

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?

(Under construction)

STORY

Book 1

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. Basile) 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

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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 Warens, 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, for 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

MEMORIES: SELF REFLECTION Rousseau opens the seventh book by reflecting on memory and its importance to his self-placing; he reflects, that is, on the reason for his writing the present 'confessions,' as an effort to protect himself against enemies—remember he is a hypochondriac—and as a way to tame the past, in which he has many faults to remember. (He notes that he forgets his misfortunes, while recalling his faults, thus viewing himself critically as a person. Modest he is, though extremely preoccupied with himself, a rare combination.) He is just in the process of moving to Paris, has left Mme. de Warens, and is feeling disoriented, having moved into a squalid flat in the big city. Hence all the more reason to be thinking back onto the continuity of his life. The move to Paris marks a critical turn in that life, and Rousseau must bring all his attention to understanding himself.

A DIPLOMATIC PERIOD: VENICE The turbulent European political scene, of which Rousseau had been aware already in Switzerland, and which he intuited both from travellers' talk and from the chatter of French soldiers as they passed through Switzerland, was a natural segue from the high level social elite of Paris, in which military figures abounded. From one of these *militaires* Rousseau got a post working for

the French Ambassador in Venice. He found himself plunged into a world of routine passport and document vetting, personal rivalries, jealousies, and indifference to the 'new guy outside the system,' which Rousseau was in spades. Rousseau himself at first responded by simple diligence, working around the clock to satisfy the duties of his job—pure bureaucracy—even while serving as a target of jealousy and rivalry. It was not all grunge work, in Venice, for there was a charming whore for brief entertainment, and a sexy Italian call girl, who proved to Rousseau that he was maturing in the pleasure game, and a young teen ager of adorable honesty and ignorance who became a lover and travelling companion to Rousseau. But there was also a huge Nemesis, the French Ambassador himself, who treated the highly competent Rousseau like trash, and helped him to realize how important it is to walk away from what is destroying you. Rousseau did just that, returning to Paris.

CITY LIFE: PARIS

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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,

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Book 7

MEMORIES: SELF REFLECTION Rousseau opens the seventh book by reflecting on memory and its importance to his self-placing; he reflects, that is, on the reason for his writing the present 'confessions,' as an effort to protect himself against enemies—remember he is a hypochondriac—and as a way to tame the past, in which he has many faults to remember. (He notes that he forgets his misfortunes, while recalling his faults, thus viewing himself critically as a person. Modest he is, though extremely preoccupied with himself, a rare combination.) He is just in the process of moving to Paris, has left Mme. de Warens, and is feeling disoriented, having moved into a squalid flat in the big city. Hence all the more reason to be thinking back onto the continuity of his life. The move to Paris marks a critical turn in that life, and Rousseau must bring all his attention to understanding himself.

A DIPLOMATIC PERIOD: VENICE The turbulent European political scene, of which Rousseau had been aware already in Switzerland, and which he intuited both from travellers' talk and from the chatter of

French soldiers as they passed through Switzerland, was a natural segue from the high level social elite of Paris, in which military figures abounded. From one of these *militaires* Rousseau got a post working for the French Ambassador in Venice. He found himself plunged into a world of routine passport and document vetting, personal rivalries, jealousies, and indifference to the 'new guy outside the system,' which Rousseau was in spades. Rousseau himself at first responded by simple diligence, working around the clock to satisfy the duties of his job—pure bureaucracy—even while serving as a target of jealousy and rivalry. It was not all grunge work, in Venice, for there was a charming whore for brief entertainment, and a sexy Italian call girl, who proved to Rousseau that he was maturing in the pleasure game, and a young teen ager of adorable honesty and ignorance who became a lover and travelling companion to Rousseau. But there was also a huge Nemesis, the French Ambassador himself, who treated the highly competent Rousseau like trash, and helped him to realize how important it is to walk away from what is destroying you. Rousseau did just that, returning to Paris.

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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'Epainay, or Houdetot's Parisian friends'; the leaving of the Hermitage, which Rousseau had impulsively negotiated out of heavy pique toward Mme. d'Epainay; Rousseau's refusal to accompany Mme. d'Epainay 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'Epainay'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 Ebulient, 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'Epainay 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.

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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'Epinay, 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'Epinay—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 Heloise*, 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 Heloise) 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

THEMES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS