(Without) Naming Names:
The *Préface de Julie*

*Le sort fait les parents, le choix fait les amis.*

Delille

*Cette alternative ne me paroit pas si necessaire qu'à vous.*

Rousseau

With the superfluous publication of a second preface to his novel *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, Rousseau’s occasional self-portraiture took an important but tentative step out of margins. The *Préface de Julie* was, on the one hand, freestanding and, on the other, unquestionably devoted to the novel, except insofar as Rousseau distractingly played the pre­acer’s stock role of “editor” in figura. A prior instance of the exorbitant doubling that gave us two (prefaces) for one (novel) places “editor” R in adversarial and mutually defining tête-à-tête with “man of letters” N, and begs the question of dialogue. Especially when the *Préface* is read against the defiantly monologic “Préface” that had actually headed the novel, the Rousseau between the lines of February 1761 is revealed to have been in a state of considerable agitation and telling ambivalence. In the throes of self-contradiction, he sounds as open as absolutely opposed, and as absolutely opposed as open, to the possibility of discussing his novel with any man of letters. These vacillations between affective extremes can most readily be accounted for by a provisional identification of interlocutor N as erstwhile friend and mentor Diderot, with whom Rousseau had recently, dramatically, and painfully severed all extraliterary ties.

What nonetheless rescues the *Préface* from the banality of a dramatized roman à clef is the fact that Rousseau makes a point of leaving the
identification implicit. Operating in the vaguely autobiographical sphere of unmistakable but unconfirmed resemblances gives him the latitude to inscribe N/Diderot in a nebulous but obsessive paradigm of paternity. It remained for the Confessions only to appropriate and plot that paradigm as the "true" story and personal myth of a two-stage, paternally engineered fall into reading (Isaac Rousseau) and writing (Diderot).

But even beyond that is the suggestive asymmetry of the R/N dyad. On the one hand, interlocutor R is identified with extraordinary pomp as none other than Rousseau himself and is made, in a remarkable departure from prefatory usage, to pronounce a vow of absolute sincerity. On the other hand, the unnamed N becomes a nexus of mutually aggrandizing fusion between biological fathers and paternal surrogates. Already rehearsing the constitutive autobiographical and referential pacts of the Confessions, Rousseau nonetheless hesitates to give up altogether the proven flexibility, irresponsibility, and separate but equal truthfulness of occasional fictions. Poised on the near side of commitment to a more unequivocal brand of life writing, the Préface de Julie illuminates the Confessions' self-serving partiality. Their reading or "third preface" to Julie is an exemplary case in point and gives rise to some still open questions of difference: between autobiographical fiction and autobiography proper, and between inventing autobiography and claiming the patent.

MORE THAN A PREFACE?

"Je me rappelle deux passages*** . . . " (2:25). Rousseau writes at this point in the Préface de Julie as though in perfect compliance with the mainstay of prefatory apologistics known as "helpfully" screening the primary text for passages enabling and supportive of whatever interpretation the author wants to urge on the reading public. On this occasion, Rousseau nonetheless has something in mind besides doing his duty as best he can by Julie. Not that the novel, which would turn out to be the eighteenth century's most popular and influential, comes in for anything like the slights of commission and omission to which Rousseau had subjected his Narcisse; Julie is extensively discussed and just as warmly embraced. Mid-eighteenth-century France qualifies as one of those times and places when, by dint of untold repetition or "une régularité aujourd'hui surprenante," novel-prefacing in particular had attained "une sorte de perfection technique" and "une certaine absurdité préfacière."
Checklist in hand, we can confirm that, on Julie’s behalf, Rousseau left no well-worn stone unturned. And yet, “Je me rappelle deux passages...” —what follows the suspension points amounts to a partial and paradigmatic suspension of prefacing as usual. When the authorial footnote signaled by Rousseau’s three asterisks goes on to locate the two noteworthy “passages” not within the territorial limits of Julie, but in the preface to Narcisse and in the Lettre à d’Alembert, the normal retrieval processes of selective memory are effectively released from exclusive preoccupation with the prefaced novel. As would any such extraneous recollections, these two work at disrupting preface-to-prefaced symbiosis. The kind of stretching Rousseau had done to echo the First Discourse in the preface to Narcisse accedes here to the unambiguous status of deliberate allusion. Supplementing an inherited intertext with two that he has freely chosen and clearly identified, Rousseau removes our novel readers’ blinders and reconstitutes the preface of his most recent work as writing with the more remote and checkered past of a particular individual’s curriculum vitae.

His making a pair of philosophical works relevant to discussion of a mere novel redounds to the advantage of Julie. But why should Rousseau have singled out these two in particular as his intertexts of choice? In anticipation of tracking down the addendum of content to which the Lettre à d’Alembert helps to divert Julie’s preface, we might first appreciate with what pertinence the footnote formalizes the link between past and present instances of prefacing. For, with the Préface de Julie, Rousseau’s liminary self-indulgence not only compounds the excesses of the preface to Narcisse but inches toward autonomy. The earlier preface was already too long and too solicitous by far of the reader’s undivided attention to be skipped over lightly as a perfunctory nod to publishing conventions; the Préface de Julie goes on at even greater length, for a full twenty pages in the Pléiade edition. But this later Préface also outdid the outlandishness of the dedication to Geneva. It was no longer a matter simply of overdressing a major work for publication, but rather of subjecting liminary space to serious overcrowding. This time, Rousseau all but signed away his right of recourse to the alibi of prefacing as required writing: he tendered his Préface de Julie as a “brochure” unto itself—hence, the italics for which the title “Préface” does not normally qualify—and as the second of two published and virtually simultaneous prefaces to one and the same novel.
Julie already had a perfectly serviceable two-page “Préface” and had been in print for two weeks when the Préface de Julie first appeared under separate cover. And, I should add, according to plan: the so-called seconde préface or préface dialoguée did not respond, as authors’ prefaces to subsequent editions sometimes do, to anything that had transpired in the negligible interval of deferment. This second preface is so far from representing a more advanced stage of the author’s thinking as to have been published second but written first. Resurrected “as is,” at Rousseau’s insistence and by pre-arrangement with his publisher, the Préface de Julie thus went beyond solicitation to command attention as the next closest thing to an autonomous text in its own right.

Rousseau’s contemporaries did take notice. Bypassing the fundamental enigma of its accession to the public domain, they characterized the text itself as “enigmatic.” It is to an unabashed Rousseauophile, Mme de Cramer-Delon, that the Préface owes its designation as “une maniere d’enigme” (and, incidentally, an enigmatic, unsubstantiated claim to have found the missing mot). But Grimm only cast the same findings in a more negative light with his aggressive-defensive dismissal of “en quatre-vingt-dix pages un recueil fort serré de sophismes ou la bonne foi est offensee a chaque ligne.” The Préface de Julie remains somehow opaque and problematical; it is the sort of text that inspires more than the average number of vows to “write an article someday.” Recent readings by literary theorist Paul de Man and historian Robert Darnton have validated the widespread intuition that the preface would be worth the effort of a second look.

De Man pays the preface the supreme compliment of making it the high point of intellectual sophistication in Julie and, beyond that, the site of Rousseau’s acquiring knowledge about the undecidability of reference that would prove vital to his writing of the Confessions. The normal preface-prefaced hierarchy becomes subject to reversal when it is suggested that, from an epistemological standpoint, Rousseau’s novel is best reconceived as prefacing his preface. De Man thus comes close to instancing the radicalism of Jacques Derrida’s move to make a demarginalized, no longer stricito sensu prefacing coextensive with any and all writing: “il n’y a que du texte, il n’y a que du hors texte, au total une préface incessante.” If the Préface is not exactly more than a preface, neither, at this level of abstraction, is any other text we could name. The case for this collapse of difference is conveniently buttressed by what Rousseau him-
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self knew to be a preface too intellectually challenging for mass consumption. But even supposing that the Préface had turned out to be less provocatively enigmatic, it would have done its part to raise metaprefatory questions about its own place in the great scheme of texts.

Having been characterized by an introductory “Avertissement” as a “Dialogue ou Entretien supposé” (2:9), the Préface de Julie takes up where the prefaced novel had left off. There, Wolmar and Claire had put the finishing touches on epistolary exchange by writing to Saint-Preux over Julie’s corpse; here, the editor and a man of letters exchange words over the corpus that includes Julie’s letters. The two speakers designated in the margins as R (the editor) and N (the man of letters) get together over a manuscript version of La Nouvelle Héloïse that N claims to have finished and to have found not at all to his liking. “Voila votre Manuscrit. Je l’ai lu tout entier,” N first says to R (2:11), thereby acting out auspiciously the minimal prefatory gesture of presenting or presenting that which is perforce really absent, the prefaced text. The text is in this instance one that N feels should not be published. As N poses his many questions and raises his many objections to the novel and R responds more often than not with questions of his own about N’s critical assumptions, the familiar topoi of novel-prefacing are thoroughly, if somewhat haphazardly, inventoried. Arguments associated with all three of the usual lines of prefatory inquiry (Is this book true? moral? interesting?) are rehearsed. They come in eventually for exhaustive enough permutation and combination to warrant N’s proposing that the conversation, now nearing completion, be transcribed “pour toute Préface,” in lieu of any more conventional preface. Not that the title “Préface” would necessarily cover the “Entretien” in its entirety; N claims only that the “Entretien” would at least cover in their entirety the bases of novel-prefacing: “Les éclaircissements nécessaires y sont tous” (2:30).

The conversation will “do” as a preface, but remains free to do and be more than a preface. The distinction is a fine one, and one that might not come to mind if the immediate future did not quite literally hold more in store for R and N. The two pursue their conversation into the margins of the margins and with their microphones down. The exchange actually transcribed extends beyond the region of the text that N had earmarked, as essentially prefatory, for transcription. “Vous avez raison,” continues the “editor” (2:30), readily acquiescing at first to the suggestion that he substitute what they have said for what he might have
written on his own initiative. R balks only but emphatically at N's further suggestion that, in the eventual transcription, their two roles should be transposed such that the general public would be treated to the spectacle of N's urging publication of Julie on a reluctant R and finally conquering his resistance. On the basis of what N says—"Cela sera plus modeste, et fera un meilleur effet"—we third-party readers might easily be tempted to chalk his urgings up to the rhetorical savvy of a man of letters. But R somehow knows better than to believe that N has proposed a harmless exercise of poetic license, or that the proposal has been tendered in a spirit of gracious capitulation and helpfulness to the cause of the novel. The exchange takes a turn for the gratuitously sinister with N's final revelation that, in urging the role reversal, he was in fact only laying "un piege" and for purposes only of catching R out of "caractere" (2:30). With the fate of Julie no longer even nominally at issue, the man of letters shows his true colors by putting not the book but its editor to a test of character! And the editor in turn comes through with flying colors by virtue of knowing where to draw the line on principle between such metaphorical exchanges as he absolutely will not brook (N for R) and those (a chat for a preface) to which he can subscribe. But can he still? Lapsing into silence at precisely the point where he would have reacted to N's revelation, the metaprefatory coda leaves R's feelings, like Saint-Preux's at Julie's end, unrecorded and unresolved. We can only surmise that, just as the death of Julie had put a damper on her resultant apotheosis, so the exhilaration of successful self-portraiture must be mitigated for R by knowledge of yet another tester's treachery.

TO PUBLISH OR NOT TO PUBLISH? Dialogue at Issue

Rousseau himself wondered what to do with the pseudotranscription whose existence he first acknowledged to publisher Rey in a letter dated almost two years prior to the publication of Julie.11 The Préface de Julie had an eventful prehistory, which twentieth-century editions inadvertently suppress by making the second preface readily available for the price of Julie and by placing it adjacent to the novel. The twists and turns of that prehistory bear recalling; they suggest an enduring, if ambivalent, investment in the Préface on the part of its author. And that ambivalence in turn helps to situate the Préface at another pivotal point in the evolution of Rousseau's occasional self-portraiture. The emphasis of inspiration was shifting imperceptibly from literary to existential occasions, in ways
that Rousseau leaves unsaid. So do readings of the Préface that take either of the extreme positions of considering it only as a gloss on Julie or only as a text with the same prospects as any other for standing free and clear on its own perennial intellectual merits of any particular occasion in the author's life.

Writing to Rey that he might call his “écrit sur les Romans” something like “Préface de Julie,” Rousseau nevertheless vowed never to affix it to his own novel. Already, he was calling with tantalizing vagueness for permanent separation—beyond separate publication—between the novel and an “écrit” that “n’en doit faire partie en aucune manière” (emphasis added). As publication deadlines for La Nouvelle Héloïse came and went, Rey, who had been in possession of the complete six-volume manuscript since 1758, redoubled his excuses. Rousseau was momentarily tempted (2:1342) to distribute the text of the preface as a press release in order to sustain the public’s curiosity in a novel (or “manuscrit dont je suis le dépositaire et que je me propose de publier”) that had long since been promised by a note to the Lettre à d’Alembert.

In the meantime, Rousseau had composed a second version of the preface, the one entitled simply “Préface,” which we now know as the première préface by virtue of its having been singled out to head the inaugural edition of the novel. From that moment on, the perceived obligation to preface having been fulfilled by another text, the Préface de Julie became superfluous, de trop, and as difficult to place in practice as in theory. Editors still do not agree whether the Préface de Julie belongs at one extreme of the novel or at the other. In the “Pleiade” edition, it follows the “first” preface and directly precedes the novel; in the Garnier-Flammarion edition, it is relegated to an appendix. Neither placement tells the whole story; editors might just as accurately follow the lead of the practically minded Rey, who, in his 1763 printing of Julie, used the seconde préface to flesh out what he thought to be a too-slim second volume.

For his part, Rousseau contemplated then discarded at least two separate plans for publishing his “digression supplémentaire.” The preface was tentatively slated to appear in conjunction first with the illustrations for Julie and later with his De l’Imitation théâtrale. Once the decision had been made that the preface should appear alone “quinze jours ou trois semaines après la publication du livre,” Rousseau hounded Cointet, to whom the manuscript had been entrusted, with almost daily re-
minders. The anxiety-ridden author wrote on 9 February 1761: “Je persiste à être d’avis que la préface paroisse le Lundi 16”; again (with a proposed change) on the eleventh: “La préface doit actuellement être tirée”; and finally on the fifteenth: “Les exemplaires de la préface ne sont pas arrivés hier; peut-être viendront-ils demain.” Even when allowances have been made for some combination of unreliable publishing practices and authorial paranoia, Rousseau betrays a surprising degree of affective involvement in getting out (and getting right) a text that for no apparent reason had so recently and so repeatedly been threatened with permanent suppression. (By contrast, the *Imitation théâtrale*, always an also-ran, would remain unpublished and would later become an unsuccessful candidate for copublication with the *Essai sur les langues* and *Le Lévite d’Éphraïm* [2:1921]). Among other things, we are moved to wonder what could have prompted Rousseau, in the second place, to write the first “Préface.”

One way of rationalizing this overinvolvement and inconsistency would be to stage a confrontation between Julie’s two prefaces and to ask what would have been lost had the seconde préface never been placed into circulation. On the one hand, there is a significant enough carryover of Julie-centered content from one to the other to warrant Darnton’s approaching the “prefaces” as a seamless document with a single story to tell. The première préface is obviously derivative and (mis)quotes liberally from the seconde; Rousseau writes in the “Avertissement” to the *Préface de Julie* of having placed it “par extrait à la tête du recueil” (2:9). De Man perceives this process of extraction as having worked to the detrimental oversimplification of the most interesting aspect of the *Préface*, namely its utter refusal to resolve the question of whether Julie should be taken for a fiction or for an authentic correspondence. But he does not identify dialogue itself as the single most important source of the *Préface de Julie*’s superior tension. It is only under relentless cross-examination by N that editor R comes off as unmistakably evasive. Tormented by doubt (2:29), N acknowledges his frustration: “Quand je vous demande si vous êtes l’auteur de ces Lettres, pourquoi donc éludez-vous ma question?” (2:27).

The most obvious qualitative difference between the two prefaces is also the most important. What has been lost somewhere en route from the second preface to the first is dialogue. In the process of writing the monological “Préface,” Rousseau will have mentally fed himself the ques-
tions to which he knows or assumes his readers will want to know the answers; in the Préface de Julie, responsibility for actually directing those same questions to R is assumed by a second party, N, who only in retrospect volunteers to speak for any constituency beyond himself: "Tout le monde aura la même curiosité que moi" (2:29). Rousseau himself refers repeatedly to this difference. The subtitle he approved for the Préface de Julie reads: "Entretien sur les romans, entre l'éditeur et un homme de lettres" (2:7). Syntactic parallelism with the title of the novel, Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse, lays the groundwork for a significant distinction. One alternate title, La Nouvelle Héloïse, formulates a hypothesis (Rousseau's heroine is a modern-day avatar and spiritual sister of the real-life Héloïse) in need of verification by reading; the other, Entretien sur les romans, contains an immediately verifiable statement of fact (on whatever subject, dialogue, as signaled typographically, is surely in progress). This business of calling attention to the obvious is carried forward in the "Avertissement," whose first sentence begins by offering a choice (or a happy medium) between the formality of a literary genre with roots in Antiquity ("Ce dialogue") and the informality of loosely focused, everyday conversational exchange ("ou Entretien supposé"). Moreover, this same "Avertissement" later advances the claim that the tête-à-tête to follow has been disqualified from normal prefatory duty on the basis not only of its "longueur" but of its "forme" (2:9).

On rereading in the light of this insistence on the Préface de Julie's idiosyncratic dialogism, the première préface begins to look not merely monological, but self-consciously, aggressively, even offensively so. Rousseau's public did take offense: the same contemporaries who would later give the "enigmatic" seconde préface mixed reviews were far more unanimous in their distaste for the first. Reporting to Rousseau from Paris on the novel's initial reception, La Condamine got right to the point: "il plait généralement hors la préface."21 More or less diplomatic in his direct dealings with the author, d'Alembert suggested that Julie would be served by "l'adoucissement de quelques phrases de la préface."22 For Julie Lespinasse, d'Alembert reserved a more critical appraisal: "J'ai trouvé la préface mauvaise; elle m'avait même un peu prévenu contre l'Ouvrage."23 Rousseau hardly stood to be cheered by the complicitous reassurance of Mme de Créqui: "Votre préface est ravissante; on la traduit en ridicule à Paris, mais je la leur fais entendre."24 Except with this willing exegete, Rousseau's "Préface" could not have gone over as more
off-putting if it had been meant to offend. Perhaps it was. Two-stage publication at close range made comparison with the dialogical original more or less inevitable. When Mme de Luxembourg was furnished with this basis of comparison, she seized right away on a singular disparity of tone: "j'aime bien mieux la grande préface que la petite, la grande dit les mêmes choses, mais comme c'est plus détaillé cela révolte moins."25

Indeed, from the outset of his monological reworking, Rousseau makes a "revolting" public spectacle of retreat from dialogue: "Il faut des spectacles dans les grandes villes, et des Romans aux peuples corrompus. J'ai vu les moeurs de mon temps, et j'ai publié ces lettres" (2:5). The initial pronouncement is both aphoristic and autoreferential: it repeats and extends to "Romans" the conclusions of Rousseau's own Lettre à d'Alembert on the subject of "spectacles." The prefacer is thus established as a supreme legislator speaking ex cathedra from somewhere beyond the pale of debate. Nor, in the elliptical follow-up, is there any room for discussion between the two instances of the first-person pronoun: I saw, therefore I published. Due process is suspended; Rousseau's readers are condemned to supply the minor premise of their own corruption.

Mme de Luxembourg's point about the monological preface's lack of details is likewise well taken. As Rousseau proceeds to run apace down a laundry list of prefatory topoi, he seems to be saying (but with nothing of Marivaux's good humor26), "You people want a preface? Take this . . . and this . . . and this." Rousseau's coming dangerously close to inadvertent parody of prefacing would account for Mme de Créqui's reports of public ridicule, and for the otherwise strange pairing of adjectives in Grimm's review: "La préface qu'on lit à la tête de la Nouvelle Héloïse est déjà assez plate et assez extraordinaire."27 The author's revolt against dialogue is at first accessible to us only through these effects of tone and cadencing. But, as though to appropriate that revolt, Rousseau concludes his monological reworking with a warning: "Que si, après avoir lu [ce livre] tout entier, quelqu'un m'osoit blamer de l'avoir publié; qu'il le dise, s'il veut, à toute la terre, mais qu'il ne vienne pas me le dire: je sens que je ne pourrois de ma vie estimer cet homme-là" (2:6; emphasis added). The warning comes too late, of course, to prevent the N of the other preface from approaching the editor, claiming precisely to have read the novel "tout entier" and rehearsing a litany of reasons why publishing it would be blâmable. But the warning seems to have been framed with this N in mind. In the first preface, N's former role of discussant is not
merely written out or lost in translation, but emphatically repudiated. All debate with the author has been foreclosed pending a public reunion of the monological and dialogical prefaces. What might have remained a theoretical rivalry for liminary space unable to accommodate both prefaces has been articulated in terms of the specific difference between a one- and a two-man show. The Précis de Julie appears to have been published in the name of “Dialogue.” And published despite the fact that, on the eve of publication, Rousseau reiterated a personal preference for the monologue, which was nonetheless not permitted to stand alone for long. He wrote as follows, in the eleventh hour, to Mme de Luxembourg: “La préface est unanimement décriée, et cependant telle est ma préven­tion que plus je la relis, plus elle me plaît. Si elle ne vaut rien il faut que j’aye tout à fait la tête à l’envers. Il faudra voir ce qu’on dira de la grande. Il s’en faut bien à mon gré qu’elle ne vaille l’autre. Je la suppose actuelle­ment entre vos mains; pour moi je ne l’ai pas encore. Elle devrait paroître aujourd’hui et je n’en ai point de nouvelles.” Dialogue emerges from these thinly veiled expressions of concern for the préface dialoguée and from the overall interprefatory confrontation as an emotionally charged issue, one which the Rousseau who made no move to stop the presses chose finally to resurrect but not to resolve.

PACTS OF FRIENDSHIP WITH THE TRUTH

The dialogue form nonetheless provides no guarantees of human warmth or authentic exchange. In fact, on closer inspection, the Précis de Julie already engages the figure of the editor in one of Rousseau’s characteristic “final” retreats from interpersonal relations into exclusive friendship with the truth. Significantly, Rousseau made a point of displaying on the title page of his “Entretien” the selfsame motto, vitam impendere vero, which his R ostentatiously promises to withhold from the title page of Julie (2:27, 1336). For, despite this further instance of frustrating N’s need to know for sure about the generic status of the novel, R does end up claiming to honor the truth by keeping it quiet (2:28). And beyond that, he vouches for a truth other than Julie’s, his own. N’s burning question—“Cette correspondance est-elle réelle, ou si c’est une fic­tion?” (2:11)—and even R’s answering silence fall within the bounds of a familiar text-centered prefatory tradition. But no prior novel preface fore­tells the moment when, as if to compensate for what he will keep secret or undecidable about the novel, R displaces the question and discloses
something about himself: “être toujours vrai: voilà ce que je veux tâcher d’être” (2:27).

There is more to this declaration than meets the eye. With remarkable economy, it conflates the substance and the conditions of autobiography. Truthfulness becomes the object of a confessed desire (as it had already in the preface to Narcisse). But beyond that, the confessed desire for truthfulness stands ready—as a formal, unequivocal statement of intent—to underwrite an overall autobiographical project. In a theory of autobiography on which his readings of Rousseau’s Confessions have left an indelible stamp, Philippe Lejeune makes any such autobiographical project contingent on the explicit formulation of a “pacte référentiel,” by which he means that at some point within their texts, would-be autobiographers must make a point of reprising Rousseau’s public oath to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Or, barring that, they must make clear in what ways they intend to fall short of absolute truthfulness. R cannot say whether his referential intent is susceptible of fulfillment, but he at least goes on record as wanting to try, and at a moment when N wants only and desperately to know about Julie. A gratuitous commitment to truth-telling has been hazarded here out of context, or, rather, in partial subversion of a context advertised in advance as prefatory. If Rousseau’s version of autobiography calls for a pact, so, conversely, a pact uttered in isolation may cry out for the more congenial surroundings of autobiography. The unspoken, underlying desire to which R attests by simultaneously acting like an autobiographer and presenting his credentials is that the dialogue be decentered and our reading readjusted to allow for the possibility that not only the novel but the preface in progress may in fact be all about R.

This R differs, moreover, from the usual alter egos of in figura self-portraiture in that nothing except a few lines of text stands between the would-be truth-teller and absolute identification with Rousseau himself. Just prior to the skirmish that results in a referential pact, N levels the requisite charges of immorality against the novel and R avails himself of the usual lines of defense, invoking the novel’s immanent justice, its fitness to serve as a cautionary tale, and so forth. From there, however, the preface already takes an unanticipated turn toward autobiography: having been advised by N to publish the scandalous letters anonymously, R lets himself be inveigled into volunteering (or confirming) a first installment of vital information about himself:
Rather than trust the reader to infer R’s identity on the sole basis of an initial or a resemblance to Rousseau, the normally cryptic text twice spells out his name for all to see. The textbook stichomythia of this exchange stands out clearly against a background of paragraph-long, even page-long rejoinders. In Lejeune’s terms, a “pacte autobiographique” is sealed here by which a real person, a person known to exist and to write in the outside world, assumes responsibility for all of R’s rejoinders and especially for his forthcoming commitment to truth-telling. It is Jean-Jacques Rousseau himself who will have taken time out from prefacing Julie to rehearse the preamble to the Confessions. The Préface would look even more like a full-scale dress rehearsal if the two pacts had followed in greater textual and logical proximity one from the other. Rousseau stops just short, for the moment, of beating the preamble to the punch of overcoming a purported lifelong inability to name himself in conjunction with the expression of his desires and ambitions.

IN MEMORIAM DIDEROTIS: The Interlocutor as Former Friend

There is another way in which the preface hesitates on the brink of the autobiography underwritten just in case by Rousseau’s two pacts. That the current performance remains a fiction is borne out by a striking asymmetry in the R/N dyad. The spectacle of R’s becoming Rousseau
raises expectations that N too will acquire a “proper” name and, by extension, an empirical identity. We can imagine that, were R’s interlocutor to be displaced to the Confessions, he would become one of the “beaucoup de gens” whose “confessions” Rousseau regrets having to make in conjunction with his own (1:400). As it happens, the mystery man of letters is nowhere named “en toutes lettres.” He remains not only anonymous but, by virtue of the inevitable comparison with R, condemned to anonymity. N begs therefore to be treated as the protagonist in some not entirely fictional roman a clef. It is left to the reader to spell out the mot of this new énigme and to surmise, “À partir des ressemblances qu’il [ou elle] croit deviner,” an identity that Rousseau has chosen not to affirm. Precisely because the pole of autobiography has been so squarely planted in its midst, the “Entretien suppose” gravitates toward that pole, its progress arrested somewhere in the middle ground of “autobiographical fiction.” It no doubt comes closer to autobiography proper than does the novel, all of whose protagonists—and none of whom in particular—bear a vague, unconfirmed family resemblance to creator Jean-Jacques Rousseau. “Pas un Portrait vigoureusement peint; pas un caractere assez bien marque” (2:14), claims N in reference to Julie’s referential imprecision. And the Rousseau of the Confessions, when he insists on the willful and necessarily approximate nature of his identification with the obvious alter ego of choice, Saint-Preux, and symptomatically divides the hero as lover and friend against “himself,” echoes: je m’identifiois avec l’amant et l’ami le plus qu’il m’étoit possible” (1:430).

N becomes the key player in any attempt to fix the respective proportions of autobiography and fiction in the Préface de Julie. Whether the preface more closely approximates “Un Portrait” or “un Tableau d’imagination”—the very categories between which N asks R to choose for Julie (2:11)—depends on our tracking down an artist’s model or models. How closely does N recall a specific character and his dialogue with R in a specific scenario in the real-life adventures of Jean-Jacques Rousseau? At least one eighteenth-century reader made a solvable riddle of N’s identity and in fact anticipated that the portrait would be modeled on himself. As the only Rousseau intimate to have commented regularly on manuscript versions of Julie, the same Charles Duclos to whom Rousseau had dedicated Le Devin du village was prepared to assume that the R/N dialogue would take its lead from his own epistolary exchange with the novelist. Upon reading the preface, Duclos was disconcerted to find “himself”
transformed beyond recognition. "J'ai été frappé d'une chose, dans votre Seconde préface," he wrote to Rousseau. "L'auteur fait plusieurs réponses que vous avez écrites, mais je ne vous avois certainement pas fait les mêmes objections. Nous causerons de cela et d'autres choses, lorsque nous vous verrons." The writer's memory serves him well: nothing N says even remotely resembles what Duclos had written.

Other letters from the same period promote the less obvious but ultimately more promising candidacy of Diderot. Although Rousseau did write about Julie to Duclos, it is with Diderot that he would have liked to talk. It is this "vertueux Philosophe" or—more precisely, and straight to the point of our reading—his "entretiens" that are credited in an early autobiographical fragment with having constituted "la gloire et le bonheur" of Rousseau's life (1:1115). Accordingly, a manuscript containing the novel's first two books had been dispatched to the longtime mentor and received by him in January 1757. In the normal course of events, mentor and protégé would have met soon thereafter to discuss the work in progress. This time, however, there ensued nothing but a series of epistolary feints and parries whose effect was to delay the tutorial indefinitely.

Already in a letter from early March, Diderot uses the conditional to elaborate future projects, as though in anticipation of the fact that no such projects would ever be realized: "J'irais samedi vous prendre à St Denis ou nous dînerions, et dela nous nous rendrions a Paris dans le fiacre qui m'auroit amené. Et ces Jours, savez vous a quoi nous les em­ployerions? A nous voir; ensuite a nous entretenir de votre ouvrage [Julie]; nous Discuterions Les endroits que J'ai soulignes et auxquels vous n'entendrez rien, si nous ne sommes pas l'un vis a vis de l'autre." Rousseau countered, on March 16, with criticism of Diderot's habitual failure to honor his engagements: "II est vrai que quand vous avez promis de venir, je murmure de vous attendre toujours vainement, et quand vous me donnez des rendez-vous, de vous voir manquer à tous sans excep­tion." By the same letter's end, however, it is Rousseau who not only refuses to discuss Julie ("Il n'est pas question de mon ouvrage, et je ne suis plus en état d'en parler, ni d'y penser"), but discourages further talks on any subject ("Si vous avez quelque respect pour une ancienne amitié, ne venez pas l'exposer à une rupture infaillible et sans retour"). The rift has become so serious that Rousseau directs his reply and the following day's letter to a neutral intermediary. Mme d'Epinay is charged in the car-
lier missive with stopping the philosopher at any cost—"Surtout que Diderot ne vienne pas"—and later treated to dire predictions about the meeting's outcome were it to be held: "[Diderot] s'excedera pour venir à pied me répéter les injures qu'il me dit dans ses lettres. Je ne les endurerai rien moins que patiemment; il s'en retournera être malade à Paris, et moi, je paroitra à tout le monde un homme fort odieux." Within a week, the Héloïse manuscript had been sent, not carried back to Rousseau. Instead of commenting on the novel, Diderot in his cover letter made excuses for his failure to do so in person: "Je vous renvoie votre Manuscrit, parce qu'on m'a fait assez entendre qu'en vous le reportant, je vous exposerois à mal traiter votre ami." The circle of futility closed with yet another profession of Diderot's willingness to reschedule, if and when: "Si je ne vous chagrine point par ma visite, écrivez-le-moi, et j'irai vous voir, vous embrasser et conferer avec vous sur votre ouvrage. Il n'est pas possible que je vous en ecrive. Cela seroit trop long. Vous sçavez que je n'ai que les mercredis et les samedis et que les autres jours sont à la chimie. Faites moi signe quand vous voudrez et j'arriverai; mais j'attendrai que vous fassiez signe." For want of any sign from Rousseau, negotiations then lapsed into terminal silence. Without naming Diderot, Julie's first preface echoes the exhortation to Mme d'Epinay ("Surtout que Diderot ne vienne pas") by saying to and about any man who might criticize Rousseau for publishing Julie: "qu'il ne vienne pas me le dire" (2:6).

To replace the now legendary falling-out in its epistolary context is to rediscover an enormous investment of time and psychic energy in a single conversation that never took place. The friendship was doomed in larger part than has usually been acknowledged because Julie was doomed to publication without benefit of Diderot's collaboration. Residual frustration over life's failure to provide an existential model for the dialogical Préface de Julie goes a long way toward explaining why the preface was first written, then reduced to the monological reworking that actually headed the novel, then finally resurrected for separate publication. If the monologue tells it as it really was in the aftermath of relations with Diderot, the dialogue advertised as an "Entretien suppose" shows him (and all the innocent bystanders blanketed by the monologue's vituperation) how it might have been, if only... If only Diderot had consented to play his accustomed role, Julie would have passed directly from his hands into Rousseau's. Diderot, not N, would have pronounced the deceptively weighty words: "Voila votre
The Confessions would not bear the lasting imprint of disappointment at Diderot’s failure to make it through even the first two parts nearly six months after receiving them (1:460). And though Diderot would surely have raised serious objections to the novel, he would also have shown N the way to distinguish himself from the rest of the philosophical establishment. As Masson writes of Diderot’s singular ability to inspire confidence in Rousseau: “C’était, sans doute, un homme de lettres, mais ce n’était pas un mondain.” With the mutual understanding of adversaries whose begging to differ goes back a long way, each discussant would have shown signs of ability to complete the other’s thoughts. At some point, Rousseau might have said, “Je vous suis,” and been acknowledged to have followed Diderot’s line of reasoning “[p]récisément” (2:11). At another, the roles reversed, Diderot might have countered with something along the lines of N’s “J’aime les vues utiles; et je vous ai si bien suivi dans celle-ci que je crois pouvoir pérorer pour vous.” And Diderot might have been praised in turn for a job well done of peroration: “C’est cela même. A quoi j’ajouterais seulement une réflexion” (2:20–21). No latecomer to discovery of the Rousseau canon, Diderot would have known enough to jog his interlocutor’s memory about apparent discrepancies between Julie and previous works like the Préface de Narcisse and the Lettre à d’Alembert. Making it worth Rousseau’s while to respond, such pertinent interventions would have raised the intellectual level of the discussion above that of the première préface. And throughout, Diderot would have tempered his criticism with an indulgence born of long-standing affection and mutual esteem. Rousseau, like R, would have been forced to concede: “Votre jugement est sévère; celui du Public doit l’être encore plus.” And Rousseau would have been sufficiently cheered by that comparison to take a turn, undaunted, at reading Julie: “Sans le [votre jugement] taxer d’injustice, je veux vous dire à mon tour de quel oeil je vois ces Lettres” (2:14).

The Préface de Julie thus improves both on reality and on Rousseau’s prior imaginings. Past sins of omission specifically attributable to the real-life Diderot are rectified in short order; a fictional dialogue fills the void left by the cessation of actual relations. At the same time, the preface departs radically from the scenario for disaster in which Rousseau’s letters had earlier cast Diderot as a diabolical figure bent on falling ill and blaming his illness on Rousseau. In the published version, Rousseau’s interlocutor not only shows up spontaneously with his reading done and
feeling civil, but he puts himself entirely at Rousseau’s disposal and be­
haves as though not even chemistry were more interesting and important
than discussing *Julie*. Of course, establishing the precise tone of the di­
ologue or of any single rejoinder depends on paralinguistic factors (posi­
tioning of the speakers, body language, tones of voice) to which we
readers of a pseudotranscription have no means of direct access. As if to
remind us of what we are missing, the “Entretien supposé” repeatedly
calls attention to its supposed orality; a note furnishes the correct pro­
nunciation of “Clarens” (2:25); N reads aloud from the inscription to the
“septième Estampe” (2:13); N later invites R to catch his breath (2:20),
and so forth. Guaranteeing N against too-favorable or unfavorable in­
terpretations, the text makes more initially of his being there and present
unto language than of his being.

The change of heart responsible for this somewhat comic revision of
Rousseau’s worst-case epistolary scenario is not difficult to fathom: after
the fact of estrangement, dialogue with Diderot has become more desir­
able than ever. Like the Geneva of dedication from outside its walls or the
master’s apples that the *Confessions* place so excruciatingly just beyond
the reach of apprentice Jean-Jacques (1:34), this object of desire im­
proves with inaccessibility. Where once he had expected the worst, the
autobiographer-in-training now indulges in pseudonostalgia, remember­
ing the best of his own past as better than it ever really was. N’s skill in
peroration, for example, recasts Diderot’s notorious “real-life practice of
conversational interruption and appropriation” in a positive light. But
beyond that, as though to set a profoundly elegiac tone for the whole, the
“Entretien supposé” wastes no time in reaching back beyond the present
lives of Rousseau and Diderot to the even longer and more irretrievably
lost glory days of dialogue in Antiquity. N and R have barely said two
words of unexceptional greeting to each other in the eighteenth-century
idiom when they exchange “from memory,” without skipping a beat and
in the original Latin, a pair of rejoinders from Persius’s first satire. What
Maurice Roelens has concluded about recourse to “la forme dialoguée”
throughout the period of French Classicism takes on added relief on this
occasion of Rousseau’s ennobling the paradise lost of an “ancienne
amitié”: “Tout se passe comme si, souvent aux 17e et 18e siècles, la forme
dialoguée n’était pas retenue comme un genre mais comme une sorte de
signe culturel, forme vide renvoyant à une forme pleine, qu’elle ne dé­
signe que par allusion ou par défaut, dans le lointain inaccessible d’un
Inscribing a modern-day "Entretien" in the time-honored Classical tradition of dialogue allows Rousseau to avoid the alternative of either naming or silencing his desires. On this, as on so many other occasions, the solution of choice consists in having the objects of desire masquerade as accomplished facts or—for the time being—fictions. N does what he does because Rousseau wishes that Diderot had, but cannot or would rather not say so directly. Recourse to a compensatory fiction makes confession both possible and discreet, more of an inadvertent by-product of the dialogue's unité d'action than a speech act assumed by any one speaker.

Publishing that fiction as written, however, amounts to translating the unnamed desire for dialogue into action and to proposing a resumption of rhetorical relations. As R warms to the task of defending Julie, N becomes the designated beneficiary of remarks clearly meant to be read by Diderot himself. When Rousseau declared the preface not for everyone, he may have had this singular destinataire as firmly in mind as the mental gymnastics that would be required of any readers. For, by placing the preface into circulation, Rousseau renewed the pair's long-standing practice of exchanging personal messages under cover of literary texts addressed to the general public. Jean Fabre has insisted, with good reason, on "le rôle primordial tenu par la littérature dans une querelle où l'on a trop souvent tendance à la négliger." And in a convincing corollary to Fabre's findings, Guy Turbet-Delof has read the novelistic conclusion of Rousseau's Emile as harkening back in anger to a note from Diderot's Deuxième entretien sur le fils naturel. With the number and virulence of such coded messages increasing in direct proportion to the difficulty of face-to-face confrontation, the Préface de Julie joined the intertextual debate close on the heels of Diderot's Le Fils naturel and Rousseau's Lettre à d'Alembert.

Rousseau had read an indictment of his own self-imposed exile at l'Ermitage into the celebrated mot of Le Fils naturel: "Il n'y a que le méchant qui soit seul." Such obvious slander could not go unchallenged; a public defense of the solitary life needed to be mounted at the first opportunity. The Préface de Julie would do the job even if that meant stretching a point here or there to accommodate arguments having at least as much to do with the novelist as with his novel. R would insist on calling Julie's characters "des Solitaires" (2:14, 16, 22) and N would take the hint (2:18), even though one or the other might just as
well have insisted on the social engineering, structural complexity, or internal solidarity of the Clarens community. The Confessions go on, in fact, to recognize and exercise these other options by rereading conversations like Julie's to marital fidelity as the cornerstone of "l'ordre social" (1:435). For the moment, however, R arranges to trace the characters' every virtue—from their extraordinarily "natural" language to the heroine's exemplary conversion—to the felicitous fact of their living so far from Paris. N cannot help but misread Julie so long as he fails to acknowledge the essential difference from which all the others must follow: "Dans la retraite on a d'autres manières de voir et de sentir que dans le commerce du monde; les passions autrement modifiées ont aussi d'autres expressions; l'imagination toujours frappée des mêmes objets, s'en affecte plus vivement" (2:14, emphasis added).

The same overriding concern for equating goodness with solitude, operationally defined as distance from "la capitale" (2:20), extends to R's discussion of the novel's ideal readers. These happy few are likewise blessed with utter isolation from the Parisian philosophical establishment and cannot be reached by the siren songs of conventional fiction. Pity their less-solitary fellow readers whom alienating novels have lured to the capital city only to ruin their every chance for happiness. At this point, R's zeal gets the better of him: having once depicted novel-reading in graphic detail as nothing short of catastrophic, he catches his breath and launches into a second version of the same cautionary tale. Once provincials have been beckoned to Paris, there is little to choose between one denouement—"une vie infâme," a dishonorable pauper's death, the demise of agriculture, and, for Europe, economic ruine (2:20)—and the other—"voilà comment on devient fou" (2:21). The only difference between the two scenarios is that the second makes no pretense of rationalizing the solitary life as conducive to any general good beyond the mental health of "Hermites" (2:18). Melodrama takes over as the erstwhile attorney for the defense of isolationism goes on the attack, twice pointing the finger of blame at the corrupters of solitude, "les Auteurs, les Gens de Lettres, les Philosophes" (2:20). R's moral outrage would not run so disproportionately high with respect to the prefatory task at hand were he not always arguing his case against the would-be perpetrator of Rousseau's own downfall. Just as surely as if Diderot had been named as an unindicted co-conspirator, the apprentice autobiographer here hones his skills of aggressive self-vindication.
The deaf ears of the novel's characters and ideal readers are finally appropriated by the editor himself when he refuses to fall for the alienation of (mis)appropriating N's arguments in the eventual written record of the entretien. True to his solitary ways, R/Rousseau triumphantly resists the temptation to cut a more pleasing figure in the eyes of the world according to N. It is in fact for the metaprefatory peroration that the preface reserves the most logically compelling argument of its between-the-lines, impromptu defense. By embracing solitude as both the sign and the enabling precondition of personal autonomy, Rousseau zeroes in on the central irony of a friendship he evidently deems hardly worthy of the name. This friendship subverts its own bases in mutual esteem: one friend makes the resumption of relations contingent on the other's willingness to undergo a transformation so radical as to beg comparison with Rousseau's sitting still for literal abduction to Paris in Diderot's infamous fiacre. "Cela sera-t-il aussi dans le caractère dont vous m'avez loué ci-devant?" (2:30) R's rhetorical question lays claim to truthfulness in the form of twofold fidelity to character (I would not be myself if I allowed myself to be another). The question further assumes a metaphorical modeling of male friendship on the metaphorical exchanges of passionate love between the sexes. As the story of Julie and Saint-Preux suggests, there is no falling in love without reciprocity or the potential for asymmetrical losses of identity. Once consummated, the relationship thrives at the expense of the fallen female's sense of who she is or used to be; his all-consuming Pyrrhic victory meanwhile restricts the male's availability for the intellectual and social conquests befitting one of his sex. Identifying more closely on this occasion with Julie's loss than with Saint-Preux's, Rousseau blinds himself to the possibility that N might reciprocate his pretensions to identity, and that the other's sense of identity stands to be no less thoroughly compromised than his own by a role reversal that would straitjacket N in the part of a one-note seducer (Please, I beseech you, publish your love story). Seeing only the second-degree seduction, Rousseau stands his ground. Why shouldn't Diderot have made the trip to l'Ermitage or allowed Rousseau to be himself? And N seems to understand: "Non, je vous tendois un piège. Laissez les choses comme elles sont" (2:30). What exactly he and the author who fed him the line understand remains unclear, thanks to the inspired indeterminacy of the "chose" in question. Is N referring only to the dead letter of the preface or to the deadlock in relations between the two erstwhile prefacers?
Whether or not Diderot got the message, it was no doubt framed with his inflammatory mot in mind. Significantly enough, the Confessions would recall Rousseau’s having read “cette âpre et dure sentence” not in the main corpus of Le Fils naturel, but in “l’espèce de Poétique en dialogue qu’il [Diderot] y a jointe” (1:455). Rousseau’s notoriously bad memory for details notwithstanding, the poetic truth of the matter is that one belatedly prefatory and publicly personal Entretien deserves another. By responding in kind, Rousseau could pay homage to the acknowledged past master of dialogue and, at the same time, pay him back.

The Préface de Julie echoes only faintly the unresolved anger at Diderot that first surfaced in the preface to the Lettre à d’Alembert: “J’avais un Aristarque sévère et judicieux, je ne l’ai plus, je n’en veux plus, mais je le regretterai sans cesse, et il manque bien plus encore à mon cœur qu’à mes écrits.” And yet, as if to ratify that anger, R goes against prefatory tradition and out of his way to draw the open Lettre into the present field of discussion and to stand by its contents. “Souvenez-vous,” he reminds N, “que je songeais à faire imprimer ces Lettres quand j’écrivois contre les Spectacles, et que le soin d’excuser un de ces Ecrits ne m’a point fait altérer la vérité dans l’autre” (2:27). But supposing that the truth of the farewell note still holds, so too does the ambivalence attendant on talking to Diderot for the express purpose of declaring an unwillingness to talk. If there is nothing left to say, why say so? If the real purpose is reconciliation, why not say so directly, or at least refrain from saying the opposite? For that matter, repudiating the erstwhile Aristarchus seems more than slightly incompatible with resurrecting him in the person of N, unless, of course, the initial of negation can be construed as a further gesture of repudiation or as a way of striking Diderot’s name once and for all from the roster of friendship. A man (made only) of letters is finally no man at all, a no-name, the nemo of N’s own line from Persius (2:11).

But even if the letter “N” denotes nonbeing, part of the intent may have been to preserve the memory of past dialogue against the eventuality of contamination. In that case, R should have resisted the temptation to use N as a conduit for provocative messages to Diderot. To make the dream of dialogue come true is to run the risk of its turning, once again, into a nightmare. It is to resume against all odds “la recherche, toujours répétée, toujours déçue de l’introuvable Ami, de l’autre partie de soi-même.” The chance would have to be taken, however, if Rousseau were ever to find the magical words capable of winning Di-
derot over to respect for R’s point of view. The problem lies, however, in using the selfsame words to clue third-party referees in to the realization that N’s is just that as well—a point of view, contingent, traceable to a particular “source” (2:14), and finally indefensible. The Préface de Julie thus sends out mixed messages to and about Diderot from a Rousseau not quite “[r]evenu de cette douce chimère de l’amitié” (1:727) and imprudently anxious to maneuver the other man into a position of disdain for friendship. “Qu’apprend-on dans la petite sphère de deux ou trois Amants ou Amis toujours occupés d’eux seuls?” asks N (2:14). In the course of its affective vacillations, the preface illustrates both of two diametrically opposed models of friendship made available by eighteenth-century treatises. At one extreme, there is a rational ideal that, as prescribed by Saint-Lambert, seems well worth fighting for: “le philosophe doit fonder l’amitié sur deux . . . besoins: le besoin de la vérité et celui du bonheur.” At the other, there is the reality reduced by a disabused Vauvenargues to the lowest common denominator of passionate, egotistical in-fighting for personal supremacy: “En amitié, en mariage, en amour, en tel autre commerce que ce soit, nous voulons gagner.” By choosing finally to publish his preface, Rousseau implicitly endorsed the preface’s own failure to choose between the extremes of elegy and retaliation. The fact of fulfilling all the requirements for prefatory discourse even as he dabbled in autobiography gave Rousseau the latitude to indulge a gamut of emotions too intense, complex, and unresolved to be named as such.

Interestingly enough, the Confessions would pay homage to the “préface en dialogue que je fis imprimer à part” by crediting it with a successful and inadvertent seduction. By simply suspending indefinitely the question of Julie’s authorship, Jean-Jacques is said to have won over the “femmes” whom his loquacious silence allowed to go on believing that the novel told the story of his own life (1:547–48). Jean-Jacques thus wins without wooing, as though to compensate Rousseau for a loss of friendship that the Préface de Julie’s oblique solicitations will have failed to reverse. But Jean-Jacques’s lies of omission do not escape the disapproval of “les rigoristes,” a sign of the author’s own uneasiness with the kind of victories that come too easily to the protagonist of the Confessions from the moment of his reigning as a neonate over the Rousseau family household. Pierre-Paul Clément has convincingly linked this pattern to the real-life Jean-Jacques’s lack of opportunity to play out the
Oedipal drama to some decisive conclusion of hard-won personal autonomy. A further consequence of this hypothetical lack, Rousseau's tendency to surround himself with paternal surrogates and to engage them in only imaginary versions of the Oedipal conflict, has special relevance for the Préface de Julie. For what dooms friendship within the pages of the preface and keeps R and N from any paradigmatically clinching "étreinte" is an inevitable diversion of the friend and mentor into a developing paradigm of paternity. And it is the particularly defective nature of the paradigm that accounts both for R's avoiding any too overt seduction (for to seduce the father figure would be to diminish his capacity to serve as a proper Oedipal rival) and for the dialogue's final degeneration into an essentially literary version of open warfare. "En vouloir à son père, l'affronter ouvertement, c'est s'engager dans un conflit impossible." The closest Rousseau can come to a full-fledged Oedipus turns out to be a veiled struggle for control not of the mother but of discourse about a text of exemplary maternity.

THE N OF THE FATHER

What sets up the possibility of a father-to-father connection between Diderot and Isaac Rousseau is our recalling to what extent the preface's overall scenario recalls the Confessions' primal scene of nocturnal reading between widowed father and orphaned son. The Confessions are more uniformly elegiac than the Préface and less able to besmirch the name of Isaac Rousseau or to bring him far enough down from the pedestal of idealized paternity to confront him directly and in person. Whatever unspoken ambivalence attaches to the autobiography's biological father surfaces from between the lines and, belatedly, through implicit resemblances between his and the neo-paternal language behavior later ascribed to Diderot. To the Préface de Julie goes credit for first recording the resemblances and for working backward through the less remote speech acts of Diderot to a slightly more down-to-earth Isaac than might otherwise have graced the pages of the Confessions.

In an entirely other vein, for example, the dedication to Geneva had visualized earliest recorded memories of Isaac in the manner of a willfully sentimental Greuze tableau. In keeping with that occasion of the dedication's New Testament overlay, a father-son couple vaguely reminiscent of the most humble and exalted carpenter of Nazareth and the divine infant entrusted to his care had been removed to the father's atelier. And their
indirectly reported verbal exchanges had been reduced to the touchingly idyllic dumb show of "les tendres instructions du meilleur des Pères" (3:118). We know for a fact that first Isaac, then Jean-Jacques had up and left this home sweet home. But only insofar as the biblical cast of the memory hints at a revisionary conflation of Jesus's home life with the later scene of precocious intellectual mastery over the elders in the temple does the scene of undying filial dedication yield any inkling of the son's long-range potential for resentment and indocility.

But resentment against the father does surface in the Préface de Julie, as the still-accessible idyll recedes into the background of impersonal metaphories and clearly identified wishful thinking. Metaphorically speaking, while declining to say whether Julie is his natural or his adopted brainchild, R vows to conduct himself as an ideal father to the novel, for which he will "answer" without "appropriating" it (2:27). Indeed, by putting "his" Julie on a par with N's, R already allows the novel to lead a life of its own in the interstices of their disagreement. By letting the novel breathe for two weeks without benefit of a full-scale prefatorial support system, Rousseau himself thought to attenuate the coercive forces that prefaces (assuming they were read) usually brought to bear on novels and their outside readers: "Il vaut mieux laisser d'abord paroir et juger le livre; et puis je dirai mes raisons." 51

With this promise and promising behavior comes R's implicit assurance that Julie's father will not repeat the sins committed by Julie's. The editor's rejoinder that comes closest to pointing an overall moral for the novel contains an unexpectedly scathing indictment of parental tyranny as practiced by the matchmaking Baron d'Etange. It is by an emphatic visiting of sin on their fathers that girls (and boys) like Julie are finally exculpated by R: "Depuis que tous les sentiments de la nature sont etouffés par l'extrême inégalité, c'est de l'inique despotisme des peres que viennent les vices et les malheurs des enfans" (2:24). This interpretation of the novel is more than sustained by the plotting without which Julie would risk coming apart at its central seam. That plotting passes the heroine directly from her biological father to his chosen surrogate, Wolmar, at the expense of her happiness and to the near total suppression of her autonomous desiring. Peggy Kamuf's compelling recent discussion of paternal law in Julie 52 suggests that Rousseau could certainly have done worse than hold to this preliminary sketch of an interpreta-
tion. The fact remains that, by the time he gets around to remaking sense of Julie in the Confessions, Rousseau has moved so far away from focus on “l’inique despoticose des peres” that the baron is effectively excised from the cast of characters and Wolmar, as though exclusively of Julie’s generation and attached exclusively to her, is designated only as “son mari” (1:435). Like all inevitably reductive morals tacked onto complex narratives “for the moment,” R’s tag line to Julie is a good place to look for a sense of the occasion. The outright assumption of paternal tyranny comes well into the debate with N. Paternity has become an emotionally charged issue in the here and now, and in the interval since R first calmly listed the baron among the cast of imperfect but well-intentioned characters who were supposed to distinguish Rousseau’s novel from those of Richardson (2:12). Not incidentally, the preface that singles out paternal imperfection to assume a total burden of guilt does double duty as dialogue with an imperfect father.

Intergenerational conflicts are considered, for the moment, to be the root of all evil and unhappiness. It follows, in a Rousseauean universe where the younger generation cannot conceive of winning or wanting to win, that goodness and bliss would be predicated on the absence or avoidance of any such conflicts. No wonder that the “honnêtes gens” who comprise the alternative community of Julie’s ideal readership “passent leur vie dans des campagnes éloignées à cultiver le patrimoine de leurs peres” (2:22). In the best of all impossible worlds, fathers would inspire loyalty, and loyalty to their fathers would keep future generations safely at home, out of reach of the fictions that drive real readers wild: “En montrant sans cesse à ceux qui les lisent, les prétendus charmes d’un état qui n’est pas le leur, ils [les Romans] les séduisent, ils leur font prendre leur état en dédain, et en faire un échange imaginaire contre celui qu’on leur fait aimer. Voulant être ce qu’on n’est pas, on parvient à se croire autre chose que ce qu’on est, et voilà comment on devient fou” (2:21). But the irreversible madness projected here onto other unsuspecting consumers of alienating fictions is the same irreversible madness that the Confessions will reserve for Jean-Jacques himself. There, Rousseau will derive an entire lifetime of self-delusion, his own, from the primal experience of reading novels. In foretelling the story of his life, the present autobiographical fiction neglects only to incriminate the father who provided those novels and the son who read along, even in the
knowledge—such, it turns out, are the “tendres instructions” to which Isaac gave voice—that his place beside the father should naturally have fallen to the dead mother.

We are, of course, condemned in our turn to the madness of prefacing an always elusive something or other. We will never know whether in truth the prefatory fiction here expropriates an autonomous past reality of father-son relations or whether the autobiography will later have appropriated the prefatory fiction as though it were “the story of my life.” Which came first, Jean-Jacques’s alienation or that of Rousseau’s anonymous novel readers? “L’on se plaint que les Romans troublent les têtes,” claims R, but on what basis does he add, “je le crois bien” (2:21)? Without presuming to unravel the strands of psychic and textual memory, we can nonetheless comment on the details of divergence between what Rousseau takes it upon himself to name “Entretien suppose” and what he will later, with the stated intention to tell his truth, name Confessions.

The circumstances of Jean-Jacques’s initiation to l’Astrée and La Calprenède are recalled when R proceeds to involve Julie’s ideal readers in a scenario (2:22–23) corresponding detail for detail with the scenario to be enacted on the opening pages of the Confessions (1:7–8). In each instance, the readers are two; the couple isolated (“dépourvus de sociétés”); the setting nocturnal (“Durant les longues nuits d’hiver”). In each instance, reading together becomes an avowed substitute for love-making: “la nuit de lecture à la place de la nuit d’amour” is the way Philippe Lejeune puts it with respect to the Confessions version. The preface holds out to the co-readers the promise of learning, from Julie or from the experience of reading Julie together, about “le charme de l’union conjugale, même privé de celui de l’amour.” That last stipulation is a tip-off that the two scenes would be identical but for a single difference that makes all the difference: the Préface de Julie takes the liberty of (re)casting the real-life father and son as a couple comprised of “deux époux” (emphasis added). The father’s guilt does not figure for now in the novel-reading scenario; nor does the son’s. The preface holds to a fiction of generational parity and metaphorical interchangeability between co-readers. The name of “époux” to which they answer in tandem suppresses the differential traces of desire and procreation. The fiction reestablishes the (for all we know, childless) bride in her rightful place and strips the husband as potential father of his potentially abusive paternal authority. In the “campagnes éloignées” of what R acknowledges to
be his happiest imaginings ("j'aime à me figurer deux époux lisant ce recueil ensemble"), reading together remains an idyll of total intimacy without implications. Ideally, reading Julie would do nothing more radically disruptive of the couple's life as lived from time immemorial than put "une face plus riante" on their age-old "état" and "soins." Slipping from the conditional into the future tense, the dream of that perfect meeting of the minds that would or will be the couple's "[c]hn quittant leur lecture" remains just out of reach. The name of the Father surfaces as an irretrievable past ideal and muffled warning at dream's end. Something will, in fact, have changed overnight: "Ils [les "deux époux"] rempliront les mêmes fonctions; mais ils les rempliront avec une autre âme, et feront en vrais Patriarches, ce qu'ils faisoient en paysans."

The awakening from this impossible dream is ruder when the Confessions reunite Jean-Jacques with "true Patriarch" Isaac. To a son barred of necessity from attendance at his own biological conception, the father quickly makes himself known as such by seizing control of verbal creativity. "Jean-Jacques, parlons de ta mere" (1:7), says Isaac, in what Nicole Kress-Rosen has identified as the quintessential paternal speech act. Helpless to disobey the father's command to linguistic performance, the son is further placed in the untenable position of speaking about something—the dead mother—of which he has no firsthand knowledge. He must, then, pass off the other's words as his own. Additional pressure is exerted on the protégé by the exacting mentor's all too obvious investment in the success of the performance; many tears are shed (1:7). Viewed from this perspective, the call to novel-reading becomes an exemplary extension of the father's linguistic dominance. As experienced by the son at the father's behest, l'Astrée and La Calprenède do not themselves alienate Jean-Jacques; they only aggravate what is already a catastrophic alienation in language.

The Confessions fulfill this prophecy of alienation anecdotally when they subject all-purpose family member Jean-Jacques to the constant costume changes of a vaudevillian bit player. No sooner is he called to tell the mother's story from the matricidal son's point of view ("parlons de ta mere") than he gets a further call to fill in for the mother herself ("remplis le vide qu'elle a laissé dans mon âme"). Yet another call assumes the imperative mode to be already internalized: a father who describes himself as "plus enfant que toi" asks, without saying so, to be fathered by Jean-Jacques (2:7–8). By dint of this literal and logical triangulation, the
master of ceremonies clinches his transcendent role of keeper of the Logos; Isaac reconfirms his identity as one of the veritable “auteurs de mes jours” (1:7). However scandalous in and of themselves, the specific demands he places on a child of “cinq ou six ans” are only symptomatic. The resultant instability of the child’s identity bodes well for the Confessions’ ability to revisit each vertex of the triangle en connaissance de cause and so to exhaust the possibilities of the family drama more thoroughly than most self-centered narratives. But Rousseau cannot completely ignore or accept the more fundamental scandal of the Father’s demanding. The paradoxical power of the infantile Isaac has nothing at all to do with biology or character; it has everything to do with his privileged relationship to the language that, at the drop of an imperative, a novel, a copy of Plutarch’s Lives, or even a suggestion, can reduce the son to the nothingness of a character already contaminated by mere words alone.

But if Isaac is named to incarnate the primal instance of this alienation in the Confessions, his disappearance by no means restores Jean-Jacques to prelinguistic purity. Nor does a literal demise foretold from the first: “Quarante ans [plus tard], il est mort dans les bras d’une seconde femme” (1:7). Reading and writing will be conceived by the autobiographer as the two stages of a single disaster that is seen to span and transcend whatever welter of experience might have acted in the interval to obscure the metaphorical connection. As written in the Confessions, the stage-two disaster of writing dates from a time when Jean-Jacques will already have slipped, with no fanfare or ill effects to speak of, into the writing of poems, plays, a treatise on music, some articles for the Encyclopédie, and whatnot. If no one ever reads without writing (back) in the broadest sense of the word, or writes without reading, the commonality of the two activities is neither obvious nor trivial (except now that, through sheer redundancy, it has become the organizing polarity of choice of so many autobiographies d’auteurs).

Elsewhere, these two R’s converge in the practice of reading cum writing subsumed under the name of “Préface.” What do prefacers do besides write for reading their readings of other writings? The job description itself requires that prefacers complete the circuit that other readers and writers remain free to retrace in less obvious ways and as though on an optional basis. Having contracted only to read Julie, the two parties to Rousseau’s “Entretien” surprise us with a discovery: not
that we have been reading a preface all along—we knew that—but that, in the very process of their reading Julie, they have scripted a preface that now stands complete except for the metaphorical formality of transcription. What R will eventually write down, what someone must already have written (otherwise we would not be reading) in turn retains the unmistakable character of a reading so self-conscious that at one point R returns the tit of “Relisez mieux . . . relisez aussi” for the tat of N’s “Relisez . . . relisez” (2:25).

Whether or not it was by dint of prefacing Julie that Rousseau discovered for himself the vicious circle of reading and writing, it was this circle that the Confessions would reconfigure as linear, metanarrative progression/regression from one (reading) to the other (writing). And whoever came first (to mind), Isaac or Diderot, the occasion of coming to writing came at some point to call for commemoration under the aegis of a patriarchal man of letters. Diderot would be charged with instigating the further fall away from being that occurs with the transfer of Jean-Jacques’s primary linguistic focus from speech to writing: “Il m’exhorta de donner l’essor à mes idées et de concourir au prix” (1:351). Completing the exhortation to speech about the mother is that, more terrible still in its long-range implications—“dès cet instant je fus perdu”—to published discourse on the arts and sciences. Redoubled along the lines of life sentences served concurrently for related crimes, the alienation now named as such becomes the tie that binds writing to reading: “Tout le reste de ma vie et de mes malheurs fut l’effet inévitable de cet instant d’égarement” (1:351). In the dungeon of Vincennes, Jean-Jacques reverts to the posture of filial docility for which the Confessions’ Geneva nights had so well prepared him. “Je le fis” (1:351)—I did whatever he demanded, nothing more or less. Though its site and specifications have changed, the ancestral stronghold remains intact: henceforth, Diderot will supervise the production of texts, just as Isaac had supervised their consumption. Inordinate hopes once invested in the favored younger son will be reinvested in the genial apprentice on whom Diderot and the entire philosophical community for whom he speaks will count to spread a word that is basically not his but theirs.

It is as though the Father Himself had come back to haunt a perennial man-child. Rousseau’s relationship with Diderot gains in obsessiveness through its resemblance to the relationship with Isaac, and vice versa. The Préface de Julie operates already on the unspoken assumption of
Diderot’s neopaternity, by weaving relevant materials from the father’s story into the drama of adult friendship gone astray. Old memories supplement new ones, but also shape them. The preface’s subtitle, *Entretien sur les romans,* takes R all the way back to dialogue with the father about the mother’s novels and the mother as novel.

Like a latter-day “Susanne Rousseau,” Julie engages father N and son R in a contest for mastery of the discourse. The entire movement of the *Entretien* can be charted—if only, knowing too much, we think the worst—in terms of what the *Confessions* designate as the most primitive of all generational conflicts. From the moment of R’s enjoining N to linguistic performance with the peremptory “je veux un jugement positif” (2:11), the mechanism is set in motion that will wreak the son’s revenge on composite father Isaac-Diderot. With a dire prediction—“Ainsi j’arracherais toutes vos réponses avant que vous m’ayez répondu” (2:11)—Rousseau’s fictional alter ego turns the tables on the flesh-and-blood arracheurs de paroles held accountable for filling Jean-Jacques’s head and mouth with “beaux discours” (2:12). In the ensuing rejoinders, everything from the anonymity that makes a spokesman of N and precludes him from speaking in his own name to the obstinate mutism that greets his every inquiry into Julie’s origins contributes to the same ongoing enactment of poetic justice. Wanting for vital information, the man of letters seems a fool to blather on, embroidering as it were on a void. Grovel though he may in a final flurry of questions, try as he may to trip R up, N comes no closer to the truth of Julie than does Jean-Jacques to the truth of his mother.

By the preface’s end, this struggle for control of the discourse has become so all-consuming that nothing else matters. Having dropped the pretext of Julie, the dialogue turns into metadialogue; “seules comptent les relations entre les deux hommes.” In what now looks like a distant echo of Diderot’s Vincennes exhortation to seize the occasion, N suggests that the proceedings be published as an occasional text (2:30). R’s ready compliance indicates a willingness to retreat from his newfound mastery; despite it all, the role of submissive son, both wanting to please and beholden to the father’s essential collaboration, would seem to have retained its original fascination. The fictional adversary proves friendly enough, however, to make a suggestion for role reversal that dredges up persistent rumors of more extensive input by Diderot into the two
Discours than Rousseau will ever want to acknowledge. R gets a chance to foreclose publicly the possibility that one speaker's words might (yet again) be wrongfully attributed to the other. And the fact that he alone will have done the transcribing restores R/Rousseau to a position of relative mastery. Unlike N, the real-life Diderot would have insisted on testifying firsthand to the true nature of relations between the two. (He did so with a vengeance after Rousseau's death, beating the Confessions to the punch with his Essai sur le règne de Claude et de Néron, "ô Rousseau, cette fois-ci, est nommé, il vaudrait mieux dire injurie en toutes lettres."\textsuperscript{56}) For now, there can be no transcending Rousseau's refusal at the last to relinquish the possibility of nostalgia or of its polar opposite, revenge: he published the "Préface" and the Préface de Julie. By rejecting the alternative, the "Entretien suppose" permits its author to write back (as Saint-Preux never did) and to write himself into a paradoxical state of grace. Where else but in a compensatory fiction could Rousseau remain faithful to the memory of fathers Isaac and Diderot while at the same time usurping their prerogatives of paternity?

Fighting with Diderot, losing Diderot, fighting the loss of Diderot—on this chaude occasion, the Préface de Julie does all three, while purporting to do something else entirely. The loss is all the more acutely felt for having itself been relegated to silence. For sheer poignancy, neither the Correspondance nor the Confessions can compete with the fiction whose autobiographical dimension they nevertheless illuminate. Without the Confessions, feelings left inchoate and unmotivated by the Préface de Julie might never have been linked to the pertinent details of Rousseau's biography. But by the same token, without the Préface de Julie, those feelings would nowhere be preserved against dilution by the overabundant details and necessary rationalization of straightforward narrative. The Confessions replace the "logique . . . surprenante"\textsuperscript{57} and irreducible tensions of the preface with the idiosyncratic trivialization to which Diderot's paternal function is subjected in his afterlife as first author of the "plot" to write an unauthorized life of Rousseau. And, even in putting the friendship to rest, the Confessions resort to tortuous and faintly patronizing periods: "En rompant avec Diderot que je croyois moins méchant qu'indiscret et foible, j'ai toujours conservé dans l'âme de l'attachement pour lui, même de l'estime, et du respect pour notre ancienne amitié, que je sais avoir été longtemps aussi sincère de sa part que de la mienne."
(1:536) All the more reason for subjecting Rousseau to the “double reading—of the autobiography with the fiction”—that Nancy K. Miller proposes as “a more sensitive apparatus for deciphering a female self.”  

**AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FICTION: The Confessions as “Third Preface”**

There are advantages to writing and reading “only autobiographical” fiction or “only fictional” autobiography. Theories of autobiography may tend to overlook or underplay those advantages in deference to their own subject and to a teleology derivable from the fact that authorized autobiographies so often happen at the end of a career. Not that one or the other mode of writing is necessarily more truthful, but autobiography’s single-minded commitment to identity, of project and precipitate, exacts a discernible price of “logical coherence and rationalization.”

Having signed up to tell his truth, R/Rousseau must already keep track of his “caractere,” and of his keeping track; unidentified and uncommitted, N remains oblivious to the implications of speaking the other’s words or speaking at one and the same time for “Tout le monde” and for “moi.” As a minimalist rendering of individuality, N likewise remains open to alternate spellings and to occasional inflections. Once, having turned his back on the N in himself, Rousseau has contracted to do nothing but confess, there will be no turning back. Of course, the autobiographer will continue to tamper with the “facts” and to confuse the “events” of waking life with unconscious desires in ways that are sometimes verifiable, sometimes not, and always suggestive; the writing habits of a lifetime are not so easily broken by a simple statement of intent to write something else.

But, on certain occasions of confessing, Rousseau will perforce take a dimmer view, meta-autobiographically speaking, of anything perceived as a threat to preeminent self-identity. With an investment in who “he was” to protect, Jean-Jacques’s self-appointed conservator will do only the kind of reaching out that ritualistic displays of centripetal force can recollect, reconcile, and bring into line with a character established and named “ci-devant” (2:30). That Rousseau’s reach is longer and his range of motion more extensive in the Confessions than those of many subsequent autobiographers speaks well for the formative years spent hiding out in the recesses of occasional self-portraiture and autobiographical fictions, and just as well for the hubris of the converted zealot’s insatiable impulse to make a point of appropriation. At its most stultifying, that
impulse would reduce “la forme” of the Préface de Julie to a ghost of its former self. The postconfessional reprise named Dialogues: Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques allegorizes the other speaker beyond all chance for authentic otherness in the straw man of “Le François,” and replaces Julie as textual object of discussion with an objective correlative (Jean-Jacques) of the speaking subject (Rousseau). An author “forcé de parler de moi sans cesse” (1:664) ends up making “également” seem a felicitous and productive alternative to the maddening sameness of identity.

The Confessions correct the Préface in less spectacular but still telling ways. R had, for instance, let the question of potentially unreconcilable differences between Julie and the Lettre à d’Alembert ride on the eventual rereadings of his interlocutor (2:25). The question of incompatibility is still nagging when the Confessions revive it: “Mon grand embarras étoit la honte de me démentir ainsi moi-même si nettement et si hautement” (1:434). But the Confessions have a plan for rereading Julie that has been calculated from the first to “bring it all home.” In the service of self-identity, intertextual difference would be reduced to manageable proportions. It is only after Rousseau stretches to unearth the novel’s “secret” plot to reconcile “Chrétiens” with “philosophes” that, reconciled in turn to his “fate” of perennial public servant, Jean-Jacques decides to publish his novel.

It likewise falls within the Confessions’ master plan to encode the misreading that Julie is destined to overcome in terms of potential resemblances between Jean-Jacques’s novel and the “livres effeminés” that he has made a name for himself denouncing (1:434–35). What the autobiographer portrays as a risk of emasculation resides not only in the predictable emphases (“l’amour et la mollesse”) of such “livres,” but in the very prospect that, in writing one, Jean-Jacques may write himself so far out of character as to fall into a permanent state of unpredictability or lack of character: “pouvoit-on rien imaginer de plus inattendu, de plus choquant, que de me voir tout d’un coup m’inscrire de ma propre main parmi les auteurs de ces livres que j’avois si durement censurés?” (1:434–35). It is a feminized difference that scandalizes the, by implication, masculine identity of autobiography and threatens to decontrol that identity by making hard (masculine) incompatible with soft (feminine) writing. Whatever work of reconciliation the autobiography will do in the name of transcendent, androgynous selfhood takes for granted the Lettres à d’Alembert’s harsh words or “invectives mordantes” and acts on this
premise of "what came before" to harden the "doux coloris" of the *Lettres de deux amans* (1:434–35).

All but confessing here to their own partiality, the *Confessions* protect the identity of Jean-Jacques. But, self-protective in the extreme, they also cover over the *Préface de Julie* with a third, more "truthful" preface of their own devising. The *Confessions*’ failure to preface the preface means that they have lost sight of one of the most compelling subliminal arguments that could be made in support of the autobiographical reading of *Julie* that both they and the *Préface* want to urge on the novel-reading public. As Darnton sees it, prefacer Rousseau reinvents the “truth” of novel-reading. Indeed, R’s resistance to N’s bad habits effectively releases that truth from the confines of convention and, more precisely, from exclusive equation with what look from here like the red herrings of documentary authenticity and romans à clef. Rousseau’s new brand of autobiographical fiction relies neither on the claim that the *lettres* were really sent and received by any real *amans* nor on the verifiability of one-to-one correspondences between characters and discrete real-life individuals. (The *Confessions* point this latter moral by recalling that the novel was already well under way when Jean-Jacques first became involved with the “obvious” existential model for Julie, Sophie d’Houdetot [1:431]). Rousseau requires, rather, a “leap of faith—of faith in the author who somehow must have suffered through the passions of his characters and forged them into a truth that transcends literature” (emphasis added).60 But in this instance, nothing better testifies to the author’s capacity for suffering and firsthand familiarity with affective extremes than the reprise of psychodrama that coincides, in the *Préface* and in the confrontation between first and second prefaces, with the prescribing of new techniques for autobiographical reading. Not only do R and N come close to extending the emotional vigil at Julie’s bedside, but whatever affectively charged past life they may have shared lurks as close to the surface of their professional exchange as do the former passions of Julie and Saint-Preux beneath the neo-Platonism and theoretical overlay of the new-age Clarens.

The *Préface*, then, resembles the novel as a further case in point of fidelity to primary sources in the author’s psychic life. But it is also the specific context of a dialogic preface that allows Rousseau to make a pur­poseful spectacle of reinventing and interiorizing the truth that novels tell. His taking the “second nature” of prefatory conventions as an obdurate
frame of reference makes it appear that his version of autobiographical writing and reading does not come naturally, effortlessly, or as the only available option. The point of R's straining to avoid easy answers to N's questions and making up autobiographical fiction under the duress of man-to-man combat needed to be made. For Rousseau's move to transcend literature looks considerably less Promethean in the light of recent findings that he was stealing not from the gods but from the poor. What he demanded for himself was the kind of holistically autoreferential reading foisted naturally, offhandedly, and disparagingly on the "livres efféminés" of women writers. The "age-old, pervasive decoding of all female writing as autobiographical" has followed with no fanfare, as Donna Stanton discovers, from the pervasive belief that "women could not transcend, but only record the concerns of the private self." Rousseau's real originality lies in seizing an occasion to choose freely and ostentatiously the fate ascribed by Larnac's *Histoire de la littérature féminine* (1929) to female authors: "In the center of every feminine novel, one discovers the author. . . . Incapable of abstracting a fragment of themselves to constitute a whole, they have to put all of themselves into their work." Fellow novelists like Laclos chose not to follow suit, but saw where Rousseau was going. In an epistolary postface to his anti-Héloïse, *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, Laclos condemns male authors to their own dominant, moralist tradition of scrupulous observation of external realities. And by way of gratuitous countervalorization, Laclos relegates the "modèles" for Mme Riccoboni's fictions to the same "cœur du peintre" where Rousseau had claimed to discover his "charmants modèles," Julie and Claire. But it is mind-boggling to consider how differently the critical dossiers of Laclos, precursors like (Pierre) Marivaux, (Antoine-François) Prévost, and who knows what other male novelists of virtually unknown prénom might have shaped up if only they had preempted Rousseau's move in the Préface de Julie to authorize autobiographical readings. And it is suggestive of Rousseau's knowing to some extent what he was doing that one combatant in the verbal duel of the Préface ends up proposing to his fellow man (of letters) a model of reading Julie that he has himself appropriated wholesale from none other than the heroine of the novel. "Julie s'était fait une règle pour juger des livres: si vous la trouvez bonne, servez-vous en pour juger celui-ci" (2:23). How eloquently a footnote facilitating universal access to the text of Julie's rule works against the pluperfect "s'était fait," which, pending
formal endorsement by a man of letters, locates that rule just beyond the pale of general relevance. The secret unearthed, endorsed, and promulgated by the Préface is one that Julie might otherwise have carried to the grave as an eminently forgettable idiosyncrasy. Tracking down the reference, we make the unsurprising discovery that Rousseau’s self-conscious paragon of femininity views whatever books she reads as engaging the entirety of her “ame” or being (2:261). Hers is precisely the kind of wholehearted reading or specular double of his writing that Rousseau, in the person of R, is after and to which he comes after (his) her.

Fathering a tradition turns out to have less to do with reinventing the truth than with claiming the patent. Rousseau did just that in the late 1750s, at a moment when he was already of a mind to bring his narrowly defined and self-protective autobiographical self, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau en toutes lettres,” directly into play, but not so exclusively of that mind as to avoid supplementing Julie with a further foray into autobiographical fiction. Between R for Rousseau and N for Diderot/Isaac, prefacing Julie remains, in both senses of the word, a happy medium, and “truth” a matter of more than logical conséquence (2:27). To the good and skeptical friend, a man of letters, who has challenged my provisional reading of N as Diderot on the grounds that “Rousseau wasn’t like that,” I would answer, with R and N, that the best way to find out what Rousseau was, on occasion, like is to reread. As R puts it, hesitating on the threshold of a more rigid autoreferentiality: “Qui est-ce qui ose assigner des bornes précises à la Nature, et dire: ‘Voilà jusqu’où l’Homme peut aller, et pas au-delà?” (2:12).

If Diderot’s did not figure in the list of portraits that Mme de Charrière intended to track down for display in an early edition of the Confessions, the portrait of “M. de Malesherbes” did. And for cause. Even as Diderot was receding into the archetypal paternal recalcitrance commemorated and compounded by the Préface de Julie, the ambivalent son was looking elsewhere. In the person of Chrétien-Guillaume de Lamoignon de Malesherbes, nine years his junior, Rousseau found the makings of a father figure after an autobiographer’s own heart, a father figure of his dreams: a father-confessor. Among the multitudes, male and female, whom the Confessions’ Jean-Jacques is purported to have pressed into priestly service over a lifetime of compulsive oral confession, Malesherbes stands alone in literary history as the chosen recipient of person-
al letters that were eventually published as a single confessional opus in four movements. Malesherbes apparently owes this preeminence to having been in the right place (on the author's mind and out of earshot) at a time when Rousseau's life and his life story both hung in the balance. But the occasion having so conveniently presented itself, why did Rousseau go so far as to seize it, and what sense would he make of having done so?