Lamartine and the *Philosophes*
Lamartine, the quintessential romantic poet, is not generally thought of as a disciple of the traditions of the Enlightenment. In fact, the Lamartinian œuvre is often presented as the rich antithesis of the allegedly dry and rationalist eighteenth-century neoclassicism. The rapport between the poet and the philosophes has not, however, gone altogether unobserved. Desvoyes\(^1\) saw some similarity between Voltaire's *Monologue de Caton* and Lamartine's fifth meditation on the theme of immortality. Gaudon\(^2\) has suggested that Lamartine drew some inspiration from his readings of the marquis de Sade, and there is, of course, a considerable body of critical commentary on Lamartine and Rousseau, most of which establishes what Fournet\(^3\) has called "une parenté d'âme" between the two. This latter writer is one of the few who tries also to examine Lamartine's attitude toward Rousseau the political theorist as well as Rousseau the poet.

The relative paucity of comment on the Lamartine-philosophes relationship is all the more striking when one considers the immense volume of space Lamartine devoted to them not only in his *Histoire des Girondins* but in the *Confidences, Mémoires politiques, Histoire de la Turquie, Histoire de la restauration*, and several other works. Aside from the *Histoire des Girondins*, which contains a more or less systematic evaluation of eighteenth-century writers in the light of the Revolution, Lamartine's observations on the philosophes have the
quality of random thoughts; no attempt is made to establish an ordered critique of Enlightenment thinkers.

It is not surprising that Lamartine should have had an abiding interest in the philosophic currents of the age that immediately preceded his. He was born less than a year after the French Revolution and reached the age of discernment during a period when France was still undergoing the convulsions occasioned by the unprecedented upheaval in the social order.

Lamartine's preoccupation with the Enlightenment was not, moreover, merely an intellectual involvement based on a commonality of interests or the curiosity of an inquiring mind. He grew up in a family that had personal contacts with the literary luminaries of the prerevolutionary period. On his mother's side there was a grandmother and an uncle who had entertained Rousseau and Voltaire and many of their contemporaries.

Finally, one can posit Lamartine's political career (he entered the Chambre des Députés in 1834) as a factor in his observations about the philosophic coalition of the eighteenth century—members of which had produced trenchant critiques of society, and, in the specific case of Rousseau's *Contrat social*, elaborate formulas for the amelioration of the human collective. As a thinking politician, Lamartine could not but confront the vital, libertarian ideals that the *philosophes* brought to the fore during their century. It was entirely natural for the man who thought of himself as a poet-orator-leader of his people to have been preoccupied with those eighteenth-century figures who had altered not only the course of France but of Europe and the world.

I. Philosophes in General

*Development and Nurturing of Philosophes*

As might be expected, the most thorough exposition of the *philosophe* movement appears in the *Histoire des Girondins*. There Lamartine offers some very percipient observations on
the political and social ambiance that facilitated and accelerated the growth of Enlightenment thought. He mentions that the *foyer* of the duc d'Orléans provided a meeting place for the great thinkers of the age. There the cross-pollination of ideas helped produce the new spirit of the age. The duke’s salon, moreover, was not parochial, including, as it did, guests from America (Franklin), England (Gibbon), and Germany (Grimm). Orléans’s hospitality caused a melding of spirits, and both he and his children were the recipients of a blessing from the dying Voltaire (10:12).

If the salon was the breeding ground for revolutionary thought, the presses of Holland, according to Lamartine, were responsible for its dissemination. “Tout ce qui avait une pensée suspecte à émettre,” he writes, “un trait à lancer, un nom à cacher, allait emprunter les presses de la Hollande. Voltaire, J.-J. Rousseau, Diderot, Helvétius, Mirabeau lui-même, étaient allés naturaliser leurs écrits dans ce pays de publicité” (9: 271). This does not mean, of course, that all subversive writing was proscribed in France. A good deal of radical thought managed to reach print, reports Lamartine, thanks to the indulgent influence of the censor Malesherbes, who permitted the publication of the *Encyclopédie*, “cet arsenal des idées nouvelles en France.” Lamartine quotes Dorat-Cubières to the effect that Malesherbes was himself a *philosophe* (12:21,24).

**Role of the Philosophes**

Lamartine makes few categorical assertions about the influence of the *philosophes* on the French Revolution. He does, however, permit others to see parallels between the Enlightenment posture, the Revolution, and political upheavals in early nineteenth-century Europe. Continental monarchs viewed the Revolution with almost unconcealed delight, states Lamartine, because they believed that the Revolution was nothing more “que la philosophie du 18° descendue des salons dans la place publique et passée des livres dans les dis-
cours” (9:252). In the Mémores politiques he does concede that the Revolution was the realization of ideas found in the “catéchistes,” Fénelon, Montesquieu, and Rousseau (28:13). This is not, however, the same as saying that those ideas created the Revolution. In the same essay Lamartine reinforces this view by alluding to the fact that the whole idea of human freedom (which the Revolution was supposed to be all about) and the rights of man were barely understood or grasped by the philosophes.

Lamartine sees evidence of philosophe ideology in some of the most brutal events in history. In his Histoire de la Turquie, for example, he indicts Voltaire, Diderot, and d’Alembert for having encouraged and applauded Europe’s racist posture against Turkey. “Née dans une cour sceptique en Russie,” writes Lamartine, “encouragée par un souverain athée en Prusse, . . . applaudie en France dans les correspondances de Voltaire, de Diderot, de d’Alembert, . . . elle fut une pensée de civilisation tendant à ruiner par la main de la Sélimamis du Nord les mosquées de Mahomet en Orient” (28:75).

The philosophes succeeded in influencing the texture of certain parts of France, and those areas in turn radiated the radical spirit of the Enlightenment. The physical proximity of the philosophes was apparently enough to spread the “infection.” Such an area, affirms Lamartine, was Savoie, where Rousseau spent the early part of his childhood in the village of Annecy. Les Charmettes was near Chambéry. Voltaire lived out his old age at Ferney, “à la porte de Savoie.” Lamartine feels that the presence of these individuals extended to Geneva, the Calvinist citadel of religious obscurantism, and turned it into the metropolis of modern philosophy (12:156).

As for the importance of the philosophes for individuals, Lamartine sees their hand either as positive or negative influences. Louis XVIII found in Voltaire an admirable model of clarity and grace, whereas the sophism and declamatory excesses of Rousseau repelled him (12:114). Emperor Alexander of Russia is alleged to have borrowed his ideas about constitutional government from Montesquieu and Voltaire (17:
169). The preponderant Galioni and Filangieri carried on the Enlightenment spirit (27:119). De Maistre, on the other hand, abominated the atheism of the age of reason, and turned Voltaire, says Lamartine, into a “terroriste sacré” (37:44).

The Personal Connection

Lamartine’s exposure to the idea of the Enlightenment occurred early. In the Confidences he reveals that the childhood tutorials carried on by abbé Dumont included the major works of the eighteenth century. Nor were these books merely the subject of cursory examinations—they formed the basis of interminable discussions and arguments (29:355). Dumont, however, was prudent enough to have him also read counter-revolutionary pamphlets and newspapers (29:100). This initial contact with the polarities in French intellectual and political thought doubtless explains in part why he was constantly vacillating between his often fervent support of the Revolution and his criticism of the society that followed it.

Lamartine’s sensitivity to these issues was honed at Mâcon, where his uncle welcomed many of the Enlightenment luminaries. In retrospect, Lamartine records that his uncle’s foyer was, for many years, a substitute for the Academy of Dijon, the institution to which the names of Rousseau and Buffon are inevitably linked (29:491). M. de Valmont, Lamartine’s uncle, mixed with the aristocracy, the literary fraternity, and the clergy. He also claimed to have known Frederick the Great (29:476). “L’abbé Sigorgne avait connu les écrivains et les philosophes du 18e siècle,” writes Lamartine about one of the regulars of the Mâcon coterie (29:472). This singular cleric had been the interlocutor of both Rousseau and Voltaire and had discussed religion and philosophy with them “avec talent, politesse, dignité, estime mutuelle” (29:472).

Catherine and the Philosophes

Lamartine is unusually severe in his indictment of the philosophes for their sycophancy toward Catherine the Great. “Voltaire, Diderot, d’Alembert, le grand Frédéric, donnèrent
honteusement, les uns par vanité, les autres par cupidité, ceux-ci par engouement, ceux-là par faiblesse, l’exemple de l’adulation du succès, et l’exemple pire de l’estime au vice et de l’indulgence au crime” (31:240). It was their example that caused an otherwise distinguished literary generation to prostrate itself before a woman “qui s’était faite veuve pour régner en homme sur le trône, en courtisane dans son lit.” D’Alembert almost went to Russia to tutor her son, but his love of Paris caused him to reconsider. Diderot went to Saint Petersburg ostensibly to instruct the tzarina in philosophy and legislation, but, as Lamartine wryly observes, she could have taught him much about the science of government. Her association with these writers, through personal contact and correspondence, had selfish personal ends, those of acquiring the luster that names like Voltaire and Diderot would add to her court (31:268). What is all the more ironic is that despite her familiarity with the most radical thinkers in France and her assiduous cultivation of them, Catherine’s sympathy was a mere pose. She was in reality, asserts Lamartine, a counter-revolutionary and an implacable enemy of the anarchy that the philosophe ideology had allegedly engendered (31:3,9).

Lamartine is especially exercised by the fawning correspondence of Voltaire. He calls it “des railleries adulatrices” (28:109) and asserts that it was his worst weakness. “L’apothéose de Cathérine II par Voltaire est la plus grande faiblesse de ce philosophe,” he writes scathingly, “car en faiblisant ainsi devant une femme dont toute la fortune était fondée sur un meurtre, il faisait faiblir avec lui toute la morale de l’humanité” (31:241). Lamartine elsewhere indicts Voltaire as an accomplice in Catherine’s crimes. “L’adulation, quand elle descend si bas, n’est plus seulement lâche, elle est complice” (31:256).

II. Voltaire

The Voltaire-Lamartine Rapport

We have noted briefly the family ties that joined Lamartine to the philosophes. In the Nouvelles confidences the poet
speaks several times of the closeness of Voltaire in the structuring of his literary vocation. He records that his father was so enamored of Voltaire’s poetry that he found it difficult to appreciate his own son’s verses. On reading some of the latter he did not know whether to approve or to criticize them (29:503).

Lamartine’s association with Voltaire goes back to his childhood days and the influences of both his maternal grandfather and uncle. His grandfather was intendant for the duke of Orléans and his grandmother a governess for the children. In these capacities they came in contact with the celebrities of the period. “Voltaire, à son court et dernier voyage à Paris, qui fut un triomphe, vint rendre visite aux jeunes princes,” recalls Lamartine. “Ma mère, qui n’avait que sept à huit ans, assista à la visite, et quoique si jeune, elle comprit, par l’impression qui se révélait autour d’elle, que c’était quelque chose de plus qu’un roi.” Voltaire’s appearance, his accoutrements and words became indelibly marked in the consciousness of Lamartine’s mother, or as the poet himself expressed it, “comme l’empreinte d’un être antédiluvien dans la pierre de nos montagnes” (29:29).

On his father’s side there was M. de Valmont, who represented for the young Lamartine the example of the literary erudite who had read all the “haute littérature,” and especially Voltaire. The fact that his uncle’s estate was at Saint-Claude, near Ferney, afforded Valmont the opportunity of meeting the patriarch of Ferney. “Il ne partageait pas toutes les opinions philosophiques de Voltaire,” Lamartine hastens to explain, “mais il aimait par similitude de nature, ce bon sens exquis qui exprime l’idée avec la même précision que le chiffre exprime le nombre. Il aspirait comme lui à la réforme des idées arriérées sur l’esprit humain de quelques siècles” (29:449).

The importance of Voltaire for the Lamartine household was reinforced by the poet’s father, who made a practice of reading aloud such plays as Mérope. Reminiscing about this in the Préface des Méditations, Lamartine speaks rhapsodically about Voltaire’s instinct for poetic symmetry and divine-like
rhythm. "Je me disais intérieurement: Voilà une langue que je voudrais bien savoir, que je voudrais bien parler quand je serais grand . . . la Henriade, toute sèche et toute déclamatoire qu'elle fût, me ravissait" (1:7,8).

Although he was later to surpass Voltaire as a poet, Lamartine sometimes credits the former with furnishing inspiration for some of his memorable poems. Just before writing the sixteenth Recueillement, he recalls having read some of Voltaire's letters along with those of Horace and Mme de Sévigné (5:202).

**Voltaire's Influence**

Lamartine's evaluation of Voltaire is a well-balanced one, alternating between accolades showered on the man's genius and criticism heaped on his personal ethics.

His influence, we are told, extends far beyond the borders of France—into Berlin, where academicians seek to emulate the genius of Voltaire (9:273). Lamartine feels that his incredible letter-writing activity helped spread the Voltaire ideology, for his correspondents spanned the continent (9:267).

In the Histoire des Girondins Lamartine observes that Voltaire had eighty years with which to do battle with time and with his century. Unlike Rousseau's disciples, who came mainly from the proletariat, Voltaire's were drawn from the highest echelons of French society. Voltaire's followers eventually overturned altars, and Rousseau's raised them. In the final analysis, Voltaire was a monarchist, and Rousseau believed in the republic (9:215).

Lamartine sees Voltaire as a conscious iconoclast who wished to abolish theocracy and establish the rule of reason and tolerance. His reputation in the post-Revolution period was so strong that Napoleon found it necessary to denigrate him in order to consolidate his own tyranny (9:220). An astute politician, Voltaire gained the support of kings by ceding them absolute powers and fighting for their freedom from
Rome. With the backing of the monarchy, the nobility, and the educated bourgeoisie, he felt secure enough to launch his lifelong assault on Christendom (9:224).

Although Lamartine recognizes Voltaire’s invaluable contributions to the cause of religious freedom and to human reason, he does not sympathize with the latter’s destructive cynicism. The end product of the Voltairean ideology is the skeptic, not the believer. Moreover, cautions Lamartine, impiety can never destroy a religion; only another faith can do that (9:226).

This failing, however, does not detract from Voltaire’s luster as the leading mind of the eighteenth century. Lamartine is even moved in the Ressouvenir du lac Léman to celebrate that fame in verse.

Voltaire! quelque soit le nom dont on le nomme,
C’est un cycle vivant, c’est un siècle fait hommel
Pour fixer de plus haut le jour de la raison,
Son œil d’aigle et de lynx choisit ton horizon,
Heureux si, sur ces monts où Dieu luit davantage,
Il eût vu plus de ciel à travers le nuage.

(4:165)

This accolade might seem excessive except for the fact that Lamartine asserts on several occasions that Voltaire is one of the great immortal poets (1:20).

Voltaire’s name also appears in Lamartine’s appreciative essay on John Milton. He sees him as an imitator of the Miltonian epic (36:19) but admits that the Henriade never approached Paradise Lost (36:32). Both, however, asserts Lamartine, lack real understanding of human emotion, and that is why “la Henriade est surannée et le Paradis perdu n’est plus qu’un monument de bibliothèque” (36:33).

Lamartine shares with Mérimée an intense admiration for Candide, especially chapter 26 and its deposed monarchs at the Venice festival. For Lamartine this portion is symbolic of the current state of affairs in the French legislature—with
one significant difference. "C'est qu'à Venise on masquait son visage pendant ce carnaval de rois, et qu'à Paris on ne masque que son nom" (40:427).

Lamartine also sees Voltairean traits in individuals such as Paoli (10:78), the grand duke of Tuscany (37:212), and the marquis of Maisonfort (37:189).

III. Rousseau

**Rousseau-Lamartine Rapport**

There has been no dearth of critical commentary on the "parenté d'âme" between Lamartine and his eighteenth-century "romantic" predecessor. Virtually every book on Lamartine contains sections tracing the poet's dependence on Rousseau as the precursor of the poetry of feeling. Most of these works, however, focus their attention on the elements in Lamartine's poetry that are seen as evocative of Rousseau's apotheosis of nature.

There is no doubt that it was this characteristic in Rousseau that led Lamartine to admire and later to seek to emulate the author of the *Confessions*. But in his readings of Rousseau, Lamartine soon realized that there was a lot more there than lyricism and poetic fervor. Lamartine perceived in Rousseau's political writings, especially the *Contrat social*, manifestoes for the direction of French society. Since he himself was actively involved in French political life, Lamartine could not help but confront Rousseau's vision of the utopian state.

As for the Rousseauian elements in his poetry, Lamartine acknowledges his debt often and in one or two instances speaks of himself as a kind of reincarnation. In referring to the *Méditations*, he states somewhat immodestly: "Le public entendit une âme, sans la voir, et vit un homme au lieu d'un livre. Depuis J. J. Rousseau . . . c'était le poète qu'il attendait" (1:19). Lamartine ranks Rousseau with Homer, Job,
and Milton, among those who spoke of him “dans la solitude de la langue de mon cœur; une langue d’harmonie, d’images et de passions” (1:30), and Rousseau is summoned by Lamartine in the Ressouvenir du lac Léman. “Je vois d’ici verdir les pentes de Clarens,” he writes movingly of the Genevese lake, “Des rêves de Rousseau fantastiques royaumes” (1:164). In the Préface aux recueillements poétiques, Lamartine again models himself consciously on Rousseau when he tells Léon Bruys d’Ouilly to read his, Lamartine’s, confidential thoughts, his confessions (5:184).

The association of Rousseau with Lake Léman again moves Lamartine, on 7 June 1833, to pen the following verses written at the Ermitage:

Toi, dont le siècle encore agite la mémoire,  
Pourquoi dors-tu si loin de ton lac, ô Rousseau?  
Un abîme de bruit, de malheur et de gloire,  
Devait-il séparer ta tombe et ton berceau?

(5:373)

In the subsequent stanzas, Lamartine expresses the hope that he, unlike Rousseau, will be interred in the place he loves so well.

Rousseau’s gift for introspection is one of those qualities that attracts Lamartine. In the Histoire des Girondins, he alludes to this in a somewhat awkward self-complimentary fashion. “Mais si je n’ai pas reçu de la nature le style et l’éloquence de Jean-Jacques Rousseau, je n’ai pas reçu non plus sa féroce personnalité; et si le lecteur a quelque excès à craindre de ma plume dans ce jugement sur moi-même, ce n’est pas, à coup sûr, l’excès d’orgueil; ce serait plutôt l’excès de sévérité” (15:18). Lamartine makes another attempt to explain himself in terms of Rousseau in the Préambule aux nouvelles confidences, where he asserts that he, Rousseau, and others have quietly interrogated their soul and the result has been a dialogue with themselves, on the one hand, and with their century and the future, on the other (29:403). In the same
work, however, he returns to disparaging himself for not having the genius of Rousseau (29:407).

*The Family Ties*

As with the other *philosophes*, Lamartine came to know of Rousseau through his grandmother, Mme des Roys and through his mother. In the *Confidence* he asserts that Mme des Roys knew Rousseau better than Buffon, Grimm, Gibbon, or d'Alembert. "Ma mère, quoi que très pieuse et très étroitement attachée au dogme catholique," declares Lamartine, "avait conservé une tendre admiration pour ce grand homme, sans doute parce qu'il avait plus qu'un génie, parce qu'il avait une âme. Elle n'était pas de la religion de son génie, mais elle était de la religion de son cœur" (29:30). Lamartine's mother was familiar with Rousseau's theories on the education of children (29:78) and doubtless transmitted aspects of the nature doctrine to her precocious youngster. She had observed a precedent for this in the Orléans household, where the duke had innovated in using Rousseau's techniques in teaching his own children.

Lamartine's infatuation with Rousseau, begun through the osmosis of family ties, was reinforced by visits to those haunts associated with Rousseau. He mentions a sojourn in Chambéry, near Les Charmettes, "ce berceau de la sensibilité et du génie de Jean-Jacques Rousseau," as the source for the nineteenth *Méditation* (6:174). In the *Confidences* he calls it a "berceau fleuri" (29:330). In the *Voyages en orient* we find corroboration of the importance to Lamartine of locales once frequented by Jean-Jacques. "Combien plus tard j'ai passé de matins et de soirs assis aux pieds des beaux châtaigniers, dans ce petit vallon des Charmettes, où le souvenir de Jean-Jacques Rousseau m'attirait et me retenait par la sympathie de ses impressions, de ses rêveries, de ses malheurs, et de son génie" (6:313). The *Confidences* provide additional evidence of Lamartine's attempts to derive inspiration from Rousseau's old haunts, this time Lake Geneva (29:310).
The Political Rousseau

Lamartine related directly to Rousseau in a much wider context than that of the literary disciple. He saw in the latter’s Contrat social and other political documents regimens that were adopted by revolutionary figures such as Robespierre. Much of Lamartine’s political œuvre is characterized by an intense struggle over whether Rousseau’s utopian vision was indeed the panacea he claimed it was for resolving society’s inequities.

In Lamartine’s view, Rousseau was no political theorist but rather a dreamer in whom one could sense the hand of God (9:25). But in the Histoire des Girondins he makes but one of his many strictures about Rousseau. The latter, he asserts, was a very poor psychologist when it came to understanding man. He did not grasp man’s innate weaknesses. On the other hand, Rousseau might have sensed that in order to inspire men you must set ideals before them; you cannot mingle illusion and reality. The church does just that. Rousseau saw the political ideal just as Fénelon had seen the Christian ideal (9:26).

Lamartine is always careful in assessing Rousseau’s influence on the French Revolution. His writings, or at least “les maximes plus mâles de la philosophie de Rousseau,” helped undermine the faith that the nobility once had in the monarchy (9:278). Rousseau’s theories, we are reminded, were canonized by the revolutionary thinkers. “Les ouvriers de la Révolution,” he writes, “rendaient toujours hommage à la pensée de leur œuvre dans l’auteur du Contrat social, qui aurait si souvent désavoué de tels disciples” (12:437).

In the Histoire des Girondins Lamartine praises the Contrat social as the harbinger of the rights of man, but with the Entretiens littéraires (1861) a heavy disenchantment has set in. There Rousseau is termed “ce faux prophète d’une liberté anarchique, d’une liberté sans limites, d’une égalité impraticable” (15:122). Lamartine asserts that both the Contrat social and the Déclaration des droits de l’homme et du citoyen
of 1789 "sont un catalogue de contre-vérités politiques. Ni l'un ni l'autre de ces apologistes," continues Lamartine, "ne comprenaient un mot de ce qu'ils écrivaient; du moins ils n'en prévoyaient pas les conséquences. Le peuple votait de l'enthousiasme, quoi? le néant" (15:122). There is another Lamartian appraisal of the *Contrat social* in the essay on Fénélon. The latter's *Télémaque* is ranked with Rousseau's work, More's *Utopia*, and Plato's *Republic* as an example of vain speculation. Reading these works, observes Lamartine, reminds him of Frederick the Great's sally: "Si j'avais un empire à punir, je le donnerais à gouverner à des philosophes" (36:279).

**Robespierre**

Robespierre is seen by Lamartine as the disciple *par excellence* of Rousseau. "La philosophie de J.-J. Rousseau avait pénétré profondément son intelligence; cette philosophie, en tombant dans une volonté active, n'était pas restée une lettre morte; elle était devenue en lui un dogme, une foi, un fanatisme" (9:47). It was Robespierre along with Pétion who, basing themselves on the Rousseauean vision, created the popular movement, while Cazalès, Mirabeau, Maury and the clergy debated frivolously what form the government should take (9:369). Robespierre was the convinced and passionate pupil of Rousseau, according to Lamartine. The *Contrat social* was Scripture for him. War fought on behalf of this ideology was considered by Robespierre to be a glorious vocation (9:442).

"Si son maître J.-J. Rousseau eût quitté sa cabane des Charmettes ou d'Ermenonville pour être le législateur de l'humanité, il n'aurait pas mené une existence plus recueillie, plus pauvre que celle de Robespierre," asserts Lamartine about the Rousseau-Robespierre rapport (11:258). Like his model, Robespierre found solace in taking lonely walks on the Champs-Elysées (11:258). Of Robespierre's politics, Lamar-
tine writes: "C'était comme nous l'avons dit, la politique de J.-J. Rousseau. En remontant plus haut, on en retrouve le germe dans le Christianisme mal appliqué" (11:375). Robespierre's conscious emulation of Rousseau was reinforced by frequent visits to the latter's onetime domicile at Montmorency. "C'est dans cette maison et dans ce jardin qu'il acheva son rapport, sur ces mêmes arbres où son maître avait si magnifiquement écrit de Dieu" (14:307). At a critical juncture in his career, Robespierre spent time meditating at Rousseau's Ermitage. "Venait-il chercher des inspirations politiques," asks Lamartine, "sous les arbres à l'ombre desquels son maître avait écrit le Contrat social? Venait-il faire hommage au philosophe d'une vie qu'il allait donner à la cause de la démocratie? Nul ne le sait" (14:400).

Lamartine feels that both Rousseau and Robespierre made fundamental errors when they promulgated their social axioms about the rights of man. They confused man's natural instincts with the legal rights created and guaranteed by society (12:347). "Mais, si la science manquait à la déclaration des droits de Jean-Jacques Rousseau et de Robespierre," writes Lamartine in mitigation, "l'esprit social respirait dans chacune de ces formules. C'était l'idéal de l'égalité et de la fraternité entre les hommes" (12:348). Robespierre is also seen to have modeled his educational theories on the prototype offered by Rousseau in the Emile (12:354).

In the final analysis, argues Lamartine, it was Robespierre who conferred much of the fame on Rousseau that posterity takes for granted. It was he who saw to it that Rousseau's remains were transported to the Pantheon, and in so doing he "donnait, par cet hommage à la philosophie religieuse et presque chrétienne de J.-J. Rousseau, son véritable sens à la Révolution" (14:316).

Rousseau and Others

Although Lamartine links Rousseau most often with the figure of Robespierre, there are several other historical and
literary personalities whose names are joined with Rousseau, usually as his disciples. Aimé-Martin is one of those who "avait contracté parenté avec les âmes de Fénelon, de Jean-Jacques Rousseau" (9:217). Another is Mme Roland. "La lecture de l'Héloïse de Rousseau, qu'on lui prêta alors," comments Lamartine, "fit sur son cœur le même genre d'impression que Plutarque avait fait sur son esprit . . . Rousseau lui fit rêver le bonheur" (9:412). Even her marriage resembled the fictional union between Julie and Wolmar (9:416).

It is not surprising that Marat's name is also associated with Rousseau by Lamartine, who asserts that the revolutionary leader had a supernatural faith in Rousseau's principles (9:274). Lamartine also alludes to an affinity between Rousseau and Lamensais, particularly in the latter's love of reverie (17:204). Of Mme de Staël, Lamartine also observes in the *Histoire de la restauration* that she had much of Rousseau's reverie in her. In fact, he calls her "le J.-J. Rousseau des femmes," with the demurer, "mais plus tendre, plus sensée et plus capable de grandes actions que lui" (17:188,191).

Another woman whom Lamartine links with Rousseau is Mme de Sévigné. He does this in an essay in which he deals with the transitory nature of political fame versus the permanence of literary reputation (41:41). It is Mme de Sévigné, asserts Lamartine, who after the separation from her daughter, "s'y plonge dans toute la poésie des larmes. . . . Elle découvre ces délicieuses sympathies entre la nature inanimée et l'âme vivante qui ont fait depuis le génie de Jean-Jacques Rousseau" (41:112).

Fénelon is another literary great whom Lamartine juxtaposes to Rousseau. Like Rousseau and other "grands esprits" Fénelon began by singing before thinking, says Lamartine (36:353). But his ideas on education were superior to those of the *Emile*, because Fénelon had a pragmatic orientation whereas Rousseau was utopian. Lamartine also affirms that when one tries to ascertain who was the pioneering spirit of French revolutionary thought, the first real tribune of the peo-
ple, the first reformer of kings, the first apostle of liberty (in
the Rousseauian sense), it is Fénelon whose name comes to
mind (36:277).

Reference here should also be made to brief parallels
drawn by Lamartine between Rousseau and Brissot de War­
ville (9:204), Girardin (9:340), and Mme de Staël’s mother
(9:295).

_Lamartine, Critic of Rousseau_

As with his attitude toward the _philosophes_, Lamartine,
particularly in the later years, has some fairly mordant com­
ments to make about his youthful idol, Rousseau. In the _Con­
fidences_ he calls Rousseau’s _Confessions_ “puérilités” (29:52);
and, in _Raphaël_, Lamartine speaks of him as being more pas­
sionate than inspired and more “grand instinct . . . que
grande vérité” (32:318). “Jean-Jacques Rousseau a dit un mot
qui serait un blasphème, si ce n’était pas un paradoxe,” writes
Lamartine in order to amend Rousseau; “L’homme qui pense
est un animal dépravé! Quant à moi, si j’écrivais comme lui
des axiomes, je dirais: L’homme qui réfléchit est un homme
qui commence, mais l’homme qui prie est un être achevé” (33:
416). In the _Histoire des Girondins_ there is little criticism
save for a somewhat ambiguous allusion to Rousseau’s mid­
dle-class parentage (9:300). But by the time of the _Critique
de l’histoire des Girondins_, Lamartine is indicting Rousseau
along with Mably, Robespierre, and Saint-Just for having
preached the kind of social chimeras “qui mènent le peuple
droit au crime par la fureur qui succède aux déceptions, et
qui tuent bourreaux et victimes par la guerre anti-civique de
la propriété qui refuse tout et du prolétariat qui anéantit tout”
(15:88).

On the positive side of the ledger, Lamartine sees Rous­
sseau’s greatest contribution in sensitizing Frenchmen to na­
ture. This modern Platonism, as he terms it, was an efficient
antidote to the materialism and near atheism (“crime, honte
et désespoir de l’esprit human") that had infested the French mind. In the *Histoire de la restauration*, Lamartine also credits Bernadin de Saint-Pierre, Ballanche, Jouffroy, Royer-Collard, and Aimé-Martin with working in concert to find a substitute for the Enlightenment’s pernicious doctrine of irreligion (17:204).

By virtue of family ties Lamartine could almost be regarded as a nineteenth-century honorary *philosophe*. His mother and uncle transmitted to the impressionable young Lamartine personal anecdotes and stories about thinkers such as d’Alembert, Diderot, and Voltaire. Later this domestic influence was reinforced by the study, under the tutelage of abbé Dumont, of the major texts of the Enlightenment. This apprenticeship also exposed him to the postrevolutionary literature of reaction, which the abbé conveniently made available. As a budding poet it was quite natural for Lamartine to draw inspiration from Rousseau, the one *philosophe* with soul. As Lamartine became involved in France’s political affairs and began to think seriously about the structure of society, the writings of the *philosophes* and their revolutionary interpreters were subjected by him to a new kind of scrutiny.

In the Lamartinian œuvre the image of the *philosophes* is judiciously balanced between praise for the accomplishments of the Enlightenment—notably the spread of tolerance and the concept of freedom—and severe criticism both of the philosophic coalition and its unrealistic theories about the reformation of mankind. In this Lamartine resembles Chateaubriand. Both are ready to heap encomiums on the *philosophes* for their contributions to the idea of constitutional government, but they also indict them for personal hypocrisy. Lamartine, in particular, was incensed by the way d’Alembert, Voltaire, and Diderot, ostensibly the *avant-coureurs* of progressive political thought, scurried to solicit the favor of Catherine, the northern Semiramis, and the woman who in later
years came to personify autocratic rule and political obscurantism.

In the case of Voltaire one finds in Lamartine the kind of respectful posture that a nineteenth-century writer would have for the Enlightenment's greatest giant. What is unexpected, however, is the debt that Lamartine claims to owe Voltaire as the model for poetic splendor. The esteem in which Lamartine held the *Henriade* is especially surprising. As for Voltaire's political program, Lamartine has many kind words to say about the application of reason in the conduct of human affairs. He also feels that, unlike Rousseau, Voltaire had a more mature approach in his assault on the establishment. Although his targets were controversial enough, the church and the monarchy, Voltaire was astute enough to act the role of Brahmin, and in so doing gained the support not only of the aristocracy but of the bourgeoisie as well. Lamartine does not, however, let Voltaire off without a condemnation of the latter's materialism and cynicism. He makes a telling critique of the whole idea of *écrasez l'infâme* when he points out that Voltaire failed to understand that you cannot make people give up a religious persuasion by subjecting it to abuse and ridicule. This can only be done by introducing them to a new and superior religious system.

There is little doubt that in the early years of his fame Lamartine thought of himself as Rousseau incarnate in a new century. He testifies to this in numerous passages describing the inspiration he derived from reading Rousseau and from frequenting the latter's haunts and residences, particularly Les Charmettes. Even in those passages in which Lamartine denies the possibility of a legitimate comparison, the impression is strongly conveyed that Lamartine is obviously searching for a felicitous contradiction.

Lamartine never lost his admiration for Rousseau the prophet of sensibility, but he did acquire severe reservations about Rousseau the political theorist. Rousseau, he admits, had an inspiring vision of the future, but that vision must
be supplemented with a mature understanding of human psychology—a science totally lacking in the author of the *Contrat social*. This is why, claims Lamartine, it is possible to see Rousseau's writings leading logically into anarchy and violence—which is precisely what happened when Rousseauian disciples like Robespierre tried to apply his master's utopian ideas to postrevolutionary society.

Despite his strictures on Rousseau's "vain speculations" Lamartine recognizes in him the man who did the most in teaching the world about the rights of man and the ideal of liberty, equality, and fraternity. But his real contribution, according to Lamartine, was helping to reorient French literature from the sterile intellectualism of the mainstream *philosophes* to a modern Platonism in which soul and heart and nature assumed the preeminent roles.

4. All quotations from Lamartine are from the *Œuvres complètes* (Paris, 1860-66). Lamartine also cites the salon of Mme de Staël's mother as another *foyer* for the *philosophes*. He calls it "le cénacle de la philosophie du dix-huitième siècle," where Voltaire, Rousseau, Buffon, Diderot, Raynal, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Condorcet, "avaient joué avec cet enfant [Mme de Staël] et atisé ses premières pensées" (9:295).