

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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CONFESSIONS

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

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OVERVIEW

Jean Jacques Rousseau was born in Geneva in 1712 and died in Paris in 1778, thus nearly bridging a European century in which had opened onto the pre modern (in science, social self-awareness, post classical conceptions of art) and was to abut into a French Revolution of political structures and of social relationships, which would conclusively introduce the so-called modern world in which we now stand immersed and blindsided. Rousseau was born into an old and distinguished family—his dad was a watchmaker, a refined occupation in Switzerland—and as a young man he enjoyed the leisure of nannies—right there his sensibility opens—private tutors and music lessons—and a sophisticated social milieu. *Affaires d’amour*, increasingly engaging the post pubertal and twenty year old Rousseau, blended with the gradual introduction into the velleities of religious adherence—first Protestant, then Catholic, then back to severe Calvinist Protestantism—and again to rich contacts with the fervent milieu of the Parisian Encyclopedistes (Diderot, LaMettrie, d’Holbach) –to give the maturing Rousseau the human and intellectual foundations of what was increasingly to become a broad intellectual reputation, and a stand point from which he could launch into culture forming masterworks: *La nouvelle Heloise* (1761), *Du contrat social* (1762), and *Emile* (1762) Through all these works he was firmly marking a distinctive view of educational theory, political structures, and the preeminent role of nature and the natural. The introduction of Rousseauian themes—the goodness of natural man, the moral goodness of nature itself, the worthiness of the religious impulse; the goodness of woman—was by the seventeen sixties, sixteen years before Rousseau’s death, a new and firm current in western thought; Rousseau had through his ideas done much to enforce the sensibility that would make the French Revolution a reality.

Rousseau’s *Confessions*, completed in 1769, and covering the first fifty three years of his life, give us an inside look at the author’s private development, and most closely track the sexually autobiographical course of his life. While this is far from the first western autobiography—think of St. Augustine of Marcus Aurelius—it is perhaps the first self-inspective personal narrative to have powerfully shaped the western tradition of laying oneself out full length before the reading public. Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*, an inevitable precursor to the work of Rousseau, leaves us satisfied that he has lived a fallible mortal life, prone to the weakness of the flesh, often selfish, often fixated on its own needs. Whether or not Augustine’s is the message of Rousseau, does it not align with Rousseau’s reflections? Is Rousseau not confessing to his self-centered nature, his sense of searching for meaning, his longing to be solaced even at the expense of what he loves?

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Jean-Jacques Rousseau Rousseau is the main character in Rousseau’s *Confessions*. He is a character in a book and not a real person, simply the creation of a real person, who has decided to tell the story of some fifty years of his own life. The creator seems to have made this decision for several reasons. He wants to share with the world the story of a unique human being. He wants to declare his

woes, and reveal others' misunderstandings of him. He wants to give expression to his fascination with the large picture of his life; he wants to admire himself.

The image we get, of Rousseau from nursery to expulsion from his residence in Lake Bienne, where the account concludes, is of a person delighted with life, sensual even, gifted to learn and creative artistically, whose life after twenty or so is played out largely in relation to well placed women, whose interests in him range from puppy love through maternity to the occasional carnal. (Fun in the nursery is also part of the growing theme.) The creator of this Rousseau gives us relatively little insight into the inception of the writing process which, in the case of his character, is a face widely known, in fact part of world cultural development. Rather he walks us through a Rousseau who, from the time he leaves Mme. de Warens for Turin, has a look at Paris, then settles in Paris with its high life salons and patrons, is caught up by the occasional infatuation, immerses himself in the active life of the world mind, and has the first insinuations that many people resent him. The creator of the whole character, doubtless because here he reaches a point in himself which he can't penetrate, leaves his creation in a downward spiral of self-ignorance, fielding one personal rejection after another, losing the good will of men and women alike, although without clear understanding of the part he plays in this 'apocalypse.' Rousseau's character is the history of an imagined figure in action, a kind of fiction in itself, a way the 'real' Jean-Jacques Rousseau felt good, interesting, or contemptible and 'himself.'

Male figures in Jean-Jacques' Life

(Omission here for those major intellectuals, like Diderot and d'Alembert, whose personal relations with Jean-Jacques are formative, but who are left empty of unique personality.)

Jean Jacques' dad The author creates a lovable portrait of Jean-Jacques' dad, who kept the family together after the death in childbirth of Jean-Jacques' mother. The dad will have continued the family tradition of reading, and of reading aloud; he will visit Jean-Jacques and be there to be visited, throughout the perambulations of his son. This man is the original 'stable male figure,' who is a stable factor for the son, throughout his life.

M. Luxembourg M. Luxembourg is the dad-copy who will most support Jean-Jacques during the latter's period in France. While Mme Luxembourg appears slated for a romantic engagement with Jean-Jacques, it is the father who bonds with Jean-Jacques, supports him through a difficult operation, and sees him across the border into Switzerland, as he evades a French police warrant.

Lord Keith This Scottish lord, a veteran diplomat and adviser to rulers like the King of Prussia, befriends Jean-Jacques while the elderly man is living in retirement in Neufchatel. He puts the brilliant but anxious younger man at ease.

Female Figures in Jean-Jacques' Life

Mme. de Warens Mme. de Warens, to whom the young Rousseau is first sent, upon leaving his home as a teen ager, becomes the lifelong friend, support, advisor, and occasional lover of Jean-Jacques. She, but no one else, serves as a temporary replacement for Jean-Jacques' own mother. Jean-Jacque enjoys with Mme. many of his fondest moments of peace, conversation, and harmony.

Mme. Basile Mme. Basile is one of several waystops on Jean-Jacques' path to 'understanding women.' He stops in at her shop window, in Turin, and *engages* in flirtatious conversation, which soon sees him lodging in her establishment dining with her, and 'begging for a kiss.' Unfortunately, her husband comes home.

Mme. Dupin This elegant and kindly lady was Jean-Jacques' most stunning introduction to Paris. She treated the Swiss ingenu with cordiality and affection—and apparently with no ulterior motives. She was a learning experience for Jean-Jacques.

Mme. d'Epina Possessive patroness of Jean Jacques in Switzerland. She provided him a precious cottage in the Swiss countryside, where he occasionally visited her. Their relationship ended in pique, as she claimed he paid no regard to his contractual obligation to visit her.

Mme. Luxembourg This French lady enjoyed schmoozing with Jean-Jacques, while he read to her from *La nouvelle Heloise*. Though she too arranged a charming cottage for Jean-Jacques, as did Mme. d'Epina, her interest in her visitor waned.

Mme. Vercellis A dying aristocrat to whom the young Jean-Jacques was indebted for a job, early in his wanderings in Switzerland. Jean-Jacques stole a piece of jewelry from this lady's belongings. This moral stain never left his consciousness.

Mme. Lafarge One of Jean-Jacques' travelling companions on a post-chaise health journey to Montpellier. In mid-journey she throws herself on the young man, and introduces him to the first screw in the *Confessions*.

STORY

Book 1

FAMILY Rousseau introduces himself as one of a kind, and proclaims his intention, to memorialize that unique person. From the start declaring that his life has been strewn with misfortune, he nonetheless opens on observations concerning the happy marriage of his parents—though Jean-Jacques' mother died 'giving birth to him—and the outstanding relation he had with his own father. Due to his mother's early death, Rousseau's dad was obliged to rely on nursemaids and 'babysitters' to raise his son. (An older son, a 'ne'er do well,' was seven years older than Jean-Jacques, and although the younger child adored his older sibling, the relationship was lost; older brother left the family. Until he was five, Rousseau kept no memory of his family life—except that it imprinted on him a lasting memory of the wonderful condition of harmony and good nature. That condition, or the longing for it, all reinforced by wonderful days with his beloved aunt, who turned a family house into a castle of joy, stayed with him lifelong.

CHILDHOOD:

Hobbies Rousseau's earliest conscious experiences, first with his dad and then with nursemaids and nannies, was in the reading of romances, chivalric interpreted histories for kids. Surprisingly soon, the youngster's reading taste, nourished by volumes in a neighbor's small but classic library, grew substantially to include such ambitious work as Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Plutarch (Rousseau's favorite), or French masterpieces by such as La Bruyere, Bossuet, and Fontenelle. Rousseau will rarely allude to the richness of his literary background, but it will show in the strict (if exuberant) style of his works. masterpieces of flow and attention to readership positioning.

Boyfun The happiest days of Jean-Jacques' life, we imagine, were those in which, contemporary with the discovery of the world's pain, he passes quality boy-time with his cousin, playing improvised games, climbing trees, playing modest pranks, and simply discovering the countryside world around them. Does some element of that stage become a theme of Rousseau's life, of which he is forever complaining, that his life is degenerating, on the brink? If Rousseau cuts up, or simply 'has fun,'

SENSUALITY On the brink of puberty, Rousseau found himself expelled from the artificial paradise of childhood. He had for some time shared his nursemaid's bed, but at this turning point she threw him out, to his immediate despair. It was like losing paradise, for the pleasure after punishment. At the same time it was a reminder, for Rousseau the lad, of the bitterness he was often to eat, as the fruit of sexual desire. Women were the testing ground of his lifetime maturing—as he portrays himself—serving both as life preservers throughout his troubles—Mme. de Warens, Mme. d'Epina, Mme. Luxembourg—and, from childhood on, as punishing mothers, in whose inflicted pain Rousseau delighted. In his later life, it is in the playful times he spent with Mme. de Warens. Together they played older woman playful young man games around her house, wrapping it up in a hug. Rousseau knew how to have fun, especially with

Mother-type ladies, though his periods of fun were forever threatened by volatile moods which threatened to derail themselves. Sensual, masochistic, highly romantic, and spoiled, Rousseau nonetheless, and in the end, settled for a Theresa who was down to earth, caring, and fruitful.

CHARACTER:

Stubborn An episode from his early teen years reinforces young Rousseau's sense that the painful plays its part in the social construction of personal experience. All is not fun and games. His aunt and her chambermaids discover that an ornamental comb, which has been set out to dry in the sun, has fallen, and one of its tines been broken. Suspicion falls on Jean-Jacques, who seems the only plausible suspect. But Jean-Jacques is innocent, as he assures us. He was innocent at the time, he is innocent as he writes; he will always be innocent. And yet the blame falls on him and he is the punished one. His deep hatred of injustice roots in experiences like these. No DNA tracks are there, to pull mere allegations into the light of day.

Misbehavior It was from the painful cauldron of this heartless transactional world, that Rousseau briefly morphed into a petty thief, a personal fall he temporarily allowed himself, as he fell out of sync with the formerly well-functioning world of his youth. It is of curative relevance to note that Rousseau came out of his brushes with the master-slave version of early Industrialist capital, by generating a powerful contempt for money.

WORKING: Rousseau's early experiences in the workplace, as an engraver's apprentice, brought him his first contact with the master-slave relationship, which, throughout his life, he continued to abhor. The master in question treated his employees as parts in a puzzle, without feeling. Nothing more scandalized Rousseau's sense of the natural freedom of the individual.

MEMORIES: Self presentation Like his predecessor Saint Augustine, Rousseau announces his desire for autobiographical truth. Rousseau's weapon, against the temptations of self-justification, is exhortation, a replica of fearlessness, which is of course the special challenge of the autobiographer, for whom the very texture of his work seems to require 'seeing it his way.' Where Rousseau may be doomed to fail, as a self-critical observer, is in the discussion of his often failed relations to his most promising friends, to whom—one thinks of Diderot or d'Holbach—greatly simplified behaviors are attributed. An instance of Jean Jacques' skill, at self-understanding, could be pulled from the clarity with which he presents his essential thematic traits, mobility, instability, impatience, without calling in his enormous literary accomplishments to enhance his self-portrait.

Book 2

INDEPENDENCE. Rousseau's formative home life left behind him, the young Rousseau (16 years old) sets off for Consignon, a neighboring town not far from where he grew up, in Geneva. He is thrilled with the independence suddenly available to him, and makes his way to the contact who has been informed of his coming, a Catholic vicar, M. Pontverre.

RELIGION

Missionary priest The vicar looks forward to adding another convert to his list, while Jean Jacques is delighted by the sunny welcome that the good natured (and self-interested) vicar offers him. Though Rousseau has been brought up, in Calvinist Geneva, to abhor Catholicism, he finds himself drawn by the vicar into a friendly and vibrant Catholic milieu. Rousseau finds himself concluding that the vicar is pious but not essentially virtuous, and opens up his own lifelong reflections on what true virtue is. He gladly receives the vicar's suggestion, that he should visit a certain recent convert, Mme. de Warens.

Religious Conversion "school" in Turin Rousseau delights in the company of Mme. de Warens, to whom he has been sent on the recommendation of the vicar. but grows restless without some occupation. A fellow diner at Mme. Warens' suggests Rousseau should travel to Turin, where he can find hospitality and new frontiers, with a community of Catholic converts. In Turin, to which he arrives after a seven or

eight day walk through the splendors of mountain nature, Rousseau finds himself in a strongly Catholic milieu, from which he profits by learning

Ideas About religion While in Turin, preparing for his formal baptism as a Catholic, Rousseau finds himself reflecting that while Protestantism promotes the sounder moral virtues, Catholicism is equally worthy of study and thought. In privileged conversations, with ardent and canny young theologians, Rousseau sharpens his sense of argumentation and of the breadth of human experience. Yet on his baptismal day, clad in white robes, Rousseau feels that he has been made a dupe and a fool, in this conversion.

FRIENDSHIPS

Abbé Savoyard Among the benign figures in Mme. de Warens' entourage, is an Abbé, a cleric who takes a liking to the still young Rousseau, and imparts to him, for the first time in the young man's life, rich and salutary life lessons, insights sweetened by genuine friendship. The abbé teaches Rousseau to think positively about his own condition, to love life and people. These are also the lessons Rousseau derived from his own parents.

M. Venture Mme. de Warens loves giving musical parties, at which choir and instruments perform, and on one occasion she invites in a ragged hippy musician who is somewhat of a talented vagabond. Rousseau admires his age mate, for his free spiritedness as well as his talent, but Mme. de Warens concludes that the vagabond is a bad influence on Rousseau, and she sends Rousseau away to Lyons, as the travel buddy of her maître d, M. Maitre. Rousseau himself is tasting the world, and gaining confidence. He is still being watched over and cared for by Mme. de Warens.

SEXUALITY Rousseau meanwhile feels growing closeness to Mme. de Warens, with whom his relationship is becoming a cross between puppy love and sensuality. He is approaching the edge of a mature sexual relationship with his patronness. We cannot assume that their relationship is sexually complete, though Rousseau, in the style of his age, mutes the issue.

GROWTH / MATURING During this period with Mme. De Warens, Rousseau is gradually adopting a more mature relationship to the lady. Rousseau is also maturing intellectually, reading, forming an intellectual style of his own, and yet doubting whether he has the capacity for sustained work with ideas. His contact with Warens' intellectual friend, M. d'Aubonne, is sobering, for this intellectual, who could promote the young man's job potential, concludes that Jean Jacques has only very limited potential, and sets back the youth's confidence. Mme. de Warens lays plans to enhance Rousseau's education by sending him to a seminary, but Rousseau proves refractory when it comes to Latin, and we see that the young man would rather learn from nature than from books. Rousseau is still so young and the teachings of this old and wise religious tradition, in which, however, he persistently feels himself a Protestant outsider.

ROMANCE

Platonic attraction (Mme. de Warens) M. Ponterre, the vicar to whom Rousseau had originally been sent, who is sensitive to Rousseau's innocence and vulnerability, as well as to his impecuniousness. He had suggested young Rousseau should take a short trip to visit a Mme. de Warens, a recent convert to Catholicism, living in Annecy. Reluctantly Rousseau had made the short trip to Annecy, where he found what was to be the first and most lasting love of his life. (He meets her on Palm Sunday, 1728, having tracked her to her church.) The two establish an immediate rapport—she provides both the romantic sensibility and the maternal beauty which will be lodestones of Rousseau's entire subsequent emotional life. (With this encounter Rousseau begins to assess himself as a love-figure, and concludes that he is not bad looking, with his 'well turned leg' and the 'fire in his eyes.' Mme. de Warens' 'divine beauty' is, as he can feel, destined to reappear often in his life.)

Platonic Attraction (Mme. Basil) . In Turin, to which he will later be sent, Rousseau passes a shop window where an attractive employee, Mme. Basile, is working. Though he quickly learns that Mme.

Basile is married, neither he or she hesitates to flirt. Rousseau manages to acquire lodging in the lady's house, and insinuates himself into a working role, keeping accounts for her business, and doing day to day bookkeeping. One day he imprudently enters an open door into a room where Mme. Basile is working. He begs a kiss, but all he gets is two kisses on his hand. He is thrilled, though they are interrupted, and gladly accepts, shortly after, an invitation to dinner with Mme. Basile, and with a young priest whom she admires. In the midst of the dinner M. Basile returns from a trip, and, fully informed about his wife's behavior, and, furious at her amours, throws Jean-Jacques out of the house.

FAMILY While in Turin, where he tours and travels around the busy city, Rousseau receives a visit from his Father, and is enabled to reawaken his love for this imaginative and caring dad, who has been behind him from the start. The virtuous moral nature, which he has received from his parents, seems to Rousseau to have been his greatest life blessing.

CHARACTER Guilt In Turin Rousseau finds himself employed as a footman In the house of a dying wealthy Countess, Mme. Vercellis In the aftermath of the lady's death, young Rousseau comes upon a pink ribbon belonging to the Countess, and impetuously steals and pins it on a sweet serving girl whom he momentarily fancies, from among the rather disorganized and shifty crowd who gather around the dying lady. After the lady's death Rousseau realizes what a dispiriting crime he has committed, having violated a treasure of the Countess, and then, when the ribbon's disappearance was discovered, blaming the action on the innocent serving girl herself.

Book 3 1731-1732

INDEPENDENCE After leaving Mme. Vercellis' mansion, and even though stung by remorse at his petty crime, Rousseau feels a special thrill of independence, the kind of mountain walking thrill he had felt when first he travelled to Annecy, to meet the vicar and, later, Mme. de Warens. Warens has remained in his mind throughout his later experiences in Turin, and the thoughts of seeing her again gives him wings.

ROMANCE Relationship with Madame de Warens Rousseau and Mme. De Warens resume their fond relationship immediately. They instinctively understand one another—she is Momma and he is the Child, their sexual relation is fond but playful and high spirited—they are in a sense brother and sister, mutual lovers of life, even kittenish friends. In this ambience, Rousseau begins to see the path to growth and luck. It is noteworthy that Rousseau is lost when absent from 'Momma,' and cannot wait to return to her. This dependence will become a central theme in Rousseau's whole life, and has its roots in the nursemaid fantasies by which Rousseau introduced himself to us in Book One. Rousseau meanwhile feels growing closeness to Mme. de Warens, with whom his relationship is becoming a cross between puppy love and sensuality. He is approaching the edge of a mature sexual relationship with his patronness. We cannot assume that their relationship is sexually complete, though Rousseau, in the style of his age, mutes the issue.

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Book 4 1732

OVERVIEW Rousseau has reached the age of twenty, as we find him in Book IV, recreated from the memory of a man of fifty three. He observes in the present book that his ideas come to him from memory and the past, and we continue to observe the detail with which he unfolds his story—as well as the suspense, texture, and inwardliness with which he manages the art of narrative.

TRAVELLER. The present book finds Rousseau on the move, walking extensively through Switzerland, in search of Mme. de Warens, who is always on his mind, and who when found will be a source of much needed cash. From Turin in Italy back toward Geneva, and eventually to Paris itself, Jean Jacques will have traversed many miles on foot at the age of twenty, immersing himself, often enough, in landscapes—mountains, lakes, snowy hills—which exalt him. Paris alone seems to him truly ugly, with its stinking streets and filthy urchins.

A great deal of the narrative movement, in the present book, is random, moving as events prompt the writer, who finds himself spending an innocent almost erotic day with two young girls, writing his first poetry, enjoying the company of a dwarf like magistrate (Judge Simon), trying his own hand at composing music, buddying along with a flamboyant Greek priest who is in search of the Holy Sepulchre, commiserating with (and learning from) a simple peasant, who must hide his provender lest the government tax the food out of his mouth, and, just before his blessed arrival at de Warens', sleeping out on city benches, for lack of a *sou* to rent a lodging. One would compare this saga of youthful vagabondage to the ramblings of another literary wanderer, Grimmelshausen's *Simplizzisimus*, who wandered the devastated landscape of the Thirty Years War, a century before Rousseau.

ROMANCE From his early life in Geneva, as Rousseau recounted in Book One, our narrator has been exceptionally sensitive to the fair sex—even to the degree of enjoying their punishments—but, as we continue to track his development, we find that his dealings with women the senses of modesty, pure friendliness, good natured brotherliness, and occasion shame prove to be his governing emotions. His day of play with the two young girls, with whom the book opens, is amorous and fun, but no more, and perfect fun because of its refusal to go too far. Not long after, the author finds himself again in a similar role: Mlle. Merceret, the less attractive of the two girls with whom Rousseau has just been sporting, invites him to accompany her home to visit her father. On the way, the two sleep in the same room for several nights. Nothing sexual happens.

NATURE Noteworthy, Rousseau portrays Rousseau as profoundly sensitive to nature, as he makes his way back and forth through Alps, mountain villages, areas of lakes and farmlands. All that is gentle, sensuous, visually deep is summoned to the author's self-analysis, as he reflects on the many ways in which the natural sensitizes his soul. He takes us into a western literary history which stretches from Petrarch to Wordsworth, for whom 'nature hath ample power to chasten and subdue,' and for whom 'intimations of immortality' are themselves part of the disclosure implicit in scenes of wild nature.

ROMANCE *Mme. De Warens* The leitmotif of this Book, which concludes with Rousseau reuniting with Mme. de Warens, is that lady herself, who hovers like an angel over the journeys of our narrator. Not only does she remain true to her original bond with the young man—guaranteeing him a small cash base—but she aids with her often re-expressed confidence. As the Book ends she has

introduced him to the Intendant-General, who will see that Rousseau is under the protection of the regional king. But it will also be Rousseau whose own mind keeps her at the center of his life.

Rousseau's own mind will, as he is in the process of writing *The Confessions*, be rich with impressions from the past. In what he says, about the way his mind clings to its own history, and rearranges the events of it into fresh wholes, Rousseau reaches forward to the self-analytical thinking we will in a century find central to the reflective powers of Wordsworth or Coleridge. Rousseau's own mind is forever 'gushing with thoughts,' and though he does not regenerate visions, with the help of those thoughts, in the fashion of Wordsworth's 'primary imagination,' he keeps his whole imaginative life before himself, in the fashion of the most profound of autobiographers.

CHARACTER *Justice* Rousseau's texture of values—nature, gentleness, harmony, justice—naturally embraces a love of honesty, the virtue which he will emphasize in both his political philosophy (in *The Social Contract*, 1762) and his philosophy of Education (*Emile*, 1762). Already in Book One of the *Confessions* Rousseau makes clear how painful he finds it to be falsely accused, the primal outrage of one's private self. Injust chatter about another's motives drives our author to despair, and is the root of injustice. He exemplifies this passion for justice in the Swiss peasant who voluntarily feeds him—but then takes him, Rousseau, down into a hidden cellar where the man hides his best provisions, lest the government ransack his modest hut, in search of taxable items. Rousseau's ferocious devotion to justice links to his fondness for those who are simple givers. Throughout his late-teen wanderings, Rousseau is the beneficiary of kindnesses—from inn keepers, cordial fellow travelers, or genuine friends of humanity like Mme. de Warens. Justice and generosity are twinned in Rousseau's thinking, and account, as the story unfolds, for the mutual generousities Rousseau invites.

Book 5 1732-1738

OVERVIEW The period in question, in the present Book, covers the years 1732-1738, when Rousseau was in his twenties, and just after he had rejoined Mme. de Warrens, after an instructive but painful absence from her. A year of wandering through Switzerland, encountering a variety of friends and potential lovers—still a virgin, though—Rousseau is still, and does not tire of telling us this, very much a virginal soul, discovering the world freshly. He has been discovering nature, which is the foundation of his spiritual life, and his own talents, especially music, as well as a wide panoply of new personalities. Finding and returning to Momma is a true homecoming, and much of Book V is devoted to the unique relationship between Momma and her Child.

PERSONAL GROWTH / DEVELOPMENT During the six years Rousseau passes with Mme. de Warens, he grows into his intellectual maturity—at least as he sees it from his mid life writing stand point. He throws himself into math, geometry, music and the study of botany—at all of which he is gaining confidence and skill. Monthly musical concerts, fortunately, begin to gather a variety of performers to the de Warens house. Collectors, botanists, herb medicine enthusiasts—all make their appearance as well in Mme. de Warens' home.

Overall happy, busy, and preoccupied with their own special life-involvements, the three occupants of de Warens' large house are threatened with a growing disease; the impracticality of Mme., who is a poor manager, a sucker for the many schemers who plague her, and in particular welcoming to all manner of crackpots with botanical cures to offer. Rousseau sees in Momma's disintegrating management style, an inevitable breakup of the unique menage; his anticipation of the end is hastened by the fortuitous death of Claude Anet, who contracts pleurisy.

Always concerned with peace and harmony, Rousseau devotes illuminating pages to the dynamic which brought years of peace to the threesome in Mme. de Warens' household. Rousseau joins Mme. de Warens and Claude in a living agreement that by busying themselves with their individual tasks—Mme. attending [FW1] [FW2] to guests and social organization, Claude collecting botanical specimens and herbals, Rousseau preoccupied with the occasional sympathetic visitor, like the monk Father Cato, or with his innumerable skill developments (music, math, poetry)-- the threesome can live a life of self-

sufficient harmony. So benign is this familial harmony that Rousseau and his two companions resent any intrusions onto their private time, or onto their deep conversations at mealtime.

As he writes, Rousseau reflects at length on his personal development, as he becomes increasingly conscious of his gifts and his weaknesses. He is aware of lacking social skills; unable to dance or fence, and contemptuous of fine social conversation, which is a 'way of hiding your thoughts' (as Oscar Wilde says of language in general.) He is also aware, however, of the energy of his mind, of his vigorous devotion to nature, and of his gift for enthusiastic participation in others' pleasures. Rousseau is also learning, in different ways, that he is after all a loyal Frenchman; he swells with pride to see the French army battalions passing his house. His sense of the world is enlarging.

This narrator is also becoming more conscious of his gifts as a teacher, and is assembling, around him, a small cadre of music students. . . It so happens that Rousseau peoples his classes with pretty girls, including his neighbor, Mlle. Millarede, and the pretty daughter of a grocer, Mlle. Lard. By chance—chance built into Rousseau's own leaning toward older women—it is Mme. Lard, the mother, who falls for Rousseau.

At just this time Rousseau publishes his treatise on Education, *Emile*, which harvests into theory much of the practical experience he is acquiring with his students. He is innovative there, in his views on the freedoms necessary to learning, and the independence required by the learner—reflections, here, of Rousseau's own bad experience with harshly taught Latin.

ROMANCE / SEXUALITY

Giving and helpful, as ever, Mme. de Warens takes Rousseau into her house in Annecy, the village to which Rousseau originally walked, on his departure from Geneva, and at the recommendation of the Vicar, M. Pontverre. It so happens that Madame can immediately find Rousseau a post, as surveyor to the regional King's service. Rousseau seems to have happened onto great luck, after a wandering during the last stages of which he was, in fact, reduced to sleeping on park benches. Mme. de Warens is not alone, when Rousseau arrives, but is living with her lover, Claude Anet. Rousseau finds this fellow occupant of the household charming, honest, and potentially a brilliant herbalist and botanist. (These skills drew de Warens to the man, as part of her restless interest in natural medicines.)

During the years in question, as Rousseau is returning to Momma, Europe is in political turmoil, with ceaseless power and border conflicts among France, Italy, and Switzerland. However the de Warens household is bustling with the energies of a threesome who get along awesomely together. Rousseau, still a romantic youth in reality and by his own account, is happy enough with the puppy love relation between himself and Mme. de Warens, toward whom he feels increasing friendship, and diminishing desire.

The household of Mme. de Warens is full of love and harmony, for the most part, t f or Rousseau himself friendship and mutual respect are taking the place of the erotic.

The episode with the two girls on horseback, with which the book opens, shows Rousseau disinclined to introduce the carnal into the high pleasure of flirtation. (With Mme. Basile, into whose shop the narrator wanders in Turin, the name of the game remains flirtation, until Rousseau is finally thrown out). Neither homosexual proposals, nor the contacts with the numerous students of his 'musical school' he leads at Mme. de Warens', win Rousseau over into carnal knowledge. But he was being tempted.

Eventually Mme. de Warens decides she wants to have sex with Rousseau. She gives him a week to make up his mind. Rousseau takes Momma up on the proposal, but afterwards has a reaction which surprises the reader, as well as instructs Rousseau. The twenty year old feels closer to Claude, Momma's lover, than he did before. The sexual event increases Rousseau's sense of group harmony.

MONEY, REALITY With the death of Claude, Rousseau finds himself in charge of Momma's household, finances included. Rousseau decides to take music lessons in Annecy, and needs money for

travel. His travelling baggage is confiscated at the French border, and his money is seized by the authorities.

FRIENDSHIPS Rousseau meets old friends, on his journey to Annecy—during which he is using Momma's money liberally—in addition to playing music and discussing Voltaire, he meets a skilled chess player, M. Bagueret, who becomes a significant *bete noir* for our narrator. Bagueret consistently beats Rousseau in chess, and Rousseau consistently falls sick; the defeat turns his stomach, a trait to which he is victim when he plays contest-games, like gambling. Not the competitive spirit!

Book 6 1738

RURAL LIFE Momma nurses Rousseau back to health, after this last serious setback, Rousseau convinces Momma to move, with him, to a nearby secluded estate. The events of the present book are launched with the praise of peace, which Rousseau feels he finally achieves, at Les Charmettes, where he has moved into seclusion with Mme. de Warens. (Rousseau is given to periods of inexplicable exaltation, throughout his life.) We may suppose, though, that with his volatile temper, and dramatic inner-emotional life, Rousseau will continue to be subject to mood disorders, and will suffer from social maladjustments from which women's love provides him a unique solace. Mme. de Warens continues to be the rock of what inner security Rousseau can find, and although she has taken another lover, by book's end, her spirit remains close to Rousseau himself. With Mme. de Warens, again, Rousseau indulges in theological chat, the intertwines between their two religious thinking, and then the pleasures of the loving twosome, simply treasuring one another's company. The lovers' routine was soon fixed, after moving to Les Charmettes. They took leisurely breakfasts and lunch together, intermittently discussing affairs of their domestic life. Mme. de Warens was on her way to becoming a serious farmer, and the two lovers talked plants, soil, and gardening in general, a refining pursuit that kept them busy.

RELIGION Mme. de Warens remains Rousseau's loyal and protecting friend, and as she and her 'child' get to know each other better, they talk ever more frankly and unreservedly, about the meaning of their lives, and of the religions that guide them. Rousseau was brought up in powerfully Protestant Geneva, where the influence of John Calvin, who insisted on the radical evil of human being, pervaded daily life and social practice.

EDUCATION At this point in his later twenties Rousseau finds the leisure, and the desire, to know what the world is, and what kinds of advances in thought and knowledge characterize the development of culture on earth. This is the 18th century man, in Rousseau, surrounded by icons of empiricism, practical social philosophy, and the critical spirit toward human history. Unique, but of his time, Rousseau also points further to our own time.

Rousseau's thirst for knowledge and understanding morphs into a desire for encyclopedic knowledge. One of the giants of his reading, not surprisingly, is the Diderot whose *Encyclopedie* was the master example of encyclopedic (and demystifying, deconstructive) thought in Rousseau's time. He threw himself, at this time, into avid reading of Diderot himself, of Locke, Malebranche, Leibniz, and the *Logic of Port Royal*, the Jesuit based thought system, inspired by which Rousseau formulates the particular goals of his own process of thinking. Roughly put, that project was to assemble a wide stockpile of valuable (and arguably valid) ideas on which to draw throughout life. (One thinks, here, of the driving argument behind Mortimer Adler's project for thinking in terms of *The Great Books of Western Civilization*.)

On the nitty-gritty level Rousseau discovers his own learning aptitudes and aversions. His major aversion was to the study of Latin, a cornerstone of the education of the period. (He was, however, fiercely determined to master the nature of Latin poetry, an achievement he pursued through parsing the entire *Aeneid*. Far more congenial were those learning exercises that led him to discover freshly the power of musical theory, of singing itself, and of the art of poetry. He exercised himself intensely in both geometry and algebra, advancing to the question of the interrelation of the two pursuits.

HEALTH Rousseau experiences sudden discomfort with his body., with Rousseau's description of the sudden onslaught of a terribly painful and consequential episode, in which the strain of heavy lifting

provokes a fierce upper body pain, from which the shock to his muscles renders him hard of hearing, a condition that persisted throughout his life. Rousseau became convinced that a health breakdown was imminently to take his life. He began a preoccupation with death, which would pursue him until death, in fact, became his reality. As time passes—many months—with Mme. de Warens, Rousseau begins to suffer again from the same hypochondria which has beset him in the past. It seems to him that he has a polyp on his heart, and that he must cure that ailment. Interestingly enough, this period at Les Charmettes is also the moment when Rousseau, convinced by the terror of his recent illness, feels that he is living every day on borrowed time; his thirst for understanding overwhelms him at just the moment when his health convinces him he is living for the moment. Rousseau experiences fear of dying.

SEXUALITY: Mme. Lafarge Rousseau has an affair with Mme. Lafarge. Inevitably, at the end of one of many way stops en route to Montpellier, one of the ladies finds herself alone with Rousseau, and takes the initiative with him. He makes no bones about the matter from that point on. The lady, attractive enough, and sure of her come on, addresses herself foremost with a body charging kiss which leads to Rousseau's first and most powerful sexual moments. If one has wondered, to this point, how and when Rousseau engages in sex—his accounts are so inexplicit—the affair with Mme. Lafarge lays it on the line, benchmarks carnality.

OLD ROMANCE: SEPARATION On his return to Les Charmettes, Diderot rejoices at the sight of de Warens, and though they embrace, it is with special understanding; she has a new lover, and he a new relation to love. Rousseau seems enviably tolerant and resilient when it comes to sharing his love. He makes a resolution not to think of Maman sexually which cools their relationship. Rousseau leaves the town to start tutoring.

Book 7

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Rousseau's return to Paris meant an immersion in the beloved salon of Mme. Dupin; a great relief after the infighting of the diplomatic career. Rousseau adds acquaintances like Diderot to his list of friends, and introduces this luminary of Parisian intellectual life to the philosopher Condillac. (Rousseau remains a devoted ally of Diderot; whom he eagerly consoles and supports, after Diderot has later been imprisoned. Onto such a high influence level our narrator has rapidly catapulted! On how high a level Rousseau now shared his own intellectual gifts, and spread his influence!

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MUSIC AND WRITING Above all, to conclude from his comments and discussions throughout the *Confessions*, we should say that Rousseau's life preoccupation was the higher arts. Both as a youth, as a sophisticated adult absorbing the multiple charms of Italian music, and as a singer-composer-theorist, Rousseau is driven to exercise his instinctive skills in music. His skill in *writing* is evident, compelling, and page-turning, but writing and the writing act is not what *he writes about*; what he writes about ardently is music, but he does *not write about writing* in *The Confessions*..

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HEALTH Where Rousseau most greatly suffered, during this Parisian period of 'perfect domestic bliss', was in his own mind, for he continued to be tormented by hypochondria, in particular by what his doctors found to be *nephritic colic*, urinary retention.

FAMILY Theresa, the seamstress (formerly) -companion of Rousseau, is his stable rock, from whom he is inseparable during his seven years in Paris. Domestic bliss reigned over the two of them. They had—this is hearsay, not confirmed—five children together, three of whom, also hearsay, were given over

to a foundling hospital, a decision which long tormented Rousseau, especially later, when he had become a noted theorist of education—and at the same time the butt of widespread jests about his own dubious record as a father. Paternity jokes continue to follow Rousseau throughout these years.

SOCIAL LIFE: FRIENDSHIPS / BETRAYAL Rousseau's conspicuous association, with the eminent figures of his time—Diderot, D'Holbach, Voltaire, Buffon—earned him a place as a contributor of numerous important articles in Diderot's *Encyclopedia*, ensured him name recognition wherever he went. Ever the observer of loss and misfortune, however, Rousseau, leaves typically dark nuggets embedded in his account of a trip at the time, from Paris, back to Geneva. This post chaise trip was undertaken in the company of a recent and very close friend of Rousseau, a sixty year old gentleman who seemed a congenial complement to the challengingly rough roads and long hours. On this occasion Rousseau's urinary problems obliged him to take frequent 'toilet breaks.' On these occasions, as the troubled Theresa confirmed, the third passenger lost no opportunity to make out with Jean Jacques' dear partner. Rousseau, quite understandably, was enraged at this disgusting and inappropriate behavior.

INTELLECTUAL POLEMICS Rousseau was both a figure of fun and a loser. He was at one time accumulating foes, At the same time, however, he deepens his discovery of the jealousy and backbiting of fellow citizens, when they feel one of their own has acquired emoluments unattainable for them. The higher his achievement the greater the resentment of him. In the end he will make a permanent break with the big city and its envious culture. Long before leaving Paris he had yielded to a further weakness—the inability to ignore others' opinions of him—and consequently had settled for a quiet means of making enough income to live on; as a musical copyist, an ironic downstep for a man who was a serious creative musician, a good friend of Rameau and a respected theorist of notation. Again, in evaluating Rousseau's actual mental world, we need to remember that he is writing from a distinctive purchase in his own life; and stage managing his account after the fashion he considers appropriate to fetching and catching an audience.

His widely read *Letter on French Music* took a firm stand for the Italian style—against the French—in a public debate which drew intense attention to this widely read author. (His temerity of argument, against the dominant French composer and theorist of the day, Jean-Philippe Rameau, put Rousseau at the forefront of national-cultural debates, in a country highly attentive to its artistic reputations.

MUSIC The same difficulty, of forming a precise optic on this cunning autobiographer, faces us when we assess his successes during the years in question here. His *opera comique*, 'Le Devin du Village' 1752, 'The Village Soothsayer,' attracted attention throughout French culture, and was performed before King Louis XV, who was so impressed that he offered Rousseau a lifetime pension. But he declined the advice of friends like Diderot, who urged him to accept a lifetime pension from the King. He kept on earning his living first from accounting and bookkeeping, later from copying music for composers' use.

PHILOSOPHY His successful bid to win a competition, sponsored by the Academy in Dijon, concerning a tough question: *does the progress of human work in the arts and sciences lead to a purification or to a corruption of morals?* Rousseau competes, wins first place for his answer, and adds new laurels to his already prominent distinction in French higher culture. His mind wandered in and out of open nature, spurring in him thoughts of the primitive state of man, that condition out of which, as he was reflecting in works like *Le Contrat social* or in his reflections, in *On the Inequality of Man*, which he was in process of thinking through in his response to a second contest topic proposed by the *Académie des sciences* in Dijon. (Rousseau was setting the groundwork for his *Reveries d'un promeneur solitaire* (1776-78), which was destined to synergy with so much of his 'travel and nature writing,' Rousseau's achievement which was before long to promote his role as a major precursor to the work of such Romantic poets as Wordsworth or Keats. The pendulum of Rousseau's turbulent emotional life was finding its way into the world of a new sensibility, in which much that was being modernly understood—nature and spirituality; our co presence to nature; the current environmental movement—was gradually unfolding itself.

COUNTRYLIFE Once again needing peace—the kind of opiate Mme. de Warens once provided—Rousseau takes the faithful Theresa with him, leaves Paris, and heads for a modest setting in which he

can 'walk in the woods,' generating around him a sense of being-here in the world, which the bustle and tension of Paris were rendering impossible.

OLD ROMANCE I was passing by not far from where Mme. de Warens was living, elderly and withered. Rousseau made a detour to visit his old lover-patron-buddy. He was appalled to see how broken by time she was, and felt humiliated by his failure to have supported her 'all these years,' while he was in Paris. However he fails himself again, in the present assault against virtue, and offers her only the little required by conscience, before continuing to Geneva. It is his misfortune to be as profoundly human as the third passenger traveling to Geneva.

Book 9.

COUNTRY LIFE *Book 9* of the Confessions opens onto what to Rousseau seems a momentous date: *August 9, 1756*, the date of the author's leaving city life settling into The Hermitage, near Geneva, and (he believes) a life of peace in the country. The persistent pleasure he finds, in the woods and hills of his home land, buoys him throughout his life, though he must often suffer the cruelty of harsh intrusions. *Book 9* is chiefly devoted to the counterpoint between peace and harsh intrusion. We begin to suspect that what Rousseau is confessing, in this autobiography, is his own ability to make a durable peace within himself. After Paris, with its exhausting parade of trivial encounters, insignificant gossip, and bad faith relationships, Rousseau relaxes into the comfortable small house he is sharing with Theresa and her mother, and which is being provided and furnished for him by his devoted patroness, Mme. d'Epinay. His routine consists of work in the morning—he is still supporting himself by copying music—and walking in the hills in the afternoon, freeing his mind, and of course developing perspectives for the vast texts he is creating—on education, the origins of inequality and of social life. His lifetime concerns with the nature of law, and with the 'social contract' which binds us together as fellow citizens, seems to grow deeper as he devotes himself to the spirit of nature, the laws and contracts of which are fascinatingly different from those which bind human beings. The friends and colleagues, whom Rousseau has left behind him in Paris, can have little idea of the mind-world Jean Jacques is immersing himself in.

SOCIAL LIFE: FRIENDSHIPS LOST

Paris Society's reaction Diderot, whom Rousseau had so ardently befriended when first he arrived in Paris, had long proven himself unhappy with and even hostile to, Rousseau. In that hostility he joined many of the Parisian elite—Baron d'Holbach, the journalist Grimm, the philosopher D'Alembert—in expressing their resentment of Rousseau's desertion of society for a country retreat. Was this jealousy? A feeling of being disregarded? Or was it a question of urban insecurity, bred by a discomfort in the face of the genuine and independent? Rousseau himself tends to these kinds of explanation, charging his sophisticated friends with empty lives, filled with gossip, distraction, and aimless jealousy. In any case, given Rousseau's own disposition, isolated and reflective, there is no easy interpretation of his own attitudes. He is what he is: defiant, independent, and romantic.

Mme. D'Epinay From the outset, Mme. D'Epinay has made her own social contract with Rousseau. She has set him up in the natural environs he needs and wants, and has guaranteed him freedom from the outside world—his friends in Paris—as well as from her. She is a busy woman of the world. The only red flag in this arrangement is this: Mme. wants Rousseau to commit to her those periods when he is not working on his writing or meditating. She envisages, that is, a mutually agreeable intersection with Rousseau, such that they have their separate lives but join at times when they are at leisure. Rousseau will eventually despair of the demands she makes on him, and she will resent his withdrawal, while reminding him of his dependence on her for livelihood and privacy. They will eventually become the enemies latent in people who have ignored the initial boundaries they set with others. Rousseau is being sensitized, once more, to the difficulty of finding the sweet spot of privacy, from which he works best.

Diderot, D'Holbach, and Grimm The other, of course, turns out to be much larger than Mme. d'Epinay, who was simply the temporary dam against the coterie of Parisian friends and acquaintances, who for years have formed close friendships with Rousseau, then come to resent his need for solitude. Rousseau's paranoia begins to conspire with actuality—his true enemy—as both his 'domestic bliss' and

his privacy are assaulted. He senses a cabal of opposition forces, headquartered in Paris, which is working to separate him from Theresa, and to whip up hostility between Theresa and her mother, who is living with them. Theresa begins to withdraw from her walks with Rousseau. As the story unfolds, we learn more about the efforts of Diderot, D'Holbach, and especially the journalist Grimm, to spread harmful gossip about Rousseau, in his absence from the city.

IMAGINATION / DAYDREAMING At the same time, Rousseau is himself housing fantasies—of his previous amorous life—which assault him and draw him ever farther away from the forces bent on disrupting his solitude. He is starting to leave Paris for fantasy land.

ROMANCE : MME HOUDETOT An old flame, Mme. Houdetot, comes out of Rousseau's past. She has lost her husband, has taken a lover, but reserves the right to create romantic spaces around her. She knows of Rousseau's presence in The Hermitage, and one day rides over to visit him, dressed in man's clothes—an affectation Rousseau dislikes—and leaves his head spinning with the refreshed vision of her charms. Nowhere is Rousseau more eloquent, in praising woman, than in the following characterizations of his unique romance with Houdetot, on whom he is able to concentrate as on the sole loving support in a world he is coming to dread and fear. One might say that he is carving out unique protected space for this relation with Houdetot, overriding the fact of her lover, of the increasing buzz around his 'romance' with the lady, and even of his own scruples about solitude and privacy. The culmination of this virginal but passionate romance can be tracked to a particular moonlight meeting in which the pair turn from the brink of passion to a last shred of sanity. That Rousseau's solitude is shattered, by the intensity of his feelings and behavior, goes without saying, as does the response of Mme. d'Epinau, who, fully aware of what is happening, fixates her jealous rage on her tenant, Rousseau, and on his romantic partner.

Book 7

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FRIENDSHIP AND BETRAYAL Rousseau's conspicuous association, with the eminent figures of his time—Diderot, D'Holbach, Voltaire, Buffon—earned him a place as a contributor of numerous important articles in Diderot's *Encyclopedia*, ensured him name recognition wherever he went.

Ever the observer of loss and misfortune, however, Rousseau, leaves typically dark nuggets embedded in his account of a trip at the time, from Paris, back to Geneva. This post chaise trip was undertaken in the company of a recent and very close friend of Rousseau, a sixty year old gentleman who seemed a congenial complement to the challengingly rough roads and long hours. On this occasion Rousseau's urinary problems obliged him to take frequent 'toilet breaks.' On these occasions, as the troubled Theresa confirmed, the third passenger lost no opportunity to make out with Jean Jacques' dear partner. Rousseau, quite understandably, was enraged at this disgusting and inappropriate behavior.

INTELLECTUAL POLEMICS Rousseau was both a figure of fun and a loser. He was at one time accumulating foes, At the same time, however, he deepens his discovery of the jealousy and backbiting of fellow citizens, when they feel one of their own has acquired emoluments unattainable for them. The higher his achievement the greater the resentment of him. In the end he will make a permanent break with the big city and its envious culture. Long before leaving Paris he had yielded to a further weakness—the inability to ignore others' opinions of him—and consequently had settled for a quiet means of making enough income to live on; as a musical copyist, an ironic downstep for a man who was a serious creative musician, a good friend of Rameau and a respected theorist of notation. Again, in evaluating Rousseau's actual mental world, we need to remember that he is writing from a distinctive purchase in his own life; and stage managing his account after the fashion he considers appropriate to fetching and catching an audience.

His widely read *Letter on French Music* took a firm stand for the Italian style—against the French—in a public debate which drew intense attention to this widely read author. (His temerity of argument, against the dominant French composer and theorist of the day, Jean-Philippe Rameau, put Rousseau at the forefront of national-cultural debates, in a country highly attentive to its artistic reputations.

MUSIC The same difficulty, of forming a precise optic on this cunning autobiographer, faces us when we assess his successes during the years in question here. His *opera comique*, 'Le Devin du Village' 1752, 'The Village Soothsayer,' attracted attention throughout French culture, and was performed before King Louis XV, who was so impressed that he offered Rousseau a lifetime pension. But he declined the advice of friends like Diderot, who urged him to accept a lifetime pension from the King. He kept on earning his living first from accounting and bookkeeping, later from copying music for composers' use.

PHILOSOPHY His successful bid to win a competition, sponsored by the Academy in Dijon, concerning a tough question: *does the progress of human work in the arts and sciences lead to a purification or to a corruption of morals?* Rousseau competes, wins first place for his answer, and adds new laurels to his already prominent distinction in French higher culture. His mind wandered in and out of open nature, spurring in him thoughts of the primitive state of man, that condition out of which, as he was reflecting in works like *Le Contrat social* or in his reflections, in *On the Inequality of Man*, which he was in process of thinking through in his response to a second contest topic proposed by the *Académie des sciences* in Dijon. (Rousseau was setting the groundwork for his *Reveries d'un promeneur solitaire* (1776-78), which was destined to synergy with so much of his 'travel and nature writing,' Rousseau's achievement which was before long to promote his role as a major precursor to the work of such Romantic poets as Wordsworth or Keats. The pendulum of Rousseau's turbulent emotional life was finding its way into the world of a new sensibility, in which much that was being modernly understood—nature and spirituality; our co presence to nature; the current environmental movement—was gradually unfolding itself.

COUNTRYLIFE Once again needing peace—the kind of opiate Mme. de Warens once provided—Rousseau takes the faithful Theresa with him, leaves Paris, and heads for a modest setting in which he

can 'walk in the woods,' generating around him a sense of being-here in the world, which the bustle and tension of Paris were rendering impossible.

OLD ROMANCE I was passing by not far from where Mme. de Warens was living, elderly and withered. Rousseau made a detour to visit his old lover-patron-buddy. He was appalled to see how broken by time she was, and felt humiliated by his failure to have supported her 'all these years,' while he was in Paris. However he fails himself again, in the present assault against virtue, and offers her only the little required by conscience, before continuing to Geneva. It is his misfortune to be as profoundly human as the third passenger traveling to Geneva.

Book 9.

COUNTRY LIFE *Book 9* of the Confessions opens onto what to Rousseau seems a momentous date: *August 9, 1756*, the date of the author's leaving city life settling into The Hermitage, near Geneva, and (he believes) a life of peace in the country. The persistent pleasure he finds, in the woods and hills of his home land, buoys him throughout his life, though he must often suffer the cruelty of harsh intrusions. *Book 9* is chiefly devoted to the counterpoint between peace and harsh intrusion. We begin to suspect that what Rousseau is confessing, in this autobiography, is his own ability to make a durable peace within himself. After Paris, with its exhausting parade of trivial encounters, insignificant gossip, and bad faith relationships, Rousseau relaxes into the comfortable small house he is sharing with Theresa and her mother, and which is being provided and furnished for him by his devoted patroness, Mme. d'Epinay. His routine consists of work in the morning—he is still supporting himself by copying music—and walking in the hills in the afternoon, freeing his mind, and of course developing perspectives for the vast texts he is creating—on education, the origins of inequality and of social life. His lifetime concerns with the nature of law, and with the 'social contract' which binds us together as fellow citizens, seems to grow deeper as he devotes himself to the spirit of nature, the laws and contracts of which are fascinatingly different from those which bind human beings. The friends and colleagues, whom Rousseau has left behind him in Paris, can have little idea of the mind-world Jean Jacques is immersing himself in.

SOCIAL LIFE: FRIENDSHIPS LOST

Paris Society's reaction Diderot, whom Rousseau had so ardently befriended when first he arrived in Paris, had long proven himself unhappy with and even hostile to, Rousseau. In that hostility he joined many of the Parisian elite—Baron d'Holbach, the journalist Grimm, the philosopher D'Alembert—in expressing their resentment of Rousseau's desertion of society for a country retreat. Was this jealousy? A feeling of being disregarded? Or was it a question of urban insecurity, bred by a discomfort in the face of the genuine and independent? Rousseau himself tends to these kinds of explanation, charging his sophisticated friends with empty lives, filled with gossip, distraction, and aimless jealousy. In any case, given Rousseau's own disposition, isolated and reflective, there is no easy interpretation of his own attitudes. He is what he is: defiant, independent, and romantic.

Mme. D'Epinay From the outset, Mme. D'Epinay has made her own social contract with Rousseau. She has set him up in the natural environs he needs and wants, and has guaranteed him freedom from the outside world—his friends in Paris—as well as from her. She is a busy woman of the world. The only red flag in this arrangement is this: Mme. wants Rousseau to commit to her those periods when he is not working on his writing or meditating. She envisages, that is, a mutually agreeable intersection with Rousseau, such that they have their separate lives but join at times when they are at leisure. Rousseau will eventually despair of the demands she makes on him, and she will resent his withdrawal, while reminding him of his dependence on her for livelihood and privacy. They will eventually become the enemies latent in people who have ignored the initial boundaries they set with others. Rousseau is being sensitized, once more, to the difficulty of finding the sweet spot of privacy, from which he works best.

Diderot, D'Holbach, and Grimm The other, of course, turns out to be much larger than Mme. d'Epinay, who was simply the temporary dam against the coterie of Parisian friends and acquaintances, who for years have formed close friendships with Rousseau, then come to resent his need for solitude. Rousseau's paranoia begins to conspire with actuality—his true enemy—as both his 'domestic bliss' and

his privacy are assaulted. He senses a cabal of opposition forces, headquartered in Paris, which is working to separate him from Theresa, and to whip up hostility between Theresa and her mother, who is living with them. Theresa begins to withdraw from her walks with Rousseau. As the story unfolds, we learn more about the efforts of Diderot, D'Holbach, and especially the journalist Grimm, to spread harmful gossip about Rousseau, in his absence from the city.

DAYDREAMING At the same time, Rousseau is himself housing fantasies—of his previous amorous life—which assault him and draw him ever farther away from the forces bent on disrupting his solitude. He is starting to leave Paris for fantasy land.

ROMANCE : MME HOUDETOT An old flame, Mme. Houdetot, comes out of Rousseau's past. She has lost her husband, has taken a lover, but reserves the right to create romantic spaces around her. She knows of Rousseau's presence in The Hermitage, and one day rides over to visit him, dressed in man's clothes—an affectation Rousseau dislikes—and leaves his head spinning with the refreshed vision of her charms. Nowhere is Rousseau more eloquent, in praising woman, than in the following characterizations of his unique romance with Houdetot, on whom he is able to concentrate as on the sole loving support in a world he is coming to dread and fear. One might say that he is carving out unique protected space for this relation with Houdetot, overriding the fact of her lover, of the increasing buzz around his 'romance' with the lady, and even of his own scruples about solitude and privacy. The culmination of this virginal but passionate romance can be tracked to a particular moonlight meeting in which the pair turn from the brink of passion to a last shred of sanity. That Rousseau's solitude is shattered, by the intensity of his feelings and behavior, goes without saying, as does the response of Mme. d'Epina y, who, fully aware of what is happening, fixates her jealous rage on her tenant, Rousseau, and on his romantic partner.

BOOK 10

CLOSE TO NATURE Rousseau had always been drawn to nature, for its deeply calming power; his scorn for Parisian elite life has increased his inclination to live away from urban life. The house provided for him by M. and Mme. Luxembourg seems a replica of The Hermitage, surrounded by verdant landscapes, a cottage at its best. In such a setting Rousseau comes close to being and understanding himself.

SOCIAL LIFE

Banishment In the year 1758, as Rousseau puts it, he remained in a state of languor, a chilling out condition in which he recovered from the experience of being shunned by his Parisian friends, and deprived of his countryside peace. With Rousseau we too reflect on the causes of his 'banishment,' try to understand his offence. Four 'charges' against Rousseau, by his 'elite' former friends in Paris, come to the fore: his return to 'country life,' an implicit criticism—which Rousseau openly expresses-- of the folly and meaninglessness of life in the capital; Rousseau's openly observed romance with Mme. Houdetot, which aroused the hostility of the jealous—like Mme. d'Epina y, or Houdetot's Parisian friends'; the leaving of the Hermitage, which Rousseau had impulsively negotiated out of heavy pique toward Mme. d'Epina y; Rousseau's refusal to accompany Mme. d'Epina y to Geneva, a slight to a benefactor lady—though no longer a friend—who had made possible the writer's residence at the Hermitage. Rousseau was keenly aware of this likely 'list of charges,' and yet, although he is a perfunctory critic of his own weaknesses, which he regularly excoriates, he is himself, and deeply so, one part of the equation which has generated hostility to him. Is this 'one part' what he his 'confessing'?

Assuming "The underdog position" perspective Rousseau has, from the outset of the *Confessions*, a readiness to assume the underdog position, to assume that he is being persecuted: from his liking of the punishment, he receives from his nursemaids, in Book 1, to the increasing desperation of the 'banished man' in the years following his Parisian sojourn, in which he 'thinks that all the world is out to get him.' (At any time, of course, this creative man is capable of bursts of energy, joie de vivre, sallies of romance.) As he abandons his hideaway of The Hermitage, he must endure the gracious but definitive rejection of him by Mme. Houdetot; the loss of his house—partly through his own impulse; the 'worldly' sarcasms directed at him during the dinner party at Mme. d'Epina y's; the continued backbiting of the

Baron d'Holbach circle in Paris; the odious scorn that Grimm vomits forth; and not much later the jealous diatribes of the philosopher Marmontel. Rousseau writes about himself as an underdog—a condition parallel to being 'banished,'—and is thus, in a way, forearmed against the 'slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,' as Shakespeare's Hamlet puts it. All of which broaches the identity of the Rousseau which lies behind the Rousseau who is the author of these confessions, and who is, as that, simply a mouthpiece of the Jean Jacques Rousseau born squalling into the world in Geneva, in 1716,

INTELLECTUAL ACTIVITIES Ebullient, impulsive, original and brilliant, Rousseau continues to make spaces, around himself, in which the world can express its appreciation of him. Even while dealing with banishment, he is actively writing his *Letter to d'Alembert*, which will once again put him at the center of the Parisian intelligentsia, while—as we see in his deepening relationship with Mme. de Luxembourg, he is immersed in the production and sharing of his *Nouvelle Heloise*. (Production details, in the book industry, also fell to the author's lot, and Rousseau was much caught up in details of distribution, copying, and—as we see in the case of the ambitious engraver, Coindet—plate engraving; we have to imagine Rousseau full time busy, even while suffering banishment and damaged self-esteem.) the kindness of M. and Mme. Luxembourg comes when needed; the Marquis proving to be one of those male buddies—often wayfarers of no special note, or humble guys of the background, like the mason next door, who becomes a down home supper sharer with Rousseau, who is hanging out at Montmorency, which was provided him by the Luxembourgs—the way, back in their salad days, Mme. d'Epinau made the Hermitage available to Rousseau.

AGING The interlude covered by the present Book shows us a Rousseau nearing the age of fifty, and writing about it from a future only around five years older. In other words Rousseau is now tackling the difficult assignment of self-portraiture, a virtual selfie as distinct from a magisterial sweep from cradle to grave. His avuncular kiss, stolen on a staircase from Mme. Luxembourg's granddaughter, magnifies, in Rousseau's mind, the dangers of sentimental grandfatherliness, as a distorting mirror in which to read one's personality. One thinks of the sterner depictees of the aging process—Marcus Aurelius, Socrates (or Plato) portraying the dignity of our last condition, or Goethe—with his final praise of a life lived well—*im ganzen gut und wahr und resolut zu leben*—then turns to a midlife Rousseau who, like Eliot's Prufrock, questions whether he dares to eat a peach or part his hair.

WHAT ROUSSEAU MEANS BY A CONFESSION By the age of fifty, Rousseau lives himself as an elderly man, one ripe for laying the story of his life on the table. This story is his confession. He does not, like Saint Augustine, admit his 'sins,' for in fact Rousseau—both in his speculative writing on the originally benign character of human being, and in his whole disinclination to criticize (or critique) his nature—is not adept at self-critique. Earlier in the present book he has declaimed against his insensitivity, in giving readings of his work (*La Nouvelle Heloise*) to Mme. de Luxembourg, which portray him in a foolish light. He has also listed what he considers four possible charges against himself, which he can imagine his Parisian opponents levelling against him. But do we read Rousseau, in these self-critiques, as a growing intelligence genuinely critical of himself as, for instance, we read Montaigne as a cool assessor of man's inherent faults, or Racine as a remorseless tracker of the inherently tragic in human life? Hardly. Rousseau portrays the major events of his life, honoring on the whole the reckless concatenation by which event follows event—often at the prompting of the latest romance to cross his horizon—while giving little critical attention to those flaws—self-promotion, vanity, didacticism, contentiousness—which his life continually generates from the passage of time and events.

Book 11

COUNTRY LIFE Rousseau remarks on the delight he feels, when wandering through a village, to encounter the small of a good country chervil omelette—farmers' and workers' food. Rousseau delights in country pleasures, a good honest human relationship—though he has put in quality time making chit chat in fine salons, like that of Mme. Dupin, when he was first making the acquaintance of Parisian high life. His cottage at Montmorency brings him into the kind of contact in which he feels at ease, with M. Pilleu, the mason who lives next door. Rousseau and M. Pilleu dine at one another's houses, from time to time, and we are made fully aware that Rousseau is completely at home in this milieu. He is a man in the middle, socially, able to take tea with a marquis, or spend a delightful day hiking with two country girls.

SOCIAL LIFE: OUTSIDER Throughout this creative period of his forties—*La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 1761; *The Social Contract*, 1762; *Emile*, 1762—Rousseau is plagued by low level obstacles and disagreeable events; for him the overall tenor of this period is angst, diffuse uneasiness. Mme. de Luxembourg is whimsical in her treatment of him; frequently leaving it entirely to her husband, even to speak to Rousseau. M. de Luxembourg spreads gloom with his physical hangups—painful gout in his toe—and a penchant for seeking out quack doctors for his ailments. Literary enemies of Rousseau, joining the crowd at the Luxembourg dinner table, mock and insult Rousseau, as on an earlier occasion, at the dinner table of Mme. d'Épinay, trendy Parisian elitists mocked Rousseau's lifestyle. Even the naming of his dog Turk is offensive to the Luxembourg household; Rousseau changes the name to Duke. (A comic example of the tight sensibility range of upper class 'proprieties.')

The natural man in Rousseau—one of the themes he is testing out in his writings of the time—is ill at ease in this type of closed society. At his most comfortable, in these years, Rousseau will be found in his precious garden, at the cottage of Montmorency, making mental lists of 'old friends.'

PARANOIA In these personally crowded 1760's, when Rousseau is laying before the world his major works of creative thinking, he continues to be prey to delusions of persecution, and imagines (with some justification it seems) that the forces of organized spirituality (the Jesuits; the Catholic Church in general) are strongly opposed to him, and that social mistrust of him is growing, at the same time that his work is attracting an ardent readership. We know from Rousseau's past that he is susceptible to generalized fear and anxiety, congenitally endures the sense that all his Parisian friends—Diderot, d'Alembert, Mme. Houdetot, Mme. d'Épinay—turn against him. His paranoia is on show at a daily life level in the present book, where he finds himself pushed aside and horned in on by M. Coindet, his ingenious but aggressive engraver. Haven't we all known people who invite others' mistreatment, despite their own aptitude and moral value?

SETTING: THE ROMANTIC UNIVERSAL IN EUROPE Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*, slowly making its way through the cumbersome publication process, was being met by rave reviews in the trend-setting capital, and by 1800 capturing Europe as a whole, with its sentimental appeal to high-taste women readers, and to the growingly expressive middle class, with its taste for romance. The century was finding, in prose fictions like Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) or Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788), an outlet, like that Rousseau provided, for the turbulences of the heart, which were taking over polite society.

ROMANCE Rousseau is deeply grateful to the Luxembourgs for housing, hospitality, and friendship. For long it is M. Luxembourg, the marquis, who spearheads the beneficence to Jean-Jacques—staying at his side, for example, through the nasty process of the author's prostate intervention, and later helping his efforts to escape from the French authorities and their arrest warrant. Mme. Luxembourg, on the other hand, is at first wary and suspicious of her brilliant ward, who seems to be a favorite for the ladies in general. Intermittently, however, Rousseau grows closer to his long term hostess, and he delights her by morning readings of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, of which Mme. ardently wants her own copy. The sentimental romance, which develops between Mme. and her guest borrows strongly from the mode and sentiment of the time, reading itself out to our present day imaginations against an eighteenth century collage of the moment in painting—Watteau, Fragonard—music—Mozart, Handel—or philosophy (say Leibniz's Theodicy, with its underpinnings in universal harmony.)

PUBLISHING The background music of the present Book resounds with the arduousness of the publishing industry. Rousseau is himself endlessly concerned with details of paper choice, the stitching and binding of volumes distribution difficulties, and, as we see abundantly in Book XI, the question of censorship, in a society where the political sensitivity of the powers that be is given pretty free rein to intrude onto the business of publishing. Post-printing press, but pre-digital, the eighteenth century industry of publication marks a new stage in the universal drive to share feelings, understanding, and ideas. Fortunately for Rousseau he finds a publisher who shares his values and works to promote his writing among experienced and literate audiences. Gossip-free and scandal-free, true love (in the fashion of Abelard's for Héloïse) attracts just the upscale audience Rousseau values for his heart-felt excursions.

LITERARY SUCCESS AND FLIGHT Anti-Rousseau sentiments were of course commonplace among Rousseau's personal enemies as well as among groups, like the Jesuits, for whom Rousseau seemed to represent culturally destructive perspectives. As the book ends, Rousseau is in flight from the French authorities, whose political suspicions have been aroused by his widely read and, from their angle provocative texts dealing with innovative forms of education and theories of man in nature, man before he became a figure encased by laws and social proprieties.

Book 12

SOCIAL LIFE

Apocalypse Rousseau opens the final book of his *Confessions*, by the announcement that he is now tumbling into the abyss—of loss, pain, conclusion. (Please remember that Rousseau has, at the point of writing this autobiography, another fifteen years of life ahead of him. He has major writing ahead of him; the *Confessions* must thus be taken for what they are, a waystage of self-examination, and not a final summation.). The apocalypse in question, here, is largely the resulting pain of banishment, first from France, then from different agencies in the multi-regional republic of Switzerland, and above all dependence on the handouts or occasional friendships proffered by individuals along the way.

Dependency This kind of dependency—linked to the generosity of friends and the fate of political events—had of course been the life-course of Rousseau, from the time his nursemaid drove him out of her bed in Geneva. But the succession of life-obstacles, which besiege him after fleeing France, with an arrest warrant closely following him, turns him into a hunted animal, though without totally depriving him of those life pleasures—recourse to nature, meditation, writing—which constitute him. It was a time, as he puts it, when his imagination was forever active, though his pen was idle.

Fury Rousseau remains vague about the causes for his expulsion from France, and the understanding reader will, by this point in the *Confessions*, feel that one cause, of the widespread anger toward Rousseau is whatever in him has managed, for some years, to turn former friends into current enemies. His accomplishments in writing and thinking have been groundbreaking. There is in those writings a broad anti-monarchical and back-to-nature theme which runs counter to the age of Kings, into which, especially in France but also in Prussia, fate has deposited Rousseau. But after all Rousseau's kind of ideological assault, on the 'established principles' of the time, was commonplace enough, and made for the stock arguments of such as Voltaire and Diderot, who remained by and large popular figures in France. It is not easy to understand how Rousseau brought himself to drive others to drive him to the brink of the abyss.

Flight At the end of Book XI Rousseau describes the dramatic conditions under which he made his way, secretly, across the borders of France and into Switzerland. A series of episodes stud the path that will lead him to his first extensive sojourn, in the village of Motiers, near Neufchatel: he rejects an invitation from the King of Prussia, to lodge under monarchical protection; he is joined by his wife, Theresa, about whom it is becoming obvious, that her feelings toward Rousseau are cooling—another blow; in his reflections, along the mountains on foot, Rousseau is plagued by guilt, for having abandoned his five children, the fruit of his love for Theresa; he makes one lasting friendship, from among the many who seek him out for stupid or self-interested reasons, the Scottish Lord Keith, who as an honorary citizen of Neufchatel will continue to counsel and guide him. Settled in Motiers Rousseau finds, after a long time on the run, that he has lost his interest in literature, is besieged by fools, and is very unsure where to turn next.

Harassment While at Motiers, Rousseau turned to his memoirs, and returned to *his Dictionary of Music*--the activities of his imagination, if not 'literature'--and yet the swarm of curious visitors continues to descend on him—essentially mediocrities eager to profit from his reputation. There are interesting exceptions--a Latin-speaking Hungarian, two colorful aristocrats on a walking tour--and yet the procession of individuals is fundamentally distracting. The news of the death of Mme. Warens adds to the life-burden, and then, as a culminating blow, Rousseau's house, where he lives with Theresa, is savagely attacked by stone throwing opponents of the controversial resident.

Chaos Rousseau's private and public lives are devolving into chaos. He is obliged to hunt for another residence. Not for the first time, Rousseau accepts what seems an offer of safe haven, in a removed and conflict free environment. A single private house on the Lake of Bienne, is offered to Rousseau and Theresa. As it has fortunately turned out, Rousseau has recently settled with his publisher for a lifetime contract—for permission to put out a comprehensive edition of all of the author's works—and is in a position to support himself and Theresa in his island refuge. He only gives himself time, in this final book of his *Confessions*, to tell us of his sudden expulsion from Lake Bienne, his briefly considered plan to take up residence in Corsica. Essentially there, Rousseau leaves his tale of woe. (But not precisely on that note, for we have been able to follow the spirit of Rousseau before he decamps for a new exile. He has given us glimpses of a pastoral life on Lake Bienne, botanizing, rowing, and walking in the hills, which assures us that the whole man is in some sense still intact.)

AGING AND TIME The interlude covered by the present Book shows us a Rousseau nearing the age of fifty, and writing about it from a future only around five years farther into time. In other words Rousseau is now tackling the issue of historical writing as an act *in time*—not a compassing act carried through from *outside time*, like Gibbons' *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Rousseau is thus writing the history of himself, negotiating with himself, in an existential action. This in-time construction—Rousseau's autobiography—is marked by the kind of shaggyism we all experience, whether or not we historicize as a time-act or as a monument maker. We write our history of ourselves from within ourselves, and are just there as we act, just parting the shadows across a squalling crib in Geneva, just running one more time from the authorities, as we flee into the unknown—Corsica or England?

MEMORIES Rousseau presents himself as a restless soul, amiable though driven to resistance, vivid in imagination and act, though at his happiest when wandering passively through the woods. Though he depicts himself—this is an *autobiography*—as wide open to criticism, and to self-criticism, he is at the same time writing an apologia for his life, like Cardinal Newman in his *Apologia pro vita sua*, taking *apologia* in the tough Roman sense of *explanation*, not of *apology*. Rousseau appears to have excited jealousy and misunderstanding, wherever he goes, and yet to have been basically generous in his relations to others. What he most consistently accuses himself of, the giving away of his children, is amply repaid by the purely self-interested behavior toward him, of almost all his friends, the opposites, as it were, of the benign 'Savoyard Vicar,' whose faith in ultimate goodness—'and all shall be well, all manner of things shall be well'—remains visible to Rousseau throughout life's drama.

THEMES

Self centeredness. From the outset—and this may be the state of play for any autobiography—the autobiography producer is fascinated with himself. From the first lines he makes clear, that he thinks himself unique, and that he wants to share what he is with the world. It is perhaps a fine line, to distinguish this kind of self-absorption from egotism. (Common opinion leans to favoring self-centeredness, as in no way inflicting yourself on others, while egotism carries with it an air of not so agreeable indifference to others.)

Maturity. The European ideal of maturity, which perhaps we see forming in the work of Shakespeare—the study of Prince Hal or Hamlet; the characterization of Cordelia; the stage partially undertaken by the Two Noble Kinsmen—or analyzed and exemplified in Montaigne's *Essays*, that ideal is fleetingly fruitful for Rousseau, a lively reader of Plutarch's great man figures, a natural admirer of such individuals as the Savoyard Vicar with his innate masculine dignity, or of such actual figures as Lord Keith, who epitomizes the coming through into a quieter place in life, where an accumulation of experiences bubbles up in wisdom. On the whole, however, we see, in the fifty plus years covered by Rousseau's *Confessions*, a spirit too ebullient to treasure maturities more culture formed than the quietude of nature, 'which hath ample power to chasten and subdue.'

Friendship. Male friendship is a fleeting but sustaining factor in Rousseau's development. The foremost modeler of such friendship is Rousseau's dad, who proves himself his son's constant admirer and support, who visits him periodically, as Rousseau peregrinates around Switzerland, and who preserves

the thread of family happiness which had prevailed in Rousseau's childhood home, before his mother's death. One thinks also, though, of M. Luxembourg, who with his wife provided such essential aid to Rousseau in France, before the writer's flight from the country. (This gentleman had the guts to stand by Rousseau through the course of an ugly prostate operation.) Then there is Lord Keith of Scotland, whose manly administrative skills had endeared him to the King of Prussia, and who was settling in Neufchatel, where he would be a regular world-wise adviser to the never truly worldly Rousseau.

Conflict. Life without conflict is meaningless, and yet Rousseau's early life, with mom and dad present and caring, and even his later childhood, when he enjoys a nursemaid's bed, and a little later finds the pleasure of hanging out with his coeval cousin, playing boy games, and fooling around in nature, is a taste of the paradise that precedes the fall. Where does Rousseau enter the world of conflict? From the time he enters the cultural sphere of Mme. de Warens, he is part of the dating and mating sphere, where the higher societies delight in prolonging the never quite satisfying orgasm of unions. For the most part unintentionally, Rousseau watches the harmony of fine relations—with Mme. d'Epinay, with Mme. Luxembourg, with Diderot—dissipate into conflicts which eventually degrade the relationship itself.

Naivete. The conflicts mentioned above impact heavily on Rousseau (Rousseau the writer as well as Rousseau the character.) He is typically the ingenu, the one manipulated, except for two benign actors: Mme. de Warens, and nature. The natural landscapes of France and Switzerland are unfailing allies of Rousseau's spirit; the true motherly love of Mme. de Warens holds steady til the end, an afterglow, perhaps, of Rousseau's own mother, who deeply loved him. With other partners, than these two, Rousseau comes up against others' interests and is characteristically dismissed from center stage, as happens with the relationship to Mme. Basile in Turin, to Mme. d'Epinay, who feels that Rousseau is growing indifferent to her, or to Mme. Luxembourg, who takes intermittent interest in Rousseau, when he is reading to her from his works, but soon finds herself ready to cede the whole Rousseau matter to her husband.

Creativity. Rousseau is gifted in mathematics and design, from early in life, and will carry this kind of gift, into skills like musical performances, theories of musical notation, and singing, to the end of his life. (Late in life he is still trying to bring conclusion to his *Dictionary of Music*.) In the more strictly literary sense of creativity, we would say that Rousseau is a master relater of his own life, putting us inside his feelings, hopes, and weaknesses, with the skill of a master novelist. (His period, in western European writing, was flexing its fascination with the telling of tales, the sentiments of romance, the finesse of complex social interrelations. (A brilliant example: Mme. de Lafayette's *Princesse de Cleves*, with its sensitivity to jealousy, remorse, muted longing.) Rousseau's own *La Nouvelle Heloise*, a rage in Paris, showed him at his artistic peak, clothing the workmanship of a novelist in the rags of elegant country romance.

Love. Particularly with his true and first 'momma', Mme. de Warens, Rousseau finds himself en route to carnal love, but arrested at an adolescent stage of male desire, willing and eager to play games of escape and pursuit, private jokes, and male dependence. Effeminate and defiant both, as Rousseau was to characterize himself, he bites into true female flesh for the first time, when he is riding in a chaise to Montpellier; the lady across from him takes advantage of a way stop, to feel him up aggressively, to provoke the first Rousseauian screw in the *Confessions*.

Punishment. Rousseau reflects on his childhood, in the first Book, and turns up scenes in which he clearly enjoys the punishment—slaps, mini-beatings, reprimands—meted out to him by his nursemaids. Throughout his life he will position himself to be schooled, babied, or life-supported by women of strength and impulse—Mme. Dupin, Mme. Houdetot, Mme. d'Epinay, and of course by the all embracing Mama, Mme. de Warens. While there is a pure masochist component, in the early calls of Rousseau 'to be punished,' in his later years, among the kinds of women just cited, he was content to be 'mastered,' reduced to his ebullient effeminate condition.

Anxiety. Rousseau himself frequently pleads extreme anxiety. After an intense attack of upper body pain, Rousseau feels that he is on the brink of death, and long after he is susceptible to the

imminent presence of death. His final book is devoted to the apocalyptic descent into which he falls, once banished from France, and beset by false friends in Mortier, Switzerland. Neurasthenic and accustomed to expecting the worst, Rousseau is fundamentally, but intermittently, anxious.

Nature. Nature—and remember that the pre-industrial world that Rousseau, Goethe, and Wordsworth grew up in was not scarred by plastic, clogged with pollutants, and subdivided by interstates—was the true recourse for Rousseau's yearning soul. Yearning? For what was he yearning? He was yearning to reestablish the harmonies he experienced as a young innocent, a lover of the people he met, and for the most part their natural friend. What was nature giving him? Peace, immersion in power, beauty, and unself-consciousness. Rousseau feels deepened and purified by his long walks in the hills and valleys of Switzerland, and it was this same kind of 'secular religious' exaltation that Mme. de Warens provided, as herself a simulacrum of the Great Mother.

Religion Organized Christian religion, in the wake of the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation, tended to divide peoples and ideologies, and yet with the advent of the secular movement we now call The Enlightenment, in the eighteenth century, a new breed of 'science oriented intellectual' took shape and encouraged exemplars throughout Europe. The elite intellectuals of Paris—Diderot, Voltaire, d'Holbach, d'Alembert—were only a small selection from the scientifically oriented intellectuals who were reformulating a secular world view, in a thought world where major breakthroughs like those of Kepler, Newton, Leibniz, were remaking the thought maps of our universe itself. Rousseau himself is deeply immersed in the history of religion—first of all a Protestant, then for a long time a Catholic, then once again a Protestant—as his personal living situation places him in one or the other of the two jurisdictions. Yet in his brushes with the great intellectuals of Paris, as in his own history-free natural man soul, Rousseau remains true to the humanistic optimism he will have inherited from the Greco-Roman Montaignian secular Humanism he imbibed from the world he was brought up in. he imbibed from the world he was brought up in.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Rousseau

Romantic

- 1 Already in his nursery, Rousseau was drawn to his nursemaid, in whose bed he slept. until he became a teen ager, when his bed behavior led to her ejecting him.
2. Rousseau felt affection at first sight, on meeting Mme. de Warens, and never lost his strong attraction to her, his sense that they belonged together.
3. On a free afternoon in Turin, Rousseau has the time of his life, biking and hiking with two country girls.
4. Mme. Houdetot attracts Rousseau profoundly, with her willingness to enter into deep romantic conversations, without selling out on her boyfriend. It is not difficult for Rousseau to be 'the other guy,' for he is not a jealous man.
5. On rare occasions Rousseau, who though attracted to women is sexually timid, falls impetuously into the sexual, as in flirting with Mme. Basile, or in screwing Mme. Lafarge, in the post-chaise to Montpellier.
6. The perfect example is Rousseau's menage `a trois at the cottage of Les Charmettes, to which he and Mme. de Warens have moved, and where the third presence is that of Claude, Mme.'s lover. For months the three live in harmony, and Rousseau is as intimate as he needs to be with his hostess: breakfasts on the terrace; teatime tête a têtes.

Friendly Rousseau lost his mother when she died giving birth to him. From that time on, throughout Rousseau's life, his father served as a strong male figure for him. Dad was present as story teller in the family circle, and as pole of stability at various moments in his son's peregrinating life. M. Luxembourg and Lord Keith, under different supporting circumstances, helped Rousseau to find his own strength, and to work his way through difficult personal circumstances.

Nature lover From the time Rousseau first leaves home to visit Mme. de Warens, through his on-foot journeys to Turin, and around the Swiss Alps, Rousseau seems to take his deepest pleasure from

'promenades solitaires' in nature. His fertile mind, his imagination, is never more alert than in its unvoiced dialogue with nature. Short of nature, as direct immersion, Rousseau is happiest in the cottages supplied by him by Mme. de Warens, Mme. Luxembourg, and Mme. d'Epinay. Those cottages faced into nature, while providing a special space for social interactions.

Paranoid It seems to belong, to Rousseau's relative innocence about the ways of the world, that he is startled by the enmity of his 'Friends,' when he leaves Paris to live in the cottage offered him by Mme. d'Epinay. He willingly interprets this rejective behavior, on the part of his friends, as a sign of their enmity toward him.

Stubborn The affair of the broken comb is the earliest encounter with injustice in *The Confessions*. As a teen ager, in the room where Mme. is preparing her peignoir, the tine of a comb is found broken, and suspicion falls on the young Rousseau. He is innocent, but blame and punishment attach to him. Never does Rousseau forget the episode, which once again plays into the later problems he has with paranoia.

Humble Rousseau is destined to spend much of his culture time with the 'higher classes' of his western European world, and yet he is at home with 'common folk,' as one might expect, from Rousseau's extensive writings on origins and evolution of human societies, which rest on the efforts and will of the masses. Rousseau's dad was a watchmaker—an honored Swiss profession, yet 'handwork' nonetheless—and his family upbringing was comfortable but modest. Whether it was M. Pilieu, the mason next door, or the man who, after sharing his food with Rousseau, showed him his hideaway stash in an underground pit, where it would escape the tax collector, Rousseau was on the side of the little guy.