Romantic Education, Concealment, and Orchestrated Desire in Rousseau’s *Emile* and Frances Brooke’s *Julia Mandeville*

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Those who want to treat politics and morals separately will never understand anything of either of the two. (Rousseau, *Emile, or on Education* 235)

There has seldom been as ambitious a pedagogical project in narrative form as Rousseau’s *Emile, or on Education* (1762). Ambitious because, despite being interested in the fate of the individual, Rousseau seeks to achieve with *Emile* nothing less than the formation of a new kind of citizen, the founding element of a society to replace one that he deems perverted. Rousseau’s condemnation of things as they were – and his convictions about how they should be – met with contrasting reactions: Edmund Burke wrote in consternation that *Emile* was ‘impracticable and chimerical’, ‘highly blameable’ as well as utterly ‘dangerous’ (*Annual Register* 225), while Germaine de Staël commended it for ‘restoring happiness in childhood’ (qtd in Popiel 6), and Kant compared it to the French Revolution (Bloom 4). Between these poles there lay a mixture of fascination with Rousseau’s grand narrative of education and scepticism about its achievability. The impractical, if not utopian, character of the work was summed up in an otherwise benign Swiss review as follows: ‘It seems to us that an impossible condition underlies Rousseau’s education of his pupil, a small world of only virtuous people from whom the human being should learn virtue from early years on. Indeed, young people acquire the ability to speak, think and deduce from interactions with others, but to learn virtue according to this method requires circumstances which are not available in this world’ (qtd in Speerli 27).

After *Emile* had shone in the minds of his readership, promising radical prospects through a radically new education, Rousseau, possibly sensing
the unfeasibility of his project, took up the pen to depict its failure. In 1780, with the posthumous publication of *Émile et Sophie, ou Les Solitaires*, the disenchanted reader saw the life of Emile derail, the precepts of his tutor turn into utopian vagaries and sociability into dreary solitude. Readers of Frances Brooke's novel *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* (1763) would not have been surprised by the disastrous sequel to *Emile*. A writer of novels and translator of several French romances, a theatre manager and friend to Mary Ann Yates and Samuel Johnson, Brooke registered the ambivalent fascination that Rousseau's both progressive and conservative agenda held for writers of the late eighteenth century. This essay establishes connections between *Emile* and Brooke's *Julia Mandeville*, a novel that, after being soon translated into French and German, was praised by Voltaire and Goethe as a specimen of a sentimental vogue that would continue to influence Romantic writers (Steiner xii). In particular, *Julia Mandeville* and *Emile*'s shared interest in freedom achieved through independence and appropriate education is the focus of the essay. Brooke's novel is attracted to *Emile*'s idea of non-coercive education, but exposes the concealment of the educator's will as a fundamental instrumentalization of the child. I argue that, in doing so, *Julia Mandeville* represents an exceptional eighteenth-century pronouncement that casts a critical light on Rousseau's educational program. Brooke is among the few to imply that Rousseau's agenda may be only deceptively progressive. While many contemporaries (Burke was perhaps the most influential) were alarmed by *Emile*'s seeming anti-authoritarianism that aimed at 'destroying the shape which the discipline of a civilized religious order had imposed on individuals' (Hampsher-Monk 268; original emphasis), Brooke is wary of Rousseau's claim to shape the minds of the new citizen and, in particular, of the means employed to achieve this end. Hence, amidst polarized responses that either condemned or enthusiastically espoused Rousseau's ideas, Brooke delves beneath the surface of education to such matters as its management. How can the minds of autonomous individuals be shaped, and at what price? Brooke's novel anticipates a modern apprehension: the dangers of totalitarianism arising from the claim to shape the minds of citizens that have been most persuasively argued since the middle of the twentieth century, after a devastating World War II (Hampsher-Monk 267). As Lester Crocker states, 'Totalitarianism demands the surrender of one's judgment to a heteronomous judgmental power [...] and strives for willing (“free”) conformity to it' (245). This contrived ‘free’ willing, which takes the form of unremitting control that must not be perceived as control, lies at the heart of Emile's education and is ultimately