Rededications:
*Auto-avilissement* and Autobiography

*Si je hais les tyrans, je hais plus les flatteurs.*

Voltaire, *Brutus*

*Et le Père des Dieux même ne se plait à l'hommage des mortels que parce qu'ils ne sont point forcés de le lui offrir.*

Rousseau, *La Mort de Lucrèce*

*Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.*

Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

From the inspired perversity of prefacing the wrong text, we move on with Rousseau to the slightly perverse anachronism of dedicating any text whatsoever. Where the dedicatory epistle was concerned, enlightened, self-respecting authors of the eighteenth century were well advised by experts like Voltaire and Marmontel to exercise newly available options of letting the occasion pass or proceeding with extreme caution. Nor did Rousseau himself make a habit of courting favor, a seeming prerequisite to scripting a resumption of rhetorical relations in the dedicatory mode. But the combined weight of these warnings did not stop Rousseau from making 1755 his year of the dedication. In that year, he published both of the only two dedicatory epistles he ever finished: his opera *Le Devin du village* was addressed to fellow author Charles Duclos, and his Second Discourse to the Republic of Geneva. For third-party readers, these epistles retain a bare minimum of intrinsic appeal. The one to Duclos is three sentences short and remarkable only in its choice of dedicatee; the one to the Republic is unbearably long-winded and, as far as I can tell from its fulsome and wildly fluctuating tones, unreadable.

What thus becomes all the more remarkable is the amount of attention lavished by the *Confessions* on resurrecting, pairing, appropriating,
and making sense of these two eminently forgettable moments of Rousseau’s literary career. The dedications furnish the key coordinates on the basis of which the entire second half of Book 8 can be graphed as a downward slope. And that plotting turns out to be a matter neither of referential necessity nor of authorial whim. It is, rather, an oblique expression of indebtedness to the second dedication, as differentiated from the first and extended obsessively into the unfinished occasional tragedy *La Mort de Lucrèce*. In dialogue with those texts, the autobiography discovers the end and means of its own single-minded commitment to self-identity at any price. From the impossible dream of dedication without self-abasement, Rousseau will have salvaged self-abasement per se as the autobiographical strategy most conducive to indelible selfhood. Various avatars of Lucretia abetting, Book 8 thus replays the emergence of the modern antihero and his gradual Pyrrhic victory over the resistance of more classically heroic or neoclassically acceptable self-images. More riveting in this instance than Rousseau’s liminary texts themselves is the centrality to Western thought of his eventual glosses on them. We will concentrate on reading those glosses for evidence of “le pouvoir qu’il a de transformer ses échecs en réussites” and vice versa. But we will first look at the ways in which conventional wisdom of the Enlightenment made dedication into a surprisingly crucial litmus test of individual character and consigned any latter-day attempt to dedicate to automatic failure.

**CAVEAT AUCTOR: Dedication as Auto-avilissement**

“Temples are to be dedicated to the gods,” said Aristides, circa 400 B.C., “and books to good men.” In eighteenth-century France, that truth was becoming less self-evident, at least where books and good men were concerned. It is precisely between still required (prefatory) and newly optional (dedicatory) liminary exercises that Marivaux’s preface to *La Voiture embourbée* (1714) draws the line: “À l’égard de l’épître dédicatoire, c’est une formalité qu’il [le livre imprimé] est libre de retrancher ou d’ajouter. Or donc, Lecteur, puisqu’il faut une préface en voici une.” Marivaux thus captured or helped to create a moment of transition between one set of norms or expectations (integral to books, dedications might, by an exercise of free will, be subtracted) and another (unnecessary, they might be added). En route to becoming archaic, the dedicatory epistle remained, for the moment, notable either by its presence or by its absence.
By mid-century, however, philosophers were united in denunciation of the link between literary dedication and an increasingly obsolete and despised system of literal patronage. Fontenelle had put it succinctly in his *Jugement de Platon*: "Il faut que celui à qui s'adresse l'épître dédicatoire paye ou protège." There could be no pretending the dedicatory exchange to be modeled on the neoclassical ideal of rational, reciprocal, instantaneously reversible *jugement* between social equals. Instead, the operative model, on which the uneven distribution of wealth and power was seen to have left an indelible stamp, is that of an asymmetrical, mutually degrading exchange: flattery for favors, words for food. Dedicatory discourse not only demeaned the flatterer and masked his resentments, but, favorably received, it exposed the enormity of the flattered party's amour propre. Dedication restaged, inevitably, the encounter of La Fontaine's fox and crow.

Voltaire's remarks on the practice of dedication become, in the article "Auteurs," a thinly veiled pretext for attacks on clerical hypocrisy, but his diatribe only gains in clarity and venom by the association. "L'épître dédicatoire n'a été souvent présentée que par la bassesse intéressée à la vanité dédaigneuse." This allegory play of vices degenerates into a potluck dinner: "On ne sait pas que la plupart des dédicaces, en Angleterre, ont été faites pour de l'argent, comme les capucins chez nous viennent présenter des salades, à condition qu'on leur donnera pour boire." Voltaire thus evokes a tradition of venal transactions that had reached its apogee (or nadir) in seventeenth-century England with the flourishing tradesmen known as falconers. Assisted by so-called mongrels, these falconers roamed the countryside armed with samples of a forthcoming book and multiple separate copies of a dedicatory page where only the dedicatee's name had been left blank.

[Upon arrival] at the mansion of a local magnate, the mongrel, who carried a hand press, filled in the name of the particular noble, and the book was presented as dedicated to him alone. Having extracted from him all the recompense possible, the two proceeded to a new district in pursuit of some other knight or nobleman who might, in like manner, fall victim to flattery.

The animal names, mongrel and falconer, symptomize the contagious dehumanization of flattery, whose self-abasing practitioners seek to gain some measure of revenge by baiting hooks with choice words or luring
their unsuspecting victims into verbal traps. Voltaire makes the same point by his pertinent analogy with the quid pro quo of food for drink. Having reduced the dedicatory epistle to its crassest common denominator, he relies on perspicacious readers to see through his subsequent expression of relief that “Les gens de lettres, en France ignorent aujourd'hui ce honteux avilissement: et jamais ils n'ont eu tant de noblesse dans l'esprit, excepté quelques malheureux qui se disent gens de lettres dans le même sens que des barbouilleurs se vantent d'être de la profession de Raphael, et que le cocher de Vertamont était poète.”

Condorcet echoes the sentiment, and the key word, “avilissement”: “Les gens de lettres ont renoncé à ces épitres dédicatoires qui avilissaient l'auteur, même lorsque l'ouvrage pouvait inspirer l'estime ou le respect.” He further suggests that nothing less than the aspired-after dignity and autonomy of intellectual pursuits would be jeopardized by the prostitution of publishing epistles dedicatory. Any self-respecting man of letters who voluntarily indulged in that kind of letters stood to set back not only the progress of his own book but also that of a new meritocracy with the philosophes themselves at its pinnacle. It is, in short, of the dedication’s still noteworthy absence that the philosophes made a measure of authorial character and—insofar as the term is not anachronistic—class-consciousness. Truly self-interested writers and those in greater solidarity with their own peers than with the peers of the realm chose, with good reason, not to dedicate. The eighteenth century had come to see the time-honored dedicatory topos of “mea mediocritas” as formalizing redundantly a humiliation endemic to the enterprise. Even vacating the topos in favor of some other version of dedication would produce no substantive promotion of the writing self. Or so it would seem.

Dedicatory space is often (not always) a meeting ground for “bassesse intéressée” and “vanité dédaigneuse,” opines Voltaire, himself an inveterate penner of dedications. And Voltaire was not alone in failing to follow the lead of Pierre Bayle, who had sworn off dedicatory discourse on principle: “I have so often ridiculed dedications that I must not risk any.” It is precisely the presumption of so many clearly defined pitfalls that would appear to have provided a challenge and piqued the ambition of those who fancied themselves—French would use the verb “se flatter” here—equal to the task of striking a mutually acceptable tone and doing dedications up right. Voltaire’s warnings against dedication
Rededications may not be totally disinterested: any fellow writer who dedicated and managed to get away with it could be counted as a new enemy or object of envy.

The article "Auteurs" is correspondingly short on constructive suggestions. Voltaire's protégé Marmontel went on, however, to catalog a finite number of vitiated dedicatory strategies and to sketch a plan of escape from the impasse of auto-avilissement. Published in the same year, 1755, as Rousseau's two dedications, Marmontel's practical advice to would-be dedicateurs is developed in a series of articles for the Encyclopédie that begins by consigning the épître itself to a kind of archaic, marginal formalism: "Ce terme n'est presque plus en usage que pour les lettres écrites en vers & pour les dédicaces des livres."\(^{12}\) The familiar, prosaic lettre more nearly captures the contemporary spirit with which Marmontel's next article seeks to infuse the épître dédicatoire itself. He first evokes an edenic, if short-lived, état de nature, from which he sees the epistle dedicated to have fallen into degradation: "Il faut croire que l'estime & l'amitié ont inventé l'épître dédicatoire, mais la bassesse & l'intérêt en ont bientôt avili l'usage: les exemples de cet indigne abus sont trop honteux à la Litterature pour en rappeler aucun."\(^{13}\) Marmontel thus joins forces with Voltaire and Condorcet in situating the notion of avilissement at the heart of his critique; he makes into a historical process their essence of an authorial posture.

Marmontel refuses to dirty his hands by citing any one offending text. Rather, he invites his readers to test his lucid generalizations against their own experience. He appeals particularly to a public of potential dedicatees who, however insatiable their natural appetites for flattery, must certainly balk at the recycled, unappealing forms in which it is being served up to them:

[N]ous croyons devoir donner aux auteurs un avis qui peut leur être utile; c'est que tous les petits détours de la flatterie sont connus. Les marques de bonté qu'on se flatte d'avoir reçues, & que le Mécène ne se souvient pas d'avoir données; l'accueil favorable qu'il a fait sans s'en appercevoir; la reconnaissance dont on est si pénétré, & dont il devroit être si surpris; la part qu'on veut qu'il ait à un ouvrage dont la lecture l'a endormi: ses ayeux dont on fait l'histoire souvent chimérique; ses belles actions & ses sublimes vertus qu'on passe sous silence pour de bonnes raisons; sa générosité qu'on loue d'avance, &c. toutes ces formules sont usées, & l'orgueil qui est si peu délicat, en est lui-même dégoûté. Monseigneur, écrit M. de Voltaire, à l'électeur Palatin, le style des dédi-
Significantly, Marmontel's first-mentioned "détour" ("Les marques de bonté qu'on se flate d'avoir reçues . . .") brings the ambiguous reflexive *se flatter* into play. The deviousness denounced in passing is that of making other-directed flattery a seemingly safe investment in self-flattery by association. As Marmontel's answering clause ("& que le Mécène ne se souvient pas d'avoir données") declares emphatically, the strategy backfires: authors "flatter" or delude no one but themselves when they aspire after the illusory compensations of reflected glory. At the mercy of uncooperative dedicatees, they have nothing to gain and everything to lose.

What surfaces here is a mutual aggression that Marmontel stops just short of declaring endemic to dedicatory discourse per se. Let the authors beware whom Marmontel assumes to assume that dedicatees will continue to take the same bait indefinitely. Complacent recourse to a handful of commonplaces can mean only that, in reality, the flatterers feel nothing but scorn for their addressees and take them for dupes on the order of La Fontaine's crow. How else is Marmontel to account for his contemporaries' failure to invent a more restrained or otherwise unrestrained dedicatory discourse? Repetition threatens, however, to expose the commonplaces for what they are and to awaken in deditors' erstwhile dupes the self-consciousness formerly off limits to their amour propre. These slumbering giants are bound to catch on, sooner or later, to an unmistakable deviation between the "portraits flattés" they read and themselves as models. "Maître Corbeau" could no doubt be tricked a second time into dropping his cheese, but probably not by a fox content to reprise verbatim his fellow trickster's former effusions. Recognizing the conventions, dedicatees will disdain to recognize themselves, and so repay the authors' tacit mépris with a scorn susceptible of more overt and devastating expression. In the aftermath of psychological reciprocity (scorn for scorn) reasserted at the expense of all civility and in the absence of real social equality, authors risk finding themselves further back even than square one. As Jean Starobinski puts it, in his article "Sur la flatterie": "[Q]ue le flattereur se montre excessif ou maladroit, et le mépris lui est rendu, l'agression se retourne contre lui, d'autant plus dangereuse qu'elle lui vient d'un puissant. Tout se passe comme si l'énergie agressive
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naissait, chez le destinataire de la flatterie, en raison de l'impossibilité
d'accepter ou d'habiter l'image trop embellie qu'on lui propose de lui-
même."\textsuperscript{15} The moral becomes all the more inescapable when, in the dot-
age of dedication, rhetorical excesses are flagged by those of redundanty.

In the same vein, Diderot's translation of Shaftesbury's \textit{An Inquiry into Virtue and Merits} completes the scenario whereby unsuspecting addressees of flattery are provoked, paradoxically, into coming to grips with unsolicited self-knowledge: "Nor are the greatest favourites of Fortune exempted from this task of self-inspection. Even flattery itself, by making the view agreeable, renders us attentive this way, and ensnares us in the habit. . . ." That portion of the English author's text is rendered in the following, even more menacing terms by Rousseau's sometime mentor, Diderot, whom we know specifically to have mediated the Genevan's encounter with Shaftesbury: "D'ailleurs, les maîtres du monde & les mignons de la fortune ne sont pas exempts de cette inspection domestique. Toutes les impostures de la flatterie se réduisent la plupart du temps, à leur en familiariser l'usage, & ses faux portraits à les rappeler ce qu'ils sont en effet."\textsuperscript{16} And provided it were distasteful enough, the realistic self-image triggered as an aftershock by a flattering image might well prod its subject into defensive recriminations against the offending flatterer.

What dedicators had, then, to avoid was ensnaring their prey only in the habit of "self-inspection" and being caught in flagrante delicto of setting transparent traps. There was a need to short-circuit the process whereby dedications inadvertently force-fed the Socratic message "Know Thyself" to destinataires who, in their reluctance, might like as not kill the messenger. One possible, if already conventional, response to the problem of unpalatable conventions is suggested by Marmontel's quotation from a dedicatory epistle by Voltaire. "\textit{Monseigneur, écrit M. de Voltaire, à l'électeur Palatin, le style des dédicaces, les vertus du protecteur, & le mauvais livre du protégé, ont souvent ennuyé le public.}" Metadedicatory discourse along these lines sought to allay suspicions and ward off scorn by translating the author's explicit awareness of flattery everywhere in the environs into assurances of his own congenital incapacity to flatter. Rousseau's youthful freestanding verse epistles to Messieurs Bordes (1741) and Parisot (1742) exploit this topos. Both come at "sincere," "well-deserved" praise of the addressee from the angle of the poet's failure to make his way in the world. If only his rigorous
Genevan education had not forever precluded Rousseau from stooping to deal in the (counterfeit) French currency of louanges:

Mais moi qui connois peu les usages de France,
Moi, fier républicain que blesse l'arrogance,
Du riche impertinent je dédaigne l'appui,
S'il le faut mendier en rampant devant lui,
Et ne sais applaudir qu'à toi, qu'au vrai mérite.

"Epître à M. Bordes" (2:1130)

Ah s'il faloit un jour absent de ma patrie
Traîner chez l'Etranger ma languissante vie
S'il faloit basement ramper auprès des Grands
Que n'en ai-je appris l'art dès mes plus jeunes ans?

"Epître à M. Parisot" (2:1137)

Marmontel no doubt recognized that such assurances do not really exempt the author from the blindness he ascribes to other flatterers and their dupes and that, in any case, redundancy was again at work undermining the perception of authenticity. He does not pursue this avenue any further. Rather, Marmontel subordinates the issue of sincerity to the other desired outcome of authorial self-respect. What he proposes in his own name would look very much like a retreat to the neoclassical model of reciprocal honnêteté, if the prerogative to pass final judgment were not now displaced onto the reading public: "Il ne reste plus qu'une façon honnête de dédier un livre: c'est de fonder sur des faits la reconnaissance, l'estime, ou le respect qui doivent justifier aux yeux du public l'hommage qu'on rend au mérite." 

The specter of flattery so haunts Marmontel's prescriptions that they all but bracket the dedicatee's role as reader/respondent. Whether second persons see themselves in or even see the images linked to their names must matter not at all if authors are to be immunized with maximal certainty against ulterior or profit motives. Any dedicatory discourse that was acknowledged to be the least bit transactional would be tainted by the notorious precedents of bribing interlocutors into future favors or buying silence with respect to past services not really rendered. Better that authors should seem to forgo any attempt at instituting a mutual-admiration society of two and concentrate instead on giving third-party referees the wherewithal to pronounce the discourse devoid of flattery. It
is by writing dedications that a public in possession of the facts would have been pleased or proud to write in their stead that Marmontel’s authors would “distinguish” themselves as bonnètes, reintegrate themselves into a community of equals, and make the best possible case for rehabilitating dedicatory discourse.

More important to this enterprise than any absolute value of the dedicatee’s “mérite” were that the discourse observe throughout and thoroughly document a due sense of proportionality. There could be no failing to furnish the empirical evidence on the sole basis of which “mérite” had been inferred and was being submitted for confirmation by other like-minded observers. No allowance could be made for feelings left unspoken, implicit, enigmatic, inchoate; the now familiar option of “a brief expression of love or esteem for a person close to the author”¹⁸ remained inconceivable. Nor could there be any dedicating out of private, asocial, idiosyncratic feelings like guilt, passionate love, or partisan zeal, which would tend, just as surely and subversively as flattery, to inflate the discourse. To deviate from the approved list of rational or already rationalized responses (“la reconnaissance, l’estime ou le respect”) would be to court public ridicule in lieu of or in addition to a dedicatee’s individual scorn. What we mean today by real honesty or depth of emotion thus counted for less than adequacy and transmissibility and for as little as a dedicatee’s true identity. As played in accordance with these essentially aesthetic rules, the dedicatory game might, in some instances, warrant retransposition into the heroic register only vaguely evoked by Marmontel’s use of the term “hommage.” But only where the “facts” in question amounted to truly noble deeds would authors be allowed (and required by a decisive respect for proportionality) to mimic the poet-chroniclers of classical Antiquity in their parallel nobility. Conversely, modest praise would entirely befit the more modest exploits—first and foremost, services to the author—characteristic of modern-day dedicatees. By his emphasis on conformity to universal standards of seemliness, Marmontel humbled the literary exercise in order that authors might be rescued from making a public spectacle of autoavilissement.

The oblique, skin-deep self-presentation of epistles dedicatory would thus steer clear of autobiographical excess, or accept the consequences. This was no place to put Rousseau’s eventual motto “Intus, et in Cute” (1:5) into practice, no place for authors to let their hair all the way down,
or for readers to catch them in the act. Present-day readers are bound to be disappointed if they turn to the mainstream of eighteenth-century French dedications “just to see personal feelings, which have been kept in check in the effort to be objective or conciliatory, break through, as if the author found relief in forgetting everything except his [or her] own convictions or hopes or fears.” The difference that a twentieth-century compiler has posited between (utterly impersonal) dedicated and (highly personalized) dedicatory texts remained, by and large, only relative: “Many an author who never wore his heart on his sleeve put it into his dedication, and through the medium of this humble literary instrument we have received revelations of feeling, messages of love, reverence, and loyalty, which we could ill afford to lose.” Rousseau’s contemporaries rarely forgot everything; what they saw fit to put into their dedications was heartfelt up to a point, or faintly reminiscent of the heartfelt; a self-protective pudor held in check any urges toward demonstrably reckless abandon.

Rousseau cannot have been unaware of psycho-political baggage that was widely thought to encumber the very decision to dedicate and the choice of dedicatory strategies. He must have remarked his contemporaries’ collective recoiling before the horror of avilissement and the premium they were placing on abstention. And since he was less inclined than Marmontel to table the question of sincerity, Rousseau had further reason to recoil. In the preface to Narcisse he had repudiated “vile et basse flatterie, soins séduiteurs, insidieux, puériles” in no uncertain terms—not so much because flattery could not work as because it did, but only to corrupt the “cœur” of the flatterer irreversibly and to shrink his “ame” (2:968).

DEDICATION AS LÈSE MAJESTÉ: From the Heights of Heroism . . .

It is by his unconventional choices of dedicatees that Rousseau first hoped to have inured his soul against this shrinkage. The “Préface” had promised specifically that he would leave no written record of having courted the “femmes qui donnent le ton” or showered praise on “la sotise des Grands” (2:974). The pride he took, provisionally, in having lived up to the letter of that promise gives us a first way of accounting for the relative fanfare with which Rousseau’s two dedications are ushered, in tandem, into Book 8 of the Confessions: “Je dédiai ma Pièce [Le Devin du village] à M. Duclos qui l’avoir protégée et je déclaraï que ce seroit ma
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seule dédicace. J'en ai pourtant fait une seconde avec son consentement; mais il a du se tenir encore plus honoré de cette exception que si je n'en avois fait aucune" (1:382). The brief epistle to Duclos is in fact centered on the unkept promise of singularity:

A Monsieur Du Clos,

Historiographe de France, l'un des Quarante de l'Académie Française, et des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres.

Souffrez, Monsieur, que votre nom soit à la tête de cet Ouvrage, qui sans vous n'eut jamais paru. Ce sera ma première et unique Dédicace. Puisse-t'elle vous faire autant d'honneur qu'à moi.

Je suis de tout mon cœur,
MONSIEUR,
Votre très humble et très Obéissant Serviteur,

J. J. Rousseau (2:1095)

This skeletal rendition seems content to make a few modest stabs at modernizing and personalizing the dedicatory form letter. Singling out Duclos, Rousseau instills value in what passes for a once-in-a-lifetime, never-to-be-repeated gesture. He makes his own singularity—his sympathy, really, for the philosophic stance—a matter of characteristic reluctance to dedicate. Smoothly and respectfully turned, the compliment does not attract undue attention; fulfilling his avowed desire to dedicate leaves the dedicator already fully sated. Yet the text remains remarkably top-heavy with titles and weighed down at the last by formulaic assurances of vasselage. Marmontel would have approved the explicit (and verifiable) evocation of Duclos's good offices in getting the play staged but might have stopped short of endorsing genuflexion as an appropriate posture of gratitude. And Marmontel surely would have counseled against the Confessions' equation of those good offices with the bête noire of "protection." It is, after all, to a friend and fellow author, connected but not enthroned, that Rousseau addressed this strange amalgam of fulsome, measured, and faintly self-serving phrases.

But it is just this intrinsically disproportionate mix of old- and new-style dedication that makes Rousseau's text more telling for what it avoids than for what it says. The dedication not written, the dedication in lieu of which Rousseau addresses Duclos, would have honored Louis XV. Lèse majesté between the lines is overdetermined by a title page recall-
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ing that *Le Devin* had twice been successfully staged “DEVANT LEURS MAJESTES” (2:1093), by a neoclassical tradition making dedication of plays to the monarch particularly automatic, and by the wording that distinguishes Duclos as “historiographe de France” from a long line (including Racine) of *historiographes du roi*. The message becomes that of Rousseau’s deliberate choice to cast himself as the “très humble et très Obéissant Serviteur” of someone other than Louis.

So near and yet so far: Rousseau flirts with the amply illustrated precedent of using nominal dedicatees to mediate eventual access of the discourse to the ultimate seat of power. Many a dedicator had rehearsed the exploits of royal consorts, offspring, ministers, and the like as a way of setting the stage for the main attraction of heaping praise on their illustrious relation. But here, fealty to Duclos remains unswerving and untranscended; art will not imitate the one and only dedicatee’s having gone between Rousseau and Louis. Singularity of address thus has less to do with a blanket exclusion of all other comers from Rousseau’s liminary pages than with the pointed rejection in perpetuity of a sole “natural” claimant.

What the occasional text in this instance commemorates—and the *Confessions* remember, making it the narrative apogee of Book 8—is the author’s heroic refusal of a royal pension: “Au centre, comme sur un large palier, ralentendo, on assiste au triomphe du Devin du Village devant la Cour. ‘Moment critique’, et tentation précise: Rousseau acceptera-t-il d’être présenté au roi, d’être pensionné? Il refuse, pour des raisons plus ou moins pures, et il jouit orgueilleusement de sa gloire et de sa vertu” (1:1425). Whatever “démarches auto-punitives” were certainly involved in Rousseau’s actual refusal to appear before the king have left no trace in the dedication. Saying no to flattery, the dedicator goes on record as having said no to the favors that, in the throes of the court’s “vifs transports d’admiration” for *Le Devin* (1:379), Louis would have conferred on the playwright. There is something not only covertly defiant but already autobiographical-by-omission about this use of an occasional text to mark not some red-letter day in the monarch’s life but, rather, one of Rousseau’s own proudest moments. “Humbled” before and only before his friend, he can take lasting pride both in the occasion and in the harmless show of humility that provides a permanent record of inoculation against any real avilissement.

Unlike Marmontel, however, Rousseau cannot dissociate self-respect
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from an essential component of sincerity. It is to truthfulness, his truthfulness, that the specter of flattery poses the more immediate threat. And over truthfulness any dedication might cast a pall, by allowing readers to presume that the author had in mind at every moment of writing his opera the desire to please or not entirely displease some specific outside reader.

We might well read the dedication to Duclos as the proximate cause of the author's hastening to follow with a somewhat mean-spirited and off-putting "Avertissement." "Quoyque j'aye approuvé les changemens que mes amis jugerent à propos de faire à cet Interméde, quand il fut joué à la Cour et que son succès leur soit dû en grande partie," warns Rousseau, "je n'ai pas jugé à propos de les adopter aujourd'hui, et cela par plusieurs raisons" (2:1096). To be dispelled, emphatically, is the suspicion that Duclos's election as dedicatee has in any way compromised the integrity of the author's original text. Rousseau denies literal collaboration as a way of denying concessions to the pleasure of any intended reader other than himself. The last and most compelling of his "plusieurs raisons" drives home the point: "n'ayant fait cet ouvrage que pour mon amusement, son vrai succès est de me plaire. Or personne ne sait mieux que moi comment il doit être pour me plaire le plus" (2:1096).

Differentiating the signed and printed Devin from the version performed in the theater, Rousseau extends the message of his dedication to the point of partially dis-honoring a dedicatee already demoted to the status of "friend" among others. Not only does no trace persist anywhere in Le Devin of former efforts to court royal favor, but primary responsibility for those misguided efforts—seen significantly as undermining the work's "unité" (2:1096)—lies entirely with the worldly-wise Duclos et al. Onto them, Rousseau projects the savoir-flatter from which he continues to seek exemption, in testimony to persistent doubts that the dedicatory mentality can honestly be confined to proper dedications. He "confesses" his own past complicity in schemes to placate Louis and goes out of his way to devalue the pleasure or incur the displeasure of even a relatively benign dedicatee. Clearly, Rousseau's relief at having resisted the temptation of royal patronage in the nick of time is matched by anxiety that this heroic gesture may have dealt an only symbolic blow to the radical insincerity of any and all addressed discourse in a society of unequals. The slimmest of dedications thus becomes an occasion for dis-
quieting and defensive postmortems. How can Rousseau know for sure that his denials of desire to win favor are emitted from a vantage point of absolute lucidity?

Years later, at the moment of writing *Du contrat social*, he was still trying to reassure himself and to consolidate the heroism of the *Devin* episode. It is with his own brief career as a dedicator in mind that Rousseau sketched biographies of one of the *Contracts* designated whipping boys, Grotius, and his translator, Barbeyrac. From the safety of the sidelines, Rousseau enjoys watching these other dedications squirm and their integrity suffer in consequence:

Grotius refugié en France, mécontent de sa patrie, et voulant faire sa cour à Louis XIII, à qui son livre est dédié, n'épargne rien pour dépouiller les peuples de tous leurs droits et pour en revêtir les rois avec tout l'art possible. C'eut bien été aussi le goût de Barbeyrac, qui dédiciait sa traduction au Roi d'Angleterre George I. Mais malheureusement l'expulsion de Jacques II qu'il appelle abdication, le forçait à se tenir sur la réserve, à gauchir, à tergiverser, pour ne pas faire de Guillaume un usurpateur. Si ces deux écrivains avaient adopté les vrais principes, toutes les difficultés étaient levées et ils eussent été toujours conséquents; mais ils auraient tristement dit la vérité et n'auraient fait leur cour qu'au peuple. Or la vérité ne mène point à la fortune, et le peuple ne donne ni ambassades, ni chaires, ni pensions. (3:370–71)

This transparently parallel life of Grotius recalls Genevan refugee Rousseau's refusal to follow suit with a later Louis. But it also evokes, in the guise of the good road not taken by Grotius, the second and really dernière of Rousseau's épitres dédicatoires. By offering his Second Discourse "A LA REPUBLIQUE DE GENEVE" (3:111), Rousseau could believe to have completed and complemented his message of nondedication to the French king. Election of the republic perpetuates rejection of the monarch. The silent treatment accorded a party ready, able, and willing to pay informs and is informed in turn by the subsequent choice of a dedicatee, Geneva, in no position—ontologically (as a nonperson) or politically (as "the people")—to dispense favors. Where previously he had withheld a stigma of insincerity, Rousseau now places a stamp of sincerity on the text proper of the Second Discourse.

No wonder that, following the *Contract*’s counter example, the *Confessions* couple the two roughly contemporaneous Rousseau dedications in an intertext so binding that each ends up honoring the other's
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honoree. Duclos’s stature is enhanced by the exclusive company he comes to keep, Geneva’s by its singular fitness to confer that stature and to “force” Rousseau into breaking his vow never to dedicate again. Something of the classical ideal of honors conferred reciprocally but at a distance incompatible with base bartering is thus displaced from intra- to interdedicatory space. By simultaneously exposing the two sides of a single coin, the Confessions show Rousseau to have exhausted the possibilities for unproblematical, politically correct use of dedicatory space. The moment is complete unto itself, completely heroic, and fleeting.

... To the Depths of Auto-avilissement

By first evoking the dedication to Geneva out of turn, the Confessions also pose a tantalizing question. What exactly can Rousseau have found to say and in what tones within the ten-page epistle that contrasts so unmistakably with the three lines of dedication to Duclos? The answer that the Confessions withhold suspensefully I shall take for granted. Rousseau’s second and final épître dédicatoire reads like so hyperbolic an exercise in flattery that one contemporary reader was moved to declare its excesses unprecedented: “Il n’est pas naturel de confondre sa Dédicace avec les Dédicaces ordinaires... Quoiqu’il y ait dans la suite de ce long narre bien des faits qui conviennent effectivement à l’Etat que M. Rousseau a en vué, le plus grand nombre n’est gueres relatif qu’à l’Utopie, et l’Auteur s’est plu à suivre une espèce de verve qui l’entraînoit, plutôt qu’à dépeindre les objets dans leur exacte réalité” (3:1288). The title of his organ (La Bibliothèque impartiale) notwithstanding, no one would be tempted to take Formey’s for an impartial assessment. Still, it was echoed by Genevans, like former premier syndic Jean-Louis Du Pan, who had trouble recognizing themselves in so flattering a group portrait: “Vous avés suivi dans l’épître dédicatoire les mouvemens de votre cœur, et je crains que l’on ne trouve que vous nous flatés trop. Vous nous representés tels que nous devrions être et non pas tels que nous sommes.” Among our contemporaries, Jean-Daniel Candaux pulls no punches in alluding to “une dédicace à la République de Genève, où la louange, par son emphase, atteint aux limites de la flagornerie; il n’y est question que de la douceur et de la bonté des magistrats, les Citoyens y sont tous vertueux, instruits, sensés, etc.” (3:xclxxxiii). And Starobinski reminds us of what Rousseau seems to have forgotten since the epistles to Bordes and Parisot: nowhere were such excesses less apt
to go undetected or unquestioned than in Rousseau's (and his critic's) hometown: "Les Genevois aiment les manières tranquilles" (3:xlix).

We can only speculate about the sense of Rousseau's self-delusion or strategic planning. Did he think, in idealizing Geneva, to render sincere homage to what, in the infinite nostalgia of exile in Parisian deserts, he really saw? In that case, what comes across as miscalculated honnêteté might be traced to a more far-reaching nostalgia for dedication in the heroic register. Repeated assurances in the épître that the Genevans' is a happier lot than the Ancients' (3:113–14, 119) would belie a problematical attempt, on the part of a self-styled Genevan, to resurrect the oratory of Antiquity. The resulting mixed message would read: Live with the moderation of Moderns; read this as larger-than-life Ancients. Or did Rousseau intend, more deviously, to exhort, even chide his addressees into closing the gap between their ideal and real selves? Whether or not it was tendered, that bait was taken—in what spirit it is impossible to determine—by Du Pan: "Nous devons tous profiter des sages preceptes qu'elle [l'épître dédicatoire] contient et travailler de concert à procurer le bonheur de notre Patrie."24 Was Rousseau's unsolicited advice to change nothing really aimed at bringing their Geneva into closer conformity with his?

Or was the hidden agenda, as R. A. Leigh assumes, more specifically subversive still? Was the gap Rousseau wished to see closed that between the magistratical oligarchy and a "people" addressed separately and treated to a deliberately hollow-sounding celebration of the status quo?25 Is Geneva as "best of all possible worlds" really meant to seem as ripe for reform as Voltaire's Westphalia? Or was Rousseau bent from the first on provoking the good (but not great) citizenry (3:117) into acknowledging his own superior brand of citizenship? Was it to be deplored—or, perhaps, perversely hoped—that the Genevans would repudiate the "vrai Patriote" whose "zèle ardent et légitime" and "tendre affection" could only get the better of him? Rousseau in fact concludes by endowing himself with the Christ-like generosity "d'un homme qui n'envisage point de plus grand bonheur pour lui-même que celui de vous voir tous heureux" (1:120–21). Is there a method to the madness of the épître's self-evident sycophancy? Are we dealing here with the prodigal son as such, as Livy-come-lately, as juge-pénitent, as political agitator, or as self-anointed martyr?

The épître's own impossible eclecticism and instability of tone pre-
clude none of the possibilities just sketched. The mere fact that “tender” and “zealous” versions of Rousseau rub shoulders in a single sentence makes it futile to try to pin him down to any one affective register or established mode of dedication on the sole basis of the performance itself. More accessible and interesting by far are Rousseau’s postmortems. That they exist and are so protracted is already noteworthy, given the obvious alternative for an important author of never giving a mere dedication, once delivered, a second thought. But Rousseau did, and his ongoing enterprise of self-portraiture was permanently inflected by the choice he made for himself among the plethora of possible readings of the épître.

To the author of the Confessions it comes to matter less whether or what, in dedicating, he stooped to conquer than that he stooped at all—and never quite straightened up again. In the aftermath of dedication, there would be no reascending directly into the heavens from which Jean-Jacques, “auprès de la divinité,” is said to have emitted the immediately preceding broadcast of the Second Discourse (1:388–89). The text of presentation to the graphically exalted “MAGNIFIQUES, TRES HONORES ET SOUVERAINS SEIGNEURS” of Geneva (3:111) becomes, in contrast, a kind of rite of initiation into auto-avilissement. Even as the philosophes warned against it, Rousseau was making a connection between auto-avilissement and autobiography. He was recognizing paradoxical ways in which gratuitous servility can be self-serving. And he was exploring the still relatively uncharted depths of modern antiheroism. This, at least, is the sense of having dedicated that the Confessions go to considerable lengths to promote and to press through the narrative filter of Book 8’s final ten pages. Rededication to auto-avilissement underwrites the episodic account where Rousseau tells of writing the Discours:returning, dedication in hand, to the city of his birth; reveling for four months in the welcome extended there; reconverting to Calvinism and regaining his rights of citizenship; returning to France; and eventually abandoning plans for permanent resettlement in Geneva (1:389–400).

Even at the level of manifest content, the emphases of this account are startling. What Rousseau’s Pléiade editors have noted vis-à-vis the entirety of Book 8 has special relevance for its waning moments: “L’étonnant est qu’une si petite place soit accordée aux ‘idées’, en ces années qui durent être vouées à de très nombreuses lectures et à la méditation du ‘triste et grand système’ dont un premier exposé sera donné dans le
Discours sur l’Inégalité” (1:1425). In a paradigmatic reversal of figure and ground, the writing and reception of Rousseau’s dedication to Geneva come in for more extensive chronicling than those of the Second Discourse itself. If the two stories parallel each other in raising and dashing Jean-Jacques’s hopes for favorable reception of the respective texts, only the dedication’s story has a suspenseful unfolding. No sooner is the Discours composed and the hopeful sign of Diderot’s approval noted than an answering clause of the same sentence delivers the bad news: “De ces méditations resulta le Discours sur l’inégalité, ouvrage qui fut plus du gout de Diderot que tous mes autres Ecrits, et pour lequel ses conseils me furent le plus utiles, mais qui ne trouva dans toute l’Europe que peu de lecteurs qui l’entendissent, et aucun de ceux-là qui voulut en parler” (1:389). A single additional sentence fleshes out this outline of vertical fall.

In contrast, the dedication’s fate is left hanging for the duration of Jean-Jacques’s stay in Geneva. Acknowledgement of its composition heralds his arrival: “Avant mon départ de Paris j’avois esquisse la dédicace de mon Discours sur l’inegalité.” But, uncirculated, the dedication is quickly forgotten, and remains forgotten for three festive pages: “Arrive dans cette ville [Geneve] je me livrai à l’enthousiasme républicain qui m’y avoit amené” (1:392). So effusively do the Genevans welcome Jean-Jacques and in such total forgiveness of past transgressions such as his conversion to Catholicism, that, at this point in the narrative, one can well imagine that someone other than Rousseau might have pocketed or at least toned down his épître dédicatoire. The biblical prodigal, on whose story Jean-Jacques’s is provisionally modeled, had likewise rehearsed a full-blown speech of contrition: “Mon père, j’ai péché contre le ciel et contre toi; Et je ne suis plus digne d’être appelé ton fils; traite-moi comme l’un de tes domestiques.”26 But when it comes time in the Bible for actually delivering the speech, the final clause, with its embrace of servanthood, is preempted; the son is forever precluded by (gratitude for) his father’s premature embrace from delivering the self-deprecatory punch line. Expectations are raised by the biblical parallel that a Rousseau “[f]êté, caressé dans tous les états” (1:392) will also have swallowed his prepared text or at least those parts of his text rendered obsolete and too obsequious by the city fathers’ having already rolled out the red carpet and killed the fatted calf.

Instead, as though mindless of their “running down the road”27 to
avoid a native son's humiliation, Jean-Jacques forges ahead as planned with his dedication. He refuses not only to heed the general warnings of Marmontel and company but to espouse the orthodox repentance that has been defined, on the basis of Jesus's parable, as "the capacity to forego pride and accept graciousness." A golden opportunity for the authentic, unselfconscious humility of silent wonder at the other's spontaneous, unfathomable, and inimitable generosity goes unexploited, and conspicuously so. It is as though Jean-Jacques saw the city fathers only as rivals in auto-avilissement, as though they were taunting him to outdo their Imitatio and to exceed their example of running a self into the ground. For Jean-Jacques, there could be no tacit compliance with an unanticipated state of grace from which his own mediocritas might be inferred, incidentally, as a corollary of the other's exaltation. The occasion called, rather, for reappropriating and brandishing that mediocritas as his alone. He would make it public through dedication itself and explicit in such extraneously self-flagellatory versicles as: "si les égaremens d'une folle jeunesse me firent oublier durant un temps de si sages leçons, j'ai le bonheur d'éprouver enfin que quelque penchant qu'on ait vers le vice, il est difficile qu'une éducation dont le cœur se mêle reste perdue pour toujours" (3:118).

As though to explain our returning hero's apparent willingness to risk all in order to have his say, Kenneth E. Bailey reads between the biblical lines:

We could assume that [the prodigal's failure to finish his prepared speech] indicates a self-interest which says, "This is better than I expected. Why not take all I can get? I'll keep silent and accept. If he will give me sonship, who cares about being a workman?" Certainly this is not what the omission signifies. Given the prodigal's previous mind-set, sonship has certain distinct disadvantages. If he accepts sonship, he will have to live with his brother and be fed from his brother's property. He will again be under the total authority of his father. He will be denied the self-satisfaction of having "earned his own way."

Rather than forgo that last self-satisfaction, the Jean-Jacques who would dedicate thus parts company with the prodigal and reverts to the "perverted pride" of explicit insistence "that he is 'too humble' for sonship." It would seem, then, that there is a victory to be snatched from the
Genevans by dedication to them, and that it consists in perfecting the well-known reversal whereby a godless semblance of Christian humility is fetishized as a "phallic held high." Rousseau was certainly no stranger to the detours of Augustinian theology ("God humbled Himself in order to be exalted") or to the corollaries of a discreetly neo-Promethean psychology ("Augustine knew well that humility itself could become an 'exploit'). At one point in the épître, for example, Rousseau cannot resist exalting the humility of his father, Isaac, whom the author sees in his mind's eye "vivant du travail de ses mains, et nourrissant son ame des Verités les plus sublimes" (3:118). And yet, the Confessions' saga of the épître dédicatoire does not end here or, for that matter, in precisely the kind of paradoxical redemption scripted by Augustine. Being "saved," especially insofar as that would entail reliance on the caprices of external ratification, comes to matter much less to Rousseau than the more modest and modern, if still difficult, aim of being "himself."

Conversion to the cult of self-identity takes time, however, and the prodigal of orthodox Christianity is not the only or even the most nostalgically mourned casualty of this conversion. The Confessions let go much more easily of the prodigal than of the aspirations to a straightforwardly heroic self-image that are left over from the dedication to Duclos. Meandering his way through a kind of talking cure, Rousseau puts up massive initial resistance to his compatriots' antiheroic misreadings of the second épître.

The prodigal Jean-Jacques has by now returned to Paris, having left advance copies of his dedication behind. It was not well received, according to the Confessions, by the dedicatees ("Cet effet ne me fut pas favorable" [1:395]). What most shocks and disappoints Jean-Jacques and seems still to catch Rousseau off guard is the failure of all but a few Genevans to write back, and those few's failure to respond in kind. He seems to think that one good, heartfelt épître deserved others just like it and just as imbued as his with "un vrai zèle de coeur" (1:395). Instead, Jean-Jacques's sincere expression of "pur patriotisme" has somehow managed to lend itself to one version or another of misinterpretation. It has been mistaken either for a mere literary exercise on the safe, Marmontel model or, worse, for an atavistically flattering assault on the dedicatees' amour propre. A first set of readings, which Rousseau judges to be disproportionately low on affect, is exemplified by Chief Magistrate Chouet's "honnête" but "froide" letter and the "quelques complimens" penned by
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“des particuliers.” But, as though it meant to flatter and not gratuitously, this selfsame épître will also have provoked the defensive overreactions of “enmity” in the Petit Conseil and jealousy “dans la bourgeoisie” (1:395). What Rousseau says to have scandalized “tous ceux qui la remar­quérent” is the Genevans’ so-called “indifférence.” He evidently means to fault his dedicatees for unwillingness or inability to differentiate his from the run-of-the-mill dedications that had made either timid tea-party conversation or mutually degrading travesties of sincere emotion.

It is, of course, beyond the power of the épître itself to outlaw this indifference. In particular, whatever traces zeal may have left in texts that somehow strike their models as having exceeded realistic portraiture are indistinguishable from the traces of a conscious desire to flatter. Readers familiar with Rousseau’s tragedy La Mort de Lucrece will be struck—with what pertinence we shall see shortly—by the coincidence between Jean-Jacques’s unmet demands and those placed on Lucrece by her confidante Pauline. After urging her mistress to lead a less austere existence, Pauline claims to have acted selflessly: “Si mon zèle a pu vous déplaire du moins n’en blamez pas les motifs” (2:1025). Omniscience, in the case of the tragedy, allows us to discover that what Pauline arbitrarily calls “zèle” amounts, in fact, to the base and passionate self-interest of a co-conspirator in Lucretia’s eventual rape. In the case of the dedication, by contrast, sincerity remains undecidable and, in effect, less than decisive. Not knowing what to think, the Genevans may think the worst, and worse still, think only of themselves. Even to recognize Rousseau’s zeal would be to want to denounce the portrait itself as flattering, whatever the portraitist’s intent. But by this point in the Confessions, Rousseau has obviously dropped all pretense of concern for the accuracy of the portrait qua portrait. He cares only that as a self-portrait it has proven doubly inadequate: it is neither recognizable enough as an exercise in individuation nor equal to the task of portraying its subject in sufficiently unequivocal terms. That Rousseau’s “vrai zèle” and the “bassesse intéressée” denounced by Voltaire can be called to account for one and the same increment of the artist in the artist’s rendering constitutes, for the would-be self-portraitist, the really scandalous and inevitable “indifférence.”

For Rousseau wants, finally, to be recognized as a subject and to control his self-image, whatever that takes. Following the lead of Masson, we might confront Rousseau with the evidence of warm, even effusive letters of praise for his épître, “car les remerciements du Conseil furent aussi
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élogieux et courtois qu'un gouvernement très conservateur pouvait se les permettre." But any such efforts would run counter to what emerges finally as the autobiographer's chosen path. By the time we think to catch him or convince him to leave well enough alone, Rousseau has already rededicated himself, with a vengeance, to auto-avilissement. In defiance of at least some empirical evidence, he makes a spectacle of snatching humiliating defeat from the jaws of partial, unsatisfactory victory. A piquant anecdote puts an emphatic end to the indeterminacy of mixed reviews. Rousseau drives to new extremes the point of the dedication's utter failure among its elected destinataires and submits Jean-Jacques to a gratuitous reprise of ridicule: "Je me souviens que dinant un jour à Clichy chez Madame Dupin avec Crommelin Resident de la République et avec M. de Mairan, celui-ci dit en pleine table que le Conseil me devoit un présent et des honneurs publics pour cet ouvrage, et qu'il se deshonoroit s'il y manquoit. Crommelin, qui étoit un petit homme noir et bassement méchant, n'osa rien répondre en ma présence, mais il fit une grimace effroyable, qui fit sourire Madame Dupin" (1:395). The earlier, matter-of-fact report of Europe's invisible silence before the Second Discourse pales before this miming of failure by a grimace both horrifying and laughable. The dinner-table scene, which Rousseau might easily not have remembered or evoked, does not so much illustrate "indifférence" (or lack of "honneurs publics") as hurl by it, in apparent submission to some irresistible gravitational pull. The Frenchwoman's enigmatic smile makes a debasing mockery even of the honor/dishonor polarity and allows the Genevan diablotin to smirk with impunity and in perpetuity at his countryman.

Even when allowances are made for what the autobiographer knew better than the new citizen about the subsequent deterioration of his relations with the Genevan notables, there is something strangely complacent about this wallowing in the grotesque Grand Guignol of mutual avilissement. Or there would be, had the autobiographer not followed with a bottom line: "Le seul avantage que me procura cet ouvrage [l'épître dédicatoire] outre celui d'avoir satisfait mon cœur fut le titre de Citoyen qui me fut donné par mes amis, puis par le public à leur exemple, et que j'ai perdu dans la suite pour l'avoir trop bien mérité" (1:395). The Confessions have settled finally not only on a tone (of sardonic laughter at Jean-Jacques's misfortunes), but on the theme of identity.

To hear Rousseau tell it, he might just as well have dispensed with the
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entire body of the dedication and proceeded directly to the complimentary closing (“Votre très humble et très-obéissant serviteur et Con­citoyen” [3:121]), which makes the point of his citizenship by emphatic contrast with the otherwise identical closing (“Votre très humble et très Obéissant Serviteur”) to the Duclos dedication (2:1095). Or more economically still, Rousseau might have contented himself with having his name and title coupled on the Discours's title page, where they were guaranteed relief both by the initially anonymous publication of his First Discourse “Par un Citoyen de Genève” (3:1) and by the norm of more numerous and highfalutin “mentions honorifiques dont les personnages importants faisaient suivre leur noms” on title pages (3:1285). His doing neither has resulted not simply in a regrettable, qualitative difference like that between his epistle and the Genevans' letters, but in so exaggerated a quantitative disproportion of expended to received verbiage as to invite laughter. Either the dedicatory enterprise itself was ridiculously excessive, or its one-word pay-off (“Citoyen”) was tragically comically paltry. Even what elsewhere passes for an enormous gain is here belittled before the fact: the dédicace will have managed only to confer on Jean-Jacques a new identity, which, radiating outward from the subject, gains gradual public acceptance. As Starobinski puts it: “Le titre de Citoyen de Genève n’est plus une périphrase mais une apposition” (3:1285). Foreshadowing relentlessly, these same lines reflect, however, on the vulnerability of any such identity to the ravages of time and public opinion. A seemingly decisive victory deteriorates into a radical paradox of nonconformity between titles and true merit, between one’s own and others’ versions of identity.

AUTO-AVILISSEMENT AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

There, in a nutshell, is the problem of self-identity that the Confessions, as would-be monument to the character of Rousseau, confront at every turn. The autobiographer, whose secular immortality had long since been assured, worried not about “being forgotten,” but about “being remembered as someone he himself would recognize.” As formulated by Gregory L. Ulmer, the question haunting Rousseau and his spiritual descendants ups the ante of immortality: they come to wonder obsessively “how, once they have attracted the attention of the crowd, they may preserve their ‘true’ identity, as distinct from the legend created in the perception of others.” The misunderstandings they strive to
foreclose are those arising from attempts at getting beyond self-promotion to self-definition. Ulmer argues convincingly that only the early, unknown Rousseau may be wholly inscribed in the tradition of the Greek Herostratus, who so monomaniacally and enviously thirsted after fame that he settled for the notoriety of burning the temple of Modesty on the occasion of Alexander the (really) Great’s birth. Rousseau’s later, self-reflexive writings are credited by Ulmer with taking the tradition in a decisively modern direction. This “defamiliarization or ‘swerve’” went largely unrecognized by those of Rousseau’s contemporaries who continued to the death to taunt him with the name of “Erostrate.” The preface to Narcisse could not make those contemporaries forget what kept being reconstrued as the flagrant opportunism of the First Discourse. “Indeed, his attack on the arts and sciences bears an allegorical resemblance to Herostratus’s destruction of the beautiful temple.” Rousseau’s eye-catching, iconoclastic entry into the Dijon Academy’s essay contest had forever endowed his philosophical edifice with a foundation whose seeming shakiness could be recalled on the occasion of each further addition. R. A. Leigh, for one, reminds us of the sobriquet’s staying power: “Lors des troubles de Genève, et surtout à partir de la publication des Lettres de la Montagne [en 1764], on appliqua volontiers à JJ lui-même, dans les milieux politiques orthodoxes, le surnom d’Erostrate.”

But Rousseau himself did not sit still forever for such in figura portraits. He moved beyond the desire for fame that the Greek arsonist has come to embody—somewhat misleadingly, as though that desire were not really the single most compelling motive of all classical art. Rousseau was never entirely cured of the Herostratan envy he most often evinces by transparent projection onto his “enemies.” But he nonetheless proceeded, without a clean bill of health, to set himself the additional tasks of fashioning a durable self-image and making that image impervious to envy. Satisfaction of his desire for “honneurs publics” was as unsatisfactory to him as it remains for his spiritual descendants among us. Once granted, fame is not enough; it is “for ourselves” that we persist in wanting to be known. “The key to the modern applicability of the Herostratus factor . . . is the translation of reputation (fame) into identity. In the modern crisis of self, any identity will do so long as it can be determined that it is our identity, hence that selfhood is possible, just as for Herostratus any reputation would do so long as he had one.”
Ulmer cites the meta-autobiographical postface to Book 8 of the *Confessions*, and sees it as encapsulating the new crisis invented by Rousseau in the aftermath of setting his world on fire: "puisqu’enfin mon nom doit vivre, je dois tâcher de transmettre avec lui le souvenir de l’homme infortuné qui le porta, tel qu’il fut réellement, et non tel que d’injustes ennemis travaillent sans relâche à le peindre" (1:400). Ulmer does not, however, insist enough on the timeliness of these remarks, which are theoretically valid for the entirety of the *Confessions* but made with special pertinence both to the events just told in Book 8 and to the context of their telling. If, henceforth, Rousseau’s "nom doit vivre," this certainty of afterlife derives specifically from his first, prize-winning *Discours* and among the broader, theater-going public, from the *succès de scandale* of *Le Devin du village*. But the autobiographer’s rededication to the pursuit of identity also comes within striking distance of his afterthoughts on the dedication to Geneva: "Le seul avantage que me procura cet ouvrage . . . fut le titre de Citoyen qui me fut donné par mes amis, puis par le public à leur exemple, et que j’ai perdu dans la suite pour l’avoir trop bien mérité" (1:395). Rousseau’s formula sketches the problem of preserving identity in the face of external (envious) efforts to undermine it. But it also exemplifies a solution privileged by the *Confessions*. The parting of the ways between identity and legend is appropriately rendered as paradoxical, for paradox ranks high among the "fool’s inversions." And it is likewise telling that Rousseau downplays the value even of identity, as though that were the best way possible to lull the green-eyed monster into a false sense of indifference.

Indeed, the selfhood to which these lines show the way is predicated on volunteering early and often to play the fool, on wresting the weapon of ridicule from the other, seizing envy’s initiative, and burying oneself beneath more ridicule than the other could ever conceive of dishing out. Thoroughgoing autohumiliation provides the kind of preemptive strike that discourages biographical challenges to the autobiography. As a strategy of self-preservation, self-mockery aims at reducing the mockers to silence or, better yet, luring them into the vociferously impotent echoing of an antihero’s text on which it becomes all but impossible to improve. And so, far from embellishing or ennobling the "facts," Rousseau will go out of his way to render them farcical. He will exploit the comic potential of various misadventures as a means to exercising artistic control over his self-image.
Among these “comical catastrophes,” Ulmer lists the particularly “successful” failure of Jean-Jacques to shine before the committee of Genevan ministers that had been assembled to hear his abjuration of Catholicism and profession of faith:

Cette attente m’effraya si fort qu’ayant étudié jour et nuit pendant trois semaines un petit discours que j’avais préparé, je me troublai lorsqu’il fallut le réciter au point de n’en pouvoir pas dire un seul mot, et je fis dans cette conférence le rolle du plus sot ecolier. Les Commissaires parloient pour moi, je répondois bêtement oui et non: ensuite je fus admis à la communion et réintégré dans mes droits de Citoyen: je fus inscrit comme tel dans le rolle des Gardes que payent les seuls Citoyens et Bourgeois. (1:393)

Indeed, on the heels of extensive, ceremonial build-up, Jean-Jacques’s inability to rise to so momentous an occasion might easily have been rendered as pure tragedy. Instead, all’s well (but hardly heroic) that ends in comic anticlimax: an utter inconvertibility of input (“je répondois bêtement oui et non”) into output (“ensuite je fus admis à la communion”) underwrites what becomes a kind of conversion manquée or mock conversion. In this comic variant, the prodigal’s unprovoked inability to deliver his prepared text becomes laughable, even laughably inconsequential. The “moment” itself is trivialized; the paragraph in which it is buried lapses into discussing the most mundane logistics of a projected move back to Geneva. And what might have been an experience of tragic alienation (one thinks of Diderot’s nun) is converted into a particularly well-choreographed instance of prophylactic self-ridicule on the part of a formerly “besotted schoolboy.”

Who would think to take issue with so laughable a contribution to the lore— or, for that matter, with Rousseau’s “memory” of feasting on Jean-Jacques’s misfortunes at Mme Dupin’s? How appropriately his épitre dédicatoire provides the opening for this further gravitation of the potentially sublime toward the ridiculous. By virtue simply of writing that épitre, Rousseau will have willfully espoused the avilissement that was widely held to be the inevitable posture of evitable dedication. He will have found the perfect forum for self-ridicule. But he will have found it unwittingly, thinking to avoid the inevitable, to defy the odds, to wax heroic and to be recognized as having waxed heroic. The dedication thus becomes, on his and our rereading, the textual site par excellence of
confusion and incompatibility between old ends (fame) and new means (humiliation), themselves prophetic of new but unrecognized ends (self-identity). In the épître's cacaphony or "indifférence," the two voices of the heroic and the antiheroic Rousseaus converge momentarily and vie to be heard; "louange" verging on "flagornerie" is delivered "avec emphase"; Roman virtu meets and meets its match in neo-Christian humiliation. Beyond the imagination of our conventionally wise theorists, a possibility emerges from this discordant duet for untold excesses of groveling to gratify and fortify the ego. Auto-avilissement extrapolated from its dedicatory context and rededicated to autobiography can work to position the self beyond the reach of its would-be persecutors. The anachronistic "hommage" he thought to have delivered may well have done Jean-Jacques's heart good. For Rousseau, the more lasting satisfaction lies in coming to know what he never admits directly: smirk though they may, detractors of his dedication have long since been beaten to the punch by the dedication's own shameless, even defiant sycophancy. He "asks for it" now, and, in retrospect, asked for it then. At some level, the autobiographer knows memory to be the "primary integrative force of the personality," especially the kind of memory that writing trumps up to trick past and present selves into mutual conformity. Acting on this knowledge, Rousseau introduces the pivotal dinner-table pantomime with an otherwise gratuitous nod to memory: "Je me souviens. . . ."

The Confessions' lingering over the dedicatory cover letter thus attests to its role in setting their own agenda and tone. The place of the enclosure or Second Discourse in Rousseau's œuvre had long since been assured and acknowledged: the Institutions politiques whose outline he recalls having "digested" in Geneva (1:394) are a logical outgrowth and obvious sequel. The épître's ongoing importance remained less obvious and, for the autobiographer, more immediately relevant. In fact, explicit references to the épître only scratch the surface of that relevance. It turns out that the fait accompli of having dedicated can be called to account for virtually everything that "happens" to Jean-Jacques from the moment of departure for Geneva to the conclusion of Book 8. With no advance warning of their meta-autobiographical itinerary, the Confessions take us one more time all the way down the road of auto-avilissement to the partial clearing of identity. And not without some nostalgic backward glances at the high road of Augustinian redemption or at the still higher road of Roman heroism. But in order to appreciate how far and how
emblematically Jean-Jacques—and a supporting cast charged, as ever, with acting out the author's residual anxieties—will have fallen, we shall have to bring a third text into play.

ROUSSEAU'S LIVES AS LUCRETIAD

To that text, a little known, incomplete prose tragedy entitled La Mort de Lucrece, the Confessions allude explicitly only once, to say that it was begun during the Genevan sojourn—that is, in the suspenseful interval of deferment between the writing and reading of the dédicace. In a posthumous edition of Rousseau's complete works (1792), Gabriel Brizard published, under the title Courts fragmens de Lucrece, tragédie, all that he could decipher from a manuscript in pencil, since lost. Discovery in this century of a second, presumably later manuscript has led to publication of what appear to be two complete acts and a tantalizing series of fragments (2:1871–82). Rousseau takes no official note of abandoning the project, in part because his motives in doing so are implicit in those alleged for its formulation: "je méditois . . . un plan de Tragedie en prose, dont le sujet qui n’étoit pas moins que Lucrece ne m’étoit pas l’espoir d’atterrer les rieurs, quoique j’osasse laisser paroitre encor cette infortunée, quand elle ne le peut plus sur aucun Theatre français. Je m’essayois en même tems sur Tacite, et je traduisis le premier Livre de son histoire qu’on trouvera parmi mes papiers" (1:394).

Any hope of getting a tragic Lucretia staged was already doomed in Rousseau's eyes by the general laws of successful dramaturgy he enunciated in his Lettre à d'Alembert: "Un auteur qui voudrait heurter le goût général composerait bientôt pour lui-même." Prevailing taste was indeed against him: in eighteenth-century France, the plight of Lucretia had become the property of the comic repertoire and a "popular subject for parody." Inventorizing the repertoire gives Ian Donaldson grounds for concurring with Rousseau and with his editor Jacques Scherer that "French audiences may have been predisposed to regard the story light-heartedly." And removing any direct reference to the rape from the working title of his "Tragédie" may well have been Rousseau's way of attempting to circumvent "the prevalent assumption that rape was inherently comic." It still remains to be seen what it was exactly that Rousseau's contemporaries found so amusing about a Roman matron whose name (and the generic une Lucrece) had long since become synonymous with spotless female virtue, courage, and exemplary conjugal fidelity.
How could they make a laughingstock of this woman, whose heroic suicide following her rape by Sextus Tarquin, son of the reigning tyrant, had first been chronicled by Livy and so often since commemorated iconographically?

The tragic Lucretia's partial demise stems in part from Augustine's skeptical critique of her suicide. "There is no possible way out," reasons Augustine. "If she is adulterous, why is she praised? If chaste, why was she put to death?" Surely it was not her conscience that Lucretia consulted in taking such desperate (and sinful) measures, but rather—and this the Augustinian mentality finds abhorrent and unassimilable—her reputation in the eyes of others. Unless, of course, the measures were appropriate and a reliable indicator of her complicity, even pleasure, in the so-called "rape."

It was evidently at this latter alternative that Rousseau's contemporaries sniggered: "Lucretia's suicide, so far from being proof of her innocence, is now [in the 1630s, when Jacques du Bosc wrote L'Honnête Femme] seen to be a tacit confession of her moral corruption." Rousseau, in turn, saw his contemporaries as envious and uncomprehending of a virtue at once so austere and so little exemplified by their own mores. The Rousseau who would, in self-defeating defiance of those mores, have staged La Mort de Lucrèce intended, so he says, to "atterrer les rieurs." But how? For as long as we do not actually read the extant acts, we can assume that his would have been the Roman, the heroic, the haughty stance. Far from courting ridicule, the translator of Tacitus would have championed Lucretia and sent her forth to crush the sarcasms of his enemies, as one might crush an insect between one's fingers. And better yet, in making a spectacle and an exemplum of her virtue, the playwright would himself have reprised the role of Junius Brutus, whom history had honored with the titles "Brutus the Liberator" and "Father of the Roman Republic." That Brutus, it will be recalled, seized the occasion of Lucretia's suicide to thrust off the persona of a harmless simpleton (or "dullard") in which he had previously cloaked his political insurgency. By awakening the Roman populace to their collective violation by foreign despots, he had succeeded in rallying them to an essentially conservative revolt.

It was in the guise of a not yet irretrievably humbled Brutus that Rousseau had launched his épître dédicatoire: "Convaincu qu'il n'appartient qu'au Citoyen vertueux de rendre à sa Patrie des honneurs qu'elle
puisse avouer, il y a trente ans que je travaille à mériter de vous offrir un hommage public: et cette heureuse occasion suppléant en partie à ce que mes efforts n'ont pu faire, j'ai cru qu'il me seroit permis de consulter ici le zèle qui m'anime, plus que le droit qui devroit m'autoriser” (3:111). In a bold reversal of figure and ground, primary text and dedication, the Discours thus becomes Rousseau's Lucretia, his pretext (and pre-text) for patriotic address, supposedly thirty years in the making, to his compatriots. The Dijon Academy's second essay contest moves down the chain of causality to become the only occasional cause of an occasional cause, the Discours, which in turn only precipitates the “hommage public” that Rousseau claims to have made his life's single driving ambition. Had Rousseau pulled off a reversal that strains credibility, the Genevans would have recognized his civic zeal to replicate and resonate with that of Brutus. Their rapture would have matched that of Lucretia's “bourgeois” husband, Collatinus, in the final finished scene of the unfinished tragedy. There, it takes only a foretaste of eloquence to come to win Collatinus over to the Republican cause: “O Brutus, ta voix agite mon ame, et je me sens penetre du feu celeste qui brille dans tes regards. Oui, que Rome soit libre! Quelle puissance peut resister à ton zele et quel coeur lache hesiteroit à le partager?” (2:1041).

But Brutus's oratorical victory is short-lived; Rousseau's calculating, envious courtisan of a Collatinus is slated—Brutus predicts as much (2:1042)—to betray the Republican cause, like some latter-day Judas. By way of confirmation, a fragment from some later act places Brutus and co-conspirator Lucretius under house arrest (2:1043). The tragedy would evidently have strayed sooner or later into the New Testament. Its outlines alone end up mocking Rousseau's inability to bring off or to sustain the role of the Roman Brutus in his dedication; we are left with the shadings of a Christ-like antihero. Rousseau's Brutus is given, symptomatically, to Providentialist turns of phrase: “Les Dieux ont voulu que Rome portat une fois le joug de la servitude pour apprendre à la conoitre et par consequent à la detester” (2:1039).

But the transformation of Brutus pales by comparison with that of Rousseau's Lucretia: she will, by the close of Act 1, have lost all but the remnants of her former Roman austerity. And in the process of bringing her down to earth, Rousseau will have devised a less direct and defiant strategy for “squashing the scoffers” than the frontal assault suggested by the Confessions. In immediate subversion of his avowed aim, the play-
wright wastes no time recalling that the heroine and her would-be assailant were, at one time, engaged to be married. To hear Sextus's ally Pauline tell it in the scene of exposition, Lucretia's father, the "inflexible" Lucretius, "rompit un mariage qui devait faire le plus ardent de ses vœux" (2:1025). Needless to say, nothing of the kind occurs in the Roman source. Rousseau's flight of fancy opens wide the possibilities for bringing Lucretia too far down to earth. An eighteenth-century audience versed in the conventions of parental interference might well infer that Sextus and Lucretia, so-called rapist and victim, are best played as star-crossed lovers.

To be sure, successful modernization required the kind of love interest that Voltaire deplored, even though he usually bowed to public pressures. On the occasion of publishing his own tragedy about Brutus's later exploits, Voltaire acknowledged: "Des critiques judicieux pourraient me demander pourquoi j'ai parlé d'amour dans une tragédie dont le titre est Junius Brutus, pourquoi j'ai mêlé cette passion avec l'austère vertu du sénat romain et la politique d'un ambassadeur." Voltaire then went on to plead the extenuating circumstances of prevailing taste. Likewise, in her "immensely long, digressive, inventive, and popular romance," Clélle (1654-60), Mlle de Scudéry had made "clandestine, passionate" lovers of Lucretia and Brutus, whose "chaste affair" is "finally terminated in a melodramatic nocturnal scene in Lucretia's garden at Collatia." But Rousseau's other shoe has yet to fall; it does in Scene 5, when we learn conclusively from a Brutus as wise in affairs of the heart as in affairs of state that, unbeknownst to herself, Lucrèce does remain enamored, even adoring of the tyrant Sextus (2:1032). There is henceforth no question but that Rousseau has settled on the all but inconceivable love interest most perversely calculated to stimulate—not to silence—the catcalls of Lucretia's detractors. Why, we must ask, has he dragged the tragedy of an impeccable heroine down into the morass of still often unprovable date rape?

The strategy is, of course, identical to the one deployed in bringing Jean-Jacques himself down off the pedestal from which no other enemy could then, belatedly, topple him. He who laughs first thinks already to laugh last, and best. The theatrical project's execution belies its Roman sources: a tragicomic Lucrèce would not so much "crush" as court and so short-circuit ridicule. The playwright's precautionary measures anticipate the autobiographer's, especially insofar as Lucretia's avilissement
remains, at the textual endpoint of his tragedy, unredeemed. Having set the stage not for a replay of Livy but for a Christian variant, Rousseau failed to follow through even to that alternative apotheosis. Only in imagination can we leap to the hypothetical moment when, in death, Lucrecia might have assumed the enormity of her own and her fellow Romans' guilt, leaving Church Father Brutus to declaim her eulogy and spread the apostolic gospel of a new salvation. Unless, of course, Brutus would have been proven wrong: did he misread Lucrece as sinning in her heart? We will never know; nor will we know the exact nature of the impasse that precluded Rousseau from bringing his tragedy full circle to the mort announced by its title. Perhaps he was stymied by the problem of marrying the Classical and Christian traditions—a major problem, admittedly, in the épître dédicatoire, and one to which the Confessions bear discreet witness by segregating Jean-Jacques's readings of the Gospels (1:392) and of the Roman historians (1:394). Or perhaps, that problem really moot, it was his Christian contemporaries' more devastatingly "basses et sotes interpretations" (1:392) of Jesus Christ that paralyzed any movement toward 180-degree reversal of his heroine's fortunes. Rousseau may have come to know that the already finished business of endowing Lucretia with a new identity was the only end to which he could realistically aspire.

In any case, his lapsing into silence speaks volumes, as does the fact that Lucrece, and not Brutus, lives on in the Confessions as the autobiographer's alter ego of choice. If the autobiographer abandons "her" story a second time, it is not without appropriating both the story itself and the means of its telling. In explicit confirmation of subterranean, in figura self-portraiture, the same Confessions that called Lucrecia "cette infortunée" (1:394) reassign the epithet, six pages later, to Jean-Jacques. He becomes "l'homme infortuné" (1:400) whose life story must do the kind of telling all that privileges worst-case scenarios if the rumor-mongers are to be put out of business and his self-image steeled against their attacks. For Rousseau, as for the Lucrece whose express desire to be forgotten by history veritably reeks of dramatic irony (1024), there can be no going back to a state of pre-Herostratan anonymity. He can only throw himself on the pyre from which the phoenix of fame may yet be reborn as identity.

But the sharing of an epithet is the least of Rousseau's slippage from the heights of Brutus's heroism into identification with Lucretia. En route
to this conclusion, the autobiographical account of Jean-Jacques's return to Geneva already does a thorough job of dragging the Lucretia topos down into grotesquely modern depths. The *Confessions* press the actors of Jean-Jacques's real life into staging what might appropriately be entitled “the three farces of Lucretia.” And the farcical trilogy is precisely what a Rousseau more thoroughly disabused of his prior ambitions might have seen fitter to write than a tragedy.

Symptomatically, the primary motivation invoked elsewhere for this journey, patriotic zeal, is trivialized here: Rousseau cites only his consenting to the *cause occasionnelle* of an invitation to accompany his friend Gauffecourt, who had business in Geneva (1:390). Feeling too ill to forgo the nursing services of his companion, Thérèse, Jean-Jacques brings her along. Having done so becomes a source of eternal chagrin: “Je dois noter ce voyage comme l’époque de la première expérience qui jusqu’à l’âge de quarante deux ans que j’avais alors, ait porté atteinte au naturel pleinement confiant avec lequel j’étois né, et auquel je m’étois toujours livré sans réserve et sans inconvenient” (1:390). Given this ominous and somewhat suspicious prelude—has Jean-Jacques’s path not already been strewn with disillusionments?—we comprehend much more quickly than he the imploring Thérèse’s reason for not wanting to be left alone in the carriage with Gauffecourt. He, Jean-Jacques’s so-called friend, has, from the outset of the voyage, seized every available opportunity to seduce her.

There is a perfect and obvious parallel between the narrative outlines of this story (“mon ami M. de Gauffecourt... travailloit depuis notre départ à corrompre une personne... qui appartenoit à son ami” [1:390]) and that fragment of *La Mort de Lucrece* that, unattributed to any speaker, declares: “Le Vertueux Sextus s’efforce de corrompre la femme de son ami [Collatin]” (2:1044). It is what the *Confessions* say in the interstices that makes the comic difference. Rather than by some dashing *jeune premier* and darling of the masses, their Sextus is played by “mon ami M. de Gauffecourt, âgé de plus de soixante ans, podagre, impotent, usé de plaisirs et de jouissances”—in short, by a literally boiteux diable. The object of his seduction or Lucretia figure, on whose enviable “attraits” and “charmes” (2:1024) the tragedy had insisted, here becomes “une personne qui n’étoit plus ni belle ni jeune” (1:390).

Played to the hilt of grotesquery, the seduction of Thérèse takes the form of solicitation. Gauffecourt sinks so low as to “lui presenter sa
bourse,” and when that fails, he deploys pornographic literature (“un livre abominable... des figures infâmes”) to get her in the mood. How comically righteous is the indignation that moves her to the extreme measure of throwing “son vilain livre par la portière.” As for the climactic tête-à-tête in chambers, there is nothing in Rousseau’s real life to match the dramatic tension of Sextus’s inability to manage such a meeting by the end of Act 2. The Roman tyrant is still rehearsing in the fragment of a soliloquy that, with all the pomposity of an épître dédicatoire, sings the praises of Lucrece’s “beauté céleste” and the unworthiness of the singer’s own “infâme cœur” (2:1045). Gauffecourt’s path is, by contrast, unencumbered; already “le premier jour,” he takes advantage of Jean-Jacques’s retiring with “une violente migraine” (the sort of violence from which tragic heroes were, of course, miraculously immune) to make his move. And, bypassing even the pretense of civilized courtship, Gauffecourt resorts to “des tentatives et des manoeuvres plus dignes d’un satyre et d’un bouc que d’un honnête homme” (1:390).

The symbolism of Jean-Jacques’s descending even from “un carrosse bourgeois” to walk and Thérèse’s desiring to join him there is unmistakable: through insistence on physical infirmity and animal instincts, the tragedy of Lucretia has sunk below comedy into farce. Of his reaction to learning the truth, Rousseau writes: “Je tombai des nues” (1:390). But it is not so much our hero who “falls from the clouds” as the entirety of the drama that reserves for him the plum role of the cuckolded burgher Collatinus, elsewhere blinded by political ambition, here simply, stupidly blind. Given a more auspicious setting, this King of Fools might, like Brutus, have risen above the prevailing abrutissement and thought to expose and expostulate on the cadaver of Lucretia. When not in Rome, Jean-Jacques chooses instead, “pour ne pas exposer Thérèse,” to repay Gauffecourt’s hypocritical avilissement in kind: “Le malheureux me cachoit sa turpitude... je me vis forcé de lui cacher mon mépris, et de receler au fond de mon cœur des sentimens qu’il ne devoit pas connoître” (1:391). In fact, the one whom Rousseau will have waited until these Confessions to avenge is not his Lucretia (Thérèse) but himself as Lucretia: “Douce et sainte illusion de l’amitié, Gauffecourt leva le premier ton voile à mes yeux. Que de mains cruelles l’ont empêché depuis lors de retomber!” (1:391). The Confessions do not so much put an end to Jean-Jacques’s former bad faith as put the finishing touches on it. To hear the “moral” into which Rousseau seductively coaxes his story of attempted
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seduction, Gauffecourt’s real crime (as opposed to the one he merely intended) would consist in the irreparable “rape” of Jean-Jacques’s “naturel pleinement confiant” (1:390).

Are we then to read La Mort de Lucrece as trivially autobiographical or superficially based on an event in the life of the real-life Rousseau? I think it much more likely that the passage exemplifies Rousseau’s characteristic tendency toward “le réinvestissement de la fiction dans le vécu,” and that a tragedy available for exemplary trivialization by the autobiography took the lead in mediating memory of the “event.” For one thing, as we shall see, what “happens” next in the Confessions could be credited just as easily and arbitrarily as Gauffecourt’s betrayal with inspiring the already written tragedy that holds sway over both episodes. And in its actual unfolding, that betrayal seems not in the least to have fazed its self-styled victim. The Correspondance and Confessions are full of expressions of undying enthusiasm for “le bon homme” Gauffecourt (1:468); he is charged here and only here with first destroying Jean-Jacques’s illusions about friendship: “Quelle surprise! quel serrement de cœur tout nouveau pour moi! Moi qui jusqu’alors avais cru l’amitié inséparable de tous les sentiments aimables et nobles qui font tout son charme, pour la première fois de ma vie je me vois forcé de l’allier au dédain, et d’ôter ma confiance et mon estime à un homme que j’aime et dont je me crois aimé!” (1:390–91). Stretching the facts of his immediate response gives Rousseau leeway to chronicle the corruption of pure, lofty, mutual sentiment in terms of dedicatory avilissement. In memory of the épître that, begun in Paris, underwrites the journey, the Confessions tell covertly of the dedication’s fall from honneteté into flattery, and of the conspiratorial cover-up that consists in pretending the model of reciprocity (“un homme que j’aime et dont je me crois aimé”) still to be operative and positively charged. The “bas” and “honteux” (1:390) strategems of seduction to which Gauffecourt resorts exaggerate and expose the essential asymmetry and veniality of the flattery–for-favors exchange. Having taken bribery one worse, from words for money to money for sex, he goes even further (and closer to dedication) in counting on a text replete with shameful/disgusting images (“figures infames”) to arouse or flatter the senses of its destinataire. Thérèse’s tossing the book no doubt prefigures Genevan rejection of the épître and so makes a travesty of trauma. That trauma is kept for the moment at arm’s length: the Confessions safely victimize Jean-Jacques and ensconce Rousseau, whose “realistic”
portraits are as belittling of Thérèse/Lucrèce as of Gauffecourt/Sextus, in the locus of scornful skepticism.

But that changes, although the topos does not, with a parting of the ways: “A Lyon je quittai Gauffecourt pour prendre ma route par la Savoye” (1:391). The journey’s second stage, a last-ever visit to Mme de Warens, extends our reading of the life through the dual filter of La Mort de Lucrèce and of the épître dédicatoire and reconstitutes the sources of the departed Gauffecourt’s shame as those of Jean-Jacques’s own guilt. “Je la revis . . . ,” writes Rousseau, suspensefully, of his beloved Maman, “dans quel état, mon Dieu! quel avilissement! que lui restoit-il de sa vertu prémière? Etoit-ce la même Madam de Warens jadis si brillante à qui le Curé Pontverre m’avoit adressé? Que mon cœur fut navré! Je ne vis plus pour elle d’autre ressource que de se dépayser” (1:391). If “vertu” is hardly the first of Maman’s attributes to come to mind on the basis of previous portraits, context continues to hold sway over fidelity to “fact.” From Thérèse, Maman now takes over the role of Lucretia, as Brutus and Collatinus might have seen her after the rape. Whereas the Thérèse-Gauffecourt couple had been depicted, in absolute terms, as already old and infirm, past the point of love or being lovable, Mme de Warens’s “avilissement” comes as a shock. Memory of a former incarnation makes of Jean-Jacques’s visit (and of the remainder of Book 8) a kind of matinée chez la Princesse de Guermantes. The text specifies the threat that, even in the absence of tragic contingencies, the passage of objective time poses to selfhood. The question explicitly framed is the paramount question of self-identity: “Etoit-ce la même Madame de Warens?”

A fragment of La Mort de Lucrece asks in strikingly similar terms, whether of Lucretia or of the virtue she incarnates, “Nos cœurs ont bien de la peine à l’aimer pure, brillante et parée encore de tous ses charmes; lui serons-nous plus fidèles quand les taches qu’elle aura reçues nous auront disposés à la moins regretter?” (2:1043). By way of partially assuaging the guilt of his own neglectfulness, Rousseau invents grounds for believing that the desire to give Mme de Warens a change of scene (“la dépayser”) will have been realized symbolically through the writing of the tragedy she seems, for the moment, to have inspired. But the Confessions know better than to refrain from regressing through the topos to the flattering preliminaries. It falls to Jean-Jacques to do a discreet imitation of Gauffecourt’s comic variations on Sextus Tarquin’s seductions: “Je lui réiterai vivement et vainement les instances que je lui
avoirs faites plusieurs fois dans mes lettres. . . . Je lui fis encore quelque légère part de ma bourse” (1:391). Mme de Warens remains unmoved—albeit for less lofty reasons than a Lucretia attached not to her “pension” (1:391) but to “mon Epoux . . . mon Père . . . mes Enfans” (2:1024). And so, whereas Rousseau had unceremoniously snatched the tragic heroine’s pedestal out from under Thérèse, Mme de Warens is privileged to undergo a modicum of apotheosis. As though giving “herself” to Jean-Jacques/Sextus, she takes from her finger a euphemistic “dernier bijou” and places it on that of Thérèse, “qui la remit à l’instant au sien en baisant cette noble main qu’elle arrosa de ses pleurs” (1:391). The burlesque and tragic Lucretias are thus fused in a freeze-frame; *avilissement* becomes, at the last, paradoxically ennobled and ennobling.

From Maman’s apotheosis, the two-timing Jean-Jacques is, however, frozen out. Then, if ever, writes a remorseful Rousseau, “c’étoit . . . le moment,” the occasion to be seized: “Il falloit tout quitter pour la suivre, m’attacher à elle jusqu’à sa dernière heure, et partager son sort quel qu’il fut” (1:391). Instead, “Je n’en fis rien. . . . [j]e gémis sur elle”—or made a halfhearted pass at writing a tragedy with her in mind—“et ne la suivis pas” (1:392). So near, and yet so very far. For a still-guilty Jean-Jacques, there will be no identifying, except in spirit and in a trumped-up letter of dedication, with the heroically opportunistic Junius Brutus. Witness the modern autobiography’s derisory attempts to reproduce the almost magical narrative copula—defiled Lucretia-Rome revenged—at the heart and soul of the haunting Roman legend. Not for want of trying, the autobiography’s Rousseau makes a hollow mockery of Brutus’s former ability to preside over the direct, simultaneous translation of personal tragedy into political discourse and action. The only connection the *Confessions* are up to forging is syntactic; they announce, fast on the heels of failure to follow Maman, that “avant mon départ de Paris j’avois esquisse la dédicace de mon *Discours sur l’inegalité*” (1:392). The Catholic Mme de Warens means nothing to the Calvinist Genevans, nor they to her; dedication to them bespeaks a sinful lack of dedication to her. In testimony to the tragicomic fragmentation of modern life, the *Confessions* have now twice told the story of Lucretia without endowing it with any redeeming social value. And in the process, a Jean-Jacques who falls indifferently into the roles of Collatinus and Sextus Tarquin has twice faltered on the brink of readmission into the heroic sphere of action frequented by Brutus. The reflex to reverse directions and divert these farces of Lucretia toward
straightforward heroism on the Antique model has already slowed perceptibly in the interval between what masquerades as a dastardly betrayal of sacred friendship and what Rousseau admits to despising about the lukewarm lover in himself.

It remains only for Rousseau to espouse the crisis of identity as his own and to replace the existential inevitability of *avilissement* with the autobiographical strategy of *auto-avilissement*. The shock of visiting Maman is repeated when Jean-Jacques, back in Paris, receives an unexpected visit from his old friend Venture, “qui vint me surprendre un beau matin, lorsque je ne pensois à rien moins” (1:398). An invitation is explicitly tendered to link this third and final spectacle of physical and moral deterioration with that of Mme de Warens. It is “cette femme angélique” whom the young Jean-Jacques had first neglected in his *engouement* (1:125) for Venture, and who “maintenant n’étot guéres moins changée que lui” (1:398). Here, too, identity is the issue, its emerging preeminence underscored by the formerly decisive role of Venture in the young Jean-Jacques’s obsessive quest for fame and fortune. It is the chameleon Venture, Venture the successful social climber, whose “grand mérite” and “rares talens” had kindled our hero’s ambition and envy (1:133). And it is in flattering imitation of *his* Alexander, the self-styled “Venture de Villeneuve,” that our hero as mock-heroic Herostratus had adopted the anagrammatic pseudonym “Vaussore de Villeneuve” and undertaken, with humiliating results, to pass himself off as a teacher and composer of music (1:147–50). Of this formerly dazzling Venture, there remains no perceptible trace: “Qu’il me parut changé! Au lieu de ses anciennes graces je ne lui trouvai plus qu’un air crapuleux, qui m’empêcha de m’épanourir avec lui... Je le vis presque avec indifférence...” (1:398). Venture thus becomes a sort of backwards Brutus, his trajectory the reverse of the Roman hero’s emergence from the shadows of self-imposed imbecility: “la débauche averti abrutit son esprit” (1:398).

Or, rather, that *may* be the case. The hypothesis of Venture’s objective transformation occupies a middle ground between those of an equally radical transformation on the part of the subject Jean-Jacques and a universal, inescapable deterioration of all being in time: “Ou mes yeux n’étoient plus les mêmes, ou la débauche averti abrutit son esprit, ou tout son premier éclat tenoit à celui de la jeunesse qu’il n’avoi plus” (1:398). The alternative is, nonetheless, only apparent: the sight of Venture universalizes and personalizes the mockery that death-in-life makes of human
ambitions and so devalues momentary “éclat.” Julia Kristeva knows Rousseau’s horror: “The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object.”

Everyman, every man, is a Lucretia, his posthumous reputation subject to the infinite caprices and devices of historical revisionism; only the wise fool knows, like Rousseau, if not to stave off physical death, at least to write his self into a perpetual state of auto-avilissement as a hedge against the “indifférence” of non-identity.

Playing the madeleine to Jean-Jacques’s Marcel, Venture’s visit eventually triggers an avalanche of “durable” memories and reconstitutes recorded memory as fundamentally integrative of the autobiographical self. But the Confessions passage is not content merely to recall the “transports désormais perdus pour moi” (1:399) of the young Jean-Jacques’s amorous adventures; it also previes a forthcoming orgy of auto-avilissement. In Book 9, these same “transports” will stage a “retour tardif et funeste” (1:399): infatuation with Sophie d’Houdetot—married, already involved elsewhere, and young enough to be his daughter—will give Jean-Jacques the opportunity to outdo the outrageous seduction of Thérèse by Gauffecourt. Rousseau will wax sarcastic at his own expense, and even—is there no bottom to this barrel?—at the expense of what become his delusions of avilissement: “n’allai-je pas me fourrer dans la tête que l’amour désormais si peu convenable à mon âge, à mon maintien, m’avoit avili aux yeux de Mad‘e d’Houdetot . . .” (1:442).

Thanks to the same kind of historical revisionism that has made a travesty of Lucretia’s seduction, Book 9 will not merely remember one of Jean-Jacques’s pasts (with Sophie), but rewrite those more distant (“tous ces ravissans délires d’un jeune cœur” [1:398]) in the comic register.

More than anything else, this self-protective knowledge of “folie” (1:442) or silliness to come permits Book 8 to end on an upbeat or optional grace note. Having played out the three farces of Lucretia, the Confessions make a last-ditch effort to vindicate the dedication to Geneva and salvage the honor of the dedicator. Success as a hero is no longer crucial, thanks to the assurance of an undisputed prior claim on the territory of antiheroism. There being nothing left to lose and paradise lost to be regained, Rousseau takes a stab at having both a recognizable and a reputable identity. “The abject is edged with the sublime.” Hence the “pure” pleasure (1:399) Rousseau derives from recounting the so-called
"affaire Palissot." Onto the person of Palissot, author of an anti-philosophical "divertissement" entitled *Le Cercle ou les Originaux*, Rousseau projects his own former sins and sorrows of dedication. In *Le Cercle* Palissot had invented a character, Blaize Nicodème, in unmistakable if relatively innocuous satirical imitation of Rousseau. Imputations of Rousseau's obsession with fame and of his ruthless opportunism were already legend when Blaize chimed in: "Hé! qu'importe, si par là [ses paradoxes] je me suis fait une réputation? Pensez-vous, lorsque j'ai débuté que je n'ayc pas ri moi-même de me trouver des Partisans. . . . J'ai débité toutes ces belles choses sans les croire, dans l'idée qu'un Philosophe devoit penser, parler, écrire et même s'habiller autrement que le Vulgaire. J'ai refusé jusqu' à de l'argent pour ne ressembler à personne." At this stage in the *Confessions*, Palissot's attacks are woefully behind the times. Reputation is no longer the issue; it costs Rousseau little enough to contribute to Palissot's notoriety. Nor does it matter that *Le Cercle* makes a belated mockery of Rousseau's pretentious sincerity, of his highly touted personal réforme, and of his refusal of a royal pension. As exempted even from Rousseau's own selective revisionism, these highlights of Book 8 will have weathered the storm of satire, thanks to a fatal miscalculation on Palissot's part.

In staging his "divertissement" for the Polish king Stanislas, who had vigorously argued against the conclusions of Rousseau's First Discourse, Palissot "crut apparemment faire sa cour, en jouant dans ce Drame un homme qui avoit osé se mesurer avec le Roi la plume à la main" (1:399). But, by the *Confessions'* calculations, the would-be courtier has underestimated a king both "généreux" and quickly moved to righteous indignation. Rousseau's Stanislas promptly threatens, as his real-life counterpart eventually did, to have Palissot banished from the Royal Academy. Applying the general lessons of Marmontel, d'Alembert (who may well have initiated these reprisals on Rousseau's behalf) deemed the punishment fitting "quand un auteur, assez vil pour prostituer ainsi sa plume, se pare de la protection prétendue qu'un grand roi lui accorde." For his part, Jean-Jacques argues in the *Confessions'* "vive prière" that Palissot should be pardoned and that all traces of the affair should be excised from the "registres de l'Académie."

And well Rousseau might take advantage of this rare opportunity to imagine what it might have been like to play God the Son for the duration. Feeling nothing but pity for the obviously envious Palissot puts
Jean-Jacques for the short term in an enviable position: "Tout cela fut accompagné tant de la part du Roi que de celle de M. de Tressan de témoignages d’estime et de considération dont je fus extrêmement flatté, et je sentis en cette occasion que l’estime des hommes qui en sont si dignes eux-mêmes produit dans l’âme un sentiment bien plus doux et plus noble que celui de la vanité" (1:399). Having been serendipitously elevated in royal eyes and named to the most elite of mutual admiration societies, Rousseau basks, through no fault of his own, in the deferred, heady, uncomplicated pleasures that neither nondedication to Louis nor dedication to Geneva had procured.

Or does he? Was it Jean-Jacques or was it Palissot who got the response of unmitigated disgust that Rousseau’s dedication to Geneva really deserved? Do the Confessions, by their discreet idealization of Stanislas’s response, endow with factitious “pureté” a pleasure really attained through the detours of aggressive-defensive projection? Could Rousseau’s Palissot, for all his self-aggrandizing sycophancy, be nothing more than a sacrificial straw man? At a considerable temporal remove, the Confessions work to foreclose this possibility of projection. By way of ex post facto self-congratulation for Rousseau’s having held to his promise of no further dedications, Book 8 points the simple moral that there is more to be gained by forgiving foolish mortals than by joining in their no-win dedicatory games. But it was La Mort de Lucrèce that followed immediately on the heels of the épître to Geneva. And La Mort de Lucrèce leaves otherwise unresolved and haunting of Rousseau’s first person the anxiety provoked by dedication’s still fresh and guilty secrets.

ONCE A FLATTERER . . .

It takes a flatterer to know one. Or so it would seem from a meditation on flattery more thorough and subtle in Rousseau’s occasional tragedy than in all the explicit theorizing of his contemporaries. That meditation is the playwright’s primary contribution to modernization of the Lucretia topos, however suggestively he may have rewritten the roles of Lucretia and Brutus. Those two major players are hopelessly overshadowed by the quantitatively larger roles that the extant text reserves for their underlings, all of whom combine forces in what gradually takes shape as a counter-conspiracy to seduce Lucretia. The historico-legendary political conspiracy to overthrow the Tarquins remains, in contrast, strikingly undermanned. Whereas Republican leader Brutus does not
even appear until Scene 5 and can count only Lucretius among his proven allies on stage, Sextus Tarquin is amply aided from the outset. His cause is served not only by the blindly ambitious Collatinus and by his own confidant, the *affranchi* Sulpitius, but even, as we learn belatedly and with abhorrence, by the confidante to whom Lucrece will already have bared her soul in Scene 1, Pauline. Reassigning the name of Corneille's Christian heroine to a duplicitous servant makes marginalization and degradation of the heroic a fait accompli in a play where, as Jacques Scherer puts it, "Les confidents jouent... un rôle important... De longues scènes leur sont dévolues et les personnages principaux, qui cherchent le secret, sont obligés de passer par leur intermédiaire, ce qui provoque inévitablement un ralentissement de l'action" (2:1871). The action does next to nothing to advance the Republican cause. But even the rape/suicide, which Montesquieu's history of Rome had trivialized as a paradigmatically "only occasional" cause, is subjected in turn to seemingly interminable delays. This regression through hitherto "unrevealed" behind-the-scenes manipulations is both logical and profoundly moral: apparently obsessed with the *bas-fonds* of his monde à l'envers, Rousseau lingers longer there than either good drama or a lifelong distaste for servile flattery would dictate. In unfulfilled anticipation of dueling to the death in singular combat with Sextus, his Lucrece is surrounded and besieged by an entire irregular army of courtiers in friends and lovers' clothing.

Between Rousseau's invented plot and the one he inherited from Antiquity, there is a telling fragility of integration. As though echoing the unmanageable reconciliation of heroic with flattering dedication, the playwright twice resorts, when the dastardly Sulpitius spies Brutus and Lucretius from afar, to those *liaisons de fuite* on which proper tragedies frowned (2:1031, 1036–37). It seems that the air Brutus breathes would be contaminated by even passing intercourse with the members of the enemy camp, whose collective vileness and unmitigated me-firstism come out detail by disgusting detail. The opening moment of Scene 2 is particularly melodramatic and is commemorative of Rousseau's *épître*. To Lucrece, messenger Sulpitius explains that he has come to "[v]ous avertir, Madame, de la prochaine arrivée du Prince et de votre Epoux et vous remettre une Lettre de sa part." In response, Lucrece asks for clarification of the ambiguously referential possessive: "De la part de qui?" (2:1027). She asks as though it made a difference that the letter comes not from
Sextus, the reigning "courtisan vulgaire," but from the husband, Collatin, whose "humanité" and "passions douces et modérées" (2:1026) Lucrece has just defensively extolled to Pauline. As it happens, the "Lettre" bids Lucrece make ready to receive the prince to whose favor Collatin has inextricably tied his own ambitions. It reveals nothing other than the courtier in Collatin: "Faites-lui donc préparer un logement convenable et songez en recevant l'héritier de la Couronne que c'est de lui que dépend la fortune de votre Epoux" (2:1027). With no real antidote in sight, contagious flattery runs rampant through the environs, as do the tell-tale verbs *flatter* and *se flatter*.

As further revelations of *bassesse intéressée* follow in quick succession, a relentless recurrence of those verbs symptomizes Rousseau's preoccupations of the moment just as reliably as had the pathological "honneur" of his preface to *Narcisse*. No sooner have we learned in Scene 3 that Pauline has betrayed Lucrece out of love for Sulpitius (2:1028), than Sulpitius's Scene 4 soliloquy reveals his contempt for the "love object" he is merely stringing along as a means to gratify his own *arriviste* ambitions: "il faut la [Pauline] flater d'une union chimérique, jusqu'à ce qu'avec son secours Lucrece séduite et Sextus satisfait laissent pour ainsi dire à ma discrétion le choix de mes récompenses" (2:1031). Even this scorn for the gullible Pauline pales by comparison with the contempt that Sulpitius betrays in "friendly" tête-à-tête with the princely avatar of the dedication's MAGNIFIQUES, TRES HONORES ET SOUVERAINS SEIGNEURS. The confidant flatters (2:1034) his master's hopes of amorous conquest only in order that he, Sulpitius, may someday rule Rome from behind the scenes. It falls logically to Rousseau's "affranchi," still imprisoned and advantaged by a slave mentality, to demystify his "dedication" to lord, lady, and lover, and to posit the mutual neediness on which literary dedication feeds:

[V]ous n'ignorez pas que dans notre condition les vices de nos maîtres nous servent de degrés pour monter à la fortune, et que c'est en excitant leurs passions que nous parvenons à contenter les nôtres. Nous serions perdus s'ils étaient assez sages pour savoir se passer des secrets services par lesquels nous les enchaînons. C'est ainsi qu'à son tour on se rend nécessaire à ceux de qui l'on dépend, et le plus grand malheur qui put arriver à un Courtisan ambitieux serait de servir un prince raisonnable et juste qui n'aimerait que son devoir. (2:1029-30)
Such lucid interlocutors are, luckily for Sulpitius, in shorter supply in Rousseau's anachronistic Rome than in the real-life Geneva where his dedication played to mixed reviews among the "reasonable" and "just." Dismissing even Lucretia's "vertu" and "devoir" as the kind of "grands mots" or moral babble to which only a dupe like Pauline would give credence (2:1028), the cynical slave goads his master into action, or rather into neodedicatory speech acts. Sulpitius is so familiar with the territory that he is able to prescribe some refinements that might have stood Rousseau himself in good stead. If Sextus is to avoid becoming his own worst enemy, he must be sure to tone down his "transports indiscrets," even to the point of blurring his agenda: "ce n'est qu'en couvrant vos projets du plus profond mistere que vous pouvez vous flater de les lui faire approuver" (2:1035). Is that what a reckless Rousseau failed to do or an over-cautious Rousseau did too well in the epistle to Geneva? The question is intriguing, if impossible to answer without clearer access to the dedicator's personal and political agenda. But Sulpitius's impromptu advice to dedicators also raises suspicions about the seemingly disinterested moderation of the epistle to Duclos, especially insofar as Sulpitius himself incarnates the insatiable hubris of the minion who would outrank his monarch in all but name.

More disquieting still are the "transports indiscrets" to which, pending desperately needed editorial assistance from Sulpitius, Sextus—madly in love, for all we know, with Lucrece—continues to give voice. There can be no failing to realize that of the four skeletal characters inherited from Livy, it is not Brutus, Lucrece, or even Collatin, but foreign interloper, textbook tyrant, and known rapist Sextus whose tirades most closely and consistently approximate the "sentiments" and "hopeless" sincerity of Rousseau's second dedication. Even as he excuses his "égaremens" and "discours insensés" and pledges "docilité" to his editor's "avis," Sextus goes on, in the same breath, to mount a penetrating assault on the object of his "devotion" and on the republic for which she stands: "[T]u me vois enivré d'amour au point que je ne suis plus capable de me conduire. Lucrèce est toujours au fond de mon cœur et devant mes yeux, j'entends sa douce voix, ses divins regard[s] sont tournez sur moi; les miens ne peuvent voir qu'elle; mon existence est toute en elle seule, je ne vis que pour l'adorer et toutes les puissances de mon ame aliénée de toute autre objet sufisent à peine aux sentimens qui me consument" (2:1035). So inescapable and sinister are the parallels with Rous-
Rousseau’s likewise all-consuming project of dedication to the later republic of Geneva that the same lines that provisionally “humanize” Sextus tend just as inevitably to make an unmitigated monster of the dedicator. And of dedication they make a more reliable indicator of humanity’s darkest, most inhuman depths than, in their measured metaphors, Marmontel and company ever dared dream. Self-knowledge, it turns out, comes just as surely, surprisingly, and revoltingly to the erstwhile dedicator as to his dupes. Not only is Rousseau’s Sextus under no illusions when it comes to knowing himself to be “le plus vil des mortels” (2:1045), even in soliloquy, but Rousseau himself must know in what inexcusable and uneditable violence his fellow flatterer’s “transports” would have to culminate were he to complete La Mort de Lucrece.

By dint of his ill-advised outpourings, even the villain of the piece ends up making Rousseau sit still for unflattering in figura self-portraiture and keeps the play from finding a clear path back to Brutus’s lofty heroism or even to Lucrece’s modest, suspect virtue. More ironies than we could list accrue to the partial identification of Geneva’s self-styled citizen with Sextus as heir apparent to an ill-gotten throne. The Roman republic’s most overtly declared enemy pays not even lip service to interest in the affairs of state, and “dedicates” his every thought and act to the pursuit of private, criminal passions, to having his say, and to winning back on his own terms what once was his. Fundamental to the uneasiness manifested in La Mort de Lucrece is Rousseau’s knowing his dedication to have secretly diverted even other-directed, public-spirited occasional discourse to the Swiss bank account of self-promotion.

There is thus no urgency about acting out the violence of intent and reprisals lurking from the first in the play’s seemingly infinite regress of dupery and in the unprecedented infusion of the Lucretia topos with flattery’s euphemistic figures. To stage the rape, bienséances permitting, would be a redundant, anticlimactic adding of injury to the multiple insults that Lucrece has already suffered at the hands of the playwright and his conspiratorial surrogates. Physical violence would even detract from the playwright’s selective, ill-disguised ventriloquism. Seeming to have mastered only the trick of projecting the modern-day dedicator’s voice of (self)-flattery into ancient Rome’s every recess, Rousseau does not so much vamp until ready as only, obsessively vamp.

La Mort de Lucrece thus fulfills, ironically, the Lettre à d’Alembert’s prophecy that any nonconforming playwright would end up writing
“pour lui-même.” Psychodrama serves the erstwhile dedicator as a short course of self-therapy. In camera Rousseau can both indulge his unconfessed vice to the hilt and take heart from the Lettre’s further assurances that what gets said in the pages of self-styled tragedies has nothing to do with anyone’s real life: “Heureusement la tragédie telle qu’elle existe est si loin de nous, elle nous présente des êtres si gigantesques, si boursouflés, si chimériques, que l’exemple de leurs vices n’est guère plus contagieux que celui de leurs vertus n’est utile.”61 Perhaps the tragedy did the trick of abjecting the flatterer in Rousseau and allowing the crisis of auto-avilissement to pass on already attenuated to the Confessions’ stock of hazy, self-serving memories. Julie Kristeva suggests the alternative possibility that “from its place of banishment, the abject [did] not cease challenging its master.”62 The traces of his occasional abjection may have prodded Rousseau into reasserting mastery over the Lucretia topos at the very moment of committing his definitive self-image to the pages of the Confessions.

The autobiography implicated in some such scenario surely makes a special point of converting dedicatory losses into autobiographical gains. That means privileging the figure of Lucretia as alter ego and muse and isolating, meta-autobiographically, the moment of an all but unprovoked and unproductive suicide. Using his pen, as she will have used the sword, the Rousseau of Book 8 will finish himself off in anticipation of would-be rapists’ dealing a fatal blow to his self-identity or—wherever the palimpsest cannot quite bring itself to obliterate the original of heroic ambitions—to his self-esteem. The still transitive death blow nevertheless resists translation into metaphorical, political terms and becomes, admittedly, solipsistic. Bypassing the detours of ostensibly other-directed flattery, Rousseau will get right down to the business of auto-avilissement and leave all the others out of it, except as imagined instigators (his enemies), bystanders recruited from real life for purposes of demonstration (Gauffecourt, Maman, Venture, Palissot, et al.), and the posterity of reader-witnesses to be nonplussed, ideally, by there being nothing more incriminating to say. A Rousseau inspired less by the demise of Lucretia than by the passing of a certain unambiguously exalted way of reading that demise will trade the heroic rhetoric of letters to the republic for a second chance, a chance at “being” in the eighteenth-century Republic of Letters.
There is much more to say. Ironically, even readings like this one that seek to expose and understand the self-protective facticity of Rousseau's occasional antiheroism end up helping to protect the possibility of a self-inscription that under more favorable circumstances might dispense entirely with the distortions of strategic planning. That is the dream of transmissible selfhood that keeps Rousseau writing and, more specifically, keeps the urge to frame occasional messages with selected others in mind from dying gracefully with the second and last épître dédicatoire. The hope of successfully addressed self-portraiture springs eternal, especially in Rousseau. The Lettres à Malesherbes, to name but the most obvious exception to the Confessions' eventual rule of damage inflicted for the sake of damage control, culminate in a new instance of devil-may-care dedication to their destinataire. And, more discreetly, as we shall see in chapter 3, the Préface de Julie reaches out from the margins of another bestseller and from the desert of another self-imposed exile in tacit solicitation of a particular patron and friend.