

# Delight and Defence

A grayscale photograph of a woman sitting on a grassy field, wearing a large, wide-brimmed straw hat. She is holding an open book up to her face, reading. The image is semi-transparent, allowing the text to be overlaid on it.

Women Reading  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau in  
Eighteenth-Century Sweden

Elisabeth Mansen

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is often characterized as a women's writer – read, admired, loved and criticized by women. Internationally, there is a research field laid out by Mary Seidman Trouille's classic work, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers Read Rousseau* (New York 1997) and heralded by Robert Darnton's examination of reader reactions to Rousseau in *The Great Cat Massacre: And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (London 2001 [1984]). However, more scholarly work is needed to gain a clear picture of women reading Rousseau. Recent studies have rather unexpectedly found that the very first woman to criticize Rousseau's views on women in print was Swedish poet Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht (1718–1763). Her *Defence of the Female Sex against J. J. Rousseau, Citizen of Geneva*, currently translated into English, was written in 1759 and originally published in 1761<sup>1</sup>. This was one year before Rousseau's *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762) was published and more than thirty years before Mary Wollstonecraft's famous examination of Rousseau in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).

Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht is the only one among the critics of Rousseau to present her opinions in rhyme and meter. *Defence of the Female Sex* consists of an argumentative introduction over five pages, followed by an impressive poem, 648 lines long, with her views on Rousseau and on the oppression of women throughout history. The argumentation in *Defence of the Female Sex* uses a rich variety of elements connected to our conception of the Enlightenment, such as the symbolism of light, the idea of utility, the critique of inherited notions, the rights of man, and the opposition to all autocratic power. Moreover, it highlights the importance of re-examining history. In her poem, Nordenflycht invites Rousseau to follow her on an imaginary journey through history.

1 Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht, *Defence of the female sex against J.J. Rousseau, citizen of Geneva (1761)*, Lund : Ellerström, 2016. Nordenflycht's text has been translated into English, by Alan Crozier, as *Defence of the female sex against J.J. Rousseau, citizen of Geneva (1761)*, and into French, by Françoise Sule, as *La défense du genre féminin contre J.J. Rousseau, citoyen de Genève (1761)*; the Swedish original being *Fruentimrets Försvar, emot J.J. Rousseau medborgare i Genève*. This article is built on two articles in Swedish, previously printed in *Kritik och beundran: Jean-Jacques Rousseau och Sverige 1750–1850*, ed. Jennie Nell & Alfred Sjödin (Lund 2017, Criticism and admiration: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Sweden 1750–1850). This is a combined, concentrated, revised, and expanded version, not available anywhere else.

She explores time and space in his company in order to find philosophers who share her opinions on liberty, equality and gender, as well as women who will show Rousseau and the reader what they are capable of.

The significance of this poem of Nordenflycht's in an international context became obvious as the result of a project on the reading and reception of Rousseau in Sweden during the period 1750–1850, funded by The Swedish Foundation for the Humanities and Social Sciences<sup>2</sup>. It raises more general questions about women reading Rousseau. Were women really as delighted with him as has hitherto been supposed? Did women really read Rousseau to the extent that we have been led to believe? Consequently, this study examines women reading Rousseau in Sweden from the 1750s to the 1850s. The purpose is to identify women reading Rousseau, and discover what they read, how they read it and the thoughts, feelings and reactions aroused by their reading. There are many questions to ask: Were they influenced by Rousseau, did they express ideas about his writings and did they spread their views to others? Did they visit Rousseau while he still lived or travel to places associated with him? Who owned books by Rousseau or showed interest in him in other ways? Did this interest vary with social status or change over time? Our picture of the literary landscape of the eighteenth century would benefit from further research and, in addition to previous research, this study will consult biographical material, book lists, diaries and letters in order to try to answer as many of these questions as possible.

Rousseau's works were available in French on the Swedish book market during the eighteenth century, in bookshops and lending libraries as well as at auctions<sup>3</sup>. But his direct influence

2 It is almost impossible to prove the negative point needed in order to claim that there are no earlier publications by women on this topic. However, corroboration has been sought from all the participants in the project as well as from the international Advisory Board.

3 Margareta Björkman, *Catharina Ahlgren: Ett skrivande fruntimmer i 1700-talets Sverige* (Catharina Ahlgren: A women writing in eighteenth century Sweden), Stockholm, 2006, p. 471, Anita Ankarcróna, *Bud på böcker: Bokauktioner i Stockholm 1782-1801: Traditionen - böckerna - publiken*, (Bid on Books : Book Auctions in Stockholm 1782-1801: The Tradition - the Books - the Audience), Stockholm, 1989, p. 123, 134, 152 and 162f.

is sometimes inferred too easily when certain subjects are mentioned, such as a general critique of western civilization, the social contract, more liberal child education, a complementary gender perception or a special appreciation of nature. The name Rousseau often takes precedence, although these themes were discussed by many others, sometimes as far back as antiquity, i.e. by the stoics. Therefore, this study requires more positive proof of the reading of Rousseau than thematic references or general associations.

### Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht – a poet with enlightened ideas

The most ardent reader of Rousseau among Swedish women during this period seems to have been the poet Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht. She was a contemporary of Rousseau and her reactions to his ideas range from warm admiration to intense criticism. She appreciated him as a writer and had no problem reading his works in French, but she reacted strongly against his ideas on women, as expressed in his *Lettre à M. d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758). She delivered her powerful and passionate response in print in *Defence of the Female Sex, against J. J. Rousseau, citizen of Geneva* (2016, orig. *Fruentimrets försvar, gentemot J. J. Rousseau medborgare i Genève*, 1761). Alone among Rousseau's critics, Nordenflycht chose the didactic poem as a genre, and filled her alexandrines with striking metaphors and antitheses in order to demonstrate the elevated ambition of the poem. She even emphasized the idea of equality by alternating between masculine and feminine rhymes of one and two syllables respectively. Her choice of the poetic form was deliberate. She knew that poems do not attract everybody, but, according to Nordenflycht, poetry has the capacity to simultaneously please the senses and engage the mind<sup>4</sup>.

Nordenflycht has an assured place in the history of Swedish literature as an author and member of the learned society Tankebyggarorden (Order of Thought Builders) in Stockholm, but her harsh criticism of Rousseau's outlook on women is less well

4 Nordenflycht, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

known and deserves international attention. Nordenflycht's poem appeared long before Mary Wollstonecraft, Madame de Staël or Olympe de Gouges formulated their critiques of Rousseau, and her contribution is particularly interesting in that she reacted while Rousseau was still alive, and a year before the publication of *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762), in which he elaborated upon his views on women. Her ambivalence is obvious. She appreciated Rousseau as an author, especially his ambition to be honest and sincere, but her reaction to his outlook on women remained firm<sup>5</sup>.

Nordenflycht's response rested on her wide reading of Rousseau and her profound admiration for him. Her motive force consisted in large parts of amazement and disappointment. In his earlier work, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750), she had found him open to the idea that better education for women would benefit the whole of humankind. That is part of the reason why Nordenflycht reacted so vehemently when Rousseau's *Lettre à M. d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758) included a long footnote in which he claimed that women in general were extremely limited both intellectually and emotionally. They lacked celestial fire, and could neither think profoundly nor feel intensely. In the text, Rousseau made women's attitudes responsible for the superficial civilization that he despised, as well as for the wretched theatrical productions in Paris<sup>6</sup>.

Nordenflycht shared Enlightenment values and hoped for development towards greater freedom, justice and equality, for women as well as men. In her poem, she invoked the strongest authorities of the age : Nature, Experience and History. She

5 Nordenflycht claimed women's admission to higher education and civil rights as early as 1741 in the poem « Fruentimbers plikt at upöfwa deras wett » (Women's duty to develop their minds). Her defence of the female sex was published in a separate volume early in the summer of 1761. She sent it to her friend Samuel Älf on 26 June 1761. The poem reached a wider audience in *Witterhets Arbeten*, 1762, Works of Fiction. Sven G. Hansson, *Satir och kvinnokamp i Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflychts diktning: några konflikter, motståndare och anhängare* (Satire and the struggle for women's rights in the poetry of Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht: Some conflicts, opponents and supporters), Stockholm, 1991, p. 112.

6 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Letter to d'Alembert and Writings for the Theatre*, in *Collected Writings of Rousseau*, vol. 10, edited and translated by Allan Bloom, Charles Butterworth, and Christopher Kelly, Lebanon, NH : Dartmouth College, 2004, p. 327.

embarked upon a pioneer quest, combing through history for philosophers and authors with a positive view of women. She started with the Bible, and continued with Plato, Plutarch, Pierre Bayle and the Danish author Ludvig Holberg<sup>7</sup>. Her next argument consisted of a gynaeceum, a catalogue of women. She began with Sappho, a brilliant exception whom Rousseau himself willingly acknowledged, and continued with Aspasia, Cleopatra and Semiramis. She highlighted the contributions of women to both culture and science, including female rulers and monarchs. Nordenflycht believed that the power of example is the most convincing evidence of women's competence and capacity.

To convince M. Rousseau and his supporters about how preposterous their way of thinking is, in this my defence of the female sex I have cited some of the famous women who have shone and still shine with great properties, genius, learning, virtue and heroism, since examples are the most binding proof<sup>8</sup>.

She tried to cover as many fields as possible, but was well aware of the fact that readers could not be supposed to be familiar with all the distinguished women mentioned. Therefore, she supplied the text with generous biographical and historical footnotes.

Thirty years later, Mary Wollstonecraft had largely abandoned this line of reasoning. She declared: « I shall not lay any great stress upon the example of a few women », mentioning only a couple with admiration, such as Sappho and Eloisa (shared with Rousseau and Nordenflycht), and the Empress of Russia. Wollstonecraft also added the androgynous Chevalier d'Eon, and the highly respected historian Catharine Macaulay, ending with « etc. »<sup>9</sup>. She knew the impact of example, but had no real inte-

7 Nordenflycht, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

9 Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *The works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, Vol. 5, ed. Janet Todd & Marilyn Butler, London, Pickering, 1989, p. 145-146. Chevalier d'Eon was an androgynous character with an adventurous life and an impressive name. J. M. J. Rogister, *D'Éon de Beaumont, Charles Geneviève Louis Auguste André Timothée, Chevalier D'Éon in the French nobility (1728-1810)*, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

rest in exceptional women<sup>10</sup>. Nordenflycht would have agreed, but still believed in numbers, up to a point: « to enumerate them all, it would have become an encyclopaedia, not a poem »<sup>11</sup>. Too many examples would ruin the poetry, and a few exceptions could be tolerated or simply overlooked, but in her opinion a carefully chosen but still massive historical testimony proved the worth of women.

Nordenflycht's philosophical ideal was equality in reason, emotion and ambition, founded on the idea of the innate and natural rights of man. Addressing women in general, she wrote :

You are yourself one part that holds the world together,  
And born with sense and drive, with feelings and desires.  
Woman, just like Man, as human is complete<sup>12</sup>.

The problem, as she saw it, was that men, no matter whether they worshipped or disparaged women, prevented them from using their reason, acquiring knowledge, or reaching important positions in society.

Our sex's rights have seen such autocratic treatment,  
Transformed at times to God, at times into a maggot,  
Yet always in accord with one severe decree:  
To keep us from the light, and bar from high pursuits<sup>13</sup>.

It was the sincere conviction of Nordenflycht that references to Nature usually hid the true state of things, and that present society was the result of inadequate education.

So Nature gets the blame, and blood and heart likewise  
For causing what is due to nurture, nothing else<sup>14</sup>.

She laid the blame on tradition, unjust politics and men in power.

10 Wollstonecraft, *op.cit.*, p. 146.

11 Nordenflycht, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 13

13 *Idem.*

14 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

They block the vein that brings the water to the wellspring,  
And then they wonder why that vein will give no water.  
They snare the eagle's foot and mutilate its wing,  
And then reproach the bird that cannot reach the sun.  
So female drive is bound by upbringing and habit<sup>15</sup>.

The actions of men were the reason for the shortcomings of women. Upbringing and habit provided the limits of their movements. Fortunately, women were not represented by flimsy swallows or tiny sparrows. Instead, Nordenflycht chose the eagle as a symbol of female power. Furthermore, she connected the fate of women with the greater history of mankind.

Oh, cruel tyranny, how can our world grow better,  
When half mankind is bound in ignorance and fettered<sup>16</sup>.

Ignorance constituted the fetters; education was the obvious countermeasure.

Nordenflycht was a firm advocate of the rights of women. She considered it her duty to defend her sex and voiced hope for a development towards greater freedom, justice and equality. Her endeavour included battling habits, prejudices, longstanding tradition—and Rousseau.

... my zeal has been ignited by reverence for truth, love of justice, concern for the value and rights of my sex, which have for so long been downtrodden by the tyranny of habit. M. Rousseau has the interest of his native country to defend and I have half the human race<sup>17</sup>.

Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht is probably the most important woman reading Rousseau in Sweden, and her defence of women stands out with increasing clarity as a central Enlightenment text in its desire to combat prejudices and injustices, as a pioneering

15 *Idem.*

16 *Idem.*

17 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

feminist work by virtue of the arguments about women's competence, and in Rousseau reception through its distinct character of protest. For a long time to come, her poem gave rise to commentary and thus contributed to Rousseau's presence in Swedish cultural life.

### Magdalena Sofia Montgomery Silfverstolpe – a salon hostess who loved Rousseau

Rousseau was also important to a central figure in the Swedish Romantic tradition, the salon hostess Magdalena (Malla) Sofia Montgomery Silfverstolpe (1782–1861)<sup>18</sup>. Her extensive diaries, containing notes on everything from philosophy and aesthetics to everyday events, are an invaluable source of cultural history. Rousseau was among her most beloved writers, but, unlike Nordenflycht, she was an unreserved admirer. There is every reason to believe that her own diary project was inspired by Rousseau's *Confessions*, published in the year of her birth.

Malla Silfverstolpe owned a library of over a thousand volumes and kept meticulous reading notes, sometimes including short reviews and personal reflections. Reading Rousseau, she was always willing to acknowledge her delight. She bestowed her blessing upon his ashes and highlighted both his sublime genius and his passionate heart. Writing in French, she exclaimed : « Génie sublime, coeur passionné et sensible, mes bénédictions sur ta cendre ! »<sup>19</sup>

The early volumes of Silfverstolpe's diary are full of underscores and exclamation marks. She resembled Rousseau in her subjective and emotional traits, in her emotional outbursts, her conflicting impulses, and her awkward combination of strong self-esteem and deep despair.

18 The archive of Malla Silfverstolpe at Uppsala University Library amounts to 26 volumes. A selection of her memoirs is available in Swedish in *Malla Montgomery-Silfverstolpes memoarer* (The Memoirs of Malla Montgomery-Silfverstolpe), 1–4, Stockholm, 1908–1911.

19 Malla Silfverstolpe's diaries. Original manuscript, p. 1590f. UUB. See also Ingrid Holmquist, *Salongens värld: Om text och kön i romantikens salongskultur* (The world of salons : Text and gender in the romantic culture of salons), Stockholm, 2000, p. 201.

Both of them often felt lonely, even in company, and considered themselves simultaneously uniquely important and misunderstood. Silfverstolpe easily identified with Rousseau's heroines, a Julie or a Sophie, and like Julie, she often fell in love with young men and felt torn between duty and inclination. Silfverstolpe read Rousseau's *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762) in her youth. In her diary, she admits that some of his reasoning was too advanced for her, but she felt a close affinity with Sophie<sup>20</sup>. In her diary, where she called herself Malla, she wrote :

At this time Malla made acquaintance with Rousseau in "Emile". There was a lot that was too serious and profound for her, but Sophie interested her, and she delivered a kind of solution to her own mystery. One night, just like Sophie in « Emile », Malla dreamed that she would become acquainted with a person who in the future would have a great influence on her destiny<sup>21</sup>.

Silfverstolpe does not object to Rousseau's ideas on women. She belongs to the Romantic tradition and readily accepts the notion that women's talents are mainly found in the area of emotions, which is Rousseau's position in *Émile*. In her memoirs, she recollects a strange encounter in her teens with one of her many admirers, in which Rousseau plays an ambiguous role:

February 8 [1801], Malla's birthday, Brelin came in the evening, took the opportunity to speak to her alone and said, « Miss Malla's only obligation towards me is to be happy ! Receive with kindness this little book that contains some good advice. » It was a « Taschenbuch » for the year 1800 with the title : « Die Kunst mit Männer glücklich zu seyn, nach Goethe, La Fontaine, Rousseau und Wieland. » The title seemed so peculiar that she was ashamed to display the book,

20 Silfverstolpe's diaries, *op.cit.*, p. 211.

21 Malla Silfverstolpe, *Malla Montgomery-Silfverstolpes memoarer*, 1, 1782-1803, Stockholm, 1908, p. 147.

but it was really rather good and Malla made many notes showing her acclaim and approbation<sup>22</sup>.

Rousseau is presented as a teacher of happy heterosexual relationships. In her diary, Silfverstolpe called him her most beloved author and the reading notes for 1817, when Silfverstolpe was 35 years of age, tell us that she read Rousseau's *Les Confessions* (1-2, 1782-1789) with « sincere interest »<sup>23</sup>. Visiting Germany in 1825-1826 together with the poet Erik Gustaf Geijer and the composer Adolf Fredrik Lindblad, she spent some time in Berlin with her literary friends Bettina von Arnim (1785-1859), Rahel Varnhagen von Ense (1771-1833) and Amalia von Helvig (1776-1831). Helvig often spent time in Sweden and is sometimes considered Swedish because she was married to a Swedish nobleman. She was a member of the Swedish Academy of Art and in 1804-1810 held a salon in Stockholm, visited by, among others, Malla Silfverstolpe. On 31 January 1826, Silfverstolpe made notes of discussions with Helvig on Rousseau and Goethe, two of her favourite authors. When Helvig mentioned that someone had criticized Rousseau's *Les Confessions* and that someone else opposed this, Silfverstolpe defended Rousseau, insisting on his innocence and sincerity<sup>24</sup>.

Silfverstolpe allowed Rousseau to influence both her life and her writing. This was noted by her contemporaries, not least by the author Fredrika Bremer, who associated Silfverstolpe's journal with Rousseau's work<sup>25</sup>. Previous research has also noticed the influence of Rousseau on Silfverstolpe's literary style in general, and on her diary in particular. Literary scholar Ingrid Holmquist, who has studied the original manuscripts of Malla Silfverstolpe, finds major similarities between their literary expressions and points out that the early sections of Silfverstolpe's diaries in particular,

22 *Ibid.*, p. 277.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 240 and 290. Holmquist, *op.cit.*, p. 201.

24 Malla Silfverstolpe, *Malla Montgomery-Silfverstolpes memoarer*, 4, 1825 (sept.)-1861, Stockholm, 1911, p. 46, The poem « Sur Les Confessions de J. J. Rousseau » in C. Bonafont, *Flore, ou variétés littéraires: étrennes pour 1816*, Strasbourg, 1816, p. 66.

25 Letter from Fredrika Bremer to Malla Silfverstolpe dated Årsta 23 December 1840. Fredrika Bremer, *Fredrika Bremers brev*, 2, 1838-1846, Stockholm, 1916, p. 93f and 541.

where you find an older narrator looking back on her earlier life, are similar to Rousseau's *Confessions*<sup>26</sup>. The form of reading attributed to romantic readers, whose intense empathy has consequences for their way of living their lives, called « rousseauianism » by Robert Darnton, accurately describes Silfverstolpe's relation to Rousseau.

Silfverstolpe's reading of Rousseau did not remain only a private matter, expressed in her diary and notes on her reading. In the romantic salon she started in the university town of Uppsala in 1819, and maintained with brief interruptions until the 1840s, reading aloud and discussing literary and aesthetic subjects were major elements. She read from her diaries and spread her views on Rousseau to a large circle of men and women, including younger generations. Among the guests were friends and family, as well as more casual visitors, such as author Fredrika Bremer and singer Jenny Lind. Some of the women in her salon owned copies of the works of Rousseau. Salon hostess Alida Knös (1785–1855) and her daughter, the poet Thekla Knös (1815–1880), had a copy of *Julie, ou La nouvelle Héloïse* in their library. The writings of Thekla Knös show that she was well acquainted with the ideas of Rousseau<sup>27</sup>.

Malla Silfverstolpe maintained an interest in Rousseau throughout her life. During the 1850s, she read Saint-Marc Girardin's portrait of Rousseau's life and work in the issues of *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Her comment, in French, was that Girardin did not do justice to the author<sup>28</sup>. She had obviously retained her positive attitude, but her diary and reading notes are not always full of references to Rousseau. On the contrary, there are long periods during which she says nothing about him. Her other favourite author, Goethe, is mentioned and quoted more frequently. She also frequently mentions Lord Byron, Maria Edgeworth, Victor Hugo,

26 Holmquist also finds influences from Byron, Madame de Staël and Fredrika Bremer. Holmquist, *op.cit.*, p. 195, 201, 203, 222, 236. See also Paul Fröberg, *Minnen och bikt : En studie i Malla Montgomery-Silfverstolpes memoarer* (Memories and confession : A study in Malla Montgomery-Silfverstolpe's memoirs), Stockholm, 1975, p. 24.

27 Elisabeth Mansén, *Konsten att förgylla vardagen : Thekla Knös och romantikens Uppsala*, (The art of beautifying everyday life : Thekla Knös and Romanticism in Uppsala), Nora, 1993 p. 72.

28 Malla Silfverstolpe's Reading Notes dated 1 December 1853, in October 1854 and March 1855. UUB. Girardin's work was published in Paris in 1875, after the death of Malla Silfverstolpe.

Edgar Allan Poe, Ann Radcliffe and Walter Scott, as well as Swedish authors such as Carl Jonas Love Almqvist and Fredrika Bremer. Silfverstolpe's reading notes rarely provide more than authors and titles, sometimes giving a final assessment, but they clearly show that, in Malla Silfverstolpe, Rousseau had found a congenial reader.

## Fredrika Bremer – a champion of women's rights

The most famous female Swedish author of the nineteenth century, Fredrika Bremer (1801–1865), also has a documented interest in Rousseau. In her youth, she read *Julie, ou La nouvelle Héloïse* with delight<sup>29</sup>. On a visit to Bern in October 1832, she visited St. Peter's Island where Rousseau had lived. She found it verdant and beautiful in the middle of a calm lake<sup>30</sup>. She then called him « Roussau », but a few months later, in a letter to her friend Per Böklin, she spelled Rousseau's name correctly<sup>31</sup>. In her letters, she also associated Rousseau (and Madame de Staël) with the question of whether or not suicide is a crime<sup>32</sup>. Around 1840, there are several references to Rousseau in Bremer's letters, and when she discussed the reasons for the French Revolution, she considered the enthusiasm for Rousseau's perception of nature to be a contributing factor<sup>33</sup>. Fredrika Bremer associates Rousseau with finding comfort in nature, quoting him in French: « tant que j'herborise je ne suis pas malheureux » (when I collect plants I am never unhappy)<sup>34</sup>.

29 Carina Burman, *Bremer : En biografi* (Bremer : A biography), Stockholm, 2001, p. 29, Sophie Adlersparre and Sigrid Leijonhufvud, *Fredrika Bremer : Biografisk studie* (Fredrika Bremer : Biographical study), Stockholm, 1896, p. 1 and 21f.

30 Fredrika Bremer, *Fredrika Bremers brev, 1, 1821–1838*, Stockholm, 1915, p. 63.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 217.

32 Letter from Bremer to Anders Lindeberg (1789–1849) in Fredrika Bremer, *Brev: Ny följd, tidigare ej samlade och tryckta brev, 1, 1821–1852*, Stockholm, 1996, p. 73f. « Tout homme a droit de risquer sa propre vie pour la conserver. » Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, Paris, 1762, II : 5, p. 69.

33 Bremer writes about « the enthusiasm for the nature gospel that Rousseau preached. » Letter-like draft in Bremer (1996) p. 467.

34 Letter from Fredrika Bremer to Ebba Svanberg (1821–1887), Stockholm 9 January 1843. Bremer, 1916, *op.cit.*, p. 297. See Lettre DCCCCLXVI à M. Peyrou, Dec 19 1768. *Oeuvres complètes de J.J. Rousseau : correspondance* (Paris 1826) p. 7.

This is a quotation from one of Rousseau's letters, available in a French edition from 1826, and if Bremer had not received it from other sources, she seems to have devoted more detailed studies to the works of Rousseau. She also discussed the flaws and merits of Rousseau in her novel *En dagbok* (A Diary, 1843)<sup>35</sup>.

Of particular interest is a letter from Fredrika Bremer to Malla Silfverstolpe, dated Årsta, 23 December 1840, in which Bremer compares Rousseau's *Les Confessions* to both the diary of Malla Silfverstolpe and her own plans to write a frank biography:

[...] I thought that no one could be more sincere than I, so merciless in exposing one's own weaknesses and misery, – revealing things only the goal can justify, turning ugliness to beauty, in short I believed myself to be (~~next to Rousseau~~) alone with such a state of mind. – In your work, dearest Malla, I have greeted a kindred spirit, and acknowledged it with joy. This is how you encounter and recognize each other – in God<sup>36</sup>.

Thanks to the careful publishers of the letters of Fredrika Bremer (Klara Johanson and Ellen Kleman), this reference to Rousseau remains visible, although Bremer herself had deleted it. Obviously, she saw the similarity between the three writing projects, although she might have overestimated the religious inclinations of the others.

Sophie Sparre – discovered in a private library  
by a stroke of luck

Sometimes, you have a stroke of luck. After this study had come to an end, I found an odd volume of Rousseau's *Émile* in a private library. It was a first edition and the book still had its old grey cover. Giving it a closer look I found the owner's signature: Sophie Sparre.

35 Fredrika Bremer, *En Dagbok* (A Diary), Stockholm, 1843, p. 25f. See Burman, *op.cit.*, p. 230–243.

36 Letter from Fredrika Bremer to Malla Silfverstolpe, *op.cit.* Bremer, 1916, *op.cit.*, p. 93f and 541.

The style was beautiful, thin and slightly sprawling, the ink bleached, and the name written with a pen that created wider lines when the hand pressed harder. This signature was obviously written long ago by another woman who owned a volume of Rousseau. But the discovery would be much more interesting if it were possible to identify this Sophie Sparre. There have been several women of that name, but a clear favourite is the Sophie Sparre (1761–1832), who married the artist and author Carl August Ehrensvärd (1745–1800) at the Royal Palace of Stockholm in 1785<sup>37</sup>. This Sophie Sparre was a well-read woman, and associated with several Rousseau-reading women at court. She had been in the service of Princess Sofia Albertina and the former Duchess Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta, by then Queen Charlotte. She is supposed to have managed to make Ehrensvärd abandon his negative opinion of women and their marriage was very happy. To decide whether the bookkeeping Sophie Sparre really was the Sophie Sparre married to Ehrensvärd, a signature of the latter was needed. Sweden's foremost expert on Ehrensvärd is Sten-Åke Nilsson, professor emeritus in Art History at Lund University. He knows that in the Tosterup collection at the National Archives there is a letter signed by said Sophie Sparre<sup>38</sup>. Luckily, he owns a copy of this letter, which is fortunate, as access to the Tosterup collection requires special permission. Nilsson is one of my former teachers and he agreed to meet me in the entrance to the Royal Library in Stockholm, where we could compare the two signatures.

At a quick glance, the signatures seem very similar – the initials, the inclination, the r:s. But there are also differences. The name on the letter is beautifully written and the p:s perfectly rounded. The name in the book seems to be written quickly, the

37 « Carl August Ehrensvärd », in *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*. (Bengt Hildebrand, O. Nikula, and Gunhild Bergh.), <http://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/16733>> 2019-08-23. See « Carl August Ehrensvärd », Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl\\_August\\_Ehrensv%C3%A4rd](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_August_Ehrensv%C3%A4rd)> 2019-08-23. See also Sten Åke Nilsson, *1700-talets ansikte : Carl August Ehrensvärd* (The image of the eighteenth century : Carl August Ehrensvärd), Stockholm, 1996 ; and Elisabeth Mansén, *Sveriges historia. 1721-1830* (The history of Sweden 1721-1830), Stockholm, 2011, p. 197f, 227, 529 and 537f. Ehrensvärd's letters to Sophie Sparre are published as Carl August Ehrensvärd, *Brev till Kickan* (Letters to Kickan), Stockholm, 1971.

38 The inventory of Carl August Ehrensvärd. The National Archives, Svea Court of Appeal, Main archive, E IXb: 163 (1801 no. 34).

p:s are open. You have to take into account that the situation is different, perhaps also the time, but is that enough of an explanation ? Another expert, antiquarian book-seller Mats Rehnström, can produce pictures of several signatures of the Sophie Sparre who married Ehrensvärd. By the end of our lunch, we had agreed that the main characters are so similar that it is reasonable to suppose that the signatures were written by the same person. On reflection, he decided that it is so<sup>39</sup>. On this evidence, I really believe that this is the case. And, regardless of the identification, we have found another woman reading Rousseau : a Sophie Sparre who owned an original volume of Rousseau's *Émile*.

This was, of course, an unexpected occurrence. Without this series of coincidences, that woman's connection to Rousseau would have remained hidden from the world. Some works of Rousseau have obviously been in the possession of women without leaving any traces in public archives. It must be remembered that reading does not always leave traces. Matters discussed in conversation or over a cup of coffee are irretrievably lost. Only a few women bothered to make reading notes or document their reading in diaries, letters, or other media. Furthermore, the evidence that was produced may have disappeared over time.

### More voices in the choir

Nevertheless, more women reading Rousseau in Sweden between 1750 and 1850 have been recorded. At court, Rousseau was studied by Queen Louisa Ulrika (1720–1782), by her daughter Princess Sophia Albertina (1753–1829) and by Duchess Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta (1759–1818). In December 1779, Rousseau's *Émile* was read aloud at court, according to the Duchess, who reported this to her friend Sophie von Fersen, sister of the Axel von Fersen who tried to save Queen Marie Antoinette of France from the guillotine<sup>40</sup>.

39 E-mail from Mats Rehnström to Elisabeth Mansén 25 October 2015.

40 My Hellsing, *Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta: Hertiginna vid det gustavianska hovet* (Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotte: Duchess at the Gustavian Court), Stockholm, 2015, p. 304.

Library researcher Sten G. Lindberg has established that the original edition of Rousseau's *Émile* that was found in the Queen's library at the Palace of Drottningholm was particularly well worn<sup>41</sup>. The Queen was of course reminded of Rousseau's ideas as early as 1761, when Nordenflycht's *Defence of the Female Sex* was dedicated to her<sup>42</sup>. The Queen corresponded with several French philosophers, including Voltaire, but not Rousseau. Researcher Merit Laine assumes that he was considered something of an outsider<sup>43</sup>. Duchess Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta read Rousseau as a young woman. Historian My Hellsing, who has devoted a doctoral thesis to the Duchess, believes that she was familiar with Rousseau's political writings, and in a letter to her friend Sophie von Fersen from 15 June 1784, she quoted Rousseau's *Les Confessions*<sup>44</sup>. The two letters give the impression that Sophie von Fersen also belongs to the Rousseau-reading women of this period.

Several of the women who read Rousseau early on were writers. This is the case with Françoise Marguerite Janiçon (1711–1789), who was declared the most learned woman in Sweden by the well-read publicist Carl Christoffer Gjörwell (1731–1811). On 9 December 1758, long before the first Swedish review, she pointed the attention of her friend Johan Arckenholtz to Rousseau's letter

- 41 Sten G. Lindberg, « Drottning Lovisa Ulrikas bibliotek på Drottningholm » (Queen Louisa Ulrika's library at the Palace of Drottningholm), in *Kungl. Vitterhets historien och antikvitetsakademiens årsbok*, 1994, p. 82. See also Anita Ankarcrone, « Drottningholmsbibliotekets bokbestånd » (The Books at the Library of the Palace of Drottningholm) in Stig Fogelmarck, Anita Ankarcrone, & Anders Zander (ed.), *Biblioteket på Drottningholms slott* (The Library at the Palace of Drottningholm), Drottningholm, 1998, p. 22.
- 42 Ann Öhrberg, in « "Man snärjer örnens fot": En diskussion om begreppet makt med utgångspunkt från Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflychts dikt "Fruentimrets Försvär" », in *Feministiska litteraturanalyser 1972–2002* (Feminist literature analyzes 1972–2002), Lund, 2005, p. 186. See also Hansson, *op.cit.*, p. 103.
- 43 Merit Laine draws attention to Louisa Ulrika's appreciation of Nordenflycht and her poem dealing with Rousseau. Merit Laine, « En drottning med "mannawett" ». See also Marie-Christine Skuncke, « Lovisa Ulrikas korrespondens med utländska författare och lärda », in Sten Åke Nilsson (ed.), *Drottning Lovisa Ulrika och Vitterhetsakademien* (Queen Louisa Ulrika and the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters), Stockholm, 2003, p. 39 and 52. In her surviving library, you can find Rousseau's *Émile* (1762). Mats Rehnström, « Sofia Albertinas bibliotek », in *Biblis 2000* :10 p. 3–16, Sam Owen Jansson, « Det stenbockska fideikommissbiblioteket », in *Fataburen* 1953, p. 95–108.
- 44 Hellsing, 2015, *op.cit.*, p. 211 and 304.

on the theatre<sup>45</sup>. Catharina Ahlgren (1734–ca 1800), who often published herself under the pseudonym Adelaide, is another author reading Rousseau. Literary sociologist Margareta Björkman claims that Ahlgren had a special interest in *Julie, ou La nouvelle Héloïse* and associated Rousseau with ideas of true friendship. Ahlgren identified herself primarily with Julie's friend Claire<sup>46</sup>. Her copy of *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*, as well as copies of the works of Nordenflycht, were inherited by her daughter Catharina Juliana (Julie) Eckerman (1765–1800), who may have received her nickname from Rousseau's novel. Björkman includes them both in her interesting attempts to reconstruct reader profiles of the Swedish eighteenth century. She finds them more well-read and less limited to novel reading than is usually presumed of women at the time<sup>47</sup>.

Another Rousseau-reading woman with literary connections was the author Carl Jonas Love Almqvist's mother, Brigitta Lovisa Gjørwell (1768–1806), daughter of the aforementioned Carl Christoffer Gjørwell. Almqvist reports that her dearest pleasure was to wander around in the woods and fields, with no other companion than her beloved author Rousseau<sup>48</sup>. A special position among the women reading Rousseau around the turn of the century is given to her sister Gustafva Gjørwell (1769–1840). She had an impressive book collection of over two thousand volumes, not including Swedish literature and maps<sup>49</sup>. Rousseau is represented by his novels, his *Confessions* and a collection of letters, but not by his essays. You can find *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* in two editions, from 1782 and 1783, *Émile, ou de l'Éducation* (ed. 1782),

45 Hansson, *op.cit.*, p. 94ff. Öhrberg, *op. cit.*, p. 227ff and 259.

46 Björkman, *op.cit.*, p. 168f, 366f, 437 and 448. See also Ruth Nilsson, *Kvinnosyn i Sverige: Från drottning Kristina till Anna Maria Lenngren* (Views on women in Sweden: From Queen Kristina to Anna Maria Lenngren), Lund, 1973, p. 250.

47 Björkman, *op.cit.*, p. 375–380 and 404. Ekerman is considered to have mastered French and is described in Wikipedia as a « courtesan and spy », [http://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julie\\_Eckerman](http://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julie_Eckerman), 23 August 2019.

48 Albert Theodor Lysander, C. J. L. Almqvist, *karaktens- och levnadsteckning* (C. J. L. Almqvist, A Picture of his Life and Character), 1878, p. 260.

49 *Förteckning öfver afl. Enkefru Gustafva Eleonora Lindahls, född Gjørwell, efterlemnade Boksamling, som kommer att försäljas å Stockholms Bok-Auktionskammare den 21 November 1840 och påföljande auktionsdagar*, Stockholm, 1840. See Carl Magnus Carlander, *Svenska bibliotek och ex-libris* (Swedish libraries and bookplates), Stockholm, 1904: 3; p. 121ff.

*Les Confessions* (ed. 1790) and *Correspondances* (3 vol., ed. 1803). There are some volumes of Rousseau's collected works from 1782, as well as a supplement, which makes it likely that the other volumes of his collected works have gone missing. Among literature on Rousseau is to be found Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *De J. J. Rousseau considéré comme l'un des premiers Auteurs de la Révolution* (1791)<sup>50</sup>. How much of this Gustafva Gjörwell herself had read is not known. She may have inherited the books from her father, her husband and/or her sister. A lot of women, and men, obtained access to literature through their friends and relatives. Gustafva Gjörwell, however, had a more personal connection to Rousseau as his name is found in her autograph collection. Autographs could be bought or obtained in different ways, but they must have been written by the person in question. Gustafva Gjörwell's lifetime overlaps Rousseau's and the question is: did she meet him? If so, it must have been early in her life. She travelled extensively in Europe and visited famous people and places. Among the persons mentioned in this context are Goethe, Schiller, Klopstock, Herder – and Rousseau. But her travels took place mainly after her marriage to shipowner and book collector Johan Niklas Lindahl (1762–1813) in May 1781<sup>51</sup>. This was several years after Rousseau's death, so she probably never did meet him.

The Rousseau references in the works of well-known Swedish poet Anna Maria Lenngren (1754–1817) are debated, peripheral and few. Rousseau is mentioned primarily in connection with her poems « Några ord till min k. Dotter, i fall jag hade någon » (1798; Advice to my dear daughter, if I had one) and « Pojkarne » (1797; Boys). The latter is associated with Rousseau's letter to d'Alembert about the theatre. Both poems express a complementary relationship between the sexes, but since Rousseau is not mentioned by name, researchers disagree as to how important his

50 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

51 Carlander, *op.cit.*, p. 121ff. Oscar Levertin & Carl Christoffer Gjörwell (ed.), *Svenska memoarer och bref. 2, Bibliotekarien C. C. Gjörwells familjebref* (Swedish memoirs and letters, the family letters of librarian C. C. Gjörwell), Stockholm, 1900, p. 31. Freddie Hallberg, « Gustafva Eleonora Lindahl, "Gröna frun på Saltängen", 1769–1840. » Östergötlands länsmuseum, <https://norrkopingprojekt.wordpress.com/historia/folkets-stad/grona-frun-pa-saltangen>, 23 August 2019. Johan Niklas Lindahl later donated his library to the Swedish Academy.

influence was. However, everyone seems to agree that Lenngren refers to Nordenflycht's critique of Rousseau in the phrase « I wrote the defence of my entire sex » in the poem « Dröm » (1798; Dream)<sup>52</sup>. According to current research, Lenngren does not contribute more than that<sup>53</sup>.

However, the poet Julia Christina Nyberg (1785–1854), known under the pen-name Euphrosyne, explicitly refers to Rousseau. In her poem « Tank-Lekar » (1842; Games of Thought), she focuses on Rousseau's critique of western civilization and makes fun of the fact that, despite his preference for a natural life in ages past, he cannot force time to go backwards<sup>54</sup>. In an earlier work, she reminded the reader of Rousseau's play *Pygmalion*<sup>55</sup>. Rousseau – and especially Nordenflycht's criticism of him – is also mentioned in Nyberg's poem « Minnessång öfver Hedv. Ch. Nordenflycht » (1831; In Memory of Hedv. Ch. Nordenflycht)<sup>56</sup>. Obviously, Nyberg liked to comment on both Rousseau and Nordenflycht.

In addition to women who read Rousseau and wrote about him, there are also a number of female book collectors who might be worthy of closer study<sup>57</sup>. However, owning a book does not prove that you have actually read it. Also, many women of the period read books owned or borrowed by men – their fathers, brothers, sons, spouses, friends and acquaintances. One example is professor

52 Nordenflycht in this poem is called « the Swedish Uranie ». Anna Maria Lenngren, *Samlade skrifter*, 2, Stockholm, 1918; Collected Works, p. 203 and Anna Maria Lenngren, *Samlade skrifter*, 3, Tillägg och kommentarer, Stockholm, 1926, p. 392 and 396ff.

53 Lenngren, 1926, *op.cit.*, p. 513. The commentator Anton Blanck does not hesitate to call Lenngren a follower of Rousseau, and claims that in the poem "Boys" she is close to Rousseau's letter to d'Alembert both in motif and style. Anton Blanck, « Om allvaret i Fru Lenngrens diktning », in *Samlaren* 1920, p. 47f. The Rousseau referred to in Lenngren's poems is usually the author Jean-Baptiste Rousseau (1670–1741).

54 Julia Christina Nyberg, *Samlade dikter af Euphrosyne* (Collected poems by Euphrosyne), 3, Stockholm, 1842, p. 97.

55 Julia Christina Nyberg, *Samlade dikter af Euphrosyne*, 2, Örebro, 1832, p. 274.

56 The poem is included in Julia Christina Nyberg, *Samlade dikter af Euphrosyne*, 1, Örebro, 1831, p. 237–247. The emphasis on the word Rousseau is here on the first syllable, otherwise in Swedish, as in French, on the second syllable. See also Nyberg, 1842, *op.cit.*, p. 246.

57 In Carl Magnus Carlander's classic work on Swedish libraries and bookplates, *Svenska bibliotek och ex-libris*, 1–4, Stockholm, 1902–1904. You can find over sixty women born during the period 1750–1850 recorded as owners of more extensive libraries.

Daniel Boëthius (1751–1810), who borrowed Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* from Uppsala University Library and kept it for five years between 1790 and 1795<sup>58</sup>. Family and friends had plenty of time to read this book.

## International comparison

This study of Swedish women reading Rousseau gains a wider interest when related to Trouille's analysis of French and English women reading Rousseau<sup>59</sup>. She concentrates her study on seven women of the Enlightenment: Mary Wollstonecraft, Madame de Staël, Madame d'Épinay, Madame de Roland, Madame de Genlis, Olympe de Gouges and the letter writer Henriette, who corresponded with Rousseau but, as far as we know, never published anything<sup>60</sup>. To these interesting early readers we can now add Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht, Malla Silfverstolpe, Fredrika Bremer and their Swedish sisters. Just like many of the writers studied by Trouille, they admired Rousseau as an author and sometimes excelled in trying to provide him with excuses for his harsh words against women. Several of these readers of Rousseau were authors, both those found in the Swedish material and in Trouille's book and, in the case of Madame d'Épinay, Madame Roland and Silfverstolpe, Rousseau is regarded as an inspiration for their autobiographical works<sup>61</sup>. Their ambition as authors provided them with personal reasons to oppose Rousseau's insistence on limiting women's sphere to their homes. They could not reasonably subscribe to

58 Björkman, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

59 The comparison is mainly based Mary Seidman Trouille, *Sexual politics in the Enlightenment: Women writers read Rousseau*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997, p. 1–10, 62, 137f, 201–204, 242f and 281. Trouille's material suggests that noble women were more critical of Rousseau than middle-class women. In Sweden, this is not obvious. Nordenflycht is critical, but Silfverstolpe is not, which suggests a difference in time rather than social standing.

60 Only the opinions of Madame d'Épinay and Henriette were penned during the lifetime of Rousseau. Henriette's first letter is dated 26 March 1764, three years after the publication of Nordenflycht's *Defence*. Madame d'Épinay expressed her ideas through the characters of her novel *Histoire de Madame de Montbrillant*, published posthumously. Trouille, *op. cit.*, p. 2–10 and 95–161.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

his opinion that it is disgraceful for a woman to publish her own works or otherwise attract attention. Moreover, their appreciation of Rousseau did not prevent Mary Wollstonecraft, Madame de Staël or Fredrika Bremer from creating literary heroines with great revolutionary potential. Madame de Roland and Madame de Staël, just like Malla Silfverstolpe, also had to ignore the fact that Rousseau did not regard the role of salon hostess as acceptable for women.

The women in Trouille's book, as well as the women in the Swedish material, were not always willing to recognize the traits of Rousseau's philosophy with which they came into conflict. Most of them did not perceive the inconsistencies found within Rousseau's writings and some of them might have had tactical reasons for appearing to agree with Rousseau on certain points. This seems to be the case with Wollstonecraft, and perhaps also Nordenflycht. There are, of course, genuine fans as well. Both in the Swedish material and in Trouille's book, women explicitly state that they share Rousseau's view of women and his complementary gender construction. They appreciate his emphasis on the importance of the home and the family, they like his sensibility and his insistence on the power of love. They draw attention to passages in which he seems to admire women, and they embrace his ideals of mutual fidelity in marriage. They would like to believe that women's strength lies in emotional superiority rather than in intellectual activity and that, even personally, they have more to lose than to gain by competing with men or trying to imitate them. They also notice the more positive ideas about women that Rousseau expresses in *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, as well as in the first part of *Émile*, rather than the more critical views he formulates in the letter to d'Alembert and in the second part of *Emile*. Wollstonecraft allows the characters in her novels to read Rousseau with pleasure and she personally gives *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* to her future husband, philosopher and author William Godwin<sup>62</sup>.

62

Elisabeth Mansén, « Vänskap som smälte till kärlek : Om Mary Wollstonecraft och William Godwin » (Friendship Melting into Love ; On Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin), in Ingrid Holmquist (ed.), *Könsöverskridande vänskap : Om vänskapsrelationer mellan intellektuella kvinnor och män* (Friendships crossing borders of gender : About friendly relations between intellectual women and men), Göteborg, 2011, p. 101, Elisabeth Mansén, « Mary Wollstonecrafts mångskiftande bilder av män. En ny läsning av *A vindication of the Rights om Woman* » (Variable

Some women also agree with Rousseau's criticism of women of the time as (to a great extent) vain and superficial. This is clearly true of Mary Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges, and possibly also of Fredrika Bremer.

A quick comparison between the works of Nordenflycht and Wollstonecraft shows that Rousseau played an equally important but very different role in their writings. On a general level, Nordenflycht was looking for friends and allies, while Wollstonecraft was attacking her enemies. Nordenflycht was a contemporary of Rousseau and wanted to treat him as a potential friend. He was alive and might change his mind. She just had to provide evidence, gather support from other authors who shared her opinions, and show him the error of his ways. Wollstonecraft was too late for that. She concentrated her research on her opponents in order to expose writers with ideas that she definitely did not share, to dissect their works and to convince the reader that the misogynists were wrong, and she was right. This creates a fundamental difference between the works of Nordenflycht and Wollstonecraft, making further comparison less interesting. Moreover, Nordenflycht was first and foremost a poet; Wollstonecraft was not.

## Final discussion

Eighteen women reading Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Sweden between 1750 and 1850 have been identified in this study<sup>63</sup>. All of them read Rousseau in French. Several simultaneously expressed

images of men : A new reading of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*"), in Kristina Fjelkestam, Helena Hill & David Tjeder (ed.) *Kvinnorna gör mannen: Maskulinitetskonstruktioner i kvinnors text och bild 1500–2000* (Women make the man: Constructions of masculinity in women's texts and images 1500–2000), Göteborg, 2013, p. 203f.

63 The women reading Rousseau discussed in this study are Queen Louisa Ulrika, Princess Sophia Albertina, Duchess Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta, Catharina Ahlgren, Fredrika Bremer, Julie Ekerman, Sophie von Fersen, Brigitta Lovisa Gjörlwell, Gustafva Gjörlwell, Amalia von Helvig, Françoise Marguerite Janiçon, Alida Knös, Thekla Knös, Anna Maria Lenngren, Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht, Julia Christina Nyberg, Magdalena Sophia Silfverstolpe, and Sophie Sparre. In some sense, Madame de Staël is Swedish, because she was married to a Swede, but her connection to Swedish culture is not strong enough for her to be counted among Swedish readers in this context.

both admiration and critique. Those who attacked him often defended him too, and even those who appreciated his vision of women did not live accordingly. They insisted on thinking independently and claimed the right to formulate their own opinions, sometimes in print. Quite a few of these women were unmarried and childless, and all of them went beyond the roles of wife and mother. Nevertheless, they might have appreciated his high esteem of the tender mother and the intimate family sphere. However, all of them were attracted to other features of his philosophy. They appreciated his honesty and his style as a writer, they loved his descriptions of nature and the profound movements of the human soul, they treasured the good things he said about women, and they probably sympathized with his egalitarian ideals, as well as what they perceived as a defence of the outcasts from society. They each interpreted Rousseau in their own way, and chose different approaches to him, various ways of expressing their admiration and criticism and numerous ways of allowing him to influence their lives. Appropriation, adaptation and apology are just some of the attitudes that occur. Receptivity, refutation and counter-reaction are others.

The study also suggests that *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* was by far the most widely read of Rousseau's works by women during this period. Apart from this novel, women in the eighteenth century seem primarily interested in his philosophical ideas, particularly his views on women. The texts that came into focus were *Lettre à M. d'Alembert sur les spectacles* (1758) and *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762). Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht also referred to both *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750) and *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi des hommes* (1755). However, *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) seems to have attained a dominant position in the eighteenth century. Both Catharina Ahlgren and her daughter Julie are tied to this work. The women of the early nineteenth century mainly appreciated Rousseau's literary style and his depictions of individuals, emotions and moods. They liked to read *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, but also *Les Confessions* (1-2, 1782-1898). They identified themselves with the heroines of his novels and discussed the ideal friendship, the display of emotions and the power of love. This applies in particular to Malla

Silfverstolpe, but also to Amalia von Helvig. Both Fredrika Bremer and Julia Christina Nyberg pay attention to Rousseau's critique of western civilization and his views on nature. Nyberg mentions *Pygmalion*, and Bremer refers to his letters, and comments on his influence on the French Revolution and his attitude towards suicide.

The importance of Nordenflycht should not be underestimated. Her response to Rousseau stands out as a central Enlightenment text in its desire to combat prejudice and injustice; advocating freedom, justice and equality, and invoking nature, experience and history in a passionate and poetic defence of women. Nordenflycht presented her poem to different readers for different purposes: to Rousseau (to refute him), to women (to defend them), to the literary world (to impress with intricate rhymes and learned associations) and to Queen Louisa Ulrika of Sweden (to strengthen the bonds with her patroness). The memory of her poem follows women reading Rousseau into the nineteenth century, when Malla Silfverstolpe, as a writer and salon hostess, becomes a centre for spreading interest in Rousseau. Silfverstolpe appears as a clear representative of the romantic reading that Darnton calls "rousseauanism", which had consequences for her entire life. As a full-fledged romantic, she has no problem accepting Rousseau's complementary view of the sexes. On the contrary, she identifies with his female protagonists and believes that they explain the mystery of her own life. She reads *Émile, ou de l'éducation* as well as *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* and *Les Confessions*. His belief in the power of love, and his capacity to describe feelings, becomes central to her conception of Rousseau. Both Silfverstolpe and Bremer are influenced in their writing by Rousseau's *Confessions* and both of them comment on his view of nature. Bremer is interested in his ideas and visits places associated with Rousseau, but despite her position as a pioneer in the struggle for women's rights, she either agrees with or does not seem to care about his views on women. Even if these women wanted to, they could not adapt to Rousseau's ideal of women. Nevertheless, they retained their appreciation of him.

Although the findings of this study indicate that Rousseau was not as extensively read by Swedish women as is usually claimed, the study highlights a wide range of interesting women

reading Rousseau, who had both an impact in their own time and more long-term effects<sup>64</sup>. Among them are the very first woman to address Rousseau in print, a salon hostess of the romantic era, a champion of women's rights, a number of writers and several women of the Swedish court. In view of the fact that Rousseau's writings often deal with gender aspects, women reading Rousseau undoubtedly deserve closer study. With diligent research and detective work – and some good luck – we are developing a richer and more reliable picture of women reading Rousseau.

64

The impression that Rousseau is less visible than one might presume is corroborated by other researchers. Historian Eva Helen Ulvros, who has studied the letters and diaries of bourgeois women in the south of Sweden during the period of 1780–1880, has expressed her surprise at Rousseau's absence from the material. Eva Helen Ulvros, *Fruar och mamseller: Kvinnor inom sydsvensk borgerlighet 1790–1870* (Wives and misses : Women in south Swedish bourgeoisie 1790–1870), Lund, 1996, , Eva Helen Ulvros, *Kärlekens villkor: tre kvinnoöden 1780–1880* (Conditions of love : The lives of three women 1780–1880), Lund, 1998. She also reports the similar results of a fellow researcher. In an e-mail from 21 January 2015, Ulvros writes: « In my book I explore what women read instead of reading Rousseau, but an article by historian Inger Hammar, called 'Rousseau – åberopad i sin frånvaro' (Rousseau – referred to in his absence), discusses the assumption that Rousseau was often read, but that there actually is no concrete evidence of this in Sweden. Inger Hammar studied a lot of previous research and also analysed parliamentary debates from the nineteenth century on women's position in Swedish society without encountering Rousseau.» In the future, we should perhaps be more restrictive in claiming that Rousseau was the favourite author of women in the eighteenth century.