.com/>
- Bill Moyers, “Interview with Sherry Turkle: On Being Alone Together.” Oct 18, 2013. <http://billmoyers.com/segment/sherry-turkle-on-being-alone-together/>

### Discussion Questions and Suggestions for Close Reading

- Ask your students what comes to mind when they think of the word “confession.” What does it evoke? Crime shows on TV? Redemption? The Catholic confessional booth? What does the fact that Rousseau’s *Confessions* ostensibly consists of the *author’s* “confessions” suggest about the work they’re about to read? (If you have French-speaking students, you can ask if the word has different connotations in French; multi-lingual students in your classroom might wish to contribute as well.)

To expand this discussion, consider looking at the website *PostSecret* (people send in anonymous postcards “confessing” their secrets). What do people seem to conceive of as “confessions?” What is secret, shameful, or hidden? Compare these secret, anonymous confessions to the posts, “likes,” etc., that populate most social media sites. What’s the difference? What might account for that difference? What does that difference tell us about

secrecy, self-construction, about how much of ourselves we really *do* put online? Where might Rousseau's *Confessions* fit in, and what does that tell us about Rousseau's purpose in publishing the *Confessions*?

\*Note: Some of the posts on PostSecret are highly graphic.

- Read the first page of Rousseau's *Confessions* out loud with your students. What reactions do they have? What do they make of his tone – aggressive, challenging, extravagant, narcissistic, and even funny (depending on your sense of humor). What do these opening statements tell us about what R claims he wants to do in the *Confessions*? What kind of relationship does R seem to want to establish with his readers, to judge from his opening statements?

"What motivates Rousseau [in writing and publishing *Confessions*] is the wish not merely to publish his story but to alter his public perception – to correct the distorted picture that his enemies have circulated about him. The *Confessions* is Rousseau's attempt to reshape the reception of his work that has been based on a misrepresentation of the author. Addressed to the public – both present and future – the *Confessions* thus seeks to substitute one image of the celebrated author with another...Rousseau draws a sharp contrast between the falsity of the public image and the truth of the private one. Writing about himself will allow him to undo the damage caused by fame; for fame has produced a distorted image, a lie that conceals the author's true self."

- Mostefai, "Author as Celebrity and Outcast," 69

### *Sapere Aude – Dare to Know!*

- Carefully read the "Preface" that accompanied the Neuchâtel edition of the *Confessions* with your students (or at least read the first two pages). Rousseau begins by noting, "I have often noticed that even among those who most pride themselves on their knowledge of mankind, each of them knows scarcely anything apart from himself, if indeed it is true that any of them knows even himself; for how can a human being be defined through those aspects alone that are in him, and without his being compared with anything else? And yet this imperfect knowledge that we have of ourselves is the sole means we employ in getting to know others. We make ourselves the measure of everything..." (643) Discuss with your students whether Rousseau is correct here. Do we judge everyone else based on ourselves? Why or why not might this be the case? What kinds of limitations to knowledge – of ourselves, of others, of the world around us – does this suggest?
- Rousseau goes on to clearly define his project in the *Confessions*: "I have decided to encourage my readers into taking a further step in their knowledge of men, by persuading them to abandon, if this is possible, that single and fallible rule whereby we judge the hearts of others according to our own, whereas on the contrary one ought often, in order to know even one's own, to begin by studying other people's. I should like each person, in order that he might learn to judge himself correctly, to have at least one point of comparison; that he should know himself and one other person, and that other person will be me."

Discuss Rousseau's claims with your students here. Ask students how *they* would define the knowledge gained from reading autobiography. What kind of knowledge, or truth, does autobiography contain? How is it different from other kinds of knowledge, gained from other kinds of texts – fiction, history, a scientific proof or mathematical formula? In what does its value lie? What are its limitations? (The handout, "What is Autobiography?" should be helpful

here.) Consider Rousseau's claim, also in the Preface, that "what I am writing is not so much the history of...events in themselves as that of *my state of mind* while they were happening," 644)

- Rousseau's tone in the Neuchâtel "Preface" is markedly different from the one found on the first page of the *Confessions* itself. Which introduction to Rousseau's project do students prefer? How does Rousseau's explanation of his autobiographical project in the Neuchâtel Preface differ from the explanation in the first page of the *Confessions*?
- "In writing," Rousseau claims, autobiographical authors "disguise" their inner mode of being: "under the cover of his life's story, he [the author] offers an apology; he presents himself as he wants to be seen, not as he is." (He presents this, of course, in contrast with his own project, in which he will present "all...the aberrations of his heart" to his readers, p. 58). Ask students to consider autobiographical acts *they* engage in, for instance through social media, such as posting pictures of themselves or what they've done on Facebook. *What selves are they presenting?* Are they presenting themselves *as they are* or as they wish to be seen?
- On p. 270, Rousseau declares, "The particular object of my confessions is to make known my inner self, exactly as it was in every circumstance of my life. It is the history of my soul..."

Yet throughout the *Confessions* we get the distinct impression that the self is fluid, multiple, performative – even fake. Not only does Rousseau himself occupy a multitude of roles throughout his life – from watchmaker's son to engraver's apprentice, Calvinist to Catholic, servant to secretary to philosopher, son to lover of the same woman, citizen to exile – but on two occasions he also deliberately assumes alternate identities: on p. 142-3, he sets himself up as a singing-master from Paris ("I Venturized myself," p. 142), without knowing anything about music; on p. 244, he passes himself off as a Mr. Dudding, an Englishman. What do these "Venturized" selves tell us about Rousseau's representation of identity in the *Confessions*? What does the idea of an acted, performed, performing self suggest about the idea Rousseau presents in his Preface, that through observation of others we learn about ourselves?

### *Crime, Confession – Redemption?*

- On p. 17, Rousseau tells us, "I have taken the first step, and the most painful, into the dark and miry labyrinth of my confessions." *What* has he just confessed to, exactly? How does he see its connection to his own development as an individual? (p. 16-17) Perhaps most importantly, why is *this* incident, among many others that he could have chosen, the one Rousseau calls the "first" of his confessions? \*Note: For those of you trying to avoid the sexual scenes in the *Confessions*, note that the incident referred to is Mlle. Lambercier spanking the child J-J. Rousseau.

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement...**a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship**, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console and reconcile...[Confession is] a ritual in which the expression alone...produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation...

- Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 61



- Share Foucault's observations with your students about confession as "a ritual that unfolds in a power relationship." Discuss what this suggests about the act of confession in our own society – in the justice system, in religious institutions, at the doctor's office, the therapist's office, on reality TV-shows, Facebook, talk shows, tabloids. What are the power relations in each of these instances? *Who* holds the power? Why is confessing one's guilt, one's sins, even one's "bad" thoughts, so important in each of these ostensibly very different instances? Consider the emphasis placed on the act and sheer drama of confession in crime shows (*The Closer*, *True Detective*), or the plea deal an alleged defendant will enter when his lawyer believes he cannot win the case: he confesses – pleads guilty – and receives a sentence less severe than the one he might have received had his case proceeded; he exchanges his confession of guilt for a more lenient sentence. Why is this? Why place so much *moral* emphasis on the mere act of confession?
- Now, carefully read first the scene with the comb (p. 18-20) with your students, where Rousseau, still in Bossey, is falsely accused of having broken a comb and refuses to confess to a "crime" he had not committed ("They could not extract from me the confession they demanded," p. 18), and is thereafter beaten ("disciplined") several times (none of them, on these occasions, pleasurable). Then read Rousseau's theft of the ribbon at Mme de Vercellis's house and his accusation of the girl Marion (Book II, p. 83-5). What similarities are there between these two instances? What do the adults in both cases place the greatest emphasis on? What does this tell us about the world Rousseau grows up in? How does Rousseau's analysis of his own behavior in the first instance (with the comb) differ from his analysis of his behavior in the second (with the ribbon)?
- How does Rousseau describe his own behavior during the theft and accusation of Marion? How does he describe Marion herself? What effect does his choice of words have on how we interpret the scene – and consequently, Rousseau? What kind of "self" does the scene reveal? How convincing is Rousseau's analysis of his own behavior?
- What role does *shame* play here, according to Rousseau? What does that shame suggest of a scene so utterly tangled up in questions of confused sexual desire, secrecy, appearances, and fear of what "others" would think?

\*Note: It would be interesting and productive to read this scene in conjunction with Rousseau's analysis of how inequality, violence, jealousy, etc., arise in society in effect because people start to compare themselves to each other, concern themselves with how they are thought of and therefore ranked in the social and emotional hierarchies of society – that is, because they become aware of a "public." See *Discourse of Inequality*, *Émile*, "Key Excerpts," etc.

- The accusation of Marion is an ugly, petty incident that most likely had terrible consequences for Marion (this should be impressed on students if they don't grasp it from reading of the event themselves), and Rousseau claims it has haunted him ever since. It is easy to read it and dismiss him as a horrible human being. And yet we only know it happened *because* Rousseau tells us about it, or to put this slightly differently: we only know Rousseau was a horrible child/young adult because he tells us so. So why, in the end, *does* Rousseau "confess" this incident to his readers? Discuss this question with your students, thinking about it both in relation to Foucault's claims regarding power, redemption and authority; and to statements

Rousseau make elsewhere about his project in the *Confessions*, i.e., “I must reveal...all the aberrations of my heart” (58); “It is pointless to attempt to look into the heart of another while attempting to conceal one’s own,” and so forth (80).

- Another famous incident – or rather, infamous *series* of incidents, or “inconveniences” (335), as Rousseau refers to them, concern the multiple pregnancies of Rousseau’s long-time companion Thérèse Levasseur (whom he meets on p. 319-20), and his decision to abandon each of their eventually five infant children at a foundling hospital (not a fate any one of them is likely to have survived) despite what he represents as Thérèse’s objections. Read p. 333-335 with your students, the first of two instances where Rousseau narrates Thérèse’s pregnancies and what subsequently happened to their children; then p. 347-8, where he narrates a subsequent pregnancy. Discuss these incidents with your students.

In our time, political speech and language are largely the defense of the indefensible...Thus political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness...

- Orwell, “Politics and the English Language”

- First, what do they notice about Rousseau’s language in the two separate narrations? For instance, in the first, we learn that Thérèse is “growing stout” (333), that “the following year the same inconvenience presented itself” (335); “the mother agreed no more readily” (335), and so forth. What is happening here? Compare with Rousseau’s account on p. 347-8. What is different about Rousseau’s language?
- Second, the “confession” itself and Rousseau’s justifications, or analysis of his actions. What do your students make of how he justifies himself, from declaring that he followed the precepts of Plato’s *Republic* in abandoning his children to the state, to declaring he’d fallen under the influence of bad men. Now, on the one hand, Rousseau is correct in noting – as he does on p. 333 – that abandoning illegitimate and even legitimate children was a common custom in eighteenth century Paris, where poverty was endemic; the foundling hospitals certainly never lacked for residents. On the other hand, Rousseau also clearly feels guilty about what he had done, i.e., this may have been a *common* custom, but it was nothing to be proud of, to declare openly; it was a secret, to be concealed. To this must be added the fact that in 1762, with Rousseau already in exile from Paris, an anonymous pamphlet entitled *Sentiments of the Citizens* appeared in Geneva (it had, in fact, been written by Voltaire – not a fan of Rousseau’s). As James Miller notes, “Voltaire’s screed made a number of false allegations about Rousseau, but it also took dead aim at his Achilles’ heel, describing how this supposed paladin of truth and virtue” – not to mention the author of a treatise on how to educate children – “had surreptitiously abandoned the children he had conceived out of wedlock ‘at the door of an orphanage.’ For years, only a few people had known Rousseau’s secret. Now, thanks to Voltaire, the world knew” (250). In other words, part of what is interesting about Rousseau’s “confession” here vis-à-vis the *Confessions* as a whole and Rousseau’s overall, declared aim in the *Confessions* to “tell the truth” about himself, warts and all, is that while incidents such as that of Marion and the ribbon are incidents that would not have been known had Rousseau not

chosen to “confess” to them in the *Confessions*, abandoning his children is a shame he *had* to confess to, because it was *already* known (i.e., through *Sentiments of the Citizens*). That is, it was an act he had to defend. It is also, arguably, the one thing throughout all of the *Confessions* that he clearly feels incredibly uncomfortable “confessing” to.

What does this suggest, in the end, about Rousseau’s ability to confess to *all* the “aberrations” of his heart? What does it suggest about the truth-claims of autobiography? Would we react differently to this particular confession if this a work of fiction rather than autobiography?

### *Narrative and the Structure of Memory*

- How is the *Confessions* structured? Chronologically? In interrupted episodes? What is the first factual event that Rousseau tells us about? How does he proceed from there? What might that tell us about how he is constructing his own life? How might he have constructed it differently, for instance? (Note: These would of course be questions to return to throughout your reading of the *Confessions*; particularly if you intend to teach even a section of Part II, where it would be important to observe and discuss why a division was put in place there – on the one hand, it was practical; on the other, it was also emotive, metaphorical, signifying a break – as far as Rousseau is concerned by the time he is actually writing the *Confessions*, in his life and how it evolved.)
- What *patterns* emerge? That is, how does the “plot” of the *Confessions* appear to be structured? Rousseau himself, for instance, tells us that his “faithful guide” throughout the *Confessions* has been “the chain of feelings that have marked the successive stages of my being and, through them, of the events that were their cause and effect” (270). In Books I or Books I-II, or III-VI, of what does that “chain of feelings” seem to be composed? What changes in Part II?
- What might the structure of the *Confessions* – that is, how Rousseau conceives of his own development as an individual and then chooses to narrate it – suggest about conceptions of personhood and individuality in the eighteenth century? Here it is important to stress with students both how Rousseau was a product of his time *and* an innovator – or, to use Lejeune’s terms, a “revolutionary.” For instance, it’s been claimed that Rousseau contributed to the “invention” of childhood in the eighteenth century through the publication of both *Émile* and the *Confessions*. Discuss with students what evidence in Books I-VI might help support that claim. \*Note: For historical background on childhood in the period, see Gélis, “The Child.” As it might really interest students to know that the idea of “childhood,” such an ever-present and inarguable concept in our own era, *was* a historical construction, it might be worthwhile to either share Gélis’s piece (short, richly illustrated, and written with a general audience in mind), or to take students through a discussion of the evolving eighteenth-century concept of childhood by using, in part, the many paintings Gélis includes in his discussion coupled with visuals from our own era, in order to arrive at a more in-depth understanding of Rousseau’s representations in the *Confessions*.
- What does the narrator’s attitude toward his younger self seem to be? What happens toward the end of Book I to occasion the narrator’s very explicit commentary on the young Rousseau’s

decision to leave Geneva? As critic Sidonie Smith and others have observed, one of the peculiarities of autobiography is that the author is at once the subject who narrates and the object that is narrated, or written about; this creates a gap, or fissure, between the narrating self and the narrated self that is worth paying close attention to.

- By the time you get to the end of Book III in the *Confessions*, do one of the “Rashomon” memory exercises with your students included in the “Assignment and Project Idea” section. Then read and discuss with your students what Rousseau says about the events he will recount in Book IV (toward the very end of Book III), on p. 127, from “the things I will have to relate in the following book are almost entirely obscure...” to the end of the paragraph, and focusing particularly on the notion that, “Almost nothing happened of sufficient interest to my heart for me to retrace its memory with any clarity,” and “There are events in my life that remain as present to me as if they had just happened; but there are voids and lacunae too...”

### *The Cult of Rousseau: Readers, Celebrity and Authorship*

Printing and publishing were thus not only the most important cultural mechanisms for the spread of Enlightenment ideas; printing and publishing were the embodiment of the Enlightenment in action; the medium was the message – spreading light. [...] The eighteenth century witnessed an explosion in printed materials across Europe...The main cause of this dramatic increase in publishing and printing was rapidly increasing literacy. Even in France, whose literacy rate trailed behind the Protestant nations of the north, literacy increased from 29 to 47 percent of the population between the 1680s and the 1780s. New types of readers thus emerged on the European landscape: the middle classes, women and even servants, shopkeepers and artisans. These new readers demanded new kinds of reading matter.

- Hesse, “Print Culture,” p. 366, 369

Rousseau would experience the burgeoning of the personal cult of the author complete with visits, fan mail and pilgrimages. Thus in insisting, as he does [in the *Confessions*], in ‘telling it all,’ Rousseau is responding to and exploiting the public desire to peer into an author’s private life.

- Mostefai, “Author as Celebrity and Outcast,” p. 68-9

Rousseauistic reading would explore the conventions of reading...By confessing his moral failures [in the *Confessions*], he underlined his honesty and at the same time created an ideal Jean-Jacques who could speak directly from the heart to the ideal reader envisioned in the text.

- Darnton, “Readers Respond to Rousseau,” p. 231, 234

- Read Mostefai’s very short (it’s about 4.5 pages) and illuminating piece with your students, having already read the Darnton and Hesse pieces yourself. What did it mean to be a published author in the mid-eighteenth century? What might the connection be between an exploding literacy rate, commercial print culture and autobiography? What was unique – or what did Rousseau feel to be unique – about his own “celebrity?” How does Rousseau’s celebrity and his readers’ fascination not just with his work but, crucially, with his life, compare to our own media landscape today?

## Assignment and Project Ideas

The possibility for assignment and project ideas inspired by autobiography is almost infinite. What follows are just a few suggestions. The PDF file, “Group and Classroom Activities,” from Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s 2011 *Reading Autobiography* (on the website) contains a number of excellent suggestions as well; most are inspired by, utilize or ask students to think about the Internet and social media in relation to autobiography.

- Ask students to write their own autobiographies. To get them started, ask them to think about one particularly vivid childhood memory. If nothing comes to mind, ask them to listen to a piece of music they associate with their childhood, or eat a meal they ate often as children, or look at pictures of themselves as children, or of their parents before they were born. What do they see, feel, hear, and remember? Ask them to describe at least five or six different memories, then step back and reflect. What patterns emerge? What do those patterns indicate? Ask them to analyze what these patterns or emergent “chains of feeling” they’ve arrived at might tell them about themselves, about their families, about the town, state, country and world in which they grew up (and are still growing up). Students can then either continue to write, telling their story verbally, or translate their writing and reflecting into another medium: visual, auditory, etc. Consider asking students to write a Preface, as Rousseau does, in which they write their own “manifesto” of autobiography, or what they think others will learn from reading the story of their lives. Note: The corpus of contemporary autobiography is an embarrassment of riches; consider using excerpts or entire books, films, etc., to get your students inspired and engaged in telling their own 21<sup>st</sup> century tales.
- Ask students to visit the site *Six-Word Memoir*; discuss how people represent their lives in this extremely concise form. Then ask students to summarize the Confessions using only six words. Alternately, ask them to write their own autobiographies using only six words. Then discuss: what did they leave out? What seemed most essential? What does this suggest – about memory, narrative, history, or language?
- Adapted from Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 288: Ask students to write an autobiographical paragraph about themselves in the first person, using a memory from childhood. Then, after a few hours, to give a name – a fictional name – to the person who experienced that memory. Then rewrite the entire paragraph in the third person. What changes were made?
- From Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*: Ask students to compose an event in their lives as a comic page, then write an essay exploring issues in designing the page – frames, dialogue bubbles narrator’s voice over, gutter size, visual style.
- The *Rashōmon* Exercises: It’s important to stress just how strange and inconsistent memory is when embarking on any autobiographical project, discussion of autobiography, etc., with your students; we all remember differently, and we remember different memories differently depending on what kinds of emotions we felt at the time and who we perceive ourselves to be today. There are any number of exercises to get students started thinking about this; here are two: 1) Get them talking about something – sports, politics, a TV show they all watch – something that pretty much everyone has an experience of in some form and ideally,



something they enjoy talking about and can talk about at some length; alternately, show them a clip of something they haven't seen before. As a homework assignment, tell them to recall what they remember of this conversation in as much detail as possible once they get home – that is, once time has elapsed and they've done other things. Here it would be crucial to stress that they can't consult with other students, can't share what they wrote to arrive at a similar account – the point is to see how and what they remembered, and how everyone, most likely, will have remembered the exact same event slightly differently. 2) Ask students to narrate, in the first person and in writing, a moment of great importance in their lives that involved at least one other or ideally a few other people. Then ask them to share what they wrote with one of the other people involved in the same incident. Does that person remember the event in the same way? How much turned out to be “true” about what the student remembered?

- Ask students to reimagine – and recreate (and reinterpret) – the *Confessions* (or one Book or one event in the *Confessions*) as an online, social media project. That is, what would the *Confessions* have looked like – structurally, content-wise, medium (online or print, blog or Twitter), had Rousseau written it today?
- Essential to the genre of autobiography, Rousseau's *Confessions*, and indeed to Rousseau's overall philosophical and political project were questions of self-perception, self-construction, interrelation and community. Who am I? Who are you? How do we interact? How might we best participate in and form a just, free community of equals? Answers to all four questions are changing rapidly and radically: we are a world of Facebook “likes,” followers, Twitter feeds, iPods, iPhones, iPads and other relentlessly ubiquitous objects named “I,” and what that means shall be left to wiser minds. Apocalyptic screeds and celebratory manifestos have both been written; consider sharing excerpts from a few with your students to see what they, immersed in a sea of digitization and continuous virtual connection, think is happening to self-perception, human interaction and community today. Three suggestions, the first available online: Bill Moyers's 2013 interview with MIT psych prof Sherry Turkle (hardly an action movie, but Turkle's focus on identity and interrelation might be useful; both are important themes for Rousseau), PBS's 2010 documentary *Digital Nation*, and Jaron Lanier's *Who Owns the Future?*

### UNIT 3: FREEDOM, CONSTRAINT AND THE NATURAL WORLD

**Objective:** To explore the question of freedom in Rousseau's *Confessions*.

As even the most cursory reader of Rousseau's *Confessions* will discover, Rousseau was deeply engaged in exploring what freedom is, how it can be achieved, and why it is so frequently denied. As Christopher Bertram explains,

The concern that dominates Rousseau's work is to find a way of preserving human freedom in a world where human beings are increasingly dependent on one another for the satisfaction of their needs. This concern has two dimensions: material and psychological, of which the latter has greater importance. In the modern world, human beings have come to derive their very sense of self from the opinion of others, a fact which Rousseau sees as corrosive of freedom and destructive of individual authenticity [*Discourse on Inequality*, 1754]. In his mature work, he principally explores two routes to achieving and protecting freedom: the first is a political one aimed at constructive political institutions that allow for the co-existence of free and equal citizens in a community where they themselves are sovereign [*The Social Contract*, 1762]; the second is a project for child development and education that fosters autonomy and avoids the development of the most destructive forms of self-interest [*Émile*, 1762].

Now, if *Emile* is Rousseau's account of how a child's education and individual development *should* work, *Confessions* is Rousseau's account of how it most often does not. For Rousseau, crucially, regards *himself* as the preeminent example of someone who is too "dependent on the opinion of others." Another person might have attributed this to personal vanity or insecurity and left it at that, but Rousseau attributes it to society, that is, to how the society into which he was born conditioned him into becoming the freedom-loving yet dependent, constantly constrained individual he became. Rousseau does many things in the *Confessions*, but one of the most important is analyzing his own development in order to better understand – and therefore help us, his readers, understand – the role freedom and autonomy play in human nature and development, and therefore *should* play in society and in societal, familial and political institutions.

#### Handouts:

- Government and Society in Eighteenth Century Geneva and Savoy
- Key Excerpts from Rousseau's Philosophical Work

#### Preparatory Reading:

- Bertram, Christopher, "Jean Jacques Rousseau." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2012)  
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/rousseau>

Bertram provides a useful, concise introduction to Rousseau's political philosophy that you might find helpful in terms of understanding Rousseau's basic philosophical ideas, specifically his representation of freedom in the *Confessions*.

## Additional Readings and Resources

- Nicholas Dent, “Discourse on Inequality,” “Emile,” “The Social Contract.” Excerpts. *Rousseau*. New York: Routledge, 2014.

The excerpts listed above, available as PDFs on the website, are from Dent’s book-long introduction to and explanation of Rousseau’s work. Dent provides one of the most accessible explanations and analyses of Rousseau’s philosophy that I’ve encountered. (There is a plethora to choose from, but most are dry and needlessly convoluted.) I’ve included Dent’s discussions of *Discourse on Inequality*, *Emile* and *The Social Contract* on the website, as these are perhaps the most pertinent for understanding the *Confessions*. For the dedicated Rousseau-enthusiast, Dent’s book is worth reading as a whole. \*Note: The excerpt on *Discourse on Inequality* is very short and almost required reading!
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 1754.

*The Social Contract*, 1762.  
*Émile, or Education*, 1762. Available on the website in excerpts or as a whole.
- Robert Darnton, “The Great Cat Massacre.” *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*.

Details the experiences of apprentices, such as Rousseau in Book I, and the violent rebellions they sometimes executed in revenge against brutal masters.
- Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” [*Was ist aufklärung?*] 1784.

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/kant-what-is.asp> Made available by Fordham University Modern History Internet Sourcebook.

## Discussion Questions

- What is freedom? What does it mean to be free? Ask students to define, for themselves, this elusive and complicated concept. In order to ensure that you don’t receive pat and shallow answers, consider adding the following prompt: *Can we be free when we live in society, that is, when we share our world with other people?*

The classic example of why other people complicate our own autonomy is the traffic light; the traffic light constrains my freedom in the sense that I don’t just keep driving because I want to. Instead, I stop when it’s red; I drive when it’s green. I agree to do this and to therefore constrain my own autonomy because living in a society of other people invariably means that I *have* to be constrained. I can’t just do what I want. If I drive when it’s red but everyone else stops and a little old lady decides to cross the street, I’ll most likely crash into the other cars and kill the little old lady.

What do your students make of this idea? That is, that living in society means that I am never wholly “free”? (Note that this is basic social contract theory, i.e., what Rousseau explores and defines in *The Social Contract*).
- A follow-up question concerns unjust laws. That is, if being in society means constraining my own freedom and accepting the laws society imposes, what happens when a law is more problematic than, say, the law of the traffic light? What happens when I decide that a societal law – whether one imposed by a community of people (such as a community deciding that being gay is immoral), or one imposed by a government (Jim Crow laws in the South; apartheid in South Africa; discrimination

against Jews in Nazi Germany) is wrong and that I *won't* obey it? What is my "right," as it were, to come to that decision?

\*Note: If these are questions that interest you or that seem to interest your students, supplementing discussion with excerpts from Rousseau's *Social Contract* (see the hand-out on "Key Excerpts" or one of the selections provided on the website), and/or with classic American texts on this idea, such as the *Declaration of Independence*, Thoreau's *On Civil Disobedience*, and/or Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, might be of additional interest.

## Suggestions for Close Reading

### *Justice, Love and Freedom*

- There is a constant tension between freedom and constraint, desire and discipline, throughout the *Confessions*. On p. 10 in Book I, Rousseau writes of his earliest years, "How could I have learnt bad ways, when I was offered nothing but examples of mildness and surrounded by the best people in the world? It was not that the people around me...obeyed me, but rather that they loved me, and I loved them in return. My whims were so little encouraged and so little opposed that it never occurred to me to have any. I am ready to swear that, until I was myself subjected to the whims of a master, I never even knew what a caprice was." What is Rousseau suggesting here about how "whims" and "caprices," by which in effect he means children disobeying their elders, arise in children? How are they to be avoided, according to Rousseau? What do your students make of this idea of the "natural" child, who is only loved, never "opposed"? What is the role of love in childhood development? Of rules, regulations and discipline? Are these always at odds with one another or can they work together?
- Later in Book I, Rousseau is moved to Bossey to be educated with his cousin; of this transition he writes, "At Geneva, where nothing was imposed on me, I had loved reading and study, it was almost my only amusement. At Bossey I was made to work, and thus grew to love the games that served as relaxation" (Book 1, p. 12). Here, again, we see the tension between love, learning, and discipline: at Geneva, "where nothing was imposed on me" – that is, where he wasn't *made* to learn anything, "I loved reading and study." At Bossey, he is "made to work," and therefore "grew to love the games that served as relaxation." In other words, anything we are "made" to do, we do not love; when we do not love, we do not learn. Do your students agree? What is the role of *freedom* in education, in a child's development? How is freedom connected to love?
- The famous spanking incident takes place on p. 14-15 of Book I of the *Confessions*, and might almost seem to contradict Rousseau's earlier statements regarding his love of freedom from "opposition" and constraint; here, instead, he finds *pleasure* in punishment. Rousseau tells us that the "common childhood punishment" Mlle Lambercier, who educates him at Bossey, inflicted "made me even more fonder of the woman who had administered it. Indeed, it took all of the sincerity of my affection for her and all my natural meekness to prevent me from seeking to merit a repetition of the same treatment; for I had found in the pain inflicted, and even in the shame that accompanied it, an element of sensuality which left me with more desire than fear at the prospect of experiencing it again from the same hand" (14). What do your students

make of this, given Rousseau's earlier declarations? Corporal punishment is meant to inflict pain and shame, to control and discipline the child into socially appropriate, civil behavior. Rousseau, however, instead experiences *pleasure*; in fact, he has to restrain himself from doing something bad again, since he knows he'd only be doing it in order to ensure that he could be "punished" by Mlle Lambercier once more. Is there a way in which experiencing pleasure (what he's not supposed to experience) instead of pain and shame (what he *is* supposed to experience) constitutes a rebellion of sorts? Finding pleasure in discipline, after all, inverts the "natural" order. It's against how things are *supposed* to work. Can pleasure in discipline be a form of revolutionary response to the "punishment," as it were, of entering into civil society? [\*Note that the Unit on Gender returns to this incident in greater detail.]

- Compare with the incident with the comb on p. 18-19, which also takes place in Bossey. Here Rousseau is "severely chastised" (that is, beaten) for a crime (breaking a comb) that he did not commit, and is punished more severely still and repeatedly, because he refuses to confess. He calls this his first experience of "violence and injustice" (19) and of "the stronger" asserting their will over those who are weak, simply because they can (20). Afterwards, he and his cousin "were still pupils, but were no longer attached to our guardians by bonds of affection, respect, intimacy, confidence; we no longer looked upon them as gods who could see into our hearts; we were less ashamed of doing wrong and more afraid of being found out; we began to dissemble, to rebel, to lie" (20).
- The incident with the comb and its effects on Rousseau's development is then echoed on a larger scale once Rousseau becomes the apprentice of a "coarse and violent young man," M. Ducommon. Read pgs. 30-31 with your students, focusing in particular on Rousseau's analysis of "the difference...between filial dependence and abject servitude" (30). To what does he attribute the changes that take place in his character and behavior during this period? How could it have been altered? What does he mean, precisely, by the "difference between filial dependence and abject servitude?" When he begins to steal (p. 31-33), is his stealing justified? "The thrashings I received for being a petty thief legitimized my being one," Rousseau argues (33). What do your students think? What is Rousseau's responsibility here, in a situation where he can exercise only very limited power and where stealing becomes a kind of petty rebellion against the injustices he suffers at the hands of his master?

\*Note that Rousseau's experiences as an apprentice were not at all unusual in this period; apprentices and journeymen (one step above apprentices), suffered a great deal of abuse at the hands of masters who had tremendous power over both their present (what they ate, where they slept, how much they worked), and their future (whether or not they would progress in their profession.) For more on the lives of apprentices and journeymen in the eighteenth century, see Darnton, "The Great Cat Massacre," esp. the first few pages. Cat-lovers and the faint of heart should not proceed beyond.

\*Note that all of these incidents from Book I, and the ideas Rousseau is arguing for throughout regarding the freedom, love and justice at work in a *just, free and equal society* (i.e., not the kind of society he experiences with either the Lamberciers or with M. Ducommon), can be fruitfully read in conjunction with excerpts from *Discourse on Inequality*, *The Social Contract* and *Émile*; see the "Key Excerpts" for suggestions.

### *Freedom and the Pursuit of Money*

- On p. 37, Rousseau writes, “I adore freedom, I abhor embarrassment, constraint, servitude. As long as I have money in my purse, it assures my independence and relieves me of the necessity of scheming to acquire more, a necessity I have always regarded with loathing; and so, for fear of seeing my money disappear, I hoard it: the money we possess is the instrument of freedom; that which we pursue is the instrument of servitude. That is why I save what I have and covet nothing.” Read this passage with your students. What do they make of the line, “the money we possess is the instrument of freedom; that which we pursue is the instrument of servitude.” What does Rousseau mean by this? Why does the pursuit of money lead to “servitude?” Do your students agree? Is it possible to possess money if one has not, first, pursued it, and having pursued it, are we not always in “servants?” Can we imagine occupations, work, the pursuit of happiness, outside of the pursuit of money?

### *Freedom, Idleness, and the Pursuit of Nothing – or Rousseau, Noble Savage*

- Rousseau leaves Geneva at the end of Book I and beginning of Book II and begins to ramble: “The independence I believed I had won was the only feeling that moved me. I was free, I was my own master; I believed I could do anything, achieve anything; I had only to leap and I would rise soaring through the air. The world, with its vast expanses, lay before me” (44). Throughout the following Books of the *Confessions*, Rousseau develops a very particular idea about what freedom, absolute freedom, consists in and its distinction from work, compulsion and constraint. Compare what Rousseau says on leaving Geneva, for instance, with his thoughts on departing Turin with his friend Bâcle:

Mountains and meadows, woods, villages, and streams stretched endlessly and with unendingly varied delights before me...I remembered with pleasure how [the journey] had enchanted me on my way to Turin. By how much more would it do so now that I was adding to the pleasure of independence that of travelling with a friend my own age, of my own choosing, and of a congenial disposition, without constraint, without restriction, without duties to be fulfilled, and without obligation to go or to stay except as we chose? I would be mad to sacrifice such good fortune to ambitious plans whose fulfillment would be slow, difficult, uncertain, and which, even supposing they were one day realized, could never, however brilliant, equal one quarter of an hour of true youthful pleasure and freedom. – *Confessions*, p. 97

Though he calls it a “fanciful wisdom,” this notion of capturing even “one quarter of an hour of true youthful pleasure and freedom” acquired without obligation and without constraint, appears again and again in the *Confessions*: with the Mlle Galley and Graffenried on p. 134, and in his reflections on walking and the pleasures of being on the move, on p. 158. Read these passages (p. 44, 97, 134), with your students. What do they make of Rousseau’s indisposition to work? It is perhaps easy to be dismissive of it: work is life; everyone has to work to make a

living, except those born with an inherited wealth. Yet why is this the case? And is all work equal, and equally rewarded? If it is not, how is it possible to work *and* be free?

I have never thought so much, existed so much, lived so much, been so much myself, if I may put it thus, as during those journeys I made alone and on foot. There is something about walking that animates and activates my ideas; I can hardly think at all when I am still; my body must move if my mind is to do the same. The pleasant sights of the countryside, the unfolding scene, the good air, a good appetite, the sense of well-being that returns as I walk, the freedom of the inn, the remoteness from everything that makes me feel a dependence on others, of everything that reminds me of my own situation, all of this releases my soul, encourages more daring flights of thought, impels me, as it were, into the immensity of beings, which I can choose from, appropriate, and combine exactly as I wish without fear or constraint. All nature is at my disposal and command; my heart, straying from object to object, identifies and unites with those it finds beguiling, surrounds itself with images that charm, drinks deep of delicious sentiment...When I stopped, all I thought of was a good dinner; when I set out again, all I thought of was a good walk. I felt as though a new paradise awaited me at the door; I thought only of going to find it. – *Confessions*, p. 158-9

- Read this passage with your students. What might it be about *walking* that “animates and activates” Rousseau’s ideas and “releases [his] soul?” Why does he connect the activity of walking with freedom? Why is he free, and from what?

#### *Freedom, Constraint and Society*

- During his time as a footman with Mme de Vercellis in Turin in Book II, Rousseau makes the following, highly astute observation of his interactions with his employer: “She judged me on the basis not so much of what I was but of what she had made me, and because she regarded me as nothing more than a footman, she prevented me from being anything else” (80). Read this passage closely with your students and discuss the contradictions, tensions and richness of what Rousseau observes here. On the one hand, selves are fluid: we become what the world makes us. On the other hand, that fluid self is constrained by circumstance: we *only* become what the world imagines that we are. Discuss with your students whether or not, and to what degree, this is true, and what the implications of it would be – not just for individuals, but also and perhaps most perniciously, for individuals living in an unequal or unjust society.
- Compare the incident in Book II with Mme de Vercellis with either the incident Rousseau relates immediately afterward, where the appearance of virtue (Rousseau’s) does battle with the appearance of theft, lies and seduction (Marion’s), and yet where appearances are highly deceiving – Rousseau is guilty, Marion is innocent. Furthermore, Rousseau believes that it is “shame” – that is, of being *shamed publicly*, and therefore, what others would think of him – that determines his inability to confess to the crime and be absolved, if at the same time also thought a thief.
- Compare Rousseau’s observation in Book II with his later determination, related in Book Eight, to “concentrate all my inner strength on breaking free from the shackles of public opinion and on doing courageously, and without troubling myself about the judgment of others, whatever



seemed to me to be right” (352). In order to make his appearance match his inner independence and virtue, he also reforms his appearance: “I gave up gold trimmings and white stockings, took to a short wig, laid aside my sword, and sold my watch, saying to myself as I did so, with a feeling of unbelievable joy, *I will never need again, thank God, need to know what time it is*” (354).

### Activities and Project Ideas

- Ask students to describe an incident in which they felt that they were powerless and being unfairly treated. How did they react? Did they exercise a petty rebellion, as Rousseau does? Did their behavior increase? Ask them to analyze the incident, once narrated, in the manner of Rousseau in his *Confessions*. What do they make of that particular incident in retrospect? Do they still think their behavior was justified? Why or why not?
- Stage a debate between students who think that a) we become what society believes that we are, and students who think that b) we can always exercise free choice and are not dictated by circumstance. Select judges who will determine once the debate is concluded whose argument was the most convincing.
- In *Émile*, Rousseau devises a program of education designed to produce virtuous, compassionate, and autonomous individuals; it’s the kind of education he feels he did not receive. Assign students the task of a) analyzing their own upbringing and education, as Rousseau does in the *Confessions*. What was the effect of their upbringing? What kind of individual did their upbringing seem aimed at wishing to produce? Then, if students are interested, ask them to further determine what they think are the most important virtues or qualities that people in a society or community can possess. Creativity? Compassion? Dedication to hard work? Based on what they come up with, ask students to devise a program of education aimed at producing the virtues and qualities they think are the most important in society. Students can work in groups and then present, discuss and debate their educational programs with the class.
- In his philosophical work, Rousseau tries to figure out a way to create a lawful, just and equal society where human freedom will be ensured and enabled, rather than restricted; it’s debatable whether he succeeds. Ask students to imagine their own just and equal society that enables rather than restricts individual freedom. What will it look like? How will freedom be preserved? Is *individual* freedom as important as Rousseau believed? What of the collective? Will it be an elective democracy? (Since most students will probably choose that option, try to point out some of the flaws of democracy; for instance, does democracy always ensure that people are governed justly? What of majority votes vs. minority votes? Why is the rule of the majority justifiable in a society striving to be equal? Students can write essays; construct a game (video or physical), write a story of a visitor to the perfect society, etc.
- Ask students to research and present to the class what people actually wore around the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. How radical *was* Rousseau’s “sumptuary” revolution? Alternately, students can propose and argue for individuals engaging in similar sumptuary reforms

today. What might that look like in the age of jeans and T-shirts? How would an individual declare his independence, through clothing, from “the yoke of public opinion” (*Confessions*, p. 354) today? Alternately, a group of students could determine what truly radical sumptuary reform would look like, engage in an experiment with new and varied forms of dress, document the experience in video or through photographs and/or by keeping a diary, and then analyze the experience in an essay: what reactions did they receive from parents, friends, their community? What did they learn about themselves from the experience? What did they learn about their community? How difficult (or easy) is it to present a *really* different self to the world?

## UNIT 4: I AM A WOMAN, DISORDER IS A WOMAN - SEX & THE WORK OF GENDER IN ROUSSEAU

“Never has a people perished from an excess of wine; all perish from the disorder of women.” –  
Rousseau, *Letter to d’Alembert on the Theater*

“Now I shall be a woman.” – Rousseau, 1762

“Legend has it that in France the eighteenth century was the century of women” – Steinbrügge, *Moral Sex*

**Objective:** To explore Rousseau’s representation of sex and gender in the *Confessions* within the historical context of eighteenth century European culture and history.

This Unit focuses on Rousseau’s representation of sex, gender, family, reproduction and homosexuality in the *Confessions*; it additionally provides historical background on these issues and references to sources that should help contextualize Rousseau’s representations within the broader context of eighteenth century French and European history and culture. Questions of sex, gender and sexuality are combined into one Unit because they are intimately linked in the *Confessions* itself; however, those teachers wishing to avoid discussions of sex and sexuality can easily do so. The handout provided contains a primer on the basic realities of women’s lives in the eighteenth century that can be used as is or adapted.

### Handout:

- Women in the *Confessions*: Eighteenth Century Contexts

### Preparatory Reading:

- Roseanne Kennedy, “Introduction.” *Rousseau in Drag: Deconstructing Gender*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 1-14.
- Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, “The Female Life-Cycle.” *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. *New Approaches to European History*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2008.

### Additional Readings and Resources

- “Chivalric Romance.” *Wikipedia*. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chivalric\\_romance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chivalric_romance)
- Melissa Butler. “Eighteenth century Critics of Rousseau’s View on Women.” *Rousseau and Criticism*. Eds. Clark and La France. Ottawa: *Pensée libre*. No 5, 1995.  
<http://www.rousseauassociation.org/publications/TOC/rousseauAndCriticism.htm>  
Scroll down the page to find the link. Short, concise summary in the form of a conference paper detailing Rousseau’s views on women’s role in society; also summarizes critiques of Rousseau’s views by his contemporaries.

### Women in the Eighteenth Century

- Adrienne Rogers, “Women and the Law.” *French Women and the Age of Enlightenment*. Ed. Samia Spencer. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984. 83-97.
- Wiesner-Hanks, Merry E. “Women’s Economic Role.” *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. *New Approaches to European History*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2008.

- Olympe de Gouges. *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman*. September 1791.  
<http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/293/>  
Foundational feminist text. A butcher's daughter born in 1748 in the south of France, de Gouges was a playwright, anti-slavery advocate and feminist. She was executed during the French Revolution.
- Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. 1792.  
<http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/wollstonecraft/woman-contents.html>  
Another foundational feminist text authored in the late eighteenth century, this time by a British woman responding directly to the French Revolution and to Rousseau's claims about women and women's education in *Émile*. It is difficult to excerpt; this Oregon State link makes the text available in its entirety.

### Family Life

- Suzanne Desan, "Making and Breaking Marriage: An Overview of Old Regime Marriage as a Social Practice." *Family, Gender and Law in Early Modern France*. Penn State UP, 2009. 1-25.  
Excellent, accessible overview of marriage patterns in pre-Revolutionary France.
- Lieselotte Steinbrügge, from "Introduction." *The Moral Sex: Women's Nature in the French Enlightenment*. Trans. Pamela E. Selwyn. Oxford UP, 1995.
- Christine Théré, "Women and Birth Control in Eighteenth Century France." Trans. Nicole Wilson-Denner. *Eighteenth Century Studies* 32.4 (1999) 552-564.
- Margaret Hunt, "The Foundling Homes." *Women in Eighteenth Century Europe*. Routledge, 2009.
- Jacques Gélis, "The Child: From Anonymity to Individuality." *A History of Private Life*, Vol. III. Belknap, 1989. Brief, illustrated overview of the transformation of societal attitudes toward children in the eighteenth century.

### Sex

- Jeffrey Weeks, "The Invention of Sexuality." *Sexual Lives: A Reader on the Theories and Realities of Human Sexualities*. Eds. Robert Heasley and Betsy Crane. McGraw Hill, 2003.
- Anna Clark, "Enlightening desire: New attitudes toward sexuality in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries." *Desire: A History of European Sexuality*. New York and London: Routledge, 2008.

### Homosexuality

- Michel Rey, "Parisian Homosexuals Create a Lifestyle, 1700-1750: The Police Archives." *'Tis Nature's Fault: Unauthorized Sexuality during the Enlightenment*. Ed. Robert Purks MacCubbin. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987.
- Bryant T. Ragan Jr. "The Enlightenment Confronts Homosexuality." *Homosexuality in Modern France*. Eds. Jeffrey Merrick and Bryant T. Ragan Jr. Oxford UP, 1996. 8-30.

### Les Salonnères

- Dena Goodman, "The Enlightenment Salonnère." *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the Enlightenment*. New York and Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996.
- Daniel Roche, "Salons." *France in the Enlightenment*. Harvard UP, 1998.

- “Salon Life.” *Modern History Sourcebook*. Fordham University.  
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/18salons.asp>
- “Welcome to the Salons of Paris.” Site maintained by Mt. Holyoke students in history.  
[https://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwart/hist255-s01/paris\\_homework/welcome\\_to\\_salons.html](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/rschwart/hist255-s01/paris_homework/welcome_to_salons.html)
- “Marie-Thérèse Rodet Geoffrin.”  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie\\_Th%C3%A9r%C3%A8se\\_Rodet\\_Geoffrin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie_Th%C3%A9r%C3%A8se_Rodet_Geoffrin)  
Good Wikipedia entry on one of the leading *salonnières* of the eighteenth century, Mme. Geoffrin. Entry includes Lemonnier’s painting, *Le Salon de Mme. Geoffrin*, 1812.
- Francois-Nicolas-Barthelemy Dequevauviller, after Nicolas LaVreince, *L’assemblée au salon* [The salon], 1783 <https://artsy.net/artwork/francois-nicolas-barthelemy-dequevauviller-after-nicolas-lavreince-lassemblee-au-salon-1>

### Select Eighteenth Century Representations of and by Women

- *Eighteenth Century Women Painters in France*. Metropolitan Museum of Art. New York, NY.  
[http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/18wa/hd\\_18wa.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/18wa/hd_18wa.htm)  
Includes a series of famous portraits of Marie Antoinette by Elizabeth Vigée-Le Brun.
- Francois Boucher, *Marquise de Pompadour*. Wallace Collection, London, UK. 1756.  
[http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/cas/his/CoreArt/art/anc\\_bou\\_pomp.html](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/his/CoreArt/art/anc_bou_pomp.html)  
Portrait of the Marquise de Pompadour, mistress of Louis XV and a powerful political figure during his reign; the portrait emphasizes her intellect and her role as a patron of the arts and of the Enlightenment. Analysis provided by Boston College Art and History.
- Jean-Baptiste Chardin, *La Bénédicité* (Saying Grace), ca. 1740  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le\\_B%C3%A9n%C3%A9dicit%C3%A9](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_B%C3%A9n%C3%A9dicit%C3%A9)
- “Dido and Lady Elizabeth Murray,” c. 1780. Attributed to Johann Zoffany. Collection of the Earl of Mansfield, Scone Palace, UK.  
<http://www.oxforddnb.com/templates/article.jsp?articleid=73352&black=,12729,19655> Oxford DNB entry provided by Reyahn King, Oct 2007.  
For additional analysis of this painting, see Stuart Jeffries, “Dido Belle: The art world enigma who inspired a movie.” *The Guardian*. May 26 2014.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/may/27/dido-belle-enigmatic-painting-that-inspired-a-movie>. David Dabydeen, “The Black Figure in 18thc. Art,” *BBC History*, Feb 17 2011, analyzes the painting in the context of other 18<sup>th</sup> c. portraits of black figures.  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/abolition/africans\\_in\\_art\\_gallery\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/abolition/africans_in_art_gallery_01.shtml) Note: When it comes to this justly famous and fascinating portrait we are of course in England, not in France, but I’m including the painting here nonetheless precisely because it is such a unique portrait of a young black woman in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and because England was by no means unique in engaging in the slave trade in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: France did so also. Slavery was abolished in the French colonies only in 1794 (and then reinstituted by Napoleon a few years later).
- Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People*, 1830.  
<http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/july-28-liberty-leading-people>  
Famous post-Revolutionary painting with Liberty as a bare-chested woman.

### Discussion Questions

- Ask students to define “masculine” and “feminine.” What do these connote? Ask them if they

think “feminine” always accurately describe someone who is biologically female, or “masculine” always someone who is biologically male? What if it does not? Does society (high school society, family, friends, the town you live in, the state, the US) accept people who do not conform to societally defined gender norms? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, why do we *care* whether people conform or don’t conform to gender norms? Why talk about it?

- Ask students to come up with synonyms for “masculine” and “feminine.” Which of these seems to offer characteristics that our society values? Which seem to indicate power?
- Alternately, consider asking students to select 2-3 images of men and/or women from contemporary popular culture and media, bring these in to class and discuss what they see. How do these images represent and above all, seek to *codify* what is “masculine” or “feminine?” Are there any images popularly available that suggest alternate, or androgynous, definitions? Then compare these to images from the *eighteenth century* (for examples, see below in “Representations” and in Unit 1). Discuss the similarities and differences between eighteenth century and contemporary representations of gender.
- Define the difference between sex (a biological “identity” that we’re assigned at birth) and gender (constructed, cultural, what we’re socialized into) for your students, and ask them what they make of the distinction. How much of our gendered identity is culturally constructed? How much do they think is “natural,” or biological? Try to genuinely push students too comfortable with either position by teasing out, for instance, what actually designates our biological selves (hormones, for instance; estrogen works differently than testosterone).
- Is gender connected to sexuality? To how we desire and whom? Are these “biological” desires, as it were, or are they culturally constructed? These are sensitive and can be deeply personal subjects for your students, for obvious reasons, but the purpose is not so much to get at questions of sexual orientation but rather at sexuality itself. That is, where does desire come from? Why do we desire one person rather than another? One kind of *act* – spanking, for instance, in Rousseau’s case – rather than another? Are these “natural,” that is, are we born with them, or do they emerge due to how our sexuality is formed in childhood and adolescence, as Rousseau suggests that his was in the *Confessions*?

\*Note: Consider assigning Jeffrey Weeks’s short, accessible, thought-provoking essay on the “invention of sexuality” to ground discussion.

## Suggestions for Close Reading

### *Gender Trouble*

- Read Rousseau’s description of his mother (“she was beautiful and she was good,” p. 6) and of his parents’ courtship in the very beginning of the *Confessions* (p. 6-7). Ask students what they make of his description of his mother and of the courtship itself. What kind of language does Rousseau use here? What does the actual reality of his parents’ marriage appear to have been?
- Rousseau dates his first moment of “uninterrupted consciousness” to reading chivalric romances with his father, books he notes that his mother had left behind. (\*Note: here it is important to define for students what Rousseau means by the genre term, “romance;” see the recommended Wikipedia entry for a definition.) How does Rousseau describe his experience reading his mother’s books? What did he learn from them? How does he describe reading her *father’s* books? What kinds of books were these? What does he claim he learned from these

books? What *gender* characteristics does he seem to ascribe to each set of reading experiences? (Note that *both* sets of books obviously belonged to Rousseau's mother, but that Rousseau decisively separates his experiences as on the one hand "masculine" (republican, citizens, Greeks and Romans – from Rousseau's grandfather), and on the other "feminine" (passionate, sentimental – from Rousseau's mother). How does he believe that these two seemingly disparate reading experiences shaped the man he became? (See top of p. 9 and bottom of p. 11, nr. 9). Is he, in the end, more "woman" than "man," according to how he himself defines these terms?

- What does Rousseau's attitude toward his father seem to be in the first few pages of the *Confessions*? What does his father's attitude toward his son seem to have been? See, for instance, p. 7 ("comfort me for losing her"), and 8 ("I'm more of a child than you are"). What role does Rousseau's father seem to be asking his son to play?

[In Rousseau]...alongside what first appears to be a valorization of strict gender identities (masculinity and femininity) and roles (citizen and mother, public and private), one finds the opposite: the continual undermining, inversion, and critique of said ideals and values. Throughout Rousseau's writings, we have various examples of "perverse" identifications and the inversion of roles: men who act like women, women who act like men, women who love women, "incestuous" love relations, a privileging of *ménages à trois*, and the continual denigration of both paternal and fraternal power.

Perhaps the best example is Rousseau himself...an exemplary figure of "perverse" desire, ambivalent gender identity, and the abnegation of masculine and paternal authority. As he repeatedly proclaims in his autobiographical texts and letters (written for the public and publication), he was from an early age masochistic, at times an exhibitionist, an excessive masturbator (by his own account), ambivalent about sexual intercourse, against the institution of marriage, unable to assume paternal authority, and even for a time—while living in exile in Môtiers, Neuchâtel—becoming a cross-dresser [wearing a fur-lined Armenian robe]. (Is it any wonder that the only time he "truly" fell in love was with a woman— "Sophie" d'Houdetot—who dressed like a man?) [...] In short [in Rousseau's *Confessions*] we have a man (Rousseau) who dresses and acts like a "woman," loving a woman who dresses and acts like a "man," who loves another man. Things will get even more complicated...

- Kennedy, *Rousseau in Drag*, p. 1-3

### Sex – The Horror Story

- Rousseau's first "confession" ("I find it embarrassing to go into greater detail, but I must," p. 14), has been discussed in both Units 2 and 3 in the context of autobiography and freedom; significantly, however, this "confession" is above all *a confession about sex* – about a "bizarre taste," in Rousseau's own words, "which persisted beyond adolescence and indeed drove me to the verge of depravity and madness" (15). Read p. 14-17 with your students, paying particular attention to Rousseau's representation of desire, the role of the imagination and what he was and was not able to tell his sexual partners (ex. "I dare not tell them everything, but nor am I able to perform everything...And so I have spent my life coveting but never declaring



myself...Never daring to reveal my proclivities," p. 17). In effect, Rousseau confesses a sexual "proclivity" in the first fifteen pages of the *Confessions* that he also informs us he has "never dared reveal" before. So why *does* he finally confess this "bizarre taste" – and in the glare of publicity, to his readers, rather than in the intimacy of a bedchamber? And why begin taking "the first step, and the most painful, into the dark and miry labyrinth of my confessions" with a confession specifically about sex? (17)

- Pay close attention to words such as "embarrassing" and "shameful" here. *Why* is Rousseau ashamed? ("It is not what is criminal that is the hardest to reveal, but what is laughable or shameful," p. 17). *Should* he be ashamed? Consider introducing and defining the term *heteronormative* to students as a way of discussing Rousseau's sexuality productively.
- On p. 65-67, while in Turin to be converted to Catholicism, Rousseau has his first involuntary homosexual encounter with a fellow would-be convert. How does Rousseau seem to feel about it, judging from his description? How does he seem to feel about the young man involved – whom, significantly, he never identifies by name? (And this in an autobiography where almost everyone *is* named.)
- Who does the young man involved appear to be? That is, if Rousseau never identifies him by name, how *does* he identify him? Do those identifications change? What is the significance of the young man variously being described as Moorish, Jewish, even a "false African?" What would the status of all three have been in eighteenth century Italy? (Here it might be interesting, too, to note the long-standing association between sodomy and heresy, given that both Rousseau and "the false African" are purported converts. See Ragan, p. 9).

### Homosexuality in the Eighteenth Century: Facts and Fictions

To speak of "being gay" in early modern Europe is anachronistic. A uniform "sexual identity," as we think of this today, did not exist.

Instead, men and women engaged in sodomitical *acts*. "Sodomy" could describe any sexual relation between same-sex partners. Engaging in sodomitical acts did not preclude engaging in sexual acts with partners of the opposite sex.

Sodomy was common and practiced among all factions of society.

In France, sodomy was punishable by law and even an executable offense. In actuality, persons caught engaging in sodomitical acts were most often let off with light sentences or fines. Here, as always, class mattered; being wealthy or a member of the aristocracy was an effective safeguard from prosecution.

Eighteenth century French writers seem to have regarded sodomy as peculiarly Italian, referring to it as "the Italian taste."

According to some historians, roughly by the mid-eighteenth century we see new sexual identities beginning to form, characterized roughly as man (heterosexual), woman (heterosexual), sodomite (gay male), and sapphist or tribade (gay woman).

For more, see Merrick, Ragan and Rey (above).

- Read Rousseau's description of his encounter with Mme. de Basile in Turin, p. 73-75 ("Nothing that the possession of women has since made me feel can equal the two minutes I spent at her feet without daring to touch her dress," p. 75), and compare this with his account of his first lengthy stay with his beloved "Maman," Mme. de Warens, on p. 104-106. What similarities are there in his encounters with both women? (Note, for instance, that both are older than he, married, to some degree in a position of power over him, and serving some kind of maternal, supportive or care-giving role).
- Discuss Mme. de Warens. Who is she? Why does she take in Rousseau? Compare Damrosch's description (see "List of characters") with how Rousseau characterizes her. What does Rousseau's description leave out? What does Damrosch's? \*Note: Consider using the Handout on "Women in the *Confessions*: Eighteenth Century Contexts," or Wiesner-Hanks's "The Female Life-Cycle," to ground discussion in historical context.
- Take a look at the 2012-2013 exhibit on Mme. De Warens's life at the Musée Historique de Vevey. (Only in French). What aspects of her life and personality is the museum stressing? Why might that be? [http://www.museehistoriquevevey.ch/francais/expo\\_madame-de-warens.html](http://www.museehistoriquevevey.ch/francais/expo_madame-de-warens.html)
- Ask your students what they make of Rousseau's relationship with this surrogate mother (p. 104) whom he nonetheless enjoyed fantasizing about sexually (p. 106-7). \*Freud, anyone?
- On p. 189, after Rousseau has left and returned to Mme. de Warens again and again, unable – or, more accurately, unwilling – to keep a job, "Maman" finally proposes that she and Rousseau formalize their union, so to speak. Why might she have done this? (She already had one live-in lover, for instance, Claude Anet). How does Rousseau react? What is our reaction as readers? What is his reaction once he in fact becomes her lover (p. 191-3)?
- How does she go about proposing the matter to Rousseau and why might she have done it in such a business-like manner? What might this suggest about her relationship to her protégée? How stable was her status in Savoyard society?

I became entirely her creation, entirely her child, more so than if she had been my real mother. We began, without realizing it, to be always together...we fell into the habit of thinking of nothing outside of ourselves, of limiting our happiness and the fulfillment of all our desires to that mutual possession which was perhaps unique among mankind and which was not, as I have said, the possession of lovers, but something more essential, something that depended not on the senses, nor on sex, nor on age, nor on looks, but on everything that makes us what we are and that we can only lose by ceasing to be.

– Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 267

- Read the passage above with your students. Ask students how they would characterize, in their own words, the love Rousseau is describing here. Is it important, for instance, for this transcendent, sense-, looks- and age-defying love that Rousseau positions himself, first, as a "child," as "entirely her creation?" Compare Rousseau's description of his relationship with Mme. de Warens in this passage to Darnton's description of the relationship Rousseau wanted to establish with his readers.

## *Sex and Power: Children, Chambermaids and Prostitutes*

- Compare Rousseau's worshipful descriptions of Mme. de Warens and Mme. de Basile, and his apparent desire to be dominated by a woman, with his descriptions of his longtime companion Thérèse (p. 319-323). He defends her; he likes her; she describes her as innocent and simple. He makes fun of her with his aristocratic patrons while also celebrating the "sweetness of our intimacy" (323). He declares teaching her to read, write and count "a waste of time." What might account for these apparent contradictions? What portrait of Thérèse emerges between the lines of Rousseau's description? What role does *class* seem to play? (Note, too, that his relationship with Thérèse is perhaps his only relationship with a woman that he does not sentimentalize).

\*Note #2: Consider assigning the Handout on "Women in the *Confessions*: Eighteenth Century Contexts," Wiesner-Hanks's "The Female Life-Cycle" and Desan's essay on marriage patterns to ground discussion in historical context.

- In Venice, Rousseau and his friend Carrio engage in what appears to have been a not uncommon Venetian pastime (the Venetian libertine Casanova's memoirs are full of references to the purchase of barely pubescent young girls from their mothers for the purpose of sexual pleasure, for instance): they purchase a child, Anzoletta, from her mother, with the apparent intent of grooming her to be their "companion" (p. 313-314). Shortly thereafter, Rousseau leaves Venice, and we never find out what in fact happened to Anzoletta. This is a difficult section to read: Rousseau, celebrant of childhood innocence in *Émile*, at once sentimentalizes his encounter with Anzoletta, declares she was never violated, and yet still engages in the purchase of a child for (albeit postponed, nonetheless presumed) sex. If you choose to teach and discuss the Venice chapter with your students, it might be most productive to discuss the incident with Anzoletta in terms of gender, power and class, keeping in mind Rousseau's declared abhorrence of unequal power relations and of societies where people, as a consequence of inequality, exploit and enslave each other. Rousseau and Carrio, for instance, are young men with money and power; Anzoletta and her mother have neither.

It might also be worthwhile to keep in mind, too, that Rousseau, as a wandering, in effect homeless adolescent, is himself solicited by other men for sex – not just "the false African," who was perhaps closer in age to himself, but also the abbé who gives him lodging for a night in Book III. How do the power relations in that exchange compare to his relation with Anzoletta? On the one hand, Rousseau is much older, male and refuses the abbé. On the other hand, in the exchange with the abbé, he is also vulnerable: he is younger, poor and homeless. What might this tell us about the intersection of sex and power in the eighteenth century?

- On p. 345, we meet a cleric and his mistress, whom Rousseau describes as a "little girl...who, since he could not support her on his own, was still available to others;" he notes that at one point, "We all three of us accompanied the poor little thing." Ask students what they make of Rousseau's language here and throughout his subsequent description. How might they describe how power, gender and sex intersect here? (Rousseau seems at once to observe the incident critically, to sentimentalize it and to exploit it). He later declares, "I had cause for self-reproach...I eased its burden by my prompt and frank confession" (346). What precisely is it

that he feels guilty about? What implicit contract has he violated, and with whom?

While I was philosophizing on the duties of man...Thérèse became pregnant for the third time. [...]

Never for a single moment of his life could Jean-Jacques have been without sentiment, without pity, an unnatural father. I may have deceived myself, but I could never have hardened my heart. If I were to declare my reasons here, I would be saying too much.

My task is to be truthful; it is the reader's to be fair.

- Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 347, 349

### Family Life

- What kinds of family units do we encounter in Rousseau's *Confessions*? In Geneva, at Boissy, in Turin, at Mme. de Warens's, in Paris with Thérèse?  
Compare with what family units in general appear to have looked like in early modern Europe. (Consider assigning the articles or excerpts from articles by Desan, Wiesner-Hanks and Théré to ground discussion in historical context). How different from the norm were the family units Rousseau experienced? How *patriarchal* were these units, as Rousseau experienced them?
- What has changed and what hasn't about how and why people forge familial ties since the eighteenth century?
- Unit 2 (autobiography) has already explored Rousseau's "confession" of the five illegitimate children he fathered with Thérèse and his subsequent abandonment of each child to a foundling hospital despite Thérèse's avowed resistance (For language and the relation of this "confession" to Rousseau's autobiography overall, see Unit 2). For this Unit, explore the intersection of sex, power, gender and reproduction in the situation, with reference to the historical context.

Read p. 333-335, and then again p. 347-8 with your students. What do we learn, here, about Rousseau's relationship to Thérèse? What do we learn about her relationship to her own family – to her mother for instance? Is there a truth to the idea that her illegitimate children need to be abandoned in order for Thérèse's "honor" to be preserved, or is this merely a disingenuous fiction Rousseau and her mother concoct to bend her to their will?

Consider assigning Hunt's "The Foundling Hospitals" or sharing some of the observations in Théré and Wiesner-Hanks about the rise in the abandonment of children by the mid-eighteenth century, which occurred, paradoxically, alongside new notions of sentimental domesticity and maternal virtue among the bourgeoisie.

How does the historical context complicate or help our understanding of Rousseau's decision to abandon each one of his five illegitimate children? (And it clearly was *Rousseau's* decision – not Thérèse's).

### Reign of the Disorderly Man-Women of France

- Share with your students some of the insights from Roche and Goodman, or assign Roche (very short, insightful on *salon* dynamics) with supplements from the Wikipedia entry on Mme. Geoffrin and the Fordham University and Mt. Holyoake websites on the Paris salons (both very short; Fordham's is just a brief collection of anecdotes; Mt. Holyoake's is a "tour" of the world of the Paris salons, with a focus on the role of women and the late eighteenth century.) Discuss the notion that (upper middle-class and noble) women exercised power and influence in this period (Goodman's argument) because they encouraged, participated in and supervised the salons. What does conversation, dialogue and debate involve? How might it generate ideas and disseminate culture? How powerful is conversation? How powerful is *culture*? What are its limitations?
- Rousseau and the *Salonnières*. Rousseau returns to Paris from Venice in Book VII and Book VIII, renews his acquaintance with philosopher and *encyclopedist* Diderot, meets d'Alembert, Condillac, Abbé Raynal, Grimm, the Baron d'Holbach and *salonnière* and memoirist Mme. d'Épinay, who would become his patron; he begins to participate (awkwardly, according to his own account) in the salons, dinners, theaters, opera and coffee houses of Paris. The salons were a world ruled by precisely the kind of well-read, witty, intelligent women whom Rousseau would disparage in *Émile*: "A brilliant wife is a plague to her husband, her children, her friends, her valets, everyone. From the sublime elevation of her fair genius she disdains all her women's duties and always begins by making herself into a man" (*Émile*, qtd. Dent 106). Do the *Confessions* support (as most critics have argued) or disabuse us of the notion that Rousseau feared, disliked and in general distrusted women, particularly women with intellectual ambitions? What does he seem to have associated society women *with*? Why might he have found them threatening?

M. de Francueil introduced me into Mme. d'Épinay's household; I sometimes went there to supper with him. She was amiable, witty, accomplished and assuredly an acquaintance worth having.  
- *Confessions*, p. 335

The success of my first publications [*Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*] had made me fashionable. The condition in life that I had chosen for myself excited the public's curiosity; they wanted to know this bizarre man, who courted no one and who cared for nothing except for living free and happy in his own chosen way; which was enough, of course, to ensure that he could no longer do so. My room was never empty of people...The women used a thousand ruses to get me to come to dinner...Launched in spite of myself into society without having acquired its manners, and in no position to adopt or submit to them...Conscious that I would never overcome my foolish and sullen indifference...  
- *Confessions*, p. 357-8, 359

- Rousseau had met the Comtesse d'Houdetot at least twice previously, but as Kennedy notes, it is not until the day she appears before him dressed as a man that he falls in love: "This time she was on horseback and dressed like a man. Although I do not greatly care for this sort of masquerade, I was captivated by the air of romance it lent her visit and, this time, it was love"

(429). Kennedy read this as a destabilization of gender roles and relations, of Rousseau's playing the "woman" and of his refusal of patriarchal authority or rule. Is this convincing? Discuss the scene with your students, paying particular attention to Rousseau's reference to "masquerade" and "air of romance," and to who is the active and passive party in the exchange. If this is a romance, and she is dressed like a man, what does that make Rousseau? Are there echoes here of his earlier relationship with Mme. de Warens or his interaction with Mlle. Lambercier? (And what of Thérèse, who is – bizarrely – around the entire time and who is even assigned the task of delivering the would-be lovers' letters?)

- The idea of Mme. d'Houdetot as an actor in some kind of fiction occurs on one previous occasion as well, the first time she visits the Hermitage: "This visit had an air about it of the opening of the novel" (422). What do masquerades, romances and novels have in common? What do we know from Part I about Rousseau's relationship to and how he was influenced by chivalric romance?

### Assignment and Project Ideas

- Assign students the task of writing the "confessions" of Thérèse Levasseur or Mme. de Warens or Mme. d'Epinay. Ask students to re-read the *Confessions* carefully for the small glimpses we get of these women's lives, voices and personalities (we certainly get more of Mme. de Warens than Thérèse. Keeping in mind that in *Rousseau's Confessions* we only get his representations of these women, students will need to read carefully between the lines). Assign Wiesner-Hanks's "The Female Life-Cycle" for historical context. Then ask students to write a first-person, "confessional" autobiography from Thérèse's or Mme. de Warens's point of view. What *did* Thérèse really think of Rousseau? Of her life in Paris, of her intrusive mother? Of Diderot and Mme. de Luxembourg? And what of Mme. de Warens –speculator, adventuress, educator of young men and sometime spy?
- What was life like for women in the eighteenth century? Ask students to choose one woman who appears in the *Confessions* and research what life for a woman of her class might have been like. The sources provided with the guide ("Women's Economic Role;" "The Female Life-Cycle," etc.) should provide good places to get started. Students can then either present their findings to the class as a research essay, a work of historical fiction, or as a "choose your own adventure" game, such as that created by U Michigan students in 1999, which can be found here: [http://www.umich.edu/~ece/student\\_projects/make\\_your\\_way/start.htm](http://www.umich.edu/~ece/student_projects/make_your_way/start.htm)
- What might it have been like to be gay in the eighteenth century? For a man? A woman? An aristocrat or an artisan? Ask students to research this question and present their findings to the class as a research essay or work of historical fiction. The essays by Michel Rey and Bryant T. Ragan Jr. (see above) should provide good starting places.
- Transform your classroom into an eighteenth century *salon*. One student (or two students) will be hostess or host; the others will be participants – philosophers, men and women of letters, artists, thinkers, and politicians. The salon should be hosted at someone's home (yours; theirs). Study the "rules" for intelligent, "civilized" conversation that the *salonnières* sought to effect and adopt these as the guidelines for conversation.

- Ask students to experiment with their gender identities for a day. First, discuss and define the parameters: in our 21<sup>st</sup> century reality, what does it actually mean to experiment with gender identity? What defines and determines gender in a world where gender norms are beginning to seem, at least on the surface, increasingly fluid? Second, determine what the experiment will consist of for each student (Dress? Voice? Movement? Behavior?). Determine how long the experiment will last in order for it to be meaningful. Conclude by asking students to reflect on the activity in a narrative essay.
- The title of this unit is the “work of gender.” Assign students the task of writing an analytic essay about the “work” of gender in Rousseau’s *Confessions*, beginning by asking whether or not gender was “work” – that is, to what extent, in the end, is gender a predetermined given in the *Confessions*? To what extent is it created? To what extent are gender boundaries fluid or static?

### **Suggested Additional Readings: Women and the French Revolution**

These texts all variously address what happened to women’s lives and rights during the French Revolution; as the period after 1778 is somewhat beyond the time-frame of the *Confessions*, not much about this period has been included in the guide (though mention is made of changes to the law in the handout), and it’s a complicated, but fascinating story. Texts recommended by Terry Kelley, Prof. of English, UW-Madison.

- Madelyn Gutwirth, *Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era*. Rutgers UP, 1992.
- Lynn Hunt, *Family Romance of the French Revolution*. UC Press, 1993.

### **Suggested Additional Readings:**

#### **Gendered Lives in Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth century Europe**

Note: This is idiosyncratic, entirely subjective and hardly exhaustive list of memoirs, a novel, a biography and a scholarly monograph that shed further light on the intersection of gender, sex, politics and work in early modern Europe.

- Anne-Marie-Louise D’Orleans Montpensier, *Against Marriage*

Publisher Description: In seventeenth-century France, aristocratic women were valued by their families as commodities to be married off in exchange for money, social advantage, or military alliance. Once married, they became legally subservient to their husbands. The duchesse de Montpensier, a first cousin of Louis XIV, was one of very few exceptions, thanks to the vast wealth she inherited from her mother, who died shortly after Montpensier was born. She was also one of the few politically powerful women in France at the time to have been an accomplished writer. In the daring letters presented in this bilingual edition, Montpensier condemns the alliance system of marriage, proposing instead to found a republic that she would govern, “a corner of the world in which . . . women are their own mistresses,” and where marriage and even courtship would be outlawed. Her pastoral utopia would provide medical care and vocational training for the poor, and all the homes would have libraries and studies, so that each woman would have a “room of her own” in which to write books.

- *Monsieur d’Eon is a Woman: A Tale of Political Intrigue and Sexual Masquerade* by Gary Kates

Publisher Description: Born in 1728, French aristocrat Charles d’Eon de Beaumont had served his country as a diplomat, soldier, and spy for fifteen years when rumors that he was a woman began to circulate in the courts of



Europe. D'Eon denied nothing and was finally compelled by Louis XVI to give up male attire and live as a woman, something d'Eon did without complaint for the next three decades. Although celebrated as one of the century's most remarkable women, d'Eon was revealed, after his death in 1810, to have been unambiguously male. Gary Kates's biography of d'Eon recreates eighteenth-century European society in brilliant detail and offers a compelling portrait of an individual who challenged its conventions about gender and identity.

- Mme. de Graffigny, *Letters from a Peruvian Woman*, 1747

Publisher Description: One of the most popular works of the eighteenth century, *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* [Letters from a Peruvian Woman] appeared in more than 130 editions, reprints, and translations during the hundred years following its publication in 1747. In the novel the Inca princess Zilia is kidnapped by Spanish conquerors, captured by the French after a battle at sea, and taken to Europe. Graffigny's brilliant novel offered a bold critique of French society, delivered one of the most vehement feminist protests in eighteenth-century literature, and announced- fourteen years before Rousseau's *Julie* - the Romantic tradition in French literature."

- Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth Century Lives*

Publisher Description: Natalie Zemon Davis retrieves individual lives from historical obscurity to give us a window onto the early modern world. As women living in the seventeenth century, Glikl bas Judah Leib, Marie de l'Incarnation, and Maria Sibylla Merian, equally remarkable though very different, were not queens or noblewomen, their every move publicly noted. Rather, they were living "on the margins" in seventeenth-century Europe, North America, and South America. Yet these women--one Jewish, one Catholic, one Protestant--left behind memoirs and writings that make for a spellbinding tale and that, in Davis' deft narrative, tell us more about the life of early modern Europe than many an official history. Glikl bas Judah Leib was a merchant of Hamburg and Metz whose Yiddish autobiography blends folktales with anecdotes about her two marriages, her twelve children, and her business. Marie de l'Incarnation, widowed young, became a mystic visionary among the Ursuline sisters and cofounder of the first Christian school for Amerindian women in North America. Her letters are a rich source of information about the Huron, Algonquin, Montagnais, and Iroquois peoples of Quebec. Maria Sibylla Merian, a German painter and naturalist, produced an innovative work on tropical insects based on lore she gathered from the Carib, Arawak, and African women of Suriname. Along the way she abandoned her husband to join a radical Protestant sect in the Netherlands. Drawing on Glikl's memoirs, Marie's autobiography and correspondence, and Maria's writings on entomology and botany, Davis brings these women to vibrant life. She reconstructs the divergent paths their stories took, and at the same time shows us each amid the common challenges and influences of the time--childrearing, religion, an outpouring of vernacular literature--and in relation to men" (pub description).

- Daryl Hafter, *Women at Work in Preindustrial France*, 2007

Publisher Description: This book draws upon substantial archival research in Rouen, Lyon, and Paris to show that while the vast majority of working women in eighteenth-century France labored at unskilled, low-paying jobs, it was not at all unusual for women to be actively engaged in economic activities as workers, managers, and merchants. Some even developed vertically integrated wholesale and retail businesses, while others became indispensable to manufacturers through their technical skill. In fact, Hafter documents how certain women guild masters were able to exploit the legal system to achieve considerable economic independence, power, wealth, and legal parity with male masters. She also shows how gender politics complicated the day-to-day experience of these working women.

## UNIT 5: ROUSSEAU V. WORLD – RELIGION, MORALITY AND THE *PHILOSOPHES*

**Objective:** To explore questions of religion and morality in the *Confessions* in the context of the French Enlightenment.

### Preparatory Reading:

- Rousseau, “Creed of a Savoyard Vicar,” from *Émile* (1762)
- David A. Bell, “Culture and Religion.” *Old Regime France, 1648-1788*. Short Oxford History of France. Ed. William Doyle. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. 78-99.
- Gail Ossenga, “The clergy in a confessional state,” excerpt from Ossenga’s chapter “Society.” *Old Regime France, 1648-1788*. Short Oxford History of France. Ed. William Doyle. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. 54-57.
- Voltaire, “Religion.” *Philosophical Dictionary*, 1764. Trans. H. I. Wolf. New York: Knopf, 1924. Made available by Hanover College, 1995.  
<https://history.hanover.edu/texts/voltaire/volrelig.html>

### Additional Reading Suggestions:

- David Garrioch, “The Party of the *Philosophes*.” *The Enlightenment World*. Eds. Martin Fitzpatrick, Peter Jones, Christa Knellwolf and Iain McCalman. Routledge, 2004. 426-442. Useful overview, with Voltaire at the center.
- Rousseau, *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, 1750. Trans. Ian Johnston.  
[http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/r/rousseau/jean\\_jacques/arts/](http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/r/rousseau/jean_jacques/arts/)
- Voltaire. *Treatise on Tolerance*. 1763. Trans. Richard Hooker.  
<http://www.constitution.org/volt/tolerance.htm>  
Voltaire’s famous defense of Jean Calas, freedom of religion and religious toleration. Calas was a Toulouse Protestant executed on the charge of having murdered his son, a Catholic convert. Voltaire’s advocacy on behalf of Calas succeeded in getting him posthumously exonerated and compensation paid to his family.
- Robert Darnton, “The Great Divide: Rousseau on the Route to Vincennes.” *George Washington’s False Teeth: An Unconventional Guide to the Eighteenth Century*. New York and London: WW Norton, 2003.
- Stephen Colbert, *The Colbert Report*. July 15, 2014.  
<http://thecolbertreport.cc.com/videos/nnucn6/obama-s-senioritis>  
Colbert mocks Fox News mocking the Enlightenment. Hilarious.

### Quick Lecture Points

- *Religious Toleration in 18<sup>th</sup> c France*  
France is Roman Catholic, with a long history of persecution of religious others, from the Protestant Huguenots in the seventeenth century to the Jansenists in the eighteenth. Following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, “only Catholics could legally hold services of worship, be married and baptized, enter French universities, obtain masterships in guilds, or serve in any public capacity,” except in the region of Alsace (Ossenga 56). A sizeable community

of Protestants remained, nonetheless, in the south of France. Jews were expelled from France in 1394, but by the seventeenth and eighteenth century small communities of Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews have returned. Ossenga notes that “no Jew was allowed to own land or hold office.” The French revolution will change the status of all religious minorities in France: freedom of religion is enshrined as a principle of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, and Protestants and Muslims, and by 1791 also Jews, are admitted to the full rights of citizenship.

- *Religious Toleration in 18thc Geneva*

To be a citizen of Geneva you had to be a Protestant. When Rousseau converts to Catholicism in Book II, he is renouncing his birthright as a citizen. To reclaim it (as he will also proceed to do), he has to reconvert to Protestantism.

- *The Wealth and Power of the Catholic Church*

David Bell notes, in the chapter included here, that “it is hard to overstate the extent to which Roman Catholicism permeated early modern French life,” its influence underwritten by the church’s “enormous economic and political power.” It owned at least 6 percent of the land outright (and in some regions more); possessed its own system of justice; recruited its members from the “surplus children of the wealthy and well-connected,” and until the middle of the eighteenth century, was the largest “source of charitable aid given to France’s armies of destitute and travelling poor” (80). In shock after the schism of the Reformation, it was also a militant church, determined to wrest popular “pagan” festivals from the peasantry and resist Protestant incursion.

- *Jansenist*

The Jansenists were a Catholic movement, particularly popular among parish clergy in the north of France, that advocated for a “gloomy and demanding strain of Catholicism” (Bell 87). They stressed the “utter depravity and sinfulness of humanity” and a life of self-denial and constant prayer (Bell 87). The effect of the movement, and their importance to the history of the eighteenth century, was to exacerbate the split between the clergy and ordinary believers, and further schisms within the church itself, which feared that Jansenism was merely Calvinism in disguise. As a consequence Jansenists were persecuted by the Church. Both Jansenism itself and the Church’s reaction harmed the Church’s reputation and its hold over the Catholic faithful.

### Discussion Question:

- Read the first page and a half of Bell’s essay on “Culture and Religion” in *Old Regime France* with your students, where Bell suggests eighteenth century intellectuals perceived themselves as engaged in an “epic conflict” between faith and reason, fanaticism and freedom, science and tradition, darkness and light. He goes on to suggest this is misleading, but notes that it is also a “compelling” story. Ask students what they make of this “epic conflict,” as translated to their own 21<sup>st</sup> century realities. Is such an “epic conflict” going on today, whether in the US or in the world? Must faith and logic be always at loggerheads? Religion, after all, is not always fanaticism; reason (as the French Revolution would go on to prove) can be equally fanatical, equally cult-like.

The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the *disenchantment of the world*. Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations. It is not accidental that our greatest art is intimate and not monumental.

– Max Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, 1918

### *Suggestions for Close Reading*

- It is in Book II that Rousseau, adrift and unemployed, begins his journey toward conversion. On p. 46, he observes of M. de Pontverre, who sends him on to Mme. de Warens, that “although M. de Pontverre was a good man, he was certainly not a virtuous one. He was, on the contrary, a pious man, with no notion of virtue beyond worshipping images and telling his beads...” What distinction is Rousseau making here, between “goodness,” “virtue” and “piety?” Why is M. de Pontverre “good” without being virtuous? What does Rousseau seem to despise about de Pontverre’s version of religion?
- On p. 48-52, we meet Mme. de Warens for the first time. What is her role as a convert to the Church? In Rousseau’s eventual conversion? What does this suggest about the intersection of politics, power and religion in the period?
- On p. 54, Rousseau makes another observation about morality and duty, “which is that we should avoid situations that bring our duty into conflict with our interests and represent our own advantage to us as dependent on the misfortune of others, since I am certain that in such situations, however sincere our love of virtue has previously been, we will sooner or later weaken, without noticing it, and become unjust and wicked in deed without having ceased to be just and good in spirit.” What does Rousseau mean by “duty?” What is the “love of virtue” here? Is it *possible* to be “unjust and wicked in deed” while still remaining “just and good in spirit?” Ask students to write down their own definitions of these terms, and their implication; then discuss: do they agree with Rousseau? What is the significance of Rousseau suggesting this transformation occurs without us being even aware of it, and why might our belief that our own advantage depends on the misfortune of others *hasten* that transformation into moral obliviousness?
- Rousseau arrives in Turin on p. 58; he describes his religious experiences and education up until that point on p. 60-61. What are Genevan attitudes toward Catholicism, according to Rousseau? And yet why has he himself become “confused about the whole thing?” What kind of portrait of religion is he painting here?
- Reflecting on his coming conversion, Rousseau declares, “I could not avoid the conclusion that the holy work I was about to perform was, when it came down to it, an act of mere banditry. Although I was still very young, I felt that, irrespective of what was the true religion, I was about to sell my own...” (61) Read this passage carefully with students. What precisely is Rousseau suggesting that he’s horrified by here? That he’s about to convert to Catholicism? Or is it the reason for why he’s doing it? Why *is* he, in fact, about to convert to Catholicism?
- How might Rousseau’s actions here compare with his description of M. de Pontverre’s piety in the earlier passage? Ultimately, what is Rousseau suggesting religion *is* and should be *for*? Does that differ from what we’ve seen of the uses to which religion is put in Rousseau’s world?

If virtue costs us dear, we have only ourselves to blame, for if we resolved always to be prudent, we would rarely need to be virtuous. But inclinations, which in themselves could easily be overcome, engage us without the least resistance on our part: we yield to small temptations whose perils we despise. And so, imperceptibly, we slide into dangerous situations which we could easily have avoided...

- Rousseau, *Confessions*, Book II, p. 62-63

- Read the above passage carefully with your students. What does the morality, or virtue that Rousseau is describing here resemble? Is it a question of good and evil, of stark opposites? Compare his notion of “yield[ing] to small temptations” gradually with the fate he suffers in the broken comb incident (Book I), or the accusation of Marion (later in Book II). Consider also the processual nature of the morality or virtue Rousseau is describing in light of his autobiographical project – both as narrative and as revelation. How might a narrative of the self help yield insights such as the gradual “yielding to small temptations?” What work is the rhetoric of “strength” and “weakness” in this passage doing?
- It is in Book III that Rousseau meets M. Gaime, who will become his model for the “Savoyard vicar” in *Émile* (p. 88-90). How does Rousseau describe him? What is appealing to Rousseau about this man’s person, his representation of religion and how he approaches Rousseau himself? On the bottom of p. 89, for instance, Rousseau notes that by the time he meets M. Gaime, “my conversion was not at that time very solidly based,” but that he was nevertheless “moved” by his conversations with Gaime. “Far from finding his talks tiresome, I enjoyed them for their lucidity, their simplicity, and above all, for a certain tender solicitude with which I felt them to be full” (90).
- Read the “Creed of the Savoyard Vicar” from Rousseau’s *Émile*. What kind of religion is Rousseau propounding here? What are the key tenets of religion, as Rousseau explains it here? That Catholicism is the one true Church? What does his attitude seem to be toward clerical establishments, toward the institutionalization of religion? What might have threatened clerical establishments in both Calvinist Geneva and Catholic Paris about Rousseau’s “Creed?” (It was this “creed” that got *Émile* banned, burned and Rousseau exiled).
- In Book VI, Rousseau retreats with his “Maman” to the rural idyll of Les Charmettes, where he declares “This is where my life’s brief happiness begins” (220). On p. 230, he describes his morning prayers:

I rose each morning before the sun. I set off uphill through a neighbouring orchard to join a pretty path that followed the hillside above the vineyards all the way to Chambéry. There, as I walked, I said my prayers, which consisted not of an empty moving of the lips but of a sincere lifting of the heart towards the author of that lovely nature whose beauties were everywhere before my eyes. I have never liked praying indoors; I feel as though the walls of the room and all the other little works of men interpose themselves between my God and me. I love to contemplate Him in His works,

while my heart is raised on high. My prayers were always pure, for that I can vouch, and for that reason deserved to be heard.

- *Confessions*, Book VI, p. 230-231

- Read this passage with students. Where is Rousseau praying and why? What kind of religion is he advocating for? Why does he believe his prayers should be heard? Compare with what we know already about Rousseau's readers' fiercely emotional reaction to his work (Darnton's "Readers Respond"), and to his earlier reference to being above all "moved" by M. Gaime's conversations with him about religion. What does religion offer in these passages? Clerics, buildings, tradition and institutions are done away with, or in other words, Rousseau is dividing religion from religious *experience*.
- Where does this passage locate virtue? What is potentially problematic about that? Where else do we see Rousseau arguing that virtue is determined by intent, by an "innocent heart," rather than deed? Are these convincing arguments?
- Ask students to read Voltaire's definition of "Religion" in his 1764 Philosophical Dictionary, and compare it both with the descriptions of religion and of religious experience they've encountered thus far in the *Confessions*, and with the "Creed of a Savoyard Vicar" that Rousseau expounds in *Émile*. What similarities and differences are there in these two texts? How does their language and tone differ? What does each philosopher seem to think religion is for or should be? Discuss with students which definition (Voltaire v. Rousseau) they find the most convincing or compelling and why.

Note: It might be interesting to add some personal biography to the discussion:

these men had very different class backgrounds (the one wealthy, urbane, at home in precisely those *salons* that made Rousseau so nervous; the other – well, the other was Rousseau), ideas and styles of writing, the latter definitely evident even in translation. There was a considerable degree of enmity between them as well: Rousseau distrusted Voltaire and believed he despised him for a lowborn plebe – which, in fact, he did. Posterity, meanwhile, has revealed that it was Voltaire who wrote and circulated the infamous *Sentiments of the Citizens*, which revealed Rousseau's poor paternal skills to the world.

- The illumination on the road to Vincennes. In a famous moment on p. 341-2, Rousseau describes how he "saw another universe and became another man" while on a walk to visit his friend Diderot, who'd been imprisoned by edict of the king for publishing two religiously controversial pieces, the *Letters on the Blind* and *The Promenade of a Skeptic*; as he walks, according to his own account, he reads a question posed by the Academy of Dijon for one of its essay prize competitions in the *Mercure de France*: "*Has the progress of the sciences and the arts contributed to the corruption or purification of morals?*" (342) As Damrosch notes, "it was a trite enough question, practically guaranteed an answer in the affirmative, but Rousseau...saw a new way of arguing in the negative" (212). In a 1762 letter to Malesherbes (press and printing censor for France, but a liberal and supporter of the *philosophes*), he would describe the moment as follows:

Suddenly I felt my spirit dazzled by a thousand brilliant insights. A host of ideas crowded in upon me all at once, troubling my mind with a force and confusion impossible to express. I felt my head spinning with a giddiness like intoxication. A violent palpitation oppressed and expanded my breath. Finding it no longer possible to breathe while walking, I let myself collapse

Teaching Rousseau's *Confessions* in Wisconsin

Great World Texts: A Program of the Center for the Humanities, University of Wisconsin-Madison

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beneath one of the trees which line the avenue; there I spent half an hour in such a state of agitation that on rising I discovered the front of my vest to be wet with tears I never knew I had shed. Oh Sir! If I had ever been able to write one quarter of what I saw and felt beneath that tree, how clearly I would have revealed all the contradictions of the social system; how forcefully I would have exposed all the abuses of our institutions; how simply I would have demonstrated that man is naturally good, and that it is only through these institutions that he becomes evil! All that I was able to retain from the flood of great truths which, for the space of a quarter of an hour, engulfed me in light as I lay beneath that tree...That is how, when I least expected it, I became an author almost in spite of myself.

- Rousseau, *Second Letter to Malesherbes*, 1762

What kind of experience is Rousseau describing here? One arrived at by careful reasoning and dispassionate logic? It is this moment that will launch his career as a writer and philosopher. Is it what we would expect from someone often carelessly labeled merely another “Enlightenment philosopher?”

- Read the excerpts from the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, or the text in its entirety (it’s short), with your students. What is Rousseau arguing here about the sciences and the arts? What do they *do*? What is their role in society? Rousseau became an “instant celebrity” with the piece. Given the context of the time, why might that have been? What is he arguing *against*?

Suspicious, offenses, fears, coldness, reserve, hatred, and betrayal will constantly lurk beneath this uniform and treacherous veil of politeness, this vaunted urbanity that we owe to the enlightenment of our century.’

Even while government and laws give security and well-being to assemblages of men, the sciences, letters and arts, which are less despotic but perhaps more powerful, spreads garlands of flowers over the iron chains that bind them, stifle in them the sense of that original liberty for which they seemed to have been born, make them love their enslavement, and transform them into what are called civilized peoples

- Rousseau, *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*, 1750

[*The Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*] was a very brief piece...and readers today may well wonder what all the fuss was about. Attacks on modern corruption were boringly familiar, but Rousseau’s approach was remarkable because he attacked the assumptions of the Enlightenment from within...In his paradoxical but powerful argument, he agreed with the philosophes that civilization had brought much that is good, but he argued that at the same time it is destructive; its defects are not occasional exceptions to its virtues but a direct consequence of them.

– Damrosch, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Restless Genius*, 216

### Assignments, Activities and Project Ideas

- Assign students the task of writing a narrative describing and determining their own religious convictions and experiences, using Rousseau’s thoughts in the *Confessions* and in the “Creed”

to situate their own feelings and ideas. What does religion mean to them? What do they believe? Why? Is belief possible without tradition? What does tradition add?

- Assign students the task of writing an essay analyzing the interaction of faith and reason in the 21<sup>st</sup> century US. On the one hand, we've got pundit-satirists like Bill Maher blasting the devout as irrational and calling the religion a myth only the credulous – that is, those who do not reason – would believe. On the other, we've got religious right-wingers calling the science of climate change a creed “straight from the pit of hell.” Where does truth in this debate lie?
- Assign students the perhaps anachronistic task of writing an essay in response to precisely the same Dijon Academy question that inspired Rousseau to write his first *Discourse*: “Have the sciences and the arts corrupted or purified morals?” (Perhaps to avoid confusion, suggest students focus on either the sciences or the arts). Share the following analysis of Rousseau's *Discourse* by Darnton:

[In *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences*], Rousseau saw that morality was a cultural code, the unwritten rules of conduct, knowledge and taste that held society together. Man could not do without it, for man stripped of culture was a Hobbes-ian brute, lacking an ethical existence. But supercivilized man, the *homme du monde* who divided his time between the opera and the Cabaret La Selle, was still worse...the arts and sciences were at bottom political institutions. The sophistication of the salons reinforced the despotism of Versailles...Culture corrupts, and absolutist culture corrupts absolutely.

– Robert Darnton, “Rousseau on the Route to Vincennes,” p. 113-4

Before students write their essays, discuss Rousseau's observation that morality works in society as a cultural code, rather than an innate virtue. What might this suggest? What are its implications for how people behave? What do students make of the intersection between culture and politics? What does the idea, “culture corrupts, and absolutist culture corrupts absolutely” suggest? How are Rousseau's observations about morality and culture applicable to our own culture, society and political institutions today?

- Rousseau, unlike Voltaire (who was a deist) or Rousseau's acquaintance and salon host the Baron d'Holbach (who was an atheist), and many other of his philosophe contemporaries, *did* believe in God – just not in the way the Catholic or Calvinist churches wanted him to. Suggest to a group of students they write a play imagined as a conversation about religion, religious toleration and the role of the Church in people's lives between Rousseau, Voltaire, d'Holbach, a Jansenist clergyman and a conservative Catholic bishop (or some variation thereof). Each student would be assigned one person (ex., Voltaire), research that person and his ideas about religion, and then reconvene with the group to draft the script for the play.



## UNIT 6: AN IRRESISTIBLE ENTHUSIASM – MUSIC, THE ARTS AND POLITICAL FREEDOM

**Objective:** This Unit will explore Rousseau’s representation of music in the *Confessions*, the role of music and the arts in Rousseau’s philosophical work, and the role of music in Enlightenment culture and art more broadly.

Rousseau was an ardent admirer of Italian comic opera...[which dealt] with ordinary people in everyday situations, singing arias with appealing melodies...French *tragédie lyrique*, in contrast, reflected the dignity and ornate splendour of the *ancien régime*. It carried the audience into an artificial world of enchantment, or an equally unreal human world filled with noble and legendary characters moved by grandiose passions...Some scholars have also pointed out that...French opera was identified with privilege and authority, while Italian comic opera was considered anti-establishment and egalitarian .

– Cynthia Verba, “Music in the Enlightenment,” p. 311

### Preparatory Reading and Listening:

#### Reading

- “Querelles des Bouffons.” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Querelle\\_des\\_Bouffons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Querelle_des_Bouffons)  
Short, credibly sourced Wikipedia entry on the angry French v. Italian opera quarrel of the 1750s.
- Rousseau, *Letter on French Music* [Short excerpt] 1753.  
[http://www.cengage.com/music/book\\_content/049557273X\\_wrightSimms/assets/ITOW/7273X\\_41c\\_Rousseau.pdf](http://www.cengage.com/music/book_content/049557273X_wrightSimms/assets/ITOW/7273X_41c_Rousseau.pdf)  
Rousseau’s wildly controversial essay on why Italian music is superior to French music. The ensuing controversy (the “querelles des Bouffons”), according to Rousseau himself, helped stop a revolution and endangered Rousseau’s life.
- Robert Wokler. “Rousseau, Rameau and Revolution.” (1978) *Rousseau, the Age of Enlightenment, and their Legacies*. Ed. Bryan Garsten. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2012. Noted Rousseau scholar Wokler takes on the task of figuring out whether the latter two of Rousseau’s claims (see above) have any validity, and concludes that well, actually, he wasn’t too far off the mark.
- Martin Fitzpatrick, “The Age of Louis XIV and Early Enlightenment in France.” *The Enlightenment World*. Eds. Fitzpatrick, Knellwolf, Calman and Jones. Routledge, 2004.  
Links Louis XIV’s (“the sun king”) absolutist regime with his patronage of the arts.

#### Listening

- Pergolesi, *La serva padrona* [The servant as mistress] 1752.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKl4wpplS3U>  
1916 performance of the Italian comic opera that inspired Rousseau’s *Le Devin du Village*, and whose arrival in Paris occasioned the (in)famous “querelle de bouffons.”
- Rousseau, *Le Devin du village* (opera). 1752. Premiere: Paris Opera, March 1753.  
<http://www.allmusic.com/album/rousseau-le-devin-du-village-mw0001577344>

Includes a brief history of Rousseau's opera by Stephen Eddins, followed by links to a performance of a 2006 performance of *Le Devin du village* performed by Gabriela Bürgler, Michael Feyfar, Dominik Wörner, the Cantus Firmus Consort and the Cantus Firmus Kammerchor, led by Andreas Reize.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ld7XDELDnto>

Different link, same performance.

### Additional Reading and Listening Suggestions:

**Note:** The eighteenth century was an immensely rich period of musical composition and creation: J. S. Bach, Handel, Vivaldi, Mozart, Gluck, Haydn and Beethoven were all active in this period. The links to general resources below (*All Music* or *Music in the Eighteenth Century*) should help you learn more about music in the period more generally. The focus, however, of this section of Unit 6, are reading and listening suggestions that are either relevant to Rousseau's *Confessions* (such as the performances at the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice), or music that in some manner reflects the theme of this unit: music, the arts and politics.

#### Reading

- Cynthia Verba, "Music in the Enlightenment." *The Enlightenment World*. Eds. Fitzpatrick, Knellwolf, Calman and Jones. Routledge, 2004.  
Verba covers similar ground to Wokler – that is, Rousseau, Rameau and the "querelles," but focuses less on the politics and instead situates the discussion within the context of Enlightenment conversations and debates about music more broadly.
- Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages* [Excerpt on Music and Politics]. 1781.
- Rousseau, "Music." Trans. Beverly Wilcox. *The Encyclopedia of Diderot and d'Alembert: A Collaborative Translation Project*. Ed. Dena Goodman  
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/did/did2222.0002.890/music?rgn=main;view=fulltext;q1=Rousseau>  
Rousseau wrote most of the entries on music in the *Encyclopédie*; this is one.
- *All Music* <http://www.allmusic.com/>  
This free, searchable site contains entries (biographies, overviews) on **all the major composers** of the period, along with a vast assortment of links to performances of their music. Just type in "Haydn" or "Mozart" and go from there.
- *Music in the Eighteenth Century*.  
<https://sites.google.com/site/jarice18thcmusic/home>  
Digital accompaniment to John Rice's *Music in the Eighteenth Century* (Norton, 2012). Provides an excellent list of recordings and performances of eighteenth century music that are available online, with some information about the performances.
- Charlton, David. *Opera in the Age of Rousseau: Music, Confrontation, Realism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

#### Vivaldi and the Women of the Ospedale della Pietà

- BBC. *Vivaldi's Women*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=153WVp8QJQ0>  
BBC Documentary about the sacred vocal and instrumental music Vivaldi wrote with and for the all-female orphan choirs of the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice, ca 1700s-1740. Rousseau attends a performance at a school like the Ospedale during his time in Venice.

#### Rameau, the Arch-French Composer

- Ivan Hewett, "Rameau: The Greatest Composer You've Never Heard Of." *The Telegraph*.

20 July 2014. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/proms/10971031/Rameau-the-greatest-composer-youve-never-heard-of.html>

- Rameau, *Hippolyte et Aricie*. Paris, 1733.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nR7-DVh3uWU>  
Complete performance of Rameau's opera, Glyndebourne, UK, 2013.

#### *Mozart's Beaumarchais*

- Beaumarchais, *Marriage of Figaro*. 1784.  
<https://archive.org/details/marriagefigaroa00beaugoog> Full text of the revolutionary play that became Mozart's *Figaro*. In order to get the opera approved for performance in Vienna, Da Ponte (who wrote Mozart's libretto), removed all overtly political references.
- Michael Billington, "How to Stage a Revolution." *The Guardian*. Jan 5 2006.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2006/jan/06/classicalmusicandopera>  
On how Beaumarchais shaped the revolution through his plays.
- Mozart, *Marriage of Figaro*. Premiere: Vienna, 1786.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fef03047ZX8>  
Complete video performance of Mozart's opera. Vienna Philharmonic, Kiri te Kanawa.

#### *Beethoven: Joy and Freedom*

- Beethoven [b. 1770], "Ode to Joy" [Ode to Freedom], *Symphony No. 9*. 1821.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xPuSzvCSQA>  
This is a recording of the so-called "Freedom Concert," conducted by Leonard Bernstein and performed by the Vienna Philharmonic, that took place in Berlin after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany in 1989. The choir sings "freiheit" (freedom) instead of "freunde" (joy). "Ode to Joy" has also been adopted as the anthem of the European Union.

#### *Selected Films*

- Dir. Milos Forman. *Amadeus*. 1984. DVD. The classic Mozart film.
- Dir. Raymond St-Jean. *Le Mozart Noir: Reviving a Legend*. 2003. DVD.  
Documentary about the virtuoso violinist, composer, Paris symphony conductor and revolutionary, the Chevalier de St. Georges, son of a Senegalese slave and a French nobleman. The wikipedia entry on St Georges is good and appears credibly sourced:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chevalier\\_de\\_Saint-Georges](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chevalier_de_Saint-Georges)
- Dir. René Féret. *Mozart's Sister*. 2011. DVD.  
The Mozart family goes on the road, touring Europe's capitals, with sister Nannerl playing second fiddle (literally) to Papa Leo's favorite boy genius.

#### **Discussion Questions**

- What is music for? Why create or listen to music?
- What is the role of music in a culture? To move people; to create a thing of beauty, to transport us beyond ourselves? What is the role of music in *our* culture today?
- What is the responsibility of artists, such as musicians, to their communities of listeners? One example where this question comes up most often these days is perhaps rap and hip hop music (I assume I don't need to rehearse what rap/hiphop is often accused of promoting). Are rappers

and hip-hop artists responsible for what they put in their music? Are they responsible for how listeners interpret that music? *Are* they promoting crime? Violence towards women? [Listening to an example here would probably help promote discussion]. To what extent does race play a role in shaping the conversation, particularly in the media, about this music? These are all ways of asking the question: how *powerful* is music? How powerful are the arts?

- Few 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans would probably say that rap or hip-hop should be censored by the state. Many parents, however, do try to censor or control what their kids listen to or see, presumably thinking their kids are either too young to be exposed to it (it being whatever the parent in question deems inappropriate) or perhaps even thinking they should never be exposed to it, no matter their age. Is there a contradiction in this? What's different about government censorship as opposed to, say, parental censorship? Does government censorship matter as much, or pose as much of a threat to freedom of expression, as it once did, given the rise of social media? (The example of China and Twitter is perhaps interesting here). Discuss what the question of censoring what young children listen to actually suggests about what we believe music does.
- Share with students some of the ways in which art and government were intertwined in the eighteenth century (see Fitzpatrick in this Unit, Bell in Unit 1). Then ask what the situation is like today. To compare Louis XIV's support of the arts to enhance and celebrate the splendor of his reign with, ahem, the NEA, is not exactly a fair or accurate comparison, for a variety of obvious reasons. But politics is still driven by spectacle, and music is hardly a-political. So what does the intersection of music, or the arts, and politics or political power, look like today? When we speak of the "politics" of music, what do we mean?
- Discuss the eighteenth century performance history of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* and some of the twentieth century performance history of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. What do these two disparate examples suggest about political spectacle and ritual, the power of symbols and the power of music – both in the eighteenth century and today?

### Suggestions for Close Reading

- What does Rousseau associate music with throughout the *Confessions*? How does he describe his experiences of music? He begins studying music in Book III, first by being sent to a seminary, where he learns nothing from the priests but does learn from the one book – a book of music – that he brings with him, inspiring the ever-hopeful Mme. de Warens with "the idea that I might become a musician" (118). He's promptly sent off to choir school. How does he describe his experience there?
- Rousseau first meets the dubious Venture, "French musician," on p. 121-22, and becomes, on his own account, infatuated with him; in Book IV, having abandoned his choir-master in Lyons, unable to locate Mme. de Warens and trying to figure out what to do with himself, he comes up with the peculiar idea of passing himself off as the "Venture of Lausanne, to teach music, which I knew nothing about, and to present myself as coming from Paris, where I had never been." Why might he have settled on precisely these lies, precisely this identity? What do they represent for him? (See also p. 144-145, Rousseau's first concert, mythomania in full swing.)

- Read pgs. 182-183 In Book V. Rousseau, now back with “Maman” and working as a surveyor, becomes “so completely absorbed in my music that I was unable to think of anything else;” he decides to quit his job and “devote myself entirely to music,” a step in a few paragraphs later he calls “insane” (183). What has led him to this moment? How does he describe it? He talks of being “in the grip of an irresistible enthusiasm: my passion for music was becoming a sort of mania.” What is his tone in these passages? What does music seem to be *doing* to Rousseau? What other kinds of emotions does he describe in this manner?
- He also observes of others’ reactions to his impractical step, that “seeing me devote myself entirely to music, judged my talent by my sacrifice and concluded that, with such a passion for this art, I must possess it to a superior degree” (183). What is Rousseau suggesting here? Compare, for instance, with other observations Rousseau makes in the *Confessions* and in his philosophical work about how appearances create reality: people see what they want to see or expect to see; that which confirms rather than challenges what they already know. (Rousseau is soon inundated with music students.)
- In Book VII, Rousseau finally arrives in Paris to present his new system of musical notation to the French Academy [which includes Rameau] who soundly reject it (p. 275-279). But what does his passion for music and his mastery of it nonetheless provide him with during his time in the capital?
- Later in Book VII, he travels to Venice to work as a secretary to the British Ambassador:

I had arrived from Paris with a typical French prejudice against Italian music, but I had also been endowed by nature with an innate sensibility, against which prejudice cannot for long prevail...When I heard the barcarolle, it was as though I was hearing singing for the first time, and I was soon so infatuated with opera that...I would often steal away from the company and find myself a place somewhere else. There, quite alone, shut up in my box, I would abandon myself, however long the performance, to the pleasure of enjoying it at my ease from beginning to end. One day at the San Grisostomo theater, I fell asleep...The noisy and brilliant arias failed to arouse me. But who could convey the delicious sensations produced in me by the sweet harmonies and angelic strains of the one that did? What an awakening! What rapture! What ecstasy, when at the same moment I opened both ears and eyes! For a moment I thought I was in paradise.

- Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 305

Read this passage carefully. What kind of language is Rousseau using to characterize his experience with Italian music? What does he suggest about national prejudices when it comes to music? What happens to him in his solitary box? Compare with Darnton’s “Readers Respond to Rousseau” and with his philosophical work in general. What did Rousseau believe emotion could *do*? What did sentiment, ecstasy, rapture signify for him, politically speaking? What is the significance of his suggesting he mistook the “divine aria” he heard with a belief that he was in “paradise”?

- Watch parts of the BBC documentary, *Vivaldi’s Women*. Then read Rousseau’s description of visiting a “scuole” like the Ospedale on p. 305-306: “I can conceive of nothing more voluptuous nor more touching than this music, the richness of the composition, the exquisite art of the

singing, the beauty of the voices..." (etc). What does Rousseau seem to be experiencing here even more strongly than in his solitary box at the opera? Does it matter that the singers are young women concealed by a grille, objects of fantasy, of voices only and not reality? And yet Rousseau is determined to see them. What happens? What does he seem to struggle to understand about beauty and music? What does the incident reveal about gender, romantic fantasy, physical beauty and aesthetic appreciation, about the power of appearances?

- On p. 324, Rousseau's first opera, the *Gallant Muses*, is performed. What's the audience's reaction? What does the reaction indicate about music, power and the arts in the period?
- On p. 365, Rousseau begins composing *Le Devin du Village* (The Village Soothsayer), after a long talk with a M. Mussard ("passionately fond of Italian music") about the Italian *opera buffa* (comic opera), "which we had both seen in Italy and by which we had both been enraptured. That night, unable to sleep, I began musing as to how one might go about introducing this kind of drama into France..." (365) How does it get produced? (That is, who helps him? Would it have been possible without assistance from others?) How does his audience react? (p. 367-8) Who is present for the second performance? (p. 368-9) What's the result? What do the ensuing events suggest about the intersection of money, power and politics in Rousseau's society? Why does Rousseau suggest he did not accept the king's pension? Why might he actually have done it?
- Read carefully with your students Rousseau's description of the "querelles des bouffons" on p. 374-376 ("All Paris was divided into two camps, whose passions ran higher than if some affair of state or of religion had been at stake," p. 374). What is this debate about, at its heart? Why is everyone getting so upset over *music*? What happens to Rousseau? Are his claims that his life was in danger believable? Why may there be some truth to his claims? (See Wokler) Suggest students read the short wikipedia entry on the "querelles des bouffons" to help them make additional sense of the debate; see also the discussion questions.
- Does music have a nationality? Does it belong to one nation, one culture? Does it reflect a society's values, institutions, inequalities, sensibilities? Or does it transcend them? Assign the brief excerpts from *Essay on the Origin of Languages* and *Letter on French Music*. What does Rousseau seem to have thought? Do your students agree with him?
- How do Rousseau's ideas about music, language and freedom resemble the ideas about moral and civil freedom that he develops in his philosophical work, ex., *Discourse on Inequality* and the *Social Contract*? Rousseau's descriptions of experiencing music is of passion, rapture, ecstasy. What might these transports of emotion have to do with freedom? What kind of "freedom" is this?

What, in fact, are the moral relations of individuals as Rousseau conceived them but calculations of intervals of another sort? The prevailing social divisions between persons have their counterpoint in the divisions of octaves, instrumental music is matched by instrumental politics, and the subjugation of peoples is achieved, in part, by their masters' conjugation of verbs and their manipulation of language in general.

– Wokler, "Rameau, Rousseau and Revolution," p. 65

## Activities and Project Ideas

- Why not suggest would-be musicians in the class, perhaps in collaboration with musicians from other classrooms, set up a performance of Rousseau's *Le Devin du village* as their class project?
- What does "freedom" *sound* like? Suggest musicians in the class compose their own musical piece representing or embodying freedom – individual, moral, civil.
- Rousseau's descriptions of music in the *Confessions* are of passion, rapture, ecstasy. It is difficult to get a sense of the music itself, as it was performed; instead all we can know is how Rousseau reacted to it. Is there something about our experience of music – even our experience of art – that resists description, resists communication? Assign students the task of first listening to a piece of music – any piece of music – that they genuinely love, find intoxicating, can't get enough of. Then ask them to attempt, in writing, to describe the music to someone else who has never heard it; what they're trying to communicate is what makes the music precisely so rapturous. Discuss the results in class. How do music and language interact? How much of our subjective aesthetic experiences can we truly convey?
- Stage a debate in class that resembles the "querelles des bouffons," but now about a contemporary musical or artistic controversy. Assign two class judges, who will determine which side presents the better arguments. After the debate, assign a short piece of writing where students reflect a) on the experience of the debate and whether or not they've changed their opinions as a result, and b) what the debate has made them think about in terms of the role music and/or the arts play in society.
- Who were the young women of the Ospedale della Pietà? We learn from Rousseau that their angelic voices were not always matched by angelic exteriors. But who were these abandoned, illegitimate, one-eyed musical geniuses? Ask students to research the Ospedale and then write a historically accurate short fiction narrating the life of one such young woman. Alternately, have the fictional young woman write a letter to Rousseau in reaction to his descriptions both of listening to their music and of meeting them in person in the *Confessions* (granted, Rousseau died before the *Confessions* was published, but nonetheless).

## UNIT 7: ROUSSEAU'S REVOLUTIONS - SLAVERY, THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE INVENTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

"Everything is rooted in politics...a people will never be other than the nature of its government makes it...What is the nature of government most likely to produce the most virtuous, the most enlightened, wisest and in short, the best people?"

– Rousseau, *Confessions*, Book IX, p. 395

**Objective:** To explore questions of injustice and inequality in the *Confessions*, Rousseau's legacy in eighteenth century revolutionary history, and the paradoxical legacy of Enlightenment thought and history for the development of human rights.

The French Revolution was a watershed moment in the history of the world, its effects felt from Europe to the Americas. It was but one of many revolutions, both social and political, that took place in the eighteenth century. As Paul Hyland, Olga Gomez and Francesca Greensides have observed,

Alongside the development of 'Enlightened' philosophies of law, government and kingship, the eighteenth century witnessed major social changes, political unrest and conflict – most famously in North America and France, but also in England, Ireland, Switzerland, Corsica, the Austrian Netherlands and other places. There were also numerous slave revolts in North America and the Caribbean [the most successful of which resulted in the establishment of the first independent black republic, Haiti. There were] "peasant revolts in Hungary, Russia, Bohemia and Sweden...Shortly after the close of the century, the great revolutionary leader Simon Bolívar, well schooled in the Enlightenment, would begin the process of liberating half of South America from Spanish rule. Of course, these conflicts were not all inspired by Enlightenment texts and reasoning. However, through the North American and French Revolutions – particularly the latter – new thinking emerged about the power and rights of people to transform their societies, rather than seek the restoration of a prior order, and to become the citizens of secular republics rather than the subjects of ancient monarchies. These radical ideas were rehearsed (and often rejected) in many works of the Enlightenment, but they became explosive through the experience of the revolution and would give rise to new ways of thinking and writing about human society and history. (328)

This Unit explores Rousseau's legacy for the French Revolution and for eighteenth century revolutionary history. It also explores the claim that the philosophers, novelists and revolutionaries of the Enlightenment, Rousseau chief among them, "invented" human rights; Rousseau, indeed, is often credited with being the first to coin the phrase "rights of man" in *The Social Contract*. In the centuries since, human rights have become part of international law, and speaking of "human rights abuses" a powerful rhetorical tool in advocating for the rights of people across the world.

Yet the concept of "human rights" rests on a powerful but problematic assumption: that human beings have rights strictly by virtue of being human. Well, what does it mean to *be* "human"? Who gets to count as "human?" Women? Slaves? In the eighteenth century, most (white) men would have answered in the negative to both questions, at least in so far as "human" constituted the right to exercise agency and self-determination (slaves), or vote and participate in the civic life of the nation (women). Jefferson could draft the Declaration of Independence, declaring "all men are created equal,



and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights,” but he did not free his slaves. Indeed, in the years 1775-1800 alone, European and American slave-traders shipped two million, eight thousand, six hundred and seventy Africans across the Atlantic to plantations throughout the Americas and the Caribbean. In 1794 the French National Assembly did abolish the slave trade in France, but it took a slave revolt to transform the French plantation colony of St. Domingue into the free, independent black republic of Haiti. The Rousseau-reading revolutionaries of the National Assembly, meanwhile, proposed an egalitarian politics for their new republic that nonetheless did not include women. The legacies of Rousseau, the Enlightenment and of the American and French Revolutions are powerful – ethically, socially and politically. They are also highly paradoxical.

“Man is born free, but he is everywhere in chains.” – Rousseau, *The Social Contract*  
(This first line from the *Social Contract* became one of the most widely disseminated slogans of the French Revolution; see Hesse)

“Every period and every party of the Revolution made some claim upon the heritage of Rousseau...reference to Rousseau [became] an obligatory part of political debate...”

- James Swenson, *On Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, p. 172

“After 1789, many French revolutionaries would take public and vociferous stands in favor of rights for Protestants, Jews, free blacks and even slaves, and at the same time actively oppose granting rights for women”

- Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*, p. 67

“In the second half of the eighteenth century, six imperial systems straddled the Atlantic, each one sustained by a slave trade. The English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and Danish all...produced a range of plantation produce - sugar, rice, Indigo, coffee, tobacco, alcohol...It is extraordinary that consumers’ pursuit of this limited range of exotic goods, which collectively added so little to human welfare, could have generated for so long the horrors and misery of the Middle Passage and plantation slavery.”

– David Eltis, “Brief Overview,” *Transatlantic Slave Database: Voyages*

### Handout:

- Key Excerpts from Rousseau’s Philosophical Work

### Preparatory Reading

- Lynn Hunt and Jack R. Censer. *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution*. Eds. Hunt and Censer. <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/>

This website, a collaboration between the Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University and CUNY, contains **all you might need to understand and teach the French Revolution**. The “Explore” link takes you through entries such as “Social Causes of the French Revolution” to “The Monarchy Falls,” among others, offering links to images, important

- documents (such as the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*) along the way. There's also a timeline and a useful glossary of terms. Excellent, accessible site.
- "Enlightenment and Human Rights" from *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*.  
Brief and useful overview. Webpage links to the UN's *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* as well as France's 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* and Olympe de Gouges's critique of the *Declaration*.
  - Carla Hesse, "Reading in extremis: Revolutionaries Respond to Rousseau." *Into Print: Limits and Legacies of the Enlightenment; Essays in Honor of Robert Darnton*. Ed. Charles Walton. Philadelphia: Penn State UP, 2011.  
Fascinating account of how Rousseau's works are turned into sound-byte length slogans by French revolutionaries in order to promote and legitimate the revolution after 1789.
  - Dorinda Outram, "When People are Property: The Problem of Slavery in the Enlightenment." *The Enlightenment. New Approaches to European History*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2005.

### Additional Resources

- Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 1754.  
*The Social Contract*, 1762.  
*Émile, or Education*, 1762. Available on the website in English, in excerpts or as a whole.
- *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.  
<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/history.shtml>  
Provides a very short history of the drafting of the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" after the end of WWII, along with the full text of the declaration itself.
- Lynn Hunt, "Torrents of Emotion: Reading Novels and Imagining Equality." *Inventing Human Rights: A History*. New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2008.  
Makes the claim that eighteenth century novels, such as Rousseau's *Julie*, "taught their readers nothing less than a new psychology and in the process laid the foundations for a new social and political order" (Hunt 39). Hunt wrote *Inventing Human Rights* for a general audience, and it is a brisk, engaging and accessible read.
- "Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Revolution." *Rousseau Association*. Conference, Montréal, 1989. <http://www.rousseauassociation.org/publications/TOC/rousseauAndRevolution.htm>  
Open-access online resource of papers by a number of Rousseau scholars, many of them in English, on the topic of "Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the French Revolution."
- "Bastille Day Reading List." Oxford University Press Blog, July 14, 2014.  
<http://blog.oup.com/2014/07/french-revolution-bastille-day-reading-list/>  
To commemorate Bastille Day (the day the revolutionaries stormed the Bastille and symbolically inaugurated the French Revolution), Oxford UP on July 14, 2014, made the following excerpts available online: "Why it Happened" from *The French Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*, by William Doyle; "Rights, Liberty and Equality" from *Revolution and the Republic* by Jeremy Jennings; "Marie Antoinette as Tribade in the Pornography of the French Revolution" from *Homosexuality in Modern France* by Jeremy Merrick and Bryant T. Ragan; and a chapter on the Terror, "Off with their Heads" from Dan Edelstein's *The Terror of Natural Right*. All published by Oxford UP.
- Marisa Linton. "What we can learn from the French Revolution." *Oxford University Press Blog*. July 6 2013.

Briefly reflects on the legacy of the French Revolution for contemporary revolutions around the world today, such as the Arab Spring. By a leading historian of the French Revolution.

- PBS. "Global Revolution." *Marie Antoinette and the French Revolution*.  
<http://www.pbs.org/marieantoinette/revolution/index.html>  
This webpage, from a PBS site and feature film about "Marie Antoinette and the French Revolution," provides an interactive timeline and global map that details the revolutions across the world that occurred from the 1770s on through the nineteenth century. It also features a good short summary and analysis of the similarities and differences between the American and French revolutions, and a short list of "Educator Resources."
- *The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*. <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/index.faces>  
Excellent site, product of a multi-year ongoing collaboration between researchers, historians, librarians and cartographers, it provides a historical overview of the transatlantic slave trade, maps of slave trading routes, estimates by country and year, links to teacher resources and to other websites and resources.
- *The Louverture Project*. [http://thelouvertureproject.org/index.php?title=Main\\_Page](http://thelouvertureproject.org/index.php?title=Main_Page)  
This wiki project "collects and promotes knowledge, analysis and understanding of the Haitian revolution of 1791-1804." Open content resource built and maintained by community of users. Provides access to lots of key documents pertaining to the Haitian Revolution.
- Bangré, Habibou. "France, Slavery and Colonization." *The Root*. Feb 27 2010.  
[http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2010/02/france\\_slavery\\_and\\_colonization.html](http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2010/02/france_slavery_and_colonization.html)  
Interview with French intellectual Louis-Georges Tin about the legacy of French slavery and colonialism.
- Stefan Simons. "Memorial to the Slave Trade: French City Confronts its Brutal Past." *Der Spiegel International Online*. April 24, 2012.  
<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/nantes-opens-memorial-to-slave-trade-a-829447.html>  
The slave trade made Nantes rich; the city has now erected a memorial to the victims of the slave trade that many residents are unhappy about.
- Sylviane A. Diouf. "Black Abolitionists in France," "Saint-Domingue and French Abolition." *The Abolition of the Slave Trade: African Resistance*. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. 2005. [http://abolition.nypl.org/essays/african\\_resistance/](http://abolition.nypl.org/essays/african_resistance/)
- *Declaration of Independence*. July 4, 1776.
  - 1) <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/DeclarInd.html> (Final Draft)
  - 2) <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/tr00.html#decl> (Link to original rough drafts of the *Declaration*, with emendations by Franklin and Adams)

### Images

- "Images of the French Revolution." *French Revolution Digital Archive*.  
<http://frda.stanford.edu/en/images>  
A collaboration of the Stanford University Libraries and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. 14,000 searchable images, prints, illustrations, medals, coins and other objects pertaining to the French Revolution. Excellent, illustrated timeline.
- David, Jacques-Louis. *Oath of the Horatii*. 1784. Louvre Museum, Paris, France.  
<http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/oath-horatii> Foundational image for the rising cult of the nation and the (male) republic.

- David, Jacques-Louis. *The Tennis Court Oath*. 1791. (Sketch) Musée National du Château , Versailles. <https://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/633/#>
- “Africa and the African Diaspora.” Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.  
[http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/explore/dgexplore.cfm?topic=all&collection\\_list=Africa naBlackHistory&col\\_id=147](http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/explore/dgexplore.cfm?topic=all&collection_list=Africa%20naBlackHistory&col_id=147)  
Focused on African-American life, this searchable database also contains several thousand images pertaining to the transatlantic slave trade and European colonization.

### Films

- PBS. *Egalité for All: Toussaint l’Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution*. Aired 2009.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOGVgQYX6SU> The recreations are a bit dubious, but it’s a solid effort on an important subject.
- PBS. *Slavery and the Making of America*. 2005.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24U156LHXYM>
- PBS. *African-Americans: Many Rivers to Cross – The Black Atlantic*. 2013. Narrated by Henry Louis Gates Jr. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/african-americans-many-rivers-to-cross/video/> Good. Makes some of the most recent research on this topic accessible and engaging. Focus is on the US, but there is well-presented information here about the slave trade as a whole.
- PBS. *Marie Antoinette and the French Revolution*. 2006. DVD only.
- BBC. *The French Revolution: Tearing Up History*.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78u2nOEZliE> Tells the story of the Revolution through the destruction of art, symbols and buildings.
- Dir. Sofia Coppola. *Marie Antoinette*. 2005. Candy-colored biopic of Marie Antoinette. Definitely *not* about the Revolution.
- Dir. Benoît Jaquot. *Farewell, My Queen*. 2012. Bastille Day, as told from the perspective of Marie Antoinette’s servant.
- Dir. Steve McQueen. *12 Years a Slave*. 2013. Slavery in 19thc US.
- Dir. Steven Spielberg. *Amistad*. 1997. Uneven portrait of the famous slave revolt. Too many heroic white people. See Rediker’s *Amistad*, an excellent history meant for a general audience by a leading historian of the slave trade, for comparison and historical contextualization.
- Dir. Michael Apted. *Amazing Grace*. English abolition, late 18thc. See:  
<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2007/jun/14/english-abolition-the-movie/#fn4-443015108> if you intend to teach this movie.

### Discussion Questions and Suggestions for Close Reading

#### Confessions

- Rousseau dates his first, formative experience of injustice to being falsely accused of having broken a comb and then beaten when he refused to confess to a crime he had not committed. Read about this incident with your students (p. 18-19), paying particular attention to the bottom of p. 19, where Rousseau talks of “feelings, originally excited on my own behalf,

hav[ing] acquired their own integrity, and [...] become so detached from any self-interest that my heart begins to burn with indignation whenever I see or hear of any unjust action, whatever its object and wherever it occurs, quite as much as if I were myself to suffer its effects,” and so forth; he speaks of anger at tyrants, treacherous priests, and animals tormenting each other simply by virtue of being stronger. What is Rousseau describing here? What does it mean to experience an injustice visited upon someone else as if it were visited upon yourself? What value system does Rousseau seem to be advocating for here? What does “justice” in this brief description look like? Who are the victims and who the perpetrators, as Rousseau conceives of it here?

- On p. 65-67, while in Turin to be converted to Catholicism, Rousseau encounters three other male would-be converts whom he variously identifies as Slavonians, Jews and Moors. What does his attitude toward them seem to be? What might account for it? What was the status of the latter two in eighteenth century Europe?
- Rousseau also has his first involuntary homosexual encounter with one of these fellow would-be converts. How does Rousseau seem to feel about the young man involved? Rousseau never identifies him by name, but how does he identify him? Do those identifications change? What is the significance of the young man variously being described as Moorish, Jewish, and a “false African?” Why these three appellations and why the progression from Moor – to Jew – to not just “African,” but a “false African?” What value system and regard for those outside the pale of white Christian Europe is Rousseau revealing here?

\*Note: Consider supplementing discussion by asking students to look up the word “Negro” in d’Alembert and Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*.

- On p. 552, what does Rousseau diagnose as characterizing the state of affairs in France? What does he predict will occur?
- What happens to Rousseau in Book XII and why? Where is Rousseau by the time he is writing the *Confessions*? What specifically were the authorities in France and Geneva afraid of?

### *Rousseau and Human Rights*

- Ask students to pair up in groups of two or three and discuss what they think “human rights” are. They will need to define both “human” and “rights” in their own words. Discuss their conclusions with the rest of the class, paying particular attention to definitions and rights that come up repeatedly, and the ones that are only mentioned by one or two students (assuming the latter occurs).
- Read with your students the *Declaration of Independence* (US, 1776) the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* (France, 1789) and the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Geneva, 1948), Articles 1-27 (the “articles” are very short). What differences are there between these ostensibly very similar texts? What might those differences suggest about how each “declaration” is conceiving both of human beings’ “inalienable rights” and, significantly, of *community* – that is, not only of rights per se, but of how each person (you, me) has the *right* to be treated by others? Who drafted these documents, in each case? (Gender, class – in addition to nationality) Does that affect – should it affect – how we read them? Who is excluded from each text? Who is included?

- Now add excerpts from the *Social Contract* (1762) (See hand-out or excerpt available on GWT website). What definitions and ideas emerge in Rousseau that the drafters of the *Rights of Man and Citizen* clearly adopted? What does Rousseau seem to advocate for? What does he not advocate for? How realistic does he ultimately seem to have felt that his proposed just and equal government was? Who does *he* include in his republic? Who does he exclude?

After 1789, editions of Rousseau's works...flooded the nation...[there were] rapidly multiplying and increasingly modest editions of *The Social Contract* in small format – the original 'little red book' – and the many abridgements of his words and ideas into simple maxims for everyday life...

The opening phrase of book I, chapter I of *The Social Contract*, "Man is born free..." rapidly appeared as an epigrammatic devise on everything from revolutionary identity cards, processional banners, and public podia to paper money and festive altars..."

- Hesse, "Reading in extremis," p. 148, 149

- Share with your students some of the details from Hesse, Swenson and Cranston about how Rousseau influenced the drafters of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*; include the eighteenth century "Twitter-feed" manner that the *Social Contract* was disseminated during the Revolution, perhaps after watching the BBC documentary on the destruction of art, statues and symbols during the Revolution, *Tearing Up History*. Why did the revolutionaries adopt Rousseau, among all the philosophers of the Enlightenment, as their prophet? What does the propaganda campaign for which they used his words tell us – about the Revolution, about Rousseau, about politics, symbols, national myth-making, about the power of language to persuade, inform, and create belonging?
- Do politics work similarly or differently today? Who or what today possesses the kind of authority and power that Rousseau's words did in the eighteenth century?

[In revolutionary France], Rousseau[']s name...enjoyed extraordinary prestige, a prestige even among those deputies in the Assemblée who did not think at all as he did. For example, as early as December 1790, his bust was installed in the meeting place of the Assemblée, with copies of *Emile* and *Du Contrat social* placed beneath it...similar busts were placed in provincial buildings...Outside the Assemblées, people made busts of Rousseau from the stones of the Bastille for private veneration. This is perhaps more significant...Rousseau, the self-styled plebeian, was a people's philosopher. He was also the favorite plebeian philosopher of a certain type of nobleman, just as in real life, he had been the darling of the Luxembourgs, of Malesherbes, of Conti, of Mesdames de Bouffiers, de Verdelin, de Crequi, de Chenonceaux and the rest of them...

The Comte de Ségur in his *Memoires* speaks of Rousseau 's writings as prompting the action of those noblemen in the Assemblée who voted on the memorable night of 4 August, 1789 to renounce their own titles and "feudal rights:" The concept of liberty, however it was expressed, attracted us by its audacity...Men are happy to lower themselves from their customary rank, as long as they feel they can easily resume it at

### *Rousseau and Slavery*

- The famous first lines of the *Social Contract* are "Man is born free, but is everywhere in chains." For Rousseau, these chains were metaphorical. For the millions of Africans shipped across the Atlantic in the eighteenth century, they were decidedly literal. Rousseau speaks of metaphorical slavery all the time in his philosophical work. But why did he never extend his critique to slavery? [Note that there *were* persons in the eighteenth century who did advocate for the abolition of slavery, such as Olympe de Gouges and Rousseau's friend the Abbé Raynal]. What might account for his and others' obliviousness? How could Enlightenment thinkers, from Rousseau to Kant to Jefferson, advocate for liberty and self-determination, for both persons and nations, and *not* advocate for the abolition of slavery?

Such a question might seem like mere intellectual sophistry, but it actually gets at the heart of the question of who counts as human; who determines that humanity and what that humanity subsequently enjoins. For instance, on the continent of Africa itself, while any number of variables could determine who ended up getting sold into slavery (war and crime were common causes), West Africans appear rarely to have sold into slavery persons who were members of their own tribe. This did not extend to members of other tribes: there was no sense of an "Africa," of blackness in and of itself as an identifier; "Yoruba" wasn't one tribe: there were multiple different tribes that spoke variations of Yoruba and who came to identify themselves *as a result of the slave trade* as "Yoruba." All of these identifiers, modes of belonging or personhood, were products of the slave trade. The point here is that just as the one slave trader would not have sold a member of his own tribe, so would a British slave-trader not have sold another white British person into slavery – but selling a *black African* was legal, lucrative and acceptable. What accounts for our inability or refusal to recognize another's humanity?

And what had happened that by the 1790s, abolition had reached peak fervor in Britain and slavery would only a few years later be abolished in the country that had profited from the slave trade the most? (In France, slavery was first abolished in 1793, then reinstated by Napoleon.)

- How does humanity's relentless penchant for dehumanizing others complicate any possible notion of "universal" human rights? Or is this precisely what makes human rights legislation so important?

### **Assignments and Project Ideas**

#### *A few teaching suggestions from the web*

\*Note: this is a very small sample: there are numerous suggestions and resources available on these topics online

- "Teaching the French Revolution." Grades 9-12. *The Teaching Channel*.  
<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/teaching-french-revolution>.
- PBS. *Marie Antoinette and the French Revolution: Educator Resources*. 2006.



<http://www.pbs.org/marieantoinette/educators/index.html>

- “Teaching Human Rights: Resources for Educators.” *Amnesty International Ireland*.  
<http://www.amnesty.ie/resources/education#SECONDARY>
- PBS. *Slavery and the Making of America: Teacher Resources*.  
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/teachers/index.html>  
Links to “historical narratives,” both fiction and primary documents; lesson plans for different grade levels; tools for students to create their own virtual museum, etc.
- Michaela Alfred-Kamara. “Teaching Slavery: Tips for tackling the issues in the classroom.” *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2013/nov/28/teaching-slavery-classroom>  
Notes for teaching students about contemporary slavery and human trafficking.
- “Teaching Social Inequality.” *Introduction to Sociology*.  
<http://www.asanet.org/introsociology/studentresources/Simulations/SimulaCoinToss59on032408.html>  
This series of coin-toss activities, meant to demonstrate the arbitrary nature of resource distribution, can be used to teach any number of issues pertinent to this Unit: human rights issues such as who has access to clean water; social inequality in Old Regime France, etc.

### *Additional Suggestions*

- Ask students to individually research a contemporary human rights issue, using sites such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, PEN Center America, etc., to get started, then return to class ready to present and argue for an issue that the entire class will adopt, research, strategize and organize a human rights campaign around for the duration of the semester. Issues can be local, national or international (all three have benefits and disadvantages, obviously, when it comes to what you’re hoping your students will learn). The class can then vote on which project they want to work with; assign roles such as research, fund-raising, writing, organizer (etc), or map out a campaign in which everyone engages in some aspect of all of these (with your help, of course). Alternately, if you have a large class, students could select a geographic area or country.
- Supplement this activity by teaching students about the huge grassroots effort to abolish the slave trade that took place in the late eighteenth century in Europe, an effort the writer Adam Hochschild has called “the first human rights campaign in history.” His *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire’s Slaves*, is a very good, lively account of British abolition.

### *Eighteenth Century Grassroots Movements*

In 1787–1788, during the heady period between the American and French Revolutions, a huge grassroots movement against the slave trade burst into life in Britain, startling abolitionists and slave traders alike. There was a solidarity across racial lines that often seems elusive in our own time. Some British radicals later began to point out similarities between the plight of slaves and British factory workers, some of whom marched under banners calling for ending slavery “both at home and abroad.” Antislavery fervor spread quickly in Ireland, where people felt they, too, knew something about oppression by the English. In 1792, more Britons signed petitions to



Parliament against the slave trade than were eligible to vote. In the same year, more than 300,000 people refused to buy West Indian sugar. This was the largest consumer boycott the world had yet seen, and for tens of thousands of women—none of whom could vote—the occasion for their first political act.

The movement was led by an extremely imaginative, hard-working committee of activists, most of them Quakers, who pioneered tactics that are still used by human rights groups today. The committee's moving spirit and traveling organizer, Thomas Clarkson, was for much of his life a staunch radical who kept in his living room a stone he had proudly removed from the ruins of the Bastille a few weeks after its fall.

- Adam Hochschild, "English Abolition: The Movie," *New York Review of Books*, 2007.

During the French Revolution of 1789, people of color from Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe, and Martinique living in France organized themselves into the Société des citoyens de couleur (Society of Colored Citizens), headed by mulatto Julien Raimond...It worked closely with the Société des amis des noirs (Society of the Friends of the Blacks), which asked for equal rights for free people of color, the immediate abolition of the slave trade, and a gradual abolition of slavery....

The Légion franche de cavalerie des Américains et du Midi (Free Cavalry Legion of the Americans and the South) was led by Joseph Bologne de Saint-George. Born in Guadeloupe in 1739, he was the son of an enslaved Senegalese woman and a French nobleman...On May 17, 1793, the Legion sent an "Address to the National Convention and to all the patriotic clubs and societies on behalf of the Negroes held in slavery in the French colonies of America." It was written in the name of "one million slaves" and asked for the immediate abolition of slavery. A delegation of black men and women was received by the Convention in Paris on June 4. Among them was Jeanne Odo a woman born in Saint-Domingue, who claimed to be 114. The delegation carried a new flag: a black man on the blue stripe, a white man on the white stripe, and a mulatto on the red stripe, with the slogan "Our union will be our strength." The flag symbolized the end of the colonial order, as well as general freedom and equality. Following the black citizens' campaign, the new constitution enacted on June 24, 1793, specified that no one could be sold.

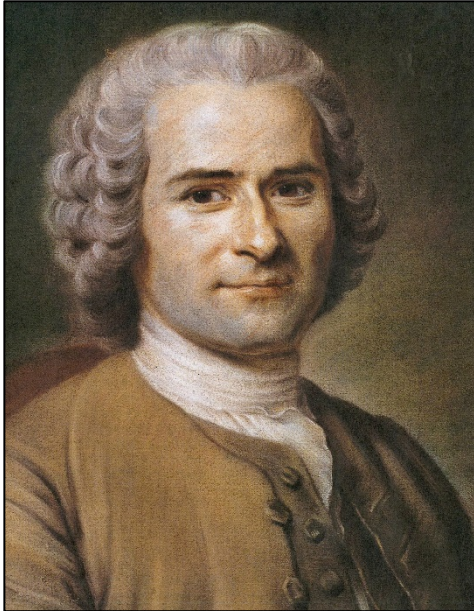
- Sylviane A. Diouf, "Black Abolitionists in France," *The Abolition of the Slave Trade*, Schomburg Center

- Script, dramatize and stage your own Bastille Day in class. Learn about what led to this seminal event in the history of the Revolution first; then transfer it to the contemporary United States. The Bastille was a popular symbol of oppression and state stagnation. Is there anything similar in your town or community? What would "storming the Bastille" look like today? Occupy Wall Street? Occupy the Capitol?
- Robespierre, remembered as one of the architects of the Terror, carried his pocket Rousseau with him always; Marie Antoinette visited Rousseau's grave at Ermenonville. Assign students the task of researching both of these historical figures and then imagine a conversation about Rousseau taking place between them. What about Rousseau's work and person appealed to both these radically different historical figures? Students could write the conversation as a play, as a lengthy interview; Rousseau himself could make a deus ex machina appearance.
- Can revolution produce lasting change? Or is the hope for radical change unleashed by revolutionary forces merely succeeded by a period of violence and repressive terror, and finally a return to the old regime, albeit perhaps wearing a new face and a different

name? (Mubarak succeeded by General el-Sisi, for instance; the Russian Tsar by Stalin). Assign students the task of researching the progression and result of the French and Haitian Revolutions, and write an analytic research essay comparing these with a contemporary event of similar magnitude, such as the so-called “Arab Spring” in Tunisia and Egypt a few years ago. What creates societal change? Is freedom and equality possible in countries – like *ancien régime* France, like Egypt – so long accustomed to veritable dictatorship, stark inequality and an oppressive status quo?

- Rewrite the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* to encompass animals and/or other non-humans, the environment, the ecosystem. What would such a declaration look like? Who counts? What are the rights of the non-human?

## UNIT 8: ENGAGED READINGS – PREPARING FOR THE STUDENT CONFERENCE



This year, the Great World Texts program will be welcoming a scholar, writer, activist or other expert on Rousseau's *Confessions* to the Student Conference, and students from all over the state will have the rare opportunity to interact with him or her and discuss the text they've been studying. This interaction will be the heart of the Student Conference.

Meeting an author is an amazing, exciting event, but also one that brings special considerations for how we approach the text and our projects. How should students act? What kinds of questions should they ask? How can they best prepare for this meeting? What should teachers do if students are disruptive or rude?

**Objective:** Prepare students to make the most of the Spring Student Conference through active engagement; and to provide tips to build confidence, address concerns, and set expectations for decorum and behavior during the conference.

### Preparatory Materials:

- Preparing for the Great World Texts Spring Student Conference
- Guidelines for Student Conference Presentations
- Presentation Proposal form
- Presentation Summary form (due date TBA)

### Additional Readings and Resources:

- "The Short Story #8: Meeting the Author." YouTube Clip. (Starts at 2:30)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pY9IH61bpyY>  
Fun clip to show students and break ice about issues they might be concerned about
- Dane Gutman, "The Perfect Author Visit." <http://www.dangutman.com/pages/planvisits.html>  
Some great tips for preparing students and making sure author visits go well.
- Jo Walton, "How to talk to writers." <http://www.tor.com/blogs/2008/12/how-to-talk-to-writers>
- Suzanne Roberts, "How to talk to a writer."  
<http://the-how-to.tumblr.com/post/32877145596/how-to-talk-to-a-writer>
- CCBC's tips for meeting an author: <http://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/authors/tips.asp>

## Handouts/Presentation Materials for Students:

- Guidelines for Presentations
- Presentation Proposal form
- Presentation Summary form (due date TBA)

## Lecture Points:

- **Prepare your students for meeting a person.** Emphasize that, like all people, our scholar/writer/activist could be nervous, excited, happy, sad, shy, in a good or bad mood, etc. Show clips of him doing interviews, and show the class his or her photograph so they can think of him or her as an individual from the start.
- **Emphasize being courteous and respectful:**
  - Always greet the author, thank him/her for coming, and introduce yourself before jumping into your question.
  - Use polite language
  - Try to make eye contact and be conscious of body language
  - Thank the author for his or her time
- **Help students avoid anxiety and feeling nervous:**
  - Focus on the experience, not the “performance” or “act” of talking to the author
  - Take a deep breath. It’s ok to be nervous, but the author is just another person – he or she came all the way to Wisconsin just to talk to *us*, which might make you feel nervous, but it should also make you feel confident that she thinks you have something to say that is worth hearing.
  - This is a chance for **dialogue**. **Dialogue means both voices matter.** The author wants to hear from you as much as you want to hear from the author. Sharing your ideas and reactions to his book will make it easy to start a conversation. Thinking about our interactions with the author as a chance for conversation takes the pressure off our own performance and lets us focus on the chance to learn.
- **Encourage them to be SPECIFIC:**
  - Don’t just say “I love this book!” Say what you loved most about it. What inspired you? What made you think? What challenged you?
  - Avoid yes or no questions (*Was it hard to write this book?*) Instead, ask questions that allow room for thought and interpretation (*What was the biggest challenge you faced when writing this book?*)
  - Consider the “lead in” to your question. Give a little context to let the author know where you’re coming from. For example, “Why did you choose [x]?” would be a much more interesting question if the speaker first explained WHY [x] is interesting or confusing to him/her. Ex., “I loved this character, but was confused by some of his choices, such as [give example]. Why did you choose to have him do [this or that]?”
- **Be prepared:**
  - Think about how the author might react to your questions. Role-play possible answers.

- Prepare a list of possible follow-up questions if he does/doesn't answer a certain way.
- **Know the consequences.** This conference is a serious academic affair and a lot of planning has gone into this event by teachers, students, and UW staff. The people in attendance have all traveled far and spent weeks and months preparing and getting excited for the conference. Being disruptive, discourteous, or disrespectful to the speakers or your peers during the conference is unacceptable, and teachers whose students do not follow the decorum guidelines will be expected to remove students immediately from the room.

#### Discussion Questions:

- How would you like to be treated (or not treated) if you were the author?
- What questions do you most want answered? What do you want to know about the author that the book can't tell you?

#### Assignment and Project Ideas

- **Role play: Meeting the Author.** Have students prepare questions for various authors and practice asking and answering them. What questions got the best (or worst) answers? Why?
- **Brainstorm: productive questions.** Ask students to get in groups and write down every single question they can think of to ask the author. Then switch questions with other groups and discuss the questions, then select the best ones. Did any groups have the same questions? How do we decide what "good" and "bad" questions are? Hint: "bad" questions are ones that are too easy to answer, very obvious, or could be easily answered by anyone who read the book.
- **Research the author.** Students can get excited about the author's visit by doing research into her life, background, hometown, and body of work. Learning more about who s/he is, why s/he's famous, what makes her/him interesting to others, will get students excited to meet her/him and inspire interesting questions.
- **Writing exercise:** ask students to write, and revise their questions independently and in groups. Have them work together until they feel the question is worded perfectly so that it is clear, direct, and interesting to both the author and the audience.

#### Suggestions for expanding this unit:

- Apply the author visit guidelines above to other author visits or assemblies the students have attended or will attend. Have them compare or assess how "well" that speaker was received, and why.

## WHAT IS A CLOSE READING?

Close reading is a specific method of literary analysis, which uses the interpretation of a small piece of text as a way to think about the whole. This kind of analysis invites readers to pay close attention to the effects of the specific words on the page. We ask ourselves *why* each word was chosen, *how* it contributes to the broader themes and ideas of the text, and *how* it interacts with other words/images in the text.

For example, the second sentence of the *Confessions* reads as follows: “I want to show my fellow men a man in all the truth of nature, and this man is to be myself” (5). Rousseau could have written the first clause of this sentence in any number of other ways, such as, “I want to show other people what it means to be a human being,” or “I want to show others what the truth of humanity is.”

All versions technically have the same meaning, but we come away with different impressions. It’s our task as careful, attentive readers to figure out what effect the choices Rousseau has made has on the story we’re reading. Why the “truth of nature?” Why “my fellow men?” Close reading asks us to pay attention to the nuances of language and how it generates our sense of reality – both our own and that of the text.

While there is no “right” way to analyze a text, there are more and less convincing ways of interpreting different passages. The steps below are intended to help you persuasively close read a passage in a literary text (though the skills you develop are applicable to the close reading and analysis of any text anywhere):

### 1. Summary

Read the passage once without making any annotations. Start by asking yourself: what’s going on here? What is the speaker/character/narrator saying? Who is speaking? In what context? If you are unable to write a 1-2 sentence summary of the passage, read through again until you have a clearer idea. Don’t panic if you’re unsure, many texts are deliberately ambiguous or confusing; it is not always possible to say for definite what is happening.

### 2. Mood & Tone

The second time you read through, think about the overall mood created by the writing. Is it comic, tragic, sinister, serious? What is the tone of the writing: formal, playful, ironic? Does the writer use understatement or exaggeration? (This is very important to pay attention to in *Snow* particularly.)

### 3. Literary Devices

Circle/underline the specific words, images and literary devices which contribute to the mood and tone you have identified. These might include any of the following:

- Unusual vocabulary/word choice (archaic words, neologisms, foreign imports, slang/colloquialisms). Use an online dictionary such as [www.askoxford.com](http://www.askoxford.com) if you need to look up words you don’t recognize.
- Symbols: does the writer use images which seem to represent something else?
- Metaphors and/or similes
- Striking comparisons or contrasts

- Personification
- Alliteration and/or onomatopoeia

#### **4. Bigger Picture**

Having considered these details, you can start to develop your overall interpretation of the passage. Consider the ways that your passage fits into the text as a whole. What do you think is the text's main message? How does it contribute to the broader themes of the work? How do the particular literary devices you have identified help to emphasize, intensify or trouble the other questions and issues that the text raises?

## WHAT IS AUTOBIOGRAPHY?

This handout is intended to briefly help you define what an autobiography is and get a sense of what kinds of questions the genre uniquely raises for our reading and critical thinking. As always, feel free to adapt or change to use as a hand-out with your students, with due credit given to Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith's *Reading Autobiography: A Guide to Interpreting Life Narratives*, Minnesota UP, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, 2010, from which the below has been taken.

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### Definitions – or Why an Autobiography is not a Novel

#### *Life Narrative*

A life narrative is any kind of writing that takes a life as its subject, from biography to autobiography (Smith, Watson 3).

**Examples:** Rousseau's *Confessions*

Leo Damrosch, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Restless Genius*

#### *Biography*

Biography is a term for a life narrative that is narrated by someone other than the subject of the narrative (Smith, Watson 3-4). A biography will most often aim for a historically accurate, multi-faceted portrait and assessment of the subject's life.

**Examples:** Leo Damrosch, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Restless Genius*

Maurice Cranston, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Early Years*

**Source of Information:** Letters, historical documents, memoirs written by persons who knew the subject, photographs; other archival material.

#### *Novel*

A novel shares some of the same characteristics of an autobiography, such as plot, setting and characterization, but it is not an autobiography. Many novels are, like autobiographies, narrated in the first person; some, such as *Jane Eyre*, even present themselves as autobiographical narratives. But they are not.

**Examples:** Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*

**Source of Information:** The writer's imagination. A novelist is not bound by time and place or by the rules of evidence that in a life narrative necessarily links "the world of the narrative with the historical world outside the narrative" (Smith, Watson 13).



## History

A life narrative, such as Rousseau's *Confessions*, may contain "facts" and information about life, government and society in eighteenth century Europe. But it cannot be reduced to the historical record: an autobiography is *not* a factual history.

**Examples:** Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment* (Harvard UP, 1984).

**Source of Information:** Historians rely on a vast array of historical documents, from letters to memoirs, maps to census figures, in order to assemble an objective, analytical portrait of the events, forces and conditions of a particular time and place.

## Autobiography

Autobiography is a "term for a particular *practice* of life narrative that emerged in the Enlightenment and which has become canonical in the West" (Smith, Watson 3, italics mine).

**Examples:** Rousseau's *Confessions*

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

**Source of Information:** Personal memory is the primary archival resource that the autobiographical writer relies on. Autobiographical writers will sometimes include letters (as Rousseau does in Part II of *The Confessions*), photographs and other personal memorabilia to supplement their narrative, but memory remains the primary source of narration and of the truth claims an autobiographer advances about his or her life. This means that, unlike a novelist, an autobiographical writer is bound by his or her lived experiences in a particular time and place. And unlike a historian, an autobiographer is only interested in the larger forces, conditions or events of a historical time-period in so far as these impact his or her own story. The autobiographer is always the center of his or her own narrative, while a historian places him or herself outside of the narrative in order to attempt to ensure the assembling of objective historical fact.

## In conclusion, an autobiography is...

...Not a novel, biography, or species of historical record. It is a "historically situated, highly subjective practice of self-representation" (Smith, Watson 14).

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## What This Means for Readers

Autobiographical narrators establish for their readers a different set of expectations, a different pact, than the expectations established in the verisimilitude or suspension of disbelief of the novel, or the verifiable evidence of biography and history writing (Smith, Watson 12). Autobiography therefore raises a series of questions that are important to keep in mind when we read. These include:

- What is the truth status of autobiographical disclosure or "confession"?
- How do we know whether and when a narrator is telling the truth or lying, and what difference would that make?
- What are the politics of memory? That is, what does the narrator remember and why?

## KEY EXCERPTS FROM ROUSSEAU'S PHILOSOPHICAL WORK

These excerpts have been provided to ensure that, if you choose, you can teach Rousseau's philosophical works to your students without having to ask them to read an excessive amount of philosophy. Excerpts have been chosen that seemed most relevant to the text itself and to themes Rousseau develops in the *Confessions*.

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### DISCOURSE ON THE ORIGIN AND FOUNDATIONS OF INEQUALITY AMONG MEN

1754 (written), 1755 (published)

**Summary:** "Here, Rousseau argues that natural man has become corrupted and unhappy through social interactions that are pervaded by the wish to dominate others... Government and law, he goes on to say, often do no more than reinforce the privileges of the rich and the abjection of the poor, and this is quite contrary to justice and the respect for human dignity to which everyone is entitled" (Dent, *Rousseau*, 22)

#### The project of the *Discourse*:

To know the source of inequality among men, "begin by knowing mankind...[but] how shall man hope to see himself as nature made him, across all the changes which the succession of place and time must have produced in his original constitution? How can he distinguish what is fundamental in his nature from the changes and additions which his circumstances and the advances he has made have introduced to modify his primitive condition?" (DI 43, OC III: 122)

"Like the statue of Glaucus, which was so disfigured by time, seas and tempests, that it looked more like a wild beast than a god, the human soul, altered in society by a thousand causes perpetually recurring, by the acquisition of a multitude of truths and errors, by the changes happening to the constitution of the body, and by the continual jarring of the passions, has, so to speak, changed in appearance, so as to be hardly recognizable." (DI 43, OC III: 122)

#### On natural man:

"I think I need not fear contradiction in holding man to be possessed of the only natural virtue, which could not be denied him by the most violent detractor of human virtue. I am speaking of compassion, which is a disposition suitable to creatures so weak and subject to so many evils as we are: by so much the more universal and useful to mankind, as it comes before any kind of reflection; and at the same time so natural, that the very brutes themselves sometimes give evident proofs of it" (DI 73, OC III: 154).

*Amour propre* "is a purely relative and fictitious feeling, which arises in the state of society, leads each individual to make more of himself than of any other, causes all the mutual damage men inflict on one

another, and is the real source of the 'sense of honor.' This being understood, I maintain that, in our primitive condition, in the true state of nature, *amour-propre* did not exist; for as each man regarded himself as the only observer of his actions, the only being in the universe who took any interest in him, and the sole judge of his deserts, no feeling arising from comparisons he could not be led to make could take root in his soul, and for the same reason, he could know neither hatred nor the desire for revenge, since these passions can spring only from a sense of injury." (DI 73 Note 2, OC III, Note XV: 219)

"As soon as men began to value one another, and the idea of consideration had got a footing in the mind, every one put in his claim to it, and it became impossible to refuse it to any with impunity. Hence arose the first obligations of civility even among savages; and every intended hurt became an affront, because, besides the hurt which might result from it, the party injured was certain to find in it contempt for his person, which was often more insupportable than the hurt itself" (DI 90, OC III: 169)

"Insatiable ambition, the thirst of raising their respective fortunes, not so much from real want as from the desire to surpass others, inspired all men with a vile propensity to injure one another, and with a secret jealousy, which is the more dangerous, as it puts on the mask of benevolence, to carry its point with greater security...The wealthy...had no sooner begun to taste the pleasure of command, than they disdained all others, using their old slaves to acquire new, thought of nothing but subduing and enslaving their neighbors; like ravenous wolves, which, having once tasted human flesh, despise every other food and thenceforth seek only men to devour" (DI 96, OC III: 175)

In this new world order, "all ran headlong to their chains, in hopes of securing their liberty; or they had just wit enough to perceive the advantages of political institutions, without experience enough to enable them to foresee its dangers. The most capable of foreseeing the dangers were the very persons who expected to benefit by them; and even the most prudent judged it not inexpedient to sacrifice one part of their freedom to ensure the rest...Such was, or may well have been, the origin of society and law, which bound new fetters on the poor, and gave new powers to the rich, which irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, eternally fixed the law of property and inequality, converted clever usurpation into unalterable right, and, for the advantage of a few ambitious individuals, subjected all mankind to perpetual labor, slavery and wretchedness" (DI 99, OC III: 177-8).

"In reality, the source of all these differences is, that the savage lives within himself, while the social man lives constantly outside himself, and only knows how to live in the opinion of others, so that he seems to receive the consciousness of his own existence merely the judgment of others concerning him...in short... always asking others what we are, and never daring to ask ourselves, in the midst of so much philosophy, humanity, and civilization, and of such sublime codes of morality, we have nothing to show for ourselves but a frivolous and deceitful appearance, humor without virtue, reason without wisdom, and pleasure without happiness" (DI 116, OC III: 193)

"It follows that moral inequality...clashes with natural right, whenever it is not proportionate to physical inequality – a distinction which sufficiently determines what we ought to think of that species of inequality which prevails in all civilized countries, since it is plainly contrary to the law of nature, however defined, that children should command old men, fools wise men, and that the privileged few

should gorge themselves with superfluities, while the starving multitude are in want of the bare necessities of life” (DI 117, OC III: 194)

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## ÉMILE, OR EDUCATION

1762

**Summary:** *Émile* is Rousseau’s treatise on education. “In [*Émile*], Rousseau favors what he calls a ‘negative education,’ where the child is not controlled, directed, admonished at every turn but instead provided with an environment and resources in which the naturally healthy and ordered course of development of their body, feelings and understanding is allowed to unfold at its own pace...The child’s own emerging interests should be supported and enriched, not be subjected to impositions and requirements...It is in *Émile* that Rousseau most fully explains and defines his well-known view that man is by nature good but corrupted by society (Dent, *Rousseau*, p. 23-4).

### The project of Émile:

“In the natural order, since men are all equal, their common calling is man’s estate, and whoever is well raised for that calling cannot fail to fulfill those callings related to it...On leaving my hands, he [*Émile*] will, I admit, be neither magistrate nor soldier nor priest. He will, in the first place, be a man. All that a man should be, he will in case of need know how to be as well as anyone; and fortune may try as it may to make him change place, he will always be in his own place...Our true study is that of the human condition. He among us who best knows how to bear the goods and ills of this life is to my taste the best raised” (E I: 41-2, OC IV: 251-2)

“What will a man raised uniquely for himself become for others? If perchance the double object we set for ourselves could be joined in a single one by removing the contradictions of man, a great obstacle to his happiness would be removed. In order to judge of this, he would have to be seen wholly formed: his inclinations would have to be observed, his progress seen, his development followed. In a word, the natural man would have to be known. I believe that one will have made a few steps in these researches when one has read this writing.”

(E I: 41, OC IV: 251)

### On childhood:

“A child cries at birth; the first part of his childhood is spent crying. At one time we bustle about, we caress him in order to pacify him; at another, we threaten him, we strike him in order to make him keep quiet. Either we do what pleases him, or we exact from him what pleases us. Either we submit to his whims, or we submit him to ours. No middle ground; he must give orders or receive them. Thus his first ideas are those of domination and servitude. Before knowing how to speak, he commands; before being able to act, he obeys...It is thus that we fill up his young heart at the outset with the passions which later we impute to nature and that, after having taken efforts to make him wicked, we complain about finding him so.”

(E I: 48, OC IV: 261)

“The first tears of children are prayers. If one is not careful, they soon become orders. Children begin by getting themselves assisted; they end up getting themselves served. Thus, from their own weakness, which is in the first place the source of the feeling of their dependence, is subsequently born the idea of empire and domination. But since this idea is excited less by their needs than by our services, at this point moral effects whose immediate cause is not in nature begin to make their appearance; and one sees already why it is important from the earliest age to disentangle the secret intention which dictates the gesture or the scream.” (E I: 66, OC IV: 287)

“The child who has only to want in order to get believes himself to be the owner of the universe; he regards all men as his slaves. When one is finally forced to refuse him something, he, believing that at his command everything is possible, takes this refusal for an act of rebellion. All reasons given him at an age when he is incapable of reasoning are to his mind only pretexts. He sees ill will everywhere. The feeling of an alleged injustice souring his nature, he develops hatred towards everyone, and, without ever being grateful for helpfulness, he is indignant at every opposition.”

“In growing, one gains strength, becomes less restless, less fidgety, withdraws more into oneself. Soul and body find, so to speak, an equilibrium, and nature asks no more of us than the movement necessary to our preservation. But the desire to command is not extinguished by the need that gave birth to it. Dominion awakens and flatters amour-propre, and habit strengthens it. Thus, whim succeeds need; thus, prejudices and opinion take their first roots.”  
(E I: 68, OC IV: 289)

“He who is aware of the need he has of others’ help, and who never fails to experience their benevolence, has no interest in deceiving them; on the contrary, he has a palpable interest in their seeing things as they are, for fear that they might make a mistake prejudicial to him. It is, therefore, clear that the de facto lie is not natural to children. But it is the law of obedience which produces the necessity of lying, because since obedience is irksome, it is secretly dispensed with as much as possible and the present interest in avoiding punishment or reproach wins out over the distant interest of revealing the truth” (E II: 101, OC IV: 335).

### *The Emerging Individual:*

“Now our child, ready to stop being a child, has become aware of himself as an individual. Now he senses more than ever the necessity which attaches him to things...we have made an active and thinking being. It remains for us, in order to complete the man, only to make a loving and feeling being – that is to say, to perfect reason by sentiment.” (E III: 203, OC IV: 481)

“Émile has little knowledge, but what he has is truly his own...Émile has a mind that is universal not by its learning but by its faculty to acquire learning; a mind that is open, intelligent, ready for everything, and, as Montaigne says, if not instructed, at least able to be instructed” (E III: 207, OC IV: 487)

“[Émile] considers himself without regard to others and finds it good that others do not think of him. He demands nothing of anyone and believes he owes nothing to anyone. He is alone in human society; he counts on himself alone.” (E III: 208, OC IV: 488)

“The source of our passions, the origin and the principle of all the others, the only one born with man and which never leaves him so long as he lives is self-love [*amour de soi*] – a primitive, innate passion, which is anterior to every other, and of which all others are in a sense only modifications. In this sense, if you wish, all passions are natural. But most of these modifications have alien causes without which they would never have come to pass, and these same modifications, far from being advantageous for us, are harmful. They alter the primary goal and are at odds with their own principle. It is then that man finds himself outside of nature and sets himself in contradiction with himself.”

(E IV: 212-3, OC IV: 491)

“So long as his [Émile’s] sensibility remains limited to his own individuality, there is nothing moral in his actions. It is only when he begins to extend outside of himself that it takes on, first, the sentiments, and then, the notions of good and evil which truly constitute him as a man and an integral part of his species” (E IV: 219-20, OC IV: 501)

“Since my Émile has until now looked only at himself, the first glance he casts on his fellows leads him to compare himself with them. And the first sentiment aroused in him by this comparison is the desire to be in the first position. This is the point where love of self [*amour de soi*] becomes *amour-propre* and where begin to arise all the passions which depend on this one.” (E IV: 235, OC IV: 523)

“He [Émile] is a man; he is interested in his brothers; he is equitable; he judges his peers. Surely, if he judges them well, he will not want to be in the place of any of them; for since the goal of all the torments they give themselves is founded on prejudices he does not have, it appears to him to be pie in the sky...He pities these miserable kings, slaves of all that obey them. He pities these false wise men, chained to their vain reputations. He pities these rich fools, martyrs to their display.” (E IV: 244, OC IV: 536)

“But consider, in the first place, that although I want to form the man of nature, the object is not, for all that, to make him a savage and to relegate him to the depths of the woods. It suffices that, enclosed in a social whirlpool, he not let himself get carried away by either the passions or the opinions of men” (E IV: 255, OC IV: 551).

#### On conscience:

“He who follows conscience obeys nature and does not fear being led astray” (E IV: 286-7, OC IV: 594-5).

“The difference is that the good man orders himself in relation to the whole, and the wicked orders the whole in relation to himself.” (E IV: 292, OC IV: 602).

#### On religion:

“The true duties of religion are independent of the institutions of men...a just heart is the true temple of the divinity...in every country and in every sect the sum of the law is to love God above all else and one’s neighbor as oneself...no religion is exempt from the duties of morality...nothing is truly essential

other than these duties...inner worship is the first of these duties...without faith no true virtue exists.” (E IV: 311-12, OC IV: 632)

\*These are short quotes assembled by Dent from *Émile*, from the section known as “Creed of the Savoyard Vicar.” The “Creed” is what got the book burned in Geneva and Paris and contributed to Rousseau’s exile from Paris see the website for the entire section.

### On women

“The strictness of the relative duties of the two sexes is not and cannot be the same. When woman complains on this score about unjust man-made inequality, she is wrong. This inequality is not a human institution – or, at least, it is the work not of prejudice but of reason” (E V: 361, OC IV: 697)

“By the very law of nature women are at the mercy of men’s judgments, as much for their own sake as for that of their children. It is not enough that they be estimable; they must be esteemed...Their honor is not only in their conduct but in their reputation; and it is not possible that a woman who consents to be regarded as disreputable can ever be decent. When a man acts well, he depends only on himself and can brave public judgment; but when a woman acts well, she has accomplished only half of her task and what is thought of her is no less important than what she actually is...Opinion is the grave of virtue among men and its throne among women” (E V 364-5, OC IV: 702).

“Woman is made to yield to man and endure even his injustice.” (E V: 396, OC IV: 750-1).

\*Note: See the article from Kennedy’s *Rousseau in Drag* on why Rousseau’s autobiographical works, in particular the *Confessions*, actually destabilize and contradict much of the misogynist hysteria in his philosophical work.

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## THE SOCIAL CONTRACT, or PRINCIPLES OF POLITICAL RIGHT

1762

**Summary:** *The Social Contract* consists of Rousseau’s views “on how a legitimate state should be established, organized and run” in order to ensure liberty and equality among men. “What marks a state as legitimate for Rousseau, thus giving it a right to unqualified obedience, is its guarantee to all its members of the freedom to enact their own laws. The institutional device which Rousseau relies on to allow this freedom is direct democracy.” Rousseau argues that, “If those who are subject to a state’s jurisdiction assemble together to make its laws, that state is legitimate, since all of its members then have a direct and equal legislative voice.” However, “by the time one reaches the end of the *Social Contract*, it becomes obvious that only in rare and difficult cases does Rousseau believe” that government by direct democracy can be established; for it to happen, “society must be small, isolated, homogenous and egalitarian...Political institutions, meticulously divided between legislative and executive, must be in exquisite balance. No state has ever met these demanding requirements, nor is it likely that a state ever will” (Alan Ritter and Julia Conaway Bonatella, “Introduction to *On the Social Contract*,” *Rousseau’s Political Writings*, p. 84)

### The project of the *Social Contract*

“Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains...how did this change come about? I do not know. What can make it legitimate? That question I think I can answer” (SC I).

On the idea that “might makes right:”

“If I were to consider only force and its effects, I would say that as long as a people is compelled to obey and does so; it does well; as soon as it can shake off the yoke and does so, it does even better...” (*Rousseau’s Political Writings: Social Contract* 85)

“Force is a physical power; I do not see what kind of morality can result from its effects. To yield to force is an act of necessity, not of will – at the most, an act of prudence. In what sense can it be a duty?” (SC I: 3)

“Let us suppose for a moment that this alleged right exists. I say that nothing but inexplicable nonsense results from it, for as soon as might makes right, the effect changes along with the cause; any new force that overcomes the first also inherits its rights. As soon as it becomes possible to disobey with impunity, it is possible to disobey legitimately; and since the strongest is always in the right, it is only a question of behaving so that one may be the strongest. But what kind of right is one which perishes when the force behind it ceases to exist?” (*Rousseau’s Political Writings: Social Contract* 87)

On liberty and the state:

“To renounce one’s liberty is to renounce one’s humanity, the rights of humanity and even its duties...Such a [complete] renunciation is incompatible with man’s nature, and to strip him of all freedom of will is to strip his actions of all morality. In short, an agreement [i.e., between subjects and a government] that stipulates absolute authority on one hand and unlimited obedience on the other is vain and contradictory. Is it not clear that one is not committed in any way to a being from whom one has the right to demand everything, and does not this single condition, this lack of equality or mutual obligation, suggest the meaninglessness of such an act?” (*Rousseau’s Political Writings: Social Contract* 89)

“The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate [that is, each person in the body politic], and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before. This is the fundamental problem of which the social contract provides the solution.” (SC I: 6)

“Since each person gives himself entirely, the condition is equal for all, and since the condition is equal for all, no one has an interest in making it burdensome for others...Each person, in giving himself to all, gives himself to no one, and as there are no associates over whom he does not acquire the same right as he concedes to them over himself, he gains the equivalent of all that he loses and more force to preserve what he has” (*Rousseau’s Political Writings: Social Contract* 93)



“Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole” (SC I: 6)

[This “act of association” creates the “public” of the republic]

“This public person, so formed by the union of all other persons, formerly took the name of city, and now takes that of *Republic* or *body politic*...Those who are associated in it take collectively the name of *people* and severally are called *citizens*, as sharing in the sovereign authority, and *subjects*, as being under the laws of the State” (SC I: 7)

“This passage from the state of nature to the civil state produces a most remarkable change in man, by substituting justice for instinct in his conduct, and giving his actions the morality they previously lacked...Although in this state he denies himself several of the advantages he owes to nature, he gains others so great – his faculties are exercised and developed, his ideas are extended, his feelings are ennobled, his whole soul is so uplifted...What man loses by the social contract is his natural liberty and an unlimited right to everything that tempts him and to everything he can take; what he gains is civil liberty and ownership of everything he possesses” (*Rousseau’s Political Writings*: Social Contract 95-6)

“The general will alone can direct the forces of the state in accordance with the end for which it was instituted, that is, the common good...It is what [...] different interests hold in common that forms the social bond, and if there were not some point of agreement among them, no society could exist. Indeed, it is solely on the basis of this common interest that society should be governed” (*Rousseau’s Political Writings*: Social Contract 98)

“When then is a government? An intermediate body set up between the subjects and the Sovereign, to secure their mutual correspondence, charged with the execution of the laws and maintenance of liberty, both civil and political.”

“I shall end this chapter and this book by remarking on a fact on which the whole social system should rest: i.e., that, instead of destroying natural inequality, the fundamental compact substitutes, for such physical inequality as nature may have set up between men, an equality that is moral and legitimate, and that men, who may be unequal in strength or intelligence, become every one equal by convention and legal right” (SC I: 9).

## WOMEN & GENDER IN THE *CONFESSIONS*: EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CONTEXTS

**Objective:** This handout is intended to help clarify and contextualize Rousseau's representations of women in the *Confessions* and elsewhere in his philosophy, within the context of women's lives in eighteenth century France and Europe. Feel free to use as is with your students, or adapt and compress for your own purposes. It provides basic information that you can supplement through the sources suggested in Unit 3.

### INTRODUCTION

This handout focuses on the experience of women in the eighteenth century. It does so for two reasons: first, in his philosophical work, Rousseau repeatedly insists on immutable, biologically determined differences between men and women. He insists on this in an era when gender, family, the nature of humanity and the role of all persons in the civil affairs of the state were being rethought. Some of Rousseau's contemporaries, for instance, such as Condorcet and Olympe de Gouges, believed women should possess equal civil rights with men. Rousseau did not. Another of Rousseau's contemporaries, the Chevalier d'Eon, was born anatomically male but lived most of his life as a woman. S/he believed women were closer to God.

To focus on the experience of women is therefore not to suggest that gender identities are fixed and limited to categories such as "man" and "woman." It is rather to try to determine what it meant to belong to the category "woman" during the eighteenth century.

### 1. ALL WOMEN ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL

The historical experience of women differed widely in this period, as in ours – according to class, geography, marital status and number of children, to name just a few. A vast gulf separated a woman such as Rousseau's formidable aristocratic patron Mme. de Luxembourg from the illiterate child Anzoletta, whom Rousseau and his friend Carrio purchase from her mother in Venice. As Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks notes, "the role of gender in determining the historical experiences of men and women varie[s] over time and from group to group. For some people, such as the very poor, social class was probably more important than gender" (12). French women could not vote in this period, true, but then neither could anyone else: France was an absolute monarchy, as was the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia-Savoy. Even within a country civil rights could vary: in the south of France, and according to the customary laws of Paris, all children, regardless of sex, were "equally eligible to inherit," while elsewhere in the country "customs and laws...varied widely" (Rogers 34-5; see also Desan).

The eighteenth century was also the age of the transatlantic slave trade. A slave woman's experience might differ slightly from that of a slave man's, but the most salient factor in either person's experience was slavery, not gender.

## 2. HOWEVER, IN THE EYES OF THE LAW, ALL WOMEN WERE EQUAL IN THAT THEY WERE EQUALLY UNEQUAL TO MEN

For the most part, however, into whatever class or station of life she'd been born, when a woman got married in eighteenth century Europe, her person and assets were given over to "the absolute control of another party" (Rogers 35; see also Wiesner-Hanks 44). This would have happened to Mme. de Luxembourg, Mme. d'Epinay, Sophie d'Houdetot, Mme. Dupin, Mme. de Warens and any number of other independent-minded women whom we encounter in the *Confessions*.

As Suzanne Desan notes,

Husband, wife and family of origin all assumed that the husband would have more authority within the household. Husband and wife might well work toward a common goal and enjoy reciprocal respect or affection. Spouses continually negotiated the contours of their relationship, but popular assumptions, law, religious teaching and long-standing patterns of family practice all worked to reinforce the patriarchal authority over both wives and children.

Once married, women had few options. A husband's adultery was not grounds for separation, but if a woman was accused of adultery, her husband had the right to have her locked up in a convent for two years. With the consent of her family, he could even lock her up for the rest of her life, all the while maintaining control of her property (Rogers 38; Desan). He could even kill her; according to one legal treatise of the time, "the husband...does not have the right to kill his wife, but, if he does so, he quite readily obtains a pardon" (qtd. Rogers 38). Conversely, the law deemed that a husband did owe his wife economic support and should not exercise brutality against her. Desan notes that an "abused wife, with the support of her family, might succeed in having a violent husband imprisoned. About five percent (10 cases) of the *lettres de cachet* in Caen immured brutal husbands." On the death of their husbands, widows did regain possession and control of their dowries and any other assets, but they could not dispose of it as they wished. Overall, as Rogers notes:

Access to all professions and the rights to litigate, to bear witness in court, to have guardianship of minors, to have one's signature considered legally binding and valid, to witness a will, to make a will – these rights were enjoyed by Frenchwomen of the eighteenth century either not at all or to a limited extent. (40-41).

## 3. NOT ALL WOMEN REGARDED THEMSELVES AS BOUND BY THESE LAWS

Mme. de Warens, for instance, may have legally ceded body and person to her husband when she married him, but she leaves him and her country and takes up with a series of younger lovers, her pension from the King of Sardinia and Savoy granted her on the basis of a carefully staged conversion to Catholicism.

Adultery may have carried strict penalties according to the law, but at least among the aristocracy and the upper classes, as long as the woman in question behaved with discretion, adultery was more or less acceptable and above all, widely practiced. This was, after all, an age when those born wealthy and noble, and including men as well as women, rarely had the liberty of choosing their own marriage partners. Thus Mme. de Warens (Claude Anet; Rousseau), Sophie d'Houdetot (Saint Lambert) and Mme. d'Epinay (Grimm) all maintain long-term, loving, companionable liaisons with men who were not their husbands. Paradoxically, the poorer you were, the more choice you had in choosing a partner: in such cases, no property was involved.

Beyond the *Confessions*, there is also plenty of evidence of women exercising greater autonomy than the letter of European law ostensibly allowed for. Wiesner-Hanks notes that, In almost all city law codes beginning in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, married women who carried out business on their own, or alongside their husbands, were allowed to declare themselves unmarried...for legal purposes. This meant they could borrow and loan money and make contracts...It is [also] clear from court records that women often actively managed their dowry property and carried out legal transactions without getting special approval. (45)

#### 4. ALMOST ALL WOMEN WORKED.

The oft-repeated shibboleth that “women first enter the work force” in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is inaccurate; for one, laboring, agricultural, working-class, artisanal and slave women of all ages and in all societies have *always* worked. Lieselotte Steinbrügge notes of agriculture in Old Regime France,

Women...worked as hard as men...[Agriculture] at the time employed five-sixths of the female population. In some regions, according to local custom, women even did the heaviest labor. In some cases they replaced draught animals in the fields. The division of work into light and heavy physical labor by no means followed gender lines. The same can be said of the artisanal trades and emerging industry. Women's integration in the agricultural and artisanal production processes [was] obvious... (15)

Domestic service, of the kind Marion (Book II) and Thérèse Levasseur engage in, was also a major employer,

Probably the largest employer of women in most [European] cities throughout the [early modern] period. Between 15 and 30 percent of the population of most cities was made up of servants...One of every twelve people in Old Regime France were servants, two-thirds of them female. (Wiesner-Hanks 113)

Furthermore, the presence of servants did not necessarily mean “lives of indolence for their employers.” As Toni Bowers notes,

It is important to remember that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century homes were places of endless labor. Far from a luxury, household help was indispensable for the upkeep of all but the shabbiest dwellings before labor-saving innovations such as indoor plumbing, electricity, modern food storage and preparation, easily accessible fuel, appliances, and supermarkets. Whether rural or urban, households produced their own consumables to a far greater extent than today. Mistresses and/or servants routinely made their own baked goods, including bread; grew and preserved their own produce; raised, milked, butchered, and cooked their own animals; churned their own cheese and butter; produced their own liquor and medicines, and made soap and starch, which were used to launder by hand all clothing and linens.

Spinning, sewing, and mending were consuming tasks that fell to all the females of the household – mistress, children, and servants alike. Clothing, linens, draperies – all were made by hand as, especially early in our period, was the fabric they were cut from. Though in towns it was possible to bespeak a new suit at a tailor's or dressmaker's, the cost was well beyond the means of most families. Even in better-off urban households -- those more likely to patronize merchants and where servants could be expected to do the day-to-day drudgery -- the ladies were not spared needlework. Free of the need to spin, sew, mend, and darn, they instead spent countless hours painstakingly producing luxury textiles such as lace and embroidered linens. “Taking in” needlework beyond that

required for one's own family was one of very few wage-earning occupations available to respectable women, while "taking in washing," a back-breaking and often dangerous job, was a last resort of the impoverished.

Women engaged not only in agricultural and domestic labor, however. They also worked as midwives, merchants, herbalists, miners and craftswomen, among other professions. However, as Merry Wiesner-Hanks notes, "Religious opinion and the language of laws and records...all viewed whatever productive labor a woman did as simply part of her domestic role." A woman was, above all, "a helpmate to her husband and an example for her children" (103).

Generally, whenever they did engage in wage-labor, women made less than men. For many, it was not enough to make ends meet. In his *Making of Revolutionary Paris*, David Garrioch notes,

For young women [in Paris] who could not find work, particularly those from the provinces with no family in the capital, prostitution might be the only means of survival. It provided subsistence to somewhere around 10,000 to 15,000 young women [in Paris], though was by no means the resort solely of poverty-stricken provincials: female wages were so low that a woman alone, worse still with small children, had trouble making ends meet. Every quarter [in Paris] therefore had its *filles du monde* who despite police bans on renting to prostitutes had little trouble finding suitable rooms overlooking the street. Despite their worldly profession, like the beggars they were often accepted members of the neighborhood community" (61-62).

If women generally had few civil rights, a prostitute in Paris

...had absolutely no individual rights or liberty. She was constantly in danger of being rounded up either for medical examination or to be sent to prison at La Salpetriere or Bicetre. Conditions were so terrible in these prisons – starvation diet of bread and broth, hard labor, overcrowded conditions – that some women committed suicide rather than be subjected to them...prostitution was [furthermore] judged to be a crime of which only women were guilty,

And therefore a crime for which only women could be prosecuted (Rogers 41).

It is within such a context that we should read Rousseau's encounter with "Pope Joan" in Part II of the *Confessions*. The inequity in female wage-labor is also worth keeping in mind when we seek to account for Rousseau's relation with Thérèse Levasseur, who is working as a chambermaid and laundress when the two first meet. (This is not to suggest Thérèse was a prostitute, merely that economic considerations played a part in their relationship: she had a large family that Rousseau supported). The situation was slightly different in Italy: "major Italian cities such as Florence and Venice were the most tolerant [in Europe], favoring regulation over suppression and often viewing prostitutes as a significant source of municipal income" (Wiesner-Hanks 122).

Merry Wiesner-Hanks sums up women's economic role in the fifteenth through the eighteenth century as follows:

The early modern period has been viewed as a time of tremendous economic change, with the expansion of commercial capitalism, the beginning of proto-industrial production, and the creation of a world market system because of European colonization. When we evaluate women's economic role during this period, however, we find that continuities outweigh the changes. Women were increasingly pushed out of craft guilds, but they had only rarely been full members in the first place. They took over new types of agricultural tasks but continued to be paid half of what men were paid no matter what types of work they did. They dominated the urban marketplace but only rarely were able to amass much profit [what they earned belonged legally to

men]. Women's economic activities were increasingly restricted during the early modern period, but their legal dependence on father or husband, unequal access to family resources, and inability to receive formally acknowledged training had adversely affected their economic position in the Middle Ages [as well] and would continue to do so into the twenty-first century.

It is clear from the records, however, that...at least a few midwives, merchants, market women and medical practitioners took great pride in their work, seeing it as a vocation the way many men did their occupations... (133-4)

#### **4. SOME WOMEN - NOBLEWOMEN – ACTUALLY HAD FEWER CIVIL RIGHTS AND LESS ACCESS TO POWER THAN IN PREVIOUS CENTURIES.**

In the Middle Ages in France, for instance, Adrienne Rogers notes that

Noblewomen had acted as peers and had even arbitrated vassals' disputes and participated in *parlements* [French law courts], but by the eighteenth century, they could not hold any judicial offices. Access to all professions and the rights to litigate, to bear witness in court, to have guardianship of minors, to have one's signature considered legally binding and valid, to witness a will, to make a will – these rights were enjoyed by Frenchwomen of the eighteenth century either not at all or to a limited extent...As early as 1788, when the king called together the Estates General [the prelude to the French Revolution], a few women petitioned in hope that they might have a share in the benefits of liberty...

But this was not to be: in December 1789, with the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen*, "women were excluded from 'the right to vote,'" and "in the Constitution of 1791, the Constituent Assembly denied women citizenship, grouping them with other 'passive' citizens, such as children, minors and convicted felons" (Rogers 43). Other civil rights, however, such as the right to divorce and the right to keep property, were obtained following the French Revolution. (For more, see Wiesner-Hanks, "Ideas and Laws"; Rogers, "Women and the Law.")

The eighteenth century was an era of upheaval in which human nature, and with it the nature of men and women, was being rethought. The religious worldview was losing its validity, and with it the biblical curse which for centuries had allowed women to be conceived as subordinate to men. The...notion of natural human equality also facilitated a new anthropological definition of the female human being. "Woman in a state of nature, like man, is a free and powerful being," wrote Choderlos de Laclos in *Des femmes et de leur éducation* (On Women and their Education), following Rousseau's postulate on the natural equality of all human beings.

This development, however, by no means culminated in the concept of the equality of the sexes. The eighteenth century is the period when the sex-specific character attributed to men and women developed and diverged; it is the epoch in which the ideological and institutional foundations were laid for women's exclusions from civil rights and higher education...It is the age that saw the emergence of an image of female nature that allowed precisely these exclusions to be considered "natural."

The division of humanity into two unequal parts was legitimated with genuinely Enlightenment principles – this in an age professing devotion to the equality of all human beings. The road there led past the very authority that allowed men to conceive of liberation from the shackles of tutelage: Nature...the paradigm of Enlightenment emancipation in general, when applied to women, comes to mean 'subsumption' and 'limitation.' - Steinbrügge, *The Moral Sex*, 4-5

## 5. EIGHTEENTH CENTURY WOMEN IN FRANCE WERE NONETHELESS *PERCEIVED* TO HAVE POWER IN THE POLITICAL ARENA.

“Anyone at the court, in Paris, or in the provinces, who judges the ministers, magistrates, and prelates, without knowing the women who govern them is like a man who can tell that a machine works, but who has no knowledge of the inner springs” – Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, 1721

“Since women find the path to fame and power closed to their sex, they achieve their goals via other routes” – Mme. Lambert, 1747

As Steinbrügge observes,

Legend has it that in France the eighteenth century was the century of women, and the facts would seem to substantiate this view. The intellectual elite met in salons led by women; the important thinkers of the age corresponded and discussed their ideas with women. A number of women took up writing themselves, producing scientific tracts, translations, novels or pedagogical programs. Women such as Madame du Châtelet, Madame de Graffigny, Madame Riccoboni, Madame de Lambert, Julie de Lespinasse, and Madame de Genlis – to name only a few – represent this development. It was this integration of women into intellectual life which, a century later, moved the Goncourt brothers to devote a celebrated study to the women of the eighteenth century, in which they concluded that woman had been the governing principle of the age...(1)

The key phrase here is of course “woman” as a “principle,” rather than diverse *women* –acting, doing, and creating.

## 6. FOR ROUSSEAU, THIS WAS A DANGEROUS STATE OF AFFAIRS.

It was precisely this perception of eighteenth century France as condemned to the “reign of woman” that Rousseau would excoriate in his polemics and philosophical work, declaring (somewhat hysterically) in his *Letter to d’Alembert*, that “never has a people perished from an excess of wine; all perish from the disorder of women.”

In his immensely influential pedagogical treatise, *Émile*, he would argue that women should be loving mothers and wives above all, and that “nature” decreed that their influence should be circumscribed to the home, the domestic sphere and the domestic affections. He

Predicted no end of moral corruption and social decadence if women were not systematically raised to fulfill a feminine role in a domestic environment, and kept away from the public and intellectual activity that [was] the proper province of male republican citizens. (Lange 2-3)

As Lange’s reference to “male republican citizens” indicates, Rousseau was at once more politically radical and more socially conservative than many of his Enlightenment contemporaries. On the one hand, he advocated for a republic of free citizens in an age when even a staunch advocate of free speech such as Voltaire thought the lower classes were better off remaining uneducated. On the other hand, *women* simply weren’t part of the equation, as far as Rousseau was concerned (and his pronouncements in this regard are both numerous and tedious).

The witty, well-read, intellectual, hard-working *salonnières* of the era (see Goodman) Rousseau dismissed as “plagues” to all around them: “A brilliant wife is a plague to her husband, her children, her friends, her valets, everyone. From the sublime elevation of her fair genius she disdains all her

women's duties and always begins by making herself into a man" (*Émile*, qtd. Dent 106).

## **6. MANY OF ROUSSEAU'S CONTEMPORARIES HELD FAR MORE PROGRESSIVE VIEWS THAN ROUSSEAU ABOUT WOMEN'S ROLE IN SOCIETY AND POLITICS.**

"It is common knowledge that the difference between the sexes is purely physical, and restricted to those parts of the body serving the propagation of human nature...[A] woman is just as capable as a man of learning."

– Mme. de Puisieux, *Woman is Not Inferior to Man*, 1750

"If a woman has the right to be guillotined, she also has the right to vote."

– Olympe de Gouges, 1791

"If all Men are born Free, how is it that all Women are born Slaves?"

– Mary Astell, writing in response to John Locke, 1706

Few went as far as Enlightenment *philosophe* Condorcet (*On the Admission of Women to the Rights of Citizenship*, 1790) or feminist activists such as Olympe de Gouges (*Declaration of the Rights of Woman*, 1791) and Mary Wollstonecraft (*Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1792) in advocating for the rights of women to have the vote, but many – including Diderot (*Sur les femmes*, 1772) and the Baron d'Holbach (*Des Femmes*, 1773), believed women's inferiority due to their legal subordination and poor education, a stance implicitly suggesting their lot could be improved. (Diderot's opinions regarding women's rights or lack thereof continue to be a matter of debate).

That Rousseau's opinions differed from some of his contemporaries' views in this regard is an important point to stress: that is, Rousseau's chauvinism was partially a product of his society, yes, but it was mostly a product of Rousseau. The intellectual technology, as it were, for arriving at a different point of view, *was* available.

## **7. ROUSSEAU'S WOMEN READERS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY DID NOT READ *EMILE* or *JULIE* AS SEXIST.**

In fact, many women, such as writer, intellectual, early feminist and *salonnière* Germaine de Staël, found his precepts liberatory.

## **8. READING ROUSSEAU'S *CONFESSIONS*, AS OPPOSED TO HIS OTHER WORK, COMPLICATES ROUSSEAU'S VIEWS ON WOMEN.**

In the *Confessions*, gender relations and gender roles and identities arguably emerge as complex, constructed, and dynamic, rather than as predetermined, "natural," given facts. Rousseau declares that he has begun to dress as a woman in his old age (his famous Armenian costume), and tells his readers, "I shall now become a woman." As Roseanne Kennedy observes in *Rousseau in Drag*, he falls in love with a woman, Sophie d'Houdetot, who cross-dresses as a man. He tells us that he is happiest when being ordered around by a woman – when, in fact, he adopts the role society suggested belonged to women. What we make of this is up to us as readers.



Rousseau's is a most intriguing sexism, a complex and even insightful account of the ways political agendas support, constrain and construct sexual identities  
Wingrove, *Rousseau's Republican Romance*, 315

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## ROUSSEAU'S EUROPE: GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY IN GENEVA AND SAVOY

\*Note: For France, see Gail Ossenga, "Society," David Bell, "Culture and Religion," and Fitzpatrick, "Louis XIV and Early Enlightenment in France"

Rousseau was born a citizen of the independent Republic of Geneva in 1712 (Book I) and died in a France under the erstwhile reign of an absolute monarch, Louis XVI, in 1778. In his youth (Books II and III), he travels to Turin, lives for a long time in Annecy and Chambéry in Savoy, both at the time a part of the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, and additionally travels across what were then a series of independent city-states and kingdoms that are now a part of France and Switzerland.

All of this might appear rather confusing to both you and to your students, and while understanding exactly where Rousseau's narrator is at any one time in the *Confessions* might not be necessary for an appreciation of the *Confessions* as a work of art, it may nonetheless be helpful and of interest in understanding Rousseau's world more broadly. A basic understanding of government and society in Europe in the eighteenth century is, furthermore, quite necessary for grasping the revolutionary aspect of Rousseau's political philosophy, should you be teaching any part of it to your students. In either case, the following handout is intended as an aid in understanding the historical and political landscape of the world Rousseau traverses, engages and critiques in the *Confessions* and which would substantially impact his development as an individual, as a political philosopher, as a musician and as a writer. This handout focuses on Geneva and Savoy, as substantial parts of the rest of the guide includes information about France and Venice in the period; interestingly, both Geneva and Savoy, to judge from the *Confessions*, appear to have constituted remarkably similar societal ideals for Rousseau – remarkably, that is, considering that one was a feudal kingdom, and the other a republic.

Part A: Chronology of Rousseau's Travels

Part B: Government and Politics in Geneva and Savoy-Piedmont

Part C: Maps of 18<sup>th</sup> Europe

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### Part A: Chronology of Rousseau's Travels

1712	Rousseau born in Geneva; leaves. (Book I)
1728-30	Meets Mme de Warens in Chambéry (Savoy); travels to Turin (Piedmont-Sardinia-Savoy), converts to Catholicism, abjuring Genevan citizenship (Book II). Travels north across the Italian Alps to Annecy (Savoy) and Mme de Warens. Leaves for Lyons, France; returns to Annecy (End of Book III) Travels to Fribourg, Nyon, Lausanne, all cities around Lake Geneva (Book IV), stays in Lausanne. Walks frequently to Vevey. Travels to Neuchâtel (independent kingdom) Fribourg (independent city-state), Bern (independent city-state/canton), and Paris, France. Leaves Paris, travels to Lyons. Return to Chambéry around 1731. (End of Book IV).

- 1731-4 Lives in Chambéry with Mme de Warens and Claude Anet (Book V). Travels to Besançon via Geneva, returns to Chambéry. Travels to Nyon, Lyons, Grenoble and Geneva.
- 1736-38 (End of Book V, beginning of Book VI) Moves to Les Charmettes, near Chambéry in Savoy, with Mme de Warens. Lives at Les Charmettes with Mme de Warens. Travels to Montpellier, Nîmes. return to Les Charmettes.
- 1740-1 Leaves for Lyons. Resigns from job as tutor, returns to Les Charmettes.
- 1742 Travels to Paris to present new system of musical notation to the Académie. (End of Book VI, Part One – beginning of Book VII, Part II). Stay in Paris.
- 1743 Leaves Paris for Venice (independent city-state) to be secretary to the French Ambassador. Leaves Venice after quarrel with ambassador.
- 1744-55 Returns to and lives in Paris. Works on the *Encyclopédie* with Diderot and d’Alembert. (End of Book VII). The “walk to Vincennes:” “I saw another universe and I became another man” (beginning of Book VIII, p. 341-342). Writes and publishes *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*. Wins the Dijon prize. Works for the Dupin family and alternates between their Loire Valley chateaux, Chenonceaux, and Paris. Begins his “sumptuary reform” (p. 354). *Le Devin du Village* (opera). Refuses the king’s pension. Writes *Letter on French Music* and *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. Publication of Vol. 5 of the *Encyclopédie*, which contains Rousseau’s entry on “political economy.” Leaves Paris for the Hermitage in the forest of Montmorency, a house belonging to Mme d’Epinay. (End of Book VIII).
- 1755-58 (Book IX) Falls in love with Sophie d’Houdetot. Begins writing *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (Julie, or the New Héloïse). Quarrels with Mme d’Epinay, Grimm and Diderot. Writes and publishes *Letter to d’Alembert on the Theater*. Leaves the Hermitage for Mont-Louis. (End of Book IX). Moves to the “Petit Chateau” on the estate of the Duc and Duchesse de Luxembourg. (End of Book X).
- 1761 *Julie* appears. Finishes *The Social Contract* and *Emile*.
- 1762 April: Publication of *The Social Contract* by Rey in Amsterdam. May: Publication of *Émile, or Education* by Duchesne in Holland and secretly in France. Both books are condemned by the authorities in Paris and Geneva. Rousseau forced to leave France; takes refuge first in Yverdon, in Bernese territory. (End of Book XI). Expelled by Berne, he leaves for Motiers in Neuchatel, then governed by the King of Prussia. (“This is where the works of darkness begin,” p. 576).
- 1763-4 Abjures Genevan citizenship. Writes *Letters from the Mountain*. Stone-throwing incident (p. 620-621).
- 1765 Returns to Bernese territory, brief idyllic respite on the Ile de Saint-Pierre (p. 624-32). Is ordered to leave the island. **[End of Book XII, end of the part of his life related in the *Confessions*]**
- 1766 Travels to Berlin, then Paris, then England at the invitation of David Hume. Begins writing the *Confessions* while living in Wootton in Staffordshire. Period of great mental distress. Flees England, convinced he’s being persecuted, returns to France. Gives readings of the *Confessions* that are then banned. Presence otherwise tolerated by the authorities.
- 1778 Dies July 3 north of Paris.
- 1782-9 Autobiographical work, including the *Confessions*, published posthumously.

## Part B: Government and Society in Geneva and Savoy

### GENEVA

“I was born in 1712 in Geneva, the son of Isaac Rousseau and Suzanne Bernard, citizens” (5).

With these words, Jean-Jacques Rousseau begins the tale of his life in the *Confessions*, proudly declaring not only his ancestry, but also that he is the son of two *citizens* of the independent republic of Geneva. It was a birthright that would have a profound impact on Rousseau as a writer and political thinker. As Cranston notes, Calvin [the founder of eighteenth century Geneva], “no less than Lycurgus was in Rousseau’s mind when he wrote the famous chapter in *The Social Contract* on ‘the Law Giver,’ and the fundamental laws which Calvin drafted for Geneva were more than anything else the inspiration for the constitution of the republic Rousseau sketches in the same book; indeed, he says as much in [his later work] *Letters from the Mountain*, where he tells the Genevans: ‘I took your constitution, which I considered good, as my model for political institutions’” (Cranston 20). By the time he wrote *Letters*, however, Geneva had disappointed Rousseau and he had abjured his citizenship: in 1762, the authorities burned his books.

“[Geneva’s] noble image of liberty elevated my soul, that of equality, of unity, and of gentle civility...I thought I saw all those things in my native land because I carried them in my heart.”

- Rousseau, *Confessions*, p. 141

### Geneva in the year Rousseau was born:

“Geneva, in 1712, when Rousseau was born there, was a singular political entity. With an entire population of little more than 25,000, it had been an independent nation for more than a century and a half, one of the few surviving city-states in an age of great kingdoms and royal absolutism. Although it was not an ancient republic like Venice or San Marino, or even a Free City within the Holy Roman Empire, the burghers of Geneva had already in the Middle Ages exploited the rivalry between their two feudal masters, the Bishops and secular lords of Geneva [the Dukes of Savoy] to secure themselves a large measure of civil autonomy. At the beginning of the fifteenth century when their secular lords, the [Dukes] of Savoy, made strenuous efforts to assert their sovereignty in Geneva at the expense of the Bishop, the Bishop made correspondingly generous offers to the Burghers to win their support against the Duke. They backed him in return for a contract that recognized their General Council – the public assembly to which every citizen belonged – as the central legislative body in the city. Thus, Geneva, while still a municipality, acquired the structures and some of the political experience on which an independent republic could be built.”

– From Cranston, “Introduction” to *Discourse on Inequality*.

### History and Institutions of Geneva

**15<sup>th</sup> century** Geneva is part of the Duchy of Savoy.

- 1534** Geneva rids itself of both the Bishop and of Savoyard rule, declares itself for the Reformed religion (Protestantism), prints its own money and transforms itself into an **independent republic**. Meanwhile, the **Reformation** splits the Swiss cantons that surround Geneva: Fribourg remains Catholic; Berne declares itself for Protestantism. Geneva's location at the foot of the Alps makes her vulnerable to invasion, and so according to Cranston, as "Geneva was no longer to be defended as part of the Duchy of Savoy, the sensible alternative was seen as developing [an alliance] with the neighboring cantons of Berne and Fribourg" with the aim of ultimately seeking "full membership [in] the Swiss Confederation. The Reformation thwarted this design; for Berne adopted the Reformed religion [Protestantism] and Fribourg remained loyal to Catholicism, so that Geneva could not join one canton in its religious settlement without antagonizing the other. In the event, Berne, stronger in military force and offering more help to Geneva in its resistance to the Savoyards, prevailed over Fribourg." The decision also helpfully justified the "exclusion of the Catholic Bishop." The result "was to alienate not only Fribourg, but also all the other Catholic Swiss cantons, so that Geneva's inclusion in the Swiss Confederation was vetoed for generations to come."
- 1536-1568** **Jean Calvin** moves to Geneva. The Reformed religion had not immediately appealed to everyone in Geneva: some felt "closer to Fribourg;" for many, the theology of Luther simply felt foreign. But Calvin was "a French theologian of undoubted genius, a great preacher and a systematic thinker...and also a prophet...[with a] dream of realizing on earth the dream of a truly Christian commonwealth. Here was a man to turn a political necessity into a spiritual achievement, a revolutionary man for a revolutionary moment [and] a practical visionary who could transform a medieval bishopric into a modern city-state, and reconcile Geneva to the Reformed religion...Rousseau thought of Calvin as a great law-giver, [as the man who] had invented the constitution of the republic of Geneva, a founder like Lycurgus or Solon...There can be no doubt that Calvin was remarkably successful in presiding over Geneva's formative years as an autonomous state, and he owed his success in part to the lucky circumstances that throughout the years of his residence in Geneva – from 1536 to 1568 – the territories surrounding the city were occupied by Protestant Bernese troops, so that he was able to reorganize Geneva without hostile intervention by the Catholic Savoyards, whose forces at other times stood on the frontiers of the city."
- 1540s-1560s** Persecution of Protestants in France brings in refugees sympathetic to Calvin's purposes; meanwhile Calvin expels from the city any native Genevans who resist conversion to the Reformed religion. Geneva becomes "almost as much as was Massachusetts afterwards a commonwealth of exiles united by a puritan ideology." "The new men brought new trades, industries and wealth; and Geneva became an industrial, financial and commercial metropolis. Calvin's academies and seminaries attracted visitors from all over Europe, and although one or two such visitors in Calvin's lifetime found that they had only exchanged one form of persecution for another – Michel Gruet, for example, being burned at the stake for socinianism, and Jacques Gruet put to death for atheism – religious fanaticism died down as Geneva grew richer."

### **Institutions of Geneva, as designed by Calvin**

- **The General Council** The General Council is comprised of all the citizens and burgesses of Geneva, that is, of every male person over 25 who had the right to be registered on the rolls. In principle this was the sovereign body of the state, with powers to make laws, elect principal magistrates, approve or reject proposals concerning alliances, raise loans and impose taxes. Required to meet twice a year for the election of magistrates, and otherwise whenever summoned by the Councils of Two Hundred or Twenty-Five. Can hold no debates and initiate no measures. Instead, the General Council votes mutely on initiatives proposed by the Council of Two Hundred and the Council of Twenty-Five.
- **The Council of Two Hundred** designed not only to deliberate on policies to submit to the General Council, but also to be the supreme court of justice, to have the power of pardoning, and to elect the Council of Twenty-Five.
- **The Council of Twenty-Five** This is the executive instrument of the Republic. Members, elected from the Council of Two Hundred, are members of life. They are formally responsible for all the decisions that did not require the convocation of the Two Hundred; power of judging all criminal cases (without power of pardon), hearing of civil cases, the nomination of public servants, administration of finances, together with the right to summon the Council of Two Hundred, to have all the principal magistrates chosen from its own ranks.
- **The Reformed Church and the Consistory** controlled people's morals through elaborate surveillance. For Calvin, this was the most important element of the state
- **Company of Pastors and the Academy** guides culture and opinion.

**Early 18<sup>th</sup> century**     **The Council of Twenty-Five dominates; Geneva is, in effect, now ruled by a hereditary nobility:** "Without any formal constitutional change, the Council of Twenty-Five becomes systematically enlarged at the expense of the Council of Two Hundred and even more so at the expense of the citizenry assembled in the General Council. The Council of Twenty-Five by now dominates the Council of Two Hundred, and in the end the General Council is summoned only to rubberstamp the decisions of the magistrates...among the French and Italian Protestants who found refuge in Geneva were several from noble families who brought with them not only their wealth, but their assumed right to lead and rule. These families monopolized the places on the Council of Twenty-Five, and by excluding all others set up what was in fact the rule of a hereditary nobility – not as open and avowed a patriciate as that of Berne, but a patriciate veiled by the ceremonies and styles and language of republicanism. What was not disguised was the social superiority of these patrician families, and Geneva being a city on a hill, they were able to proclaim their superiority by building their elegant houses on the upper levels around the Hotel de Ville, while the humbler families crowded in wooden dwellings on the damp shores of the river and the lake.

**The number of residents who qualify as citizens becomes smaller as the population grows,** from about 13,000 in Calvin's time to 25,000 in Rousseau's. In the 16<sup>th</sup> c the great majority of male residents were citizens; by the eighteenth

century the citizens constituted a minority. Only about 1,500 of the 5,000 adult males living in Geneva in Rousseau's time counted as citizens, the class to which Rousseau himself was proud by birthright to belong. The others were crowded into various categories, not only excluded from civil rights and privileges, but denied access to all the most lucrative trades and professions in Geneva, including watch-making [the profession of Rousseau's father].

For reasons such as these there came to be a **great deal of discontent beneath the almost utopian surface of appearances in Geneva**. There were citizens who opposed the domination of the republic by the patrician families, and there were non-franchised inhabitants who opposed the monopoly of rights and privileges by the citizens. The opposition to the patrician regime which developed among the citizens at the end of the seventeenth century...assert[ed] the rights of the citizens in the General Council against usurpations of the patriciate in the Council of Twenty-Five. The leaders of this movement were themselves members of the patrician class; even so, two of them...were both put briskly to death by the government in 1707, five years before Rousseau's birth."

**A literate republic:** As a result of Calvin's system of public instruction, the artisans of Geneva were educated; they could not only read, several of them possessed books by the great philosophers, historians and political theorists.

**A solvent and well-regulated state:** Taxes are fair, and Geneva, unlike other city-states at the time, is solvent. Besides the excellent system of public education, the regime provides unusually effective welfare arrangements, and through the *Chambre de blé* assures food at fair prices when other places suffered the effects of bad harvests.

**1712**

**Jean-Jacques Rousseau is born.** "Rousseau's father Isaac was a socially ambitious man who fretted against the constraints of the artisan's life. He married above himself socially, so that Jean-Jacques was born, not in the artisan parish of St Gervais where his father had been born, but in the elegant quarter near the Hotel de Ville, in his mother's house. Although Rousseau's mother, Suzanne Bernard, was not of the social and political élite from which the rulers of Geneva were drawn, she came from the academic elite that Calvin had elevated to a position of distinction that enabled its members to meet social aristocracy on equal terms. It was Suzanne's uncle, Samuel Bernard, a prominent theologian and scholar, who had bequeathed to her the house in the Grand'rue where Jean-Jacques was born and the library that served to lay the foundation for his education" (Cranston 17).

**1725-8**

At his father's departure, he is cared for by his mother's family and educated in Boissy until 1725, when his cousin Albert, as befits a son of the middle-class, is sent away to be trained as an officer and Rousseau is sent back "down the hill" to the artisan's quarters of St-Gervais to become an engraver's apprentice. His master, in a situation not at all unusual at the time, was brutal, coarse and unfair. Rousseau leaves Geneva. [This is all related in Book I]. He will never again reside in his native city.

#### **Additional sources:**

“Geneva, Switzerland.” <http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Places/geneva.html>

Intended to help readers understand the Geneva of Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, this site provides good images, maps and some history of Geneva, mostly focused on the nineteenth century, but with good eighteenth century references as well.

Rosenblatt, H. *Rousseau and Geneva*. Dedicated to all things Rousseau and Geneva.

300<sup>th</sup> Centenary Celebration of Rousseau’s birth: <http://www.ville-ge.ch/culture/rousseau/> Geneva, 2012. In French.

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## **SAVOY-PIEDMONT** (Annecy, Chambéry, Turin, Les Charmettes)

Books II-Book VI of *The Confessions* all take place in the duchy of Savoy and in the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia; thus, much of Rousseau’s autobiographical work takes place in this largely **feudal** region ruled by the ambitious Duke of Savoy, who in 1720 had been crowned King of Piedmont-Sardinia.

When Rousseau leaves Geneva at the end of Book I, he travels to the duchy of Savoy. The Dukes of Savoy once counted Geneva among their possessions, and it should be remembered that religion in this period remains a political tool: Geneva, in declaring itself independent, also declared itself Protestant; Savoy remains Catholic. And in Savoy, as it turns out, “the Counter-Reformation [is] still active...with Catholic missionaries on the look out for potential converts among young people who [had] fled” Calvin’s Geneva (Cranston 20). Rousseau is promptly sent to Madame de Warens, a Swiss baroness on the run from her husband, whose role in the Counter-Reformation is that of an “aristocratic Swiss convert to the Catholic church, helping the conversion of others, and supported in this pious work” by the Duke of Savoy and King of Sardinia, Victor-Amedée. Whenever Rousseau refers to the “King of Sardinia” or “King Victor-Amedée” or the “Duke of Savoy” in the *Confessions*, he is referring to the same man. To him, Mme de Warens owed her pension, and it is also in his surveyor’s corps that Rousseau is briefly employed in Book IV of the *Confessions* (See especially p. 169).

### **Government and Society in Savoy**

Throughout the eighteenth century, Savoy-Piedmont is a feudal and military state. Power lies first in the hands of the King, and then in that of ancient noble families whose wealth, in turn, lies in their land. We meet a few of these noble families in the *Confessions*, such as the Comtes de Gouvons, who employ the young convert Rousseau. Looking back on his time in Savoy in the *Confessions*, specifically of his time in Chambéry, Rousseau observes,

It is a pity that the people of Savoy are not rich, or rather, perhaps, it would be a pity if they were; for as they are they are the best and most sociable people I know. If there is any little town in the world where human relations are friendly and secure and where life may be tasted in all its sweetness, that town is Chambéry. The nobility of the province who congregate there possess only such wealth as they need to survive and not enough to succeed, so that, unable to pursue ambition, they follow of necessity the advice of Cineas. They devote their youth to military service, and then return home to grow old in peace, an arrangement that satisfies both honor and reason. The women are beautiful, but could dispense with being so, since they possess everything that not only sets off beauty to advantage but may even compensate for its absence. - *Confessions*, p. 184



And again, during his “time of happiness” in Les Charmettes in Book V, Rousseau remarks of having “stopped at a peasant’s house and shared our dinner with his family, who returned us heartfelt blessings,” that “these poor Savoyards are such good people!” (239)

### **Turin, capital of Savoy**

Turin is the capital of what becomes in this period the kingdom of Piedmont-Savoy and Sardinia, and the city consequently experiences a period of economic, demographic and architectural expansion under the auspices of a king determined to make it a capital worthy of his monarchical ambitions. It is here Rousseau travels to convert to Catholicism, meets Mme. de Basile and is briefly employed at the house of Mme. de Vercelis and the de Gouvons.

In *Italy in the Age of Reason*, Dino Carpanetto and Giuseppe Ricuperati observe that Turin was

during the seventeenth century radically altered under the influence of the ruling dynasty, as the policies of Savoy...aimed to impose centralized institutions on all parts of the province and to attract the ruling classes to the capital [Turin, moved from Chambéry by the newly crowned king] to supervise their preparation for the exercise of their social duties, to fit them into the fabric of the State and to bind them more closely to the ruling dynasty. The rise in population [in Turin] reflects an expanding productivity which increased the numbers of traders and professionals as well as that of the new incoming workers...[The] social and also physical rapprochement of the Piedmontese nobility to the kings of Savoy and the rise of new classes who invested part of their financial capital in the building of houses in the capital city and employed a large domestic staff [also contributed to Turin’s expansion in the eighteenth century]. But social mobility was much reduced, and while new groups from the country were absorbed, particularly from areas going through a period of crisis, social divisions nevertheless remained intact (54).

See also the Stupinigi Palace: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palazzina\\_di\\_caccia\\_of\\_Stupinigi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palazzina_di_caccia_of_Stupinigi)  
Built in 1720s-30s for the new king of Sardinia, Victor-Amedée, it gives a sense of his ambition.

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### Part C: Maps of Europe

- *Images of Early Maps on the Web: Continental Europe.*  
<http://www.maphistory.info/imageeurcont.html>
- *Interactive Map of Eighteenth Century Europe.*  
[http://www.worldology.com/Europe/europe\\_history\\_lg.htm](http://www.worldology.com/Europe/europe_history_lg.htm)