

Honor Gibson

“Gender Ideals in Germany's 1770's: La Roche's *Die Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* and Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*”

My thesis is an exploration of gender-divided intellectual communities, which primarily explores how the role of women in Germany in the late eighteenth century influenced the female characters in Sophie von La Roche's work, especially in comparison to the portrayal of females in the work of her male contemporaries. Paying special attention to her most well known book, *Die Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim*, I analyze her portrayal of typical eighteenth century gender roles in an effort to prove that this novel and the gender relations depicted therein serve as a metaphor, albeit hyperbolic, for von La Roche's own self-perceptions. *Sternheim*, published in 1771, appeared at a transitional time in both literary and cultural history in Germany; La Roche earned herself the title of first German female novelist at a time when most women were discouraged from reading as a pastime. My work traces the development of such societal expectations and explains how La Roche was able to open new doors for her gender. I use Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, published just years later, to highlight the manner in which male writers then began to accept the new feminine ideals presented in *Sternheim*. While La Roche's heroine is cast as more independent than Goethe's female protagonist, both authors incorporate an appreciation for literature into each of their characters' development and in turn, set the stage for a new era of literary history that was accepting of women's contributions.

