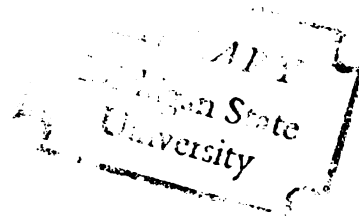


LA NOUVELLE HELOISE:  
ROUSSEAU AND THE EPISTOLARY FORM

Thesis for the Degree of Ph. D.  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY  
DENIS ALBERT ROBITAILLE  
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This is to certify that the  
thesis entitled  
LA NOUVELLE HELOISE:  
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DENIS ALBERT ROBITAILLE

has been accepted towards fulfillment  
of the requirements for  
Ph.D. degree in French

*Herbert Joseph*  
Major professor

Date Feb. 5, 1974



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## ABSTRACT

### LA NOUVELLE HELOISE: ROUSSEAU AND THE EPISTOLARY FORM

By

Denis Albert Robitaille

In order to increase the verisimilitude of their works, eighteenth century French novelists tried literary forms which resembled authentic documents. One of the most popular of these forms was the epistolary novel. One of the greatest epistolary novels of the eighteenth century, Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse, has received much critical attention. Most scholarly work has centered on the ideas and theories of Rousseau that find expression in the novel. Few works examine Rousseau the artist and fewer still, the epistolary form of the work. Most of the works that do deal with the novel's form refer to the advantages and disadvantages of the form but generally ignore the way in which the letters, with their strengths and deficiencies, function within the circumstances of the story.

In attempting to determine the function of the epistolary form in La Nouvelle Héloïse, the present study first examines the significance of letters for Rousseau himself and the reasons for his choice of the epistolary form. In his own relationships with others, Rousseau felt more at ease with correspondence than with conversation. Statements made in the Confessions reveal that Rousseau felt intimidated by the presence of an interlocutor and that writing letters was an effective means of continuing to communicate with others

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while escaping their discomfoting presence. Rousseau chose the epistolary form as the result of a personal fantasy in which he imagined himself engaging in correspondence with an ideal woman (Book IX, Confessions). His main characters, Julie and Saint Preux, share his preference for letters over conversation. This preference is the cause of many of the infractions committed by Rousseau against the conventions of epistolary fiction, especially that of distance between the correspondents. Julie and Saint Preux often write in situations in which they could have easily conversed. But this affinity for written expression points at the same time to the principle which determines the function of the epistolary form throughout the novel: the need for Julie and Saint Preux to separate in order to express their love. Their correspondence, because it implies separation, is the symbol of their search for a love based on mutual respect rather than on constant physical intimacy.

Chapter II analyzes the variations in the use of letters by Julie and Saint Preux and the way in which these variations correspond to the changes in the lovers' relationship throughout the novel. While in the very beginning of the novel Julie and Saint Preux live in the same household, letters represent a desire on their part to maintain a respectful distance while first revealing their feelings for each other. When later in Part I they discover their passion is increasing and growing dangerous and Julie asks Saint Preux to leave, letters become a means of drawing

closer together. Because they do not have to worry about the dangers of physical intimacy, the lovers become more passionate in their letters. The function of their letters throughout the novel is to strike a balance between the necessity of virtuous separation and union in love. This balance becomes increasingly difficult and is resolved only in Julie's death. Her last letter, read posthumously by Saint Preux, beckons him to join her one day in the absolute union of the hereafter.

The last chapter examines how the experience of writing an epistolary novel influenced Rousseau's subsequent autobiographical writings. Through one of the basic conventions of the epistolary novel--the fiction of authenticity--Rousseau consciously drew attention to his own role in the composition of the letters. In the two prefaces to the novel Rousseau remained purposely ambiguous on his role as editor in an effort to induce the reader to identify him with Saint Preux. This deception was necessary in order to deal with a personal dilemma: convincing his reading public that he was not contradicting his previous condemnation of the arts, and of novels in particular, in writing a work of fiction. This concern for his own reputation, and the use of an essential convention of the epistolary form in expressing it, establishes the epistolary form as a precursor to his autobiographical works which deal directly with self-understanding and self-justification.

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By

Denis Albert Robitaille

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## INTRODUCTION

In his well-known study Le Dilemme du roman au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle<sup>1</sup> Georges May characterizes the development of the novel in the first forty years of the eighteenth century in terms of the effort made by novelists to test various literary techniques and forms directed at enhancing the verisimilitude of their narration. The first person approach of memoirs and the fiction of an authentic collection of letters were the most frequently used methods of creating the illusion of actuality. Long accustomed to associating the term "roman" with extravagant stories in the vein of L'Astrée, the reading public demanded assurances from authors that the stories were true in order to accept them as "vraisemblable." Authors provided these assurances through a well-developed repertoire of literary stratagems, all pertaining to the documentary validity of the novel.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Georges May, Le Dilemme du roman au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963).

<sup>2</sup>For a detailed analysis of the techniques of the memoir or first-person novel and of the epistolary novel, consult: Vivienne Mylne, The Eighteenth Century French Novel, Techniques of Illusion (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965); Bertil Romberg, Studies in the Narrative Technique of the First-person Novel (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1962); and Philip Stewart, Imitation and Illusion in the French Memoir-Novel, 1700-1750. The Art of Make-Believe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969). Romberg's study

Few believed these claims of authenticity, but literal belief was hardly ever the author's goal. As long as the reader could entertain the possibility that the novel was true, hence distinguishing it from the concept of "romanesque," then the often intricate techniques of memoir and epistolary novels, which were intended to increase verisimilitude, served to improve the novel's literary reputation. However, as François Jost points out in commenting on this search for a form that would bring respectability to the novel, too many novelists, and especially epistolary novelists, looked upon these techniques as a facile recipe to success.

Les tâtonnements des romanciers ne menèrent donc point, semble-t-il, à la prompte découverte d'une recette. Précisément, parce que très souvent ce ne fut qu'une simple recette qu'ils cherchaient: et le roman épistolaire, pour la foule des médiocres, en restait une. Pour les génies, ce fut, dans le domaine, la trouvaille du siècle, dont les conséquences, pour l'évolution du roman, n'ont guère encore été étudiées.<sup>3</sup>

Rousseau was one of those geniuses who made of the epistolary novel the "trouvaille du siècle." La Nouvelle Héloïse (1761) was the best-seller of the eighteenth century. According to Daniel Mornet, there were over seventy editions before the year 1800.<sup>4</sup> In its influence upon the

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encompasses the literature of many countries. Stewart's work is the most complete study of technique in the French novel of the eighteenth century.

<sup>3</sup>François Jost, "Le Roman épistolaire et la technique narrative au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," Comparative Literature Studies, 1968, pp. 397-98.

<sup>4</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, La Nouvelle Héloïse, ed. Daniel Mornet, Vol. I (Paris: Hachette, 1925), p. 231.



European novel of the Romantic period, La Nouvelle Héloïse was surpassed only by Goethe's Werther.<sup>5</sup> And along with Montesquieu's Lettres Persanes and Laclos's Liaisons Dangereuses, it is one of the three greatest epistolary novels in French literature. However, relatively little attention has been given to the significance of the epistolary form in La Nouvelle Héloïse. This neglect is due in part to the decline of the epistolary novel after the first quarter of the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century the epistolary form was one of the most popular narrative techniques. There were over one thousand epistolary novels published in Europe between 1740 and 1820.<sup>6</sup> The letter achieved prominence in the realm of fiction because it was a form with which the eighteenth century reader could readily identify. As the sole means of communicating over long distances, it was an integral part of daily life. Furthermore, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries represented the golden age of the letter as an established art form. The letters of famous literary or historical figures were widely read and admired. Such letters, because they were often intended for publication, were highly stylized and treated subjects that suited a reading public rather than a private correspondent. In his article "Réalité vécue et

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<sup>5</sup>Charles Dédéyan, J.-J. Rousseau: La Nouvelle Héloïse (Paris: Centre de documentation universitaire, 1968), pp. 180-86.

<sup>6</sup>François Jost, "Le Roman épistolaire et la technique narrative au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," p. 421.

réussite littéraire: Le statut particulier de la lettre," Roger Duchêne distinguishes between two different types of letter writers in the period from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries: "épistoliers," writers who sent letters to a specific recipient, and "auteurs épistolaires," who wrote letters especially for a reading public or reworked private letters for the public.<sup>7</sup> Inevitably the formality of published letters influenced the familiar "épistolier," and educated people became more conscious of the importance of style and tone, if not of orthography, in their own letters. In the eighteenth century, correspondence was a means of entertainment as well as a necessity. But since the Revolution, the art of letter writing has declined and the epistolary novel along with it. And amid the telecommunications of the twentieth century, the epistolary novel seems a contrived, cumbersome, and outmoded means of narration. In short, it has become increasingly

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<sup>7</sup>Roger Duchêne, "Réalité vécue et réussite littéraire: Le statut particulier de la lettre," Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France, 71<sup>e</sup> année, mars-avril 1971, no. 2, pp. 177-95. This article provides an excellent analysis of the role of public and private epistolary styles in the development of the epistolary novel. To Duchêne the success of many epistolary novels during this period seemed to depend upon the novelist's skill in writing letters of interest to all (as "auteurs épistolaires") while injecting the epistolary situation of the characters with the naturalness and intimacy of letters of actual "épistoliers." For detailed information on the historical development of the epistolary novel up to the eighteenth century, consult Robert Adams Day, Told in Letters (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan Press, 1966), Charles Kany, The Beginnings of the Epistolary Novel in France, Italy, and Spain (Berkeley: 1937), G.F. Singer, The Epistolary Novel (Philadelphia, 1933), and Laurent Versini, Laclos et la tradition (Paris: 1968).



difficult for readers to appreciate immediately the subtleties of meaning in the epistolary form.

William Mead has remarked that many studies of La Nouvelle Héloïse "s'intéressent aux idées de Rousseau et à la manière dont ces idées se métamorphosent en symboles. De l'homme de lettres, du 'romancier,' ils ont peu de choses à dire."<sup>8</sup> The epistolary form itself accounts in part for this stress on ideology. In his "Quelques réflexions sur Les Lettres persanes" (1754), Montesquieu proclaimed that the most unique property of the epistolary novel was precisely its ability to disseminate philosophical, moral, and political ideas in an entertaining form:

Enfin, dans les romans ordinaires, les digressions ne peuvent être permises que lorsqu'elles forment elles-mêmes un nouveau roman. On n'y saurait mêler de raisonnements, parce qu'aucun des personnages n'y ayant été assemblé pour raisonner, cela choquerait le dessein et la nature de l'ouvrage. Mais dans la forme de lettres, où les acteurs ne sont pas choisis, et où les sujets qu'on traite ne sont dépendants d'aucun dessein ou d'aucun plan déjà formé, l'auteur s'est donné l'avantage de pouvoir joindre de la philosophie, de la politique et de la morale à un roman, et de lier le tout par une chaîne secrète et, en quelque façon, inconnue.<sup>9</sup>

Rousseau took full advantage of the didactic properties of the epistolary form. The letters of La Nouvelle Héloïse touch upon a great variety of subjects. Even the

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<sup>8</sup>William Mead, Jean-Jacques Rousseau ou le romancier enchaîné (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup>Montesquieu, "Quelques réflexions sur Les Lettres persanes" in Les Lettres persanes (Paris: Garnier, 1960), pp. 3-4.

correspondence of the story's two lovers is often as discursive as it is passionate. It is not difficult to discern Rousseau's ideas flowing from the pen of his characters.

Some critical works consider La Nouvelle Héloïse only insofar as it dramatizes ideas expressed in Rousseau's previous or subsequent works. Madeleine B. Ellis's Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse, a Synthesis of Rousseau's Thought (1749-1759) demonstrates the novel's ideological agreement with Rousseau's work up to the completion of the novel in 1759.<sup>10</sup> Her work was meant to counter earlier studies which claimed that La Nouvelle Héloïse did not represent a logical continuity in Rousseau's thought. In laying stress on Rousseau the thinker, however, Ellis's work tends to obscure Rousseau the artist. A more recent study, Lester Crocker's "Julie ou la Nouvelle Duplicité"<sup>11</sup>, interprets the novel from a political standpoint. He focuses his attention on Rousseau's vision of an ideal community, Clarens. Crocker finds the atmosphere of this moral experiment (the harmony of virtue and passion) very repressive. His analysis of the characters, especially Julie and Saint Preux, points to the deceitful behavior they must adopt in order to sustain the experiment. Crocker incorporated many of these observations

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<sup>10</sup>Madeleine B. Ellis, Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse, a Synthesis of Rousseau's Thought (1749-1759) (Toronto: U. of Toronto Press, 1949).

<sup>11</sup>Lester G. Crocker, "Julie ou la Nouvelle Duplicité," Annales Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Vol. XXXVI, 1963-65, pp. 105-152.

in a later work, Rousseau's Social Contract<sup>12</sup>, in order to prove Rousseau a totalitarian ideologist, comparing some of the statements and situations of La Nouvelle Héloïse to those of works such as Brave New World and 1984. There are unquestionably many political ramifications to La Nouvelle Héloïse; but considered only as a vehicle of Rousseau's political thought, the novel appears to be little more than an unsuccessful "roman à thèse." Rousseau's attempts at exploring and revealing his own personality through his characters, the activity in which he engaged more directly in his later autobiographical works, are ignored.

Many studies of La Nouvelle Héloïse do give consideration to Rousseau the artist and to his use of the epistolary form. William Mead maintains that one of the greatest artistic achievements of La Nouvelle Héloïse was Rousseau's use of the epistolary form, at least in Part I. Compared to his most illustrious predecessor in the epistolary novel, Samuel Richardson, Rousseau gave the correspondence of his characters the appearance of real letters "qui traduisent des états d'esprit passagers, qui saisissent des pensées au vol..."<sup>13</sup> Richardson was too loquacious and failed to observe the realistic limitations of the individual letter. However, continues Mead, Rousseau was not

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<sup>12</sup>Lester G. Crocker, Rousseau's Social Contract (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1968).

<sup>13</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau ou le romancier enchaîné, p. 54.

sufficiently committed to the novel to maintain this approach to the epistolary form and often imitated the Richardsonian style in much of the last five parts of La Nouvelle Héloïse. In his efforts at didacticism, Rousseau sacrificed much of the artist within himself for the ideologue. Mead finds La Nouvelle Héloïse great and powerful, but uneven, especially in its use of the conventions of the epistolary form. "Complexe et plein de contradictions comme le génie de son créateur, il [the novel] échappe à toute tentative de définition; un miroir n'explique pas, il constate."<sup>14</sup>

Jean-Louis Lecercle's well documented Rousseau et l'art du roman examines Rousseau's creative imagination and its development over his whole literary career.<sup>15</sup> Lecercle shows how Rousseau developed his skill as a novelist in writing La Nouvelle Héloïse and how his creative imagination contributed to his treatise on education, L'Emile (1762), and to his autobiographical works. Rousseau's imagination animated the abstractions of his didactic theories, and the Jean-Jacques described in the Confessions "est le produit

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>15</sup> Jean-Louis Lecercle, Rousseau et l'art du roman (Paris: Armand Colin, 1969). Lecercle organizes and develops on a larger scale points made in a number of earlier works on La Nouvelle Héloïse which deserve to be mentioned here: Bernard Guyon, "Introduction," Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes, Vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), pp. xvii-lxix; Daniel Mornet, La Nouvelle Héloïse de Rousseau (Paris: Melotée, 1929); Philippe Van Tieghem, La Nouvelle Héloïse de Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Paris: Nizet, 1956).

changeant d'une imagination fantasque."<sup>16</sup> Leceracle's examination of La Nouvelle Héloïse includes a scholarly presentation of the most important characteristics of the epistolary technique of La Nouvelle Héloïse.<sup>17</sup> Letters permitted Rousseau to express directly a multiplicity of subjective viewpoints, each one representing one aspect of his extremely complex personality. With letters the passions of the characters can be conveyed with greater power and immediacy than would have been possible in a memoir-novel. And, contends Leceracle, the greatest artistic advantage of the epistolary novel for Rousseau was the aura of mystery which it conferred upon the characters.<sup>18</sup> The power to disguise one's true feelings inherent in the epistolary form provided the future author of the Confessions with the experience of the difficulties of sincerity. For much of the interest of the novel, observes Leceracle, lies in the intellectual and sentimental contest between Julie and Saint Preux who try to distinguish true feelings from dissimulation in each other's letters. Besides these advantages, Leceracle points to the many difficulties of the epistolary form to which Rousseau fell prey. In order to satisfy the epistolary convention, the characters are depicted writing letters even when they would be able to speak with each other or writing of the

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 373.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 118-19.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 128-30.

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successive and sometimes contradictory feelings that possess them, when even the most unsophisticated of letters requires that one write one's final thoughts and conclusions on a given subject. Another disadvantage of the epistolary form is that events cannot always be described in letters. The important "bosquet" scene, for example, in which Julie kisses Saint Preux is not described, for it would seem ridiculous for one of the lovers to narrate it to the other; and at this particular point in the novel, Julie and Saint Preux cannot describe this experience in letters to third parties because they must keep their love a secret.

Though all these observations made by Mead, Lecerle, and others are valid, they seem to avoid very fundamental questions concerning the epistolary form of La Nouvelle Héloïse. For instance, why did Rousseau first choose the epistolary form? True, many of the letters of La Nouvelle Héloïse seem natural; but Rousseau states elsewhere that he detested correspondence. Letters were a "genre dont je n'ai jamais pu prendre le ton, et dont l'occupation me met au supplice."<sup>19</sup> The subjectivity, the multiplicity of viewpoints, the convenience of inserting didactic digressions, and the mystery surrounding the characters described by

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<sup>19</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Les Confessions in Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard, La Pléiade, 1959), Vol. I, p. 114. All future quotations from Rousseau's work shall be taken from this edition (with the exception of the Lettre à d'Alembert and the Essai sur l'origine des langues). Four volumes have appeared to date. Future references shall be limited to title, volume, and page placed in parentheses after each quotation.

Leceracle are important characteristics of Rousseau's use of the epistolary form; but many of these characteristics are found in other epistolary novels and in other forms of fictional narration. And in addition to analyzing the achievements and failures of Rousseau's epistolary technique, his ability or inability to make the letters of La Nouvelle Héloïse as credible as an authentic correspondence, it is necessary to study the way in which the letters, with their strengths and often glaring deficiencies, function within the circumstances of the story and their meaning in the novel. In any work of art, meaning and form complement each other; but in epistolary novels, this relationship assumes an extra dimension in that the characters, insofar as they are portrayed as correspondents, are participants, though seldom if ever conscious ones, in the creation of the literary work. In great epistolary novels, the letters assume an essential role in the novel, above and beyond the mere conventions of the genre. The form is part of the story itself. And with respect to La Nouvelle Héloïse, one must ask how well Rousseau utilized all the potentialities of the genre.

There are two works which address themselves to the questions mentioned above and which have been of great benefit in defining the scope of the present study. Robert Ellrich, in a study of the relationship of Rousseau with his reader, directs his attention to the writer-reader



relationship of the characters of La Nouvelle Héloïse.<sup>20</sup> Julie and Saint Preux, says Ellrich, are possessed by an overwhelming compulsion to write rather than speak. Using many examples of this compulsion in La Nouvelle Héloïse and in other works, Ellrich proves that Rousseau was a "reader-directed" author, highly apprehensive about the reactions of his reading public and more eager than most writers to direct the reader's reactions to his own ends. For as he grew increasingly reluctant to associate with others, Rousseau depended more and more upon his writings in order to remain in contact and deal with society. Though Ellrich applies his insights into Rousseau's attraction toward the written medium to a broad study of Rousseau's relationship with his reader, he points clearly to the principles governing Rousseau's choice of the epistolary form. Rousseau's decision to portray his characters through their own letters, to place in their hands, as it were, the narration of La Nouvelle Héloïse, rested more on his personal need for this form of narration than on purely literary considerations. This interpretation applies primarily to the early stages of the novel's creation. As Jean Rousset demonstrates in a chapter of his study Forme et signification<sup>21</sup>, Rousseau certainly directed his attention to the

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<sup>20</sup>Robert J. Ellrich, Rousseau and his Reader: The Rhetorical Situation of the Major Works (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Studies in Romance Languages and Literatures, 1969).

<sup>21</sup>Jean Rousset, Forme et signification (Paris: José Corti, 1964), pp. 65-92. Rousset also discussed the ideas presented in this chapter in an earlier study: "Rousseau romancier," Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Neuchâtel: 1962), pp.67-80.

literary significance of the letters as the novel began to take shape. Rousset analyzes the manner in which Rousseau arranges the letters of La Nouvelle Héloïse so that developments in the story are reflected in the correspondence of the characters. Rousset observes that as Julie and Saint Preux renounce their passion in order to fulfill their duties to society, their correspondence diminishes and then ceases while letters to and from third parties increase. Rousseau thus establishes the artistic harmony of "forme et signification."

The full significance of the epistolary form in La Nouvelle Héloïse, however, does not lie only in Rousseau's spontaneous, personal attraction for letters nor only in his conscious, artistic handling of the letters. Both aspects must be considered. Jacques Borel, commenting on the sources of literary creation, writes:

Il n'y a donc pas à opposer les aspirations de l'écrivain aux inspirations de ses devanciers, à trancher entre son expérience vécue et son expérience livresque, à nier l'une en raison de l'autre. Elles s'appellent, se complètent, se confondent... La rêverie personnelle de l'écrivain va donc se doubler d'une rêverie littéraire.<sup>22</sup>

The present study will examine the nature of Rousseau's creative experience, both the "rêverie personnelle" and "littéraire," and the significance of the epistolary form in that experience. Letters, it will be seen, provided Rousseau an outlet for some of his deepest psychological

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<sup>22</sup>Jacques Borel, Le Lys dans la vallée et les sources profondes de la création balzacienne (Paris: José Corti, 1961), p. 60.

anxieties. And the letters of La Nouvelle Héloïse represented, in the early stages of the novel's composition, Rousseau's attempts at enacting his private fantasies about a love affair with an ideal woman, a love which he felt he deserved but which life had denied him. Thus, Rousseau did not begin to write a novel in epistolary form only in order to profit from the popularity of that particular literary form, but in order to express his own feelings of love. Through the letters of La Nouvelle Héloïse Rousseau transformed his fantasies into a work of art.

The experience of having written La Nouvelle Héloïse also had considerable effect on the course of Rousseau's literary career. Along with L'Emile and Le Contrat social, La Nouvelle Héloïse occupies a central position in his personal development. A cursory view of Rousseau's career reveals a movement from the observation and criticism of society (Discours sur les sciences et les arts, 1750, Discours sur l'inégalité, 1754) to a personal vision of ideal men and ideal societies (La Nouvelle Héloïse, 1761, Le Contrat social and L'Emile, 1762), to the examination of his own personality and of his posture vis-à-vis society (Les Confessions, 1770, Les Dialogues, 1776, and Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire, 1778). From work to work, the person of Rousseau looms more important. Jean Starobinski has shown that Rousseau, even in the earliest of his works, was dealing with an intensely personal problem which Starobinski identifies as a desire to render himself transparent

to everyone's gaze.<sup>23</sup> Starobinski follows the progression of Rousseau's quest for transparency as it manifests itself more and more directly in his works. Ronald Grimsley also concentrates on Rousseau's growing self-awareness by analyzing Rousseau's psychological development, especially his increasing need to reveal his own personality more directly in his works.<sup>24</sup> As Grimsley demonstrates, self-awareness was the goal of all Rousseau's work, a fact which first became apparent in the letters of La Nouvelle Héloïse.

The present study, therefore, will also examine the epistolary form of the novel as an important act in the personal drama of Rousseau's quest for an adequate form of self-expression. Special attention will be given to one of the essential conventions of the epistolary form, the fiction of authenticity. For Rousseau consciously used it to direct attention to himself, specifically, to his role in the novel's creation. This use of the fiction of authenticity was extraordinary since this literary convention was usually intended to efface the author's presence by the suggestion that the letters were genuine. Insofar as it represented a conscious attempt by Rousseau to make himself the subject of his work, the epistolary form prefigured the autobiographical form of Rousseau's later works; and

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<sup>23</sup>Jean Starobinski, Jean-Jacques Rousseau: la transparence et l'obstacle (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

<sup>24</sup>Ronald Grimsley, Jean-Jacques Rousseau: a study in self-awareness (Cardiff: 1961).

moreover, it was the self-reflective character of the epistolary form that constituted the originality of La Nouvelle Héloïse in the development of the novel in France.

## CHAPTER I

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LETTERS FOR ROUSSEAU AND THE CHOICE OF THE EPISTOLARY FORM

The conventions of the epistolary novel are unique in fictional literature. The characters are portrayed in the act of writing about the events they experience. The events narrated and the narration itself are parts of the story. Unlike the memoir-novel in which the first person narrator postulates, usually in a preface or epilogue, his reasons for writing, the epistolary novel is a genre in which the epistolary or narrative situation--those circumstances which demand an exchange of letters by the characters (e.g. a great distance separating the characters or the presence of other characters which prevents the transmittal of certain information)--represents an integral part of the whole fictional situation--those circumstances and events which comprise the story itself. The means of narration, the letters, influence the actions of the novel's correspondents. In order to conform to the demands of the epistolary novel, its two fundamental conventions--the act itself of communicating by letters and, implicit in the first, the distance separating the characters which necessitates their correspondence--must remain constant motifs

of the novel. Two classic examples of the masterful use of these conventions are Les Lettres persanes and Les Liaisons Dangereuses. In his article on Montesquieu's novel<sup>1</sup>, Robert F. O'Reilly shows how the author, in conveying the meaning of his story, played repeatedly upon the great distance separating Usbek from his Persian domain and upon the letters he must exchange with his wives and eunuchs in order to rule his harem. Far from home, exposed to new experiences, Usbek easily formulates humane philosophical concepts in analyzing and criticizing foreign cultures. But in matters concerning the rule of his own subjects, he makes wanton use of force in keeping with Persian custom. In arranging the novel's correspondence, Montesquieu interspersed the letters in which Usbek expounds universal principles among those which convey the Persian ruler's dictatorial orders to his subordinates so as to bring out, with maximum ironic effect, the meaning of the work--the difficulty of reconciling new ideas based on intellectual principles with traditional ways of life. In Les Liaisons Dangereuses letters are weapons in a battle of the sexes.

Jean-Luc Seylaz writes:

...on sent bien que la plupart des lettres de ce recueil offrent le même caractère de concerté, de prémédité. Ruses, attaques, défenses; mots derrière lesquels on se retranche, sophismes, démonstrations: ces lettres sont des moyens de combat et des actes. En d'autres termes, elles

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<sup>1</sup>Robert F. O'Reilly, "The Structure and Meaning of the Lettres Persanes," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 1969, Vol. 67, pp. 91-131.

sont la matière de l'action, et non pas seulement son reflet.<sup>2</sup>

Laclos's novel is an incomparable study of the beguiling power of the letter. The fiendishness of Valmont and Merteuil is heightened by the fact that they are able to manipulate others from a distance, as if their letters were some magical remote-control device. These two roués carry on their own rivalry entirely through letters. They meet but once in the entire novel (Letter 151). And by simply making public the content of their correspondence, the only record of their iniquities, they forever seal their own fate.

In La Nouvelle Héloïse, however, the distance separating the correspondents implicit in epistolary novels seems at times insufficient to warrant communication by letter. "...Je vous vois tous les jours," writes Saint Preux in his first letter to Julie. As her preceptor, he spends many hours of the day with her. Yet while present in the same household and free to converse virtually at will, Julie and Saint Preux exchange some thirty-seven letters. The most conspicuous example of this extreme proximity occurs in Letter LIV of Part I. The scene is Julie's room where the lovers have agreed to meet. While awaiting Julie, Saint Preux expresses, in a letter addressed to her, the thoughts and feelings that this place inspires in him.

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<sup>2</sup>Jean-Luc Seylaz, Les Liaisons Dangereuses et la création romanesque chez Laclos (Geneva: 1958), p. 39.



Upon hearing a noise, Saint Preux imagines that it might be Julie's father. Undaunted, he continues to record his thoughts even when he discovers that it is Julie herself who has entered the room.

Il me semble entendre du bruit. Seroit-ce ton barbare pere? Je ne crois pas être lâche..... mais qu'en ce moment la mort me seroit horrible? Mon desespoir seroit égal à l'ardeur qui me consume. Ciel! Je te demande encore une heure de vie, et j'abandonne le reste de mon être à ta rigueur. O desirs! ô crainte! ô palpitations cruelles!....on ouvre!....on entre!....c'est elle! je l'entrevois, je l'ai vue, j'entens refermer la porte. Mon coeur, mon foible coeur, tu succombes à tant d'agitations. Ah cherche des forces pour supporter la félicité qui t'accable (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 147)!

The proximity of the two principal correspondents results in other irregularities in the novel's epistolary situation. On two occasions, Saint Preux describes to Julie in detail incidents in which both participated. After Julie kisses Saint Preux in the "bosquet" of Clarens, Saint Preux writes her a letter (Part I, Letter XIV) in which he reports chronologically every action leading up to the kiss. Later in the story, another letter from Saint Preux (Part I, Letter IV) to Julie depicts the tender moments of their rendezvous in her bedroom. These irregularities in the convention of distance between correspondents are certainly not the result of oversight. They are simply too obvious to have escaped Rousseau's notice. Faced with this seemingly willful disregard for the most fundamental conventions of correspondence, one must ask what prompted Rousseau to recount the story of Julie and Saint Preux through letters. And

how does one explain the motives of the young lovers for writing to each other under circumstances which would normally make correspondence unnecessary? The answer lies primarily in Rousseau's attitude toward letter writing. He preferred letters to conversation. Indeed, he preferred writing to all other forms of social contact. In his Confessions, Rousseau comments, at times quite extensively, on the meaning of letters and, more importantly, of writing itself in his own life. These comments, taken in conjunction with his detailed analysis of the circumstances surrounding the composition of La Nouvelle Héloïse, reveal how his choice of the epistolary form for his novel helped to fulfill deep psychological and emotional needs. Rousseau did not ignore the conventions of the epistolary novel but rather attached to them a very personal significance.

In the third book of the Confessions, Rousseau tells of a visit he made when in his teens to a M. d'Aubonne, an influential relative of Mme de Warens, then Jean-Jacques's protectress. Mme de Warens had sent him to M. d'Aubonne in order to obtain the latter's opinion about her charge's intellectual abilities. Rousseau recalls that after an affable interview, M. d'Aubonne pronounced him inept and somewhat shallow and that the most he could aspire to become was a simple village priest. Rousseau's purpose in relating this incident (only one of many similar to it) was to investigate and explain the possible reasons for so obviously erroneous a judgment. He goes on to describe two

basic traits of his personality which invite unfavorable opinions about his intellectual ability: an impetuous temperament and slow-wittedness.

Deux choses presque inaliabes s'unissent en moi sans que j'en puisse concevoir la manière: un temperament très ardent, des passions vives, impétueuses, et des idées lentes à naître, embarrassées, et qui ne se présentent jamais qu'après coup. On dirait que mon coeur et mon esprit n'appartiennent pas au même individu. Le sentiment plus prompt que l'éclair vient remplir mon ame, mais au lieu de m'éclairer il me brule et m'éblouit. Je sens tout et je ne vois rien. Je suis emporté mais stupide; il faut que je sois de sang-froid pour penser (Les Confessions, Vol. I, p. 113).

In the course of his conversation with M. d'Aubonne, these traits were all too apparent. Face to face with this important gentleman, Rousseau could hardly have felt "de sang froid." His capacity to feel intensely surpassed and impeded not only his ability to think, but also his ability to express himself. In his interview with M. d'Aubonne, Rousseau's speech was the only evidence upon which he could be judged. Under these circumstances Rousseau could not be at his best. "...J'ai cependant le tact assez sûr, de la pénétration, de la finesse même pourvu qu'on m'attende..." (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 113). Unfortunately, conversation is not conducive to long pauses. Rousseau felt wronged because what made M. d'Aubonne and many others underestimate him was a deceptive disparity between his conversational ability and the actual profundity of his discernment.

Rousseau's ineffectuality as a conversationalist plagued him throughout his life. The very essence of eighteenth century conversation among the upper classes and

the intelligentsia was quick-wittedness, the apt phrase, and the ability to please and entertain one's interlocutors. These traits are summed up in Duclos's description of "le bon ton" in conversation:

Toute question importante, tout raisonnement suivi, tout sentiment raisonnable sont exclus des sociétés brillantes, et sortent du bon ton.  
...Le bon ton dans ceux qui ont le plus d'esprit, consiste à dire agréablement des riens... il faut surtout amuser.<sup>3</sup>

Voltaire, in his article entitled "Esprit" in the Encyclopédie, defined wit in speech as "dire les choses d'une façon nouvelle." These were perdurable characteristics of the neo-classic age. A century before Rousseau's Confessions, they figured prominently in Alceste's condemnation of society.

...Je ne hais rien tant que les contorsions  
De tous ces grands faiseurs de protestations,  
Ces affables donneurs d'embrassades frivoles,  
Ces obligeants diseurs d'inutiles paroles,  
Qui de civilités avec tous font combat,  
Et traitent du même air l'honnête homme et le fat.  
Quel avantage a-t-on qu'un homme vous caresse,  
Vous jure amitié, foi, zèle, estime, tendresse,  
Et vous fasse de vous un éloge éclatant,  
Lorsque au premier faquin il court en faire autant?<sup>4</sup>

Rousseau, like Molière's Alceste, could not abide the artificiality implicit in salon conversation. Rousseau lacked the necessary self-assurance. When with a large group of people, Rousseau appeared obtuse; but in conversation appearances were everything. When he felt his ineptitude was

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<sup>3</sup>Charles Duclos, Considérations sur les moeurs de ce siècle in Oeuvres complètes (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1968), Vol. I, p. 103.

<sup>4</sup>Molière, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Garnier, 1962), Vol. I, p. 818.

all too obvious, it contributed to a further loss of calm and tact. There were simply too many factors to consider all at once:

...pour parler à propos, il faut penser à la fois et sur le champ à mille choses. La seule idée de tant de convenances dont je suis sur d'oublier au moins quelqu'une suffit pour m'intimider. Je ne comprends pas même comment on ose parler dans un cercle: car à chaque mot il faudroit passer en revue tous les gens qui sont là: il faudroit connoître tous leurs caractères, savoir leurs histoires pour être sur de ne rien dire qui puisse offenser quelqu'un (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 115).

The greatest fear arising from such an uncomfortable situation was that of making a mistake, an almost infallible occurrence in Rousseau's case, for, unlike the polished socialite, Rousseau did not keep abreast of the current gossip. A seemingly innocuous remark could suggest an unfortunate or embarrassing experience in the personal affairs of someone in attendance. If those whose entire life was centered around rumor and scandal committed occasional verbal transgressions, imagine the innumerable "faux pas" of a young bourgeois like Rousseau only recently admitted to the "beau monde" of Paris. In the more intimate "tête-à-tête," Rousseau did not fare any better. There were fewer people, fewer "histoires" to be taken into account; but the tension here derived from the frequency of rejoinder.

Dans le tête-à-tête il y a un autre inconvénient que je trouve pire; la nécessité de parler toujours. Quand on vous parle il faut répondre, et si l'on ne dit mot, il faut relever la conversation. Cette insupportable contrainte m'eut seule dégouté de la société. Je ne trouve point de gêne plus terrible que l'obligation de parler sur le champ et toujours. Je ne sais si ceci tient à ma mortelle aversion pour tout assujettissement; mais c'est assez qu'il faille

absolument que je parle pour que je dise une sottise infailliblement (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 115).

The constraint which Rousseau felt in conversation was the result of an acute sensitivity to the presence of the interlocutor. Rousseau perceived each of his interlocutors to be a judge of his conduct and each conversation, a form of trial. As the two previous quotations indicate, conversation, whether within a group or with an individual, implies the strong possibility of an offense or blunder followed immediately by judgment on the part of his interlocutors. Little matter that others actually passed unfavorable verdicts upon him; his volatile imagination generated his guilt feelings. An anecdote from Book VIII of the Confessions illustrates his predicament. While sitting in a café, Rousseau overheard a conversation in which a military officer said to a group of friends that he was acquainted with the author of the recently premiered Devin du village, Jean-Jacques Rousseau; but the man failed to recognize Rousseau who was seated close-by. This situation had a singular effect on Rousseau.

...Tandis qu'il débitoit ses mensonges, je rougissois, je baissois les yeux, j'étois sur les épines; je cherchois quelque fois en moi-même s'il n'y auroit pas moyen de le croire dans l'erreur et de bonne foi (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 377).

Rousseau hurriedly finished his drink, lowered his head, and departed for fear of being recognized.

Je m'aperçus dans la rue que j'étois en sueur, et je suis sûr que si quelqu'un m'eut reconnu et nommé avant ma sortie, on m'auroit vu la honte et l'embarras d'un coupable, par le seul sentiment

de la peine que ce pauvre homme auroit à souffrir si son mensonge étoit reconnu (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 377).

Despite the fact that he was never discovered by the others present and that there was no question of a lie on his part, Rousseau experienced through immediate empathy the shame of culpability. Though he was only a witness of and not a participant in the conversation, he did not identify himself with the officer's interlocutors, the judges, but with the party that compromised itself.

The culpability which Rousseau felt in conversation reveals on a minor scale the guilt which pervaded his entire life and motivated his conduct.<sup>5</sup> The feeling never left him. Not only his interlocutors in conversation but virtually everyone appeared to be judging him, and usually unfavorably. Consequently, much as Rousseau sought to avoid the constraints of conversation, he devoted most of his life to denying the guilt that plagued him. His efforts

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<sup>5</sup>Jean Starobinski's essay on Rousseau in L'Oeil vivant (Paris: Gallimard, 1961, pp. 93-190) analyzes in detail the very complex sociological and psychological causes of Rousseau's overwhelming sense of culpability. Rousseau was first brought up in the oppressive moral atmosphere of calvinist Geneva. All his actions were subject to judgment. The first book of the Confessions, remarks Starobinski, hardly ever shows a misdeed for which Rousseau was not apprehended and punished. Rousseau grew up associating desire, even the most innocuous, with sin. In order to combat this moral anguish, he attributed the condemnation of his desires to others, thus freeing himself from the inner torment of self-condemnation. Starobinski shows how all Rousseau's major works reflect an attempt at escaping the rebuke he ascribed to others. His attitude led him to scorn and avoid society and resulted ultimately in the paranoia of his later years.

to excuse the mendacious officer and convince himself of the latter's sincerity reflects his own pursuit of self-justification and sincerity which characterized much of his literary career, particularly the period of the Confessions, Dialogues, and Rêveries (1764-1778). Similar to his exit from the café in order to avoid being recognized by the officer's interlocutors and experiencing vicariously the braggart's guilt, Rousseau fled the daily company of his contemporaries in order to explain in his writings the moral integrity which he sensed to be his and which society seemed to overlook because of his dour, misanthropic mien in public.

J'aimerois la société comme un autre, si je n'étois sur de m'y montrer non seulement à mon desavantage, mais tout autre que je ne suis. Le parti que j'ai pris d'écrire et me cacher est précisément celui qui me convenoit. Moi présent on n'auroit jamais su ce que je valois, on ne l'auroit pas soupçonné même... (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 116).

Rousseau was convinced that he could show society his true worth through writing for two reasons, both of which concern the notion of hiding (in dealing with individuals, the principle applies to letter writing). First, the act of writing, while still permitting Rousseau to communicate, removed from his presence the intimidating, critical gaze of others. In the absence of those he viewed as judges of his conduct, his feeling of guilt diminished. This phenomenon is well illustrated by another example of Rousseau's aversion for conversation. In his Confessions Rousseau expressed the desire to conduct a conversation through letters:



...je fais d'excellens impromptus à loisir; mais sur le tems je n'ai jamais rien fait ni dit qui vaille. Je ferois une fort jolie conversation par la poste, comme on dit que les Espagnols jouent aux échecs (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 113).

Rousseau preferred writing to conversation because it concealed his mental confusion as he attempted to sort out his ideas and present them cogently. He compared his state of mind while writing to the stage of an Italian opera where disorder is transformed into an impeccable spectacle.

Dans les changemens de scène il régné sur ces grands théâtres un désordre desagréable, et qui dure assez longtems; toutes les décorations sont entre mêlées; on voit de toutes parts un tiraillement qui fait peine; on croit que tout va renverser. Cependant peu à peu tout s'arrange, rien ne manque, et l'on est tout surpris de voir succéder à ce long tumulte un spectacle ravissant. Cette manoeuvre est à peu près celle qui se fait dans mon cerveau quand je veux écrire (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 114).

Though Rousseau was at great pains to organize his thoughts even in writing, the reader saw only the final arrangement of his ideas. Writing provided him the curtain lacking at the Italian theater. The confusion described in this passage is mental in character, but it applies equally well to the moral disorder of Rousseau's guilt-ridden conscience. Conversation aggravated this moral disorder. For Rousseau each conversation represented a confrontation. He felt scrutinized, as though on trial. His analogy of the chess game reveals how inherently antagonistic he thought conversation and all forms of social intercourse to be. Even alone with pen and paper, he never eluded the persistent sense of sin--the disarray of his mind as he wrote, like his distress

in conversation, suggests his consciousness of guilt. But at least in writing, away from the judging interlocutor, Rousseau was free to seek and intelligibly express the good he felt within himself and that others should recognize.<sup>6</sup>

...J'étois sûr qu'à travers mes fautes et mes foiblesses, à travers mon inaptitude à supporter aucun joug, on trouveroit toujours un homme juste, bon, sans fiel, sans haine, sans jalousie, prompt à reconnoitre ses propres torts, plus prompt à oublier ceux d'autrui; cherchant toute sa félicité dans les passions aimantes et douces, et portant en toute chose la sincérité jusqu'à l'imprudence, jusqu'au plus incroyable desintéressement (Confessions, Vol. I, pp. 639-40).

And while writing by its very nature implies the absence of the writer with respect to his reader, the notion of writing in hiding was of exceptional significance to Rousseau. In describing the course of action which best suited him, he placed equal emphasis on writing and hiding: "écrire et me cacher." "Me cacher" refers here to Rousseau's public withdrawal from society. This withdrawal constitutes the second reason for which he felt that writing was the

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<sup>6</sup>To Rousseau the efficacy of communication increased in direct proportion to the degree of his interlocutor's effacement. Robert Ellrich observes that Rousseau's preferences in all verbal communication, oral or written, depended upon the degree to which he was conscious of the presence of his reader or interlocutor. Ellrich suggests a descending order of preference in verbal communication:

...talking to oneself (as Rousseau will understand himself to be doing in his Rêveries); writing highly controlled discourse with no specific reader in mind; writing to a specific reader; talking to friends (as in certain privileged moments with Mme de Warens and Mme d'Houdetot); talking to strangers or enemies (Robert J. Ellrich, "Rousseau and his Reader: The Rhetorical Situation of the Major Works," p. 19.

best means of revealing his true self. Ever since the first Discours (1750) in which he denounced the many evils of society, Rousseau felt compelled to spurn all social conventions and eventually to renounce regular social contacts. He felt that his actions had to remain consistent with his beliefs.<sup>7</sup> To Rousseau the withdrawal was equally as important as writing itself. It was a public withdrawal intended to serve as an example of his profound moral conviction, thus focusing the attention of the public even more upon his works.

Mes livres courroient les villes tandis que leur Auteur ne courroit que les forets. Tout me lisoit, tout me critiquoit, tout parloit de moi, mais dans mon absence; j'étois aussi loin des discours que des hommes; je ne savois rien de ce qu'on disoit... Il y avoit un Rousseau dans le grand monde, et un autre dans la retraite qui ne lui ressembloit en rien (Ebauches des Confessions, Vol. I, p. 1151).

Writing served well the guilt-ridden, but proud Rousseau; it at once concealed him from the gaze of the castigating judge and called attention to him as a lonely seeker of virtue.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. Confessions, Vol. I of Oeuvres complètes pp. 361-65 for the description of Rousseau's "réforme" (1751). It would not be until his retirement to L'Ermitage in 1756 that he would actually leave his friends in Paris, but his reform prepared his eventual departure. The principles which moved him are essentially the same in both instances. Cf. also pp. 401, 416, 417.

<sup>8</sup>"Pour qu'on sache enfin ce qu'il vaut," writes Jean Starobinski, "Jean-Jacques s'éloigne et se met à composer des livres, de la musique...Il confie son être (sa personnalité) à un paraître d'une autre sorte, qui n'est plus son corps, son visage, sa parole concrète, mais le message pathétique d'un absent. Il compose ainsi une image de lui-même, qui s'imposera aux autres à la fois

For all its advantages, writing was not without its drawbacks. Guilt often continued to plague Rousseau as he wrote; and the reader, though less conspicuous than an interlocutor, also assumed the role of judge. Merely replacing the interlocutor for an absent reader was insufficient to make writing a panacea. If Rousseau was to benefit from the solitude provided by writing, his mental image of the reader had to be one of a sympathetic or at least tolerant individual. Concerning his personal correspondence for example, Rousseau would not answer a letter if he felt his reader was angry with him. Since Rousseau often procrastinated in answering, he assumed that his reader had taken offense.

L'exactitude à écrire a toujours été au dessus de mes forces; sitot que je commence à me relâcher, la honte, et l'embarras de reparer ma faute me la font aggraver, et je n'écris plus du tout (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 281).

In literary works, the very form or style Rousseau

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par le prestige de l'absence et par la vibration de la sentence écrite" (Jean-Jacques Rousseau: la transparence et l'obstacle, p. 155). Starobinski's celebrated interpretation of Rousseau's work in terms of transparency and obstacle points up the tendency implicit in Rousseau's writing to present to the reader his own view of himself--which he considers to be the truth--while concealing his outward behavior--which he believes conceals his true nature. "Rousseau désire la communication et la transparence des coeurs; mais il est frustré dans son attente et, choisissant la voie contraire, il accepte--et suscite--l'obstacle, qui lui permet de se replier dans la résignation passive et dans la certitude de son innocence" (p. 11). For Rousseau, writing implies both transparency, because it communicates, and obstacle, because it provides him the solitude to meditate upon and convince himself of his goodness, his true self. "Paradoxalement, il se cachera pour mieux se montrer, et il se confiera à la parole écrite" (p. 154).



associated with any of his writings was enough to exacerbate his sense of inadequacy.

...Je réussis mieux aux ouvrages qui demandent du travail, qu'à ceux qui veulent être faits avec une certaine légèreté, comme les lettres; genre dont je n'ai jamais pu prendre le ton, et dont l'occupation me met au supplice. Je n'écris point de lettres sur les moindres sujets qui ne me coûtent des heures de fatigue, ou si je veux écrire de suite ce qui me vient, je ne sais ni commencer ni finir, ma lettre est un long et confus verbiage; à peine m'entend-on quand on la lit (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 114).

Letters, or any other form of writing, is unpleasant to Rousseau only when he is conscious of having to comply with stylistic rules. These rules imply a reader who judges the writer's success in adhering to them. Under these circumstances even letters, which normally appeal to Rousseau as a means of avoiding the disturbing presence of one judge, the interlocutor, force him to direct his attention to another. As in conversation, a form of communication which also demands "une certaine légèreté," Rousseau must court the approval of others on their terms. The result too is the same: incoherence and the appearance of insipience.

However, works "qui demandent du travail," that is, ones that permitted Rousseau to concentrate his efforts on the subject matter, his ideas, rather than on the criteria imposed by others, allowed himself to be the judge of his work, at least while in the act of writing. He felt free to be himself. Rousseau experienced this freedom in the letters of La Nouvelle Héloïse. His opinion of the fictional letters contrasts sharply with that of his real correspondence:

Si vous les lisez [les lettres] comme l'ouvrage d'un Auteur qui veut plaire, ou qui se pique d'écrire, elles sont détestables. Mais prenez-les pour ce qu'elles sont, et jugez-les dans leur espece. Deux ou trois jeunes gens simples, mais sensibles, s'entretiennent entr'eux des intérêts de leur coeurs. Ils ne songent point à briller aux yeux les uns des autres. Ils se connoissent et s'aiment trop mutuellement pour que l'amour-propre n'ait plus rien à faire entr'eux. Ils sont enfans, penseront-ils en hommes? Ils sont étrangers, écriront-ils correctement? Ils sont solitaires, connoîtront-ils le monde et la société? Pleins du seul sentiment qui les occupe, ils sont dans le délire, et pensent philosopher. Voulez-vous qu'ils sachent observer, juger, réfléchir? Ils ne savent rien de tout cela. (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Seconde Préface, Vol. II, pp. 16-17).

Writing the letters of Julie and Saint Preux gave Rousseau the sympathy and tolerance he sought. He invites the reader of the novel to judge the letters as his characters do, "dans leur espèce." There is no need to sacrifice true feelings to "amour-propre," that need to think and act in accord with the criteria established by society. Julie and Saint Preux write with the attitude that Rousseau sought to assume in real life: "pleins du seul sentiment qui les occupe..." In the letters of La Nouvelle Héloïse Rousseau could take full advantage of the solitude of writing because he could present his thoughts in a manner that suited his conception of them, and not one that appealed to literary vogue.

Rousseau's whole career reflected his inability to write in deference to literary fashion and his need to choose forms which set him apart from other men and the criteria by which they are judged. In his early years as a writer

(1740's), he tried his hand at light verse and at works for the stage. Since the seventeenth century the theater remained virtually the standard for literary success. But with the exception of his opera Le Devin du village (1752), Rousseau achieved no success in the traditional genres. It was only those characteristics which set the letters of La Nouvelle Héloïse apart from conventional correspondence--the feeling of independence from the reader and of communion with his own feelings and ideas--that enabled Rousseau to write successfully.

Rousseau's first two literary triumphs, Le Discours sur les sciences et les arts (1750) and Le Discours sur l'inégalité (1755), though written in the traditional, highly rigid oratorical form, gave Rousseau a sense of liberation from many of the standards of society. In attacking all that the Enlightenment held in absolute esteem--its institutions, art, science, customs, and tastes--Rousseau placed himself in a position to pass judgment on the guilt of society. As a result of his famous "illumination" in 1749, an experience in which he became "un autre homme," the discourses gave him the sensation of oneness with truth and with himself. He described the period as one of unprecedented self-confidence in his bearing and self-expression. He had the exhilarating feeling of moral and literary superiority.

J'étois vraiment transformé; mes amis, mes connaissances ne me reconnoissoient plus. Je n'étois plus cet homme timide et plustôt honteux que modeste,



qui n'osoit ni se présenter ni parler; qu'un mot badin déconcertoit, qu'un regard de femme faisoit rougir. Audacieux, fier, intrépide, je portois par tout une assurance d'autant plus ferme qu'elle étoit simple et résidoit dans mon ame plus que dans mon maintien. Le mépris que mes profondes méditations m'avoient inspiré pour les moeurs, les maximes et les préjugés de mon siècle me rendoit insensible aux railleries de ceux qui les avoient, et j'écrasois leurs petits bons-mots avec mes sentences, comme j'écraserois un insecte entre mes doigts (Confessions, Vol. I, pp. 416-17).

Rousseau attained a similar sense of ascendancy in L'Emile and Le Contrat social. These works laid the basis for a new society, one in which the defects he previously criticized were absent. In them Rousseau assumed, as author, the admirable roles of tutor and legislator described therein. Rather than feeling guilt and inadequacy before his fellow man, Rousseau, as he wrote these works, felt himself to be a leader of men and a figure to be admired. In the autobiographical works, Rousseau is on the defensive with respect to his readers, repeatedly attempting to justify himself in their eyes. The public seemed hostile. In order to blot out the distressing image of a reproachful reader and to enable him to explain himself in his own way, Rousseau simply replaced this reader in his mind with another. In writing the Confessions the vision of his reader as a distant posterity reassured him in his endeavor. "...Cet ouvrage ne pouvant paroître qu'après ma mort et celle de beaucoup d'autres, cela m'enhardissoit davantage à faire mes confessions dont jamais je n'aurois à rougir devant personne" (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 517). In the Dialogues the

interlocutor "Le François" represents the reading public. In the presence of this interlocutor Rousseau rends himself in two, the one examining the other (Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jaques as the actual title suggests), in order to find the reason, the mysterious sin, for which everyone seems bent on persecuting him. Having created, in a sense, his own reader, Rousseau succeeded in securing his support at the end of the *Troisième Dialogue*. But even the process of having to convince an imaginary reader was for Rousseau a "douloureuse tâche" (*Dialogues*, Vol. I, p. 977), for throughout the *Dialogues* Rousseau had to imagine "Le François" imbued with the prejudices of society toward himself. The search for a totally cooperative reader reached its logical conclusion with the *Rêveries*. In this work Rousseau himself became the intended reader.

...Je n'écris mes rêveries que pour moi. Si dans mes plus vieux jours aux approches du départ, je reste, comme je l'espère, dans la même disposition où je suis, leur lecture me rapellera la douceur que je goûte à les écrire, et faisant renaître ainsi pour moi le tems passé doublera pour ainsi dire mon existence. En dépit des hommes je saurai goûter encore le charme de la société et je vivrai decrepit avec moi dans un autre age, comme je vivrois avec un moins vieux ami (*Rêveries*, Vol. I, p. 1001).

In this "dédoublement"--both writer and reader--Rousseau attained not only the solitude which he needed to express himself clearly and persuasively, as suggested by the statement in the *Confessions* of his decision to write and to hide, but also the solace of a sympathetic reader, one who sees himself as he does and grants approval.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Rousseau's preference for writing as a means of

Though this "dédoublement" as writer and reader occurred only in the last two years of Rousseau's life, the choice of the epistolary form for La Nouvelle Héloïse represented an earlier stage in the same process. The appeal of the letters lay in their capacity to provide him not only a sympathetic reader, but a loving one. For the letters that were to become La Nouvelle Héloïse were originally Rousseau's imaginary correspondence with the woman of his dreams, not an attempt to write a formal epistolary novel. To borrow Carol Blum's apt phrase, Rousseau did not choose to put his novel into epistolary form but put his letters into novel form.<sup>10</sup> According to Rousseau's account of the early

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avoiding the gaze of others who pass judgment on him and of explaining himself to his contemporaries, whether expressed through his desire for a "conversation par la poste" or through his choice of forms which suited him and not public taste alone, attests to what Robert Ellrich calls the author's "other-mind problem." Ellrich treats Rousseau's principal works as successive attempts by Rousseau to flee the ever present reader in order to achieve a more perfect description of himself. No matter what he wrote, Rousseau felt he was misunderstood. Ellrich demonstrates that each of Rousseau's ensuing attempts to dispel the misunderstanding was an effort at substituting the real reader (the reading public that actually read and at times adversely judged his works) with an ideal reader (one who would understand and judge Rousseau as Rousseau himself did).

He senses that there exists an "other-mind problem," and that the capacities of the real reader to understand are limited, but keeps the uncomfortable recognition at bay through evasive tactics: the nourishment of a fantasy of a perfect reader, with whom he can enjoy complete solidarity; the simple rejection of the uncooperative reader; and the exclusion of the reader through adoption of a form in which he cannot be addressed directly.

"Rousseau and his Reader," p. 42.

<sup>10</sup>Carol Blum, "La Nouvelle Héloïse: An Act in the Life of Jean-Jacques Rousseau," L'Esprit Créateur, Fall, 1969.

development of the novel, he alone was to be the reader of Julie and Saint Preux's letters, not his reading public. Rousseau wished to enjoy for himself the fantasy of lovers who exchange letters. A brief examination of Book IX of the Confessions<sup>11</sup> will reveal that it was Rousseau's attempt at making real and enjoying the fantasy he created by imagining himself as both writer and reader that determined the choice of the epistolary form.

In the spring of 1756, Rousseau went to l'Ermitage outside Paris, hoping to find there serenity and happiness. In the idyllic atmosphere of l'Ermitage Rousseau's thoughts turned immediately to love. However, there was no one he knew whom he could love nor who could love him precisely in the total, uncompromising way he desired.

...L'impossibilité d'atteindre aux êtres réels me jeta dans le pays des chimères, et ne voyant rien d'existant qui fut digne de mon délire, je le nourris dans un monde idéal que mon imagination créatrice eut bientôt peuplé d'êtres selon mon coeur (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 427).

This rather vague "pays des chimères" and "monde idéal" inhabited by "des êtres selon [son] coeur" became in time more precise as Rousseau became more acquainted, as it were, with his imagined friends. He pictured two girls, one blonde and one brunette. Both were attractive, virtuous, and

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<sup>11</sup>Cf. Henri Guillemin, "Les Affaires de l'Ermitage," Annales Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Vol. XXIX, pp. 59-258 and Robert Osmont, "Remarques sur la genèse de la composition de La Nouvelle Héloïse," Annales Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Vol. XXXIII, pp. 93-148 for detailed analyses of the development of La Nouvelle Héloïse.

the closest of friends. Rousseau then placed himself in the midst of the two girls by giving one of them a lover who acted as his alter ego.

Epris de mes deux charmans modèles, je m'identifiois avec l'amant et l'ami le plus qu'il m'étoit possible; mais je le fis aimable et jeune, lui donnant au surplus les vertus et les défauts que je me sentoies (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 430).

After having given himself entirely to this fantasy for three or four months and having elaborated his daydreams (he gave his imaginary world a specific setting: the little town of Vevey on the shores of Lake Geneva), Rousseau committed them to paper. This act represented an effort at actualizing them. Not only was he visualizing attractive situations for his imaginary love, but by writing a correspondence he had the impression of participating in it.

Ces fictions, à force de revenir prirent enfin plus de consistance et se fixèrent dans mon cerveau sous une forme déterminée. Ce fut alors que la fantaisie me prit d'exprimer sur le papier quelques unes des situations qu'elles m'offroient, et rappelant tout ce que j'avois senti dans ma jeunesse, de donner ainsi l'essor en quelque sorte au désir d'aimer que je n'avois pu satisfaire, et dont je me sentoies dévoré (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 431).

Identifying himself with "l'ami" as he wrote, Rousseau experienced actual contact with a remarkable woman. Were not the letters he could see before him real? Did not they confirm the existence of the beings he imagined? He had only to reread them, and the real world disappeared and was replaced by "des êtres selon [son] coeur."

Replacing real societies with imaginary ones was one of his favorite pastimes:

Je trouve mieux mon compte avec les êtres chimeriques que je rassemble autour de moi qu'avec ceux que je vois dans le monde, et la société dont mon imagination fait les frais dans ma retraite achève de me dégouter de toutes celles que j'ai quittées (Let-  
tres à Malesherbes, Vol. I, p. 1131).

Letters simply gave an added measure of reality to this pastime. It is especially noteworthy that Rousseau chose letters and not a first or third person narration in order to record his fantasy. "Je jettai d'abord sur le papier quelques lettres éparses sans suite et sans liaison..." (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 431). The choice seems automatic, almost instinctive. When Rousseau decided to give form to his fantasy, writing became an integral part of the fantasy itself. The characters he depicted not only love one another, but also express that love in writing. However, in light of the fact that Rousseau considered writing a means of improving, even idealizing social relationships, the presence of letters in his ideal society seems quite normal. Communicating with others through writing reduced hostility and guilt. These flaws, or anything that might cause them, were specifically excluded from his imaginary love affair. "...Je n'admis ni rivalité ni querelles ni jalousie, parce que tout sentiment pénible me coûte à imaginer, et que je ne voulois ternir ce riant tableau par rien qui dégradât la nature" (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 430). Rousseau equated nature with goodness, the absence of sin. Because he associated all physical desire, and especially sexual desire, with sin and its attendant guilt, letters were a necessary

and convenient way of averting sexual contact and of purifying love while still expressing it.

Writing to the woman he loved was a very attractive situation for Rousseau. "Je me souviens qu'une fois Made de Luxembourg me parloit en raillant d'un homme qui quittoit sa maitresse pour lui écrire. Je lui dis que j'aurois bien été cet homme-là, et j'aurois pû ajouter que je l'avois été quelquefois" (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 181). Rousseau often felt inferior in the presence of a woman to whom he was attracted, and writing was often the only way he could declare himself. The rich and influential Mme Dupin was one such woman.

Si son maintien réservé n'attiroit pas beaucoup les jeunes gens, sa société d'autant mieux composée n'en étoit que plus imposante, et le pauvre J. J. n'avoit pas dequoi se flatter de briller beaucoup au milieu de tout cela. Je n'osai donc parler, mais ne pouvant plus me taire j'osai écrire (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 292).

His initiative in this instance failed. However, letters played an important part in the one great love affair of Rousseau's life.

In January of 1757, while still preoccupied with the letters of La Nouvelle Héloïse, Rousseau was visited at l'Ermitage by the Countess Sophie d'Houdetot. Rousseau was taken with the young woman and soon became infatuated with her. He identified her with his Julie.

Elle vint, je la vis, j'étois ivre d'amour sans objet, cette ivresse fascina mes yeux, cet objet se fixa sur elle, je vis ma Julie en Made d'Houdetot, et bientôt je ne vis plus que Made d'Houdetot, mais revêtue de toutes les perfections dont je venois d'orner l'idole de mon coeur (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 440).

The shame he felt because of his desire for her made him insecure in her presence. One of the signs of this insecurity was his inability to tell Sophie of his love.

La honte compagne du mal me rendit muet tremblant devant elle; je n'osois ouvrir la bouche ni lever les yeux; j'étois dans un trouble inexprimable qu'il étoit impossible qu'elle ne vit pas. Je pris le parti de le lui avouer, et de lui en laisser deviner la cause: c'étoit la lui dire assez clairement (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 441).

As was the case in most of his amorous relationships (with Mme de Warens and Mme Basile for example), the woman had to take the initiative. In this instance, Rousseau left it to Mme d'Houdetot to deduce that his agitation was the result of his love for her. And if he could not speak of love to her, sexual advances were virtually unthinkable. Forced to sublimate his passion, he began to worship her as a symbol of virtue that physical possession would destroy. Adherence to this ideal produced severe emotional and sexual tension.

"...Je ne sentois plus auprès d'elle que l'importunité d'une vigueur inépuisable et toujours inutile" (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 445). Frustrated by his inability to control the direction of their relationship, Rousseau, even while on his way to see Sophie, took to writing love letters in order to vent his turbulent emotions. "Pour me distraire j'essayois d'écrire avec mon crayon des billets que j'aurois pu tracer du plus pur de mon sang..." (Confessions, Vol. I, pp. 445-46). In such letters Rousseau expressed the passion he dared not voice in her presence. Their purpose was in part cathartic and therapeutic. Many of the letters were



never sent. The writing of his feelings was at times more important than the actual communication of the message. But while his letters to Sophie relieved his emotional stress, they also represented his efforts at becoming the interpreter of the idealistic love he felt their relationship should symbolize, a love springing from their mutual devotion to virtue. They were a means of disavowing his sometimes indiscreet behavior when alone with her in order to emphasize the moral excellence of his principles.

...Si je n'ai pu contenir de même mes discours, mes regards, mes ardens desires, de quoi peux-tu m'accuser si ce n'est de m'être engagé pour te plaire à plus que la force humaine ne peut tenir? Sophie, j'aimai trente ans la vertu. Ah! crois-tu que j'aye déjà le coeur endurci au crime? Non, mes remords égalent mes transports; c'est tout dire. Mais pourquoi ce coeur se livroit-il aux légères faveurs que tu daignois m'accorder, tandis que son murmure effrayant me détournait si fortement d'un attentat plus téméraire? Tu le sais, toi qui vis mes égaremens, si même alors, ta personne me fut sacrée! Jamais mes ardens desires, jamais mes tendres supplications n'osèrent un instant solliciter le bonheur suprême que je ne me sentisse arrêté par les cris intérieurs d'une ame épouvantée. Cette voix terrible qui ne trompe point me faisoit frémir à la seule idée de souiller de parjure et d'infidélité celle que j'aime, celle que je voudrois voir aussi parfaite que l'image que j'en porte au fond de mon coeur, celle qui doit m'être inviolable à tant de titres. J'aurois donné l'univers pour un moment de félicité: mais t'avilir, Sophie! ah, non, il n'est pas possible, et quand j'en serois le maitre, je t'aime trop pour te posséder jamais.<sup>12</sup>

In effect, Rousseau created through his letters a love based on good intentions. Whereas these honorable

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<sup>12</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Correspondance complète, ed. R. A. Leigh (Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1967), Vol. IV, p. 277.

intentions expressed the essential goodness of his character, his speech and actions, for which he felt guilt, were mere accidents. They reflected extremely difficult circumstances which were not indicative of his true nature. Through letters Rousseau elevated himself to the same pedestal of virtue upon which he had placed Sophie. Unable to succeed sexually, he tried to dominate her morally and intellectually. These efforts were particularly evident in the series of six Lettres Morales which Rousseau wrote to Sophie and hoped some day to publish with her permission. These letters constituted, as their title suggests, moral lessons with Rousseau as teacher.

...C'est maintenant mon tour, ô Sophie, c'est à moi de vous rendre le prix de vos soins, puisque vous avez conservé mon ame aux vertus qui vous sont chères, je veux pénétrer le vôtre de celles qui lui sont peut être encore inconnues. Que je m'estime heureux de n'avoir jamais prostitué ma plume ni ma bouche au mensonge, je m'en sens moins indigne d'être aujourd'hui près de vous l'organe de la vérité (Lettres Morales, Vol. IV, p. 1081).

This last sentence reflects the great extent to which Rousseau depended upon his abilities as a writer to assist him in courting Mme d'Houdetot. Writing to Sophie became such an integral part of his relationship with her that he considered his letters to be the sole convincing testimony to the sublimity of his love for her. When in the late summer of 1757 Mme d'Houdetot, upon the return of Saint-Lambert from the army, requested that Rousseau return her letters to her and destroyed the letters she received from him, Rousseau felt that the very existence of his love was negated.

Elle me redemanda ses lettres; je les lui rendis toutes avec une fidélité dont elle me fit l'injure de douter un moment....Elle ne pouvoit retirer ses lettres sans me rendre les miennes. Elle me dit qu'elle les avoit brulées; j'en osai douter à mon tour, et j'avoue que j'en doute encore [1770]. Non l'on ne met point au feu de pareilles lettres. On a trouvé brulantes celles de la Julie. Eh Dieu! qu'auroit-on donc dit de celles-là? Non, non, jamais celle qui peut inspirer une pareille passion n'aura le courage d'en bruler les preuves.... Si ces lettres sont encore en être, et qu'un jour elles soient vues, on connoitra comment j'ai aimé (Confessions, Vol. I, pp. 463-64).

The factors which governed the choice of the epistolary form of La Nouvelle Héloïse were more personal than literary (essentially, the important role of writing in alleviating Rousseau's problems in dealing with society and the genesis of La Nouvelle Héloïse from a very private fantasy enjoyed through the use of letters). Literary considerations were a troublesome afterthought, the original purpose of the letters being to simulate an intimate personal relationship with "des êtres selon [son] coeur." Rousseau experienced great difficulty in logically arranging the letters of Parts I and II. "...Lorsque je m'avisai de les vouloir coudre j'y fus souvent fort embarrassé" (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 431). The personal nature of his choice resulted in a marked penchant on the part of Julie and Saint Preux for the written word in expressing their love, a penchant reflected in the serious infractions of the epistolary convention of distance.

"...Employons à nous écrire," writes Julie, "les momens que nous ne pouvons passer à nous voir" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 52). Julie makes an important

distinction here on the manner in which she and Saint Preux spend their time together in the home of her parents at Vevai. There is a time for expressing themselves verbally and a time for being together. The distinction implies more than an economy of time, and writing is more than a supplement for conversation. They seem to reserve their correspondence for the expression of their personal feelings, their inner being. Saint Preux, while traveling in his native country, writes to Julie:

Je ne vous ferai point ici un détail de mon voyage et de mes remarques; j'en ai fait une relation que je compte vous porter. Il faut réserver notre correspondance pour les choses qui nous touchent de plus près l'un et l'autre. Je me contenterai de vous parler de la situation de mon ame: il est juste de vous rendre compte de l'usage qu'on fait de votre bien (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 76).

Little mention is made throughout La Nouvelle Héloïse of conversations in which Julie and Saint Preux discuss intimate matters.<sup>13</sup> In their moments together they seem singularly taciturn on the subject of their love. The letter which Saint Preux writes to Julie immediately after their "nuit d'amour" reveals how infrequent were their words when alone together.

Rend-moi cette étroite union des ames, que tu m'avois annoncée et que tu m'as si bien fait goûter. Rend-moi cet abattement si doux rempli par les effusions de nos coeurs; rend-moi ce sommeil enchanteur trouvé sur ton sein; rend-moi ce réveil plus délicieux encore, et ces

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<sup>13</sup>One notable exception is found in Part IV, Letter XVII. Saint Preux describes to Milord Edouard a trip to Meillerie during which he speaks of his love to Julie.

soupirs entrecoupés, et ces douces larmes, et ces baisers qu'une voluptueuse langueur nous faisoit lentement savourer, et ces gemissemens si tendres, durant lesquels tu pressois sur ton coeur ce coeur fait pour s'unir à lui (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 148).

The absence of speech at such a sensitive moment is understandable; words are superfluous. Yet even though Julie is quite aware of what transpired during the meeting in question and Saint Preux sees her frequently enough to inform her of the feelings this "union des ames" inspired in him, he communicates his experience in writing. His purpose seems to be more than the communication of his impressions of their mutual experience. His letter here is a means of transcending the physical limitations of time. In his poetic refrain, "rend-moi," he attempts to renew and prolong, for himself and Julie, an exquisite but evanescent experience.

In another letter that describes an event at which both were present, Saint Preux clearly tries to recreate an ephemeral experience, in this case the kiss given him by Julie in the "bosquet."

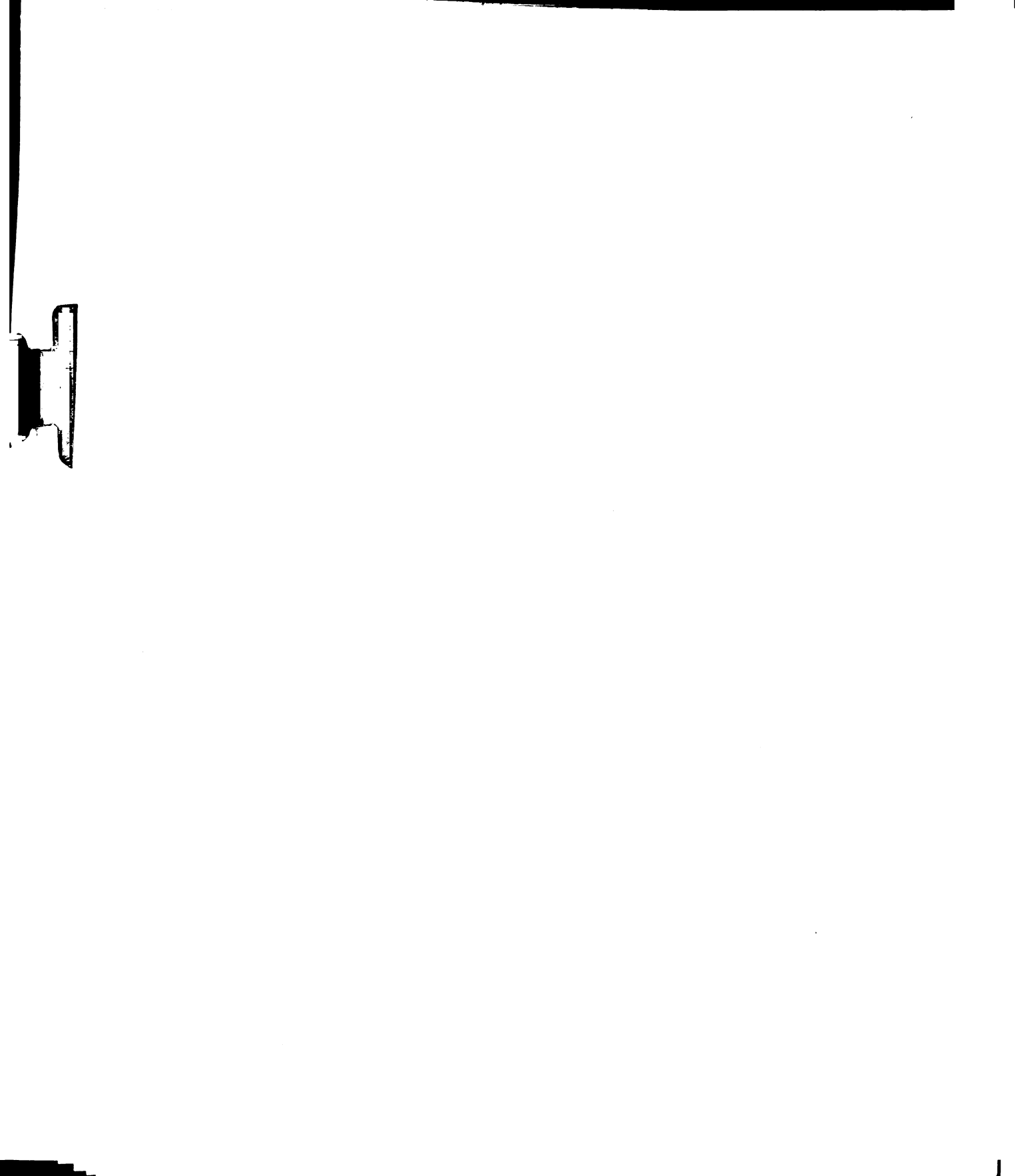
Mais que devins-je...quand je sentis.....la main me tremble.....un doux frémissement.....ta bouche de roses.....la bouche de Julie.....se poser, se presser sur la mienne, et mon corps serré dans tes bras? Non, le feu du ciel n'est pas plus vif ni plus prompt que celui qui vint à l'instant m'embraser. Toutes les parties de moi même se rassemblerent sous ce toucher délicieux. Le feu s'exhaloit avec nos soupirs de nos levres brulantes, et mon coeur se mouroit sous le poids de la volupté....quand tout à coup je te vis pâlir, fermer tes beaux yeux, t'apuyer sur ta cousine, et tomber en défaillance. Ainsi la frayeur éteignit le plaisir, et mon bonheur ne fut qu'un éclair (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, pp. 64-65).

The breathless tension of the situation is reflected in the short fragmented sentences. Every moment of the episode is described so that sentiments left unspoken at the time are placed into their context. Both for Julie and Saint Preux, the written account of this experience acts as a limited but real compensation for a lost moment of happiness.

Besides being a method of recapturing past experiences, writing becomes a substitute for actual contact between Julie and Saint Preux. Julie confesses to a compulsion to devote every free moment of solitude to correspondence with her lover.

Mon ami je sens que je m'attache à vous chaque jour davantage; je ne puis plus me séparer de vous, la moindre absence m'est insupportable, et il faut que je vous voye ou que je vous écrive, afin de m'occuper de vous sans cesse (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 54).

With the aid of imagination, writing letters is a means of summoning her absent lover. This is precisely the purpose of Saint Preux's letter to Julie which he writes in her room in order to relieve the anguish of solitude (Part I, Letter LIV), unquestionably the most unconventional and unrealistic letter of the entire novel. Alone for the first time in Julie's room, excited by these unusual and suggestive surroundings, Saint Preux needs an outlet for his emotions. The act of writing functions as this safety valve. Though Julie is soon to arrive, he cannot seem to resist immediately addressing his feelings to Julie on paper.



Quel bonheur d'avoir trouvé de l'encre et du papier!  
 J'exprime ce que je sens pour en tempérer l'excès,  
 je donne le change à mes transports en les décrivant  
 (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 147).

Referring to this particular passage, Robert Ellrich observes that for Saint Preux writing is an auto-erotic act.<sup>14</sup> "Donner le change à la nature," notes Ellrich, was the eighteenth century euphemism for masturbation. Indeed, some of Saint Preux's remarks in this letter indicate that he is engaging in an auto-erotic fantasy. At one point, his imagination runs rampant at the sight of Julie's clothes.

Toutes les parties de ton habillement éparses  
 présentent à mon ardente imagination celles de  
 toi-même qu'elles recellent.... Cet heureux  
 fichu contre lequel une fois au moins je n'aurai  
 point à murmurer;...ces mules si mignonnes qu'un  
 pied souple remplit sans peine; ce corps si délié  
 qui touche et embrasse.....quelle taille enchan-  
 teresse.....au devant deux légers contours.....  
 ô spectacle de volupté....la baleine a cédé à la  
 force de l'impression.....empreintes délicieuses,  
 que je vous baise mille fois!....Dieux! Dieux!  
 que sera-ce quand.....Ah, je crois déjà sentir  
 ce tendre coeur battre sous une heureuse main  
 (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 147)!

Saint Preux seems to be writing his sentiments almost auto-  
 matically. He does not put aside his pen until after Julie  
 appears. This incredible letter is an example of Julie and  
 Saint Preux's need to express their feelings in letters  
 carried to a state of obsession.

Such exaggerated uses of correspondence cannot be  
 simply dismissed as aberrations of the epistolary form.  
 Certainly, they remain serious infractions of conventional

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<sup>14</sup>Ellrich, "Rousseau and his Reader," p. 21.



epistolary form and diminish the verisimilitude of the novel. Jean-Louis Lecercle argues that these irregularities in the epistolary situation are due primarily to the inherent rigors of the epistolary form.<sup>15</sup> The writer must narrate a story to his reader at the same time as one character writes to another. The reasons Rousseau offers as justification for these technical errors (such as the statement in Letter LIV of Part I: "Je donne le change à mes transports en les décrivant") are unconvincing. They seem to draw only more attention to the improbability of the situation. However, inasmuch as these faults in the epistolary conventions are accountable in large part to Julie and Saint Preux's affinity for the written word, and the result of a similar affinity for writing on Rousseau's part, the causes which determine the infractions in the convention of distance govern the function of all Julie and Saint Preux's letters throughout the novel. As revealed in their strikingly unconventional uses of letters, Julie and Saint Preux do not correspond simply because they are apart and wish to convey information. They write to fulfill an emotional need. If Julie and Saint Preux write even when they could speak, it *is* because they need to be separated in order to express *their* love. The distance implicit in correspondence is *self-* imposed; it is internal rather than external.

*Si j'ose former des voeux extrêmes ce n'est plus  
qu'en votre absence; mes desirs n'osant aller*

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<sup>15</sup>Lecercle, Rousseau et l'art du roman, p. 126.

**jusqu'à vous s'adressent à votre image, et c'est sur elle que je me venge du respect que je suis contraint de vous porter (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, pp. 53-54).**

**Saint Preux's words convey Rousseau's ideal conditions for self-expression: hiding and writing. Apart from Julie, Saint Preux need not dwell upon the sinfulness of his desires, desires he must usually mask by respect; and he may address himself, as in a letter, to an imagined, idealized Julie who responds favorably to his desires. The need to imagine a more compliant Julie resembles Rousseau's own need to create an ideal reader. Just as Rousseau's life represents a long search for perfect self-expression in writing, so the story of Julie and Saint Preux's love is inseparable from the drama of their efforts at expressing that love.**

## CHAPTER II

### THE FUNCTION OF THE EPISTOLARY FORM IN LA NOUVELLE HELOISE

In speaking of Les Liaisons Dangereuses, Tzvetan Todorov states: "...The letter here is more than a mere technique, it figures as an important element of the world that is evoked. The best proof of this is that one cannot even give an account of the plot without mentioning these letters... All of the important turning points in the plot can be said to be bound to the verbal phenomenon of the letter."<sup>1</sup> The same may be said about the letters of La Nouvelle Héloïse. The epistolary situation constitutes an important element of the fictional situation. Variations in the correspondence of Julie and Saint Preux follow the vicissitudes of their love affair. Throughout the novel, their letters are a modus amandi. Although the letters of Parts II through VI, As William Mead has observed<sup>2</sup>, do not resemble real letters as much as those of Part I, their meaning in the novel is not dependent primarily upon epistolary verisimilitude.

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<sup>1</sup>Tzvetan Todorov, "The Discovery of Language: Les Liaisons Dangereuses and Adolphe," Yale French Studies, No. 45, 1970, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau ou le romancier enchaîné, p. 54.

The letters of La Nouvelle Héloïse function within the story itself in terms of the connotation which Rousseau gives to the act of writing in general and to letter writing in particular, a connotation apart from the meaning of the written words themselves: being able to separate himself from the judging gaze of others and to remain in contact with others at the same time. From the very first line of his initial letter to Julie, Saint Preux is conscious of the necessity of separation: "Il faut vous fuir, Mademoiselle." The need for separation arises from Saint Preux's respect for Julie's high moral character; for although his letter is an avowal of love which constitutes an increase in intimacy over their relationship as tutor and pupil, it is her virtuous behavior more than her physical beauty which attracts him. Saint Preux writes in the same letter:

Non, belle Julie; vos attraits avoient ébloui mes yeux, jamais ils n'eussent égaré mon coeur, sans l'attrait plus puissant qui les anime. C'est cette union touchante d'une sensibilité si vive et d'une inaltérable douceur, c'est cette pitié si tendre à tous les maux d'autrui, c'est cet esprit juste et ce goût exquis qui tirent leur pureté de celle de l'ame, ce sont, en un mot, les charmes des sentimens bien plus que ceux de la personne, que j'a-dore en vous. Je consens qu'on vous puisse imaginer plus belle encore; mais plus aimable et plus digne du coeur d'un honnête homme, non Julie, il n'est pas possible (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 32).

Since virtue is the source of Julie's charm, Saint Preux finds himself in a serious predicament. Any surrender to the desire for physical love compromises the virtuous qualities upon which love is dependent; and, by the same

token, any excessive adherence to the precepts of virtue excludes all sexual satisfaction. The danger of sharing a relationship under these conditions is exemplified later in the novel (Part I, Letter XXIX) when Julie surrenders her virginity to Saint Preux. Julie, who for her part is attracted to Saint Preux by his commitment to moral rectitude, grants him this favor out of admiration and pity for his respectful continence.

Cent fois mes yeux furent témoins de ses combats et de sa victoire; les siens étincelloient du feu de ses desirs, il s'élançoit vers moi dans l'impétuosité d'un transport aveugle; il s'arrêtoit tout à coup; une barrière insurmontable sembloit m'avoir entourée, et jamais son amour impétueux mais honnête ne l'eut franchie... Je le vis dans des agitations convulsives, prêt à s'évanouir à mes pieds. Peut-être l'amour seul m'auroit épargnée; Ô ma Cousine, c'est la pitié qui me perdit (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 96).

Virtue and love seem so inseparable that their basic incompatibility is obscured. Julie deceives herself by presuming them to be identical. "Il sembloit que ma passion funeste vouloit se couvrir pour me séduire du masque de toutes les vertus" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 96). The result of her error is shame, remorse, and the jeopardy of both love and virtue. Saint Preux's first letter represents an attempt at resolving this dilemma.

For Saint Preux, who neither wishes to leave nor offend Julie by a face-to-face avowal of his feelings, a letter permits him to achieve a respectful distance and to convey his heretofore unspoken love. His letter draws him away from Julie so that he may communicate with her more

intimately than before and is thus a more effective stratagem. The reverential indirectness of Saint Preux's means of approach invites Julie to commit herself. Saint Preux asks her to decide his fate. She must permit him to stay with full cognizance of his true sentiments or banish him.

Si la commiseration naturelle aux ames bien nées peut vous attendrir sur les peines d'un infortuné auquel vous avez témoigné quelque estime, de legers changemens dans votre conduite rendront sa situation moins violente, et lui feront supporter plus paisiblement et son silence et ses maux: si sa retenue et son état ne vous touchent pas, et que vous vouliez user du droit de le perdre, vous le pouvez sans qu'il en murmure... (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 34).

In writing to Julie, Saint Preux has established a pattern in dealing with the problem of love and virtue. For throughout the novel, letters serve to relieve the anguishing effects of the dilemma upon the lovers as they endeavor to resolve it. In this function the letters exchanged by Julie and Saint Preux reflect every major development in their affair. The opening letter announces the novel's first crisis: the confession of love. With each ensuing crisis, there occurs a concomitant modification in the role of their correspondence. It is these modifications in the epistolary form of La Nouvelle Héloïse and their significance with respect to the story of Julie and Saint Preux that will now be examined.

In the period immediately following Julie's response to Saint Preux's amorous overtures (Part I, Letters V through XIII), the function of their letters resembles that

of the first letter. Their correspondence is a means of exploring each other's feelings and intentions while preserving a distance conducive to proper conduct. Most of their comments deal with the joys and difficulties which result from the delicate balance of love and virtue.

Que je la relise mille fois, cette lettre adorable où ton amour et tes sentimens sont écrits en caractères de feu; où malgré tout l'emportement d'un coeur agité, je vois avec transport combien dans une ame honnête les passions les plus vives gardent encore le saint caractère de la vertu (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, pp. 41-42).

Saint Preux, however, feels unfulfilled even in the knowledge that Julie respects and loves him.

Quels sont, belle Julie, les bizarres caprices de l'amour? Mon coeur a plus qu'il n'esperoit, et n'est pas content. Vous m'aimez, vous me le dites, et je soupire. Ce coeur injuste ose desirer encore, quand il n'a plus rien à desirer; il me punit de ses fantaisies, et me rend inquiet au sein du bonheur (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 47).

In response to her lover's complaint and as a reward for his patient continence, Julie allows him a kiss (Part I, Letter XIV). But because their kiss dangerously arouses their passion, Julie requests that Saint Preux absent himself for a time from Vevai. With his departure, their correspondence no longer serves primarily to divide the lovers, but to unite them. Apart, less concerned with an immediate threat to their morals, Julie and especially Saint Preux give vent to their passion in their correspondence. They now depend almost entirely upon their letters as a substitute for the enjoyment of being together.

Returning to his own country to attend to personal business as Julie suggested he do, Saint Preux discovers that when he is far from Julie he obtains great pleasure by imagining himself on much more intimate terms with her than he ever was when still at Vevai. The restraint he was obliged to maintain with Julie is forgotten, and his letters become more audacious.

Oui, cruelle, quoique vous ayez su faire, vous n'avez pu me séparer de vous tout entier. Je n'ai traîné dans mon exil que la moindre partie de moi-même: tout ce qu'il y a de vivant en moi demeure auprès de vous sans cesse. Il erre impunément sur vos charmes; il pénètre par tout comme une vapeur subtile, et je suis plus heureux en dépit de vous, que je ne fus jamais de votre gré...

Je ne suis point à plaindre dans la solitude, où je puis m'occuper de vous et me transporter aux lieux où vous êtes (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 69).

The vicarious pleasure that Saint Preux receives from these fantasies derives in large part from the knowledge that he is able to share them with Julie through his letters.<sup>3</sup> This pleasure is described in a letter written from the snow-covered mountain country around Meillerie where Saint Preux establishes himself while awaiting Julie's permission to return. The area is located directly across Lake Geneva from Julie's home at Vevai. There, looking through a telescope at Vevai and what he believes to be Julie's house, Saint Preux devotes all his time to imagining all the events

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<sup>3</sup>It probably derives as well from the sexual release they provide. Later in the story, Julie warns Saint Preux against the habit of masturbation ("voluptés solitaires") in which he has admittedly indulged (Part III, Letter XV).



taking place there. He has brought pen and paper in order to communicate his fantasies to Julie. He writes:

C'est de là qu'à travers les airs et les murs, il ose en secret pénétrer jusques dans ta chambre. Tes traits charmans le frappent encore; tes regards tendres raniment son coeur mourant; il entend le son de ta douce voix; il ose chercher encore en tes bras ce délire qu'il éprouva dans le bosquet. Vain fantôme d'une ame agitée qui s'égaré dans ses désirs! Bientôt forcé de rentrer en moi-même, je te contemple au moins dans le détail de ton innocente vie; je suis de loin les diverses occupations de ta journée, et je me les représente dans les tems et les lieux où j'en fus quelquefois l'heureux témoin (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 91).

One of the "diverses occupations" that Saint Preux most enjoys to imagine is Julie reading his letters and writing to him.

Quelques momens, ah pardonne! j'ose te voir même t'occuper de moi; je vois tes yeux attendris parcourir une de mes Lettres; je lis dans leur douce langueur que c'est à ton amant fortuné que s'adressent les lignes que tu traces...(La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 91).

Separated from Julie for the first time by a great physical distance, Saint Preux becomes more aware of the inherent capacity of letters to overcome separation. The same means of communication that he once considered an instrument of virtuous isolation while in Julie's company at Vevai, he now sees as his only real link with Julie, one which enables them to share the thoughts, feelings, and fantasies that constitute the whole of their love for as long as they are apart. If in his solitude Saint Preux's only comfort is the increasingly passionate visions he has of Julie, the letters in which he expresses them ensure that Julie directs her thoughts to him as she reads and answers them.

The reassurances and satisfaction that letter writing affords Saint Preux during his absence is unfortunately temporary. Correspondence is also a persistent reminder of their separation. They may share their feelings through letters, but the fruit of repeated reflection upon their love while apart is frustration. "Je le sens, mon ami, le poids de l'absence m'accable. Je ne puis vivre sans toi, je le sens; c'est ce qui m'effraye le plus" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 88). They try to vent their frustration in their correspondence by increasingly passionate outbursts. Saint Preux advocates total physical possession and describes Julie's virtues as delirium. "...Je suis capable de tout, hors de renoncer à toi, et il n'y a rien, non rien que je ne fasse pour te posséder ou mourir... L'enthousiasme de l'honnêteté t'ôte la raison, et ta vertu n'est plus qu'un délire" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 92). Separation gives them a false sense of security from the evils of physical possession. Julie perceives this danger of prolonged separation: "C'est au milieu du sommeil, c'est dans le sein d'un doux repos qu'il faut se défier des surprises: mais c'est, sur tout, la continuité des maux qui rend leur poids insupportable, et l'ame resiste bien plus aisément aux vives douleurs qu'à la tristesse prolongée" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 87). But upon Saint Preux's return to Vevey, they succumb to desire (Part I, Letter XXIX) and fulfill in reality the passion they expressed more and more unrestrainedly in their letters.

But what they believed would be the supreme pleasure of sexual union soon transforms itself into a sense of loss. In giving themselves over entirely to passion without concern for the virtue that both cherish, Julie and Saint Preux destroy the precious balance of love and virtue sustained up until this point by their correspondence. And appropriately enough the first sign of this imbalance between love and virtue appears in their correspondence. Julie, far more sensitive to the loss of virtue than her lover, notices immediately the transformation in the tone of their letters.

Il fut un tems, mon aimable ami, où nos Lettres étoient faciles et charmantes; le sentiment qui les dictoit couloit avec une élégante simplicité; il n'avoit besoin ni d'art ni de coloris, et sa pureté faisoit toute sa parure. Cet heureux tems n'est plus: hélas! il ne peut revenir; et pour premier effet d'un changement si cruel, nos coeurs ont déjà cessé de s'entendre (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 102).

An example of the contrivance that has replaced the straightforward expression of sentiment is a letter in which Saint Preux proposes that Julie now devote herself completely to love rather than mourn her virtue. She is now committed to him, he says, and should remain faithful to that commitment.

Veillez être à moi, tu n'es plus coupable.  
O mon épouse! O ma digne et chaste compagne!  
Ô gloire et bonheur de ma vie! non ce n'est point  
ce qu'a fait ton amour qui peut être un crime,  
mais ce que tu lui voudrais ôter: ce n'est qu'en  
acceptant un autre époux que tu peux offenser  
l'honneur (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 101).

Julie views this attitude as a vain attempt at absolving their guilt. Saint Preux's letters have become sophisticated. The

honor of which he speaks has been transformed by his convoluted reasoning from that of sexual purity to the honor of total physical commitment to him. Julie too, despite her regret over the loss of her innocence, writes in order to justify the triumph of passion. She views love as inevitable and all-consuming.

Je vois, mon ami, par la trempe de nos ames et par le tour commun de nos goûts, que l'amour sera la grande affaire de notre vie. Quand une fois il a fait les impressions profondes que nous en avons reçues, il faut qu'il éteigne ou absorbe toutes les autres passions; le moindre refroidissement seroit bientôt pour nous la langueur de la mort; un dégoût invincible, un éternel ennui, succederoient à l'amour éteint, et nous ne saurions longtems vivre après avoir cessé d'aimer. En mon particulier, tu sens bien qu'il n'y a que le delire de la passion qui puisse me voiler l'horreur de ma situation présente, et qu'il faut que j'aime avec transport, ou que je meure de douleur (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 109).

They have ceased to understand one another as before because their letters speak now only the artificial language of passion and no longer the simple language of the heart. Their letters have become an instrument of aberration in their relationship. They no longer serve virtue, and the love originally based on mutual respect is perverted.

Thus in the third stage of Julie and Saint Preux's affair (Part I, Letters XXXII to LII), their correspondence assists them in the pursuit of further physical intimacy. Decency, honor, and a devotion to virtuous principles are still the subject of many of these letters, but these qualities do not preclude the desire for sensual pleasures. Rather, they enhance it. Julie writes:

Le véritable amour toujours modeste n'arrache point ses faveurs avec audace; il les dérobe avec timidité. Le mystère, le silence, la honte craintive aiguissent et cachent ses doux transports; sa flamme honore et purifie toutes ses caresses; la décence et l'honnêteté l'accompagnent au sein de la volupté même, et lui seul sait tout accorder aux désirs sans rien ôter à la pudeur (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 138).

Since the lovers have now experienced sexual fulfillment, letters are no longer satisfactory substitutes. Although they still enjoy exchanging letters, they write mainly out of necessity. The primary purpose of their letters is to plan private encounters. Saint Preux has relinquished his position as Julie's preceptor (Letter XXXII) and has avoided frequent public visits to Julie in order not to arouse suspicion of their affair. Seven of the twenty letters indicated above deal at least in part with a proposed rendezvous. Letters no longer provide pleasure in and for themselves. Words seem irrelevant. For example, when Julie tries to calm Saint Preux's impatient ardor, he replies: "...Je te dirai encore, ma jolie prêcheseuse, qu'il est inutile de vouloir donner le change à mes droits, et qu'un amour affamé ne se nourrit point de sermons" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 126). The silent, passionate embrace, that moment of ecstasy which renders all other pursuits unimportant are the only language that Julie and Saint Preux now understand.

After the clandestine rendezvous of the lovers in Julie's room has taken place (Part I, Letter LV), letters once again assume great importance in their relationship.

Julie and Saint Preux discover that a virtuous "amitié" offers them more sustained happiness than sexual intimacy.

J'ai pris pour toi des sentimens plus paisibles, il est vrai, mais plus affectueux et de plus de différentes especes; sans s'affoiblir ils se sont multipliés; les douceurs de l'amitié tempèrent les emportemens de l'amour, et j' imagine à peine quelque sorte d'attachement qui ne m'unisse pas à toi (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 149).

This amitié increases in significance as their relationship progresses. Compared to passionate love, the tender, less turbulent "amitié" offers hope rather than despair. "Amitié" is based on sentiment, not sensuality. It aspires to perfect love, sufficient unto itself. When Julie and Saint Preux are obliged to separate once again after the Baron d'Etange learns of their mutual affection, their letters become the only means by which they exchange the sentiments of the heart which constitute the charm of their new "amitié." But not only are their letters a means of preserving and enjoying their love, they also symbolize the commitment to virtue and to social duties implicit in their decision to part company. For Saint Preux's decision to depart at Julie's request is an extension of his original choice of letters in declaring his love. Once again their letters represent a movement toward virtuous distance and toward intimate communion in love.

The adjustment from a period of personal intimacy to one of separation is difficult. As in previous moments of crisis, there occurs in adjusting to the new situation a similar crisis in the composition of letters. In the

opening lines of his very first letter to Julie after his departure (Part II, Letter I), Saint Preux states that he feels awkward in writing.

J'ai pris et quitté cent fois la plume; j'hésite dès le premier mot; je ne sais quel ton je dois prendre; je ne sais par où commencer; et c'est à Julie que je veux écrire! Ah malheureux! que suis-je devenu? Il n'est donc plus ce tems où mille sentimens délicieux couloient de ma plume comme un intarissable torrent! Ces doux momens de confiance et d'épanchement sont passés: Nous ne sommes plus l'un à l'autre, nous ne sommes plus les mêmes, et je ne sais plus à qui j'écris. Daignerez-vous recevoir mes Lettres? vos yeux daigneront-ils les parcourir? les trouverez-vous assés réservées, assés circonspectes? Oserois-je y garder encore une ancienne familiarité? Oserois-je parler d'un amour éteint ou méprisé, et ne suis-je pas plus reculé que le premier jour où je vous écrivis (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 189)?

Saint Preux's difficulty in finding proper words with which to address Julie is a sign that their relationship has regressed. All that has occurred between him and Julie since his first letter seems to have been obliterated. Saint Preux, compelled to adopt an attitude of great reserve toward Julie by her request to leave, feels as he did on the first day he wrote to her--insecure and aware that in deference to her virtue and despite his attraction to her he must separate himself from her. Saint Preux realizes that he must discover a way to pay homage to Julie's virtue and to achieve some satisfaction in his love for her. The key to this discovery lies in the notion of "amitié," various aspects of which Saint Preux calls to mind as he overcomes his temporary verbal uncertainty.

Viens image adorée, remplir un coeur qui ne vit  
que par toi: sui-moi dans mon exil, console-moi

dans mes peines, ranime et soutien mon espérance éteinte. Toujours ce coeur infortuné sera ton sanctuaire inviolable, d'où le sort ni les hommes ne pourront jamais t'arracher. Si je suis mort au bonheur, je ne le suis point à l'amour qui m'en rend digne. Cet amour est invincible comme le charme qui l'a fait naître. Il est fondé sur la base inébranlable du mérite et des vertus; il ne peut périr dans une ame immortelle; il n'a plus besoin de l'appui de l'espérance, et le passé lui donne des forces pour un avenir éternel (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 190).

Saint Preux takes solace in the spiritual and sentimental values of their love. His statement that he is dead to happiness echoes his feeling after the night he spent with Julie that sexual pleasures would only decline in the future. His vocabulary emphasizes love's spirituality: "image," "coeur," "mérite," "vertus," and "ame." Though it is only an image of Julie that Saint Preux summons for consolation in his solitude, his heart and his soul are made full by that image. Her real presence no longer seems necessary for him to experience love. The principle of love based on virtue, temporarily obscured by their quest for physical gratification, assumes renewed importance. The sensual aspect of love is not disavowed; Saint Preux simply recognizes its limitations. Though the absent Saint Preux is no longer able to renew sexual relations with Julie, their one moment of supreme passionate fulfillment lives in his memory, always present to nourish and lend meaning to his spiritualized love. "...Le passé lui donne des forces pour un avenir éternel." With the realization that all satisfaction must be spiritual in nature, Saint Preux finds the eloquence



he previously had in his letters. Expressing in writing the feelings that constitute this spiritual love and sharing them with Julie become a manner of achieving such satisfaction. The enjoyment of their love through correspondence implies both separation and contact. Whereas the separative character of the letter was at one time emphasized over its unifying character (in Saint Preux's initial letter to Julie) and vice versa (when Saint Preux was at Meillerie), each now assumes equal importance.

With the separative and unifying properties of the letter in balance, the letter attains its full potential as a means for Julie and Saint Preux to pursue their love. In this fourth stage of their relationship (Part II, Letter I to Part III, Letter XX), letters are in a very real sense a means of making love at a distance. They provide Julie and Saint Preux a convenient middle ground which permits them to reveal themselves to each other, to experience true contact despite their separation, while ensuring that this contact remains in conformity with their spiritual love, their "amitié." In offering this middle ground the letter functions as a mirror. Saint Preux sees reflected in Julie's letters her thoughts, hopes, love, and, with the help of his imagination, her very person.

J'ai reçu ta lettre avec les mêmes transports  
que m'auroit causés ta présence, et dans l'em-  
portement de ma joye un vain papier me tenoit  
lieu de toi.

.....  
Mais comment ne te pas connoitre en lisant tes  
lettres? Comment prêter un ton si touchant et

des sentimens si tendres à une autre figure que la tienne? A chaque phrase ne voit-on pas le doux regard de tes yeux? A chaque mot n'entend-on pas ta voix charmante? Quelle autre que Julie a jamais aimé, pensé, parlé, agi, écrit comme elle? Ne sois donc pas surprise si tes lettres qui te peignent si bien font quelquefois sur ton idolâtre amant le même effet que ta présence. En les relisant je perds la raison, ma tête s'égaré dans un délire continuel, un feu dévorant me consume, mon sang s'allume et petille, une fureur me fait tressaillir. Je crois te voir, te toucher, te presser contre mon sein...objet adoré, fille enchanteresse, source de délice et de volupté, comment en te voyant ne pas voir les houris faites pour les bienheureux?...ah vien!... je la sens...elle m'échappe, et je n'embrasse qu'une ombre (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, pp. 240 and 244).

Julie's letters render an accurate likeness of her, an actual extension of her presence; and though Saint Preux realizes, as he rereads her letters and fancies that he hears, sees, and embraces her, that Julie remains only an image, they trouble and arouse him as much as her physical presence. Their letters stimulate their imagination; and at this moment in the novel, Julie and Saint Preux experience love primarily through their imagination. They need the solace of an illusory personal contact when circumstances conspire to keep them apart. Julie, who creates her own fantasy around the portrait of herself that she has sent to Saint Preux (Part II, Letter XX), acknowledges the necessity of such illusions:

Cent fois le jour quand je suis seule un tressaillement me saisit comme si je te sentois près de moi. Je m'imagine que tu tiens mon portrait, et suis si folle que je crois sentir l'impression des caresses que tu lui fais et des baisers que tu lui donnes: ma bouche croit les recevoir, mon tendre coeur croit les goûter.

O douces illusions! Ô chimeres, dernieres res-  
sources des malheureux! Ah, s'il se peut, tenez-  
nous lieu de réalité (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol.  
II, p. 289).

The virtue of letters in a situation which requires the substitution of visions for reality is that they lend substance to the dreams of Julie and Saint Preux. For the letters in which their dreams are expressed are real. Though the image of Julie disappears with Saint Preux's attempt to touch it, it may be summoned again with each new reading. The letter does not disappear, and like the mirror it attests to the reality of the person whose thoughts it reflects. Insofar as Julie and Saint Preux embrace the notion that the pleasure of love lies in the union of the heart, the exchange of their letters, which express the feelings of the heart, constitutes true love-making in spite of their separation. And since they no longer dare to share these sentiments when together for fear of succumbing to purely sensual desires, their correspondence allows them to indulge their passionate feelings upon each other's image without actually transgressing their virtuous principles and without experiencing the deterioration of those feelings. Under these rigorous conditions, love as intense as theirs can only be enjoyed in the world of their imagination and shared obliquely in the mirror of that imagination, their correspondence.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>One of the most revealing scenes in the Confessions involves the use of a mirror in communicating love (Vol. I, pp. 75-76). The adolescent Rousseau, enamored of

The letters exchanged by Julie and Saint Preux in Parts II and III of La Nouvelle Héloïse serve not only to

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a young Italian woman, Mme Basile, sneaks up to her room. She is seated in the room with her back to the door where Rousseau is standing. Moved by the sight of his loved one, the intemperate youth then kneels with his arms outstretched toward her. He does not believe that he is seen and greatly enjoys this moment of stolen intimacy. Suddenly, Mme Basile sees the kneeling Jean-Jacques reflected in a mirror facing her. She does not turn around but does acknowledge her awareness of his presence by pointing to the mat at her feet. Neither of the two speak. There seems to be a silent complicity in enjoying this moment.

Jean Starobinski, in his chapter on Rousseau in L'Oeil vivant (Paris: Gallimard, 1960, pp. 110-11) gives a lucid analysis of the appeal this indirect approach had for Rousseau.

On imagine volontiers, cependant, que cette approche indirecte lui convenait mieux que toute autre, et qu'il aurait pu l'avoir délibérément choisie: elle lui permettait de se montrer "en effigie," sans toutefois se laisser atteindre dans sa personne réelle par le regard de Mme Basile. D'une façon merveilleusement synthétique, le miroir est ici à la fois au service de la timidité et de la tendance exhibitionniste. Il trahit et il protège; il donne à voir, mais il ne livre qu'un reflet; il annonce une présence, mais la réduit à une image. ...Réfugiés tous deux dans le monde pur des images et des reflets, ils ne sont pas coupables. Leur rencontre s'accomplit sans eux, chacun n'étant pour l'autre qu'un fantôme. C'est la condition requise pour que Jean-Jacques connaisse le plus haut bonheur, c'est-à-dire cet état où l'exaltation, par son intensité même, aboutit à la dépersonnalisation. Ainsi triomphe la magie, qui établit à la fois la distance et le contact, réalisant le miracle d'un contact à distance.

The indirectness of the contact afforded by the letters of La Nouvelle Héloïse is a source of genuine enjoyment for Julie and Saint Preux. And it is more than coincidental that in the same period that Rousseau was beginning to create the imaginary correspondence of Julie and Saint Preux (1756-57) his thoughts were drawn also to the incident with Mme Basile. The scene is described in the Ebauches des Confessions (Vol. I, pp. 1160-61) which, according to Marcel Raymond and Bernard Gagnebin, may very well have been written in the summer of 1756 at L'Ermitage. Cf. Oeuvres complètes, Vol. I, p. 1857.

unite them in space, but in time as well. While letters bring the lovers from their solitude into each other's presence, they also convey the memory of their past intimacy in order to console and sustain their present separation. They permit Julie and Saint Preux to live in the past, at least momentarily. For the memory of their past begins to play an increasingly important role in their lives.

"...Que le ciel garde ses bienfaits," writes Saint Preux, "et ne laisse, avec ma misere, le souvenir de mon bonheur passé. J'aime mieux les plaisirs qui sont dans ma mémoire et les regrets qui déchirent mon ame que d'être à jamais heureux sans ma Julie"<sup>5</sup>(La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 190). Fidelity to each other and to the memory of their days spent together at Vevei becomes a recurring theme in their letters. It is the source of most of the dramatic interest of Parts II and III. Saint Preux fears that he will lose Julie to whomever her father might betroth her (Part II, Letter X); Julie fears Saint Preux will be corrupted by the world (Part II, Letter XI). Of the twenty-five letters exchanged by Julie and Saint Preux in Parts II and III, nine deal with fidelity (Part II, Letters I, X, XI, XII, XIII, XX, and XXVI; Part III, Letters V and XVIII). These letters provoke memories of their past love, thereby keeping it alive in the present.

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<sup>5</sup>Wolmar, in the second half of the novel, will seek, by destroying the memory of their young love, to cure them of the last remnant of their passion.

Though letters can bring Julie and Saint Preux together across the miles that separate them and can soothe the melancholy of their present situation with recollections of the blissful moments of their past, they also constantly remind them, because of the time which elapses between the sending and receiving of each letter, of the anguish of separation.

Un des plus grands maux de l'absence, et le seul auquel la raison ne peut rien, c'est l'inquietude sur l'état actuel de ce qu'on aime. Sa santé, sa vie, son repos, son amour, tout échape à qui craint de tout perdre; on n'est pas plus sûr du présent que de l'avenir, et tous les accidens possibles se réalisent sans cesse dans l'esprit d'un amant qui les redoute. Enfin je respire, je vis, tu te portes bien, tu m'aimes, ou plutôt il y a dix jours que tout cela étoit vrai; mais qui me répondra aujourd'hui? O absence! ô tourment! ô bizarre et funeste état, où l'on ne peut jouir que du moment passé, et où le présent n'est point encore. (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 240)!

Because of its epistolary nature, the relationship of Julie and Saint Preux seems fixed in the past. Georges Poulet, commenting on the significance of La Nouvelle Héloïse in the history of fiction, especially from the point of view of the literary representation of time, calls it "...Le premier grand roman, où l'être humain est présenté dans l'ensemble de sa durée, ou plus exactement dans un présent qui est toujours en rapport avec son passé."<sup>6</sup> The epistolary form

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<sup>6</sup>Georges Poulet, Etudes sur le temps humain, (Paris: Plon, 1950), p. 158.

Other scholars have drawn attention to the importance of time in La Nouvelle Héloïse. In his excellent article "La Mémoire et l'oubli dans La Nouvelle Héloïse," Annales Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Vol. XXXV, pp. 49-71, Bernard Guyon argues that time and not virtue is the true

of the novel contributes significantly to the impression of duration, of the present in relation to the past, because, as Saint Preux suggests, when one communicates only through correspondence one cannot escape the past for the present. In Julie and Saint Preux's attempts at uniting with each other emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually, union in the present is never achieved because they are communicating on a temporal treadmill--the letter always bringing to the one what is now the other's past. Though their correspondence affords them genuine solace during their separation, Julie and Saint Preux become more sensitive to the discrepancy implicit in letters between the time of their

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conflicting element against passion. Shortly after her marriage to Wolmar, Julie points out to Saint Preux that passion burns itself out with time and is therefore incompatible with the married state (Oeuvres complètes, Vol. II, pp. 372-73). Sexual pleasure is numbed by repeated indulgence. Guyon shows that Julie and Saint Preux preserve their "amour-passion" by remembering one another as they were in a changeless past. Conversely, Wolmar tries to cure them of their passion by having them forget the past and immersing themselves in the ever-changing present.

Letters, then, are an excellent means of overcoming the ravages of time, for as Saint Preux remarks about correspondence: "...On ne peut jouir que du moment passé." Julie and Saint Preux experience love only in the past because changes that might have occurred since the time of the letter's dispatch are hidden from them. "...On n'est pas plus sûr du présent que de l'avenir." Though the temporal discrepancies of correspondence are painful to Saint Preux in the first half of the novel, they will be seen in a better light later in the novel. His words with regard to the conditions of correspondence--"cet état...où le présent n'est point encore"--prefigures Julie's later praise of anticipated pleasures--"...il n'y a rien de beau que ce qui n'est pas" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 693).

For a more exhaustive study of the role of time in La Nouvelle Héloïse cf. François Van Laere, Une Lecture du temps dans La Nouvelle Héloïse (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1968).

composition and that of their reading. The letters exchanged by the lovers in Parts II and III remind them of the painful incompleteness of their love.

The only thing that enables Julie and Saint Preux to continue marking time, making devotion to their previous experience of love suffice in the present, substituting an imaginary presence through letters for a real one, is the hope that in the future they will find a way to live together. Though Julie realizes after her miscarriage of Saint Preux's child (end of Part I) that there is little chance of a respectable marriage, she sustains his hopes in order to preserve her own. She conceals from him the news that her father has already chosen a spouse for her and promises him that she will never marry anyone without his consent (Part II, Letter XI). Saint Preux, still hopeful for the future, continues to write generally optimistic letters; and the feelings expressed in those letters are in turn Julie's only consolation and encouragement. "Je n'avais plus d'honneur," writes Julie in Part III reflecting upon this period in her affair with Saint Preux, "que le votre, plus d'espérance qu'en votre bonheur, et les sentimens qui me venoient de vous étoient les seuls dont je crusse pouvoir être encore émue" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 346). Ironically, the letters themselves figure prominently in the ruin of this hope that encourages Julie and Saint Preux to continue writing. When Mme d'Etange discovers Saint Preux's letters to her daughter (Part II, Letter XXVII), the lovers



realize exactly how bleak their future is and how fruitless, their correspondence. Claire points this out to Saint Preux immediately after his letters have been discovered.

...Le sacrifice que vous avez fait à l'honneur de Julie en quittant ce pays m'est garant de celui que vous allez faire à son repos en rompant un commerce inutile. Les premiers actes de vertu sont toujours les plus pénibles, et vous ne perdrez point le prix d'un effort qui vous a tant coûté, en vous obtenant à soutenir une vaine correspondance dont les risques sont terribles pour votre amante, les dédomagemens nuls pour tous les deux, et qui ne fait que prolonger sans fruit les tourmens de l'un et de l'autre (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 309).

Saint Preux accedes to Claire's request and promises Mme d'Etange to cease all correspondence with her daughter (Part III, Letter II). Shortly thereafter (Part III, Letter V) Julie also renounces all future correspondence.

The decision by Julie and Saint Preux to refrain from further correspondence implies more than despair over their future, however. It risks negating their love altogether, for up to this point in the story the predominant means of expressing their love, their correspondence, is synonymous with it. Though Julie's formal engagement to M. de Wolmar (Part III, Letters X and XII) makes even more obvious the futility of continued correspondence, the lovers continue to write for want of a viable alternative to letters as a means of feeling and expressing their love. Julie pledges her undying love to Saint Preux and hopes that her father, Claire, and Saint Preux will each find happiness despite her sorrow.

Oui, tendre et généreux amant, ta Julie sera toujours tienne, elle t'aimera toujours: il le faut, je le veux, je le dois... Mon parti est pris, je ne veux désoler aucun de ceux que j'aime. Qu'un pere esclave de sa parole et jaloux d'un vain titre dispose de ma main qu'il a promise; que l'amour seul dispose de mon coeur; que mes pleurs ne cessent de couler dans le sein d'une tendre amie. Que je sois vile et malheureuse; mais que tout ce qui m'est cher soit heureux et content s'il est possible. Formez tous trois ma seule existence, et que votre bonheur me fasse oublier ma misere et mon desespoir (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, pp. 334-35).

However, Julie does not indicate how Saint Preux is to remain happy in the future with her simple pledge of love when he knows that she will be sad and that they will not be able to write to nor see each other. Saint Preux answers:

L'espoir que tu me rends est triste et sombre; il éteint cette lueur si pure qui nous guida tant de fois; tes attrait s'en ternissent et n'en deviennent que plus touchans; je te vois tendre et malheureuse; mon coeur est inondé des pleurs qui coulent de tes yeux, et je me reproche avec amertume un bonheur que je ne puis plus goûter qu'aux dépends du tien (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 338).

It is only after Julie's mystical experience on the day of her wedding that Julie discovers a way of vivifying their love even though they must deny themselves every manner of expressing that love available to them in the past. Her encounter with Divine Providence impresses upon Julie the sacredness and goodness of the marital state; and her attitude toward Saint Preux, though still one of love, changes.

Tout est changé entre nous; il faut nécessairement que votre coeur change. Julie de Wolmar n'est plus votre ancienne Julie; la révolution de vos sentimens pour elle est inévitable, et il ne vous

reste que le choix de faire honneur de ce changement au vice ou à la vertu.... Oui, mon bon et digne ami, pour nous aimer toujours il faut renoncer l'un à l'autre. Oublions tout le reste et soyez l'amant de mon ame.... Si vous perdez une tendre amante, vous gagnez une fidelle amie (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, pp. 363-64-65).

Their love is not lost but is absorbed in friendship.

This "amitié" is based on the renunciation of physical love in favor of a platonic one--"...soyez l'amant de mon ame."

Their correspondence, which was an essential element of their past love, has no place in this newly conceived friendship since Julie is now Julie de Wolmar. Obviously there is nothing very strange about a young, devoted bride wishing to discontinue all contact with her former lover. However, because of the change in the nature of Julie and Saint Preux's love, the discontinuation of their correspondence does not signify the extinction of their love. Rather, it becomes an integral part of it. The absence of letters between Julie and Saint Preux gives meaning to their "amitié" in very much the same way as their incessant correspondence symbolized their passionate love.

The period of silence between Julie and Saint Preux extends from Part III, Letter XX to Part VI, Letter VI, a period of approximately seven years. During this long span, their letters are addressed primarily to Mme d'Orbe and Milord Edouard. These letters reflect the commitment that the lovers have made to sublimate their love in favor of a total devotion to family and friends. Jean Rousset has shown that as early as the beginning of Part

III the letters between Julie and Saint Preux become less frequent and that their letters to third parties increase.<sup>7</sup> Rousset sees a close relationship between the situation of the story and the epistolary situation. Part III depicts the discovery of Saint Preux's letters and the death of Mme d'Etange, events which compel Julie and Saint Preux to view their love in the larger context of family and friends. The lovers adopt a mode of conduct that subordinates anti-social passion to social virtue. Communication becomes collective. By the end of Part III, Julie and Saint Preux no longer communicate directly, but through others. In her last letter to Saint Preux, Julie writes:

Voici la dernière lettre que vous recevrez de moi. Je vous supplie aussi de ne plus m'écrire. Cependant comme je ne cesserai jamais de prendre à vous le plus tendre intérêt et que ce sentiment est aussi pur que le jour qui m'éclaire, je serai bien aise de savoir quelquefois de vos nouvelles, et de vous voir parvenir au bonheur que vous méritez. Vous pourrez de tems à autre écrire à Made d'Orbe dans les occasions où vous aurez quelque événement intéressant à nous apprendre. J'espère que l'honnêteté de votre ame se peindra toujours dans vos lettres. D'ailleurs ma Cousine est vertueuse et sage, pour ne me communiquer que ce qu'il me conviendra de voir, et pour supprimer cette correspondance si vous étiez capable d'en abuser (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, pp. 375-76).

With Claire as censor, only those feelings that comply with the principle of "amitié" are acceptable for transmittal. The sublimation of Julie and Saint Preux's passionate love toward a platonic friendship is thus reflected in the

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<sup>7</sup> Jean Rousset, Forme et signification and "Rousseau romancier."

extreme obliqueness of the means of communicating their affection. The fervor of their previous correspondence is reduced to the polite exchange of news. In effect, the indirectness of their communication is designed to expurgate all sentiments that might rekindle their past love.

Although the letters that Julie and Saint Preux address to third parties represent the new direction of their relationship, that of "amitié," they take little advantage of this means of cultivating their friendship. From the time of Julie's last letter to Saint Preux (Part III, Letter XX) to Saint Preux's return to Clarens at the invitation of M. de Wolmar (Part IV, Letter IV), there are only two letters exchanged by Claire and Saint Preux (Part III, Letter XXVI and Part IV, Letter III). This represents a period of six years, one year longer than the period of the lovers' entire previous correspondence. True, Saint Preux was voyaging around the world and was incommunicado for four of the six years. But in the two years preceding his journey, the only news he sent to Claire was that of his departure. During that same period Saint Preux received no letters at all from Claire.

The infrequency of these letters indicates how difficult it is for Julie and Saint Preux to think of each other only as friends and no longer as lovers. Their silence betrays a persistent passion which remains hidden at the root of their "amitié." They do not openly admit the existence of such passion because they are entirely committed

to its elimination, especially since Julie's marriage. Yet they indulge in it by more subtle means. Since correspondence no longer functions as an outlet for their amorous feelings, they prefer a mute solitude which gives voice to memories of a more ardent past. To Saint Preux these memories are his only consolation and sustenance on a lonely voyage. To Julie such memories are simultaneously attractive and distressing. The ambiguity of her feelings perplexes her since she believes that her voluntary separation from Saint Preux and silence toward him is incontrovertible evidence of her triumph over passion. But even after six years of exemplary virtue as wife and mother, Julie admits to a fondness for moments of solitude during which memories of her past love trouble the serenity of her new life.

...La solitude m'est dangereuse précisément parce qu'elle m'est douce, et que souvent je la cherche sans y songer. Ce n'est pas, tu le sais, que mon coeur se ressente encore de ses anciennes blessures; non, il est guéri, je le sens, j'en suis très sûre, j'ose me croire vertueuse. Ce n'est point le présent que je crains; c'est le passé qui me tourmente. Il est des souvenirs aussi redoutables que le sentiment actuel; on s'attendrit par reminiscence; on a honte de se sentir pleurer, et l'on n'en pleure que davantage (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 402).

During her affair with Saint Preux, Julie spent her solitary moments writing letters to him. Reminiscence of that affair now replaces correspondence as a means of occupying her solitude and of ventilating her emotions ("...On s'attendrit par reminiscence") and consequently constitutes as

serious a threat to her happiness as her letters once did. Julie and Saint Preux separated and renounced their correspondence as an affirmation of respectful friendship, but their solitude and silence serve only to resurrect images of their previous love. Renunciation of communication is insufficient because one of the essential and most appealing aspects of correspondence, solitude, the time to think of one another at will and in whatever way they choose, remains intact. They have become so accustomed to these solitary fantasies after their protracted correspondence that in spite of their abstinence from it they continue to behave towards each other mentally and emotionally as if they were still writing. The only image he and Julie will retain of one another is that of young lovers. As Claire points out to Saint Preux before his departure:

...Vous serez toujours l'un pour l'autre à la fleur des ans; vous vous verrez sans cesse tels que vous vous vites en vous quitant, et vos cœurs unis jusqu'au tombeau prolongeront dans une illusion charmante votre jeunesse avec vos amours (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 321).

Ironically, correspondence, by its very absence in their daily lives and because the separation essential to it is rigorously maintained, continues to influence Julie and Saint Preux because the act of remembering they substitute for the act of writing induces the illusion of an immutable love.

If the suspension of correspondence between Julie and Saint Preux eliminates the private communication of love,

love smolders and represents a silent threat to future happiness. Wolmar sees the flaw in denying all contact between Julie and Saint Preux. He realizes that the memory of their love is preserved and even aroused by their separation, not weakened and eradicated; and his decision to reunite Julie and Saint Preux (Part IV, Letter IV) represents a deliberate effort at nullifying that persistent memory. Wolmar, the dispassionate observer of human behavior, believes that by having Julie and Saint Preux see each other as they are in the present their memory, which is the only remaining source of passionate love between them, can be effectively neutralized. Wolmar deems this to be especially efficacious with Saint Preux who sees in Julie a woman entirely different from the one he left.

Ce n'est pas de Julie de Wolmar qu'il est amoureux, c'est de Julie d'Etange; il ne me hait point comme le possesseur de la personne qu'il aime, mais comme le ravisseur de celle qu'il a aimée. La femme d'un autre n'est point sa maîtresse, la mere de deux enfans n'est plus son ancienne écoliere. Il est vrai qu'elle lui ressemble beaucoup et qu'elle lui en rappelle souvent le souvenir. Il l'aime dans le tems passé: voila le vrai mot de l'énigme. Otez-lui la mémoire, il n'aura plus d'amour (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 509).

Taking away Saint Preux's memory entails the systematic invalidation or elimination of every place or object remindful of his affair with Julie. The "bosquet," for example, where years before the young lovers first kissed (Part IV, Letter XII) is purposely profaned by Wolmar. There, he embraces Julie and Saint Preux and insists they do likewise.



Consequently, for Julie and Saint Preux the "bosquet" no longer represents their former love, but the transformations that have occurred between their previous relationship and their present one. And similar to the profanation of the "bosquet," the continued renunciation of their correspondence also removes from life at Clarens an essential part of their past. Under the direction of Wolmar, however, all aspects of correspondence are eliminated, and particularly the solitary moments which stimulate the imagination and memory of Julie and of Saint Preux and which were formerly devoted to the written expression of love. In place of private thoughts and ideas, Wolmar presents, for the continual consideration of all the inhabitants of Clarens, the image of selfless communal living. For Saint Preux, who is the newest member of the community and, hence, very vulnerable to images of the past, it is imperative that he see Julie in the company of the other members of the community. "A la place de sa maitresse," writes Wolmar, "je le force de voir toujours l'épouse d'un honnête homme et la mere de mes enfans: j'efface un tableau par un autre, et couvre le passé du présent" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 511). Correspondence is a covert, exclusive activity and, therefore, a threat to the spirit of community. In attacking Julie and Saint Preux's preferred method of communication, Wolmar is really attacking the privacy of their thoughts. Their first thoughts of love and their method of first revealing them were secret. For Julie,

wife and mother, and for Saint Preux, recently appointed tutor of the Wolmar children, secrecy is dangerous.

Encore un coup, continua Made de Wolmar d'un ton plus tranquille, ce n'est point dans les assemblées nombreuses où tout le monde nous voit et nous écoute, mais dans des entretiens particuliers où regnent le secret et la liberté, que les mœurs peuvent courir des rigues (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 457).<sup>8</sup>

Wolmar insists that communication at Clarens be essentially communal, that is, that each member of this intimate society endeavor to lay bare his thoughts and feelings to all the others. This openness is experienced most perfectly in the episode of the "matinée à l'anglaise." On this occasion, all those present, Saint Preux, M. and Mme de Wolmar, and their children, enjoy and share the same feelings of mutual love and respect. The occasion is particularly exceptional because the transmittal of these sentiments is non-verbal. "Que de choses se sont dites sans ouvrir la bouche! Que d'ardens sentimens se sont communiqués sans la froide entremise de la parole" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 560)! This immediacy in the communication of feelings is rare. But under the direction of Wolmar, all at Clarens at least aspire to this goal. Thus, correspondence,

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<sup>8</sup>In exploring the totalitarian tendencies of Rousseau's political philosophy, Lester Crocker (Rousseau's Social Contract and "Julie ou la nouvelle duplicité") refers often to Wolmar's efforts at thought control. He likens them to the "Big Brother" governments depicted in books such as 1984 and Brave New World and establishes Rousseau as their fictional precursor. The elimination of correspondence between Julie and Saint Preux in this part of La Nouvelle Héloïse lends support to his views.

which adds the mediacy of written symbols to communication, becomes unattractive to Julie and Saint Preux.

The letters written by Julie and Saint Preux in Parts IV and V of La Nouvelle Héloïse are addressed only to persons who are absent from the community of Clarens. The fact that they cease even to desire to write to each other reflects their commitment to the ideals of straightforwardness and friendship. Their letters usually describe the activities at Clarens and often contain an exhortation for the correspondent to return to its open ambiance. This devotion to the high principles of Clarens is especially apparent in Saint Preux's letters to Milord Edouard which constitute the majority of his correspondence in the second half of the novel. In several long letters Saint Preux describes in great detail and with abiding admiration M. de Wolmar's beneficent governance of his people and lands. He also calls upon his English friend to assist him in his efforts at overcoming his passion and strengthening his dedication to virtuous friendship with all. "C'est par vos soins, c'est sous vos yeux que j'espere honorer mon état présent de mes fautes passées" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 557). Writing to Milord Edouard provides Saint Preux with the opportunity to observe and analyze himself systematically and rationally. "J'ai besoin de vos avis et je veux m'observer de près" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 426). Saint Preux's letters mirror no longer his

love for Julie, but his devotion to the community of Julie's family and friends.

Julie's letters, addressed mostly to Mme d'Orbe in Parts IV and V, deal primarily with her duties as wife and mother and with her attitude toward Saint Preux. Her letters become less and less frequent, however, and cease altogether in Part V (Part IV, Letter XVI to Part V, Letter XIII; some one hundred and ten pages). Her growing reluctance to discuss her feelings even with her most trusted confidante, Mme d'Orbe, stands in marked contrast to Saint Preux's constant preoccupation with life at Clarens in his correspondence with Bomston. Wolmar remarks about his wife:

Un voile de sagesse et d'honnêteté fait tant de replis autour de son coeur, qu'il n'est plus possible à l'oeil humain d'y pénétrer, pas même au sien propre. La seule chose qui me fait soupçonner qu'il lui reste quelque défiance à vaincre est qu'elle ne cesse de chercher en elle-même ce qu'elle feroit si elle étoit tout-à-fait guérie, et le fait avec tant d'exactitude, que si elle étoit réellement guérie elle ne le feroit pas si bien (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 509).

The disappearance of all letters from Julie symbolizes her isolation from the community. Her introspection betrays the crisis to come. Julie's behavior is virtuous, but it conceals feelings of love for Saint Preux which she cannot eradicate. Since the suppression of thoughts and feelings is frowned upon at Clarens, Julie's silence attests to serious flaws in Wolmar's carefully controlled experiment. Her moral rectitude itself, the "sagesse" and "honnêteté," creates the veil over her heart. The inner conflict which

it obscures--whether she will succumb to her love for Saint Preux--remains a constant threat to the moral excellence she has attained since her marriage.

The realization of the precariousness of her situation festers within Julie during her long silence and surfaces again in her surprising request that Mme d'Orbe marry Saint Preux (Part V, Letter XIII). After long, silent reflection, Julie decides that she must act to change the situation created by Wolmar's invitation to Saint Preux to live at Clarens. With Claire and Saint Preux united in marriage, Julie hopes that her former lover's sexual desire will be satisfied by her friend and that the threat of a renewed affair will be more effectively nullified than is possible with Wolmar's efforts at controlling the memory of their love.<sup>9</sup> Julie insists in her letter to Claire that should her friend refuse to marry Saint Preux, the present state of affairs at Clarens must be discontinued.

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<sup>9</sup>A marriage between Claire and Saint Preux might also provide Julie, though she does not express this possibility explicitly, with an opportunity to experience the intimacy of marriage to Saint Preux vicariously. Such an interpretation of Julie's request to Claire has been suggested by H. Wolpe in his article "Psychological Ambiguity in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*" (University of Toronto Quarterly, 1958-59, pp. 279-90) and by Aram Vartanian in "The Death of Julie: A Psychological Post-mortem" (L'Esprit créateur, Vol. VI, no. 2, pp. 77-84). Wolpe sees ambiguity throughout the novel in the relationship between Julie, Saint Preux, and Claire. At times one wonders if the three are friends or lovers. Rousseau states in Book IX of the Confessions that from the very beginning of the novel's conception he imagined such a triangular relationship. Claire is "l'inséparable cousine" during the period of Julie and Saint Preux's affair. She becomes their intermediary during Saint Preux's long absence. As Saint Preux's wife, her role as intermediary would reach its logical conclusion.

Que si, malgré mes raisons, ce projet ne te convient pas, mon avis est qu'à quelque prix que ce soit nous écartions de nous cet homme dangereux, toujours redoutable à l'une ou à l'autre; car, quoi qu'il arrive, l'éducation de nos enfans nous importe encore moins que la vertu de leurs mères (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 634).

The resumption of Julie's correspondence represents her realization that her love for Saint Preux is ineradicable and signals the beginning of her final attempt at resolving the dilemma in which it places her. She soon resumes her correspondence with Saint Preux (Part VI, Letter VI); and her love increasingly reasserts itself until in her last letter Julie acknowledges its invincibility. In this way, the direction in which Julie and Saint Preux's correspondence proceeded in the first half of the novel--from intimate and passionate letters to indirect communication through Claire, to silence--is inverted. Julie's letter to Claire, which ends her silence, is followed by her last three letters to Saint Preux. The resumption of correspondence between Julie and Saint Preux forms a rapid coda for the novel and restores to their relationship the intensity of the night of love they shared in Julie's room.

When Claire declines to act upon her suggestion, Julie makes the same request to Saint Preux (Part VI, Letter VI). Though Julie's letter urges him to marry another, its very presence and appearance stir the passion-filled memories he has been trying to overcome. His reply begins:

Julie! une lettre de vous!...après sept ans de silence...oui c'est elle; je le vois, je le sens:

mes yeux méconnoitroient-ils des traits que mon coeur ne put oublier? Quoi? vous vous souvenez de mon nom? vous le savez encore écrire?...en formant ce nom votre main n'a-t-elle point tremblé?...Je m'égare, et c'est votre faute. La forme, le pli, le cachet, l'adresse, tout dans cette lettre m'en rappelle de trop différentes. Le coeur et la main semblent se contredire. Ah! deviez-vous employer la même écriture pour tracer d'autres sentimens (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 674)?

In this passage perhaps more than in any other, we can see just how closely their letters are associated with their love. The agitation apparent in his words, the exclamations, interrogatives, and disjointed phrases are the result of the letter itself. It is a form of communication once consecrated to love alone; and because of the request contained in Julie's letter, Saint Preux accuses her of betraying that form. Julie herself, despite the virtuous principles she proclaims in her letter to Saint Preux, does not deny the pleasure implicit in writing to him. "Quel sentiment délicieux j'éprouve en commençant cette lettre" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 664). Although neither Julie nor Saint Preux admit that love alone remains the foundation of their relationship, their correspondence, which once signaled the birth of their love, now announces its rebirth.

Saint Preux rejects Julie's proposal on the grounds that marriage to Claire would constitute infidelity toward their past love. Without such fidelity, he insists (Part VI, Letter VII), their "amitié" would be rendered meaningless. Saint Preux's position, however, makes Julie

more apprehensive about the adequacy and benefit of their dedication to virtue. She demands that he stay away from Clarens (at the time of these letters, Saint Preux is in Italy with Milord Edouard). But included in Julie's demand for a renewed separation is the request that they re-establish a regular correspondence.

Si vous croyez devoir donner encore quelques années d'absence aux restes toujours suspects d'une jeunesse impétueuse, écrivez-moi souvent, venez nous voir quand vous voudrez, entretenons la correspondance la plus intime. Quelle peine n'est pas adoucie par cette consolation? Quel éloignement ne supporte-t-on pas par l'espoir de finir ses jours ensemble (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 693)?

In her effort to preserve their hard-won virtue, Julie restores the intimacy discouraged at Clarens. Her letter fulfills the same purpose as Saint Preux's very first letter which begins with the words: "Il faut vous fuir, Mademoiselle." It establishes a distance conducive to virtue and a means of pursuing the joys of a love that cannot be denied. Indeed, their only joy lies in the pursuit of a more perfect union in love. The separation implicit in correspondence finds its compensation in the expression of their hope for a life no longer threatened by sin. It is precisely the "espoir" which Julie seeks in a renewed correspondence that is absent from the community of Clarens. Although Julie experienced greater happiness in her years at Clarens than at any other period of her life, Julie feels an unexplainable emptiness in the midst of contentment.



Voilà ce que j'éprouve en partie depuis mon mariage, et depuis votre retour. Je ne vois par tout que sujets de contentement, et je ne suis pas contente. Une langueur secrète s'insinue au fond de mon coeur; je le sens vuide et gonflé, comme vous disiez autrefois du votre; l'attachement que j'ai pour tout ce qui m'est cher ne suffit pas pour l'occuper, il lui reste une force inutile dont il ne sait que faire. Cette peine est bizarre, j'en conviens; mais elle n'est pas moins réelle. Mon ami, je suis trop heureuse; le bonheur m'ennuye (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 694).

Julie realizes that life at Clarens, as happy as it seems, is stagnant. There, happiness itself is wearisome because it depends upon a perfect balance of love and duty. There exists an incessant tension. All personal feelings and aspirations are subservient to community interests. Even Julie and Saint Preux's memories are denied them and superseded by the tableau of a blissful present. The transformation of their love into "amitié" depends, in effect, upon the dissolution of their love. The happiness produced by this friendship is artificial because it denies the reality of their passion for each other. Julie is "too happy" in the sense that she has had enough of this contrived well-being. The total concentration on the present and on the community of friends necessary for happiness at Clarens destroys all hope in the future and in the satisfaction of real personal needs, which for Julie constitute true human happiness. In one of the novel's most eloquent passages, Julie tells Saint Preux of her conviction that all human happiness lies essentially in its anticipation.

Tant qu'on désire on peut se passer d'être heureux; on s'attend à le devenir; si le bonheur

ne vient point, l'espoir se prolonge, et le charme de l'illusion dure autant que la passion qui le cause. Ainsi cet état se suffit à lui-même, et l'inquiétude qu'il donne est une sorte de jouissance qui supplée à la réalité.

Qui vaut mieux peut-être. Malheur à qui n'a plus rien à désirer! il perd pour ainsi dire tout ce qu'il possède. On jouit moins de ce qu'on obtient que de ce qu'on espere, et l'on n'est heureux qu'avant d'être heureux. En effet, l'homme avide et borné, fait pour tout vouloir et peu obtenir, a reçu du ciel une force consolante qui rapproche de lui tout ce qu'il desire, qui le soumet à son imagination, qui le lui rend présent et sensible, qui le lui livre en quelque sorte, et pour lui rendre cette imaginaire propriété plus douce, le modifie au gré de sa passion. Mais tout ce prestige disparoit devant l'objet même; rien n'embellit plus cet objet aux yeux du possesseur; on ne se figure point ce qu'on voit; l'imagination ne pare plus rien de ce qu'on possède, l'illusion cesse où commence la jouissance. Le pays des chimeres est en ce monde le seul digne d'être habité, et tel est le néant des choses humaines, qu'hors l'Être existant par lui-même, il n'y a rien de beau que ce qui n'est pas (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 693).

Correspondence prevents the union for which they yearn while permitting them to pursue it. It allows for the exercise of the imagination which is an essential element of the happiness that Julie describes. Because the act of writing is solitary, Julie and Saint Preux may visualize each other in circumstances which afford them the perfect union which they seek and which would cease if they were actually together. In this respect, the postponement of the ultimate enjoyment of their love inherent in their correspondence is the closest they may come in this world to the state of self-sufficiency applicable to God alone.

The preservation of their love through letters is an old solution. Saint Preux experienced the illusion of

union with Julie as he wrote to her from Meillerie (Part I, Letter XXVI). Julie understands the benefits of correspondence with Saint Preux more fully now that she realizes that the happiness they seek in union is paradoxically dependent upon their separation. However, Julie feels as much frustration as happiness from this perpetuation of desire. She fervently hopes to enjoy the pleasure of reunion with Saint Preux: "Quel éloignement ne supporte-t-on pas par l'espoir de finir ses jours ensemble" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 692)? But in the very letter in which she urges Saint Preux to resume a regular correspondence, she doubts whether there is anything worth hoping for in this world.

Concevez-vous quelque remede à ce dégoût du bien-être? Pour moi, je vous avoue qu'un sentiment si peu raisonnable et si peu volontaire a beaucoup ôté du prix que je donnois à la vie, et je n'imagine pas quelle sorte de charme on y peut trouver qui me manque ou qui me suffise.... mon coeur ignore ce qu'il lui manque; il désire sans savoir quoi.

Ne trouvant donc rien ici-bas qui lui suffise, mon ame avide cherche ailleurs dequoi la remplir; en s'élevant à la source du sentiment et de l'être, elle y perd sa sécheresse et sa langueur; elle y renaît, elle s'y ranime, elle y trouve un nouveau ressort, elle y puise une nouvelle vie; elle y prend une autre existence qui ne tient point aux passions du corps, ou plutôt elle n'est plus en moi-même; elle est toute dans l'Etre immense qu'elle contemple, et dégagée un moment de ses entraves, elle se console d'y rentrer, par cet essai d'un état plus sublime, qu'elle espere être un jour le sien (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, pp. 694-95).

Life at Clarens has lost its charm, and correspondence with Saint Preux can provide at best only temporary satisfaction of her needs. Her only hope is to transcend an existence



founded on the constant enmity of duty and passion. The thirst for a new existence is, in effect, a death-wish which is soon fulfilled thanks to a fortuitous accident (Part VI, Letter IX).<sup>10</sup> Yet even in death, correspondence assumes a pivotal role.

On her death bed, Julie composes a letter to Saint Preux in which she unequivocally discredits the faith she placed in Wolmar's plan for a harmonious "ménage à trois" and reaffirms her love for her former tutor.

Il faut renoncer à nos projets. Tout est changé, mon bon ami; souffrons ce changement sans murmure; il vient d'une main plus sage que nous. Nous songions à nous réunir: cette réunion n'étoit pas bonne. C'est un bienfait du Ciel de l'avoir prévenue; sans doute il prévient des malheurs.

Je me suis longtems fait illusion. Cette illusion me fut salutaire; elle se détruit au moment que je n'en ai plus besoin. Vous m'avez crû guérie, et j'ai crû l'être. Rendons grace à celui qui fit durer cette erreur autant qu'elle étoit utile; qui sait si me voyant si près de l'abîme, la tête ne m'eut tourné? Oui, j'eus beau vouloir étouffer le premier sentiment qui m'a fait vivre, il s'est concentré dans mon coeur. Il s'y réveille au moment qu'il n'est plus à craindre; il me soutient quand mes forces m'abandonnent; il me ranime quand je me meurs (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, pp. 740-41).

She summarizes her whole life in terms of her feelings for Saint Preux. Her love for him is primordial ("le premier sentiment qui m'a fait vivre") and enduring ("il s'est concentré dans mon coeur"); it sustains her in the face of

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<sup>10</sup>Aram Vartanian ("The Death of Julie: a Psychological Post-mortem," L'Esprit Créateur, Vol. VI, no. 2, pp. 77-84) has demonstrated most ably that despite the flimsy physical pretense for Julie's death, the psychological aspects of her passing deserve our greatest attention. Julie seems eager to die; and the more grave her condition, the greater her joy and satisfaction.

death ("il me soutient quand mes forces m'abandonnent") and guarantees eternal life ("il me ranime quand je me meurs"). For Julie, death, faith in an afterlife, and love for Saint Preux are an indivisible goal. "...Death," observes Vartanian, "was so attractive to Julie because it had become for her, involuntarily, an affirmation of desire, which was no longer possible under the self-imposed conditions of her virtuous life."<sup>11</sup> Thus, Julie's letter, in expressing her desire, performs the same function at the end of her life that it has performed since the beginning of her relationship with Saint Preux--the communication and preservation of love. Its last paragraph refers to the cyclical nature of their affair and to the critical role that the letter played in it:

Adieu, adieu, mon doux ami... Hélas! j'acheve de vivre comme j'ai commencé. J'en dis trop, peut-être, en ce moment où le coeur ne déguise plus rien... Eh pour quoi craindrois-je d'exprimer tout ce que je sens? Ce n'est plus moi qui te parle; je suis déjà dans les bras de la mort. Quand tu verras cette Lettre, les vers rongeront le visage de ton amante, et son coeur où tu ne seras plus. Mais mon ame existeroit-elle sans toi, sans toi quelle félicité goûterois-je? Non, je ne te quitte pas, je vais t'attendre. La vertu qui nous sépara sur la terre, nous unira dans le séjour éternel. Je meurs dans cette douce attente. Trop heureuse d'acheter au prix de ma vie le droit de t'aimer toujours sans crime, et de te le dire encore une fois (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 743).

Though this letter maintains the tradition of their previous correspondence, it also represents a momentous transition

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

in their relationship. Love is communicated and preserved on a new plane. The letter unites the temporal world with the eternal. It beckons Saint Preux toward the new spiritual realm into which Julie has crossed. Julie's letter is posthumous and constitutes Julie's last physical remains. Its words are the symbolic representation of Julie's spirit which has triumphed over the corruptibility of the body and over the physical desires which constantly menace the spiritual needs of love. "Ce n'est plus moi qui te parle, je suis déjà dans les bras de la mort. Quand tu verras cette lettre, des vers rongeront le visage de ton amante, et son coeur où tu ne seras plus." The discrepancy in time between the letter's composition and its reception coupled with the knowledge that Julie is already dead<sup>12</sup> leave the impression, to repeat Jean Rousset's phrase, "que ces paroles sont jetées par dessus la tombe."<sup>13</sup> Death establishes the final separation of the lovers; and, as has been the letter's function throughout their affair, Julie's letter "d'outre tombe" spans the gulf between them and unites them in spirit. In the end, as from the beginning, their letters are a symbol of the opposing forces, attraction and separation, which simultaneously govern their relationship. However, Julie's last letter has one trait that

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<sup>12</sup>Julie's passing was described to Saint Preux by Wolmar in the letter previous to Julie's. He is, therefore, aware of the letter's posthumous nature.

<sup>13</sup>Rousset, "Rousseau romancier," p. 79.

distinguishes it from all the others. It expresses Julie's firm belief that this time the letter, which announces the need to flee Saint Preux at the same time as it expresses a desire for closer union, will lead him into a world where one need no longer write letters, where lovers can be united by the virtue which once separated them. Recognizing the limitations of love by correspondence but still subjected to them while she is alive, Julie must write the letter to end all letters before passing into the realm of silent, absolute union.



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### CHAPTER III

#### EPISTOLARY NOVEL: PRELUDE TO AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Just as the act of writing letters was an integral part of Julie and Saint Preux's love, writing was a whole way of life for Rousseau himself. For this man who found it difficult to accept and adjust to the conventions of life in society, writing was a means both of expressing his displeasure with society and of finding a place within it. Rousseau saw in his writing a fatal force. From the moment he decided to write his first Discours, his literary career began to follow a path from which there was no return. "Tout le reste de ma vie et de mes malheurs fut l'effet inévitable de cet instant d'égarement" (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 351). The epistolary dialogue of La Nouvelle Héloïse is a metaphor for the dialogue that Rousseau repeatedly sought to maintain with his contemporaries through his works.

From the time of his earliest works, Rousseau detected a fatal power implicit in verbal expression. The development of language and its effect upon man are important aspects of the second Discours (1755) and are the main topics of his Essai sur l'origine des langues.<sup>1</sup> In the

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<sup>1</sup>The Essai was first published posthumously in

second Discours Rousseau located in the development of language one of the signs and causes of man's evolution from the state of nature to that of civilized man. He developed this opinion at length in the Essai sur l'origine des langues. In this seldom read work, Rousseau theorized that man progressed in minute steps and over a long period of time from a state of relative silence to one of highly sophisticated communication. In the earliest stages of language, feelings and emotions, as opposed to abstract ideas, were communicated by drawings, pantomime, or "cries de la nature." As imprecise as these methods may have been, their main virtue, which has been lost in advanced civilizations, was that they communicated exactly what the physical signs or inarticulate cries denoted. These signs permitted neither subtlety nor deception. Meaning and form were at one. But with the development of society and man's growing dependence upon social conventions in order to overcome the physical hardships inflicted by his natural environment, language became more complex and conventional. These changes created as many problems as they solved and represented both a loss and a gain for man.

A mesure que les besoins croissent, que les affaires s'embrouillent, que les lumières s'étendent, le langage change de caractère; il devient plus juste et moins passionné; il substitue aux sentiments les idées; il ne parle plus au coeur, mais à la raison. Par là même l'accent s'éteint, l'articulation

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1781. Recent scholarship estimates its composition to have occurred during the period of the second Discours. Cf. Oeuvres complètes, Vol. I, p. 1548.

s'étend, la langue devient plus exacte, plus claire, mais plus traînante, plus sourde, et plus froide. Ce progrès me paraît tout-à-fait naturel.<sup>2</sup>

Though there are advantages and disadvantages to be had from the progress of language, man is not free to choose between systems of expression that speak primarily to the heart and those that speak primarily to reason. The evolution of language from passion and simplicity toward coldness and complexity is inevitable, "tout-à-fait naturel." With each ensuing generation, man must exert a greater intellectual effort in order to express himself and understand others. He is doomed either to bear the burden of this constant effort or to succumb to willful lies and facile ambiguity.

The period of autobiographical works in Rousseau's career (Les Confessions, 1765-1770; Les Dialogues, 1773-1776; Les Rêveries, 1776-1778) was marked by an agonizing ambivalence on the author's part toward the whole tactic of writing and hiding upon which he depended in order to deal with society. On the one hand, Rousseau remained committed to writing as a means of explaining himself to and reconciling himself with the rest of mankind; but on the other, he became the prisoner and victim of his works.

The opening lines of the Confessions convey his confidence in his ability to describe himself faithfully to his readers: "Voici le seul portrait d'homme, peint exactement

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<sup>2</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Essai sur l'origine des langues, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Musset-Pathay (Paris: Dupont, 1824), Vol. II, p. 429.

d'après nature et dans toute sa vérité, qui existe et qui probablement existera jamais" (Vol. I, p. 3). Furthermore, he was convinced that the reader could not help but benefit from "...un ouvrage unique et utile, lequel peut servir de première pièce de comparaison pour l'étude des hommes, qui certainement est encore à commencer..." (Vol. I, p. 3).

However, despite the masterful chronicle of his destiny that was the Confessions and the frenetic self-justification of the Dialogues, the goal of the work that was to end with his death, the Rêveries, remained the same. In the opening paragraph of the first Promenade he states: "Mais moi, détaché d'eux [les hommes] et de tout, que suis-je moi-même? Voilà ce qui me reste à chercher" (Vol. I, p. 995).

Rousseau could never cease addressing himself to the same problem of self-knowledge and self-expression because the judgment of his readers never seemed satisfactory. When, for example, L'Emile and Le Contrat social were burned and a warrant issued for Rousseau's arrest in 1763, it was obvious to him that they had failed to understand him. Rousseau attributed the misinterpretation of his works to the inexplicable ill will of the public toward Jean-Jacques personally.

Dans l'orage qui m'a submergé, mes livres ont servi de prétexte, mais c'étoit à ma personne qu'on en vouloit. On se soucioit très peu de l'auteur, mais on vouloit perdre Jean-Jaques, et le plus grand mal qu'on ait trouvé dans mes Ecrits étoit l'honneur qu'ils pouvoient me faire... Tout ce qu'il y a de hardi dans le Contrat social étoit auparavant dans le Discours sur l'inégalité; tout ce qu'il y a de hardi dans l'Emile étoit auparavant dans la Julie

Or ces choses hardies n'excitèrent aucune rumeur contre les deux premiers ouvrages; donc ce ne furent pas elles qui l'excitèrent contre les derniers (Confessions, Vol. I, pp. 406-07).

In Rousseau's mind, works which should have engendered respect somehow betrayed him and became weapons in the hands of a hostile society. Nevertheless, the only means available to Rousseau to exonerate himself from the misrepresentations of others was to take up the pen once again. And so began for Rousseau the unremitting cycle of writing, unsatisfactory responses, and written rebuttal that marked the years following L'Emile and Le Contrat social. According to Rousseau's account at the end of the Confessions, his public reading of the work<sup>3</sup> was greeted with icy silence by his audience. It was this strange silence which prompted the Dialogues: "Le silence profond, universel, non moins inconcevable que le mystère qu'il couvre, mystère que depuis quinze ans on me cache avec un soin que je m'abstiens de qualifier..." (Vol. I, p. 662). But when Rousseau tried to leave the manuscript of the Dialogues on the main altar of Notre-Dame and found the gate to the sanctuary barred shut, he felt that God too had rejected him.<sup>4</sup> The Dialogues were followed by a short "billet circulaire" which Rousseau tried to distribute to passers-by. Most refused to accept it. Even when Rousseau finally decided to cease writing for the

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<sup>3</sup>The Confessions were published only posthumously. Rousseau made several public readings of them, however.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Histoire du précédent écrit, Vol. I, pp. 977-89.

public, he ended his life writing his Rêveries for himself, still convinced there remained something in himself to be explained. Regardless of his contention that his writings were only pretexts used by the public to attack him personally, the result was the same: writing, the very means by which Rousseau sought to solve his problems, provoked new ones.

Written between the period of the Discours and that of the autobiographical writings, La Nouvelle Héloïse (1761) played a central role in shaping Rousseau's ambivalent attitude toward writing. Operative within La Nouvelle Héloïse is a need to write again and again. Julie and Saint Preux feel a powerful fatality attached to their letters. And Rousseau, in two separate prefaces to the novel, consciously directed the question of the authenticity of the novel's correspondence toward himself. By virtue of the epistolary form of La Nouvelle Héloïse, Rousseau first experienced for himself man's drama of self-expression and anticipated the seemingly inexorable impulse which in the last fifteen years of his life compelled him, even after repeated disappointments, to seek the understanding of his contemporaries in works of self-explanation and self-justification. In this way the epistolary form served as a prelude to the autobiographical form.

To Rousseau's hero and heroine, letters are virtually synonymous with their efforts at achieving unity in love and happiness. Julie and Saint Preux often reflect

upon the meaning of correspondence in their relationship. They come to consider the letters they exchange an equivocal fatal force which seems simultaneously to inflict misfortune and bestow blessings upon them.

"Avec quelle ardeur ne voudrois-je pas revenir sur le passé, et faire que vous n'eussiez point vu cette fatale lettre" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 35). This statement is from Saint Preux's second letter to Julie. At the very birth of their affair the lovers detect the power of destiny in their letters. All their ensuing letters follow inevitably from the first. In her first letter to Saint Preux, Julie expresses the same feelings about the letter's fatal effects:

Dès le premier jour que j'eus le malheur de te voir, je sentis le poison qui corrompt mes sens et ma raison; je le sentis du premier instant, et tes yeux, tes sentimens, tes discours, ta plume criminelle le rendent chaque jour plus mortel (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 39).

Of all Saint Preux's attractive qualities, it is his epistolary talents ("ta plume criminelle"), placed last in Julie's enumeration, which register the decisive blow to Julie's virtue. Reflecting on the origins of their love later in the novel (Part III, Letter XVIII), Julie reaffirms this conviction about the power of the letter. "Je sentis mon coeur et me jugeai perdue à votre premier mot" (Vol. II, p. 341).

Once the first letter has been written, it is as if a chain reaction occurs. The lovers are swept up into the





quid pro quo of correspondence and have no means with which to restrain it. By their very presence letters provide a point of crisis in which all Julie and Saint Preux's feelings are irrevocably forced into the open.

For Saint Preux who initiates the correspondence, the crisis consists of anxiety in anticipation of Julie's response. She refuses to acknowledge his letter for over a week. Her silence is particularly frustrating because no reply at all is worse than a refusal to reciprocate his love. It negates the very existence of the sentiments expressed in his letter. In the face of this negation Saint Preux has no alternative but to write again and insist upon the sincerity of his love.

Que ne pouvez-vous connoître combien cette froideur m'est cruelle! vous me trouveriez trop puni. Avec quelle ardeur ne voudrois-je pas revenir sur le passé, et faire que vous n'eussiez point vu cette fatale lettre! Non, dans la crainte de vous offenser encore, je n'écrirais point celle-ci, si je n'eusse écrit la première, et je ne veux pas redoubler ma faute, mais la réparer. Faut-il pour vous appaiser dire que je m'abusais moi-même? Faut-il protester que ce n'étoit pas de l'amour que j'avois pour vous?...moi je prononcerois cet odieux parjure! Le vil mensonge est-il digne d'un coeur où vous regnez? Ah! que je sois malheureux, s'il faut l'être; pour avoir été téméraire je ne serai ni menteur ni lâche, et le crime que mon coeur a commis, ma plume ne peut le désavouer (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, pp. 34-35).

Saint Preux senses that the forces of destiny are discharged through his letters because both the reply he so painfully awaits and the compulsion to write again (he pens three letters to Julie before receiving an answer) is an inevitable result of having written the first one.

Presented with these unexpected letters, Julie has the burden of action thrust upon her. She must commit herself. If before Saint Preux's avowal of love she was able to conceal her feelings and protect her virtue by silence, the intrusion of her tutor's letter into her life destroys the effectiveness of silence.

J'eus beau par une froideur affectée vous tenir éloigné dans le tête à tête; cette contrainte même me trahit: vous écrivites. Au lieu de jeter au feu votre première lettre, ou de la porter à ma mère, j'osai l'ouvrir. Ce fut là mon crime, et tout le reste fut forcé. Je voulus m'empêcher de répondre à ces lettres funestes que je ne pouvois m'empêcher de lire. Cet affreux combat altéra ma santé. Je vis l'abîme où j'allais me précipiter. J'eus horreur de moi-même, et ne pus me résoudre à vous laisser partir. Je tombai dans une sorte de desespoir; j'aurois mieux aimé que vous ne fussiez plus que de n'être point à moi: j'en vins jusqu'à souhaiter votre mort, jusqu'à vous la demander. Le Ciel a vu mon cœur; cet effort doit racheter quelques fautes (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, pp. 341-42).

After having read Saint Preux's letter, Julie risks misleading him about her true feelings by not answering him. Such a misrepresentation would have serious consequences for Saint Preux who has threatened to commit suicide if Julie refuses to reply. Furthermore, her silence would constitute in effect an untruthful reply: that Saint Preux means nothing to her. Honesty dictates that she should answer. However, to reply, even if only to discourage further correspondence, proves to be an equally unacceptable course of action for Julie. In a short "billet" she suggests that she is not in the least affected by his avowal of love and encourages him to be virtuous.

N'emportez pas l'opinion d'avoir rendu votre éloignement nécessaire. Un coeur vertueux sauroit se vaincre ou se taire, et deviendrait peut-être à craindre. Mais vous.....vous pouvez rester (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 37).

Her appeal to his "coeur vertueux" actually reveals her fears for her own virtue. She writes two other such "billets"; but despite the intended aloofness of their style, they only embolden Saint Preux. No matter how evasive and dispassionate Julie's "billets," their very existence is a recognition of the validity of the issue with which they are concerned--the feelings that they have for one another. Jean Rousset, in an article on Crébillon Fils, referring to the correspondence of the Marquise in Lettres de la marquise de \*\*\* au comte de \*\*\*, states: "Ecrire si constamment qu'on n'aimera pas est déjà un aveu; par le seul fait de son existence et de son envoi, la lettre est un acte d'amour, elle engage dangereusement."<sup>5</sup> The situation applies to Julie. The fact that she answers Saint Preux places her in the spiral of correspondence. The letters now seem to grow of themselves, constantly raising questions that demand answers which, in turn, spark further discussion and questioning. The three pairs of short "billets" between Julie and Saint Preux already mentioned (pp. 37-38) are a good example of this chain-reaction effect. They consist of a rapid succession of charges and countercharges and resemble an argument in which the disputants seem to ignore the value

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<sup>5</sup>Jean Rousset, "La Monodie épistolaire: Crébillon Fils," Etudes Littéraires, Vol. I, 1968, pp. 167-74.

of reticence and restraint. By the very fact of its existence, each statement provokes a retort regardless of its wisdom. It is after this short burst of "billets" that Julie and Saint Preux find themselves inextricably involved in a love affair.

The letters themselves of course are not the root cause of their love. That lies deep within each of the lovers. But their letters are the instrument and symbol of all the problems that spring from their love. The chronology of their affair is often set in relation to Saint Preux's first letter. The period before that letter is one of silence and of immediate and affective communication. Julie writes:

Je vis, je sentis que j'étois aimée et que je devois l'être. La bouche étoit muette; le regard étoit contraint; mais le coeur se faisoit entendre: Nous éprouvames bientôt entre nous ce je-ne-sai-quoi qui rend le silence éloquent, qui fait parler des yeux baissés, qui donne une timidité téméraire, qui montre les desirs par la crainte, et dit tout ce qu'il n'ose exprimer (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 341).

Their love was then a "je-ne-sai-quoi" which required no verbal communication. That time assumes the characteristics of a personal garden of Eden. Indeed in another description of this silent period, Julie's words are almost biblical in tone. "Deux tendres amans passerent ensemble une année entiere dans le plus rigoureux silence, leurs soupirs n'osoient s'exhaler; mais leurs coeurs s'entendoient; ils croyoient souffrir, et ils étoient heureux" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 352). The syntax is uncomplicated. There are no subordinating conjunctions. The simplicity

and straightforwardness of those days is summed up in an ingenuous statement of happiness. Furthermore, Julie refers to Saint Preux and herself in the third person. They appear to Julie as entirely different persons who are no more. For their lives have been irrevocably altered by that first fatal letter. Saint Preux's decision to reveal his passion verbally is equivalent to original sin. His act replaces the uncertainty of their feelings, the "je-ne-sai-quoi," with the certain knowledge that this feeling is one of love. At first unaware of the consequence of his love, Saint Preux realizes too late its irredeemable effects.

Cependant en revenant à mon tour sur moi, je commence à connoître combien j'avois mal jugé de mon propre coeur, et je vois trop tard que ce que j'avois d'abord pris pour un délire passager, fera le destin de ma vie... N'en doutez pas, divine Julie, si vous pouviez voir quel embrasement ces huit jours de langueur ont allumé dans mon ame [the days he has spent waiting for a reply], vous gemirez vous-même des maux que vous me causez. Ils sont desormais sans remède, et je sens avec desespoir que le feu qui me consume ne s'éteindra qu'au tombeau (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 37).

The anxiety which grows in anticipation of Julie's response makes known to Saint Preux the suffering inherent in his love. His first words of love initiate a dialogue with Julie that ceases only with death. Much of this dialogue is agonizing because in the course of their lives each decision to continue or suspend their correspondence is a renewal of the choice of silence or response imposed by that first letter. So great is the significance of that letter for Julie and Saint Preux that all their ensuing

attempts to deal with their love are reflected immediately in the intensity and frequency of their letters.

Although the letter represents a departure or a fall from an earlier state of innocence and happiness, it is not purely a negative symbol. Julie enjoys rereading the first letters from Saint Preux to the extent that they remind her of the virtuous and relatively serene time before her sexual surrender to Saint Preux.

Relisez nos premieres lettres; songez à ces momens si courts et trop peu goûtés où l'amour se paroît à nos yeux de tous les charmes de la vertu, et où nous nous aimions trop pour former entre nous des liens desavoués par elle (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 352).

The act of rereading places Julie in contact once again with her lost innocence.<sup>6</sup> Yet the letters represent more than a sentimental reminiscence. They are the only material evidence of a once happy union of virtue and love. No matter what errors Julie and Saint Preux have committed, their correspondence attests to the original goodness of their love. Similarly, Saint Preux attributes great importance to the rereading of Julie's letters; but to him they do more than revive a beatific past. All her letters, those written before and after their sexual union, pay tribute to the

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<sup>6</sup>There are succeeding periods of relative innocence to which the lovers frequently allude in La Nouvelle Héloïse and which must be defined. The first is the period of silence before the beginning of correspondence; the second is the period of correspondence before their first sexual contact. The first fall from innocence lies in the initial letter which prefigures and prepares the fall of carnal knowledge. It is to this latter period of innocence that Julie refers in this last quotation.

excellence of Julie's virtuous principles and to her efforts in adhering to them. So great is Saint Preux's admiration for these principles that he recopies her letters in a bound volume which then serves as his vade mecum.

En méditant en route sur ta dernière lettre, j'ai résolu de rassembler en un recueil toutes celles que tu m'as écrites, maintenant que je ne puis plus recevoir tes avis de bouche. Quoiqu'il n'y en ait pas une que je ne sache par coeur, et bien par coeur, tu peux m'en croire; j'aime pourtant à les relire sans cesse, ne fut-ce que pour revoir les traits de cette main chérie qui seule peut faire mon bonheur. Mais insensiblement le papier s'use, et avant qu'elles soient déchirées je veux les copier toutes dans un livre blanc que je viens de choisir exprès pour cela. Il est assés gros, mais je songe à l'avenir, et j'espere ne pas mourir assés jeune pour me borner à ce volume. Je destine les soirées à cette occupation charmante, et j'avancerai lentement pour la prolonger. Ce précieux recueil ne me quittera de mes jours; il sera mon manuel dans le monde où je vais entrer; il sera pour moi le contrepoison des maximes qu'on y respire; il me consolera dans mes maux; il préviendra ou corrigera mes fautes; il m'instruira durant ma jeunesse, il m'édifiera dans tous les tems, et ce seront à mon avis les premières lettres d'amour dont on aura tiré cet usage (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 229).

Besides the moral benefit which Saint Preux reaps from this volume, he procures a near sensual delight from the very act of transcribing the letters into his book. The pleasure is totally apart from the meaning of the words. It lies in the purely physical aspects of correspondence--the markings on paper and the act of tracing the marks. Just as the mere sight of Julie's handwriting brings joy to Saint Preux, the copying of her words provides a pleasure so exceptional that he dedicates a specific part of his day for savoring this activity. Retracing, as he reads, the words once penned by



her hand, Saint Preux establishes a physical as well as spiritual communion with Julie. Furthermore, her letters are more accessible than her person inasmuch as they can be reread, and the communion, renewed at will. Rewriting them simply gives an additional physical dimension to this communion since Saint Preux shares in the act whereby Julie transports herself to him. Ironically, both Julie and Saint Preux seem destined to seek the pleasures of love in the same form of communication that in their opinion brought sin and trial into a life of innocence and simplicity.

The ambivalence of Rousseau's own attitude toward his novel after its completion resembled that of his fictional lovers toward the effects of their correspondence on their lives. Like his characters, he did not seem to know whether he should be proud or ashamed of the letters he had written. Rousseau, who always took great pride in accepting responsibility for his works, decided to sign his name to La Nouvelle Héloïse. The practice set Rousseau apart from other authors in an age when anonymity was often a practical necessity. Rousseau would learn this later during the uproar that followed Le Contrat social and L'Emile. Even on epistolary novels in which the author pretended to be only the editor of a real correspondence, few authors placed their real names, not even as editor. But in the *Seconde Préface* to La Nouvelle Héloïse, Rousseau transformed the whole issue into a point of personal honor. The preface,

subtitled Entretien sur les romans, is in the form of a dialogue between "Rousseau," the "editor" of the letters, and an "Homme de lettres," the former defending the work against the objections of the latter. The Homme de lettres, in one of the more dramatic parts of the dialogue, presses "Rousseau" on this question.

- N. (Abbreviation for the Homme de lettres) Si vous croyez donner un livre utile, à la bonne heure; mais gardez-vous de l'avouer.
- R. (Abbreviation for Rousseau the editor) De l'avouer, Monsieur? Un honnête homme se cache-t-il quand il parle au Public? Ose-t-il imprimer ce qu'il n'oseroit reconnoître? Je suis l'Editeur de ce livre, et je m'y nommerai comme Editeur.
- N. Vous vous y nommerez? Vous?
- R. Moi-même.
- N. Quoi! Vous y mettez votre nom?
- R. Oui, Monsieur.
- N. Votre vrai nom? Jean-Jacques Rousseau, en toutes lettres?
- R. Jean-Jacques Rousseau en toutes lettres.
- N. Vous n'y pensez pas! Que dira-t-on de vous?
- R. Ce qu'on voudra. Je me nomme à la tête de ce recueil, non pour me l'approprier; mais pour en répondre. S'il y a du mal, qu'on me l'impute; s'il y a du bien, je n'entends point m'en faire honneur. Si l'on trouve le livre mauvais en lui-même, c'est une raison de plus pour y mettre mon nom. Je ne veux pas passer pour meilleur que je ne suis (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, pp. 26-27).

But when the Homme de lettres pursues the question still further and mentions "Rousseau's" self-conferred title, "Citoyen de Genève," and his motto, "vitam impendere vero," "Rousseau" becomes extremely testy, refuses to include them with his name, and denigrates the book.

- N. A la tête d'un livre d'amour on lira ces mots:  
Par J.J. Rousseau, Citoyen de Genève!
- R. Citoyen de Geneve? Non pas cela. Je ne profane point le nom de ma patrie; je ne le mets qu'aux écrits que je crois lui pouvoir faire honneur....
- N. ...Mettez-vous votre devise à ce livre?

R. Non, Monsieur, je ne mettrai point ma devise à ce livre; mais je ne la quitterai pas pour cela, et je m'effraye moins que jamais de l'avoir prise (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 27).

In the period immediately preceding the novel's publication (1761), Rousseau made even more deprecatory remarks about La Nouvelle Héloïse in some of his personal correspondence.

C'est une espèce de fade et plat roman dont je suis l'éditeur, et dont quiconque en aura le courage, pourra me croire l'auteur s'il veut (Correspondance complète, Vol. VII, Letter 1176, p. 330).

Peut-être avant la fin de ce mois le misérable et plat roman dont vous parlez arrivera-t-il à Paris... (Vol. VII, Letter 1191, p. 350).

...Mais concevez-vous M. Duclos aimant cette longue traînerie de paroles emmiellées et de fade galimatias (Vol. VII, Letter 1190, p. 379).

Je ne sais quand arriveront de Hollande les exemplaires du plat chiffon dont vous m'avez parlé quelquefois (Vol. VII, Letter 1195, p. 354).

...On annonce une traduction anglaise de cette rapsodie...(Vol. VII, Letter 1210, p. 379).<sup>7</sup>

The insecurity of Rousseau's position vis-à-vis his own novel stems from the questionable esthetic and moral reputation of the novel in eighteenth century France and from criticism that Rousseau himself leveled against the novel and against the arts in general.

Since the seventeenth century the novel had been considered inferior to other literary genres. Georges May has shown that the novel did not share the same literary lineage as the more aristocratic genres of tragedy, comedy,

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<sup>7</sup>William Mead, in discussing the genesis of La Nouvelle Héloïse, calls attention to these same passages from Rousseau's correspondence. Cf. Rousseau ou le romancier enchaîné, p. 39.

and epic. It was considered to be a flight of fancy, an unintellectual amusement far inferior to drama. Boileau excluded the novel from the class of great genres because it lacked historical credentials; it had never even been mentioned by Aristotle or Horace, and none of the great writers of antiquity wrote novels. However, it was precisely to that absence of long, formal tradition that the novel owed its freedom of expression, a freedom that led to the excesses of long novels such as L'Astrée. "Dans la littérature comme dans la société," observes May, "la naissance confère, avec des privilèges certains, des devoirs non moins certains. Si donc la tragédie ou l'épopée a pour devise 'noblesse oblige,' celle du roman pourrait être 'roture donne licence.'"<sup>8</sup> Because the novel lacked rules, it was deemed frivolous; and the very term "romanesque" implied frivolity and exaggeration. Novelists were accused not only of describing fantastic situations, but immoral ones as well. The more risqué amorous tales, such as some of the novels of Diderot, Prévost, and Crébillon, were accused of corrupting morals. Nonetheless, novels were very popular. In the eyes of some authorities, too popular apparently. In 1737 the chancellor Daguesseau issued a stringent ban on the publication of all novels in France. The ban curbed publication, but not the novel's popularity. Criticism of the novel continued throughout the century. Though Rousseau seldom

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<sup>8</sup>Le Dilemme du roman au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, p. 17.

singled out the novel for criticism<sup>9</sup>, it was at least implicitly included in his frequent condemnation of the arts in general.

Rousseau's two Discours presented an extremely negative appraisal of the role of the arts in man's moral development. In the Discours sur les sciences et les arts (1750) Rousseau suggested that art had taught men to hide their true feelings behind conventions of language which did not exist in earlier societies.

Avant que l'Art eut façonné nos manières et appris à nos passions à parler un langage apprêté, nos moeurs étoient rustiques, mais naturelles; et la différence des procédés annonçoit au premier coup d'oeil celle des caracteres (Vol. III, p. 8).

Even comedy and tragedy, genres traditionally considered morally beneficial for society, came under rigorous attack. In his Lettre à d'Alembert sur les spectacles (1758) Rousseau dismissed the old dictum of comedy, "castigat ridendo mores," as a myth. Successful comedies merely cater to public opinion and do not correct the errors of the public.

Qu'on n'attribue donc pas au théâtre le pouvoir de changer des sentiments ni des moeurs qu'il ne peut que suivre et embellir. Un auteur qui voudroit heurter le goût général composeroit bientôt pour lui seul. Quand Molière corrigea la scène comique, il attaqua des modes, des ridicules; mais il ne

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<sup>9</sup>From his earliest years Rousseau was attracted to novels. But he was aware of the dangers of this attraction. In the Confessions he states that novels "...me donnerent de la vie humaine des notions bizarres et romanesques, dont l'expérience et la réflexion n'ont jamais bien pu me guerir" (Vol. I, p. 8).

choqua pas pour cela le goût du public, il le suivit ou le développa.<sup>10</sup>

Rousseau considered tragedy no more successful than comedy in affecting human behavior. The Aristotelian theory of catharsis is ultimately a myth as well. The feelings tragedy excites are engendered by and are merely a part of the play-acting.

J'entends dire que la tragédie mène à la pitié par la terreur, soit. Mais quelle est cette pitié? Une émotion passagère et vaine, qui ne dure pas plus que l'illusion qui l'a produite; un reste de sentiment naturel étouffé bientôt par les passions, une pitié stérile, qui se repaît de quelques larmes, et n'a jamais produit le moindre acte d'humanité (Lettre à d'Alembert, P. 140).

To Rousseau art had trained men to deceive, and the novel, like tragedy and comedy, contributed to the development of insincerity in society. Instances of deceit were dramatized in novels and held up as examples for the reader to emulate. In a recent study<sup>11</sup>, Peter Brooks describes the most influential novels of the first half of the eighteenth century along these very lines of deception. And the very title of Brooks's work describes well Rousseau's impression of the novel: The Novel of Worldliness.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Lettre à M. d'Alembert (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1962), pp. 135-36. All ensuing references to this work will be from this edition.

<sup>11</sup>Peter Brooks, The Novel of Worldliness (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

<sup>12</sup>According to Brooks, the aristocratic society portrayed in the works of the most popular novelists of the eighteenth century, Crébillon, Duclos, and Marivaux, is engaged in playing a game of words. Social encounters take place in the salons where polite conversation is the main

Having acquired for himself the reputation of a moral crusader bent on exposing the insidious illusions of art, Rousseau faced a troublesome dilemma when he decided to publish La Nouvelle Héloïse. The novel became not only an embarrassment, but a threat to the validity of his previous works and to his own personal integrity.

Mon grand embarras étoit la honte de me démentir ainsi moi-même si nettement et si hautement. Après les principes sévères que je venois d'établir avec tant de fracas, après les maximes austères que j'avois si fortement prêchées, après tant d'invectives mordantes contre les livres effeminés qui respiroient l'amour et la molesse, pouvoit-on rien imaginer de plus inattendu, de plus choquant, que de me voir tout d'un coup m'inscrire de ma propre main parmi les auteurs de ces livres que j'avois si durement censurés? Je sentois cette inconsequence dans toute sa force, je me la reprochois, j'en rougissois, je m'en dépitais: mais tout cela ne put suffire pour me ramener à la raison (Confessions, Vol. I, pp. 434-35).

Rousseau was undergoing a crisis of identity. Was he the "Citoyen de Genève," the man of moral principle, the conscience of society? Or was he, as author of La Nouvelle Héloïse, one of those he accused as corruptors of society?

If Rousseau could not totally condemn and disavow his work and insisted that his name be placed on it, it was due to an admittedly irrational and inconsistent commitment to the fictional world he had created. "...Tout cela [his

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pastime. Words have a power all their own in these salons. The strategy is to use the proper verbal formula in order to force one's interlocutor into revealing something of his true self while one provides oneself with an impenetrable verbal mask. In a world where all social relations seem based on highly rigid and uniform modes of discourse and deportment, the penetration of the true thoughts and feelings of another places one at a great advantage.

previous position condemning 'les livres effeminés'] ne put suffire pour me ramener à la raison." He tried to conform his actions to the principles he had espoused and the public "réforme" he had initiated, but failed. He was simply not himself, that is, not the "citoyen," when engaged in his idyllic fantasies.

Je n'étois plus un moment à moi-même, le délire ne me quittoit plus. Après beaucoup d'efforts inutiles pour écarter de moi toutes ces fictions, je fus enfin tout à fait séduit par elles, et je ne m'occupai plus qu'à tâcher d'y mettre quelque ordre et quelque suite pour en faire une espèce de Roman (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 434).

Julie, Claire, and Saint Preux were undeniably part of himself; and whatever the consequences, Rousseau would not disown them. "Subjugué complètement il fallut me soumettre à tout risque, et me résoudre à braver le qu'en dira-t-on..." (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 435). Rousseau was willing to face this "qu'en dira-t-on" because, in trying to arrange the letters, he made every effort to give these "fictions" the morally didactic purpose that typified his earlier works.

...Je me jette à plein collier dans mes rêveries, et à force de les tourner et retourner dans ma tête, j'en forme enfin l'espèce de plan dont on a vu l'exécution. C'étoit assurément le meilleur parti qui se put tirer de mes folies: l'amour du bien, qui n'est jamais sorti de mon coeur les tourna vers des objets utiles et dont la morale eut pu faire son profit (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 435).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>William Mead has suggested that it was exactly at the moment Rousseau sought to lay greater emphasis upon the didactic possibilities of his work that he was influenced by the English novelist Samuel Richardson whose Clarissa appeared in French translation in 1751.

Peut-être que le Citoyen de Genève ne pouvait mettre son nom à un ouvrage que Jean-Jacques ne savait plus



His story was one of illicit love but one in which virtue and innocence had a part. He intended it to be different from the portrayals of love found in other novels. His would culminate in the triumph of virtue.

Mes tableaux voluptueux auroient perdu toutes leurs graces si le doux coloris de l'innocence y eut manqué. Une fille foible est un objet de pitié, que l'amour peut rendre interessant et qui souvent n'est pas moins aimable: mais qui peut supporter sans indignation le spectacle des moeurs à la mode et qu'y a-t-il de plus révoltant que l'orgueil d'une femme infidelle qui foulant ouvertement aux pieds tous ses devoirs prétend que son mari soit pénétré de reconnaissance de la grace qu'elle lui accorde de vouloir bien ne pas se laisser prendre sur le fait? Les êtres parfaits ne sont pas dans la nature et leurs leçons ne sont pas assez près de nous. Mais qu'une jeune personne née avec un coeur aussi tendre qu'honnête se laisse vaincre à l'amour étant fille, et retrouve étant femme des forces pour le vaincre à son tour et redevenir vertueuse: quiconque vous dira que ce tableau dans sa totalité est scandaleux et n'est

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comment abandonner, mais il y avait tout de même un moyen acceptable de sortir de là. Et s'il y a, entre tous les moments possibles, un moment vraiment naturel pour supposer une quelconque "intervention" de Richardson, ne serai-ce pas celui-ci? Un roman de la main du Citoyen de Genève ne pouvait relever que d'une seule et unique classe de "fictions", et à ce moment-là, en 1756, en toute l'Europe, aucun exemple de cette classe n'était plus universellement connu que Clarissa (Rousseau ou le romancier enchaîné, pp. 39-40).

It is difficult, as Mead admits, to determine the extent and exact nature of Richardson's influence. One must be wary, as Bernard Guyon points out, of an overly simplistic interpretation of Rousseau's preoccupation with the moral lesson of his work. "...Parler de conversion, de brusque passage de l'érotisme à la morale, c'est fausser la réalité" (Oeuvres complètes, Vol. II, p. xlii). The first letters that Rousseau wrote and was later to arrange in a more orderly fashion were already oriented toward this moral lesson. What is important to remember, however, is that Rousseau did make every effort to refine his work from a moral standpoint and that this refinement was the fruit of his determination to do justice both to his fictional creation and to his reputation as moral critic.

pas utile, est un menteur et un hypocrite; ne l'écoutez pas (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 435).

The "tableaux voluptueux" that constituted most of the visions which first inspired Rousseau to write were given a broader perspective. He emphasized the story in its totality, the movement from the errors of love to exemplary virtue, not the particular scenes of passionate love which were necessary to bring out the victory of moral principle.

If, on the other hand, Rousseau characterized his work with irreverent epithets ("fade et plat roman," "fade galimathias," "chiffon," etc.) and refused to grant it the ultimate blessing of the trademarks of his reputation ("Citoyen de Genève" and "vitam impendere vero"), he acted out of shame and embarrassment over its form. La Nouvelle Héloïse was undeniably a "roman," a "livre d'amour." Convinced though he was after completing La Nouvelle Héloïse in September, 1758 that his work served a useful moral purpose for its readers, Rousseau was not persuaded that the public would not condemn him for having written a novel. Whereas it was undeniable that Julie and Saint Preux, after having succumbed to their sexual desires, dedicated themselves to the practice of virtue, the vehement passion of their earlier letters painted a very attractive portrait of human moral weakness. Rousseau himself criticized Richardson, then undisputed master of the moralistic, sentimental novel, on the matter of describing evil in order to dramatize the triumph of good. In a letter to the novelist Duclos, he wrote:

Je persiste malgré votre sentiment à croire cette lecture [the reading of La Nouvelle Héloïse] très dangereuse aux filles. Je pense même que Richardson s'est lourdement trompé en voulant les instruire par des Romans. C'est mettre le feu à la maison pour faire jouer les pompes (Correspondance complète, Vol. VII, p. 319).

Rousseau feared the accusation of self-contradiction; and his fears, as comments made after the novel's publication indicate, were not entirely idle. Although his contemporaries were generally pleased with La Nouvelle Héloïse, they were quick to notice the inconsistencies that its publication implied. D'Alembert wrote to Rousseau:

Quelques personnes paroissent surprises que la lettre sur la comédie et la nouvelle Héloïse (qui vaut mieux que l'autre) soient sorties de la même plume, mais bien loin de me joindre à ces critiques, plus ils auroient raison & plus je devrois vous remercier pour ma part. Continuez, monsieur, à médire & à mériter du genre humain, il mérite également l'un et l'autre; & conservez votre amitié à ceux qui, comme moi, vous aiment et vous honorent (Correspondance complète, Vol. VIII, p. 76).

Alluding to Rousseau's praise of primitive man and his condemnation of society and its works, Duclos wrote:

Coment l'Avocat des Sauvages a t il développé tant de délicatesses d'amour et de vertu dont le germe est Sans doute dans le coeur; mais que la Société seule quoique tres corompue a pourtant développé (Correspondance complète, Vol. VII, p. 308)?

Critical comments such as these, like Rousseau's own, were not meant to question the validity of the moral lesson to be found in the events of La Nouvelle Héloïse, its message, but the medium, the form of the work. How was it that Rousseau, a man who only a short time earlier proclaimed in the Lettre à d'Alembert that he had chosen the motto "vitam

impendere vero," to submit one's life to the truth, could place his name on the title page of a novel?

Realizing that he would probably be subject to such criticism, Rousseau felt compelled to explain clearly, before publication of La Nouvelle Héloïse, the nature of his work and its complete compatibility with the positions he adopted in his earlier works. He deferred sending his manuscript to his publisher Rey for yet a few more months and completed (March 14, 1759) the Entretien sur les romans, later called the *Seconde Préface* to La Nouvelle Héloïse. It was in this work that Rousseau first confronted and attempted to resolve the embarrassing issue of the novelistic form of his work. Thus much like Julie and Saint Preux who must continue to write letters in order to resolve the problems caused by their first ones, Rousseau wrote this preface in response to the personal problems caused by his novel. And with this preface, the epistolary form once again assisted Rousseau, as when he turned to writing letters in order to fulfill his need for an ideal love affair, in dealing with these problems. For in the course of the Entretien sur les romans, Rousseau exploited one of the essential conventions of the epistolary novel, the fiction of authenticity.

Essentially, the fiction of authenticity is a claim by the author of an epistolary novel that the letters in question are an authentic correspondence and that he is only the editor. In most epistolary novels the fictional editor

explains, usually in a preface or editor's note, how the letters came into his possession and the reasons for which he had them published. With this technique, the author's presence is not directly felt by the reader, thereby heightening the illusion that one is reading an actual collection of letters. The concern for the illusion of truth was paramount among the eighteenth century novelists. Jean Rousset has observed that the eighteenth century novel had a bad conscience.<sup>14</sup> Authors did not want their works to be considered as novels, but as truth. Most of the great novels of the Enlightenment era were memoir or epistolary novels. As Georges May demonstrates, this concern with "vraisemblance" was due to the demands of the reading public and professional literary critics.<sup>15</sup> They thought of the novel as a fanciful tale, an amusement, such as the long heroic novels of the seventeenth century. The novel seemed to gain little attention as a serious literary form unless the author explicitly laid claim to historical truth. With the claim of truth the novel had more in common with tragedy, whose plots were taken from history, than with the unlikely escapades of shepherds and shepherdesses. In epistolary novels the fiction of authenticity served, in a sense, to reassure the reader of the work's merit. If the story could be true, it was worth reading. Given this attitude on the part of the

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<sup>14</sup>Jean Rousset, Forme et signification (Paris: José Corti, 1964), p. 75.

<sup>15</sup>Le Dilemme du roman au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, p. 42.

reading public, the fiction of authenticity was a necessity. To omit it was a serious breach of the laws of esthetics governing the novel. Besides demanding that the work be "vraisemblable," the reading public of the eighteenth century demanded to be told that the letters or memoirs (popular genres in their own right and with their own traditions) were true. Although he often suspected that the editorship was fictitious, the eighteenth century reader almost invariably lent himself to the illusion. As Philip Stewart observes, "the reader was part of the act, not despite but largely because of the historical pretense of the novel."<sup>16</sup> In order to induce the illusion, the fiction of authenticity, even though recognized as pure convention, was a necessary first step in the epistolary novel.

In the Entretien sur les romans Rousseau played upon the essential distinction of the fiction of authenticity--that the letters are real and not a fictional narration--not in order to strengthen the "vraisemblance" of La Nouvelle Héloïse in accord with the demands of the reading public, but in order to obscure in the reader's mind the self-contradiction implicit in his decision to publish a novel. Rousseau is purposely ambiguous on the question of authenticity. He states explicitly that La Nouvelle Héloïse is not a "roman," but never says specifically that the letters are

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<sup>16</sup>Philip Stewart, Imitation and Illusion in the French Memoir-Novel, 1700-1750. The Art of Make-Believe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), p. 141.

real. When the Homme de lettres criticizes La Nouvelle Héloïse for its lack of adventures and its extraordinary characters, "Rousseau," the "editor," replies:

C'est-à-dire, qu'il vous faut des hommes communs et des événements rares? Je crois que j'aimerois mieux le contraire. D'ailleurs, vous jugez ce que vous avez lu comme un Roman. Ce n'en est point un; vous l'avez dit vous-même. C'est un Recueil de Lettres... (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 13).

The distinction that Rousseau makes does not rule out the possibility that the "Recueil de Lettres" is fictional. When Rousseau states that his book is not a "roman," but a "Recueil de Lettres," he means simply that La Nouvelle Héloïse does not share the many faults that have come to be associated with novels, such as the unlikely events and the common, morally uninspiring characters mentioned above. The term "roman," throughout the dialogue, is consistently given a pejorative meaning. In a critical comment which prefigures the main theme of Flaubert's Madame Bovary, "Rousseau" states:

L'on se plaint que les Romans troublent les têtes: je le crois bien. En montrant sans cesse à ceux qui les lisent, les prétendus charmes d'un état qui n'est pas le leur, ils les séduisent, ils leur font prendre leur état en dédain, et en faire un échange imaginaire contre celui qu'on leur fait aimer. Voulant être ce qu'on n'est pas, on parvient à se croire autre chose que ce qu'on est, et voilà comment on devient fou (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 21).

On several occasions the "editor" disdainfully refers to novels as "vos Romans," the possessive adjective serving to separate La Nouvelle Héloïse and himself, in the Homme de lettres' mind, from that genre and its practitioners. To

Rousseau neither of the terms, "roman" or "lettres," insofar as the former implies pure fiction and the latter, historical truth, applies to La Nouvelle Héloïse. The Homme de lettres, Rousseau's foil in the dialogue, whose judgment reflects that of the general reading public, admits that La Nouvelle Héloïse does not fit either category.

N. Oh! si elle [Julie] avoit existé!

R. Hé bien?

N. Mais sûrement ce n'est qu'une fiction.

R. Supposez.

N. Ence cas, je ne connois rien de si maussade. Ces Lettres ne sont point des Lettres; ce Roman n'est point un Roman; les personnages sont des gens de l'autre monde (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 12).

In leaving the issue of authenticity unresolved, Rousseau sought to focus the reader's attention solely on the work's moral value and not on its authorship.

N. ...Cette correspondance est-elle réelle, ou si c'est une fiction?

R. Je ne vois point la conséquence. Pour dire si un Livre est bon ou mauvais, qu'importe de savoir comment on l'a fait (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 11)?

If Rousseau stressed early in the Entretien the importance of examining La Nouvelle Héloïse itself, it was with the intention of demonstrating its superiority over other novels and accepting credit for it. Rousseau's ambiguity over the origin of the letters could ease his dilemma only in part. It will be remembered that Rousseau's problem was that his novel contradicted the principles he previously professed but that at the same time he was compelled to write and publish it. Rousseau's refusal to acknowledge the author of the letters suspended for a moment the



accusation that he renounced his principles in writing a novel, but it risked depriving him the privilege of acknowledging the fruit of his labor. For in order to feel comfortable in associating himself with the letters, at least as editor, Rousseau had to confront his past criticism of the novel and explain how La Nouvelle Héloïse was able to overcome the faults of the genre.

In 1758, the very year in which he completed La Nouvelle Héloïse, Rousseau wrote in the Lettre à d'Alembert: "Quand il seroit vrai qu'on ne peint au théâtre que des passions légitimes, s'ensuit-il de là que les impressions en sont plus foibles, que les effets en sont moins dangereux" (p. 163)? Applied to the novel this was the one major criticism against which Rousseau directed most of his arguments in defense of La Nouvelle Héloïse. Rousseau could not deny that La Nouvelle Héloïse depicted an illicit love affair. But rather than admit that his work was inconsistent with his previous statements, Rousseau sought to blame society and the individual reader for his inconsistency. In the Lettre à d'Alembert Rousseau was eager to oppose the establishment of a theater in Geneva because he believed his countrymen were modern-day Spartans combatting by the practice of virtue the degenerative influence of larger nations. In his opinion theater and novels could not ameliorate a basically good society such as Geneva's; they could only pervert it. La Nouvelle Héloïse, on the other hand, was intended especially for those societies

already corrupted by an excessive devotion to the arts, that imitation of virtue which diverts men from its practice. It was a medicine for an already diseased populace.

Dans des temps d'épidémie et de contagion, quand tout est atteint dès l'enfance, faut-il empêcher le débit des drogues bonnes aux malades, sous prétexte qu'elles pourroient nuire aux gens sains (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 25)?

Rousseau believed that La Nouvelle Héloïse, unlike other novels, was constructed so as to generate and sustain a truly beneficent moral effect. The passion of the early parts served to attract those who habitually read novels and led them to the noble tableau of idyllic, virtuous Clarens. Those offended by the first part do not need the moral lessons of the rest of the novel.

Je pense...que la fin de ce recueil seroit superflue aux lecteurs rebutés du commencement, et que ce même commencement doit être agréable à ceux pour qui la fin peut être utile. Ainsi, ceux qui n'acheveront pas le livre, ne perdront rien, puisqu'il ne leur est pas propre; et ceux qui peuvent en profiter ne l'auroient pas lu, s'il eût commencé plus gravement. Pour rendre utile ce qu'on veut dire, il faut d'abord se faire écouter de ceux qui doivent en faire usage (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 17).

This last statement leaves open to suspicion the sincerity of Rousseau's contention that he signed his manuscript as "editor" only to answer for any moral harm it might occasion and not to accept credit for any favorable moral effect it might have. "Je me nomme à la tête de ce recueil, non pour me l'approprier; mais pour en répondre. S'il y a du mal, qu'on me l'impute; s'il y a du bien, je n'entends point m'en faire honneur" (La Nouvelle Héloïse,

Vol. II, p. 27). Who else could accept credit but he who affixed his real name as editor? Rousseau's decision to include his name as editor, his refusal to lend the letters the full support of his motto and title, and his defense of the moral superiority of La Nouvelle Héloïse had as their purpose the exact opposite of the one stated--to be immune from all blame of immoral influence and to be credited with any moral benefit attributable to the reading of La Nouvelle Héloïse. Rousseau wished to have the public associate him with La Nouvelle Héloïse but not with the term "romancier." These aims, though inconsistent in themselves, corresponded perfectly with Rousseau's personal problems. The only way Rousseau could escape from the accusation of self-contradiction that he felt sure would result from the publication of La Nouvelle Héloïse was to render admissible that which appeared blatantly contradictory. To him this was not at all unreasonable because truth and consistency were not coincidental.

Vous voulez qu'on soit toujours conséquent; je doute que cela soit possible à l'homme; mais ce qui lui est possible est d'être toujours vrai: voilà ce que je veux tâcher d'être (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 27).

As an "editor" who neither confirms nor denies that the "Recueil de Lettres" is real or fictional, Rousseau was able to contradict himself without abandoning his much heralded motto "vitam impendere vero." He concealed the whole truth about the origin of the letters, but only in order to avoid lying.

N. Quand je vous demande si vous êtes l'auteur de ces Lettres, pourquoi donc éludez-vous ma question?

R. Pour cela même que je ne veux pas dire un mensonge.

N. Mais vous refusez aussi de dire la vérité?

R. C'est encore lui rendre honneur que de déclarer qu'on la veut taire: Vous auriez meilleur marché d'un homme qui voudrait mentir (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, pp. 27-28).

To Rousseau it would be lying either to renounce his previous condemnation of novels or to refuse to acknowledge the greatness of La Nouvelle Héloïse merely in order to remain consistent in the eyes of the public. The truth that Rousseau wishes to honor transcends, in his mind, any inconsistency between his statements and actions. The reader is blind to this truth. He cannot judge the work in itself but seeks to determine its authorship before accepting or rejecting it.

R. Hé bien, vous concluez donc?

N. Je ne conclus pas; je doute, et je ne saurois vous dire, combien ce doute m'a tourmenté durant la lecture de ces lettres. Certainement, si tout cela n'est que fiction, vous avez fait un mauvais livre: mais dites que ces deux femmes ont existé; et je relis ce Recueil tous les ans jusqu'à la fin de ma vie (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 29).

Either of these conclusions, if accepted as the truth, would destroy the dual aims of Rousseau's fiction of authenticity. He would either be accused of forsaking his principles by writing a novel or would be denied the credit due him as author of this "recueil." By keeping the reader in doubt on the question of authenticity, as "Rousseau," the "editor," succeeds in doing with the *Homme de lettres*, Rousseau hoped to save himself from an oversimplified judgment on the grounds of inconsistency alone.

The readers of La Nouvelle Héloïse unfortunately would not necessarily react to Rousseau's ambiguous fiction of authenticity as did the Homme de lettres. They were inured to similar claims of editorship made in countless memoir and epistolary novels and usually concluded or at least suspected that editor and author were one and the same. Rousseau needed greater reassurance that some doubt would always remain in the reader's mind about his role in the composition of La Nouvelle Héloïse. Not only might the arguments of the Entretien sur les romans fail to convince the reader that La Nouvelle Héloïse must be judged on its own merits, apart from the conditions of authorship, but because the Entretien was published separately, it might remain ignored by many. This possibility compelled Rousseau to take up his pen once again on the same matter. "Cependant, Rousseau," writes Bernard Guyon,

ne voulant pas laisser paraître son roman sans lui accorder d'une manière ou d'une autre sa protection, rédige aussitôt après un extrait ou un résumé de son dialogue qu'il place en tête de la première partie du Ms. Rey...C'est la 'Préface' (Oeuvres complètes, Vol. II, p. 1341).

Though essentially a résumé of the ideas of the Entretien, the Préface contained some adjustments. The fiction of authenticity was made even more ambiguous and contained several purposely ill-disguised clues intended to let the reader "discover" that Rousseau was perhaps something more than either the editor or the author of La Nouvelle Héloïse, that he was one of the story's characters, namely

Saint Preux. This variation on the conventional claim of authenticity was intended to mystify the reader even more than did the ambiguous claims of the Entretien and thereby make any accusation of self-contradiction inconclusive at best.

The title page of La Nouvelle Héloïse reads: "Lettres de deux amans habitans d'une petite ville au pied des Alpes. Recueillies et publiées par J. J. Rousseau." This is the standard prelude to a direct claim of authenticity. The roles seem clearly established: the lovers are the authors and Rousseau is the editor. However, the choice of the words "recueillies et publiées" is important. These terms in no way eliminate the possibility that Rousseau himself has written these letters. This distinction, as specious as it is, plays an important part in Rousseau's fiction of authenticity. For the opening line of the Préface casts some doubt on the statement of the title page. "Il faut des spectacles dans les grandes villes, et des Romans aux peuples corrompus. J'ai vû les moeurs de mon tems, et j'ai publié ces lettres" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 5). Rousseau seems to play with words here, referring to novels in general and juxtaposing them to his letters. Everyone knew what Rousseau thought of the morals of his day. He implies that he published the letters because corrupt people need novels. Must one conclude that this is a novel? Perhaps, but not necessarily. The equivocation remains. Rousseau is careful to refer to his work as "ces lettres."

In the next paragraph, the strange ambiguity concerning his relationship to the work becomes more tantalizing and perplexing.

Quoique je ne porte ici que le titre d'Editeur, j'ai travaillé moi-même à ce livre, et je ne m'en cache pas. Ai-je fait le tout, et la correspondance entière est-elle une fiction? Gens du monde, que vous importe? C'est sûrement une fiction pour vous (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 5).

The point of all this is to get the reader to ask questions, to question his own presuppositions. Nothing is stated directly and the reader is free to decide for himself if he can. The first sentence, like the terms "recueillies et publiées," provides a margin of doubt for the reader. Rousseau does not say that he is the editor but that he bears the title of editor. He then belabors the point of his editorship by saying he worked on the text. Why does Rousseau bother to state the fact that an editor works on a text unless he wishes to imply that his role is slightly more than editorial? He then follows up this implication, as if reading the reader's mind, with the logical question: is he the author of a fictional correspondence? But the sentence is interrogatory, not declarative. It does not permit the reader a firm conclusion about the letters. And the last sentence-- "c'est sûrement une fiction pour vous"--though it might seem to be a direct admission of the work's purely imaginary origin, clearly suggests, with its contemptuous "pour vous," that the letters are authentic but that the reader has been weaned far too long on novels to be able to recognize truth

when he sees it. Rousseau bandies the reader about as if he did not wish to permit him the opportunity to form an opinion for or against authenticity. He leads the reader in two directions at once, purposely confusing him, as if wishing to conceal something he is reluctant to admit.

The fourth paragraph of the Préface elaborates still further his ambiguous fiction of authenticity and leaves the reader with the impression that he has something he wishes to conceal.

Quant à la vérité des faits, je déclare qu'ayant été plusieurs fois dans le pays des deux amans, je n'y ai jamais ouï parler du Baron d'Etange ni de sa fille, ni de M. d'Orbe, ni de Milord Edouard Bomston, ni de M. de Wolmar. J'avertis encore que la topographie est grossièrement altérée en plusieurs endroits; soit pour mieux donner le change au lecteur; soit qu'en effet l'auteur n'en sut pas davantage. Voilà tout ce que je puis dire. Que chacun pense comme il lui plaira (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 5).

Names of people and places have been changed for two possible reasons: either because there is something that must be hidden from the reader or because the author was not familiar with the area. Rousseau tells us that whatever the reasons for the inaccuracy of these facts (these facts refer only to names and locations; Rousseau never openly questions the veracity of the events themselves) it is possible that these false details merely conceal real persons whose true identity the author or editor, for his own reasons, cannot reveal. This type of concealment does not originate with Rousseau. Memoir novelists often avowed the use of fictional names in order to strengthen the illusion that the story is



true, so true that the fictional editor or the narrator himself had to disguise or eliminate real names so as not to embarrass certain public personages.<sup>17</sup> But because La Nouvelle Héloïse is an epistolary novel, such a technique perplexes the reader and invites him to question further the reasons for disguising names and topography. Ostensibly, Rousseau claims to be the "editor" in order to guarantee the authenticity of the letters. He never relinquishes this role. But he seems intent on confusing it with that of "author." As "editor" he credits these onomastic modifications in the text to the "author": "soit pour mieux donner le change au lecteur; soit qu'en effet l'auteur n'en sut pas davantage." In this case the "author" would seem to be one of the correspondents of La Nouvelle Héloïse. But if Rousseau is referring to one of the characters, why would the latter change the names when he is not the one publishing the letters? Rousseau, who in his role as "editor" considers himself to be a person distinct from the "author," is the one who had them published. If, on the other hand, the "author" to whom he refers represents the possible writer of entirely fictional letters, why did he not have the work published and adopt the role of "editor" himself? Rousseau seems anxious to let the reader observe him trying actively but unsuccessfully to hide the fact that he was one of the correspondents of the "recueil," that the "author" and

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<sup>17</sup>Cf. Stewart, op. cit., pp. 277-80.

"editor" are one. "Voilà tout ce que je puis dire. Que chacun pense comme il lui plaira." Is not Rousseau inviting the reader to replace these words with something on the order of: "That is all I dare say. The truth is there to find for him who searches for it?"

For anyone of Rousseau's time who first read the story, the implications of Rousseau's ambiguity over authorship and editorship were, in all likelihood, not immediately clear. The Préface merely laid the necessary seeds of doubt. William Mead describes how Rousseau continued to alert the reader to some hidden truth with numerous hints spread across the novel under the guise of editorial footnotes.<sup>18</sup> For example, Rousseau the "editor," reacting to a statement of Milord Edouard, encourages the reader to doubt the authenticity of the whole correspondence, if he has not already done so.

La chimere des conditions! C'est un pair d'Angleterre qui parle ainsi! et tout ceci ne seroit pas une fiction? Lecteur, qu'en dites-vous (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 200)?

Strange words from one who should be defending the validity of the documents he has compiled! The reader must ask what truth the editor feels obliged to veil.

But of all the suggestively ambiguous statements made by the "editor," the most striking concern Saint Preux. Having clearly implied in the Préface that the "author" was

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<sup>18</sup>Cf. William Mead, op. cit., Chapitre IV, "Ambiguïté."

one of the correspondents of La Nouvelle Héloïse and that the "author" and "editor" were one, both facts that were supposedly to remain secret, Rousseau completes the circle of these all too transparent efforts at secrecy by indicating that Saint Preux is the character with the most to hide, that he is the "author" and "editor," that he and Rousseau are the same.

Perhaps the most obvious suggestion by Rousseau that he is indeed the hero of the story lies in his overly conspicuous concealment of Saint Preux's supposed "real" name. In one of the many footnotes upon which Mead comments, Rousseau refers to Saint Preux as "cet amant anonyme."<sup>19</sup> Saint Preux, the reader learns, was a name given him by Julie and Claire. Yet even before the bestowal of this alias, Saint Preux's "real" name is never given. All letters addressed to him are marked "A l'amant de Julie" or "De Julie." Mead remarks that this anonymity constantly reminds the reader that he does not know who Julie's lover really is, whereas at least the other characters have a name.<sup>20</sup> Rousseau continues to raise the question of Saint Preux's name until the last few letters. Mead draws our attention to a footnote to Letter VII of Part VI. After seven years of silence, Saint Preux receives a letter from Julie. His response begins: "Quoi! vous vous souvenez de mon nom! Vous le savez

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<sup>19</sup> La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 186.

<sup>20</sup> William Mead, op. cit., p. 108.

encore écrire...En formant ce nom, votre main n'a-t-elle pas tremblé" (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 674)? At the second mention of "nom," Rousseau notes: "On a dit que Saint Preux était un nom controuvé. Peut-être le véritable était-il sur l'adresse" (p. 674). "Peut-être! Mais pourquoi ne l'y serait-il pas?" says Mead.

Si la lettre à Saint Preux était enfermée dans une lettre à Milord, tant mieux, mais sinon, doit-on supposer que "Saint Preux" portait maintenant dans le monde le nom qu'il avait porté à Clarens? Alors comment une lettre adressée à un autre nom lui parviendrait-elle? Sans la note, qui ne se trouve ni dans le brouillon ni dans la copie personnelle de Rousseau, on ne verrait dans la phrase de Saint-Preux qu'une simple façon de dire: Julie m'a accepté dans sa maison et me conserve son amitié et par comble de bonheur elle m'écrit. La note, au contraire, sert à créer une énigme, car, encore une fois, on devait réfléchir que ce jeune homme "de famille honnête quoique obscure", connu de tout le monde à Clarens et qui ne fait d'ailleurs rien qui déshonorerait le nom de ses parents, est le seul des personnages à porter pour les autres un nom qui n'est pas le sien. Le nom que la main de Julie a tracé sur le papier ne sera-t-il donc pas pour le lecteur celui de Jean-Jacques Rousseau?<sup>21</sup>

It was not until the publication of the Confessions in 1778 that Rousseau revealed that La Nouvelle Héloïse, though enriched by circumstances from his own life, was imaginary.

"Sans quelques reminiscences de jeunesse et Made d'Houdetot, les amours que j'ai sentis et décrits n'auroient été qu'avec des Sylphides" (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 548).

It is impossible to ascertain the percentage of readers who actually believed Rousseau was Saint Preux. Some apparently gave the question serious consideration. Mme de

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

Polignac confessed in a letter to Mme de Verdelin that she would like to ask Rousseau to see the portrait of Julie that Saint Preux received.<sup>22</sup> Charles Duclos, a novelist in his own right, believed at least that Rousseau was hiding some secret about the novel's origins.

Je desirois comme lecteur et citoyen qu'il [the novel] fut d'un autre que de vous; comme ami, je serois fâché qu'il n'en fut pas. Vous me rendez, je crois, la justice de croire qu'en vous parlant ainsi, je ne pompe pas votre Secret; quand je suis curieux, je fais mes questions crûment; ainsi ne me repondez pas a cet article la (Correspondance complète, Vol. VII, Letter 1165, p. 317).

There is actually little documentary evidence to indicate that Rousseau succeeded in convincing many of his readers that he was Julie's lover. Of greater importance, however, in this whole matter is that Rousseau felt sufficiently threatened by a possibly unpropitious public reaction to involve himself personally, in two separate prefaces, in this elaborate and convoluted charade.

Mead's analysis of the personal bent Rousseau gave La Nouvelle Héloïse through the fiction of authenticity is aimed at establishing the exact nature of Rousseau's influence upon the "roman personnel" and his originality as compared to his most illustrious predecessor in the epistolary novel, Richardson. While not truly a "roman personnel," La Nouvelle Héloïse provided writers like Goethe, Chateaubriand, and Constant a whole new approach to the novel. As for the

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<sup>22</sup>Correspondance complète, Vol. VIII, Letter 1258, p. 56.

comparison to Richardson, Mead states that they achieved common literary ends--"vraisemblance"--through different means--one subjective, the other objective.

Le côté "personnel" de la Nouvelle Héloïse, comme l'objectivité de Clarissa, est destiné surtout à nous procurer cette "utile" sensation d'un contact bouleversant avec l'existence de nos semblables.<sup>23</sup>

However, besides increasing the "vraisemblance" of La Nouvelle Héloïse, Rousseau's efforts at sustaining the illusion of a personal correspondence had a significant effect upon Rousseau's career. It made him more aware that the examination and expression of the self were the activities that best suited his genius. For Rousseau, by creating a novel from a very personal use of letters and orienting the epistolary convention of the fiction of authenticity in both prefaces toward the threat of that novel's publication on his personal reputation, drew himself further and further into the drama of written self-expression that is the epistolary novel and that later became the drama of his autobiographical writings.

Bernard Guyon writes of the capacity of the epistolary novel to reveal Rousseau's complex personality:

...Le roman par lettres, grâce au dialogue permanent qu'il institue entre des personnages qui sont tous, à des degrés divers, des représentants de l'auteur, offrait à un homme qui déjà sentait s'accumuler sur lui les malentendus et les contresens, un moyen exceptionnel de faire apparaître concurrément les aspects multiples de sa sensibilité, les richesses contrastées de sa pensée (Oeuvres complètes, Vol. II, p. xxxvi).

Any author, of course, invariably shows something of himself

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<sup>23</sup>William Mead, op. cit., p. 106.

in all that he writes. However, Rousseau, as his description of the novel's genesis in the Confessions indicates and as Guyon implies here, was more conscious than most novelists of the degree to which his characters express his own feelings and ideas. Certainly, the epistolary form satisfied Rousseau's penchant and need to reveal and explain himself obliquely. But the epistolary form, through its conventional fiction of authenticity, led Rousseau to an important discovery, one that would greatly influence his later autobiographical works: that the truth about himself, hidden beneath his incongruous behavior, lies in the written expression of his heart and mind. By its very nature the fiction of authenticity invited Rousseau to reflect upon the letters he had written and to comment on the degree of truth contained therein. And, as was previously indicated, because Rousseau labored under the handicap of an anti-novel, anti-theater reputation, not only did his letters have to seem authentic, but the illusion of their authenticity depended, at least in his own mind, upon his ability to make himself credible, that is, to make his novel an acceptable addition to the body of his work, true to the spirit of the Discours and the Lettre à d'Alembert. No novelist has ever seemed so concerned about the manner in which his work, in its every detail, reflected his own worth as a human being. He even established La Nouvelle Héloïse as a standard for understanding him. If one could thoroughly appreciate La Nouvelle Héloïse, this indicated that one had a special moral sense

which was necessary in order to understand him. "...J'ai toujours cru qu'on ne pouvoit prendre un interest si vif à l'Héloïse, sans avoir ce sixième sens, ce sens moral dont si peu de coeurs sont doués, et sans lequel nul ne sauroit entendre le mien" (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 547). It was out of a desire that he be understood through his novel, despite the apparent self-contradictions, that Rousseau centered the whole question of authenticity around himself, Rousseau-Saint Preux, editor-author.

The Prefaces to La Nouvelle Héloïse did not mark the first time that Rousseau felt the need to defend himself against a charge of self-contradiction. In December of 1752, Rousseau wrote in the Preface to his play Narcisse an apology for his decision to have the comedy presented (the 18th and 20th of December, 1752) and later published. "Il faut, malgré ma répugnance, que je parle de moi; il faut que je convienne des torts que l'on m'attribue, ou que je m'en justifie" (Narcisse, Vol. II, p. 959). Such an apology was prompted by the fact that two years earlier Rousseau had published his famous Discours sur les sciences et les arts. Rousseau was at the height of his "réforme" and was determined to live up to the principles enunciated in his Discours. He felt that the great fault of all philosophers was that they never lived up to their principles. In defense of his own transgressions on this score, he argued that Narcisse and some other earlier plays and verse were the product of inexperienced youth.



...Je ne pense plus comme l'Auteur dont ils [his earlier works] sont l'ouvrage. Ce sont des enfans illégitimes que l'on caresse encore avec plaisir en rougissant d'en être le père, à qui l'on fait ses derniers adieux, et qu'on envoie chercher fortune, sans beaucoup s'embarrasser de ce qu'ils deviendront (Narcisse, Vol. II, p. 963).

Rousseau also added, as he did later in the Preface to La Nouvelle Héloïse, that perhaps corrupted people need plays and other such amusements. In contrast to the Prefaces to his novel, however, Rousseau made no pretense of converting people to virtue. Works such as Narcisse were entertainment that diverted the audience from evil actions.

Il ne s'agit plus de porter les peuples à bien faire, il faut seulement les distraire de faire le mal; il faut les occuper à des niaiseries pour les détourner des mauvaises actions; il faut les amuser au lieu de les prêcher...c'est peut-être les servir utilement encore que d'offrir aux autres des objets de distraction qui les empêchent de songer à eux (Narcisse, Vol. II, pp. 972-73).

With the exception of this last point concerning the moral effect of his works, Rousseau's defense against the accusation of self-contradiction follows a very similar pattern in the Prefaces to Narcisse and La Nouvelle Héloïse. However, the Preface to La Nouvelle Héloïse established a new and important departure on this question. Whereas the Preface to Narcisse was an appendage to the play, the Preface to La Nouvelle Héloïse served an essential function in the novel as the fiction of authenticity. For the first time, Rousseau's attempt to explain the discrepancies between his principles and his conduct were integrated into the very form of his work.

In the Confessions, the Dialogues, and the Rêveries Rousseau confronted the same perplexing division in his personality which others observed, but misinterpreted.

Pour bien connoître un caractère il y faudroit distinguer l'aquis d'avec la nature, voir comment il s'est formé, quelles occasions l'ont développé, quel enchaînement d'affections secrettes l'a rendu tel, et comment il se modifie, pour produire quelquefois les effets les plus inattendus (Ebauches des Confessions, Vol. I, p. 1149).

"La force de vos preuves," says Rousseau to le François of the Dialogues who has accused Jean-Jacques of "abominations,"

ne me laisse pas douter un moment des crimes qu'elles attestent, et là-dessus je pense exactement comme vous: mais vous unissez des choses que je sépare. L'Auteur des Livres et celui des crimes vous paroît la même personne; je me crois fondé à en faire deux. Voilà, Monsieur le mot de l'énigme (Dialogues, Vol. I, p. 674).

Rousseau, without denying that he had committed acts which contravened the moral principles espoused in all his works (theft, prevarication, false witness, abandonment of his children to a public orphanage), refused to admit to any charge of hypocrisy. His claims to moral authenticity in the autobiographical works rested on contentions as difficult to verify as the fiction of authenticity of La Nouvelle Héloïse: his inner self, his "affections secrettes," his "dispositions intérieures" (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 86). Rousseau maintained that his true nature, "...cette bienveillance innée pour mes semblables, cet amour ardent du grand, du vrai, du beau, du juste; cette horreur du mal en tout genre; cette impossibilité de haïr, de nuire, et même de le vouloir" (Confessions, Vol. I, pp. 356-57), remained

intact, even while committing reprehensible and shameful acts. These acts were the result of unavoidable circumstances which at times distorted the voice of nature. How was society to recognize his "dispositions intérieures?" Through careful consideration of his works which are their outward manifestation.

Mais lisez tous ces passages dans le sens qu'ils présentent naturellement à l'esprit du lecteur et qu'ils avoient dans celui de l'auteur en les écrivant, lisez-les à leur place avec ce qui précède et ce qui suit, consultez la disposition de coeur où ces lectures vous mettent; c'est cette disposition qui vous éclairera sur leur véritable sens (Dialogues, Vol. I, p. 695).

Ne songez point à l'Auteur en les lisant, et sans vous prévenir ni pour ni contre, livrez votre ame aux impressions qu'elle en recevra. Vous vous assurerez ainsi par vous-même de l'intention dans laquelle ont été écrits ces livres, et s'ils peuvent être l'ouvrage d'un scelerat qui couvoit de mauvais desseins (Dialogues, Vol. I, p. 699).

The directive to consider the work and not the author echoes that of the Seconde Préface of La Nouvelle Héloïse. The purpose of the directive is essentially the same as that of his novel's fiction of authenticity: to deter the reader from drawing erroneous conclusions about the sincerity of Rousseau's convictions from his often erratic behavior.

The authenticity that Rousseau sought to establish by purposely confusing the issue of editorship-authorship and by seeking to inject himself into the story applied to himself as well as to the letters. At its deepest level, the authenticity was moral, not literary. As Saint Preux, author insofar as he is one of the correspondents

and editor insofar as he collects and gives a fictitious cover to the letters, Rousseau tried to persuade the reader to accept this paradoxical truth: that he was not a novelist in the conventional sense and in no way betrayed his earlier criticism of novels; and that at the same time he was the author of La Nouvelle Héloïse, a fictional "recueil de lettres" which depicted a successful struggle for virtue. Rousseau saw himself and his novel as morally authentic because both remain consistent, in spirit if not in word, with moral principle.

At issue for Rousseau in the autobiographical writings and the Prefaces to La Nouvelle Héloïse is the truth concerning his own character and its accurate reflection in his works. And because Rousseau locates the source of truth in his own natural impulses, it mattered little that his claims of authenticity applied to entirely fictional letters. The events described in the autobiographical works, though based on fact, and the events of his novel are vehicles of the same truth. To Rousseau the authenticity of La Nouvelle Héloïse and the authenticity of the Confessions represent two sides of the same coin.

The truth of La Nouvelle Héloïse lay in the feelings and ideas expressed in its letters. In support of this sentimental and intellectual authenticity, Rousseau pointed to the conviction held by many of his readers that the feelings and passions expressed in the letters had been really experienced. Readers were mistaken only in their belief

that these sentiments were directed toward real persons.

Tout le monde étoit persuadé qu'on ne pouvait exprimer si vivement des sentimens qu'on n'auroit point éprouvés, ni peindre ainsi les transports de l'amour que d'après son propre coeur. En cela l'on avoit raison et il est certain que j'écrivis ce roman dans les plus brulantes extases; mais on se trompoit en pensant qu'il avoit fallu des objets réels pour les produire; on étoit loin de concevoir à quel point je puis m'enflammer pour des êtres imaginaires (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 548).

Rousseau's ambiguity in the fiction of authenticity certainly contributed to the reader's error. On the level of fact, his fiction of authenticity was a lie, and a far more elaborate and deceitful one than the simple traditional claim of editorship. But fact and authenticity were not identical for Rousseau. Authenticity meant truth, the "dispositions intérieures." Fact pertained only to the historical reality of an event: either something occurred or it did not. Rousseau, therefore, could not understand the need for revealing the fictional nature of the letters.

Je ne voulus ni confirmer ni détruire une erreur qui m'étoit avantageuse. On peut voir dans la préface en dialogue que je fis imprimer à part comment je laissai là-dessus le public en suspens. Les rigoristes disent que j'aurois dû déclarer la vérité tout rondement. Pour moi je ne vois pas ce qui m'y pouvoit obliger, et je crois qu'il y auroit eu plus de bêtise que de franchise à cette déclaration faite sans nécessité (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 548).

To reveal that the letters were fictional would have been more stupid than honest and totally unnecessary because the reading public, as Rousseau was well aware, expected and depended upon the fiction of authenticity in order to lend themselves to the illusion of reality. And more important

for Rousseau, such a revelation, although factually true, would have rendered ineffective that more profound inner truth contained in the letters.

Even though the autobiographical works deal with facts from Rousseau's life, the role of historical facts in establishing the authenticity of these works differs little from that of the fictional events of La Nouvelle Héloïse. They remain subordinate in importance to the inner being where Rousseau locates truth.

...J'écris moins l'histoire de ces événemens en eux-mêmes que celle de l'état de mon ame, à mesure qu'ils sont arrivés. Or les ames ne sont plus ou moins illustres que selon qu'elles ont des sentimens plus ou moins grands et nobles, des idées plus ou moins vives et nombreuses. Les faits ne sont ici que des causes occasionnelles....Les faits sont publics, et chacun peut les connoître; mais il s'agit d'en trouver les causes secrettes (Ebauches des Confessions, Vol. I, pp. 1150-51).

Rousseau believed that the events of his life, the facts, should be interpreted in the light of his sentiments at the time of their occurrence. For his memory of these feelings, the "causes secrettes," is more reliable than that of particular incidents.

Je n'ai qu'un guide fidelle sur lequel je puisse compter; c'est la chaîne des sentimens qui ont marqué la succession de mon être, et par eux celle des événemens qui en ont été la cause ou l'effet. J'oublie aisément mes malheurs, mais je ne puis oublier mes fautes, et j'oublie encor moins mes bons sentimens. Leur souvenir m'est trop cher pour s'effacer jamais de mon coeur. Je puis faire des omissions dans les faits, des transpositions, des erreurs de dates; mais je ne puis me tromper sur ce que j'ai senti, ni sur ce que mes sentimens m'ont fait faire; et voila dequoi principalement il s'agit. L'objet propre de mes confessions est de faire connoître exactement mon intérieur dans

toutes les situations de ma vie. C'est l'histoire de mon ame que j'ai promise, et pour l'écrire fidèlement je n'ai pas besoin d'autres mémoires: il me suffit, comme j'ai fait jusqu'ici, de rentrer au dedans de moi (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 278).

The emphasis on sentiments was not to be construed as a license to alter the facts. "...Il ne suffit pas...que mes recits soient fidelles il faut aussi qu'ils soient exacts" (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 175). However, in the absence of available facts, Rousseau saw no fraudulence in substituting fictional elements, as long as they did not misrepresent the inner truth.

Je n'ai rien tu de mauvais, rien ajouté de bon, et s'il m'est arrivé d'employer quelque ornement indifférent, ce n'a jamais été que pour remplir un vide occasionné par mon défaut de mémoire; j'ai pu supposer vrai ce que je savois avoir pu l'être, jamais ce que je savois être faux (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 5).

As Rousseau observes in the Quatrième Promenade (Vol. I, pp. 1030-31), "fiction" is not the same as "mensonge." One lies only when the statements made, be they factual or fictitious, constitute an injustice, either toward oneself or others. Rousseau believed that if truth and justice are to be served, fact on occasion had to be seasoned with fiction much like the fiction of La Nouvelle Héloïse needed the hint that the correspondence was in fact his own.

The task of accurately combining the multitude of facts and feelings in order to realize truth is an extremely ambitious if not impossible one. Rousseau pondered this issue, central to all the autobiographical works, in the "pré-ambule" to the Neuchâtel manuscript of the Confessions.

Il faudrait pour ce que j'ai à dire inventer un langage aussi nouveau que mon projet: car quel ton, quel style prendre pour débrouiller ce cahos immense de sentimens si divers, si contradictoires, souvent si vils et quelquefois si sublimes dont je fus sans cesse agité (Ebauches des Confessions, Vol. I, p. 1153).<sup>24</sup>

The problems of determining the truth about himself are really literary ones. He needs a special language, a new tone and style. Rousseau believed that he was able to perceive and to reveal in writing, as an observable reality, his true self. "Je veux montrer à mes semblables un homme dans toute la vérité de la nature; et cet homme, ce sera moi" (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 5). But the self, what he referred to in the Ebauches des Confessions as the "modèle intérieur," is really a literary creation. Robert C. Carroll writes: "Rousseau's writing task especially after the novels is not a justification of self but a creation of self and an articulation of self within the linguistic atmosphere."<sup>25</sup> "L'homme dans toute la vérité de la nature" that Rousseau wishes men to see and understand is no more real than the characters of La Nouvelle Héloïse. Stated more positively, the reality of the autobiographical works is the same as that of La Nouvelle Héloïse: it is artistic. Their reality,

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<sup>24</sup>The Neuchâtel manuscript (1764), titled Ebauches des Confessions in the Oeuvres complètes, contains a much longer statement of the goals of the Confessions than the definitive Geneva manuscript. Cf. Oeuvres complètes, Vol. I, pp. 1888-89 for more complete information on this manuscript.

<sup>25</sup>Robert C. Carroll, "Rousseau's bookish ontology," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, Vol. 79, 1971, p. 124.



their truth, is that of the printed page, not that of observable facts. As far as Rousseau is concerned, others must accept this written truth. For no one can know the truth about the "modelle intérieur" of another. "Comment nous feroit-on connoître ce modelle intérieur, que celui qui le peint dans un autre ne sauroit voir, et que celui qui le voit en lui-même ne veut pas montrer" (Ebauches des Confessions, Vol. I, p. 1149)? And even though the judgment of the individual who examines his own "modelle intérieur" is questionable, his is the least fallible. "Nul ne peut écrire la vie d'un homme que lui-même. Sa manière d'être intérieure, sa véritable vie n'est connue que de lui..." (Ebauches des Confessions, Vol. I, p. 1149). At its deepest level the observable truth of Rousseau's autobiographical works is that of a writer in the process of creating a self from what he alone can perceive.

In the autobiographical works writing enabled Rousseau to create for himself an existence apart from a world in which he appeared totally inept. "Rousseau's autobiographical works are...an attempt to create a written world where the subject can live his existence to the fullest, experiencing a full presence without blinking or blushing before the monolithic regard of society."<sup>26</sup> From the Confessions, to the Dialogues, to the Rêveries, Rousseau never ceased treating this written world in which his true self is

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

visible to all. As Jean Starobinski explains, the constantly renewed verbal creation determines authentic self-expression.

La loi de l'authenticité n'interdit rien, mais n'est jamais satisfaite. Elle n'exige pas que la parole reproduise une réalité préalable, mais qu'elle produise sa vérité dans un développement libre et ininterrompu.<sup>27</sup>

Self-creation in writing became a way of life for Rousseau.

Silence, though appealing, would have frustrated his goal of correcting the false impression society had of him.

Un silence fier et dédaigneux est en pareil cas plus à sa place, et eut été bien plus de mon goût; mais il n'auroit pas rempli mon objet, et pour le remplir il falloit nécessairement que je disse de quel oeil, si j'étois un autre, je verrois un homme tel que je suis (Dialogues, Vol. I, p. 665).

His true self lies in his written interpretation of himself.

It is in his imagined existence, his writings, that he wishes to be judged.

Que la trompette du jugement dernier sonne quand elle voudra; je viendrai ce livre à la main me présenter devant le souverain juge. Je dirai hautement: voila ce que j'ai fait, ce que j'ai pensé, ce que je fus (Confessions, Vol. I, p. 5).

The written word replaces the man as the basis of judgment.

The significance of Rousseau's experience with the epistolary form concerns precisely the act of written self-creation. The epistolary form of La Nouvelle Héloïse was the instrument through which Rousseau established, as it were, his laws of authentic self-expression which later governed the autobiographical form. Rousseau first of all vicariously

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<sup>27</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau: la transparence et l'obstacle, p. 237.

experienced what was for him an ideal love affair through the letters of La Nouvelle Héloïse. The characters themselves achieve their most constant fulfillment in their correspondence. There are very few overt, physical experiences of love between Julie and Saint Preux. For the author and his imaginary lovers, proof of the reality and authenticity of the love they feel lies in their ability to express it in writing. Rousseau became more aware of the nature of his ability to express his true feelings in writing when, through the fiction of authenticity, he had occasion to reflect upon the meaning of these imaginary letters in his own life. Because he saw that on the one hand the fictitiousness of these letters contradicted his previous pronouncements on novels and that on the other they expressed his true sentiments, Rousseau realized that their authenticity transcended the concepts of fact and fiction. By elaborating this theory of authenticity in two separate prefaces, each one seeking to establish the integrity of the work and of its "editor," Rousseau initiated a personal tradition of locating his true self in the written expression of the self.

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The problem of literary truth, authenticity, raised by Rousseau through his use of the epistolary form influenced not only Rousseau's own intellectual development, but also the development of the novel in France.

In 1761 novelists still sought to persuade the reader of the value of their works through a pretension to

authenticity. This had been the mainstay of memoir and epistolary novels since the early part of the century. It persisted even though it became unconvincing through overuse. The novel, it was felt, had to affect the forms of genuine documents: memoirs, histories, and letters, in order to improve its reputation beyond that of pure fantasy. Commenting on the dependence of French novelists of the eighteenth century on claims of authenticity, Philip Stewart states:

The author in fact alludes more to technical devices--the "revêtement"--than to the essential verisimilitude of plot, which remained a problem, for most novels were still an extravagant stringing together of fortuitous tales studded with coincidences.<sup>28</sup>

Rousseau, though using the same "revêtement," invites, indeed dares the reader to go beyond the question of fact or fiction and consider La Nouvelle Héloïse as a self-contained artistic entity before judging its value as literature. As Rousseau later explained in the Rêveries, one should seek the "vérité morale" in fiction, for good fiction does not hide truth but dramatizes useful truths.

Mentir sans profit ni préjudice de soi ni d'autrui n'est pas mentir: ce n'est pas mensonge, c'est fiction.

Les fictions qui ont un objet moral s'appellent apologues ou fables et comme leur objet n'est ou ne doit être que d'envelopper des vérités utiles sous des formes sensibles et agréables, en pareil cas on ne s'attache guère à cacher le mensonge de fait qui n'est que l'habit de la vérité, et celui qui ne débite une fable que pour une fable ne ment en aucune façon (Vol. I, p. 1029).

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<sup>28</sup>Imitation and Illusion in the French Memoir-Novel, 1700-1750, p. 174.

In defending fiction Rousseau's primary intention was not to promote the novel genre per se. His main concern was the moral effect of novels. La Nouvelle Héloïse was actually intended to be the novel to end all novels, novels here in the sense of exaggerated, frivolous adventures.

Il est d'autres fictions purement oiseuses telles que sont la plupart des contes et des romans qui, sans renfermer aucune instruction véritable n'ont pour objet que l'amusement (Réveries, Vol. I, p. 1029).

Saint Preux suggests that novels be permitted to be written only by certain morally sensitive writers.

Les Romans sont peut-être la dernière instruction qu'il reste à donner à un peuple assés corrompu pour que toute autre lui soit inutile; je voudrois qu'alors la composition de ces sortes de livres ne fut permise qu'à des gens honnêtes mais sensibles dont le coeur se peignit dans leurs écrits, à des auteurs qui ne fussent pas au dessus des foiblesses de l'humanité, qui ne montrassent pas tout d'un coup la vertu dans le Ciel hors de la portée des hommes, mais qui la leur fissent aimer en la peignant d'abord moins austere, et puis du sein du vice les y sussent conduire insensiblement (La Nouvelle Héloïse, Vol. II, p. 277).

One suspects, however, that if Rousseau took up Diogenes' lantern in order to find these "honnêtes gens," the only man that he would discover to fit the description would be Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This being the case, La Nouvelle Héloïse would have to be not only the last, but the only novel worthy of the term "utile." Nonetheless, La Nouvelle Héloïse, because of its overall high moral tone, was instrumental in improving the novel's reputation in France and in increasing its popularity.

La Nouvelle Héloïse itself, of course, met with an overwhelmingly favorable reaction. A reading of volume VIII of Rousseau's Correspondance complète (ed. R. A. Leigh) reveals how deeply moved were its readers. Even some of Rousseau's stern countrymen from Geneva praised the work. In the forty years following the publication of La Nouvelle Héloïse (1761), literary critics looked more favorably upon the novel. "By the end of the eighteenth century, thus, the novel had won over a number of zealous defenders to its cause; and their arguments served both to give the genre status and to justify the ever-growing interest of the reading public."<sup>29</sup> Many of the arguments they presented in defense of the novel restated those of Rousseau. Josephine Grieder has shown that the critics stressed the importance of feelings, "sensibilité," in novels and that "...they argued that fiction was in fact truth--moral truth."<sup>30</sup> Many novelists reacted to Rousseau's insistence on moral over factual truth by stressing moral didacticism in their works. There was a marked increase in the number of these "romans moraux": from 1741-1760, there were fifteen; from 1761-1780, ninety-seven.<sup>31</sup> Most of these novels were little

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<sup>29</sup>Josephine Grieder, "The Novel as a Genre: Formal French Literary Theory, 1760-1800," French Review, Vol. XLVI, No. 2, December, 1972, p. 289.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, La Nouvelle Héloïse, ed. Daniel Mornet, Vol. I (Paris: Hachette, 1925), pp. 303-305.

more than ill-disguised sermons. However, the deeper implications of the notion of "moral truth" brought out in La Nouvelle Héloïse were not lost upon the novelists.

Bernard Guyon remarks that novelists from Restif and Laclos to Balzac and Flaubert praised La Nouvelle Héloïse as one of the milestones of art.<sup>32</sup> Rousseau's skill in letting the reader "discover" that he was really Saint Preux opened the door to the many autobiographical novels of the Romantic period. Says William Mead:

Mais les autres romanciers qui le lisaient n'auront pas manqué d'apprécier, et dès la première heure, de quelle façon cette découverte de l'autobiographie romancée pouvait leur faciliter, à eux aussi, la tâche. Ils ne savaient peut-être pas que Rousseau mentait; mais le fallait-il savoir pour comprendre combien ce genre de mensonge était utile?<sup>33</sup>

And three generations later, Balzac's triumphant claim of truth for the fruits of his imagination is a descendant of Rousseau's ambiguous fiction of authenticity.

Ah! sachez-le; ce drame n'est ni une fiction, ni un roman. All is true, il est si véritable, que chacun peut en reconnaître les éléments chez soi, dans son coeur peut-être.<sup>34</sup>

Where lies truth? This question, insofar as it pertains to art, is the most important one raised by Rousseau's handling of the epistolary form of La Nouvelle

<sup>32</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes, Vol. II, p. xix.

<sup>33</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau ou le romancier enchaîné, p. 111.

<sup>34</sup>Honoré de Balzac, Le Père Goriot (Paris: Garnier, 1963, pp. 6-7.

Héloïse. Subsequent novelists owed much to Rousseau, for his skill served to loosen the fetters of overly esteemed factual truth on the art of the novel in France.



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