

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host Allison Tyra. And today I'm joined by Dr. Rebecca Wilkin and Dr. Angela Hunter, who have recently reconstructed Louise Dupin's *Work on Women*, which is now available in English for the first time, thanks to their efforts, and "presents an in depth feminist treatise of the French Enlightenment, featuring an original claim about the modernity of gender inequality that informed the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Dupin's secretary." So first, can you give us an introduction to Louise Dupin and her place in history?

AH: So one of the things that we find so interesting about her place in history is the fact that she hasn't had one, or not a rightful place in history until relatively recently. And the story about why that's the case is reflective of some of the things that she even writes about in her feminist treatise. So she was known as a beauty and a salonier, and particularly from Rousseau's depiction of her and the confessions where he speaks of their friendship, and briefly his work for her. So there's not much known until recently when there have been these efforts to bring her work to the fore in French and then ours in English, about the breadth of her philosophical project. So she was born in 1706, died in 1799. So really bookmarked the entire 18th century, and in the middle of it, in the 1740s through the early 1750s, she was working on this large philosophical feminist project. And in it, she's really trying to understand and explain the development of inequality between men and women, and the consequences of that and of the view that women are inferior. And she's doing this in a way that's wide ranging across several domains. So she's working in science and in law and political philosophy, and in history, including religious history or church history. Looking at education, and then also more loosely mores, a kind of moral philosophy, society, her contemporary society and social relations there even conversations is something she studies in one chapter. And she also looks at literature and theater, both historically and of her time.

So she's doing this amazing amount of work and her work itself has this breadth and depth is really unique for feminist works in this general time period and it's also a really polemical work. And that also deserves a place in history. So some of this is an argument for where she should be in history and we hope where she is now taking a place in the history of philosophy, the history of feminist thought. But it's a polemical work that critiqued systems, the way we would describe them and really the way the Enlightenment was describing them as well, systems of thought, like science and systems of law and legal theory and social system. So gender relations obviously, the most obviously for her work. But just generally relationships between men and women, the marriage relationship systems of education, the way people raise their children, upbringing. So all of these types of things she thinks are interlocked and have to be seen together. But why she has no recognized place in history in the traditional view of philosophy. It's not just because she's a woman and ergo was left out, although that happened to too many women thinkers. She did abandon the work before it was completely finished. And she did not publish it and it was not published in her lifetime or even shortly thereafter, and it didn't enjoy like a broad circulation and drafts or anything that you might think. So it was well advanced when she abandoned it but it wasn't complete.

And then after her death, the, the manuscripts went to heirs, and they were dispersed eventually in the 20th century. And there's going to be a series of auctions where they're selling these papers, which brings some of them back together but they're still in pieces, for an inventory. So there's a scholar who gets called on to do an inventory of the pieces before they are sent their merry ways, and they end up in many different archives as well as in private hands. And there at the auction, we always find it really interesting and we write about this in our introduction, that the value of her manuscripts is reduced to the value of the handwriting of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. As you pointed out in the intro, he was her secretary between 1745 and 1751 so when she was in the deep part of work on this, although she had begun it before he came into her service. And because there's his handwriting in quite a bit of it. The value was assessed as a higher value and people are interested in it as a production, if you will, or at least something that was related to Rousseau. So that's part of the history of where she kind of got lost in history, but also why her work deserves a great place in history.

AT: So, do you think that if her work had been published, she would be known today?

AH: Yes, I do. In the way that women's work was recovered, I can't assess how well she would have been received in her time because of the nature of the work, but certainly if it had been published in her time, it would be known and not just because of its connection to Rousseau although that would have, I think, kept it in the light more easily than than some other works. Because it's a really strong piece of philosophy and it's really kind of striking. And today I think, and I hope, and it seems to be the case that people interested in feminist thought are finding in her work all kinds of interesting connections to our time. For example, she has this concept that she calls masculine vanity, and she uses it throughout the work itself to talk about some of the causes for the continual belief of men's superiority that even in this enlightened time when thinkers are questioning everything and going to root causes and really trying to understand how things are that they just accept that there's a strong difference physically between men and women and mentally and that women are weaker, etc. etc. And she thinks that masculine vanity is this psychological motivation that allows men to see their own superiority and dominance as something that doesn't even need to be questioned, as if it's not even there. So it's this self-serving fantasy, what we would call sexist bias today, but with the side of bad faith. It could be recognized. They're certainly able to recognize it if they look, but they don't see it. And Rebecca and I both think that has a lot of interesting connections to ways that we critique our own society today. And she has a great ironic tone in places. It's not throughout. It's not dripping with irony and sarcasm, but there's some biting wit in some of her critiques, and she employs it really well to mock the self-certainty of certain thinkers, many of whom she attacks directly. She names names who are scientists and poets and philosophers. So I think some of that really would appeal to readers today. I hope it does. But I do think that her place would have been probably minor because women would have been seen as minor thinkers anyway, but she would have been known.

RW: And one of the reasons, there's lots of reasons why she wouldn't have published, but it is because of the critiques she makes of people who are recently deceased, powerful men who are recently deceased. What would have happened if she'd published it? We assume that she was worried about her reputation and that it would have really been very difficult for her and her family had she published this. So she would be known now. We would know of her, but maybe there'd be some huge kerfuffle that we'd also know about.

AH: Right, of the time period. Because also she was a very wealthy woman. So she was a woman of great privilege, even though she wasn't part of the nobility by birth. She was the illegitimate daughter of a man named Samuel Bernard, who was a big banker and financier whose wealth increased. And he took good care of the three children he had with her mother and supported her husband. When she got married, he was a tax farmer. And that was this collection of tax system through private individuals who leased it out and got to take the interest. You had to buy a lease and her father helped him do that. And then he became extremely wealthy, such that they were able to buy a great chateau. A major chateau in Chenonceau, but also major property in Paris. And she was very well connected socially, even with people in the nobility. So there might have been some worries about reputational damage for her own social thing. And she had a son who by that time was an adult and had really gone astray, gotten into a lot of trouble. Which could have also perhaps inhibited her thinking that people would mock her for talking about education and changing both boys' and girls' education and thinking she didn't do such a great job with her own son. This is all speculation about some of the reasons that she might not have risked publication, and at the same time, decided to not even to complete the work, I think, once she decided not to do further work in this vein.

AT: Could you tell us more about her life, like her biography and particularly any factors that may have contributed to her thinking?

AH: So I don't think that the illegitimacy, her own, would have been such an issue because it was pretty widely known. And I think when you had wealth, the stain of it is wiped away. But her mother has been a part of an acting family. And so she has two different things and her recognized father, the man who was married to her mother also was an active presence in her life, a supportive presence. In terms of contributing to her thought, she held a salon, and it was most active in the 1730s to the '50s but continued through her old age. And I don't want to overplay the importance of salons and conversational culture for intellectual thought, but it was a major place where women and men would be able to talk together, at least in certain salons, about major issues. She was connected to a large number of philosophers and scientists and mathematicians, and not only through her salon, but through others. And so when you track some of her network, she was just actively engaged in intellectual networks, people that were lending books and giving her firsthand testimony reports of the scientific findings at a particular Academy meeting. This will be published within six months to a year, probably, but she's getting letters that are explaining it to her early on and incorporating some of that info when she's writing about, say, sexual difference in the science side. And she's trying to downplay the differences between men and women and looking at like animal experiments, and she's drawing on things that are happening live. So she's really pulling from the currents of her time. So it's not a just in a musty attic. Well, it would not have been musty - in a beautiful sitting room with your books, writing, with just the history of philosophy. There was also a lot of engagement with the legal compilations of judgments that were rendered that were a new publication, and she had access to those and use that to great benefit in the section on law. So I think just in her life, she was as hooked in as she could be as a woman. And that was pretty hooked in given that she lived in Paris, this huge center of intellectual thought, and that she was connected to many, many recognized thinkers who would have been men of the time, and drawing from that as much as possible.

What made her want to delve into this feminist thing in her life, it's unclear. We don't have many of her remaining letters. So when Rebecca and I or others speculate about why she didn't complete the work, it really is just the best guess based on understanding the time period. Many of her letters, all but a small number, comparatively, were burnt in year 2 of the Republic, 1792 maybe '93, unclear exactly, when she was finally taking refuge outside of Paris in her chateau on the advice apparently of the operations manner, who was a defrocked priest, or I don't know if he was defrocked at the time, but he was about to be and who was the leader of the revolutionary democratic group in the area of the time. So whatever they thought they were protecting or that it was just a good idea to get rid of certain things, that's one of the reasons that we don't have a lot of direct testimony that we might have about others, as much of it seems to have been burnt. Although there's always things that come up for auction, little pieces of writing and things, typically because again, it's Rousseau's hand and that's what makes it valuable. So it's possible some little cache of something will appear that's still out there and give us a better sense of her biography, of the deeper personal beliefs and understandings. But she seems to have been very motivated to take up the cause of not just taking up women's equality, but truly understanding it and explaining its development and how things are the way they are in her contemporary world. And her husband seems to have been fine with it. One of the things we know they work together on a critique of Montesquieu's *Spirit of the Laws*. So they were intellectually engaged couple, so she was well situated to be able to do the kind of work she wanted, but it seems without much bother or concern about her personal life. Again, the wealth, the conciliatory husband or so, at least it seems, and the connections to help her get access to things that a woman might not typically have access to.

RW: So Angela's really emphasized how much she was plugged into the intellectual culture of her time, but it seems like her main feminist influence was the late 17th century text, the only text she really names in her work or calls out as an inspiration is François Poulain de la Barre, *On the Equality of the Two Sexes*. And that might have come to her via this figure who was very active in late 17th century salon culture. The Abbe Castel de Saint-Pierre, who circulated in a lot of the salons in Dupin's time and had given her advice about how she might, it seems that they had had some kind of exchange about if she were going to write this treatise about women early on. He gave her kind of an outline for it, but it was, "here's all the great women you should think

about including” and that kind of thing. So she went far beyond that. But it is interesting that the actual feminist-y piece, the one source we know that she was really inspired by, was not of her time. It was like 70 years earlier.

[Listen to Catherine Freyne on Freda du Faur](#) or [read the transcript](#).

AT: I'm curious because, as mentioned, this is the first time this is available in English. And I've talked before about different women, so like the mountaineer Freda du Faur or the artist Anne Dangar, who were both Australian but were basically forgotten here, but were very well known in New Zealand and France respectively because that's where they were doing their work. So with the language barrier, is she actually somewhat known in French scholarship? And it's just that the language barrier means that we don't know about her?

[Listen to Dr Rebecca Edwards on Anne Dangar](#) or [read the transcript](#).

RA: No, no, it's not like that. Her work started being available in archives, we can count on one hand the people who were working on them in the '80s. Once they're bought at auction and they start being catalogued and made available, there were really not many people working on them. And it was only in the early 2010s that Frédéric Marty, who's our good friend and colleague in France, I'm not sure when his master's thesis was, but he edited a piece of it. Was that 2005, Angela? (AH: Maybe a little bit later than that, maybe 2008.) So we were working in parallel he had started before us, but we were each on our own tracks reconstructing this work and his came out in French in 2022. He wrote a monograph before that about Dupin. So he'd been getting the word out a little bit, but it's the same thing. He was interviewed on French cultural radio shows and stuff. So it's really just since like the 2020s basically. And Angela, of course, published an article in 2009, I think. There's small pieces published in the '80s, '90s, bits of it, scholars who were local to various archives, like Sylvie Dangeville at the University of Illinois published something, I think that was in the '90s, two chapters. And Leland Thielemann was a big pioneer. He was a French professor at the University of Texas, Austin, and the Harry Ransom Center in Austin bought a huge bunch of manuscripts and he was transcribing them and stuff. In view, we think of an edition, but that didn't materialize. And then there's a man named Jean-Pierre de Boudet who was tapped into the archive in Montmorency, France, which is outside of Paris. And there's a museum to Rousseau there for Rousseau scholars. Local scholars were tapping into the archives, but really not much. There's really not much curiosity.

AH: Right, not as much as you would expect. But I think once the work came out in French, so his edition in French, that really has generated a lot more scholarship on Dupin, just making it easily available for everyone and explaining the state of the manuscripts. And there are some things you have to just conjecture on. And then ours in English, which is selections, we didn't do the whole thing, hopefully does the other side, brings the English-speaking world into being more interested in her and trying to dig in more with the ideas and hopefully people will take that and run with it in their in their scholarship.

RW: We provide a lot more context in ours because we can't assume the same historical knowledge and that kind of thing as a French public would have. So it's a different packaging too.

AH: And yeah, one of our goals was to make it accessible too for students, to be used in the classroom, or for just a general audience but also to be helpful for scholars. So it's got a lot of footnotes and each section has introduction and life chronology and that kind of thing. So, hopefully again those two are just ways to point people in directions that they're going to find something that we never perhaps focused on and take it and and go with it, with other thinkers. We've had people and I know I'm interested in doing more comparative work with some of the other feminist writers, not necessarily of the time, not that mid part of the century, but earlier and then later as well.

AT: I'm also curious, because in a previous conversation about New Woman writer Mary Ward who was much later, she was end of the 1800s started the 1900s. She basically got blackballed during the 1970s-ish feminist scholars reclaiming writers and thinkers, because Mary Ward, after she wrote her groundbreaking New Woman novels, she then was president of an anti suffrage league for a couple years. I'm not saying it's not problematic, but they just straight up blackballed her, they posthumously canceled her. I just wanted to juxtapose that because it sounds like, whereas that was an active choice that people were collectively making, with Louise Dupin, it sounds more like she's just been so overlooked that even people looking for this kind of material didn't find her, they didn't see her. And I'm guessing that's because this was largely presented as, "oh, it's Rousseau's handwriting," it was presented in the context of him rather than "this is a woman's work."

[Listen to Josephine Browne on Mary Ward, Marcella and the New Woman](#) or [read the transcript](#).

RW: Yeah, that is true. I think there was a lot of concern on the part of Rousseau scholars at first that these manuscripts would be taken to be Rousseau's own and sold (AH: Pass it off as his work.) And how embarrassing that would be for him because it's about women. (laughter) The other reason is that we benefited from the Internet and the ability to scan documents. We did visit archives, but we also, I bought a bunch of scans of manuscripts. So the material disposition of it being in 10 different libraries with various levels of finding aids or none at all, it just was really hard. And also, you don't really know. Thank goodness we have the inventory that Anicet Sénéchal, and Angela mentioned this, made before things were auctioned off because that gives at least some kind of picture. But he would list the title and then maybe the first couple sentences or sentences that he thought were important. But I don't know how much time he had to do this, it was an immense amount of work to put this together. So I think just also is just really difficult. It took us, I don't know how many years to just get a sense of what the whole thing was.

AH: Transcribing, and the pages are in order and some of the drafts, their pages are in one archive and more pages are in another. And so you're not sure if X is a draft of Y, which one's later, which one's more recent on some of them. So, it was hard to figure it out so that people would have had to really be digging to find it. But now it's open. And I think Rebecca talks about the canceling thing in interesting ways in some of her work.

RW: Yeah. And I would say also, when I was starting to work on Dupin, I wasn't even thinking I was going to do an edition. That that was not really on my horizon. I just wanted to write an article about her. And it's so weird to have little snippets, but to not know at all what the whole thing is. How can you write an article when you're just taking little tiny pieces and you have no idea how they fit into the whole? So it's not just that you don't have access, but you don't even know really how the pieces fit together at all. Or if what you're looking at, how important it is to the whole. There are a lot of barriers, let's put it that way, to scholarship on Dupin. And I think everybody was just waiting for everybody else to just finally do an edition, and then then we can go in and use it. So certainly that was the case for Leland Thielemann. Everybody was waiting for Thielemann, as Angela talks about in her 2009 article, to publish the edition and just like, "Well, what's he doing?"

AH: "Why is it taking so long?" And then most people died before they finished it. There was another professor in Texas who, she had spent decades working on this slowly at her own pace, going to all the archives well before things would have been scannable or digitizable. And she was retired and continued to work on it. And I think was very quite close, given the things she had access to. And then she died leaving her work unfinished. So it's got this weird history of almost making it public before we and Frédéric came along and did our work on it and got it out there.

RW: Yeah, so you could say we're standing on the shoulders of giants, but it's a lot of false starts because like Thielemann's work. The first scans we ordered from the Harry Ransom Center, we got his transcriptions, but

they were typed on a typewriter. And in the end, we couldn't see as well what was going on with them as we could from just the straight up manuscripts. All his work transcribing actually didn't help us in ours, though he did write a great article in 1983, and that was shortly before he died. This is the way human knowledge goes. It's not this linear process. You have these false starts or these, you almost get there, you almost get there, and then something makes it push over the water over the dam.

AT: When you said everyone kept dying, my immediate thought was, is this manuscript cursed? And then it's more that it takes so long to try and piece everything together in the pre-internet days. And even today, there are many collections that are not digitized or properly indexed because those things take resources and we all have priorities on how we allocate those resources. But yeah, my immediate thought was, is it cursed?

AH: Let's hope not because we would like to continue living and working on Dupin and other things.

AT: Well, I think you're safe because you did actually publish. So maybe that's the curse is, if you're working on her stuff and you never publish it.

AH: We are happy to have pushed it over the line in her honor. Sometimes we actually do get a little teary about it. We're like, "what would she think?" She didn't totally finish it and she never thought it would see a reception. And here she here she is in the 21st century getting a reception. But also, I think in many ways, I don't want to overstate it, but in many ways, very relevant to the kinds of discussions that we're still having today about gender and about equality and inequality. So that part feels good.

AT: So I want to get into the double edged sword of her connection with Rousseau, because on the one hand, it is very annoying that her stuff is viewed only in the context of him. And it's actually ironic because a lot of times women's contributions are undermined. People say, "oh, she was just the secretary." And in this case, he actually was just the secretary. And yet people are still prioritizing him and his contribution, such as it was, to this work. But at the same time, if there wasn't that connection, there's a very good chance that her papers would have just been destroyed.

RW: Yeah. So it's thanks to his handwriting, thanks to this fetishization of his handwriting. And even Anicet Sénéchal, the guy who inventoried the manuscripts before they went to auction, he only listed those pieces that had Rousseau's handwriting in them. So things that were all hers, he didn't list. That's to your point, they wouldn't have been kept probably.

AH: Even in the 1960s, he was still prioritizing the main guy, the guy that had the intellectual, supposedly, and cultural value, over her work. Luckily, there are lots of pages where there wasn't a way to connect them. So we don't think a whole lot got left out of his original inventory and another stack did end up being inventoried. But it just goes to show that, yeah, she was in some ways written out of the first account of her own work when it seemed like something was unrelated to what Rousseau's work for her had been dealing with. To give him his due, he did do a ton of research for her, hundreds and hundreds of pages of reading notes, basically, that he made for her. So I will give that acknowledgment.

RW: He read enormously. She would send him out, go look for for this, and so just to give you an example, Claude Fleury's *Histoire Ecclesiastique*, so *History of the Church*, is 37 volumes or something he went through. He just combed through every one looking for evidence of women having important roles in the church, stuff like that. He read enormously. (AH: And profited from it.)

AT: Yeah, I was going to say that really raises the question of how much of his work was not only influenced by

her, and I do want to get into that specific question as well, but if she had not been paying him to go do all of this learning, would Rousseau have even been Rousseau?

RW: That's a great question. It's interesting how little of this shows up in his later work. I think one of the main lessons he took from it, and we're not talking yet about direct influence, but cautionary tales maybe that he took from this project was collecting facts is perhaps not the best way to go around about proving something. By which I mean, you have one fact, you can always find a fact to counter that fact, "what about this, what about that?" So I think that he, through doing all this searching out of facts, he may have decided that facts were not strategic as a form of argumentation. He never portrayed himself as a historian of any sort. That was nothing that he was particularly interested in. And she was trying to look to history for like actual true fact things. So, yeah, I think he took a lesson that what was effective rhetorically was not going to be just a lot of information.

AH: I do think also he was exposed to a lot of sources that he might not have come across in his own work that he benefited from. He might not have ever used them, but it certainly gave him a broader basis of knowledge than he had coming into that position.

RW: Probably the thing I'm going to say that he can use the most, maybe travel narratives. Would you say so, Angela? (AH: Yeah, potentially I could see that.) When he's talking about like in the discourse on the origin of inequality, origin and foundations of inequality among men, he's talking about primitive man, that sort of thing. So I think some of the travel narratives that he was looking at to find evidence of other countries whose customs had egalitarian practices. He wasn't paying attention to those practices. That's not what he kept from that, but that he was thinking a lot about what is man and his natural state, that kind of thing. And that was one thing that you use travel narratives for.

AH: Maybe also some of the Roman law things (RW: Absolutely.) that he would have drawn on because he was really digging into some pretty arcane details there that I don't know that he would have naturally gone to that type of reading. And certainly since he's mainly known as a political philosopher, in addition to a novelist, that certainly benefited his own thinking and some ready to fingertip source type material in his thought.

AT: Now, as many listeners will know, men taking women's ideas without crediting them and then getting all the glory is a pet peeve of mine. To the point that I wrote a whole book about it. Sadly, Dupin is not in my book. So could you tell me about how this applies to Rousseau and Dupin?

RW: Sure. So let me just back up a little bit to talk about how Dupin herself talks about this. I think one of the most interesting things about her is she talks about, how men take credit for the accomplishments of women. So we talk about that now, but she was already talking about that then. So just to give you one example, she talks about one of the great spiritual friendships of the early 17th century. So this is over 100 years before she was writing, during the Catholic Counter Reformation. And she's talking about Louise de Marillac and Vincent de Paul, who were this team who founded the Daughters of Charity and some orphanages and whatnot. It was her money. She was the widow of a secretary to Marie de Medici, the regent of France at the time. It was her money and it was maybe their shared vision. But Dupin says, it was his credit, basically his reputation that helped this happen. But it was really her materially that set this up. And then Dupin talks about how Marillac took Vincent de Paul's advice about humility too seriously to the point where she never claimed any of the things that she did. And in his canonization process, she was never mentioned. So he got canonized as a saint and she was left out. So that was one very specific example where Dupin was talking about that. But mostly she's concerned with how subsequent generations give and don't give credit. So the process of reception and how those are influenced by implicit bias and sexist bias in particular. And canonization is really a great metaphor for that, actually, because when you're canonizing a saint, it's after they die. It has to happen after

they die, who builds this whole case for them and makes this case. And they have to have so many things, so many miracles and whatnot to become canonized. But we can also talk about canonization in terms of a process of forming a canon of literature, a canon of philosophy, how that works. Dupin is just really interested in how afterward, how the reception happens and how the the tradition gets built. So she'll talk, for example, about Hypatia, this philosopher who taught philosophy in Alexandria. Her school had many students. She had a bishop as a pupil. So that's an example of benign neglect, like nobody pays attention to that. Nobody talks about Hypatia except all these women writing these treatises about lists of illustrious women.

So there's that kind of thing, that there's there's women who kind of disappear because nobody's just nobody cares. And then there's also the active erasure. And that's more interesting, I think, and more unique that Dupin talks about. And this relates, Angela talked about this masculine vanity a bit, and it relates very much to that. So she talks in the history section how modern historians, so when when she's talking about modern, that's that's pretty much 17th century, 18th century, how they ignore belittle or vilify women while aggrandizing men. So she says, for example, "the worthiest female subjects are painted with the weakest qualities and colors, while the bad ones are painted with very vivid colors jumping off the page. And meanwhile, historians are sheltering men's dignity in history." So, for example, Fredegund and Brunhilde, these were the wives of Merovingian kings. They were they were notorious for their 40 year feud, for their violence. But Dupin says, "well, just look at the context. This was just how things were at the time. Everything was done through violence." And it's really interesting because modern historians basically have confirmed that. This chronicler who writes a lot about them, Grégoire de Tours, basically was playing up their cruelty to mask just what was a structural process. Basically succession was determined through murder. And so it was displacing this violence onto them, masking the violence between kings and their heirs and so forth. She talks a lot about Salic law. She calls it the Salic idea. The law is not really is not really a law, which supposedly made women unable to rule in France. So they were barred from the throne because the supposedly ancient law, but it was a made up law. So there's that active erasure or distortion along that. It's either out of interest, like with the Salic law thing, or that's out of vanity, like for Brunhilde and Fredegund. And it's all pretty poignant because Dupin theorizing this sexist bias in history pretty much predicted the fate of her work.

So benign neglect, obviously with her work, lack of curiosity, we talked about that. But also, and this is again more interesting, is the active erasure, because their ideas actually didn't disappear. They didn't disappear. They were appropriated. They were adapted. They were pressed into service to a very different agenda. Or you could say more precisely that the argument to which she made her case, so the case being that inequality is the product of a long succession of chance events. That argument was usurped and disguised. The case itself was that women are naturally equal to men and therefore should be socially equal to men in France now. So the case was mocked and discarded. So there was a usurpation of the how and a discarding of the what. So let's talk about that a little bit more, what was usurped and disguised, Dupin talks about, she wants to show that there was a natural equality at the origin of mankind or humankind. And she emphasizes the length of time and the amount of interventions that were necessary to make inequality become the norm. So she'll say, for a long time, women held on to all the rights that nature gave them in common with men. They were only deprived of these rights gradually and by chance.

And you can compare that to the general structure of Rousseau's discourse on the origin foundations of inequality among men, which was published only four years after he left her service. So Rousseau does something weird in that he divides his story into two parts. The second part is what you'd expect. It's the stages of, he calls them revolutions, just changes in human society. But the first part is equally long. It's like all about just these people toodling around in the state of nature. And the point of spending all this time, making this first part so long is to show that it could have lasted like that forever. That all the changes that happened in the second part are just contingencies that might never have happened. So he's telling the same story, that to create inequality, you had to have a long time and these events that happened. And basically the point is that inequality is an aberration. It could have never happened. So that's like, OK, but everybody was at that time, taking things back to the origin, making arguments about change over time. OK, so maybe that wasn't so, like

my students would say, he adapted. He didn't take that idea, he adapted that that way of thinking. But his usurpation is actually a lot more specific than that in the turning point for this move to inequality, which is very similar to hers. So she's talking about how right how how women lost rights over time. For her, the most significant place where women's rights were usurped. So when she's talking about rights, she's not talking about like women's rights, like we think about that today. She's talking about property rights. So wealth was transferred from generation to generation through basically two two ways. One was inheritance. One was dowry. Often dowry was what women got. They got their inheritance in advance. That was their dowry. And then the dowry is what their husbands aren't supposed to have. They manage it basically. The wife is the husband's first creditor. So as long as she's alive, he can't get rid of her dowry. It's almost like a mortgage situation that she has on his goods. So the marriage contract in this whole situation is what her focus is. Because the marriage contract is, as she defines it, a bogus contract. Because the marriage contract, any contract is supposed to be an exchange where one person is getting something and the other person is getting something. A contract where one person gets everything and the other person gets nothing is legally not considered a viable contract. It would be considered null and void. And that's how she describes the marriage contract. This is this is what she says. This is how she describes it. The groom and the bride arrive equal and free at the altar. One leaves with the property and freedom of the other, who leaves destitute and subjected. And the galling thing is that this is how things are now. And it's not how they always were. And yet French jurists are trying to make it seem like this has always been the case, and particularly that this is straight from Roman law. So they're doing a very reductive interpretation of Roman law in order to argue that all of women's property should kind of just be passed into the hands of their husbands.

AT: Men rewriting history to justify the subjugation of women? That sounds so unfamiliar. (laughter)

RW: Right, yeah. So anyway, why this is this relevant to Rousseau is because basically he takes Dupin's criticism of the Hobbesian marriage contract. That is his criticism of the Hobbesian social contract, because in Hobbes's social contract, you have these people who are all at war and then they agree in order to get peace, they're going to submit to an absolute sovereign. And so that's the justification for absolute monarchy for Hobbes. So Dupin complains that marriage is becoming like absolute monarchy. And the husband believes he's the monarch in the household. So what Rousseau does, because he says in the second discourse on inequality, that what made inequality, what solidified it, what made it permanent, was to legalize it through a contract in which the rich banded together and said, "let's tell the poor that we'll protect them as long as they give up their freedom." And so they are ensuring their wealth for the rest of eternity. What we see is almost a mathematical equation is that Rousseau substitutes out, on the social contract, he talks about the Hobbesian social contract as a slave contract. But it seems much more obvious that it is actually the marriage contract that he's got creating this structure, because the rich is substituting for the husband and the poor is substituting in for the wife. So if you think about what he says in the social contract, he says, "whether from one man to another or from one man to a people, this discourse will always be equally mad. I make with you a convention all at your expense and all to my profit that I will observe as long as I please and that you will observe as long as I please." That's the marriage contract. That's the marriage contract just made over into the criticism of the social contract.

So in that sense, Dupin's place in history is a place in political philosophy in that we see with Dupin, Rousseau, this crossover from this feminist tradition into this natural law tradition. The idea of the inequality between men and women has been absorbed and transformed to inform Rousseau's criticism of social contract theory and make his own social contract theory. And that is never apparent in his work. There's many, most men he doesn't cite either. But what is especially annoying is that then he comes back in his treatise on education, which was probably his most influential piece of work, influential at all levels of society, that had the most ramifications. He's actually making fun of her and her arguments. So I said that he's taken the how of her argument and he discarded the what. This is the what. He's discarding the what. He says, "when woman

complains about unjust manmade inequality, she is wrong. This inequality is not a human institution, or at least it is the work not of prejudice, but of reason.” So he's admitting that inequality is not natural, but that it needs to be based on reason. And the woman clearly that he is, like “woman” in the abstract when one woman complains. He's got someone very specific in mind. It's Dupin herself. So at the same time, he's negating her argument without even mentioning her name. And so it's this double erasure, making fun of someone you're not even mentioning. This was the chance for Dupin to enter, even if she didn't publish, this is where she could have entered into a conversation, could have had some sort of reception. But he's not going to talk about her. And it could be because she asked him not to. Perhaps if she decided not to publish, she also didn't want, maybe he had like a nondisclosure agreement with her. That's possible.

AT: But I doubt she asked him to belittle her, even indirectly.

AH: Right. To belittle her work and her thought that he knew quite intimately. So to me, it's all the more vicious. (AT: Fuck Rousseau.) I have to agree. But also, I love his work. So I also have to cry when I say it.

AT: Eh, death of the author. He's long dead. It's fine. Now, I'm always curious what entrances people so much about a particular topic that they would undertake such a huge project. And doubly so that both of you were so intrigued. And I'm also curious about how this collaboration both came about and progressed. So what happened here?

AH: It is a long story. I think Rebecca alluded to earlier that we both were pursuing different trajectories with our interests with Dupin, not knowing each other. One of those, siloed people looking at manuscripts and hoping to make something with it. For Rebecca, maybe an article. And then we ended up finding each other and connecting and very quickly said, “hey, what a crazy idea. What if we made an edition?” Knowing that that would be a lot of work because, we could join forces, sure. But there were still manuscripts that we hadn't accessed. So our stockpile was not yet complete. And both of us were many years into our own personal journey. But we decided pretty quickly, let's do this. Let's try to get a grant. Let's try to get a book proposal, because it just seemed that important, right? All this time that people were trying to put out this work. And we just said it needs to be out there. And this could be the biggest project of our lives. I certainly felt that way because it's for other people. It was for our own scholarly interests as well. But really getting it out there is the monumental achievement, if I want to pat us on the back for that.

And we wanted it to be useful for all kinds of readers. So again, we had a lot of supporting materials to write and organize and make it so that people coming to the text with no background in the period or even in philosophy, that they would be able to follow along. And follow the process that Dupin had. And then our translation process. I think that's where we had the most collaborative aspect. So it's not just getting everything organized and figuring out what to include in the edition and what to leave on the cutting room floor, which was hard enough. And we varied back and forth on a few pieces. But we had a page limit, a word limit for the book. So it was always clear it was going to be selections. And we had this practice where we would take an article or a chapter - she called them articles, so we respected that, but a chapter, basically - one of us would translate it and then the other would read it and respond to any queries about, choose between these three options, that kind of thing. Then we'd meet and talk it over and hash it out from beginning to end. And we developed this process where we left each other notes, but also where we worked together, we used colored ink. This is the beauty of Google Docs. Maybe why we were so much better place to finish it. We and Frédéric, the contemporary 21st century workers, is because that really, we live in different states really far away from each other. And we were able to pass this back and forth, and meet and go over it and hash it out and make decisions. And we did it for each piece. And then again, several times for the whole to try to capture tone and voice and consistency and deal with just thorny issues. So that was a big part of our process. We also did visit each other and spent lots of time sitting next to each other on couches and at kitchen tables for a week-long

intensive sessions where our spouses just basically brought food and gave us food and then retired, and children were shooed away. And it was like, this is the precious six days that we have to really do this together. And then we'll go back to our Google Docs. And we had to have hard conversations to hash things out. And it was just amazing. It really brought an amazing feeling of camaraderie, I will say, with each other, with Dupin, with the process.

RW: Yeah, we enjoyed the translation because that was when we were really digging in most to understand what she was saying. We wouldn't have finished if either of us were working alone, I speak especially for myself there, it's just so daunting. But we have very different approaches to translation. I was like, "I am going to crack this code. I am going to figure out exactly what she's saying. And I'm going to use all the words I need to really lay out exactly what she's saying." And my sentences would end up being twice as long as hers. And Angela was much more, "remember, we have to respect her style. You're overinterpreting," basically. So between us, I think we really couldn't have done better for the translation.

The nadir was certainly the notes. We had given ourselves like a month, I think, in our NEH grant. (AH: A couple months, yeah.) Yeah, a couple months to do footnotes. And we ended up feeling like, this being a service to other scholars, a really important and part of our work was to find what sources she was using. And she doesn't name them usually or will just allude to something. So we spent what was supposed to be a month was like a year Google searching basically Google Books. That was an amazing tool to be able to, because you can word search Google Books. So we'd come up with like, "what are the weird words in this sentence? They sound like they're coming from somewhere" and we would plug that in. And our database for her work is over 200 titles.

AH: Over 250 sources that are known that she's using. She names a dozen of them maybe, max. Well, I shouldn't say that. It might be two dozen because with some of the science people, she's more specific. She's talking about Aristotelians. And so you're like, "well, which ones exactly? Could we track this down?"

RW: And it was not fun. But I don't regret it. I think it was good. We felt like we were doing it as a service to other scholars, but also to Dupin. And it's really exciting to share with students. I love being able to tell students that, "look, it's not that the past just like comes to us. It doesn't just walk itself to us. The only reason that we know about texts is that people ask questions and go looking for them." Or the only reason we don't know about certain texts is that they don't get asked questions. And so this is a model of what it means to create a reception for a work. And it's really nice for students to see that something can be not published for however many centuries. And then it is and something changes and who knows political philosophy, how it's taught. So that they are potentially active participants in what they're doing in class. Even having a discussion in class or writing a paper that that is participating in a reception of a work. So that's extremely gratifying to think that we can like talk in that way about what we've done.

AH: And having to cut those notes because Oxford said "they can't stay at the bottom of the page. There's too many and they're too long." And so we cut at least in two different hard cut sessions. So I guess there's somewhere, the deep version of the of the footnotes that if anybody listening would like to know more about a particular thing, we probably have a note that that either got cut or got shortened to one sentence. We were trying to map to a web of other references and thinkers and contexts. And we did that in the introductions because there are four sections and there's an enter to each section. And so it's like, what do people need to know to understand where she's coming from, what she is and is not addressing in this section and situated intellectually. And because the sections are so different from all these different discourses, that too was a lot of a lot of work and a lot of pink and blue ink. That's the colors we have stuck to to this day. We made some little notes for our discussion with you and we used our pink and blue colors. We're now stuck in this. But it's been a great collaboration, and I would do it again and again, but only for for Dupin. I don't know that I could ride that

hard unless there's someone else out there that I have not yet discovered. But I wouldn't edit Rousseau and spend this much time. Others can do that. And that's a great use of time. But this really was a labor of love.

RW: Yeah. And I think there's nothing like a friendship that results from from such struggle and shared purpose. It's been the most beautiful really experience of my scholarly career to work with Angela. And I've experienced just unrelenting grief, really, that it's over. And every time, I get to think, "I'm going to be on this Zoom with with Angela today. Yay! Bring it back, old times." It was quite an experience, really a human experience that I wouldn't exchange for anything.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast. And remember, well behaved women rarely make history.