

Germaine de Staël's Second Thoughts on Rousseau

Germaine de Staël's very first publication, her *Letters on the Works and Character of J. J. Rousseau* (1788), convey her sincere enthusiasm for Rousseau, whose "genius" she celebrates throughout an extensive commentary of his works. Her admiration for a notoriously misogynist thinker did not go unnoticed: Isabelle de Charrière and Mary Wollstonecraft both severely criticized Staël's work shortly after its publication. Charrière published a defense of Marie-Thérèse Levasseur, Rousseau's partner, in which she criticizes "la baronne" for her partiality towards Rousseau and for her classist bias towards Levasseur. Wollstonecraft wrote an unsympathetic review of Staël's essay for the *Analytical Review*, and further criticized it in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* – taking issue with Staël's seeming complacency with Rousseau's proposals regarding women's role in society. I will show that while these criticisms are important to consider, Staël's endorsement of Rousseau was always critical of his proposals for the education of women. Furthermore, Staël's later 1814 preface to the reedition of her *Letters* voices stronger disagreements with Rousseau and suggests that her own ideas on women might have benefited from her sustained engagement with Rousseau's ideas.

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