What the Censor Saw: 
*Lettres à Malesherbes*

Où est-il, où est-il, ce château de Malesherbes que j'ai tant désiré de voir?

Rousseau

Our emphasis thus far has been on showing how texts that are surely occasional are also autobiographical. The *Lettres* that Rousseau wrote to Malesherbes during the month of January 1762 present the opposite challenge, that of finding our way back beyond the self-evident fact of the letters' autobiographical content to a sense of the occasion or "circonstance qui [leur] sert de cadre ou de soutien."¹ The *Lettres* are the only occasional autobiography from Rousseau's middle period whose claims to figure in editions of his autobiographical or personal writings have never been disputed. And the *Lettres* are, not incidentally, the only protohistory that the *Confessions* openly embrace, by calling them "en quelque façon le sommaire de ce que j'expose ici" (1:569). The *Confessions* further proclaim that, on this basis alone, the letters, which remained unpublished during Rousseau's lifetime, deserve to be "conservées." But even as acknowledged sources of the *Confessions*, the *Lettres* stand to lose by being taken all the way off the support system at their source. The *Confessions* are less responsible than the biases of subsequent literary history for understanding accession to special pre-autobiographical status to be tantamount to release from the stigmatized underclass of "only
occasional” writing. It is the Confessions’ own lead that we will follow in giving the occasion its due and placing greater than usual stress on the timing of the Lettres, on their epistolary context, and especially on the person and persona of their addressee.

In writing back to Malesherbes, the erstwhile author of La Nouvelle Héloïse happened for himself on Julie’s magic formula of “confessing to a censor.” That favorable circumstance accounts for the uncharacteristic ease with which Rousseau recalls pouring his heart out in the Lettres and, in the process, unblocking the long-range autobiographical project of which the Confessions themselves are the result in progress. Rousseau understood how the choice of a confessor gains in significance in direct proportion to the deinstitutionalization of the act of confession. Making a notable exception to his rule of writing to the Director of the Librairie only on official business was Rousseau’s way of self-consciously short-circuiting the usual pathways of literary production in the ancien régime and putting an unprecedented stamp of intimacy and personal sincerity on his impromptu substitute for full-scale memoirs. And it is the letters as residual surplus of extraliterary sincerity that the autobiographer is most eager to incorporate into the prehistory and permanent conceptual sphere of his autobiographical project. To the unspoken advantage of all his other occasional texts, Rousseau uses the Lettres to undermine, even invalidate the usually automatic associations of “occasional” with “trivial or insincere writing.”

But there are further rewards of reading to be had by taking from the Lettres an appreciation of the extent to which Rousseau’s Malesherbes personifies the vagaries of institutionalized censorship that were a fact of eighteenth-century literary life. The Confessions typically use anecdotal accounts of Rousseau’s extensive prior dealings with Head Censor Malesherbes as occasional antecedents for forays in the direction of metaphorical, psychic censorship. Rousseau comes closest to positing the censoring agency within of modern depth psychology in a remarkable passage from Book 11 where the same conceptual apparatus evoked with reference to problems in publishing Emile is brought to bear on the immediately ensuing account of Jean-Jacques’s likewise censored relations with the ingenue Amélie. It is internalized censorship and not illicit desire or even the desire to confess that momentarily becomes the Confessions’ most deeply embedded and obliquely revealed secret and,
for Rousseau, a point of pride in difference from such disavowed precursors as Montaigne.

A LAST-MINUTE CHANGE IN PLANS:
From Memoirs to Confessions

Unlike Augustine's, Rousseau's *Confessions* did not always go by that name—or so, in hindsight, they imply. Nor did Rousseau have at his disposal the norms or the name of "autobiography." The term wasn't coined until the turn of the nineteenth century; the two traditions of internal self-inspection and anecdotal narration were not yet formally welded into the theoretically daunting but still workable amalgam to which Rousseau's name would in turn be indissociably linked. It is important to keep those facts in mind as we recreate the occasion of Rousseau's coming to write his letters to Malesherbes in January 1762. At that time, Rousseau was still in self-imposed exile from Paris. He anticipated earning enough from sales of his forthcoming *Emile* to set up independent housekeeping and enter into a state of "absolute retirement" (1:517) from society and from literature. In the meantime, he was living with Thérèse at Montmorency as an honored guest of the Maréchal de Luxembourg. There, Rousseau had, at some point, begun making copies of pertinent documents and assembling a dossier with an eye to writing his life story in retirement and having it published after his death. Recalling those initial stages, the story as told in the *Confessions* looks ahead to a finished product not of "confessions" but of "mémoires" (1:516–17).

The term "mémoires" may be meant as a bona fide working title. Or it may simply refer to the project that had been proposed to Rousseau by his publisher, Rey, and that in the Montmorency years remained still nebulous and modestly inscribed in the mainstream eighteenth-century tradition of fictional, "factional," and authentic memoirs. Rousseau chooses, in any event, to remember the work in progress as an exclusive matter of memory. He elects one of Elizabeth Bruss's "[f]aulty or naive" definitions ("autobiography is an act of . . . memory") over the other ("autobiography is confessional") to cover activities anterior to and at least nominally discontinuous with eventual confession. And regardless of whether dramatic irony is intended to enhance the confessional value of the *Confessions* by contrast with what might have been other emphases, the *Confessions* do honor the discontinuity. Making it seemingly unbridgeable, they make it difficult for readers to imagine how Rousseau
ever got past the kind of “remembering” that really amounts only to research­ing, and how he moved on to the business of turning his research to account.

No sense of urgency emerges from Rousseau’s retrospective evoca­tions of a systematic, secretive, solipsistic—but, finally, unselfcon­scious—hoarding of aide-mémoire. This apparently passive and unproblematical reunion with bits and pieces of his past remains as un­certainly linked to the actual writing of the Confessions as an athlete’s or musician’s warm-up to the actual playing of a game or symphony. We never see Jean-Jacques in face-to-face interaction with his note cards, formu­lating or modifying hypotheses, putting together the pieces, sketch­ing an outline. This noteworthy standoffishness brings Rousseau’s account into the vicinity of Barrett J. Mandel’s contention that unmitigated re­membering does not so much enable as interfere with autobiography: “The pictures—part of a survival mechanism—are there to prevent self­discovery.”5 There are, of course, abundant traces in the Confessions’ coherent trip down memory lane of Rousseau’s first steps to rescue him­self from forgetfulness or from the appearance thereof. In fine memori­alist tradition, he would, as planned, make extensive use of his supporting documentation, citing many of the letters he had exchanged with his various correspondents, alluding to others. But he would also insist that on the basis of these raw data alone the Confessions did not write them­selves.

Book 1 gets straight to the point. Its account of pre-scriptural child­hood is unusually long and detailed by the standards of eighteenth­century “memoirs of famous men” and must have been scripted without benefit of much in the way of documentation. Beyond that, however, the author is depicted as willing and wanting to disregard even such docu­ments as he might easily have obtained. First and foremost among those missing pieces is the full text of the (in)appropriately erotic pastorale sung as a lullaby to Jean-Jacques by his loving and beloved aunt: “J’ai cent fois projeté d’écrire à Paris pour faire chercher le reste des paroles” (1:12). But instead of writing to Paris, Rousseau ended up transcribing what he had and what remains readable as a text of forbidden desire despite several missing lines (1:11). The Confessions thus make a para­digmatic sacrifice of documentary thoroughness to the end of revealing Rousseau’s memories to be in a preferable, even blissful state of in­completion.
Book 10 goes on to provide that sacrifice and Rousseau's leap from remembering to confessing with existential grounds. From where the autobiographer stood, it must have taken the perception of a literal deadline to precipitate a headlong plunge into writing, which he might otherwise have continued, indefinitely, to approach as an asymptote. Having been convinced by a nasty bout with his chronic illness that he would not live to complete the "Mémoires que j'avois projettes" (1:569), Rousseau took exception to his rule of all or nothing and took once again to the margins of literature. He seized another occasion, or, as he puts it in the Lettres, "abused" one (1:1142). On the foundations of a long-term professional correspondence with Malesherbes, Rousseau fashioned what would turn out, in the absence of prior long-range architectural planning, to be a makeshift confessional; and he arranged for the performance of last rites.

Although the two men had begun exchanging letters as early as 1755, Rousseau's Letter 1 takes a first step toward confession by locating the terminus a quo of relevancy in a more immediate past. By way of autocontextualization, the letter begins by thanking the addressee for "la derniere lettre dont vous m'avez honnore" and by alluding, enigmatically, to "ce qui vient de se passer" (1:1130). The events in question are as well known to literary historians as to Malesherbes and accessible through the exchange of letters immediately predating the famous four. Having been drafted by the Maréchale de Luxembourg to help oversee the printing of Rousseau's Emile, Malesherbes had become the confidant of delusional fantasies on the part of the ailing author. Fearful that the printing had ground to a halt, Rousseau communicated to Malesherbes as a matter of incontrovertible fact a scenario whereby malicious Jesuits would have seized control of the manuscript. Their plan—or so he assumed—was to suppress it during his lifetime and to thereafter publish in his name a version truncated and falsified beyond recognition.6 Malesherbes tactfully accorded some measure of verisimilitude to this paranoid plotting, which his firsthand investigation proved to have no basis in fact.7 Meanwhile, upon awakening independently from his nightmare, Rousseau confessed to having been wrong. Or, rather, backing off from full-fledged confession, he laid the blame for his shameful scenario on a delusional double of whom he claimed to have rid himself once and for all: "je ne prends aucun interest à celui qui vient d'usurper et deshonorer mon nom. Je l'abandonne à votre juste indignation; mais il est mort pour ne
plus renaittre." (Why Rousseau should have, on this one occasion, voluntarily relinquished the possibility of a plot against him is a not entirely inexplicable curiosity to which we shall return.)

Which brings us to the "derniere lettre" penned by Malesherbes on Christmas Day, 1761. Having assured Rousseau that his secret was safe, Malesherbes, as would any conscientious theatrical confidant, ventured an assessment of his correspondent's mental state. The diagnosis both recalled and revised the philosophical party line. That Rousseau had, by self-imposed solitude, consigned himself to a lifetime of unhappiness was a forgone conclusion, one that Malesherbes did not question. But whereas Rousseau's "enemies" saw him persisting in masochistic folly out of "vanité" or exclusive concern for his reputation as an inveterate eccentric, Malesherbes discerned a constitutional excess of "bile noire," a congenital rather than willful misanthropy. To be pitied for what he could not change, Rousseau also deserved to be admired for living his "true" self to the most logical extreme: "Etant assés malheureux pour voir souvent des horreurs où Démocrite n'auroit vu que du ridicule, il est tout simple que vous ayés fui dans les deserts pour n'en plus estre temoin."

Of course, the highly principled persona sketched by Malesherbes uncannily resembles the man of anachronistic moral superiority Rousseau had exhausted himself trying to become in the _Preface de Narcisse_. But then was then, and now was now; there could be no foretelling if, when, or how Rousseau, ever the erratic correspondent, would respond. He did respond quite promptly in a letter dated 4 January 1762. But the delay is belabored in his salutation: "J'aurois moins tardé Monsieur à vous remercier de la derniere lettre dont vous m'avez honoré si j'avois mesure ma diligence à repondre sur le plaisir qu'elle m'a fait. Mais outre qu'il m'en coute beaucoup d'écrire, j'ai pensé qu'il falloit donner quelques jours aux importunités de ces tems ci pour ne vous pas accabler des miennes" (1:1130). Better late than never—or rather, better late. Opening an interval of deferment and opening that interval to interpretation becomes Rousseau's way of encoding a problem of global misunderstanding (of his "caractère" and "motifs") that he then goes on to address globally. Not that Malesherbes has got Rousseau all wrong, but his assessment does err somewhat and, for once, on the high side of the truth. By way of setting the larger record straight, Rousseau wrote back: "Les motifs auxquels vous attribués les partis qu'on m'a vu prendre depuis que je porte une espece de nom dans le monde me font peut-être plus d'hon-
neur que je n'en merite mais ils sont certainement plus prés de la verité que ceux que me pretent ces hommes de lettres, qui donnant tout à la reputation, jugent de mes sentimens par les leurs" (1:1130).

Thus the initial compliment of Rousseau's letter will not have been turned in vain or as a gratuitous hors d'oeuvre; rather, it sets a precedent for using the letter's main body to correct whatever errors as to his affect and motivation Rousseau's silence "to date"—not just since his receipt of Malesherbes's letter—may have left unchecked. No one but Rousseau knows why Malesherbes did not hear from him sooner, or, by analogy, what motive "moins noble, mais plus pres de moi" (1:1131) than the one hypothesized by Malesherbes really underlies Rousseau's decision to live far from the madding crowd. The transition from epistolary compliment as opening gambit to more essentially autobiographical content is easily made and holds up nicely. Contrary to everyone's assumptions—"Oh! Monsieur combien vous vous trompez!"—the solitary life is revealed to be as uniformly pleasurable as receipt of a letter from Malesherbes (1:1131); avoidance of interpersonal encounters comes off as no less incompatible with humanitarian intentions than failure to reply by return mail: "Je serois beaucoup plus inutile à mes compatriotes, vivant au milieu d'eux que je ne puis l'être dans l'occasion, de ma retraite" (1:1143).

Without forcing the analogy, Rousseau also gets away with the preposterous insinuation that in the delayed reaction to Malesherbes's letter he is likewise saying his piece or telling his side for the first time since acquiring "une espece de nom dans le monde." It is as though the writer were utterly oblivious to the marginal notations of aggressive-defensive self-portraiture we have been reading. Preoccupation with the still embryonic state of his memoirs no doubt explains how Rousseau can pay Malesherbes the further compliment of granting him exclusive rights to the heretofore "untold story."

The compliment does, in fact, seem richly deserved. If Malesherbes had not really made it easier to talk than all the others, the truth-telling session would not spill over so volubly into the further letters of 12, 26, and 28 January. It also appears, however, that the charm of breaking past silence would in turn be broken were the two correspondents to resume the give and-take of normal epistolary relations. As though to stave off any further intervention by the real Malesherbes and to freeze him in the posture of his Christmas-Day missive, each of Rousseau's letters except
the last concludes with a variation on the warning "to be continued" (1:1133, 1137, 1142).

Meanwhile, the "Monsieur" of direct address becomes, through ritualized repetition, the ubiquitous textual marker of a persona assigned at the outset to the reader in the text. Rousseau's "épanchement" (1:1133) is channeled through the narrowest of openings and depends on the possibility raised by Malesherbes's letter of typecasting then containing him in the role of confessor. Therein lies a most welcome novelty: any response addressed directly to the accusations of the philosophes would have had to take the form of yet another outright apology. Malesherbes alone invites confession. His coming close to the truth establishes enough commonality of belief or outlook between the two men for Rousseau to proceed directly, confidently, and with a minimum of posturing or predating to the specifics of the cas de conscience at hand. Better yet, Malesherbes misses the mark only on the side of undue flattery, thus triggering in Rousseau a healthy dose of self-inspection or soul-searching and allowing him to posit the "truth" by subtle opposition with a specific, slightly "too-good-to-be-true" appearance.

In confession, moreover, Malesherbes gives Rousseau an angle from which to come at (or bypass) the mountain of autobiographical materials he had been accumulating with no more clear-cut end than "mémoires" in sight. Left to his own devices, Rousseau's life story might have run the usual risks of enervating over-preparation: "c'est mon ordinaire dans les entreprises que j'ai le plus à cœur, de m'épuiser en belles préparations, et ne rien faire qui vaille quand j'en veux venir à l'exécution." Instead, from Malesherbes, our erstwhile memorialist gets the go-ahead to write, as though automatically, "sans brouillon, rapidement, à trait de plume" (1:569)—and documentation be damned! Beyond that, Rousseau gets Malesherbes's tacit permission to come, as ever, from an angle—even when, with his "whole life" on the line, some more ceremonial and unprecedented approach would seem to be called for.

Now, if ever, Rousseau is prepared to acknowledge by a prompt act of confession that, however paradoxically, self-presentation flows more easily from the cues and constraints of this or that "occasion" than from any absolute, really paralyzing license to "tell all" whenever and however one wants. The seamless passage in Letter 1 from the prior week's health bulletin to the disappointments and dreams of a lifetime speaks volumes
about autobiography's momentary accommodation with the occasional, as does Letter 2's positively charged recollection of writing the First Discourse. No matter that the Discours remained the smoking gun of Rousseau's alleged opportunitism, or that, inevitably inexhaustive, the Discours had finally managed to conserve not even "le quart de ce que j'ai vu et senti sous cet arbre" (1:1135). What Rousseau commemorates here, precisely because it pertains so well to the work at hand and already well under way, is the incomparable feeling of writing, as though inspired, to the moment: "Si jamais quelque chose a ressemblé à une inspiration sú­bité, c'est le mouvement qui se fit en moi ... tout à coup je me sens l'es­prit ébloui de mille lumieres" (1:1135). What a relief to break the ice once again in an occasional text.

The tacit metamessage from Malesherbes that Rousseau picks up is, in short, a doubly encouraging injunction to confess. On the one hand, keep up the good work of occasional self-portraiture; on the other, rest assured that, however opportunistic, your scaled-down autobiographical project can still be conceived as a one-of-a-kind (i.e., confessional) response to the opportunity of a lifetime. However promptly the Lettres retreat into confession's shadow, apology, Rousseau will have begun by announcing a strictly confessional intent and by reducing his hearer's existential heterogeneity to the single function of hearing his confession. For his part, the real-life Malesherbes had graciously presumed to provide the full range of services befitting an all-purpose confidant or professional therapist: "elucidator (where ignorance has given rise to fear), . . . teacher, . . . representative of a freer or superior view of the world," among others. But Rousseau demurred: his unifactorial "Monsieur" is destined from the outset of Letter 1 to specialize as "a father confessor who gives absolution, as it were, by the continuance of his sympathy and respect after the confession has been made."11 Having recently demonstrated his special aptitude for knowing even the worst of Rousseau's delusions without wavering in his sympathy and respect, Malesherbes has earned the confidence of our once-and-future "penitent"12 and a right to the whole truth: "Quoique je ne me console point de ce qui vient de se passer, je suis très content que vous en soyez instruit puisque cela ne m'a point ôté votre estime, elle en sera plus à moi quand vous ne me croirez pas meilleur que je ne suis" (1:1130). In terms of getting the story out, however, it becomes increasingly less important that Malesherbes actually read what he will in any case receive than that he be installed until fur-
ther notice in a textual confessional. The rhetorical frame suffices to guarantee the ipso facto identity of confession and to keep the letters coming.

**BUT WHO WILL CONFESS ME? The Lessons of Julie**

The general cause of putting the life story to paper is thus well served by the occasional cause of Malesherbes's acting in such a way as to pin the telling down to a specific bone of contention and to a particular, confessional mode of telling. Consider, as a further source of urgency, the life-threatening illness on which the survivor's *Confessions* are bound to insist, and it is easy enough to call this convergence of causes to account for the *Lettres* themselves, for the self-satisfaction that Rousseau derives from writing and having written them, and even for the unmitigated cheerfulness with which he acknowledges his opposite number's good offices. Still, what looks, unaccountably, like a surplus of positive affect attaches specifically to Rousseau's depictions of epistolary coupling with his chosen confessor. However good for the soul, confession worthy of the name is supposed to hurt at the time, and to exact a price of shame or difficulty in verbalization. But there would be no guessing that on the basis of the progress reports that a Rousseau in no obvious pain delivers at regular intervals through the *Lettres*. He writes, in the second: "J'ai sûrement bien du plaisir à vous écrire" (1:1138); expands, in the third: "Quoique j'aime trop à parler de moi, je n'aime pas en parler avec tout le monde, c'est ce qui me fait abuser de l'occasion quand je l'ai et qu'elle me plait. Voilà mon tort et mon excuse" (1:1142); and, in the fourth, insists one last time on "le plaisir que je prends à vous écrire" (1:1144).

This undiluted "plaisir" rings truer still when we recall that, several years later and in other circumstances of less than life-and-death urgency, Rousseau proposed an exact replication of the epistolary experiment. "Ce n'est pas d'aujourd'hui, Monsieur, que j'aime à vous ouvrir mon cœur et que vous me le permettez," he wrote on 10 May 1766, in what might have been the first of further *Lettres à Malesherbes*. "Laissez-moi donc vous décrire mon état une Seconde fois en ma vie." This surplus and survival of affect make it difficult to hang the *Lettres* so entirely as before on what Malesherbes did, on a one-time basis, in his Christmas letter, to elicit confession. We would be moved to ask who this Malesherbes really was, and who he was to Rousseau, even if Letter 4 did not get around to rescuing "Monsieur" from anonymity. On the second-person respectful pronoun, Rousseau finally hangs a surfeit of referents. The letter treats its
destinataire to a seemingly exhaustive litany of his claims to fame and on the author’s affections: “vous né d’un sang illustre, fils du Chancelier de France, et Premier President d’une Cour souveraine; oui Monsieur . . . vous qui m’avez fait mille biens sans me connoitre et à qui malgré mon ingratitude naturelle, il ne m’en coute rien d’être obligé” (1:1145). All the more remarkably, by this belated ennobling of his interlocutor, Rousseau makes Malesherbes as peerless in the microcosm of the Lettres as in the venues of everyday life. For, in striking contrast to the name-dropping of most traditional memoirs and of the Confessions themselves, the Lettres are singularly lacking in secondary characters. The first three letters will have yielded only a passing reference to Diderot (1:1135) and one to Thérèse, who never matters much and who matters less here than Rousseau’s faithful pooch (1:1139). It is as though proof of blissful self-sufficiency depended on voiding the life story of all external signs of human life. But Letter 4 ends up making a noteworthy exception to general policy for the other man to whom the proof of self-sufficiency is being, confessionally, addressed. And in bestowing both objective and subjective identities on his interlocutor, Rousseau reminds us of the destinataire’s crucial importance in any addressed, but especially in confessed, discourse.

As Stephen Spender puts Rousseau’s case in deceptively simple terms: “Confession must always be to a confessor. . . . And the human soul can only be measured adequately if there is an adequate confessor.”14 It has become standard critical practice to classify the Lettres by content as “pre-Romantic.”15 But the historical moment that the Lettres occupy fully and embrace through their rhetorical frame is also one of crisis in confession. His reaching out to Malesherbes typifies Rousseau’s reluctance to extricate himself entirely from a tradition of religious confession that was generally and reassuringly supportive of sustained soul-searching. By the same token, however, Rousseau was loath to inscribe himself wholly as an orthodox penitent within the confines of that tradition, to wit, his going outside religious orders to improvise the ordination of Malesherbes. To be entirely adequate or acceptable in Rousseau’s eyes, a confessor would evidently have to fulfill some new version of age-old criteria.

Within the broader context of eighteenth-century challenges to religious orthodoxy, the subversive secularization that made models and metaphors of religious rites and realities extended to displacement of the
scene of confession. Even the Pietists among Rousseau’s contemporaries participated in this displacement through their practice of exchanging “journaux intimes” epistolarily for the correspondents’ “édification mutuelle.” But insofar as making the metaphor really involved deinstitutionalizing the office, confession could not meaningfully be removed from the church or from its aegis without some further moves to compensate for the real losses incurred in transition. For, left to its own devices, partial secularization would work especially to depressurize the act of confession. By way of putting and keeping the pressure on, the enabling framework of organized religion limits and spells out the penitent’s options, making regular attendance at the confessional a prerequisite to full participation in the life of the faith, restricting the choice of confessors to an unambiguously entitled subset of fellow men, and grounding specific choices sufficiently (and secondarily) in such considerations as availability and trust. “The rule requiring confession of sins gives to self-examination a character at once systematic and necessary.” Conversely, the decision to confess becomes otherwise remarkable and the choice of a confessor otherwise questionable in the absence (or vague memory) of any institutionalized injunction to confess or institutionally sponsored prelates ready to act by the authority vested in them.

It would take the professionalization of psychoanalysis to put those kinds of pressures back on, to reinstitutionalize the office and the injunctions, to recertify a select number of practitioners, and to redirect confession, with all due formality, toward the new and totally secularized transcendent motivation of mental health in the here and now. From midway between the confession box and the analyst’s couch, questions arose with special pertinence in the eighteenth century as to whether the impulse to confess was innate or learned, universal or idiosyncratic. And whatever the answers to those questions, it also bore asking how given individuals might, as private, unordained citizens and on an ad hoc basis, bring out the self-portraitist as “penitent” in a particular interlocutor.

Linguistic usage confirms a necessary displacement of pressure to confess from the institution onto one or both individuals and, in fact, privileges the one who hears, conferring on the secular confessor the function of “tirer des aveux, un secret à quelqu’un.” Of course, with the church’s blessing and to obviate attempts by the faithful to bypass the institution and speak directly to God, causation has always emanated from the priest’s side of the confessional. It is he, not the penitent, whose
title of confessor substantivizes the verb "confess." For the priest to "confess," moreover, is really a matter of making the other confess. The fact that court cases today may be thrown out on the basis of a confession's having been coerced belies an ingredient of coercion common and essential to all confession: "The site of confession or self-exposure dramatically reverses power's conventional dynamics: the one who remains silent and listens exerts power over the one who speaks."  

If not institutional, at the one extreme, or forcible, at the other, that coercion must be, in some sense, cultural or psychological. With no license specifically to hear confessions, lay priests make confessions happen on the sole basis of what they do (Malesherbes stuck by Jean-Jacques, and overestimated him) or what they represent (that remains to be seen). Better yet, given the tremendous loss of cultural authority for which restitution needs to be made, doing and being combine in variable proportions to bring the lay priest to the threshold of installation. Of course, a completely internalized coercive force or "voice of conscience" may already be available to assume the confessor's function of drawing out the penitent. In that case, the flesh-and-blood confessor's presence would be a largely ceremonial projection or way of keeping up appearances for old times' sake. Anyone willing to listen would do, with priority accorded, all things being equal, to the confessor presumed to be most closely in tune with the voice of conscience. But even granting that the penitent speaks to quiet that voice, confessed discourse as such remains, and hyperbolically so, addressed. What remains otherwise indeterminate and subject to individual variation is the division of labor between the no fewer than two joint subjects to the verb "confess," and the proximity of the confessional act itself to the institutional model.

But there is more to be said about this partial secularization with immediate relevance to Rousseau's *Confessions* and to the *Lettres à Malesherbes*. Gone the same way as the religious fiat that had made confession mandatory are the institution's reliably dogmatic guidelines as to the contents of confessional discourse. It has become more difficult to know a sin when you see one, and less easy to recognize confession's licit objects as those acts and feelings that some higher authority will have prejudged to be really illicit. There is more cause than previously for penitents to fret, upon leaving the confessional, that they may have left something out or, conversely, made much ado about nothing. A possible strategy for overcoming this incertitude of sin is the one adopted by
Rousseau in the *Confessions*, which for great stretches—but not necessarily the same stretches for all readers—seem hardly worthy of the name. That strategy consists in telling all and leaving it up to the confessors to separate mere narrative chaff from the kernel of confession. For more than two hundred years, in an increasingly secularized society and in ever-increasing numbers, readers of the *Confessions* have responded just that way to the challenge of Rousseau's title. The role of confessor has been taken as though it were a sacred mission, despite Rousseau's having conferred it indiscriminately on us all.

But there is a lesson to be learned (and then partially unlearned) from the massive, still accumulating body of sincere attempts at naming Rousseau's real or really important sins (as opposed to the dummy desires he posits and overplays). Each new generation or school of confessor-analysts ends up visiting its own sins (or what pass at the time for sins) on the so-called father of autobiography. Rousseau was sensitive to the implications of confessing to anybody and everybody; he advertised his life story as a "prémière pièce de comparaison pour l'étude des hommes" (1:3). But critics invested in Rousseau's modernity have perhaps been too quick to seize exclusively on the incipient anthropology of that claim and to discard as quaintly moralizing or pompously defensive the attendant challenge to each of us to compare ourselves with the author on the basis of goodness (1:5). For to accept the challenge or even to contemplate accepting it would be to inquire, as we do self-interestedly at the grocery store: what's good (or bad, or indifferent) today? And to inquire would be to put some distance of mutual illumination between the moment to which Rousseau wrote and the one to which, occasional readers all, we read Rousseau. Take, for example, the recent "discovery" of Rousseau's overriding and presumably guilty desire to make a spectacle of confessing. To what extent, we might ask, does that discovery mirror our own uneasiness with the media confessional mode currently presided over by the electronic-age high priests of radio and television talk shows? Indeed, the parameters of confessional discourse are less and less precisely defined by what priest and penitent both know (because they have it on the same inviolable authority) to follow directly from the axiom "I have sinned." The "confessable" risks becoming identifiable as such only in the confessing or replay of confession, and has more than a little to do with the chosen or accidental confessor.
But Rousseau did not always leave the identity of his confessors to chance. His novel *Julie*, which only slightly antedates the *Lettres*, illustrates one way in which the postorthodoxy penitent can use knowledge of an interlocutor's identity to make a reassuring case for having confessed. With one foot in the old religious and one in the new secular age, Rousseau had penned a pair of deathbed confessions for Julie. During the requisite interview with the man of the cloth, she unburdens herself incompletely and with specific emphasis on her theological heterodoxy (2:727–29). Julie then goes on (thereby compounding that heterodoxy) to confide her deepest, darkest secret to the two men in her everyday life (2:740–43). To be sure, lusting in one's heart for a man other than one's own husband figures to this day on a universally approved list of sins against the patriarchy. But the ultimate meaning of Julie's revelation and our tendency to grant it confessional status derive less from a locution (she has enduring feelings for Saint-Preux) than from the illocutionary—in this instance, epistolary—context. She addresses the text of her letter to Saint-Preux but first submits it for prior approval to husband Wolmar, as he has taught her to want to do; she would not think of doing otherwise.

The thought occurs that, had Wolmar been eliminated from the letter's itinerary, its contents might have taken on an ambiguously confessional or even a decidedly *un*-confessional air: it might have read as a simple declaration of undying love. Instead, what nudges Julie and Wolmar toward the confessional is the presumption of pain to be inflicted by the confidence itself on the person of the confidant. To the loser in love, the message says not only "I have lusted in my heart" but "I don't love you." Lack of certainty that God Himself has absorbed the penitent's sins as so many blows against His own person may call for this added precaution of putting a face on the confessor and making him a truly interested party to that which will surely, in consequence, have been confessed. Following Julie's lead precisely and self-consciously, the Rousseau of our *Lettres* takes care not to make his formal introduction of Malesherbes "himself" without first insulting just about everything Malesherbes stands for: "Je ne puis vous dissimuler Monsieur, que j'ai une violente aversion pour les etats qui dominent les autres, j'ai même tort de dire que je ne puis vous le dissimuler, car je n'ai nulle peine à vous l'avouer, à vous né d'un sang illustre, fils du Chancelier de France, et Premier President d'une Cour souveraine; . . . Je hais les grands, je hais
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leur état, leur dureté, leurs préjugés, leur petitesse, et tous leurs vices, et je les haïrois bien d'avantage si je les meprisois moins" (1:1145). On both occasions, "true" confession thus comes to hinge less on the after-the-fact recitation of past offenses than on a speech act of knowingly offending the confessor. If third-party readers would be well-advised to know the confessor, so, it turns out, would the self-styled penitent.

In Julie, confession of guilt is thus replaced by what is, in essence, a potentially infinite regress of guilty confession. As Michelet would have it, "La confession conjugale (un sacrement de l'avenir) est l'essence du mariage." Or, rather, that would be the case if the superhuman Wolmar were not really incapable of feeling anything like the pain of a cuckolded husband. "Un mari débonnaire et hospitalier emprcssé d'établir dans sa maison l'ancien amant de sa femme" (2:13) is the way an incredulous N describes Wolmar in the Préface de Julie. Still, Julie's confession is bound to get her first reader "where he lives," if not as M. de Wolmar, then as chief architect of Clarens, the monumental social experiment under which he had intended to bury the novel's former disorder of illicit passion. "J'efface un tableau par un autre, et couvre le passé du présent" (2:511) is the way Wolmar describes his own handiwork. It is, in other words, of the metaphorical censor in Wolmar that Julie's final letter makes a perhaps not inadvertent mockery. The resurfacing of desire undermines the social architect's attempts to incarnate the censoring agency at its most severe and to extend its activities into the sphere of real-life interpersonal relations. Desire will out. But so too will the possibility, at least, of repression. It is by choice that Wolmar leaves the text of Julie's confession intact and forwards it to its ultimate destinataire, Saint-Preux. By leaving the fate of her letter in Wolmar's hands, Julie confirms him to the end in his other role as literal (and permissive) censor of every word ever written by femme de lettres Mme de Wolmar.

Julie thus upholds censorship proper, as specifically opposed to unauthorized, dysfunctional, demonically figurative variants thereof. Beyond that, secular confession is to some extent reinstitutionalized as censorship, thanks to Wolmar's wearing the two hats of censor and confessor. It is, however, at the point of resistance to total interchangeability, where the confession-censorship analogy breaks down and one term does not entirely cover the other, that confession to the censor further compensates for the penitent's incertitude of sin. The inviolability of the actual confessional is such that, by definition, the penitent's secrets will
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go no further (except instantaneously to an already all-knowing God). Censorship stands, in contrast, as a provisional way station on the prescribed path of the discourse from writer to intended readers. The sacred duty of confession translates, in this secular economy of censorship, into a punctual enactment of desiring. In routing her manuscript through Wolmar, Julie cannot help but send an implicit metamessage along the following lines: This, Monsieur (le Censeur), is what I desire to say publicly (about what I have desired). Do I have your permission to do so?

To the guarantee of confession provided by the penitent’s willingness to forgo the self-censorship of ordinary politeness and inflict personal injury on the confessor, written confession to the censor thus adds the further guarantee of an undeniable, if not necessarily confessed, desire that the text eventually see the light of day. And when there are ways around the pseudosacred duty of submission to censorship—supposing, for example, that Julie could have gotten to the lovers’ old mailbox and posted her letter directly to Saint-Preux—the desire for publication may be doubled by or predicated on a likewise unconfessed desire for the prior stamp of approval or legitimacy that only the external censorship can confer. There is, in this instance, no absolute compulsion to pinpoint the sin or sins, or to decide on their degree of actual sinfulness, only a consciousness on the part of the penitent of having committed some acts of exorbitant and overwhelming desire.

But a delicate balance still needs to be maintained. If the censor-in-the-confessor were to overshadow the confessor-in-the-censor, the new-age penitent would be in for new causes of anxiety. Confession is, of course, beside the main point of literary censorship, which deals indiscriminately with texts of all stripes and degrees of subversiveness. Left to the exclusive devices of censorship, the writer might, for cause, worry about the sincerity of texts formulated with the censor qua censor in mind or not entirely out of mind. A voice of censorship may have so thoroughly infiltrated and inflected the process of composition as to make submission to the literal censor a redundant, pro forma gesture, or what amounts, in fact, to a denial of denial. Has the writer, in fact, “foreseeing which passages were likely to be objected to by the censor, ... forestalled him by softening them down, making some slight modification or contenting himself with hints and allusions to what he really wants to
And how does the writer feel about the prospect of complicity with an institution that, unlike institutionalized confession, would seem at best to have the bad name of a necessary evil? For, even as an institution, censorship has almost always required that the political orthodoxy on whose behalf it operates offer at least a pretense of exculpatory rationalization. But then again, the ability to identify a real-life censor "out there" may in fact protect the writer, if not against authorial censorship itself, at least against the intuition that there may be any such thing.

On the other hand, were a secular confessor like Wolmar to be stripped of his concomitant mandate to censor, his reading would serve no transcendent social end. He would read (or not) on his own time, for his own reasons, at his own discretion, and he might, at any time, vacate the confessional or disrupt the confessional process by some move toward resumption of normal interpersonal relations. The exorbitant metademand that may or may not accede to consciousness of the penitent has no longer to do with getting the text out and/or approved, but rather with monopolizing the floor and prolonging autofractal discourse beyond socially acceptable limits.

It is to just such a desire that Rousseau, as author of the *Lettres à Malesherbes*, freely admits in the metaconfessional aside of Letter 3: "Quoique j'aime trop à parler de moi, je n'aime pas en parler avec tout le monde, c'est ce qui me fait abuser de l'occasion quand je l'ai et qu'elle me plait. Voila mon tort et mon excuse" (1:1142). Rousseau does not admit directly to abusing Malesherbes's indulgence and liking to write in confidence to *him*. But through the very deviousness of effacing the interlocutor, less becomes more than full disclosure. What the admission leaves largely unsaid and, in consequence, looming large is Rousseau's pleasure in knowing that, with "Monsieur" on the receiving end (and not "tout le monde"), there is little enough reason to fear the worst-case scenario whereby one-sided confession would degenerate into a mutual exchange of confidences. A "Monsieur" named Malesherbes was as unlikely to confide in return as, say, a censor in receipt of an author's unsolicited manuscript. Malesherbes, in fact, came honestly, and more honestly than the self-appointed Wolmar of Rousseau's prophetic fiction, by the title and good offices of censor-confessor. Everyone knew—and no one better than Rousseau—that among the
duties that befell Malesherbes in his governmental post as Directeur de la Librairie was that of administering the Parisian Office of Censorship.25

THE CENSOR AS BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE CONFESSORS

Censorship was an inescapable fact of eighteenth-century publishing history, and the Librairie was a prominent landmark on the literary landscape. Government regulations called for routine submission to the office of all manuscripts for which authorization was being sought to publish in France. Having been recruited as censors, experts in the field to which manuscripts sought admittance were instructed to scrutinize them for anything libelous or otherwise offensive to church, state, or public morals.26 These censors could, on the basis of their findings, recommend against publication, make a provisional recommendation for publication pending substantial editing, or authorize publication in one of three ways: by granting an outright permission, a permission tacite, or a tolérance. The last two categories existed in large part for the protection of the censors themselves. In the case of a recognizably important but controversial book, publication could be ensured but not endorsed by a censor's simply looking the other way.27 And insofar as no individual censor could be expected to catch all instances of libel or heterodoxy, the permission tacite was a useful compromise measure. Permissions tacites were recorded only in Malesherbes's office (and not in the published books themselves), thus guaranteeing anonymity to censors and protecting the inadvertently permissive among them from eventual prosecution as accessories after the fact to crimes of authorship.28

Beaumarchais's ironizing Figaro captures these principles and procedures of the office quite accurately in the process of a bitter denunciation:

[P]ourvu que je ne parle en mes écrits ni de l'autorité, ni du culte, ni de la politique, ni de la morale, ni des gens en place, ni des corps en crédit, ni de l'Opéra, ni des autres spectacles, ni de personne qui tienne à quelque chose, je puis tout imprimer librement, sous l'inspection de deux ou trois Censeurs. Pour profiter de cette douce liberté, j'annonce un écrit périodique, et croyant n'aller sur les brisées d'aucun autre, je le nomme Journal Inutile.29
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It nonetheless bears recalling that individuals living in the vicinity of vigorous censorship tend to make unwarranted generalizations about the institution on the sole basis of their own experience. The unpublished and unpublishable Figaro thus represents the isolated exception to a general rule of variably open, easy, and understandable accommodation with the Office of Censorship on the part of Enlightenment authors. In this business of granting permissions, it was hardly a case of hardened lines between “us” and “them.” The office frequently employed as censors authors whose own works stood, on other occasions, to be censored—an instance of particularly inspired casting being that of d’Alembert’s volunteering to censor and so expedite the publication of Rousseau’s Lettre à d’Alembert. In whatever political terms one chooses to cast the ancien régime, little happened in its waning moments to refute David Tribe’s cool-headed conclusion: “Even in totalitarian countries censorship is usually exercised in a less ham-fisted way than is commonly appreciated, so that most writers are not pure rebels but share some of the interests and prejudices surrounding them.”

For his part, Rousseau never opposed literary censorship in principle, although he did, on several occasions, declare himself perfectly capable of doing his own. Out of unwillingness to let the Genevan Conseil censor his Dedication to the Second Discourse, Rousseau wrote: “Mon expérience m’a donc fait prendre la ferme résolution d’être désormais mon unique Censeur.” And Rousseau did, at times, admit to frustration with the system’s inevitable inconsistencies: “Monsieur de Malesherbes m’élève des scrupules sur les sentiments de Julie et de Saint-Preux qu’il n’a point élevés sur les miens propres dans mon discours sur l’inégalité ni même dans ma lettre à M. d’Alembert.” Convinced that Malesherbes’s proposals for “retranchemens” in Julie added up to a “mutilation . . . choquante,” Rousseau launched a third-person bombastic retort (e.g., “Quoi! Monsieur de Malesherbes veut-il que je renie ma foi?”). The bombast no doubt has something to do with the Head Censor’s failure to appreciate what a thorough job of pre-censoring the novelist had already done, in part by thematizing censorship in the character of Wolmar. The Rousseau who railed at efforts on the part of Malesherbes’s theologically minded deputies to “convert” Julie was, after all, the author of a “perfectly adequate” conversion already on the books (2:363–65).

Rousseau’s conspiracy theory of a Jesuit plot to suppress and later
mutilate *Emile* is likewise grounded in the institutional reality of censorship. His wildest imaginings yield a horror story of censorship infiltrated by a seditious fringe element, wrested from the control of the proper authorities, and allowed to run rampant. Evidence we shall turn up later suggests that at some level Rousseau himself knew *Emile* to deserve the dreaded hatchet job of his demonic Censor-Jesuits, "the persecutor always being in some sense the victim's double, if only as a projection effect." But it is also suggestive that, on this singular occasion, Rousseau did get back in touch with reality, precisely by contacting and unburdening himself to Malesherbes, the proper authority. Our own moment in literary history is quite tellingly reflected by the fact that authors' death wishes for their books run toward computer failure or lackluster advertising campaigns. The Jesuit plot theory may be just as illustrative of a former age when authors really dealt, on a day-to-day basis and even in their fantasy lives, with censorship. From too far away, we tend to view that censorship too monolithically and not myopically enough when we alternately deplore and dignify it as our ancestors' special albatross and challenge to greatness.

And, for better or worse, from 1750 to 1763 Malesherbes was the man in charge at the Office of Censorship. For his work there, he earned the grudging respect even of Voltaire. For one of Malesherbes's para-professional initiatives, "allowing pages of the manuscript of the *Encyclopédie* to be hidden away from the eyes of the police in his own house," he has since been reductively romanticized as "the Enlightenment's Trojan Horse in the Camp of Authoritarianism." In fact, reflecting in retirement on his experience, Malesherbes would write of having come to view institutionalized censorship as impractical and intellectually undesirable. But, for the duration of his tenure, which included occasional forays into hands-on involvement with day-to-day operations, Malesherbes seems to have exercised his administrative functions as scrupulously, conscientiously, and fair-mindedly as possible. He was more of a "writer's censor" than some, and yet, ever the government's representative.

It was this middle man that Rousseau had in mind when he serendipitously got his letters to the censor in under the wire. In no position to know that Malesherbes would resign his office the following year, Rousseau had every reason to connect, even confuse, the individual with the charge. The parallelism of their two careers is so striking that Male-
sherbes acceded to his post at the Librairie, in 1750, just in time to pass judgment on Rousseau’s First Discourse. Symptomatically, thirteen years and countless official encounters later, Rousseau’s letter of condolence to the “retiree” evoked the compensations of the private life, to which the writer wrongly supposed the ex-director to be returning: “occupé des charmes de la littérature, vous n’êtes plus forcés d’en voir les calamités.” Malesherbes found himself obliged to remind Rousseau that, far from being retired, he still retained his other “charge” (as Premier Président de la Cour des Aides). The opening line of Rousseau’s letter of condolence (“J’use rarement, Monsieur, de la permission que vous m’avez donnée de vous écrire”) is likewise typical. It salutes in Malesherbes an individual whom Rousseau never quite forgets to be in the business of granting permissions. Many among even the most personal of Rousseau’s letters to Malesherbes parrot the refrain “Permettez-moi,” which had launched their correspondence with a request that the director not allow the Second Discourse to be circulated in France prior to its distribution in Geneva. The correspondence thus illustrates a general truth about autobiographical discourse: “Just as portions of the author’s identity may be treated as irrelevant or undistinguished, aspects of the audience’s individual or collective identity may be more or less cavalierly neglected.” What Rousseau almost never neglects in writing to Malesherbes are the professional bases of their relationship.

In fact, however much he appreciated the occasional warmth of this working relationship, Rousseau was, as a rule, far from wanting “his” Malesherbes for a generic friend or protector. It came as an unpleasant surprise to learn that the Head Censor could forget himself to the point of acting “out of character.” To wit, the instructive chapter of their dealings about Julie. Having opted for printing in Amsterdam, the penurious novelist proposed that Malesherbes receive the proofs and forward them to him—provided, of course, that “cette grace” not prove too “onéreuse.” Rousseau evidently relied too heavily on Malesherbes to understand that he was being provided with an opportunity to do his official duty of censoring. The author could not hide his disappointment at Malesherbes’s handling of the request as routine (“Il n’y a aucun homme de lettres un peu connu à qui je ne procure la même facilité”) and speeding the proofs along their way unopened. Against the censor’s insensitivity and dereliction of duty, the author went on to lodge a formal complaint: “Si malgré nos conventions vous vous faites un scrupule
d'ouvrir les pacquets, comment puis-je, Monsieur, ne pas m'en faire un de souffrir qu'ils vous [soient] adressés. Quand M. Rey vous a demandé cette permission, nous avons songé, lui et moi, que puisqu'il falloit toujours que le livre passât sous vos yeux comme Magistrat, vous vous feriez un plaisir, comme ami et protecteur des lettres d'en rendre l'envoi utile au libraire et commode à l'Editeur."

It is against this background of resistance by Rousseau to the "decensoring" of relations with Malesherbes that the move to engineer decensored relations by and in the Lettres takes on added relief. Not that the Lettres ever formally inscribe the censor in his office. It is, rather, the conspicuous censoring of the censor that elevates a fact of biography among others to the status of that which, axiomatically and fundamentally true, would be "needless to say" and does not bear repeating. Given the two correspondents' mutual understanding, there was no need for Rousseau to gloss the possessive in his phrase "Vos gens de lettres" (1:1143). Already, Letter 2's beginnings of a life story had appealed discreetly to Malesherbes the censor in giving a new twist to the primal catastrophe of Jean-Jacques's precocious reading. On this occasion, Rousseau systematically suppresses all signs of personal agency: "A six ans Plutarque me tomba sous la main, à huit je le savois par cœur; j'avois lu tous les romans, ils m'avoient fait verser des seaux de larmes, avant l'age où le cœur prend intérêt aux romans" (1:1134). Even the young Rousseau does not but will have read, as though the Fates themselves had dropped a copy of Plutarch into his lap. But this is obviously not what happened; the child must have gotten his hands on the wrong books as a result of someone's dereliction of duty. Where, in Rousseau's hour of need, were those curbs on free expression to which even the most enlightened and permissive societies tend to subscribe, curbs aimed at protecting the "innocence of children"? By tacitly indicting Isaac Rousseau on this single count of failure to censor, the Lettres embrace the censor in Malesherbes as fundamentally constitutive of their own more perfect father confessor.

It is, then, as though answering the call for a censor who would have made all the difference in Rousseau's life and who can still exercise a decisive impact on his life story that Letter 4 summons Malesherbes from the wings of discourse and gives rebirth, in the here and now, to a "vous né d'un sang illustre." In the recitation of Malesherbes's indictable existential links to the nobility and political establishment, the title of Directeur de la Librairie is conspicuous by its absence. And rightly so: it is the
censor whom Rousseau seeks to take away from all that by ostentatiously disrupting his own syllogism in progress. With major (I hate the high and mighty) and minor (You are one of them) premises firmly in place, the letter veers off. In defiance of formal logic and of the confessional logic that Julie's direct hits on her confessor had raised to an art form, Rousseau's sentence comes to rest on the “mille biens” (1:1145) accorded him by Malesherbes from the time immemorial when the censor only knew of the author and vice versa.

More than anything else, it is this evocation of an impersonal, strictly professional past that allows Rousseau to make an unprecedented “occasion,” in the ceremonial sense of the word, of his having happened to confess to the censor. In the normal course of events, personal letters are so obviously extraneous to literature and so unquestionably exempt from censorship, providing no attempt is made at publication, that no one would think to make the point. Only in the particular instance of letters addressed to the censor for his eyes only does the point of deviation from standard literary practice emerge with something like the force of a radical departure or absolute retirement. Even Julie's deathbed letter, which was destined to complete its prescribed trajectory through Wolmar posthumously, does not cover the exceptional case of letters voluntarily dead-ended in the hands of the censor-confessor. What Malesherbes will have received are not merely personal and confidential letters, but letters self-consciously conceived as short-circuiting the process of literature as usual. Omitting Malesherbes's title will have become Rousseau's way of hinting at the relevance of literature as that which an extraordinary rhetorical situation has managed to render uniquely irrelevant.

If, for once, Malesherbes does not censor, but only hears confession, it must follow that Rousseau does not write mémoires in any mundane, run-of-the-mill sense of the word. He engages, rather, in the pseudosacred business of making his confession. It is, finally, this chance to knowingly disregard his interlocutor's existential identity that brings out the self-conscious and self-confident innovator in Rousseau. The Lettres break new ground. As the first of Rousseau's absolutely freestanding self-portraits, they exit a worst of all possible worlds, one where liminary self-portraiture carried out more or less clandestinely had remained a satellite of real literature and subject to precisely the same guidelines for admissibility to publication. For once, the old rules are momentarily and momentously suspended: Rousseau can, with the other's blessing, move
his self to center stage and think to write a life story no less unique than its subject.

To be sure, the *Confessions* would look back on the *Lettres*, “en quelque façon le sommaire de ce que j’expose ici” (1:569), as the kind of by-the-book, unapologetic preface that the *Encyclopédie* recommended and Rousseau himself had attempted when he summarized the First Discourse in the *Préface de Narcisse*. It would even be possible to read the *Lettres* as Rousseau’s best extant attempt at dedication to the Maréchal and Maréchale de Luxembourg: Letter 4 tells finally of Rousseau’s having been seduced out of solitude to live “au Chateau de Montmorenci” by the exceptional “chaleur de l’enthousiasme” that its “maîtres” inspire (1:1145). But the *Lettres* were never pressed, regardless, into either prefatory or dedicatory service. And the *Confessions* make the point that the *Lettres* were left unpublished, despite Rousseau’s having taken all but the final step in that direction. He had made copies of the letters that, on request, Malesherbes returned to sender (1:569), and he had given them the unifying title of a single opus: “Quatre lettres à Monsieur le Président de Malesherbes contenant le vrai tableau de mon caractère et les vrais motifs de toute ma conduite” (1:1131). It was nonetheless only fitting that the *Lettres* should be left just out of the margins and the loop of literature: they thereby remained free to commemorate the occasion on which Rousseau’s self-portraiture found a way to leave the (publishing) world behind and to closet itself in the confessional.

Rousseau hastens to make clear that his spiriting Malesherbes away from the prevailing social order should not be construed as a gesture of political subversion. The aim was not to do away with censorship, but merely to liberate a would-be autobiographer from literature. Lest Malesherbes get the wrong idea, Letter 4 closes by relating the recurring “dream” that the Letters themselves fulfill symbolically, but which cannot come true in any real-life context:

J’ai cent fois supposé dans mes rêves M. de Luxembourg point Duc, mais [sic] Maréchal de France, mais bon Gentilhomme de Campagne habitant quelque vieux château, et J. J. Rousseau point auteur, point faiseur de livres, mais ayant un esprit mediocre, et un peu d’acquis, se présentant au Seigneur Chatelain, et à la Dame, leur agréant, trouvant auprès d’eux le bonheur de sa vie, et contribuant au leur; si pour rendre le rêve plus agréable vous me permettiez de pousser d’un coup d’épaule le château de Malesherbes à demi lieue de là, il me semble Monsieur qu’en rêvant
de cette maniere je n’aurois de longtems envie de me reveiller.
(1:1146)

It is not to promote “J. J. Rousseau” that the dream-come-true den-otes “M’ de Luxembourg,” but specifically to remove literature from the equation of social inequality. “Point auteur, point faiseur de livres”—that is precisely the point—Rousseau would not need nor would he merit so powerful a protector. There would be no call for the specter of censorship to mediate happy relations with that protector; the protégé would no longer be obliged to see his lord and lady in the discomfiting guise of peers of the very realm that censorship normally defends against bookmakers of his ilk. The censor-turned-neighbor could be added to the picture at any time, as an “agreeable” afterthought and gratuitous embellishment. Asking permission to shove “le chateau de Malesherbes” into his own vicinity, Rousseau renders appropriately forcible the fait accompli of uprooting the censor and dismantling the three-tiered structure where censorious middlemen keep authors’ wishes in line with political orthodoxy. For the Letters themselves have done everything in their only symbolic power to replace that structure with the twin towers of confessional tête-a-tête in a self-consciously transgressive “ton familier” (1:1133).

EXTENDING THE INSTITUTIONAL MODEL:
The Inside Story of Censorship

Of course—as Freud’s dream censor is wont to object when, caught napping, it must resort to staircase wit—it’s only a dream. And Rousseau would live to wake up from his “long rêve” (1:1146). His Confessions would tell a different story of censorship, if only because censorship was their own inevitable destination and a subject that, as a faithful record of waking life, they could not always avoid. Full accounting for the career of any eighteenth-century homme de lettres demanded discussion of the bureaucratic maneuvering that consumed so much of the time and energy even of the sometimes desultory Rousseau. The Confessions oblige, making no secret of Malesherbes’s official involvement in Rousseau’s attempts to publish his various works, and often going into considerable detail. Only at the moment of actually evoking the Lettres do the Confessions follow their lead in censoring the censor, but with different results.
To readers already well versed in the details of Malesherbes's curriculum vitae (and in for quite a few subsequent reminders), it must look suspiciously as though the Confessions wished to see the recipient of Rousseau's Lettres as having taken his work home and acted the censor even when off duty. Rather than respect the inviolability of the confessional, Malesherbes, as would-be censor in private service to Rousseau, is said to have expressed approval of the letters, shown them around to a broader Parisian public, even—as we know not to have been the case—had copies made himself at the author's behest (1:569). In vague recollection of having inscribed we-know-who in the confines of a private confessional, Rousseau uses the selection and discreet distortion of facts to domesticate the censor as such, to ply the public official over to his side—even, this time around, to thumb his nose in the general direction of the rich and powerful whose interests Malesherbes had been commissioned to protect and at whose pleasure he normally served.

Or, rather, this is one reading to which we are pointed precisely by that (Malesherbes's title) which Rousseau pointedly omits to mention. Then again, the omission may seem pointed only because what we know to be omitted (censorship) is itself a matter of selective omission, and because, once admitted to consciousness, the possibility of censorship runs so rampant through our minds as to infiltrate the environs with an ever-increasing degree of probability. Say the word—or better yet, in a more perfect marriage of form and content—write the word under erasure, and suddenly we find ourselves being pressured into a state of greater than usual vigilance, and into a mode of microscopic analysis. It takes only the vaguest rumor of censorship on the agenda to make us watch an author's words for signs that more may be going on here than meets the eye. Axiomatic foreknowledge of psychic censorship has been the inveterate alibi of symptomatic, "in-depth" reading at least since Freud posited the metaphorical extendability of the institutional model and positioned a censoring agency squarely within the individual psyche. In Rousseau, by contrast, punctual cues do the work of axiomatic foreknowledge. The metaphor is still in the making, always provisional, and always within sight of the institutional base.

A portion of the Malesherbes-Rousseau correspondence dealing with Julie illustrates what I mean by a tendency or compulsion to internalize censorship known or surmised to be in the air. There being no legal prohibitions against contrefaçons or reprintings in France of books pub-
lished abroad, Malesherbes offered Rousseau the opportunity of naming his own publisher for the inevitable reprinting of *Julie*. Surprised that the director would even consider granting a *permission* for his novel, Rousseau took Malesherbes to school on "la rigueur de la censure" in France. The director would seem to have forgotten the difference between tolerating foreign imports and permitting domestic publication. To a disconcertingly overpermissive censor, Rousseau proposed the example of his own moral rigor: he vowed to dissociate himself entirely from the French edition and balked especially, "en repos de conscience," at the thought of deriving personal gain from an enterprise detrimental to the interests of Rey.

It took every argument Malesherbes could muster to provoke Rousseau's letter of capitulation, which begins as follows: "J'ai fait, Monsieur, tout ce que vous avez voulu, et le consentement du Sr Rey ayant levé mes scrupules je me trouve riche de vos bienfaits. L'intérêt que vous daignez prendre à moi est au dessus de mes remercimens."

But, en route to this resolution, the episode will have brought out and into play the censor within. Why should Rousseau have overreacted to the prospect of receiving a permit for *Julie*? No doubt because he did not or—more precisely—had claimed not to want one. On the occasion of sending Malesherbes an advance copy of the novel for his personal library, Rousseau had added, somewhat gratuitously: "Je vous Supplie, Monsieur, que ce recueil ne Sorte pas de vos mains jusqu'à Sa publication. Alors je suis bien sur que son Succès ne tentera personne de le contrefaire, et bien plus encore que vous ne le permettrez point." Permission being the one thing we never receive without asking for it, or, when it is granted "spontaneously," without the presupposition of an unspoken or deviously spoken (i.e., censored) desire, Rousseau evidently assumed Malesherbes to have made such a presupposition. For the director to pass directly to the details of reprinting meant that an expression of nondesire or not of desire by Rousseau must not have been taken seriously. But who or what was to blame if not a malfunctioning of the internal censorship, which must have contented itself with a too transparent translation of desire into its opposite, by allowing the word *permission* to be placed into circulation.

The malfunctioning goes unacknowledged; malaise akin to that of the Freudian dreamer whose wish will have "surprised" the dream censor nonetheless sought relief in two ways: through projection of overpermissiveness onto an external permission-granting agency (Malesherbes
would be found remiss, inadequately rigorous), and through a belated public display of self-censorship (Malesherbes would witness a thoroughgoing sacrifice of self-interest to generosity). In Rousseau’s letter of capitulation, the lifting of censorship misplaced onto a manufactured desire to profit goes hand in hand with a more adequate “censoring” of the residual desire for permission. “J’ai fait tout ce que vous avez voulu”—the reduction of all desiring to that of an external censor to grant permission commemorates through denial the heretofore unspeakable operations of the imperfectly vigilant internal censorship.

It is to experiences like this one that the Lettres à Malesherbes called a temporary, stabilizing halt, by writing even the institutional model out of epistolary relations. The Rousseau of the Confessions seems, conversely, to be inching toward a depth psychology featuring something along the lines of literary censorship in a pivotal role. Politically speaking, he had every reason to proceed with caution, lest he surprise himself in the act of having embraced, along with the institution’s modus operandi, its institutional loyalties to the high and mighty. That distasteful prospect gives rise to emphatic expressions of denial in the Confessions passage that recalls Jean-Jacques’s disagreement with Malesherbes over what to do with an aphoristic formula in Julie (1:512). Both recognize that the aphorism—“la femme d’un Charbonnier est plus digne de respect que la maîtresse d’un Prince”—might be mistaken by the king’s mistress, Mme de Pompadour, for a disagreeable allusion to her own status. But Jean-Jacques declares the deed of censorship to be already done, by him, and consciously so: only upon reading his manuscript had he made the connection and so substituted the word “Prince” for the original, more incriminating “Roi.” His conscience is doubly clear. To swear that he had no “application” in mind “dans la chaleur de la composition” is to address directly the question of malicious (or censorable) intent, but also to void the creative process itself of internalized pressure from the top to censor along party lines. Guilty of an illicit thought, Jean-Jacques might—perish the thought—have taken unconscious steps to couch it in licit form. His manuscript might have arrived at the Office of Censorship already bearing traces not only of lèse majesté but of the king’s censorship and the concubine’s pseudolegitimacy.

This brush with unconscious orthodoxy is too close not to call for the extreme measure of projecting the excesses of servile censorship onto Malesherbes. The Confessions catch the Head Censor in the act of
deleting the entire sentence and gluing a substitute page “aussi proprement qu’il fut possible” into the copy of Julie destined for Pompadour’s perusal. The deed was, however, not neatly enough done to preclude her detecting this “tour de passe-passe” or sleight of hand. It is from censorship become, in Tribe’s words, ham-fisted that Rousseau thinks to dissociate himself by this act of poetic justice. The same moral might, however, be applied with as much pertinence to the autobiography’s high-visibility “cut” to Malesherbes as to the latter’s likewise well-intentioned, if clumsily executed, cutting and pasting. The excesses of denial through projection onto the “real” censor so closely mimic those of a laughably literal, even parodic version of literary censorship as to suggest that, with the king out of the picture, things might be different and less defensive. This is not the moment to entertain the possibility that something like censorship may go on even “dans la chaleur de la composition.” But the more propitious moment will come when receipt of Lettres addressed to and not through him will put Malesherbes in the position of acting not on behalf of the crown but on his own initiative.

Seizing that initiative, the Confessions complete their discussion of the Lettres à Malesherbes with a passage that permits of two diametrically opposite allegorical accountings for the three-stage chronology: “Mémoires”/“Lettres”/“ce que j’expose ici.” Rousseau’s relies heavily on the two-faced concept of supplémentarité to leave the question in a state of indeterminacy: “[P]ar l’esquisse tracée à la hâte dans ces quatre lettres, je tâchais de suppleer en quelque sorte aux Mémoires que j’avois projettes. Ces lettres qui plurent à M. de Malesherbes et qu’il montra dans Paris, sont en quelque façon le sommaire de ce que j’expose ici plus en détail et méritent à ce titre d’être conservées” (1:569). The twice or doubly supplemental Lettres not only take the place of a “vide” called “Mémoires” but, likewise and otherwise, coexist with the Confessions in the guise of “un surplus, une plénitude enrichissant une autre plénitude, le comble de la présence.” These lines, which change meanings of “le supplément” in mid-course and use the deictic “ici” to formalize thoroughgoing banishment of the Lettres to nonpresence, might well have inspired Derrida’s provisional conclusions about supplementarity per se: “Chacune des deux significations s’efface à son tour ou s’estompe discrètement devant l’autre. Mais leur fonction commune se reconnaît à ceci: qu’il s’ajoute ou qu’il se substitue, le supplément est extérieur, hors de la positivité à laquelle il se surajoute, étranger à ce qui, pour être par
lui remplace, doit être autre que lui. A la différence du complément, disent les dictionnaires, le supplément est une ‘addition extérieure’ (Robert).”

The “censored” (and literally condensed) version of the life story would warrant conserving as an alleged outsider to both the “Mémoires” and the Confessions. It provides documentary counterproof that neither the remembering nor the confessing has been affected or infected by the censorship “out there.”

But to stop at this point would be to resist knowing that the Lettres qua lettres or letters “à ce titre” also serve to underwrite the “Mémoires”/Confessions polarity, investing one pole with the negativity of absence, the other with the positivity of presence. The Lettres lend substance to a diacritical mark of difference on the basis of which an unrealized before (of raw materials only) can be distinguished from an after of “exposure” to the light of day. And in this instance, censorship can be identified as that extra something without which the Confessions would not be wholly themselves. Rousseau’s chronology models the psychic censorship through whose good graces primal memories and desires are nowadays universally assumed to emerge from the unconscious and accede to acceptably symbolic form.

Earmarking the Lettres for conservation is the Confessions’ way of remembering, symbolically, that censorship has underwritten every moment of Rousseau’s coming to confession.

The Confessions are as hesitant to affirm as to deny this reliance of confession on unconscious self-censorship and, in fact, have no business doing either. To admit directly to self-censorship would be to make a mockery of the confessional process, whose integrity depends on assurances that the penitent is telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth as far as he or she knows. But when knowledge of the truth extends to an intuition of self-censorship, not to say so would in turn be less than truthful, “en sorte que tout est faute,” both avowal and refusal to avow.

In the absence of institutionalized assurances that everyone censors as much as everyone sins, censorship becomes the most guilty and the least confessable of sins. The most guilty, insofar as it renders all other secrets, as formulated, suspect; the least confessable in that suspicion is precisely what the penitent cannot afford to arouse. Caught in a double bind between the dictates of religious precedent and the murmurs of secular psychology, the Confessions do what they can to be honest with the autobiographical act. They leave the metaphorical connection with in-
stitutionalized censorship unmade but makeable and, on at least one occasion, use the chronology of their own telling to flee and embrace the occasion of metaphor.

TELLING AND KISSING: An Allegory of Censorship

Time will and will not tell in the suggestive passage from the Confessions that begins by establishing a precise temporal frame for a new chapter in Jean-Jacques’s adventures entitled “second voyage de Montmorenci de l’année 1760” (1:534). Starting now, and until further notice, we will learn what transpired in the course of the second visit paid by the Maréchal and Maréchale de Luxembourg to the country estate where Thérèse and Jean-Jacques have been installed as permanent guests. As is typical enough of the Confessions not to attract undue attention, the relevant memories are then filtered through a second, thematic screen: career developments take their accustomed distance from the private life and, in this instance, take precedence. A first paragraph is devoted in its entirety to developments surrounding Émile.

The manuscript having been completed, the issue of the hour is that of where to publish it. A disagreement pitting Jean-Jacques against the Maréchale and her eventual ally Malesherbes turns on the question of whether the Office of Censorship can be counted on to grant a permission tacite. An obstinately pessimistic Jean-Jacques second-guesses the king’s censorship, as though better qualified to do so than either the professional administrator or the aristocrat. He argues that there is no chance of obtaining a permission and that, without one, he absolutely does not want to “permettre . . . l’impression dans le Royaume” (1:534). A long (lost) letter from Malesherbes evidently provided reassurance that “la profession de foi du Vicaire Savoyard,” Émile’s most outwardly problematical passage, “étoit précisément une pièce faite pour avoir par tout l’approbation du genre humain, et celle de la Cour dans la circonstance” (1:534). Jean-Jacques was at last convinced to let the Maréchale go ahead with arrangements for publication, as though publication per se had ever been at issue. After all, what did Jean-Jacques know about censorship, except that “l’impression d’un livre qu’il [Malesherbes] approuvoit étoit par cela seul légitime” (1:534)?

The permission of an unusually “coulant” (for him) Head Censor thus becomes the necessary, sufficient, and profoundly arbitrary condition of legitimacy. The court’s opinion counts for as little as humanity’s in
a punctual act of legitimization that may very well reflect neither absolute justice nor even its parochial applications “dans le système que le Gouvernement avoit adopté” (1:534). But by a “scrupule” deemed “extraordinaire” Jean-Jacques refuses to back off from his prior insistence on foreign printing (1:534–35). There is no accounting for this scruple, unless Jean-Jacques knows more about Emile, censorship, or both than he lets on in this paragraph, which proceeds smartly through a few more minor stipulations to an emphatic conclusion: “Voilà exactement ce qui fut convenu entre Mad* de Luxembourg et moi, après quoi je lui remis mon manuscrit” (1:535). If the deal is closed, so too is the subject of Emile; Jean-Jacques has relinquisched the manuscript and claimed to want nothing further to do with it.

The change of subject from literary to real life is easily accomplished. Smoothing the transition to a new paragraph becomes a simple matter of using “Mad* de Luxembourg” as the antecedent for a subject pronoun and recalling the prevailing temporal frame: “Elle avoit amene à ce voyage sa petite fille Mademoiselle de Boufflers, aujourd’hui Mad* la Duchesse de Lauzun” (1:535). By more than satisfying the demands of narrative coherence, the text earns the right to forge ahead, to forget, and to lull its unsuspecting readers into forgetfulness of its own immediate past. But rather than exercise that right, the narrative doubles back. And not only at the level of recorded time, whose linear unfolding the pluperfect “avoit améné” already disrupts, transporting the narrative back to the starting line of the “second voyage.” Persistent verbal echoes work to bring the publishing story back into play in the course of a supposedly unrelated (or superficially related) domestic drama. Look for “Elle me permit” to revive the issue of “permission,” for “ma maussaderie ordinaire” to resurrect “un scrupule extraordinaire,” for “je censure” to answer “la censure,” for “la Cour” to resurface as “le pouvoir des Rois.”

Elle avoit améné à ce voyage sa petite fille Mademoiselle de Boufflers, aujourd’hui Mad* la Duchesse de Lauzun. Elle s’appelloit Ame­lie. C’étoit une charmante personne. Elle avoit vraiment une figure, une douceur, une timidité virginal. Rien de plus aimable et de plus interes­sant que sa figure, rien de plus tendre et de plus chaste que les sen­timens qu’elle inspiroit. D’ailleurs e’toit une enfant; elle n’avoit pas onze ans. Mad* la Mareschale qui la trouvoit trop timide faisoit ses efforts pour l’animer. Elle me permit plusieurs fois de lui donner un baiser; ce que je fis avec ma maussaderie ordinaire. Au lieu des gen-
tillesses qu’un autre eut dites à ma place, je restois-là muet, interdit, et je ne sais lequel étoit le plus honteux de la pauvre petite ou de moi. Un jour je la rencontrai seule dans l’escalier du petit Château: elle venoit de voir Therese avec laquelle sa Gouvernante étoit encore. Faut de savoir que lui dire, je lui proposai un baiser que dans l’innocence de son cœur elle ne refusa pas, en ayant receu un le matin même par l’ordre de sa grand maman et en sa présence. Le lendemain, lisant l’Emile au chevet de Made la Mareschale, je tombai précisément sur un passage où je censure avec raison ce que j’avois fait la veille. Elle trouva la réflexion très juste, et dit là dessus quelque chose de fort sensé qui me fit rougir. Que je maudis mon incroyable bêtise qui m’a si souvent donné l’air vil et coupable quand je n’étois que sot et embarrasé! bêtise qu’on prend même pour une fausse excuse dans un homme qu’on sait n’être pas sans esprit. Je puis jurer que dans ce baiser si répréhensible ainsi que dans les autres, le cœur et les sens de Mlle Amélie n’étoient pas plus purs que les miens, et je puis jurer même que si dans ce moment j’avois pu éviter sa rencontre, je l’aurois fait; non qu’elle ne me fit grand plaisir à voir, mais par l’embarras de trouver en passant quelque mot agréable à lui dire. Comment se peut-il qu’un enfant même intimidation un homme que le pouvoir des Rois n’a pas effrayé. Quel parti prendre? Comment se conduire denué de tout impromptu dans l’esprit? Si je me force à parler aux gens que je rencontre, je dis une balourdise infailliblement : si je ne dis rien, je suis un misanthrope, un animal farouche, un Ours. Une totale imbécilite m’eût été bien plus favorable: mais les talens dont j’ai manqué dans le monde ont fait les instruments de ma perte des talens que j’eus à-part-moi. (1:535-36)

Thanks to the aforementioned linguistic doublings, a schematic allegory of censorship doubles the narrative proper, as though in defiance of Jean-Jacques’s much-protested reluctance at the anecdotal level to test “la censure.” The allegorical intertext does not surface without a struggle; on the contrary, by continuing to marshal resistance to the substantive connection between the two paragraphs, the text acts out the very censorship about which it dares not speak directly; “[s]uperficial associations replace deep ones if the censorship makes the normal connecting paths impassable.”65 Indeed, the intent to leave nothing unconfessed both proscribes and prescribes confession to censorship. If the autobiographer is to live up to his word—“je dirai tout, je n’omettrais pas une de mes fautes, pas même une de mes mauvaises pensées”66—there can be no omitting the feeling (or “mauvaise pensée”) of having lied and continuing to lie by omission. The tracks of censorship must be covered, but also be re-coverable, in both senses of the word. Here, as wherever
What the Censor Saw

censorship is not pathological, it will not blot out, but rather compromise at every turn with the returning repressed, which happens, in this exemplary instance, to be a subtext of censorship. At the two levels of *énoncé* and *énonciation*, that censorship will dissimulate its own operations, but only partially.

And so the narrative takes its time and an entire sentence ("Elle s'appelloit Amélie") to reveal the granddaughter's given name, even when the preceding sentence's two titles, "Mademoiselle de Boufflers" and "Madame la Duchesse de Lauzun" (that Mlle de Boufflers), have established her extratextual identity beyond the shadow of a doubt. It is as though, freed from referential duty, the name "Amélie" were placed into circulation as an approximate anagram for "Emile." The text exchanges one for the other on a regular basis, from the moment of relinquishing the manuscript to Mme la Maréchale and receiving in its stead "sa petite fille." One day Jean-Jacques is kissing Amélie; the next day—and the next sentence, as though by virtue of a cinematic jump cut—finds him rereading the supposedly closed book of *Emile*. Returning tit for tat, a feminine for a masculine, a biological child for a brainchild, the Amélie/Emile polarity surreptitiously couples the two paragraphs and installs unspoken censorship at the source of polarization and residual difference. For "Amélie" to become "Emile" and vice versa requires only that letters be scrambled (displacement) and a single letter dropped or added (condensation).

In further testimony to this (in)visible process of linkage, the two poles also exchange properties. The text eventually lets slip a masculine "un enfant" with reference to "Mlle Amélie" and, at the outset, endows the child with the attributes of a work of art. Rousseau's "portrait" does not allow us to see Amélie, but only to see her as a thing of absolute beauty. She is so absolutely self-contained and self-sustaining as to defy misprision by any subjective beholder: "Elle avoit vraiment une figure, une douceur, une timidité virginale. Rien de plus aimable et de plus intéressant que sa figure, rien de plus tendre et de plus chaste que les sentiments qu'elle inspirait" (emphasis added). With this objet d'art, moreover, no censor could find fault; there is nothing even remotely corrupting about the influence it exerts—at least until Mme la Maréchale, in unmistakable imitation of Rousseau's Pygmalion (2:1228), tampers with aesthetic perfection and sets about bringing the portrait to life. Amélie as work of art is inspired by the substitution of Platonic categories of good and evil for the unpredictable vagaries of the institutionalized censorship.
to which her brother Emile was subject. Her perfection figures a desire that texts could be wholly virginal, and that desire would reside wholly in the censoring eye/I.

“D’ailleurs, c’était une enfant; elle n’avoit pas onze ans.” Tipping the balance of the previous period, the text protests too much—but no more than is necessary to rescue the text from unmediated innocence. In anticipation of filling the position of the artist-censor with Mme la Maréchale, the text fills in, censoring by implication the idea that Amélie could be thought of as desirable or desiring and, even as it censors, planting the thought squarely in our minds. Of course, by this point we have begun to wonder what the portrait of Amélie has to do with the story of Jean-Jacques; nothing better serves to arouse our suspicions than a too systematic suppression of the first person pronoun. But by denying subjectivity to the narrator-protagonist, the text points the ghost of an accusatory finger in our direction. The text’s feigning of ignorance where desire and censorship are concerned only prods us into a state of heightened awareness and blushing self-consciousness: how could we (want to) think “that” of a “me” that has yet to make an appearance in this paragraph? Rousseau obviously knows more about the fear of pedophilia and infantile desire than his later rhetorical question—“Comment se peut-il qu’un enfant même intimide un homme que le pouvoir des Rois n’a pas effrayé?”—admits directly. If Freud has it right, the force of a taboo is proportionately and circularly related to that of the (proscribed) desire—and hence, the fear—that the taboo may be violated: “The id says, ‘I want it’; the superego says, ‘How horrible’; and the ego says, ‘I am afraid.”

Of the three messages, Rousseau’s text voices the last, and whispers the others in passing. What it seems to resist more adamantly even than the intuition of transgressive sexuality is knowledge that “le pouvoir des rois” and the power of a child to intimidate should manifest themselves respectively in literary and in psychological censorship, and that the two should have converged in the here and now of a self-censoring text. “Que je maudis mon incroyable bêtise”—the exclamation launches a serious attempt at making for cover and diverting the domestic drama toward the Confessions’ time-honored paradigm of Jean-Jacques’s so-called “esprit de l’escalier” or staircase wit. But the diversion is noticeably forcible; the facts do not quite fit: in this instance, “esprit” will have deserted Jean-Jacques especially “dans l’escalier.” The very ineptness of the leap from
narrative ("qui me fit rougir") to metadiscursive commentary ("Que je maudis") and from an apparent sign of shame to the unexpected signified of foolishness betrays the inappropriateness of the familiar moral to a story that the staircase-wit paradigm cannot entirely domesticate.

Rousseau stretches to recontextualize the Amelie anecdote and to privilege the claims of metaphor (in the guise of Jean-Jacques's character) over those of metonymy or propinquity in the text (to the Emile material). But censorship infiltrates even the cover story of staircase wit, which, in this particular rephrasing, places Jean-Jacques in a situation-specific double bind: "Si je me force à parler aux gens que je rencontre, je dis une balourdise infailliblement: si je ne dis rien, je suis un misanthrope, un animal farouche, un Ours." The alternative that pits the inevitable gaffe against dehumanizing silence might be read as positing the equally pathological extremes of totally uncensored and totally censored discourse—that is, if speech itself did not partially censor (the wish not to speak), and silence did not result from a lifting of the censorship on that wish. Symptomatically, anacoluthon had earlier made silence into an attribute of being, rather than a viable alternative to speech: "Au lieu des gentillesses qu'un autre eut dites à ma place, je restois-là." For us speaking animals, there can be no escaping compromise between desire and censorship, except—and on this note, the passage thinks to conclude by exorcising the censor—in those writings where Jean-Jacques will have said what he wants to say and how he wants to say it, and given a "full" accounting of his "esprit."

The distinction between oral and written expression does not, of course, hold up to our scrutiny of the passage in progress. The tongue-tied protagonist has left his mark on a writer whose hands are likewise tied and whose narrative assumes the protagonist's dilemma. What can Mme la Maréchale have been thinking when she "permitted" Jean-Jacques to kiss Amelie? Or, for that matter, when she undertook, notwithstanding her agreement with him, to publish Emile in France? Doubly pressing, that line of questioning must, however, be repressed: the discourse cannot afford to question her permissiveness (for fear of exposing hidden desire) or to replicate it too exactly or eagerly (for fear of playing the hoodwinked censor). And yet, displaced, the question stands: what can Rousseau have been thinking at the moment of rendering Madame's injunction or "ordre" to kiss as a speech act of permission?

Censorship eventually, inevitably at issue—when Jean-Jacques
"falls," at the Maréchale’s “chevet,” on a singular passage of *Emile*—is censorship contained and fetishized in a text within the text. “Je censure”—what might pass, out of context, for a bold-faced confession to the censorship presently in progress is inscribed within the pages and the eternal present of another book, an elsewhere “où je censure avec raison ce que j’avois fait la veille.” Further blunting the confession and blurring the issue, semantic slippage inherent in the verb “censurer” authorizes translation of “je censure” as “I criticize.” Does this focus on censure as the simple expression of opinion preclude the other meaning of censorship as the placing of constraints on expression itself? Apparently not: even without tracking down the allusion to *Emile*, we cannot help noticing, in the periphrastic complement “ce que j’avois fait la veille,” evidence of inhibiting forces still at work. And no wonder that the *Confessions* talk around the kiss in the staircase, whose implications *Emile* had developed all too pointedly. In fact, what Amélie’s grandmother will have unknowingly done is take two pages (4:793–94) out of the book of Sophie’s mother, who permits Emile to kiss her daughter only under her own watchful, censoring (and not censorious) eye. “Je ne suis ni farouche, ni prude,” the mother explains; “je sais ce qu’il faut passer à la jeunesse folâtre, et ce que j’ai souffert sous mes yeux vous le prouve assés” (4:794). The treatise on education spells out clearly the decisive role of censorship in arbitrarily translating illicit impulses into licit acts. “L’occasion fait le larron”—*et le défait*. Rather than steal a kiss, “Emile... tourne un œil suppliant vers la mere, et croyant voir un signe de consentement s’approche en tremblant du visage de Sophie” (4:793). When the young lover, armed with what would amount in literary terms to a permission tacite, has gotten his wish, the narrator editorializes: “Quel baiser, s’il n’étoit pas pris sous les yeux d’une mere!” (4:794).

However, in the previous privacy of tête-à-tête with Sophie, Emile had already stolen a kiss (hence, the need to stage this one), and the adult preceptor or Jean-Jacques figure had done nothing to stop him—or to inform his pupil of the crucial difference that censorship makes (4:793). The mother’s remedial advice is ostensibly addressed to Emile: “Consultez votre ami sur vos devoirs, il vous dira quelle différence il y a entre les jeux que la présence d’un père et d’une mere autorise, et les libertés qu’on prend loin d’eux en abusant de leur confiance.” But that advice cannot help but strike the pedagogue—and the reader-in-the-text at
Madame’s bedside—with the force of a “réprimande” (or censure) addressed more to him than to his pupil (4:794).

So much for the rapport of tenuous juxtaposition that the autobiography’s superficial chrono-logic had taken pains to establish between the literary Emile and the real-life Amélie. That juxtaposition has been all but supplanted by the new configuration and guilty conscience of an intertextual mise en abîme; a depth dimension has been added to the Confessions text that misleadingly appropriates the mother’s censorship (and censuring). And more deeply embedded than any other in that text is the guilty secret of unwillingness to know better than Emile or Amélie. Small wonder that negative affect (“je rougis”) attaches directly not to the kiss in the staircase but to Mme la Maréchale’s expression of approval for a job of censorship well done. It is her indirectly reported direct discourse about censorship (“Elle dit là-dessus quelque chose de fort sensible”) that makes glaring and shameful the omission or indirection of such discourse in the present text. Of Jean-Jacques’s two crimes, stealing a kiss becomes the misdemeanor to which the Confessions confess in order to avoid prosecution for the more serious offense of plagiarizing the censor (proposing a kiss) without acknowledging the source. The indeterminate status of Amélie vis-à-vis desire matters less, finally, than that the presumed innocence of her “cœur” will have been equated with ignorance of censorship: “elle ne refusa pas, en ayant reçu un [baiser] le matin même par l’ordre de sa grand-maman et en sa présence.”

The narrative proper and the justificatory reprise go to extreme lengths to recapture that lost innocence for Jean-Jacques and, through him, for Rousseau’s act of confession. How gratuitous is the explanatory clause that places Amélie on the staircase, unless the circumstance of tête-à-tête between her and Rousseau’s respective gouvernantes is read as doing what it can to share the child’s childishness with him. How labored and yet how purposeful is the period that brackets the question of difference between “ce baiser si répréhensible” and “les autres” en route to declaring Amélie’s purity to be at best equal to that of Jean-Jacques. Of course, the avowed basis for comparison favorable to Jean-Jacques consists in “les coeurs et les sens,” not in censorship. In Freudian terms, the text tries to take the parental imperative against sensuality more seriously than the (in this case) competing imperative of obedience. Better that we should think the worst of our protagonists; better that Jean-Jacques’s desiring should become the bottom line of
willingness to sacrifice the opportunity of seeing—only seeing?—Amélie, than that we should linger too long or too inquisitively at Mme la Maréchale’s bedside.

Censorship and full confession make strange bedfellows. And yet, were it not for censorship there would be no Confessions, or so the paragraph’s barest outlines suggest. The autobiographical trademark of the first person remains absent from no fewer than seven initial sentences, five of which treat Amélie in isolation, and the first and last of which pair her with Mme la Maréchale in an exclusive and exclusionary relationship. The first person accedes to the text belatedly and indirectly, as the indirect object of a verb of censorship: “Elle me permit.” She censored, therefore I am. But when only the other censored, I could not speak, as anacoluthon makes abundantly clear. And when I only mouthed the words of the flesh-and-blood, external censor, I still managed to speak only of other things: “je lui proposai un baiser.” I could not, as it were, kiss and tell. Only now that “je censure,” can “je maudis”; only now, says the text metadiscursively, “je puis jurer . . . je puis jurer. . . .” Propelling the narrative toward discourse by and about the self, the censorship moves, always in the direction of greater intimacy, from somewhere out there (presumably the drawing room) to the transitional staircase, to the bedroom. Likewise, the paragraph at large gradually absorbs, personalizes, internalizes a chapter in publishing history where the issue of permissions and, more generally, the desires, interdictions, and fears inspired by censorship, “dans le système que le Gouvernement avait adopté,” figure prominently. Or rather, what figures prominently is Rousseau’s reading of that chapter with reference both to the publishing and to the text of his own Emile. As David Tribe points out: “Apart from academic specialists, writers on censorship tend to be interested parties. I do not mean simply that they are interested in removing, reducing or extending it. Inevitably their experiences are more personal than the cultural experiences they describe publicly, and from these they make unwarranted generalizations.”

In terms of our barest outlines, the eventual admission of pleasure at the sight of Amélie is perfectly adequate and rendered with perfect adequacy by parenthetical circumlocution and a restrictive subjunctive (“non qu’elle ne me fit grand plaisir à voir”). Displacement of accent and affect, the buffering of desire by indirection and irreality—such are among the essential operations of psychic censorship. And subjectifying
the discourse is in turn the essential desire accommodated by this censorship that, at long last, places Amélie's heretofore objective beauty in the eye of a particular beholder. In striving after self-consciousness, the Confessions stop just short of self-conscious censorship. "[S]i dans ce moment j'avois pu éviter sa rencontre, je l'aurois fait." The referentially ambiguous phrase "dans ce moment" can be taken to mean "way back then," but also "just now." The autobiographer hints that he would have avoided his own "chance" meeting with Amélie had there been any other way to confess to the constraints on confession. But, in fact, only the fabrication of an elaborate cover story permits the Confessions to commemorate, if not to remember, the conditions of their own elaboration.

Partial, devious, censored confession is preferable to the only alternative, no confession at all. This message is one that the tell-all text can neither appropriate nor expropriate entirely. It therefore resorts to allegory, both now and when it later enters voluntarily into a relationship of supplementarity with the Lettres à Malesherbes. In flirting with a tripartite scheme of psychic censorship ("Mémoires"/"Lettres"/"ce que j'expose ici"), the Confessions place a provisional mark of censorship on the Lettres. It does not follow, however, that psychic censorship is embraced or even self-consciously entertained within the missives to Malesherbes. On the contrary, the real-life censor whom the Lettres decline to name functions as a lightning rod. Censorship known but never acknowledged to exist beyond the pale of discourse keeps things literal and discourages the kind of allegorical applications that would—and, in the Confessions, do—depend on formal inscription of the institutional model.

The Lettres' final dream of a world without literature is thus challenged by the dream that the more knowing and inevitably literary Confessions attribute to the young Jean-Jacques. Newly exiled from Geneva, he is about to embark on a lifetime crusade: "Un seul Château bor­noit mon ambition. Favori du Seigneur et de la Dame, ami du frère, et protecteur des voisins, j'étois content; il ne m'en falloit pas davantage" (1:45). Glossing this variant of the dream of displacement, the Confessions gently mock the modesty that "limits" Jean-Jacques's ambitions to something along the lines of a new Copernican revolution or radical reconfiguration of the existing order. From the margins, the dreamer sees himself advancing disruptively to the center of the microcosm and reducing the remnants of the ancien régime to the status of constellations. It is, of course, this impossible dream of an
egocentric universe that the *Confessions* fulfill in Jean-Jacques's stead. Revolving around him, the landed nobility ceases to relate primarily to its land: the interloper as “favori” mediates even the coupling of “Seigneur” and “Dame”; as “amant,” he differentiates the parental orbit from that of “la Demoiselle” on the sole basis of his desiring. Only the constellation named not young lord (of the manor) but “frère” (of the young lady) retains an attachment other than to Jean-Jacques. An all but imperceptible passage from the feudal to the familial order infuses the dream with a measure of social realism. But, however extraneous to the archetypal fairy tale, the brother’s friendship also constitutes the necessary addendum that legitimizes the love relationship with “la Demoiselle.” Like censorship (literary and psychic), the brother does not so much belong as hold the keys to the castle; it is on his belated approval that the possibility depends of wooing “la Demoiselle” in her father’s house. In what might therefore be read as an allegory for the three ages of desire, an archaic wish is delivered to the fraternal censor, and by him into the possession of the present-day consciousness.

Of different orders, the brother-sister team of the Princess and the Censor are nonetheless so inextricably linked as to enter and exit the texts of Jean-Jacques’s desiring in tandem. In the fourth letter to Malesherbes, spelling an end to a lifetime of (literature as inscription of) desire thus depends not simply on moving the censor into retirement and down the road, “à demi-lieue de la” (1:1146), but on removing the princess from the castle. No one remains from the original cast but Lord (“M’r de Luxembourg”), Lady (“la Dame”), and neighbors, their number increased by one. When, on the other hand, the Princess and the Censor become uncoupled and Mlle Amélie roams her grandmother’s “petit Château” unescorted, the dream’s other variant comes to life nightmarishly. Where was friendly neighborhood censor Malesherbes at the time? Right next door, on the facing page, too far and too “coulant” to be of any use in providing Jean-Jacques with the keys to the castle, and yet near enough to facilitate our reading a partially censored intertext of censorship.

What has been missing from analyses of the *Confessions* is not so much the assumption, fundamental to depth psychology, that they are pre-censored and deal in the kind of pseudo-sins we all seem to substitute unconsciously for those harder to admit to consciousness, and to admit. Indeed, it is a still unshaken belief in censorship by the other that gives
critical discourse something to say. It is even—and this is where our
collection becomes difficult—critics' "competitive particularity" or
need to say something earthshakingly new that censors our approaches
to texts. Not enough attention has been paid, however, to the self-
conscious ways in which so much of Rousseau's public and private writ-
ing grapples with the knowledge of self-censorship. The Confessions-
Lettres dyad in particular casts a furtive eye on the potential incom-
patibility of self-censorship with the will to complete self-disclosure.

When they are acknowledged to be less (pathologically) censoring
of censorship, the Confessions become more and otherwise truthful than
might be supposed, and more prosaically literary. Not that "poetry" is
precluded once the Jean-Jacques of Volume 2 begins to write in earnest.
It is at that point, rather, that poetry begins, increasingly, to take its cues
from the day-to-day minutiae of making a literary career. "Point auteur,
point faiseur de livres," J. J. Rousseau would not be himself or, at least, not
the self whose imagination has been so decisively shaped by repeated
run-ins with and end runs around the eighteenth-century version of cen-
sorship. Not only would he have had to look elsewhere than to the
Château de Malesherbes for alibis and metaphors, but the question of self-
censorship might never have occurred. And the "all" that the Confessions
undertake to tell might not so unabashedly exceed the strictly "confessable" as to intermingle the good and the indifferent. Who
knows whether that undertaking does not itself derive or derive value
and originality from the specter of really ubiquitous and unpredictable
censorship? Anything that gets said will have escaped from the infinite
category of the potentially "censorable"; relatively speaking, the more
scandalous the utterance feels to the speaker, the more dramatic and
exceptional the escape he will have thought to make.

In a passage particularly telling of Rousseau's covert moves toward
the internally divided self of depth psychology, the Confessions recount
their own conception and stake their claim to originality. Invoking a dis-
tinction since rehearsed impressionistically on countless occasions of
criticism, Rousseau indict Montaigne's Essais as inadequately confes-
sional. And on what grounds?—that Montaigne will have balked at delv-
ing too deep or, in other words, deep enough. Rousseau's dismissal of the
straw man Montaigne would have had only to posit the unconscious to
look as though it came straight out of a Freudian primer: "J'avois toujours
ri de la fausse naïveté de Montaigne qui faisant semblant d'avouer ses
défauts à grand soin de ne s’en donner que d’aimables: tandis que je sentois . . . qu’il n’y a point d’intérieur humain si pur qu’il puisse être, qui ne recelle quelque vice odieux” (1:516–17). Over Freud, moreover, Rousseau maintains the ethical advantage of keeping us fully apprised that there is still such a thing as conscious (self-)censorship; we who write to the presumed biases of scholarly journals call it “rewriting” or “editing.” And unlike the Freud whom Starobinski credits with “thinking” the “feelings” of Rousseau, the author of the *Confessions* had no theoretical investment to protect one way or the other: the depth psychology that Rousseau eyes furtively seems at the same time to be more real and more susceptible of being mocked by some generation still in the future as nothing more than “un long rêve” of Western civilization. In Rousseau, the intimation of self-censorship and the desire to revolutionize discourse about the self by lifting self-censorship more brazenly than ever before by no means preclude nostalgia for real naïveté with respect to its operations and obstinacy. In the vicinity of the Librairie, Rousseau’s discourse becomes and remains ambivalent, occasionally anxious, and obsessed. By way of apologizing for the *Lettres à Malesherbes*, the last one concludes by postulating a desire not to usurp the censor’s good opinion (1:1147), as though the writer were not already well on his way toward usurping the censor’s good offices, and his “calamités.”

In the course of wholeheartedly embracing their occasion, the *Lettres à Malesherbes* also serve the *Confessions* to come by making a tentative first pass at drafting the occasional strategy of autobiography. The draft is drably worded; the strategy comes as an afterthought and is modestly intended only for immediate deployment—a far cry from the *Confessions*’ fine neo-Malebranchean phrases and self-assured pretensions to universal applicability. But Rousseau was already trying out the thoughts that would eventually crystallize around the still missing term of the occasional. At a loss to explain the inconsistencies of his character, the erstwhile self-portraittist thought to enlist the “facts” of his biography and to lay them out in chronological order: “Quoique je ne puisse resoudre cette opposition [entre une âme paresseuse et un temperament ardent] par des principes, elle existe pourtant, je la sens, rien n’est plus certain, et j’en puis du moins donner par les faits une especie d’historique qui peut servir à la concevoir” (1:1134). Not that he would think of settling for a mere life story, but the story of a soul seemed the next best
thing to the uncompromising portrait he now felt to be beyond the means of all but narrative. In the *Lettres*, life comes already, albeit with little fanfare, to the aid of the self.

As we have seen, the “historique” in question begins with the pertinent episode of rebirth through uncensored reading. The *Lettres* leave unconfessed what the *Confessions* will later backtrack to designate as the first and foremost of Jean-Jacques’s crimes: killing his mother in childbirth. Nor, in his eagerness to explain and in the provisional certainty of doing something other than literature, does the letter-writer stop to worry that recycling the narrative mode of his theoretical and literary fictions might somehow jeopardize the wished-for fresh start or new beginning of telling his truth. But the autobiographer’s literary past would eventually come back to haunt him, as it haunts another recovering fictioneer, Mary McCarthy, in her *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*: “Can it be that the public takes for granted that anything written by a profesional writer is *eo ipso* untrue? The professional writer is looked on perhaps as a ‘story-teller’ like a child who has fallen into that habit and is mechanically chidden by his parents even when he protests that *this time* he is telling the truth.” In planting this same doubt, *Le Lévite d’Éphraïm* reproblematizes and prolongs the instantaneous wish-fulfillment of our storyteller’s extraliterary *Lettres à Malesherbes*. *Le Lévite* not only rehearses the alleged real-life matricide but provides the *Confessions* with motive, means, and opportunity to do a more thorough job of finishing off their own mother, *littérature*. 