

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU
AND THE PICARESQUE NOVEL

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU AND THE PICARESQUE NOVEL:

A STUDY OF THE CONFESSIONS, BOOKS I TO VI

by

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J'entrais avec sécurité dans le vaste espace du monde; mon mérite allait le remplir. . . les jeunes désirs, l'espoir enchanteur, les brillants projets remplissaient mon âme. Tous les objets que je voyais me semblaient les garants de ma prochaine félicité. Dans les maisons j'imaginai des festins rustiques; . . . sur les montagnes, des cuves de lait et de crème, une oisiveté charmante, la paix, la simplicité, le plaisir d'aller sans savoir où. (Rousseau, Confessions, II, 48, 62)

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fiction; with particular reference to Rousseau's knowledge
of the fiction of his day, and to the nature of imaginative
embellishment in his work.

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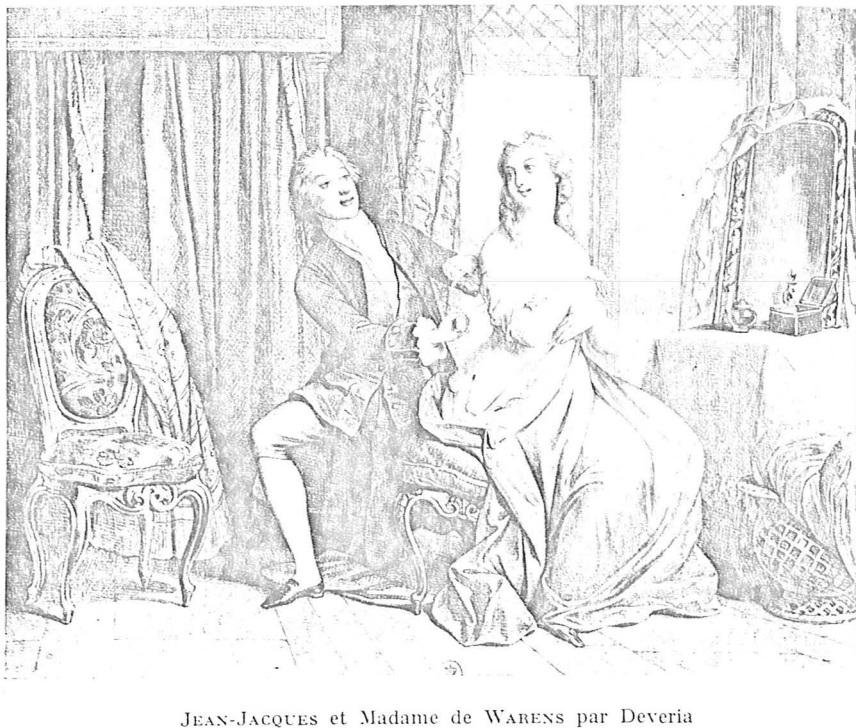
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ROUSSEAU HERBORISANT
D'après l'aquarelle de Mayer.

Cl. B. P.



JEAN-JACQUES et Madame de WARENS par Deveria

While Rousseau is usually portrayed as a benevolent botanist, some eighteenth-century illustrators were alive to the picaresque nuances of the Confessions. Deveria here confuses Rousseau with the Abbé Gros. (III, 129-130)

INTRODUCTION

Since Mme. de Staël first presented Rousseau to a generation which was to embrace and exaggerate so many of his ideas, and draw from them the very stuff of a new literature,¹ he has been annexed to the romantic movement by literary historians. Mme. de Staël drew the attention of her public to those aspects of his work which moved her most, and for which the times were particularly ripe. "Un nouveau genre de poésie existe dans les oeuvres en prose de Jean-Jacques Rousseau. . .le sentiment d'égalité se peint a chaque ligne des écrits de Rousseau",² she proclaimed.

Mme. de Staël delighted in the wild scenery of La Nouvelle Héloïse, and in the rapport which bound Julie and Saint-Preux to their natural surroundings: "On ne sépare pas dans son souvenir le bruit des vagues, l'obscurité des nuages, les oiseaux épouvantés, et le récit des sentiments qui remplissaient l'âme de Saint-Preux et de Julie. . .",³ she wrote.

¹Her Lettres sur le caractère et les ouvrages de J.-J. Rousseau first appeared in 1788; De la Littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales, in the Revolutionary year 8.

²De la littérature (Paris: Charpentier, 1842), p. 416.

³Ibid., p. 478.

In 1814, Byron and Shelley came to feed their melancholy on the grandeur of alpine peaks and the drama of storms over the lake; setting forth from the Villa Diomède, they sailed around Lac Léman in a small boat, landing near Vevey to seek out the site of Clarens.

In 1820, Lamartine's Méditations poétiques were published, and the enchanted prose of Rousseau's Cinquième promenade found an echo after half a century of silence.

Since Mme. de Staël, literary studies of Rousseau have tended to follow the lines of approach she instinctively and innocently adopted; certain of Rousseau's themes, caught up by the great romantics and developed by them, took root forever, and became virtually synonymous with his name. Two hundred and fifty years after his birth, reiteration of these themes has come to seem, perhaps, a little stale:

Si Romantisme implique l'invasion de la sensibilité dans les domaines réservés à la sereine raison, le retour à la nature, le goût passionné de ses plus farouches aspects, . . . s'il comporte le plus souvent certaine propension à la mélancolie, à l'isolement. . . il n'est pas un de ces traits que l'on ne puisse rencontrer en Jean-Jacques Rousseau.⁴

This is incontestably true; but Rousseau's work is as complex and contradictory as his personality. Jacques Voisine observes in a bibliographical survey of 1962:

⁴Pierre Parat, "Rousseau Romantique", Europe, 39^{ème} année, nos. 391-392 (Nov.-Dec. 1961), 77. [Volume commemorating the 250th anniversary of Rousseau's birth.]

Dans le cas de Rousseau, cela a été l'erreur de l'histoire littéraire. . .de le tirer trop du côté du préromantisme en quête d'un saint patron. . .⁵

a remark which seems entirely just. Dr. R. A. Leigh, currently engaged in establishing a new edition of Rousseau's correspondence, is equally loathe to saddle him with the paternity of romanticism.

Modern criticism has perhaps tended to focus on Rousseau himself, rather than on his work; many have endeavoured to throw light on the more obscure recesses of his personality. His extraordinary lucidity with regard to his own instability made him a particularly valuable subject for philosophical and psychological investigation; Rousseau was again related to a movement of ideas and categorised according to a certain terminology, appearing to his more subjective devotees on this occasion, in the words of one sceptic, as "a secular mystic seeking an answer to existentialist anguish".⁶

The present study of Rousseau makes no pretension to be other than literary. Its principal object is to indicate that Rousseau's literary affiliations are not exclusively with the romantic movement. A careful examination

⁵Jacques Voisine, "Etat des travaux sur J.-J. Rousseau", Information Littéraire, 16^{ème} année (May-June 1964), 99.

⁶Lionel Gossman, "Time and History in Rousseau", Studies in Voltaire and the eighteenth century, XXX (1964), 348.

of one of his autobiographical works will, we hope, reveal the surprisingly extensive influence of the fiction of his own times. In particular, we wish to suggest that in presenting his youthful self in the first six books of the Confessions, Rousseau unconsciously cast him in the mould of a familiar and endearing literary type, the picaro. André Maurois has called the Confessions "le meilleur des romans picaresques",⁷ but neither he nor any other distinguished critic has, to my knowledge, elaborated further on the relationship between Rousseau's autobiography and the picaresque genre. We hope, therefore, by specific reference to the text of the Confessions, and to the texts of picaresque novels, to establish the nature of this relationship.

⁷J.-J. Rousseau, Confessions, préface de André Maurois de l'Académie française (Paris: Bordas, 1949), p. xiii.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE LIFE OF J.-J. ROUSSEAU FROM 1712 to 1741

Adapted from the "Chronologie critique de la vie et des oeuvres de J.-J. Rousseau"⁸ of L.-J. Courtois; with Minor Modifications in the Light of Recent Research by Mme. Hermine de Saussure.⁹

1712

June 28; birth of Rousseau at Geneva: July 7; death of his mother, Suzanne Rousseau.

1722

October; ten days after his father Isaac's flight to Nyon, Rousseau is sent to Bossey to board with M. and Mlle. Lambercier.

1724

Winter; on his return to Geneva he is apprenticed to an engraver, Masseron.

1725

Apprenticed to Abel Ducommun, Rousseau lives away from his relations for the first time; is probably in the habit of spending Sundays with Catholic curés outside the city.

1728

Rousseau runs away from Geneva; after wandering for several

⁸L.-J. Courtois, "Chronologie critique de la vie et des oeuvres de J.-J. Rousseau", Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau [hereafter referred to as A.J.J.R.], XV (1928).

⁹Hermine de Saussure, Rousseau et les manuscrits des "Confessions" (Paris: Boccard, 1958).

days, is directed by M. Pontverre to Annecy, where he meets Mme. de Warens; by April 12, is at Turin at the Hospice of the Holy Spirit. After conversion, he wanders penniless around Turin for several weeks. Autumn; he spends a further six weeks on the streets of Turin following the death of his patroness Mme. de Vercellis.

1729

Returns on foot to Annecy. Autumn; spends a brief spell at the Lazarist eminary, whence he writes to Mme. de Warens, ". . .le Révérend Père m'a dit qu'il ne prétend que je m'en aille que quand il lui plaira. . .".¹⁰ Spends another brief spell at the cathedral choir-school.

1730

Dispatched to Lyon as the companion of Le Maître, Rousseau abandons him, but on his return to Annecy within the month finds Mme. de Warens has gone. July; he travels to Fribourg, Moudon, Lausanne, Vevey and Neuchâtel. In a desperate letter from Neuchâtel to his father, Rousseau threatens to take to crime unless financial help is forthcoming: ". . .faudra-t-il, après avoir si longtemps vécu sans reproche. . .que je deshonore aujourd'hui mon non [sic.] par une indignité?"¹¹

¹⁰J.-J. Rousseau, Correspondance générale, annotée et commentée par Théophile Dufour (Paris: Colin, 1924), I, 20. All references are to this edition of the correspondence.

¹¹Ibid., p. 13.

1731

April; as the companion of an exotic charlatan, Rousseau goes from Boudry to Fribourg, Berne and Soleure. May; leaves for a position in Paris, with a letter from the Bishop of Annecy. August; disillusioned, he returns on foot to Lyon, and thence, on receipt of a letter and funds from Mme. de Warens, to Chambéry. October; begins work on the castral survey.

1731

Rousseau abandons work on the survey, to teach music; writes to Mme. de Warens from Besançon that he has been warmly received in musical circles, but hastens to add: "J'ai donc résolu de retourner dans quelques jours à Chambéry. . .".¹²

1735-6

He visits Lyon briefly; writes to his father à propos of his past misdeeds: "Je n'ai rien à répondre à l'objection qu'on me peut faire sur l'irrégularité de ma conduite passée, comme elle n'est pas excusable je ne prétens pas l'excuser".¹³

1737

June-July; from Geneva he writes to Mme. de Warens complaining of his miserable situation as he waits to collect his inheritance, and adds;

. . .par surcroit de bonheur je n'ai Madame,
point de nouvelles de votre part.
.
si je n'en reçois pas l'ordinaire prochain

¹²J.-J. Rousseau, Correspondance générale, p. 17.

¹³Ibid., p. 32.

je ne sais ce que je deviendrai.¹⁴

September; Rousseau goes to Montpellier. His departure is probably instigated by Mme. de Warens' attention to Wintzenried, her new protégé. October; he writes that, unless he hears from her;

. . .je serai contraint de partir dans le
dernier désordre et me rendre à Chambéry
comme je pourrai.
.
Vous m'exhortés, Madame, à rester icy jusqu'à
la Saint Jean: je ne le ferois pas quand
on m'y convriroit d'or.¹⁵

Unable to support the eight-month absence she proposes, he exclaims, "Oh ma chère Maman! J'aime mieux être auprès de D. que de posséder la plus grande fortune dans tout autre cas."¹⁶

1738

Returning to Chambéry in the early spring, Rousseau stays alone at Les Charmettes, while Mme. de Warens and Wintzenried live in town.

1740

April; he goes to Lyon to be tutor in the household of M. Mably.

1741

May (?); he returns to Chambéry. July-December; is again, probably, at Lyon. Late in this year Rousseau leaves for

¹⁴J.-J. Rousseau, Correspondance générale, pp. 49, 50.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 60, 63.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 72.

Paris. His decisive break with Mme. de Warens is occasioned purely by her total refusal to lavish any more time, attention or money on him.

* * *

Daniel Mornet has said of Rousseau's early life, "La première grosse vérité que (cette existence) impose est que Rousseau est un instable et un inquiet".¹⁷ The basic facts of our chronology suggest that Rousseau's childhood and adolescence were unsettled and distressing, and that the first thirty years were spent continually on the move.¹⁸ Mme. de Warens afforded Rousseau a measure of security, as his continual returns to her indicate.

We should not necessarily infer from the disproportionate amount of space occupied in the Confessions by Rousseau's account of his early years,¹⁹ that these years were particularly happy ones. His account of his early life is euphemistic. We shall examine Rousseau's childhood more closely, the facts established by the chronology supporting the main subject of chapter I.

¹⁷Daniel Mornet, Rousseau, l'homme et l'oeuvre (Paris: Boivin, 1950), p. 21.

¹⁸Roland Desné supplies a useful map of the early journeys of Rousseau in Europe, nos. 391-392 (Nov.-Dec. 1961), pp. 232-233.

¹⁹See J.-J. Rousseau, Confessions (Paris: Garnier, 1964), p. xxxvi.

CHAPTER I
THE PICARESQUE NOVEL AND THE CHILDHOOD
OF ROUSSEAU

Before attempting to make a comparison between the early life of Rousseau and that of the fictional picaro, we might find it expedient to give some working definition of the picaresque novel, and some outline of its history.

F. W. Chandler, an early authority, described it thus:

As conceived in Spain and matured in France, the picaresque novel is the comic biography, or more often the autobiography, of an anti-hero, who makes his way in the world through the service of masters. . .it possesses therefore two poles of interest, the rogue and his tricks, and the manners he pillories.¹

Equally apt is this definition by a modern critic,

R. Alter:

. . .it is the adventurous story of a rogue's life, usually told in the first person; its episodic account of wanderings, adversity and role-playing usually incorporates a satiric view of society.²

¹F. W. Chandler, The Literature of Roguery (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1907), I, 5.

²R. Alter, The Rogue's Progress (Harvard: University Press, 1964), p. viii.

It is unwise to venture generalizations beyond those offered by Alter, as the picaresque novel is loosely defined. Each individual novel constitutes a variation on the basic themes. For the purposes of this study we shall consider the earliest Spanish picaresque novels; Gil Blas of Lesage; La Vie de Marianne and Le Paysan parvenu of Marivaux;³ and finally, picaresque novels by Defoe and Fielding.

How and when did the picaresque novel arise? Lazarillo de Tormes, an anonymous work which appeared in Spain in 1554, is generally considered to be the first. It was followed in 1599 by Mateo Alemán's Guzman de Alfarache, in 1618 by Espinel's Marcos de Obregon and in 1626 by La Vida del buscon of Villegas. Between 1620 and 1660 there was a spate of picaresque novels, and by about 1665 the genre was worked out in Spain. However, the French had been avidly devouring translations of this rogue fiction as soon as they could be procured; Guzman de Alfarache had eight editions between 1620 and 1646; the picaresque novel gradually became a part of French literary tradition, although Spain and peculiarly Spanish circumstances had accounted for its birth.

The picaresque novel had originally developed in Spain partly as a literary reaction against the escapist,

³Although Marianne and Jacob are too urbane to qualify as picaros in the original sense of the term, they clearly derive their humble social station, emotional resilience and steadfast pursuit of their own interests, from more robust opportunists.

pastoral romances of chivalry, and partly, as a consequence of cynicism and bitterness when the ideals generated in mid-sixteenth century by Erasmian humanism were blighted by reality. Idealists were forced to recognize that contempt for the world and its honours would never spread into that stratum of society where the distribution of honours and favours constituted an amusement for the idle and the privileged. Social advancement in Spain was conditioned by "purity of blood", rather than by intrinsic merit. The picaro, therefore--the outsider, who composes a new and more impressive ancestry for himself at every turn--is shown as one on whom society can never smile, and who can and must make his own way by his own means, however unscrupulous.

To these two conditions may be added the prevalence of poor social conditions in Spain, and the glorification of adventure in this, the age of the Conquistadors.

The picaresque novel was not originally conceived purely as a narrative of roguish deeds; in sixteenth century Spain, serious moral content was perfectly acceptable in a work dealing with crime and low-life; the lower the circumstances of the picaro, the greater his need of God.⁴ However

⁴Alemán in The Rogue, or the Life of Guzman de Alfarache, trans. Thomas Mabbe (London: Constable, 1924), I, 26, insists that the work will be morally edifying. Guzman says:

My travels and my studies found est-soone

the genre tended to lose its moral overtones with its passage into the literature of foreign countries. French translations often took the form of adaptations, since according to the classical hierarchy of literary genres, "le bas comique" was a quite inappropriate vehicle for moral instruction.⁵ When Lesage translated Guzman de Alfarache he suppressed almost entirely the lengthy anecdotes from the lives of the Saints, with which Aleman had peppered his text. While English translators tended to be less affected by "bienséance", and to translate the Spanish novels wholesale, we may be sure the English Protestant reader found more to interest him in the roguery than in the repentance. With the eighteenth-century resurgence of the genre on English soil, we find our narrators conspicuously reluctant to pass judgement on their characters. The "sin" of the picaro--if any!--is now considered to be the direct result of his sociological environment. Defoe, for example, has few comments to make

More Formes and Changes then are in the Moone,

 An unhewne piece of wood I long have been
 But polish't now by this neat worke-man's hand,
 And on the Altar set, as a Memoriall stand,
 To lesson others how their lives to leade,
 While I to them mine own misfortunes reade.

⁵Even Shakespeare was reproved by French critics for mingling the lofty with the low. F. C. Green in Modern Language Notes, XL (1925), p. 258, cites Desfontaines on Shakespeare: "Mais tout ce qui est naturel est-il beau, est-il agréable? N'est-ce pas s'avilir que de prendre plaisir à entendre parler des fossoyeurs et des savetiers?"

on the conduct of his Moll Flanders, who represents the nadir of picaresque aspiration, the driving force in her case being economic self-interest, pure and simple.

With Fielding's novels the underlying seriousness--even desperation--of the early Spaniards is quite gone. Fielding skates lightly over the childhood of his picaro without touching on genuine deprivation; he retains only the endearing and comic aspects of his beleaguered hero; plus, of course, the episodic framework of a story based on wanderings from situation to situation, from inn to inn.

We perceive, then, a gradual movement of the genre, away from its country of origin, and away from its specific and even painful insistence upon the cruel circumstances which would invariably turn a sharp-witted boy into a rogue. By the early eighteenth century, the picaro finds himself, as Léo Clarétie says, "sérieusement décrassé".⁶ Yet despite the gradual softening of tone, the eighteenth-century novelists still account for the formation of their anti-hero in the traditional manner, by placing him among unreliable people in a suitably undesirable milieu.

The childhood and adolescence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau conform in almost every respect to the requirements of a

⁶Cited by Vivienne Mylne, The Eighteenth-century French Novel; Techniques of Illusion (Manchester: University Press, 1965), p. 50.

picaresque novel. What, then, are these requirements, and how far were his earliest years a re-working of that bitter childhood which the early Spanish authors, either from experience or from first-hand observation, had drawn with such a sure hand?

The first step in the formation of a picaro is a broken home, or one in which the more stable parent is removed by death. Lazarillo de Tormes loses his thieving father in war, and is left to his own devices when his mother sets up house with a negro groom. Guzman de Alfarache loses both his putative fathers:⁷

. . .my mother grieved much. . .for that (she was) growne now so aged, that she was super-annuated for any more suitors. . . .You see me heere left without a father (either the one or the other!), our goods wasted, and that which is worst of all, bearing a high sayle, living at a great rate, without any person in it to gaine a penny to maintain this port. . . .

Moll Flanders' mother, having been "convicted of a felony", is deported posthaste, leaving her hard-headed daughter, still a babe in arms, to the care of the Parish.⁸

What of Rousseau? His mother's death within a week

⁷Alemán, Guzman, I, 88.

⁸Daniel Defoe, The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders (New York: Knopf, 1923), p. 4.

of his birth left him, at least, the affection of a kindly aunt, Suzon Bernard; but inevitably, his fate hinged more directly on that of his father. Isaac Rousseau was subject to extremes of emotion, and his unstable temperament caused him, firstly, to indulge the young Jean-Jacques in unbridled transports of affection,⁹ and secondly, to abandon him. On the occasion of his father's flight to Nyon, Rousseau, now ten years old, was entrusted to the care of M. and Mlle. Lambercier, whose fundamental lack of insight, notwithstanding their kindness, brought about an unmerited beating. This first taste of injustice put a decisive ending to the age of innocence for Rousseau, just as the cynicism of his mother did for the picaro Pablo.¹⁰

At the age of thirteen, Rousseau, as an apprentice to Abel Ducommun, was living in his master's house, his contact with members of his own family growing ever weaker; as

⁹"...jamais il ne m'embrassa que je ne sentisse à ses soupirs, à ses convulsives étreintes, qu'un regret amer se mêlait à ses caresses"; J.-J. Rousseau, Les Confessions (Paris: Garnier, 1964), pp. 6-7. All references within the text, and all other references unless otherwise specified, are to this edition.

¹⁰The mother ridicules the child for his naivety in wanting to know his father's identity. See A. A. Parker, Literature and the Delinquent: the Picaresque Novel in Spain and Europe, 1599-1753 (Edinburgh: University Press, 1967), pp. 62-63.

Guéhenno says, "il devint un enfant du bas".¹¹ Rousseau tells us of this stage:

Mon père, quand je l'allais voir, ne trouvait plus en moi son idole. . . .Les goûts les plus vils, la plus basse polissonnerie, succédèrent à mes aimables amusements. . . .La tyrannie de mon maître finit par me rendre insupportable le travail que j'aurais aimé, et par me donner des vices que j'aurais haïs, tels que le mensonge, la fainéantise, le vol. (I, 33)

At this point, in fiction, the picaro invariably begins to steal. He is particularly tempted by food and drink; Lazarillo shares his blind master's wine by boring a hole in the flask and inserting a straw, and also removes a substantial joint of meat, for which he substitutes a turnip:

I found the miserable old sinner with the turnip stuck between two slices of bread, preparing, as he thought, to make a delightful repast.¹²

Such behaviour is hardly surprising, since the master has no qualms about offering the boy crumbs supposedly eaten by rats, saying, ". . .there, eat that, rats are very clean animals".¹³

¹¹Jean Guéhenno, Jean-Jacques: en marge des "Confessions" (Paris: Grasset, 1948), p. 31.

¹²The Life and Adventures of Lazarillo de Tormes, trans. Thomas Roscoe (London: Nimmo and Bain, 1881), p. 20.

¹³Ibid., p. 33.

Guzman de Alfarache ascribes his first theft to the effects of want; "How many dishonest actions doth it venture on? What cruell imaginings doth it represent unto thee? What infamous things doth it sollicite?"¹⁴

Rousseau, like his fictional counterparts, quickly made the association between exemplary conduct and a full stomach, and finally discarding his long-cherished scruples, began to steal food; first, asparagus for his friends, then apples for himself:

J'appris. . .qu'il n'était pas si terrible de voler que je l'avais cru, et je tirai bientôt si bon parti de ma science, que rien de ce que je convoitais n'était à ma portée en sûreté. (I, 36)

Like all apprentices at the mercy of irascible masters, whether fictional or otherwise, Rousseau was accordingly beaten; but this treatment had the effect of deadening his conscience completely.

Je jugeais que me battre comme fripon, c'était m'autoriser à l'être. Je trouvais que voler et être battu allaient ensemble et constituaient en quelque sorte un état. . . . (I, 37)

Neither in real life nor in fiction does the apprentice endure his miserable existence for long. Rousseau at fifteen years old was virtually without family, subject to beatings by his master, and perhaps under surveillance by the

¹⁴Alemán, Guzman, I, 235.

Consistory of Geneva, which had already had dealings with his father Isaac and his elder brother François. Rousseau's master, Ducommun, sent out his henchmen to reclaim paltry debts by any means they thought fit, and Rousseau himself had incurred Ducommun's wrath in this connection. In fact, there seemed little to stay for.

Rousseau mentions in an early draft of the Confessions that he was in the habit of spending Sundays with Catholic curés outside Geneva.¹⁵ These curés regaled all comers, in the hopes of converting as many as possible to the faith, and M. Pontverre of Confignon was particular active in the recruitment of young refugees from Geneva.¹⁶ It seems likely that Rousseau was well-acquainted with Pontverre before his departure from the city, and that, as he gave Bernadin de Saint-Pierre to understand, ". . . il changea de religion pour avoir du pain".¹⁷

Hence Rousseau's arrival at that moment of decision which recurs in so many dramatic forms throughout the history of the picaresque novel:

¹⁵A fact mentioned only by Jean Guéhenno; Jean-Jacques, p. 40.

¹⁶Eugène Ritter in La Famille et la jeunesse de J.-J. Rousseau (Paris: Hachette, 1896), p. 173, gives details of an extraordinary campaign waged by M. Pontverre against Rousseau's protector M. Lambercier.

¹⁷Bernadin de Saint-Pierre, La Vie et les ouvrages de J.-J. Rousseau (Paris: Cornély, 1907), p. 42.

Dans le premier transport de douleur, je me jetai sur le glacis et mordis la terre. . . . Sur le lieu même je jurai de ne retourner jamais chez mon maître; et le lendemain, quand, à l'heure de la découverte, (mes camarades) rentrèrent en ville, je leur dis adieu pour jamais. . . . (I, 45)

This climactic moment is a commonplace in picaresque literature. Guzman de Alfarache tells us: "I had scarce gone out of the citie gate, when two great Rivers. . . did break out from forth mine eyes. . . ."18

Pablos, in La Vida del buscon, decides that a new life is called for: "I resolved never to return to school or to my father's house".19

Robinson Crusoe, whose escape his creator has particularly pressing reasons to engineer, shows all the restlessness of a picaro in his early years, and at eighteen, announces to his father:

. . . that it was too late to go apprentice to a trade. . . that I was sure if I did, I should never serve out my time. . . I should certainly run away from my master. . . and in short, to prevent my father's farther importunities, in a few weeks after, I resolved to run quite away from him.20

As for Tom Jones' arrival at this unhappy stage, Fielding informs us; "The world, as Milton phrases it, lay all before him, and Jones, no more than Adam, had any man to

¹⁸ Alemán, Guzman, I, p. 93.

¹⁹ Cited by A. A. Parker, Literature and the Delinquent, p. 66.

²⁰ Daniel Defoe, The Life and Strange Adventures of

whom he might resort for comfort and assistance".²¹ Smollett's Roderick Random, meanwhile, recalls for the benefit of his reader, ". . . (I) sallied forth in a transport of rage and sorrow, having not one friend in the world capable of relieving me, and only three shillings in my purse".²²

Gil Blas, last but not least, sets out well aware that his uncle is delighted to be rid of him; and as for his parents, ". . . ils me firent présent de leur bénédiction, qui étoit le seul bien que j'attendois d'eux".²³

Of all the stages of the picaresque novel, this is possibly the most significant, for it marks the point at which the picaro's adventures begin. Here for the moment we will leave Jean-Jacques Rousseau, with no mention of his later adventures, or the style he has chosen for their narration.

Rousseau's life from 1712 to 1728, despite periods of security, and happy months as Bossey, was not, perhaps, conducive to developing in him the temperamental stability which he lacked. His idle father's failure to follow him farther than Annecy was tantamount to an expression of utter

Robinson Crusoe (New York: Cromwell, 1903), pp. 4-5.

²¹Henry Fielding, The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling (New York: Collier, 1917), I, 313.

²²Tobias Smollett, Roderick Random (London: Folio Soc., 1961), p. 46.

²³Alain-René Lesage, Histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane (Paris: Société les Belles Lettres, 1935), I, 9.

indifference as to the fate of this second son. Isaac Rousseau's behaviour corresponds quite admirably with that of picaresque parents of fiction, and only an innate delicacy on Rousseau's part prevents the extent of this laziness and indifference being apparent to any reader of the Confessions.

If, then, Rousseau unconsciously cast his youthful self as a picaresque figure, we might remember that by the age of sixteen he lacked not one of the ideal circumstances in which to become one. Broken home, insecurity, theft, beatings, boredom, and inevitably, evasion; the pattern is complete. Before we consider what Rousseau made of these circumstances in the Confessions, we should perhaps ask how much he knew of the picaresque genre, and establish the grounds on which we might legitimately relate the Confessions to earlier and contemporary fiction. These grounds will form the matter of chapter II.

An estimated fifty per cent of the content of Gil Blas is directly derived from Spanish picaresque novels; an interesting point to remember in connection with Rousseau.

CHAPTER II

ROUSSEAU, FICTION AND IMAGINATION

Rousseau professed for the novel a disdain which was entirely appropriate to his century. Particularly in the earlier half of the eighteenth century, when literacy was largely confined to the upper classes, the novel was considered by all but a few unrepentant devotees to be not only puerile, petty, light and inconsequential, but also decadent; a pernicious influence on the morals of the young. Men of letters rigorously schooled in classical doctrines, educated in the application of logic,¹ whose criteria were established classical models and whose opinion of a modern work depended on its approximation to those models, were radically opposed to the novel, which was still groping for its definitive form, and had little chance of ever seeing the light unless presented in memoir form.² Memoirs, or pseudo-memoirs, of

¹See Daniel Mornet, La Pensée française au dix-huitième siècle (Paris: Colin, 1947), p. 7, for a fine example of scholastic debate:

. . .les jeunes orateurs du collège de Bayeux plaident à quatre pour savoir quelle est la situation la plus misérable, celle d'un statuaire privé de ses mains, d'un orateur privé de sa langue, d'un peintre de ses yeux, d'un jeune homme sourd?' Ils plaident en latin.

²The illusion of authenticity was of such importance

which a vast number was published between 1700 and 1750, were largely fiction, but laid claim to a modicum of historical authenticity; this was the case, for example, with Hamilton's Les Mémoires du comte de Gramont of 1713, where the count's movements across Europe are dictated by the movements of the French army in its glorious campaigns, and where the action, if such it may be called, is confined to the most dazzling and distinguished of court circles.

Deplored by scholars, the novel met with even more purposeful opposition by the Jesuits. F. C. Green³ has surmised that the influence of the church even resulted in the late 1730's in an official proscription of novels; the Abbé Granet in his Refléxions sur les ouvrages de littérature of 1739 said à propos of the effects of novel reading upon public morality, ". . . (le) Chef de la magistrature. . . les a proscrits avec raison";⁴ while in the case of

that the celebrated Richardson reproved a Bishop for inadvertently destroying it:

Will you, good Sir, allow me to mention that I could wish the Air of genuiness [sic.] had been kept up. . . I mean, as that they should not prefatically be owned not to be genuine. . . to avoid hurting that kind of Historical Faith which fiction itself is generally read with. . .".

Cited by Mylne, The Eighteenth-century French Novel, p. 167.

³In "The Eighteenth-Century French Critic and the Contemporary Novel", Modern Language Review, XXIII (1928), 176. See also Georges May, Le Dilemme du Roman au dix-huitième siècle (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), p. 96.

⁴Ibid., p. 81.

several of the most popular novels of the day, printed as usual in sets of several volumes, the place of printing, listed in the early volumes as Paris, changes abruptly to Amsterdam or the Hague.

Certainly, the watchful eye of the censor did not blight the fortunes of many potential masterpieces. The subject of the early eighteenth-century novels was more often amorous intrigue than anything else; in Hamilton's Comte de Gramont for example, chapter headings "Intrigues amoureuses" or "Autres intrigues amoureuses" cover well over half the book, and the content does not belie our expectations. While Hamilton does not venture much beyond the appeal of a white arm, or description of the elegant "parure" of the Count's favourites, many novels were prurient or pornographic.

Crébillon's Tanzai et Néadarné of 1735 is full of the titillation characteristic of the early Regency period, and is no doubt indicative of the prevailing moral standards of the times. At one point, Néadarné reflects on the importance of chastity to a woman:

. . .qu'un amant se présente et qu'il plaise, qu'est-ce alors pour elle que la vertu. Si elle combat encore ce n'est plus pour la sauver-elle y perdrait trop. Mais il faut céder avec honneur et mettre du grand dans sa foiblesse, tomber décemment, en un mot.⁵

⁵Claude Crébillon, Tanzai et Néadarné, histoire japonoise (1735), III, 143. The place of publication, given as "Pékin, chez Lou-Chou-Chu-La" is of course Paris.

At another point Tanzai is charged with the task of bathing his fiancée, whose honour he has sworn to maintain; "Jamais bain ne fût prise d'une façon moins tranquille", as Crébillon relates with evident delight.⁶

The décor for such piquant tales was more often than not oriental and exotic. Hardly surprising, perhaps, that novels were deemed suitable fare for women; for what rational, scholarly gentleman could care for such escapist fantasies as these?

Il lui fit traverser des apartemens immenses, plus ornez par le goût que par la magnificence. . . . Du palais on entraît dans des jardins chamans [sic.]. . . c'étoient des cascades à perte de vue, des cabinets superbes, des statues d'un grand prix. . . .⁷

A variation on amorous intrigue in these early novels, was the straightforward history of a rake's conquests. Duclos' delightful Les Confessions du Comte de ***, seems according to the findings of Daniel Mornet⁸ to have enjoyed a tremendous success, details the hero's seduction of, among others, ". . . la précieuse, la dissipée, la capricieuse, la coquette, la facile, la libertine, la scélérate, la

⁶Claude Crébillon, Tanzai et Néadarné, histoire japonoise, p. 47.

⁷Ibid., p. 145.

⁸Daniel Mornet, "Les Enseignements des bibliothèques privées (1750-1780)", Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France, XVII (1910), 449-491.

conseillère, la financière et la bourgeoise".⁹ The Count asserts that a young man of fashion would believe his honour lost if he went a fortnight without an affair, and without feeling himself to be a centre of public attention; he confides that, as for himself, "Je n'ai jamais comté un mari pour quelque chose".¹⁰ Despite the eventual conversion of the Count by an unusually strong-minded lady, the general impression we retain from the book is that, in the words of the Count himself, "Paris est le centre de la dissipation".¹¹

Worse was to follow, at least in the realm of literature, the late 1740's ushering in a spate of obscene novels. However, with the translation of Richardson's Pamela into French in 1742, the novel began to acquire the attribute of moral utility, and to find the current of literary criticism gradually turning in its favour.

Rousseau, who after nine years of striving to make a name for himself in Paris, had had his first taste of literary glory with the publication of his Discours sur les sciences et les arts,¹² an unbridled onslaught on luxury and progress; Rousseau, who had preached against the artificial

⁹Duclos, Les Confessions du comte de *** (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1888), p. xix.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 46.

¹¹Ibid., p. 63.

¹²First published in November 1750.

sophistication of a corrupt society, and had gone so far as to retire from it in an attempt to prove his sincerity, was not likely to express an interest in, or predilection for, novels.

Recalling the circumstances of the composition of La Nouvelle Héloïse at Montmorency in 1757, Rousseau explains in his Confessions that, having aired his opinion of the novel genre in public on a number of occasions, he tried for some time to resist the urge to write one himself:

Après les principes sévères que je venais d'établir avec tant de fracas, après les maximes austères que j'avais si fortement prêchées, après tant d'invectives mordantes contre les livres efféminés qui respiraient l'amour et la mollesse, pouvait-on rien imaginer de plus inattendu que de me voir tout d'un coup m'inscrire de ma propre main parmi les auteurs de ces livres que j'avais si durement censurés? (IX, 514-515)

Unsurprisingly perhaps, La Nouvelle Héloïse in its definitive form shows Rousseau reluctant to back down altogether from his original position. He recommends that the novel be kept from the hands of innocent maidens: "Il faut. . .des Romans aux peuples corrompus."¹³ . . .Jamais fille chaste n'a lu de romans",¹⁴ he insists in the first preface to the work; and elsewhere, at greater length:

¹³J.-J. Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-64), II, 5.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 6.

On a voulu rendre la lecture des Romans utile à la jeunesse. Je ne connois point de projet plus insensé. C'est commencer par mettre le feu à la maison pour faire jouer les pompes.¹⁵

Today, we tend to think of La Nouvelle Héloïse as something of an isolated phenomenon among the other works of Rousseau;¹⁶ we dismiss its rhetoric as stylised and even comic, and conclude that the august philosopher's excursion into the realms of fantasy was uncharacteristic and unsatisfactory. If, thanks to his own carefully-engineered position with regard to works of fiction, we imagine him writing one only in exceptional circumstance, we are even less likely to imagine him engaged in reading such trivia.

But setting aside for a moment the legendary image of Rousseau the profound philosopher--an image whose general acceptance he himself helped to perpetrate--let us consider the evidence for his interest in fiction. For, surprisingly enough, we know Rousseau to have been familiar with every single work of fiction so far alluded to in this chapter.¹⁷ Novel-reading was a general mania in the eighteenth century, and

¹⁵J.-J. Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes, II, 24.

¹⁶Isolated not, as in the eighteenth century, by its extraordinary merit, but rather by its overall mediocrity; changing tastes have sapped the book of much of its original fascination.

¹⁷See Marguerite Reichenburg, Essai sur les lectures de Rousseau (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1932); P. Léon, "Additions et corrections au repertoire des lectures de J.-J. Rousseau", A.J.J.R., XXIII (1934), 243-50; and the

Rousseau, far from being exempt from this mania, as he would have us believe, was particularly susceptible to it, especially during his early years. What evidence supports this view? Firstly, that of the Confessions themselves.

Rousseau recalls that reading was among his earliest pleasures:

Ma mère avait laissé des romans. Nous nous mîmes à les lire après souper mon père et moi. Il n'était question d'abord que de n'exercer à la lecture par des livres amusants; mais bientôt l'intérêt devint si vif que nous lisions tour à tour sans relâche et passions les nuits à cette occupation. (I, 7)

The novels in question were Cassandre and Cléopâtre of La Calprenède, completed in 1645 and 1647 respectively, and Le Grand Cyrus of Mlle. de Scudéry¹⁸--unappealing fare for one so young unless he already had a natural propensity to lose himself in dream-worlds. To this literary diet Rousseau attributes "des notions bizarres et romanesques (de la vie humaine) dont l'expérience et la réflexion n'ont jamais bien pu me guérir".¹⁹

If we enquire which novels were in greatest demand during the first half of the eighteenth century, and whether he had read them, Rousseau's interest in fiction is further substantiated.

Romantic Review, XXVI (Jan.-March 1935), 62.

¹⁸This work was published between 1649 and 1653.

¹⁹Rousseau, Confessions, I, 8.

The Abbé Granet, in his condemnation of the genre in 1739, affords grudging praise, but praise nevertheless, to a few outstanding works; "ouvrages ingénieux et agréables",²⁰ as he calls them; Prévost's Cléveland and Marivaux's La Vie de Marianne and Le Paysan parvenu figure upon his list. These works enjoyed sensational success, as we would infer from their mention here and from other sources. Research by Daniel Mornet²¹ and François Jost²² into the fictional taste of the eighteenth-century reader again show the novels of Prévost and Marivaux occupying prime of place, with Lesage's Gil Blas, Hamilton's Les Mémoires du comte de Gramont, and Duclos' Confessions du comte de *** also in evidence. Of the twelve French novels Jost lists as possibly the most influential of the century, Rousseau wrote one, and was well-acquainted with at least six others; since he read few novels after 1760, and died in 1778, we would surmise that his interest in fiction was considerable in his early years.

The text of the Confessions, where Rousseau belies his philosophical image to reminisce a little, shows that he

²⁰Cited by Georges May, Le Dilemme du roman, p. 81.

²¹Daniel Mornet, "Les Enseignements des bibliothèques privées".

²²François Jost, "Le Roman épistolaire et la technique narrative au dix-huitième siècle", Comparative Literature Studies, III (1966), 397-427.

not only read but also "lived" several of the novels we have mentioned. Reading Cléveland at Chambéry in the early 1730's, Rousseau experienced all the grand passions of that hero:

La lecture des malheurs imaginaires de Cléveland, faite avec fureur et souvent interrompue, m'a fait faire, je crois, plus de mauvais sang que les miens. (V, 253-4)

He ordered the last volumes of Cléveland and those of La Vie de Marianne from his bookseller Barillot of Geneva, in a letter of 1737.

His acquaintance with Lesage's Gil Blas dated from a stay at Lyon in 1731, and by saying that he was not at that time mature enough to enjoy it, he implies that he naturally came to do so in later years. He supports an anecdote of his own with an anecdote from Gil Blas in the eleventh book of his Confessions.²³

According to L. G. Crocker, Rousseau and Diderot numbered the elderly Lesage among their acquaintance during their first years in Paris.²⁴

Rousseau's knowledge of Hamilton's Comte de Gramont probably dates from his Chambéry days, as he describes it as his only source of general knowledge about England during

²³XI, 655. The anecdote in question is not, as stated in n. 1, from book II of Gil Blas, but from book VII.

²⁴L. G. Crocker, The Embattled Philosopher; a Biography of Denis Diderot (Michigan: State College Press, 1954), p. 33.

his masquerade²⁵ as an Englishman on his journey to Montpellier in September 1737.

Duclos' novel was given to Rousseau by Mme. de Broglie as a breviary, or manual for survival in Parisian society, shortly after his arrival, with which the novel's first publication virtually coincided. The work made so great an impression on Rousseau that he instigated and pursued a friendship with Duclos which lasted almost to the end of his own life.

Rousseau also knew Marivaux personally during the 1740's:

Je lui montrai... ma comédie de "Narcisse". Elle lui plut et il eut la complaisance de la retoucher. (VII, 334)

In other words, Rousseau took pains to ingratiate himself with one of the most influential literary figures of the day, whose work he knew, and was inclined to admire.²⁶ It is scarcely conceivable that in these circumstances Rousseau should not have known of Marivaux's neo-picaresque novel, Le Paysan parvenu of 1735.

²⁵Rousseau concealed his true identity at least three times during his vagabond days: in Turin [III, 97], in Lausanne [IV, 164] and here [VI, 288].

²⁶Currying favour with the great was the usual expedient for an unknown provincial, newly-arrived; Rousseau tells us, "...j'avais trente ans, et je me trouvais sur le pavé de Paris, où l'on ne vit pas pour rien". (VII, 333)

As for Rousseau's connection with Crébillon, we can only observe that the unlikely appearance of the latter on the table drawn up by Marguerite Reichenburg suggests, once again, that very little of the significant literary activity of his time went unmarked by Rousseau.

What then of the English novel, the rage of the Parisian literary scene during the 1740's and 1750's? Without attempting to give a detailed account of the extraordinary anglomania which prevailed in Paris at the time,²⁷ we will pass directly to its influence upon Rousseau. Studies of this influence usually begin and end with Richardson as a determining factor in the genesis of La Nouvelle Héloïse.

Certainly, Rousseau's reaction to Clarissa is altogether characteristic of his age. In the Lettre à M. d'Alembert of 1758 he states unequivocally, "On n'a jamais fait encore, en quelque langage que ce soit, de roman égal à Clarisse, ni même approchant".²⁸ Diderot, a reliable barometer of the literary climate, gives us some idea of the eighteenth-century reader's reaction to this rambling, sentimental novel, with this description. His subject has reached the death of Clarissa:

²⁷The works of Joseph Texte, Georges May and Vivienne Mylne deal with anglomania in some detail.

²⁸J.-J. Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Armand-Aubrée, 1832), I, 351.

Je l'examinais; d'abord je vois couler des pleurs, il s'interrompt, il sanglote; tout à coup il se lève, il marche sans savoir où il va; il pousse des cris comme un homme désolé, et il adresse les reproches les plus amers à toute la famille des Harlowe.²⁹

Diderot himself played a large part in popularising the works of Richardson, and professed himself a devotee of the new English genius: "O Richardson, Richardson, tu seras ma lecture dans tous les temps!"³⁰

Pamela was first translated into French in 1742; Clarissa, in 1751-52. Rousseau's retreat to Mme. d'Epinaÿ's estate took place only in 1756, and until then he was in continual contact with Diderot, Grimm, and the other literary anglophiles who then graced the fashionable salons of Paris; Richardson's name was on all lips. Although not guilty of deliberate plagiarism, in writing La Nouvelle Héloïse Rousseau undoubtedly became imaginatively involved in Richardson's novels to a certain extent.³¹

Should the reader enquire what possible relationship might exist between the didactic novels of Richardson and the ironic, flippant picaresque novel of the eighteenth century, we might point out that Richardson is as lavish with spicy details as with cries of virtuous indignation; that the

²⁹Denis Diderot, Oeuvres (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), p. 1101.

³⁰Ibid., p. 1093.

³¹For Rousseau, admiration invariably meant emulation;

potential downfall of a helpless virgin constitutes the main interest of both Pamela and Clarissa; that Clarissa's tormentor Lovelace is as ruthless and unrefined in his unambiguous designs, as the unkindest of picaros, and that sensuality and harsh realism both have their place in Richardson's work.³² As J. P. Priestly succinctly remarked of Pamela, "its tone is didactic, but its atmosphere is prurient".³³

Lovelace's attempts to seduce Clarissa are faithfully recorded in his correspondence:

If I am a villain, madam--and then my grasping, but trembling hand, . . . she tore my ruffle, shrank from my happy hand with amazing force and agility, as with my other arm I would have encircled her waist.³⁴

In short, then, Richardson extolled bourgeois virtues while affording his reader a sly glance at the alternatives; and in reading Richardson Rousseau would sense the dramatic effect produced by a somewhat lascivious anti-hero; Lovelace has much in common with the picaro of fiction. Rousseau's enthusiasm for the virtuous heroines of Richardson in no way negates his interest in the compelling seducers, and as we

cf. his desire to imitate Venture [IV, 164]; his style in Le Persifleur, under the influence of Diderot; and here, his purely instinctive emulation of Richardson.

³²In this connection see Joseph Texte, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Cosmopolitan Spirit in Literature, trans. J. W. Matthews (London: Duckworth, 1899), pp. 200, 226.

³³Henry Fielding, The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, preface by J. B. Priestly (London: Bodley Head, 1929), p. vii.

³⁴Samuel Richardson, Clarissa Harlowe (Boston:

shall see, one form of picaresque distortion in his own Confessions is an insistence on his own attractiveness, and on his (admittedly short-lived!) triumphs with women.

Other translations from the English also attracted much attention in Rousseau's immediate circle during the 1740's and 1750's, although very little mention has been made of their possible influence upon him. Fielding's Joseph Andrews was translated in 1743, and his Tom Jones in 1750. Although Rousseau himself makes mention of neither of these, his companions and contemporaries reviewed them for the literary journals which had sprung into being to keep Paris in touch with activity on the other side of the Channel. Desfontaines, whom Rousseau knew, said that England had not yet produced anything so fine of its kind as Joseph Andrews.³⁵ Tom Jones too³⁶ was warmly received by the critics, and despite the lamentable distortion of Fielding's style by inadequate translators, went through almost twenty re-editions and new editions between 1750 and 1800. According to Daniel Mornet's findings, moreover, Tom Jones was the most popular of nine

Houghton Mifflin, 1962), p. 264.

³⁵ See Warren Barton Blake, "'Tom Jones' in France", South Atlantic Quarterly, VIII (July 1909), p. 230.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 233.

extremely popular English works in translation; if, that is, one may assess success statistically. So we may surmise that, without perhaps ever reading the book, Rousseau would have been sure to have heard it mentioned, and quite aware of the attention and applause the picaresque genre was attracting at the time.

Smollett's Roderick Random, a classic among eighteenth-century picaresque novels, was translated into French in 1751, Peregrine Pickle in 1753; Defoe's Moll Flanders in 1761 and Sterne's Tristram Shandy in 1760.³⁷

Whether or not Rousseau did read all, or any, of these books we cannot know; but the possibility is by no means remote. They were popular, controversial and accessible. Daniel Mornet has said of Rousseau, "Il n'a pas pu ne pas subir, au moins dans une certaine mesure, l'influence des goûts de son temps";³⁸ a comment which, although made with specific reference to La Nouvelle Héloïse, is certainly applicable in a wider context. May we not, perhaps, apply to Rousseau's apparent disdain for the novel, his own explanation of his apparent disdain for France?

³⁷No place of publication appears on the 1760 translation of Part I; hence the listing in many bibliographies of the date of first publication as 1776.

³⁸Daniel Mornet, Rousseau, l'homme et l'oeuvre, p. 65.

Ce qu'il y avait de plaisant était
qu'ayant honte d'un penchant si contraire
à mes maximes, je n'osais l'avouer à
personne... (V, 208)

How, indeed, could anyone as imaginative as Rousseau have failed to delight in fiction? Since his imaginative susceptibility is rarely insisted upon, and his penchant for the colourful, the exotic and even the fantastic, virtually ignored, let us attempt to do them justice here, as briefly as possible.

Throughout the Confessions, Rousseau insists on the vividness of his imagination. Of his youth he tells us, ". . .il ne pouvait y avoir si loin du lieu où j'étais au premier château en Espagne qu'il ne me fut aisé de m'y transporter";³⁹ explaining to his reader his methods of composition, ". . .toutes mes idées sont en images";⁴⁰ and of his general character: "Il est impossible aux hommes et difficile à la nature elle-même de dépasser en richesse mon imagination".⁴¹ Under the pressure of real and imagined misfortunes, the ageing Rousseau took refuge in his chimera, as he describes in the Dialogues:

³⁹ See Théophile Dufour, "La Première Rédaction des 'Confessions', livres I à IV, publiée d'après le manuscrit autographe", A.J.J.R., IV (1908), 61.

⁴⁰ Rousseau, Confessions, IV, 198.

⁴¹ J.-J. Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes, présentation et notes de Michel Launay (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), I, 178.

La nature s'habille pour lui des formes les plus charmantes, se peint à ses yeux des couleurs les plus vives, se peuple pour son usage d'êtres selon son coeur; et lequel est le plus consolant dans l'infortune, des profondes conceptions qui fatiguent, ou des riantes fictions qui ravissent?⁴²

His preference is evident!

Often, Rousseau's readings testify to his imagination. Robinson Crusoe was always a favourite work; "Ce livre sera le premier que lira Emile; seul il composera longtemps toute sa bibliothèque, et il y tiendra toujours une place distinguée".⁴³ The abstract merits of Robinson Crusoe--its emphasis on self-sufficiency, pride in manual work, and isolation from society--appealing to Rousseau in themselves, were rendered doubly so by Defoe's description of the tropical sea, the sandy shores, and the strange and wonderful vegetation of the island.

As we have already seen, Rousseau was familiar with Prévost's Cléveland, with all its melodramatic paraphernalia. André Le Breton describes the work quite aptly in saying,

⁴²J.-J. Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-1964), II, 816.

⁴³Cited by Georges Pire in "Jean-Jacques Rousseau et Robinson Crusoe", R.L.C., 30^{ème} année, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1956). Pire offers the intriguing hypothesis that Rousseau's reading of the novel may have prompted him to leave Geneva: p. 494.

"L'action parcourt l'univers entier, et ce ne sont partout qu'évanouissements, pleurs de joie, cris de douleur, prises de voile, meurtres ou suicides";⁴⁴ not, perhaps, the diet of a Bossuet or a Pascal, but one which Rousseau, like his contemporaries, was bound to enjoy. His projected continuation of the Emile, as described to Bernadin de Saint-Pierre, was to incorporate among other features, a battle with pirates, followed by the inevitable abduction to Algiers, a desert island, and an uncomfortable trek across the deserts of North Africa.

Throughout his life, Rousseau read imaginary voyages, an overwhelmingly popular form of eighteenth-century fiction, of which, at a conservative estimate, over three hundred were written during the course of the century. Bernadin tells us of Rousseau:

Quand il en avoit rencontré quelqu'un
qu'il n'avoit pas lu, il ménageoit le plaisir
de le lire; 'Je le lirai cet hyver auprès du
feu,'
Il aimoit les Mille et Une Nuits, où le
costume oriental est très bien décrit.⁴⁵

The imaginary voyages comprised not only descriptions of utopias and alternative civilizations, but also much strange and wonderful fantasy, for example the strange pigs of

⁴⁴ André Le Breton, Le Roman français au dix-huitième siècle (Paris: Boivin, n.d.), p. 108.

⁴⁵ Bernadin de Saint-Pierre, pp. 122, 129.

Foigny's La Terre Australe⁴⁶ of 1676. These pigs had to be confined because of their habit of ploughing up all the land before them in perfectly straight lines; ". . .ils n'ont besoin d'aucun conducteur pour commencer, continuer et finir leurs raies"; only at ploughing time could their natural bent find a suitable outlet.

In La Nouvelle Héloïse, Rousseau affords Saint-Preux a brief spell on a desert island, explaining to Bernadin, ". . .je n'ai pas sorti de l'Europe. Ce n'est pas tout à fait ce que j'ai été, mais ce que j'aurois voulu être".⁴⁷

Again, Rousseau was an avid reader of Addison's Spectator. Translated into French at Amsterdam in 1714, this journal was at least as entertaining by virtue of its exotic and dramatic stories, as for its moral homilies. Hippolyte Taine cites a particularly interesting passage from the Spectator, and one which Rousseau may well have known; it is Mirza's description of his discovery of the lake of Time:

I see, said I, a huge valley and a prodigious tide of water rolling through it. . . .What is the reason, said I, that the tide of water I see rises out of a thick

⁴⁶See G. Atkinson, The Extraordinary Voyage in French Literature before 1700 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1920), p. 75.

⁴⁷Bernadin de Saint-Pierre, p. 45.

mist at one end, and again loses itself in a thick mist at the other? What thou seest, said he, is that portion of eternity which is called Time. . . .I see a bridge, said I, standing in the midst of the tide. . .I see multitudes of people passing over it, and a black cloud hanging on each end of it. . .there were innumerable trap-doors that lay concealed in the bridge, which the passengers no sooner trod upon but they fell through into the tide, and immediately disappeared. . . .⁴⁸

The image is a striking one, and the Spectator is ripe with similar gratifications for an imaginative reader such as Rousseau.

His delight in the extraordinary and the colourful is further exemplified by his own passion for travel.⁴⁹ Long before the condemnation of the Emile, Rousseau was in the habit of making unnecessary journeys in all directions, as our chronology indicates. He even contemplated travel in an upward direction, in his little-known Le Nouveau Dédale of 1742, a treatise on the possibility of human flight, and the delights it would afford:

Revenons à nos ailes [says Rousseau in all seriousness]; quand elles seront ainsi bien arrangées, il faut les oindre d'huile légèrement

⁴⁸ Cited by Hippolyte Taine, Histoire de la littérature anglaise (Paris: Hachette, 1899), III, 411.

⁴⁹ Rousseau's restlessness may have been, in part, hereditary. For more details see the article, "La Dromomanie de Rousseau", Chronique Médicale, 17^{ème} année, no. 5 (March 1910).

pour les rendre impénétrables à l'eau. Nous les attacherons bien proprement le long de nos bras. . . nous nous élancerons dans le airs avec une impétuosité d'aigle, et nous nous divertirons à considérer au-dessous de nous le manège puérile de tous ces petits hommes qui rampent misérablement sur la terre.⁵¹

"Ainsi", commented Grimm in a passage on the progress of the young Rousseau in Paris, "ses amis, avec de la foi, peuvent s'attendre à le voir quelque jour planer dans les airs. . .".⁵²

We hope to have indicated in this chapter that, notwithstanding his apparent disdain for the novel, Rousseau most certainly read, remembered and expressed admiration for all the major novels of his day. Though he may indeed have deplored the frivolity and immorality of some, he was so moved by others, that he was compelled to write one himself. Rousseau possessed an exceptionally vivid imagination, and was an attentive reader; we find echoes of his readings in all his works. Images which appealed to him were stored away in his memory--and sometimes in his notebooks--forming a reservoir on which he drew during the laborious composition of his own works.⁵³ As Pire says:

⁵⁰ Precise dating of the work is difficult. It is usually assigned to the period 1742-1752.

⁵¹ J.-J. Rousseau, Le Nouveau Dédale (Pasadena: Institute of Aeronautical History, 1950), p. 9.

⁵² Cited by Jean Guéhenno; Jean-Jacques, p. 170

⁵³ For examples, see Gilbert Chinard in L'Amérique

. . .il s'est constitué un magasin d'idées, où il a puisé dans la suite, croyant bien souvent n'emprunter qu'à son propre fonds.⁵⁴

Our third chapter will be an investigation into the relationship of the Confessions to its fictional predecessors. Although, unfortunately, Rousseau left no neat file of extracts from Tom Jones, no detailed analysis of Gil Blas, to testify to a particular interest in the picaresque novel as such, we hope that a comparison between the text of the Confessions, and the texts of certain of the novels mentioned above, may perhaps speak for itself.

et le rêve exotique dans la littérature française au dix-septième et au dix-huitième siècle (Paris: Droz, 1934). Chinard accounts for Rousseau's success by saying ". . .il flattait les tendances de son temps" [p. 358]. See also Daniel Mornet on Rousseau and Muralt, in his study of La Nouvelle Héloïse (Paris: Librairie Mellottée, 1929 [?]), and Pierre-Maurice Masson in "Rousseau et Morelly", Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France, XIX (1912), 414:

Quiconque a feuilleté, à la Bibliothèque de Neuchâtel, les cahiers d'extraits où Jean-Jacques enregistrerait ses lectures au jour le jour, ne peut plus être surpris de le voir lire tel livre obscur, et de constater que des pages, parfois bien médiocres, l'ont fortement impressionné.

See also ibid., 640-646.

⁵⁴G. Pire, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau et Robinson Crusoé", 484.

CHAPTER III

DES DETAILS QUE J'IMAGINAIS: ECHOES OF THE PICARESQUE NOVEL IN THE CONFESSIONS, I TO VI

In the introduction to the Neuchâtel manuscript, the earliest draft of his Confessions,¹ Rousseau takes pains to express his belief in the moral utility of the projected work. His insistence is not merely a reiteration of the formula "utile et agréable",² which so many eighteenth-century authors automatically applied to their works in commending them to the reader, regardless of the content; Rousseau's insistence sprang, rather, from personal conviction. Clearly, the Confessions was to be a moral portrait of Jean-Jacques, and a moral portrait of unprecedented significance. He explains his undertaking thus:

. . . j'ai résolu de faire faire à mes lecteurs un pas de plus dans la connaissance des hommes. . . Je veux tâcher que pour apprendre à s'apprécier, on puisse avoir du moins une pièce de comparaison; que chacun puisse connaître soi et un autre, et cet autre ce sera moi. (Confessions, p. 787)

¹MS Neuchâtel comprises only books I-IV of the Confessions.

²This formula for literary success is constantly cited by eighteenth-century authors, and is to be found in the preface of the vast majority of novels. It derives from Horace, "Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci / Lectorem delectando panterque monendo", Ars Poetica (Oxford: Clarendon, 1891), II, 343, 344.

Rousseau has no qualms about dismissing Montaigne, and others generally acclaimed for the finesse of their self-analysis:

Je mets Montaigne à la tête de ces faux sincères qui veulent tromper en disant vrai. . . ils mentent par leurs réticences, et ce qu'ils taisent change tellement ce qu'ils feignent d'avouer, qu'en ne disant qu'une partie de la vérité ils ne disent rien. . . Montaigne se peint ressemblant mais de profil. Qui sait si quelque balafre à la joue ou un oeil crevé du côté qu'il nous a caché, n'eût pas totalement changé sa physionomie.³

At this stage Rousseau sees himself as a prophet of truth, working for the greater enlightenment of mankind:⁴

"Je serai vrai, je le serai sans réserve; je dirai tout, le bien, le mal, tout enfin".⁵

At the head of the manuscript he copies the Latin device "Intus et in cute".⁶ In January 1763 he orders from his bookseller three works destined to help him in his relentless pursuit of truth; the Pensées of Pascal, the works of La Bruyère and the Imitation de Jésus-Christ. Rousseau did in fact carry out his original intention--whether courageous or masochistic--of sparing himself no shame in the

³Rousseau, Confessions, p. 787.

⁴Rousseau's personal motto, which he found in Juvenal, was "Vitam impendere vero"; Satires, IV, 91.

⁵Rousseau, Confessions, p. 790.

⁶Persius, Satires, III, 30.

recital of his sins.⁷ His concern with absolute truth, as expressed here, is quite sincere.

The introduction to the Paris and Geneva manuscripts is briefer than that of the Neuchâtel text, and posterior to it by perhaps two years. Although intermittent periods of great mental instability have effectively heightened the confessional aspect of the introduction, so that we find Rousseau proclaiming, "Que la trompette du jugement dernier sonne quand elle voudra; je viendrai, ce livre à la main, me présenter devant le souverain juge",⁸ his concern with the whole truth is much as it was: "J'ai dit le bien et le mal avec la même franchise. Je n'ai rien tu de mauvais, rien ajouté de bon. . . ."⁹

Up to this point any attempt to relate Rousseau's sober and lofty conception of the Confessions to the decidedly worldly novel of the early eighteenth century, would seem, perhaps, quite gratuitous!

Yet here, in the brief preface written after at least five years' work on the first four books of the Confessions, Rousseau qualifies his earlier protestations

⁷Unfortunately, his honesty failed to impress his readers in the way he had intended. He drew upon himself the censure of society with publication of the Confessions, and blackened his own reputation irretrievably.

⁸I, 4.

⁹Ibid.

in a strangely defensive manner:

. . . s'il m'est arrivé d'employer quelque ornement indifférent, ce n'a jamais été que pour remplir un vide occasionné par mon défaut de mémoire; j'ai pu supposer vrai ce que je savais avoir pu l'être, jamais ce que je savais être faux.¹⁰

His memory, he claims, is bad; he therefore has recourse to various means of supplementing it. In fact, Rousseau is here justifying the unpremeditated inclusion of a certain amount of "ornement" in the work. Having amended, abridged, refined and modified his drafts continually, over a period of several years, he was undoubtedly well aware that the artist in him had often given aesthetic considerations precedence over factual accuracy; for this he felt bound to account; hence this somewhat nebulous explanation. Elsewhere, Rousseau deals more directly with his inclusion of "ornement". This passage from the Rêveries du promeneur solitaire is for us of capital importance:

J'écrivis mes "Confessions" déjà vieux. . . Je les écrivais de mémoire; cette mémoire me manquait souvent ou ne me fournissait que des souvenirs imparfaits, et j'en remplissais les lacunes par des détails que j'imaginai en supplément de ces souvenirs, mais qui ne leur étaient jamais contraires. J'aimais à m'étendre sur les moments heureux de ma vie, et je les embellissais quelquefois des ornements que de tendres regrets venaient me fournir. Je disais les choses que j'avais oubliées comme il me

¹⁰I, 4.

semblait qu'elles avaient dû être, comme elles avaient été peut-être, jamais au contraire de ce que je me rappelais qu'elles avaient été.¹¹

Evidently then, in writing the Confessions Rousseau left himself a wide margin for adaptation, and was free to fill the gaps left by memory with charming hypotheses, provided they did not run directly counter to remembered facts!

On this score, Rousseau tells us, again in the Rêveries, how he returned from a walk devoted to meditation on the subject of lying, ". . . bien confirmé dans l'opinion, déjà prise, que le 'Connais-toi toi-même' du Temple de Delphes n'était pas une maxime si facile à suivre que je l'avais cru dans mes Confessions."¹²

He insists, however, that any departures from the truth in the work are of very minor significance: "Cette espèce de mensonge fut plutôt l'effet du délire de l'imagination qu'un acte de volonté. J'ai tort même de l'appeler mensonge, car aucune de ces additions n'en fut un."¹³

What does Rousseau really mean here? We might perhaps understand more clearly how his imagination, unfettered by distinct memories, tempted him to re-create long-past

¹¹J.-J. Rousseau, Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire (Paris: Garnier, 1960), p. 55.

¹²Ibid., p. 42.

¹³Ibid., p. 55.

events, if we consider very briefly two different allusions to his experience on the road to Vincennes in 1749.¹⁴ In the second of his Quatre Lettres à M. le président de Malesherbes, Rousseau relates:

. . .je me sens l'esprit ébloui de mille lumières. . .je sens ma tête prise par un étourdissement semblable à l'ivresse. . .en me relevant, j'aperçus tout le devant de ma veste mouillé de mes larmes sans avoir senti que j'en répandois.¹⁵

After thirteen years the memory is apparently fresh, but after twenty Rousseau tells us, "Quoique j'ai un souvenir vif de l'impression. . .les détails m'en sont échappés. . ."¹⁶ A memory which endures thirteen years is usually sufficiently stylised to remain unchanged for a few more. Might we not attribute the vivid and almost rapturous description in the second letter to Malesherbes, to the exaltation of the particular moment of writing? For Rousseau, the actual words used are a translation of a recollected state of being;¹⁷ details such as the tear-stained jacket are not necessarily historically true, but are valid approximations. When in the Confessions Rousseau alludes to this experience in passing, and without becoming emotionally involved in the memory, it

¹⁴The occasion of his inspiration to write his discourse of 1750.

¹⁵Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-64), I, 1135.

¹⁶VII, 416.

¹⁷See VII, 322, ". . .je ne puis pas me tromper sur

evokes no details, no images whatsoever.

If this is so, the details which suggest themselves to Rousseau when his imaginative involvement is at its height, and which, as Pire says, Rousseau himself takes to be true or authentic, are very probably determined by his familiarity with the literature and the "moeurs" of his own time. Nothing could be more touchingly appropriate to the eighteenth-century mode of feeling, than these unnoticed tears shed by the genius at a moment of revelation; nothing, more exquisitely geared to the literary climate of the age than certain pages of the Confessions. We would suggest that the same process of imaginative reconstruction is at work both in the case of the Lettres à M. le président de Malesherbes, and in that of the Confessions itself.

What, then, are these "additions", these "détails", these "ornements" to which Rousseau refers?

Let us examine his autobiography at those points where chance correspondence between his real-life circumstances and those of the picaresque novel is most marked. Certain developments and certain situations are common to all picaresque novels, early or urbane, and Rousseau's life, as we hope to have indicated in the chronology and in chapter I, was the very stuff of which picaresque novels are made.

ce que j'ai senti".

Examining, then, several major stages of the typical picaresque career, let us simultaneously re-consider certain pages of the Confessions; "ces pages", in the words of Henri Guillemin, "un peu trop belles. . .".¹⁸

We have already dwelt briefly on Rousseau's childhood, and have reached the point where an adverse situation and an aversion to responsibility set him travelling.¹⁹ We may be sure of one thing; that at this stage the picaro of fiction is as liberally endowed with physical charm as he is devoid of material resources; and that, with some complacency, he will introduce himself to the reader. Guzman de Alfarache says of himself, at his first solitary sortie into the world, "I was a handsome young lad, well shap't and of some reasonable good fashion in my behaviour. . .".²⁰ Roderick Random admits, "I had the satisfaction to find myself in some degree of favour with the ladies--an intoxicating piece of good fortune for one of my amorous complexion. . .".²¹

¹⁸Henri Guillemin, Un homme, deux ombres (Geneva: Editions du milieu du monde, 1943), p. 11. Microfilm.

¹⁹Rousseau almost certainly dramatizes his departure. That he was well aware of the appeal of a picaresque departure is evidenced by details from his Emile et Sophie, ou les Solitaires in Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Armand-Aubrée, 1932), IV, 290, where Emile tells us, ". . .sans valet, sans argent, sans équipage, mais sans désirs et sans soins, je partis seul et à pied. . . .Quand je ne trouvois pas à travailler de mon métier. . .j'en faisais d'autres. . .".

²⁰Alemán, Guzman, I, 239.

²¹Smollett, Roderick Random, p. 43.

Marivaux's Marianne recalls with delight the impact of her beauty upon the female members of a fashionable congregation; she has already been careful to specify, "J'étais jolie, j'avais l'air fin", and now:

Quelle fête! C'étoit la première fois que j'allais jouir un peu du mérite de ma petite figure. . . .Avant que j'arrivasse, en un mot, ces femmes faisoient quelque figure. . . .²²

Defoe's Moll Flanders is far from reticent on the subject of her superiority over her young mistresses:

First I was apparently handsomer than any of them; secondly I was better shaped and thirdly I sang better. . . .I had with all these the common vanity of my sex, that being taken for a great beauty, I very well knew it.²³

Marivaux's Jacob tells us:

. . .on disait que j'étais beau garçon . . .j'avais effectivement assez bonne mine; ajoutez-y je ne sais quoi de franc dans ma physionomie, l'oeil vif qui annonçait un peu d'esprit, et qui ne mentait pas totalement.²⁴

Now Rousseau, who most delicately withholds all self-description until the dramatic moment of his meeting with Mme. de Warens, thus setting the stage for the development of their relationship, follows the picaresque pattern quite

²²Marivaux, La Vie de Marianne (Paris: Garnier, 1957), pp. 13, 60-61.

²³Defoe, Moll Flanders, p. 16.

²⁴Marivaux, Le Paysan parvenu, in Romans, texte présenté et préfacé par Marcel Arland (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p. 570.

closely. Indulging perhaps in a little retrospective compensation--we might bear in mind his sorrowful and love-lorn state at the time of writing the Confessions--he tells us:

. . .j'étais bien pris dans ma petite taille; j'avais un joli pied, la jambe fine, l'air dégagé, la physionomie animée. . .les yeux petits. . .mais qui lançaient avec force le feu dont mon sang était embrasé. (II, 51)

This attractive exterior apparently stood him in good stead; the reaction of a certain M. Reydelet, encountered on the journey to Lyon with Le Maître, is typical:

M. Reydelet, me trouvant joli garçon, me prit en amitié et me fit mille caresses. Nous fûmes bien régalés, bien couchés. (III, 142)

The object of self-description, in the case of every work mentioned above, including the Confessions, is to enlist the reader's sympathies on behalf of the picaro. The technique is invariably successful; firstly, because the reader will automatically seize upon the appealing idea of physical attractiveness, and secondly, because he is thus admitted into a peculiarly confidential relationship with the narrator, whose petty vanity he is expected to condone.

Loosed into the world penniless, but charming, the picaro wanders for a time as aimlessly as a cork bobbing on the waves. At this stage, Rousseau thinks nothing of accompanying the Archimandrite encountered near Lausanne, whose design is "de reprendre la route de l'Allemagne, et

de s'en retourner par la Hongrie ou par la Pologne. . .".²⁵

At this stage too, every picaro is bound to indulge himself with visions of what might have been, and appropriate lamentations. Critics have remarked, in connection with Rousseau's allusions to his youthful belief in a malevolent fortune dogging his footsteps, that the malevolence appears to him only in retrospect.²⁶ We might also observe that such lamentations are a commonplace in picaresque literature; indeed they become almost hackneyed in the work of some authors. Rousseau's reflections are not new:

J'aurais aimé mon état, je l'aurais honoré peut-être, et après avoir passé une vie obscure et simple, mais égale et douce, je serais mort paisiblement dans le sein des miens. (I, 47)

Je me serais établi à Fribourg, petite ville peu jolie, mais peuplée de très bonnes gens. . . j'aurais vécu en paix jusqu'à ma dernière heure. . . . (IV, 162)

Quelle douce mort si alors elle fût venue! Si j'avais peu goûté les biens de la vie, j'en avais peu senti les malheurs. (V, 255)

Guzman de Alfarache, like Rousseau, indulges in these pathetic reflections on his lot:

I should have lighted on some good office or other. . . wherein I should have gone as far as another. . . . But as I was an unfortunate man, the best help that I had was to try my

²⁵IV, 174.

²⁶See Jean Starobinski, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. La Transparence et l'obstacle (Paris: Plon, 1957), p. 164: "(Rousseau) cherche à lire dans les images de son passé les prophéties de son malheur actuel".

fortune, by leaving my mother and my country.²⁷

Robinson Crusoe, virtually obsessed with the notion of an adverse fortune, sees himself as a veritable English Orestes:

Had I now had the sense to have gone back to Hull, and have gone home, I had been happy. . . . But my ill fate pushed me on now with an obstinacy that nothing could resist. . . .

 as it was always my fate to choose for the worse, so I did here.
 I, that was born to be my own destroyer.

 I was still to be the wilful agent of my own miseries.²⁸

Crusoe is indeed a master of the futile observation.

Rousseau's gloomy preoccupation with his irresistible fate is not only then, the retrospective delusion of a persecuted and unstable man; it is also a recognisable literary convention, which he often applies for dramatic effect. That the young Rousseau should be portrayed, like his fictional counterparts, "maudissant (s)a maussade étoile",²⁹ is quite in order. Incidentally, having striven ten whole years in Paris for recognition, Rousseau must surely have known well enough how totally unsuited he would have been to the lifelong role of peaceful provincial.

In the early years of his career, the picaro usually

²⁷ Alemán, Guzman, I, 91.

²⁸ Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, pp. 13, 16, 41, 43.

²⁹ IV, 147.

aspires to improve his state; an ambition which his charm, wit, and evident potential all help to further.

Gil Blas seems destined from an early age to move up the social scale. He soon impresses his uncle with his precocious brilliance: "Je lui parus si éveillé, qu'il résolut de cultiver mon esprit".³⁰ Moll Flanders astounds her adoptive mother by her expectations:

Why, what? said she; is the girl mad? What would you be--a gentlewoman? Yes, says I, and cried heartily till I roared out again.³¹

Needless to say, Moll is noticed by the first lady who passes, and transferred to a more refined milieu.

Tom Jones, though a foundling now wandering far from the adoptive father who has cast him off, impresses all he meets, as Fielding tells us:

. . .for (besides that he was very well dressed and naturally genteel) he had a remarkable air of dignity in his look, which is rarely seen among the vulgar.³²

While Rousseau, admittedly, had few aspirations to become rich or powerful, he most certainly had nebulous dreams of glory from an early age. In the Confessions, he presents himself as aspiring to nothing less than the hand of a perfect lady. In Turin he attends the royal Mass:

³⁰Lesage, Gil Blas, p. 8.

³¹Defoe, Moll Flanders, p. 7.

³²Fielding, Tom Jones, I, 355.

La seule chose qui m'intéressât dans tout l'éclat de la cour était de voir s'il n'y aurait point là quelque jeune Princesse qui méritât mon hommage. . . . (II, 77-78)

At Annecy, he scorns the advances of humble girls:

D'ailleurs des couturières, des filles de chambre, de petites marchandes ne me tentaient guère. Il me fallait des Demoiselles. . . . Ce n'est. . . pas du tout la vanité de l'état. . . qui m'attire; c'est un teint mieux conservé, de plus belles mains, une parure plus gracieuse. . . une chaussure plus mignonne, des rubans, de la dentelle. . . . (IV, 148-149)

The aspirations he attributes, in retrospect, to his vagabond and sometimes starving self, are entirely consistent with the demands of picaresque embellishment.

It is highly probable that, in real life, Rousseau's social superiors did remark the unusual intelligence of their young employé or protégé. Yet Rousseau describes their reactions to him, not with the moderation proper in an autobiography, but with all the verve and assurance of a picaro. Of his time as a valet in Turin he tells us:

. . . l'on me regardait généralement dans la maison comme un jeune homme de la plus grande espérance, qui n'était pas à sa place et qu'on s'attendait d'y voir arriver. (II, 107-8)

Of his experiences at the French Embassy in Soleure, where he was arrested as a vagabond, Rousseau gives a somewhat surprising account:³³ his eloquence he tells us, procured

³³A letter to his father, written from Neuchâtel shortly after this event, shows Rousseau in far from cheerful mood: C.G., I, 11-15.

him the sympathy of the ambassador, a personal introduction to his wife in her private apartment, and the offer of an under-secretary's post--which he naturally declined as being too limiting! We might suspect a little embellishment is at work here; however, our chief concern is not with insignificant distortion of the facts, over which innumerable literary battles have already been waged, but with the particular detail Rousseau employs to effect that distortion.

Despite the picaro's ambition and his potential, his initial ignorance of the ways of the world leads him into various sorry states. Rarely does he escape unscathed from his first inn and his first travelling-companions. Gil Blas, for example, offers supper to a gentleman who appears to know him:

Il y procédait. . .d'une vitesse toujours égale, et trouvait moyen, sans perdre un coup de dent, de me donner louanges sur louanges; ce qui me rendait fort content de ma petite personne. . . .Enfin après avoir bu et mangé tout son soûl, il voulut finir la comédie. . .il me rit au nez, et s'en alla.³⁴

Gil Blas is also cheated of his mule and outwitted by a cunning Friar.

The young Rousseau fares no better at the hands of his companions on the journey to Turin in 1728, M. Sabran, whom he describes as "manquant rarement de l'argent quand

³⁴Lesage, Gil Blas, pp. 15-16.

il en savait dans la bourse des autres", and his equally unscrupulous wife:

. . .j'avais jasé, et mon indiscretion ne fut pas pour mes conducteurs à pure perte. Mme. Sabran trouva le moyen de m'arracher jusqu'à un petit ruban glacé d'argent que Mme. de Warens m'avait donné pour ma petit épée, et que je regrettai plus que tout le reste; l'épée même eût resté dans leurs mains si je m'étais moins obstiné. (II, 64)

That this incident has received some picaresque embellishment, we might surmise from a glance at the Neuchâtel manuscript, where Rousseau alleges that the Sabrans did in fact take his sword. He is quite possibly exaggerating his youthful naivety for literary effect and with fictional models in mind: every picaro needs a vestige of finery to remind him of his rightful place in the social hierarchy.

Rousseau may also have exaggerated the villainy of the Lorenzi, the older servants of his mistress Mme. de Vercellis at Turin. His description of their greedy determination to exclude him from her will, reminds us of Gil Blas, where the picaro is foiled of his expected inheritance from the gluttonous Canon by the seniority of Dame Jacinthe, who hovers about the sickroom, "le visage baigné de pleurs de commande".³⁵ The failure of the youthful servant to reap any benefits from the master is characteristically picaresque, and, whether or not Rousseau realised the fact, he did in

³⁵Lesage, Gil Blas, p. 102.

fact receive what Mme. de Vercellis left him.

There comes a stage in the picaro's development when, after an initial succession of different employments,³⁶ he begins to acquire a degree of polish and self-assurance; the days of hunger, vagabondage and disguise are over. At last, he acquires a presentable suit of clothes; and accordingly, he finds himself sought after by the opposite sex. Gil Blas buys himself a dazzlingly vulgar outfit; "un pourpoint à manches tailladées, avec un haut-de-chausses et un manteau. Le tout de velours bleu et brodé d'or."³⁷ Estebanillo Gonzalez, an early Spanish picaro, saunters into the wings of the stage in his actor's costume, and disappears forthwith; Tom Jones receives, upon his arrival in London, a mysterious bundle containing "a domino, a mask, and a masquerade ticket",³⁸ which will admit him to the society of people of fashion. Marivaux's Marianne, overjoyed with the finery she receives from her middle-aged protector M. Climal, prefers to forget his recent advances and the moral implications of keeping it;³⁹ while of Joseph Andrews' transfor-

³⁶ See Eugène Ritter, "Les douzes métiers de Jean-Jacques", A.J.J.R., XI (1915-1916), pp. 17-26; also Isaac Rousseau's letter in C.G., I, 143, ". . . on doit chercher des occupations qui donnent du pain".

³⁷ Lesage, Gil Blas, p. 71.

³⁸ Fielding, Tom Jones, II, 244.

³⁹ Marivaux, La Vie de Marianne, p. 131; ". . . je ne laissais pas. . . de considérer ce linge en le pliant et de

mation period we learn:

His hair was cut after the newest fashion, and became his chief care; he went abroad with it in papers all morning, and dressed it out in the afternoon.⁴⁰

Jean-Jacques Rousseau at Chambéry, fed and clothed by Mme. de Warens,⁴¹ and educated by himself, had undoubtedly acquired a degree of polish by the mid-1730's. No longer, as previously in Turin, did he eye ladies of some social standing with the awe of a trembling valet, unable to express his ardent admiration, and bound to maintain his humble silence;⁴² as a teacher of music he was admitted into the society of young ladies on an equal footing. Rousseau relates, however, that he was soon embarrassed by the unequivocal behaviour of some of his pupils, and their mothers. Here again, he is probably guilty of a little literary

dire en moi-même: Il est pourtant bien choisi; ce qui signifiait: c'est dommage de le quitter".

⁴⁰Fielding, Joseph Andrews, p. 12.

⁴¹"La voilà travaillant à mon petit équipage, et cela avec la profusion qu'elle mettait à toute chose", he tells us [V, 238] in describing preparations for a journey to Besançon.

⁴²Rousseau's description of his waiting on his young mistress Mlle. de Breil at Turin, with its sensual nuances and basic comedy, is reminiscent of Marivaux:

L'habit de cour, si favorable aux jeunes personnes, marquait sa jolie taille, dégageait sa poitrine et ses épaules, et rendait son teint encore plus éblouissant par le deuil qu'on portait ailleurs. On dira que ce n'est pas à

embellishment; embellishment of a distinctly picaresque variety. For the handsome young picaro seems inevitably to attract ladies who are wealthy and bored, and consequently shameless. Joseph Andrews' mistress, for example,

. . .admitted him to deliver messages in a morning, leered at him at table, and indulged him in all those innocent freedoms which women of rank may permit themselves without the least sully of virtue;⁴³

while in Tom Jones, Lady Bellaston inveigles the hero into a short-lived affair:

. . .(the lady) told him "She was going, to sup with an acquaintance, whither she hoped he would not follow her; for if you should," said she, "I shall be thought an unaccountable creature, though my friend indeed is not censorious; yet I hope you

un domestique de s'apercevoir de ces choses-là. J'avais tort, sans doute; mais je m'en apercevais toutefois.
je me tenais vis-à-vis d'elle; je cherchais dans ses yeux ce qu'elle allait demander. . . . (III, 102-3)

c.f. the scene between Jacob and his mistress in Le Paysan parvenu:

Cette dame alors me fit approcher. . . notez que Madame venait de se mettre à sa toilette, et que sa figure était dans un certain désordre assez piquant pour ma curiosité.

Je n'étais pas né indifférent, il s'en fallait beaucoup. . .mes yeux la lorgnaient volontiers. . .mes regards n'avaient rien de galant, ils ne savaient être que vrai. J'étais paysan, assez jeune, assez beau garçon. . . . [p. 575-576]

Rousseau's handling of the scene is a good deal more delicate than that of Marivaux.

⁴³Fielding, Joseph Andrews, pp. 12-13.

won't follow me; I protest I shall not know what to say if you do."⁴⁴

The convention of the picaro's being sought after in this way is reflected throughout the early books of the Confessions. Rousseau's affected embarrassment at the recollection of his popularity among the young ladies of Chambéry, "Je suis fâché de faire tant de filles amoureuses de moi",⁴⁵ does not ring true; we would infer, indeed, that this recollection was a source of delight for him. His pupils do not conceal their interest in him:

(Mlle de Mellarède). . .était encore ordinairement en déshabillé, sans autre coiffure que ses cheveux négligemment relevés, ornés de quelques fleurs qu'on mettait à mon arrivée et qu'on ôtait à mon départ pour se coiffer. (V, 217-8)

On occasion, the mothers of these young ladies are even more demonstrative:

Tous les matins, quand j'arrivais, je trouvais prêt mon café à la crème, et la mère ne manquait jamais de m'accueillir par un baiser bien appliqué sur la bouche,
(V, 219)

Like most young picaros, however, Rousseau is uneasy rather than bold, and slow to comprehend how sexual attractiveness may transcend the social hierarchy;

⁴⁴Fielding, Tom Jones, II, 253.

⁴⁵Rousseau, Confessions, IV, 159.

Je ne crains rien tant dans le
monde qu'une jolie personne en déshabillé;
je la redouterais cent fois moins parée. (V, 218)

Before he has time to acquire the unscrupulousness of Marivaux's Jacob, Mme. de Warens has removed him from this dangerous milieu!

The shameless behaviour of ladies of fashion is, then, a favourite early eighteenth-century theme, relying for its effect on the comedy implicit in the reversal of roles. However, while the picaro may be somewhat unnerved by advances from this quarter, he is frankly amorous when no inhibitions are called for; Tom Jones is more at ease with Molly Seagrim than with Lady Bellaston; Jacob debauches the servant before he approaches the mistress; Guzman de Alfarache maintains that a little intrigue is the spice of life, for it is an old saying, "That two is one, one, none, and three, Roguery".⁴⁶

Rousseau endeavours to present his encounter with Mme. de Larnage in a picaresque light, suggesting that on occasion he could indulge his natural sensuality without a qualm. He enhances his own rascality with various piquant details, stressing the distance which separates his room from that of Mme. de Larnage, and dwelling on his weariness

⁴⁶Alemán, Guzman, I, 45.

after four or five days of her company. He conceals the fact that, Mme. de Warens having already begun to favour her new protégé Wintzenried, this affair was more in the nature of calculated revenge than anything else. Portrayal of himself as an inveterate gallant, both at this point in his story and when he declines to visit Mme. de Larnage for fear of seducing her daughter, is simply a useful cover for Rousseau; a means of embellishing what were perhaps rather sad memories.

Rousseau's use of burlesque is typically picaresque, and may well be accounted for by his familiarity with Gil Blas, and by his knowledge, however superficial, of the English novel. His account of his treatment at the hands of the Comte de Favria-- "(Il) me mit hors de sa chambre par les épaules",⁴⁷ or his description of Mlle. Lambercier, "qui, par une malheureuse culbute au bas du pré, fut étalé(e) tout(e) en plein devant le Roi de Sardaigne à son passage";⁴⁸ better still, his account of the behaviour of the innkeeper's wife and daughters who mistakenly believe him to be homosexual--all these have a physicality quite out of place in the French fiction of the day.⁴⁹ The last-mentioned episode

⁴⁷Rousseau, Confessions, III, 110.

⁴⁸Ibid., I, 22.

⁴⁹Marivaux's La Vie de Marianne had caused an uproar

is sufficiently robust to pass for a translation of Fielding:

Nous attendions toujours: point de déjeuner. Enfin nous passâmes dans la chambre de ces demoiselles. Elles reçurent M. l'Abbé d'un air très peu caressant; j'eus encore moins à me louer de leur accueil. L'aînée, en se retournant, m'appuya son talon pointu sur le bout du pied, où un cor fort douloureux m'avait forcé de couper mon soulier; l'autre vint ôter brusquement de derrière moi une chaise sur laquelle j'étais prêt à m'asseoir: leur mère, en jetant de l'eau par la fenêtre, m'en aspergea le visage: en quelque place que je me misse, on m'en faisait ôter pour chercher quelque chose; je n'avais été de ma vie à pareille fête. (IV, 189-190)

Fielding's Upton landlady is equally scandalised when Jones arrives with a scantily-clad lady:

. . .she had provided herself with a long and deadly instrument, with which, in times of peace, the chambermaid was wont to demolish the labours of the industrious spider. In vulgar phrase, she had taken up the broomstick, and was just about to sally from the kitchen.⁵⁰

Undoubtedly, the comic possibilities of the manly picaro cringing before the fury of the common woman, are

with its publication in 1731, by virtue of the scene where Mme. Dutour attacks a coachman:

Et quand elle fut armée: Allons, sors d'ici! s'écria-t-elle, ou je te mesure avec cela. . .Jarnibleu! dit le cocher. . .ne soyez pas si osée!. . .je suis un garçon qui n'aime pas les coup, ou la peste m'étouffe! [p. 94]

Physicality of any kind was still unwelcome when Clarissa first appeared in French; the seduction scenes were omitted by translators, though Diderot tells us that the curious soon procured private translations of them.

⁵⁰Fielding, Tom Jones, II, 23.

considerable.

Rousseau's picaresque presentation of himself is confined to the earlier books of the Confessions; firstly, because it is only appropriate in connection with his early, dimly-remembered wandering days, and secondly, because the delight he had taken in composing these poetic, rambling books was gradually blighted by an ever-growing concern with self-justification.

We shall not, therefore follow his development beyond his departure for Paris in 1741. Having set forth Rousseau's substantially picaresque treatment of the various situations in which he finds himself prior to this departure, we might allude briefly to other notably picaresque features of the Confessions, I-VI; namely, that it is an episodic first-person narrative, built around the hero's changes of place and employment, of which there are an unlimited number; that its form is particularly flexible, the author feeling free to digress at his leisure or suddenly to accelerate the pace; and that the narrator adopts a flirtatious yet confident attitude to the reader, thus involving him personally in the narrative. Some picaresque novelists, Marivaux and Fielding, for example, comment indulgently on the progress of their characters, with a half-mocking, yet paternal solicitude. Rousseau in his Confessions, as we shall see in Chapter V, adopts this technique for his own ends. Both

the Confessions and the picaresque novel, lively and entertaining as they are, had their origins in a preoccupation with sin and human injustice; and their humour, the fruit of bitter experience, is often of an ironic nature. Much opportunity for bathos is provided by the continual aspirations and deflations of the hero; mock-heroic diction is much in evidence. Rousseau describes the female candidates for conversion, at Turin, in these terms:

. . . nos soeurs les catéchumènes étaient
 . . . bien les plus grandes salopes et les plus
 vilaines coureuses qui jamais aient empuanté
 le bercail au Seigneur. (II, 66)

He affords a similar treatment to Wintzenried:

. . . prétendant n'avoir point coiffé de
 jolies femmes dont il n'eût aussi coiffé
 les maris; vain, sot, ignorant, insolent;
 au demeurant le meilleur fils du monde.⁵¹ (VI, 303)

Like a picaresque novelist, Rousseau evidently delights in anecdotes of a spicy or fantastical nature. Can we treat otherwise than as a charming invention, Rousseau's description of the local curé lacing up the stays of Mme. de Warens? [see frontspiece].

(Maman) se faisait quelquefois lacer par lui
 . . . emploi dont il se chargeait assez volontiers.
 Tandis qu'il était en fonction, elle courait
 par la chambre de côté et d'autre, faisant

⁵¹The final phrase here is a formula of supreme sarcasm dating from the days of Marot. See Romanciers du dix-septième siècle (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), pp. 541 and 1421, n. 4. F. C. Green in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a Critical Study of his Life and Writings (Cambridge: University Press, 1955) apparently mis-construes the phrase. [p. 66]

tantôt ceci, tantôt cela. Tiré par le lacet,⁵² Monsieur le Supérieur suivait en grondant, et disant à tout moment: Mais, Madame, tenez-vous donc. Cela faisait un sujet assez pittoresque. (III, 129-130)

"Assez pittoresque"; and certainly as Henri Guillemin might agree, "un peu trop beau".

Again, what should we make of the assault on Mme. de Warens by a jealous rival, who believing

. . .qu'elle a un gros vilain rat,
 empreint sur le sein, mais si ressemblant qu'on
 dirait qu'il court. . .prit son temps pour passer
 derrière sa rivale, puis renversant à demi sa
 chaise. . .decouvrit adroitement son
 mouchoir. . .? (V, 220)

What of this history of the midget Judge Simon, of Chambéry, in his beribboned night-cap, hurling chamberpots in his fury? He of whom "une certaine Madame d'Epagny disait que pour lui la dernière faveur était de baiser une femme au genou"?⁵³

There is a striking resemblance here to a scene from Scarron's Roman comique, to which, curiously enough, Rousseau has alluded on the previous page of his Confessions. Scarron's episode too relies for comic effect upon the ludicrous behaviour of a very small person in a very evil humour; Ragotin, Scarron's dwarf, attacks his opponents, "dans le ventre et les cuisses,

⁵²The phrase, "Tiré par le lacet" does not appear in MS. N. It is a perfect example of judicious picaresque embellishment.

⁵³IV, 157.

ne pouvant aller plus haut",⁵⁴ and he too is involved with a strange piece of headgear. We may perhaps be justified in taking Rousseau's passage as an example of the way in which, when swayed by his imagination, he unconsciously summons up remembered images from fiction.

This passage is clearly an example of picaresque embellishment: M. Simon is described in MS. G. as being "certainly under three feet tall", but in MS. P., the definitive manuscript, he has shrunk a further twelve inches, presumably in the interests of literature.

What should we think of the young Rousseau's shivering in his shoes as M. Basile returns to the fold? or of his masquerade as a composer at Lausanne? his supposed dreams of castles and maidens on his departure from Geneva?

Nothing, perhaps, but that on each occasion where the plain truth has received a little "ornement", Rousseau's choice of detail, of situation and of vocabulary corresponds to known fictional prototypes; while innocent of plagiarism, Rousseau reveals the extent of his conditioning by his times; conditioning which we have already discussed in chapter II.

Evidence that Rousseau did amend the text of the Confessions for greater literary effect, is of course provided by the manuscripts themselves, which reveal, for example, that

⁵⁴Romanciers du dix-septième siècle, p. 568.

his picaresque self-description originally included a reference to his bad teeth. Some scenes were modified over and over again; the celebrated "mirror-scene", supposedly with Mme. Basile, exists as an isolated fragment anterior to any draft of the Confessions, recurs in the Confessions itself with minor modifications from manuscript to manuscript, and re-appears among the stories of his youth told by Rousseau to Bernadin de Saint-Pierre, this time in connection with Suzanne Serre. Rousseau's account of his meeting with the former Mlle. de Vulson underwent a complete transformation in transition from MS. N. to MS. G.⁵⁵ In short, a close examination of the 'variantes' to the Geneva MS. enables us to pinpoint the most obvious instances of embellishment with some accuracy.

Before concluding this chapter, we might perhaps illustrate Rousseau's peculiar receptivity to literary images by tracing back the ancestry of one particular example, taken from the Fragment d'une épître à Bordes, composed at Lyon in 1741. Rousseau was at this time new to the relatively sophisticated society of a large city, and this fragment shows him endeavouring to substitute the image of gallant young blade for that of earnest provincial. He chooses to stress his supposed worldliness by insisting

⁵⁵ See Rousseau, Confessions, p. 803 for the original version of the episode; c.f. p. 30.

that he visits church largely to contemplate the beauties in the congregation. Rousseau unthinkingly avails himself of an age-old literary convention, common to very many tales of impious rogues, social outcasts, and ladies no better than they should be.

The parents of Guzman de Alfarache, for example, meet in church:

He stood, steadily looking upon her,
all the while that the Exercise of that
Sacrament gave him leave to do so, beeing
astonish't to behold so rare a beauty. . .
there is not any woman. . .but doth take
comfort, and chucked for joy, to be looked
upon with an hungry eye.⁵⁶

In the Roman Comique, shady side-chapels prove ideal place to arrange a rendez-vous. In Marivaux's novel, Marianne uses the congregation as a captive audience:

. . .il y avait dans cette église des
tableaux qui étoient à une certaine hauteur;
eh bien! j'y portois ma vue, sous prétexte
de les regarder, parce que cette industrie-
là me faisait le plus bel oeil du monde. . . .⁵⁷

Duclos' hero meanwhile, is approached not by one "fausse dévote" but by three!

Elles se mirent toutes trois à genoux
auprès de moi, elles s'armèrent d'un grand
rosaire, et j'entendis une voix qui me dit,

⁵⁶ Alemán, Guzman, I, 64.

⁵⁷ Marivaux, La Vie de Marianne, p. 62.

"Trouvez-vous ce soir à l'heure de l'oraison
sur le bord du Tage". . . .58

Joseph Andrews soon recognizes that conspicuous piety
is quite uncalled-for in London society:

. . .and when he attended his lady
to church (which was but seldom), he
behaved with less seeming devotion than
formerly. . . .59

--while the attention of Tom Jones in church is caught not by
the sermon but by the form of Molly Seagrim.

Rousseau, in turn, hopes to enhance his image as a
young man of the world by remarking, of the singer in the
church he describes:

Heureux l'amant qui peut s'attendre
D'occuper en d'autres momens
La bouche qui vous fait entendre
A des soins encore plus charmans!

and by claiming in equally indifferent verse,

Mais ce qui plus ici m'enchante
C'est mainte dévote piquante
Au teint frais, à l'oeil tendre et doux,
Qui, pour éloigner tout scrupule,
Vient à la Vierge, à deux genoux,
Offrir, dans l'ardeur qui la brûle
Tous les vœux qu'elle attend de nous.⁶⁰

This avowal, far from convincing on Rousseau's lips, testifies

⁵⁸Duclos, Confessions du comte de ***, p. 18.

⁵⁹Fielding, Joseph Andrews, p. 12.

⁶⁰Rousseau, Correspondance générale, I, 142; Fragment
d'une épître à M. Bordes, lines 10-20.

nevertheless to his susceptibility to literary influences, and to his feeling for the right image in the right place; a feeling which may also have dictated his choice of words at one significant point in the Confessions.

Rousseau's description of the idyllic afternoon of cherry-picking at Thônes, with Mlle. Galley and Mlle. Graf-fenried, includes the following lines:

Je montai sur l'arbre, et je leur en
jetais des bouquets dont elles me rendaient
les noyaux à travers les branches. Une fois,
Mademoiselle Galley, avançant son tablier
en reculant la tête, se présentait si bien,
et je visais si juste, que je lui fis tomber
un bouquet dans le sein; et de rire. (IV, 152-153)

This passage, as Arsène Houssaye was probably the first to observe, reads like a description of a painting by Baudoin, exhibited in the Salon of 1765. While Rousseau obviously did not invent the whole episode, it seems likely that he unconsciously assimilated the attitudes of the figures in the painting--which appealed to him--into his own memories of the day at Thônes, and achieved in the delightful passage cited above, a subtle fusion of the real with the ideal.

In conclusion, then, Rousseau evidently realised at a relatively early stage in the composition of his Confessions that an artistic sense, or creative urge, had seduced him from the narrow path of his original sober purpose on more than one occasion; hence the somewhat incoherent justification he offers to the reader at the beginning of book I.

It seems likely that, when writing in a mood of

particular elation or enthusiasm, Rousseau invented, or more correctly summoned up from his reservoir of remembered images, details which he incorporated into his original reflections, and in which he himself readily believed. While many of the real circumstances of his life were, indeed, essentially picaresque, their presentation in the Confessions approximates rather too closely to picaresque perfection; a little French polish is at work. We would contend that Rousseau's knowledge of the resurgence of the picaresque genre in English literature, the influence of Lesage, and through him, of the early Spanish picaresque novelists, a thorough familiarity with the novels of Marivaux, and an exceptional sensitivity to the literary and social tastes of his day, may well have helped to determine the nature of the "ornament" of books I to VI of the Confessions.

Whether or not picaresque embellishment is consistent in these books, we will discuss in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

PICARESQUE CONVENTION AND INDIVIDUAL REACTION

In the Confessions, as elsewhere, Jean-Jacques Rousseau takes pleasure in lengthy expositions of the complexities of his own character. Far from undertaking to reconcile the disparate elements within himself, he prefers to saddle his reader with this unenviable task:

C'est à lui d'assembler ces éléments
et de déterminer l'être qu'ils composent:
le résultat doit être son ouvrage; et s'il
se trompe alors, toute l'erreur sera de son
fait. (IV, 198)

In his Mémoire présenté à M. de Saint Marie pour l'éducation de son fils, of 1740, Rousseau's self-description owes something to his admiration for Prévost's Cléveland; it is a curious blend of truth and fiction:

Soit tempérament, soit habitude d'être
malheureux, je porte en moi une source de
tristesse dont je ne saurois bien démêler
l'origine. . . .¹

He describes himself as the victim of "une timidité insurmontable, qui me fait perdre contenance et m'ôte la liberté de l'esprit, même devant des gens aussi sots que moi". He also claims to despise all worldly considerations; "j'ai. . . une profonde indifférence pour tout ce qu'on

¹J.-J. Rousseau, Correspondance générale, ed. Dufour, I, 377.

appelle brillant".

His anonymous self-portrait for the Persifleur, dating from the early 1740's, though somewhat recherché and exaggerated, is perhaps more accurate than that of the Mémoire:

Rien n'est si dissemblable à moi que moi-même, c'est pourquoi il seroit inutile de tenter de me définir autrement que par cette variété singulière. . .un protégé, un cameléon, une femme sont des êtres moins changeans que moi.²

The conflicting testimonies of Rousseau's own friends suggest that he was indeed unpredictable, complex, and subject to brusque changes of mood. M. Conzié des Charmettes, who saw much of Rousseau during the 1730's at Chambéry, and on the estate of Les Charmettes, described him as solitary and unsociable, hypercritical and suspicious; this, moreover, during a relatively stable period of Rousseau's youth.³

However, a letter dispatched by Rousseau about this time to a young lady of Lyon suggests that the morose protégé of Mme. de Warens was capable of roguish deeds in the best gallic tradition, and certainly not lacking in a sense of humour. He explains with feigned compunction how he spied on her while she was bathing in the river, and how smitten

²J.-J. Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-64), I, 1108.

³J.-J. Rousseau, Correspondance générale, ed. Dufour, I, 340; Lettre de M. de Conzié, comte des Charmettes, à M. de Mellarède; ". . .avec. . .un mépris inné des hommes. . .il

he has since been with her image:

Oui, ce sont moins ces yeux dont la douceur égale la vivacité. . .c'est moins cette taille svelte et légère. . .c'est moins, dis-je, le détail et l'ensemble de tant de charmes qui m'ont séduit, que cette rougeur. . .dont j'aperçus votre front se couvrir, dès que je m'offris à votre vue, après vous avoir démasqué trop malignement mon indiscretion par un couplet que je chantai.⁴

Rousseau suggests with this same gallant self-assurance that he meet her to offer a personal apology for his misdeeds, and to make amends as best he can!

At Paris in the 1740's he struck his acquaintance, initially, as a young man eager to please; Grimm described him as "complimenteur, galant et recherché",⁵ and Mme d'Epinaÿ concluded on her first meeting with Rousseau, ". . .il est aisé de voir qu'il a infiniment d'esprit. . .de l'esprit et de la vanité comme quatre".⁶

Yet Rousseau insists in his Confessions that, being naturally eloquent only on rare occasions,⁷ he was ill at ease in salon society, where a high premium was placed upon displaying a brilliant wit. We may surmise that he supple-

nourrissait au dedans de lui une constante méfiance de leur probité".

⁴Ibid., p. 40; Lettre à Mademoiselle La Bussière [?] à Lyon [1735-42].

⁵Cited by H. Guillemin, Un homme, deux ombres, p. 15.

⁶See Jean Guéhenno, Jean-Jacques, p. 257.

⁷See Rousseau, Confessions; III, 127 and IV, 174.

mented a natural disinclination with a good deal of application, until the success of his first discourse made it possible for him to be himself with impunity. By about 1750 he was already acquiring a reputation as an austere, anti-social and even eccentric philosopher, from whom frivolous observations would naturally not be forthcoming. This role, to which he was well-suited in many respects, Rousseau also cultivated, for a number of reasons. Yet the occasional upsurge of his other self still bewildered his acquaintance. Antoine Bret, who met Rousseau at a private supper-party about 1750, tells an anecdote which shows clearly that the bold, charming Rousseau, the epitomy of self-assurance, was certainly not a myth. Enlivened by the presence of a coquettish foreign girl

. . .qui attaqua notre philosophe. . .
 entrevoy (ant) sans doute la secrète sensibilité
 au fond de cet oeil d'aigle qu'il posait si
 souvent sur elle. . .M. Rousseau s'embellit à
 nos yeux, mille traits lui échapèrent. . .qu'on
 ne lui soupçonnait pas, et que lui auroit envié
 le courtisan le plus avantageux et le plus
 accoutumé dans ces sortes de joutes galantes.⁸

Evidently, then, a certain streak of picaresque verve was by no means foreign to Rousseau. However, for the picaresque elements within him to triumph was the exception rather than the rule. We may credit his assurance that, as he says,

⁸A. C. Keyes, "Antoine Bret: anecdotes inédites sur J.-J. Rousseau", A.J.J.R., XXXII (1950-52), 181-182.

"Quoique timide naturellement, j'ai été hardi quelquefois dans ma jeunesse",⁹ with one reservation; that this boldness, inherited perhaps from Isaac Rousseau, "un homme de plaisir", was not often displayed.

It would seem then, that Rousseau was both philosopher and picaro in one; and unsurprisingly, the philosopher has much to say in the Confessions. The picaresque presentation which Rousseau adopts for certain pages of the Confessions is not consistent throughout. It would be unthinkable naïve to refer to the work as fiction, or to assert that Rousseau stops short at an entirely romanticized account of himself and his doings.

What invariably occurs in his narrative is a juxtaposition of somewhat stylised picaresque incident, and strikingly original subjective observation. Rousseau, the indulgent narrator of the young Rousseau's somewhat standard foibles --for example, stealing apples as an apprentice--is suddenly metamorphosed into Rousseau the moralist, and our attention is sharply focused not on the gay young rascal, the jaunty adventurer cast in the picaresque mould, but on the timid, fallible, even ridiculous individual; not on his approximations to a norm, but on his deviations from it. Rousseau automatically abandons the picaresque mask when he is dealing with serious matters, and the reader often experiences

⁹Rousseau, Confessions, IV, 174.

a strange jolt as he is returned to the world of reality.

For example, Rousseau dramatizes the details of his journey to Lyon with Le Maître; Rousseau and Anet, under cover of darkness, stagger to the next village with the music-master's trunk, and hire a donkey for its transport; Rousseau and Le Maître make good their escape to France. They impose upon a curé who has not yet heard of Le Maître's disgrace, and having made merry at his expense, continue on their way:

A peine pûmes-nous attendre que nous fussions seuls pour commencer nos éclats de rire, et j'avoue qu'ils me reprennent encore en y pensant, car on ne saurait imaginer une espièglerie mieux soutenue et plus heureuse. (III, 142)

The details is characteristically picaresque, the style is sparkling. Yet on the following page Rousseau must deal with a disgraceful action on his part--his abandonment of Le Maître while the latter lay writhing in the street in an epileptic fit:

Je pris l'instant où personne ne songeait à moi; je tourna le coin de la rue et je disparus. Grâce au Ciel, j'ai fini ce troisième aveu pénible. (III, 143)

The picaresque framework, so stylishly created, crumbles into thin air at each fresh confession; for picaros have few scruples.

Similarly, Rousseau moves from a highly implausible and heavily embellished account of his feelings on finding himself alone and destitute in the streets of Turin at the age of sixteen--

. . .je me voyais au milieu d'une grande ville abondante en ressources, pleine de gens de condition dont mes talents et mon mérite ne pouvaient manquer de me faire accueillir sitôt que j'en serais connu. . . . (II, 76)

--to a quite unstylised, indeed almost clinical, account of his sexual deviations, within the space of two pages. Again, his account of the mysterious illness and death of Claude Anet, whom he had recently supplanted in the affections of Madame de Warens, is singularly unconvincing, and his treatment of it is literary and melodramatic. Yet he recounts an episode of the following day with the transparent honesty we have noted elsewhere; the ultimate end of a scene like this is not to amuse or divert, and it is obviously not embellished in any way:

Le lendemain j'en parlais avec Maman. . . et tout d'un coup, au milieu de l'entretien, j'eus la vile et indigne pensée que j'héritais de ses nippes, et surtout d'un bel habit noir qui m'avait donné dans la vue. Je le pensai, par conséquent je le dis. . . .La pauvre femme, sans rien répondre, se tourna de l'autre côté et se mit à pleurer. (V, 236)

For the finesse of his analysis, for his understanding of men's pitiful subjection to the forces of self-interest, greed and cowardice, Rousseau is quite unique in his century. On occasion, his observations are of almost Sartrean implication; this, for example, of Madame de Vercellis:

Elle me jugea moins sur ce que j'étais que sur ce qu'elle m'avait fait, et à force de ne voir en moi qu'un laquais, elle m'empêcha de lui paraître autre chose. . . . (II, 89)

--or again this, in connection with Rousseau's experiences on the road to Montpellier:

J'entendis une fois Madame du Colombier dire à son amie: Il manque de monde, mais il est aimable. Ce mot me rassura beaucoup, et fit que je le devins en effet. (VI, 288)

Observations, digressions and confessions, then, are invariably made without stylistic "ornement" of any kind. Rousseau complicates matters still further--for those, at least, who would seek some homogeneity in his work--by at one moment presenting himself as a true picaro, restless and irresponsible, eloquent, endearing and sensual, ready to change careers at the drop of a hat, or to set off for Hungary on the merest whim; and at the next, dwelling on all his human inadequacies with rueful relish. Unlike the picaro, who is quick to perceive a sneer at his expense, and doubly quick to shed his provincial accent and gauche ways accordingly, Rousseau remains, so he tells us, dismally inept at minor social accomplishments till the end of his days; he is, in his own words, "celui qui tombe là des nués". Madame de Warens undertakes in vain to groom him for the world with dancing and fencing lessons:

J'avais tellement pris, à cause de mes cors, l'habitude de marcher du talon, que Roche ne put me la faire perdre, et jamais avec l'air assez ingambe, je n'ai pu sauter un médiocre fossé. Ce fut encore pis à la salle d'armes. . . . j'avais un dégoût mortel pour cet exercice. . . . (V, 230)

Besides being gauche, he is shy and clumsy,¹⁰ and frequently absent-minded:

. . . (les dames) s'informaient comment j'avais passé la nuit. Une fois, selon ma louable coutume de parler sans penser, je répondis que je ne savais pas. Cette réponse leur fit croire que j'étais fou. . . . (VI, 288)

He is also witty after the event, and inveterately tactless, as his anecdote about the "opiate de M. Tronchin" rather amusingly illustrates.¹¹

Social failings apart, Rousseau manifests an entirely unpicaresque dependence upon Mme. de Warens.¹² Despite his attempts to minimize this, it shines through transparently at some points. Destitute and desperate in Lausanne in 1731, he craves the security her presence affords:

Je me disais; Elle saura tôt ou tard que je suis errant, et me donnera quelque signe de vie; je la retrouverai, j'en suis certain. (IV, 168)

Rousseau's presentation of his youthful self is far from being consistently picaresque; but after all, his real-life reactions to the exceptionally harsh circumstances of

¹⁰ See III, 104, where the young Rousseau spills wine on Mlle. de Breil.

¹¹ III, 128.

¹² Rousseau is exceptionally sensitive to the reputation of Mme. de Warens. c.f. his letter to his father about her social standing (C.G., I, 25); his refusal to admit to her desire to be rid of him on various occasions, or to

his youth were I not consistently picaresque; in no respect, given those circumstances, did he sink as low as the picaro of fiction. Certainly, he had in those early years stolen, slept out, been something of a sexual deviant, abandoned Le Maître, pilfered from Mme. de Warens, literally sung for his supper, and done other such nefarious deeds; but as he himself recognised his preservation from far worse was little short of miraculous:

Ce sont les plus grandes extravagances de ma vie, et il est heureux qu'elles n'aient pas plus mal fini. (III, 143)

As his perceptive contemporary Dumont remarks,

. . .il y avait mille contre un qu'un tel genre de vie en ferait un vaurien et un aventurier--livré seul à lui-même en Italie à l'âge de dix-sept ans, il devait périr de libertinage et de misère.¹³

Rousseau's fictional counterparts are quickly conditioned to callousness; Lazarillo has no compunction about repaying his master in kind by inciting him to leap forward into a large stone pillar in the belief that he must jump a ditch; Gil Blas watches his obese master, the Canon, waste away from a cure of frequent bleeding and an unrelieved diet of cold water, without blinking an eyelid. Many of the Spanish picaros are brutal and even criminal before spiritual regeneration. Rousseau, however, is almost

her natural sensuality; and his romanticized account of her past in the Mémoire remis le 19 avril 1742 à M. Boudet (C.G., I, 152). Mme. de Warens was apparently known locally as "la folle" ("femme de mauvaises meours").

¹³ Dumont, "Rousseau jugé par Etienne Dumont", A.J.J.R., XXII (1933), 154-203.

pathologically sensitive, and obsessed with guilt about his own misdeeds.¹⁴

Again, the typical picaro has an eye to material advancement; even Tom Jones, the kindest of all, will not scorn the delightful Allworthy estate, with its well-filled stables and rolling lands. Rousseau remained genuinely indifferent to materialism and money, ten years of strife having persuaded him of the vanity of the cause. His little-known Discours sur les richesses¹⁵ finds its echoes in the Confessions itself. Bernadin de Saint-Pierre's admirable description of Rousseau's house and circumstances in the late 1770's further substantiates Rousseau's avowed distaste for luxury and ostentation.¹⁶

The picaro is also a sexual opportunist, which Rousseau was not, despite his naturally sensual disposition. Honesty usually bids him confess, after a good deal of picaresque detail, and description of the charms of the lady in question, that he was either sharply rebuffed in his advances, or too emotionally overcome to feel lust at all.

¹⁴ Among Rousseau's papers was found, after his death, a copy of the letter to Mme. Francueil in which he had admitted to the abandonment of his children. The letter was transcribed into a simple code, by which means Rousseau meant to keep his secret from his enemies, at the same time brooding over it to punish himself.

¹⁵ This discourse has not appeared in editions of the complete works. (Paris: Félix Bovet, 1853).

¹⁶ Bernadin de Saint-Pierre, Vie et ouvrages de J.-J.

Again, the picaro is normally indifferent to religion, which concerns Rousseau deeply, and quite inured to moral censure, which Rousseau found insupportable.

To sum up then, it can be said that while in real life Rousseau did, on occasion, display a genuine picaresque panache, he was more often insecure, inhibited and taciturn. The duality within himself is reflected in the work, where abrupt transitions from stylised treatment of a light subject, to sober treatment of a serious one, are clearly apparent. The Confessions resists all attempts to classify it as belonging to any one distinct literary genre.

While our chief concern here is to underline the picaresque nature of Rousseau's imaginative embellishment in his autobiography, that is, to relate it to picaresque fiction, we feel a brief mention of those elements in the work which endeared it to nineteenth-century writers, from Châteaubriand to Stendhal, might be appropriate at this point.

Rousseau was perhaps the first who dared to claim the validity of an entirely subjective view of the world; the first to accord any importance to the experiences of childhood, and to speak of sexual matters without prurience. His intense interest in his own motives and his own reactions,

fill the pages of the Confessions with vivid and precise details--humble and trivial perhaps, but as real to the reader as they had been to Rousseau himself. Here, for example, he recalls his subterfuge as a timid pupil:

. . . la crainte même de ne pas apprendre m'empêche d'être attentif; de peur d'impatisser celui qui me parle, je feins d'entendre, il va en avant, et je n'entends rien. (III, 132)

The Rousseau of the Confessions, as distinct from the moral propagandist of some of his other works, is singularly amoral. He has praise for the homosexual Abbé he encounters at Lyon:

Il me dit. . . beaucoup de choses très bonnes, très sensées, et ce n'était assurément pas un homme sans mérite, quoique [he feels bound to admit!] ce fût un grand vilain. (IV, 189)

The sexual moeurs of Mme. de Warens are of virtually no significance to him. Of his own theft from his unkind master at Geneva, he has no guilty memories whatsoever; yet his false accusation of the servant Marion at Turin, haunts him perpetually. While according to an abstract code of honour, both actions would be reprehensible, Rousseau appears to rely upon a personal code--a reliance which strikes the twentieth-century reader as extraordinarily modern.¹⁷

¹⁷Rousseau clearly believes in affording due consideration to exonerating circumstances before he will label an act a sin. See C.G., I, 103, for an example of his reasoning on this score: "Preuve que je ne suis pas propre à ramper dans les malheurs de la vie, c'est que je n'ai jamais fait le rogne ni le fendant dans la prospérité".

No study of the Confessions could be complete without brief mention of the unprecedented lyricism of its descriptive passages. Whether we remember the house at Bossey:

. . . tout l'arrangement de la chambre
où nous étions. . . des framboisiers qui,
d'un jardin fort élevé dans lequel la maison
s'enfonçait sur le derrière, venaient ombrager
la fenêtre, et passaient quelquefois jusqu'en
dedans. . . . (I, 22)

--or the cherry orchard at Thônes, we recognize that the poetry of these passages is totally original. The description of the waterfall at Coux is among the most delightful in eighteenth-century literature:

. . . cette écume et cette eau bleue dont
j'entendais le mugissement à travers les cris
des corbeaux et des oiseaux de proie qui
volaient de roche en roche et de broussaille
en broussaille à cent toises au-dessous de
moi. (IV, 196)

What picaro ever recalled a night "à la belle étoile" in these terms?

Il avait fait très chaud ce jour-là,
la soirée était charmante; la rosée humectait
l'herbe flétrie; point de vent, une nuit
tranquille; l'air était frais, sans être froid;
le soleil, après son coucher, avait laissé dans
le ciel des vapeurs rouges dont la réflexion
rendait l'eau couleur de rose; les arbres des
terrasses étaient chargés de rossignols qui
se répondaient de l'un à l'autre. (IV, 191)

Again, what true picaro could have contented himself with life at Les Charmettes in 1735? Rising early to walk among the vines in prayer, gardening in leisurely fashion amid the flowers until the shutters of Mme. de Warens were

thrown open; taming the pigeons and bees; taking coffee in the leafy summer-house on warm days, or browsing in books too often forgotten in the hedges or left under trees, Rousseau found himself happy:

Je me levais avec le soleil et j'étais heureux; je me promenais et j'étais heureux; je voyais Maman et j'étais heureux; je la quittais et j'étais heureux; je parcourais les bois, les coteaux, j'errais dans les vallons, je lisais, j'étais oisif; je travaillais au jardin, je cueillais les fruits, j'aidais au ménage, et le bonheur me suivait partout. . . . (VI, 259-260)

While the picaresque passages of the Confessions evidently derive to some extent from literary prototypes, the exquisite lyricism of book VI added a new dimension to French literature. Nineteenth-century writers, for whom the piquant anecdote or the picaresque situation held a very limited interest, turned for inspiration to passages such as this, Rousseau's description of his walk with Mme. de Warens on her birthday:

. . . nous allions de colline en colline et de bois en bois, quelquefois au soleil et souvent à l'ombre. . . causant de nous, de notre union, de la douceur de notre sort. . . Il avait plu depuis peu; point de poussière, et des ruisseaux bien courants; un petit vent frais agitait les feuilles l'air était pur, l'horizon sans nuage, la sérénité régnait au ciel comme dans nos coeurs. (VI, 282)

However, by the time we reach book VI Rousseau has

virtually abandoned picaresque embellishment.¹⁸ From this point onward he will turn, increasingly, away from narrative and towards self-revelation. The vivacity of the early books, where Rousseau the young picaro is whirled from one household to the next, continually re-telling his story and receiving shelter from the storm, is altogether lacking in the second part, written at a particularly difficult period of his life and dealing with a past too recent to admit of much idealization.

We hope to have drawn attention, in this chapter, to the curious interplay of romanticized recollection and serious subjective commentary in the Confessions, and to have done justice also, to Rousseau's literary originality. Returning now to the question of picaresque embellishment, which remains one of the most striking and least discussed features of the work, we will attempt to show in Chapter V why Rousseau should have had recourse to it at all. Why, then, did this distortion ever occur?

¹⁸His treatment of the Mme. Larnage episode is an isolated exception.

CHAPTER V
RETROSPECTIVE DISTORTION IN ROUSSEAU'S
"CONFESSIONS", I TO VI

It would seem that, consciously or unconsciously, Rousseau lent to the story of his early years, and to the portrait of his youthful self, a certain imaginative colouring. How should we account for this subtle metamorphosis?

Firstly, perhaps, by observing how the gradual evolution of the Confessions is related to the changing circumstances of the author. Paradoxically, each new blow, each devastating mental crisis, seems to have acted as a stimulus for redoubled literary activity. This literary activity was necessarily escapist in nature; the very act of composition constituted a withdrawal from the world and its harsh realities.

Rousseau first heeded the reiterated demands of his publisher Rey for his memoirs or *Life*, early in 1762. The Lettres à M. Malesherbes of January 1762 were perhaps a trial sketch, and encouraged by apparent success, Rousseau soon began work in earnest. This in itself, after the crushing events of 1761--final alienation of Diderot and Grimm, decisive if not irremediable breach with Mme. d'Epinaÿ, and extinction of his passion for Sophie d'Houdetot--indicates Rousseau's tendency to seek satisfaction in a world of his

own creation. Feeling towards the end of 1761, perhaps, as he had felt on arrival at l'Ermitage,

. . . je me voyais attendre aux portes
de la vieillesse, et mourir sans avoir
vecu (IX, 504),

he nevertheless embraced his new undertaking with fervour.

Apparently undaunted by the condemnation of the Emile in June 1762, Rousseau was by November of that year in a position to write to Rey:

Depuis six mois ma vie est devenue
malheureusement un ouvrage d'importance
qui demande du tems et des réflexions.¹

The publication in 1764 of the anonymous Sentiment des Citoyens--in fact the work of Voltaire--with the revelation that Rousseau had abandoned his illegitimate children to the Foundlings Home, determined him to redeem his honour, as far as possible, by freely admitting to all those sins he had committed. At this point he decided to entitle the work Les Confessions de Jean-Jacques Rousseau: once again, when the initial shock of the disclosure had passed, writing assumed a therapeutical significance.

Similarly, during his wretched stay in England in 1766, Rousseau turned to his work for consolation:

. . . tous les souvenirs que j'avais à
me rappeler étaient autant de nouvelles
jouissances. J'y revenais sans cesse avec
un nouveau plaisir, et je pouvais tourner
mes descriptions sans gêne jusqu'à ce que

¹J.-J. Rousseau, Correspondance générale, ed. Dufour, VIII, 253, letter of 16 November 1762.

j'en fusse content. (VII, 323)

On the verge of his quarrel with Hume and his ensuing mental collapse, Rousseau was producing pages which his host Davenport described to Hume as "charmingly wrote", and which inspired this gentleman to assert, "these memoirs will be the most taking of all his works".²

On his return to France the following year, despite intermittent periods of terrifying instability and anguish,³ Rousseau managed, at Trye, to compose a new book VI and to work on his supporting documents.

Apparently then, the more confused and horrifying his daily life became, the more precious did the peaceful world of the Confessions become to its author. He himself tells us:

Si je veux peindre le printemps, il faut
que je sois en hiver; si je veux décrire un
beau paysage, il faut que je sois dans des
murs. . . . (IV, 194)

--and the composition of the Confessions is an admirable case in point.

It is hardly surprising that since, as we have seen, the composition of the work represents a flight from painful

²See H. de Saussure, Rousseau et les manuscrits des Confessions (Paris: Bocard, 1958), p. 37.

³See his Note mémorative sur la maladie et la mort de M. Deschamps in Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-64), I, 1179-1180.

reality, Rousseau should have gone one step further, and idealized his past a little. As our chronology suggests, and as we might infer from his second letter to Malesherbes,⁴ he had good reason to idealize certain circumstances of his childhood and adolescence.

This idealization is often a form of innocent self-compensation for Rousseau,⁵ who despite his glorious reputation in the world of letters, remained extraordinarily sensitive to his deprivations on the humbler plane of human relationships. Rousseau had lacked a stable home, loving parents, good health; he had not dared to accept the responsibility of his children; suffering from a complete lack of social confidence, he had known humiliation at the hands of those he most longed to impress. He himself admits:

Je ne me soucie point d'être remarqué, mais quand on me remarque je ne suis pas fâché que ce soit d'une manière un peu distinguée, et j'aimerois mieux être oublié de tout le genre humain que regardé comme un homme ordinaire.⁶

We must surely feel for him, then, when in a letter

⁴J.-J. Rousseau, Correspondance générale, VII, 71; letter of 26 January 1762;

Quels temps croiriez-vous, Monsieur, que je me rappelle le plus souvent et le plus volontiers dans mes rêves? Ce ne sont point les plaisirs de ma jeunesse: ils furent trop rares, trop mêlés d'armertume. . . .

⁵See Ch. II, p. 40; "des riantes fictions qui ravissent. . .".

⁶J.-J. Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard,

to Du Peyrou⁷ he recalls the treatment too often afforded him by his elegant patronesses:

. . . les jolies femmes me faisoient en France l'affront de me traiter comme un bon-homme sans conséquence. . . jusqu'à m'embrasser dédaigneusement devant tout le monde, comme le grand père de leur Nourrice.

Still smarting from his failure to impress with his vivacity, his charm, or his person in Parisian society, Rousseau turned to memories of sweet success, and in recalling his days as the dashing music-teacher of Chambéry or the eloquent vagabond of Soleure, succumbed to the temptation of self-indulgence, and embellished his narrative as he would. Worshipped for his works but unloved for himself, how could the imaginative Rousseau have done otherwise?

At times, he lavishes upon his younger self, with an almost paternal devotion, the love of which he has been continually starved. Surely, he suggests, the young Rousseau is too endearing to arouse the reader's disapproval? Here, the mischievous apprentice Rousseau is fishing for apples through a metal grille:

La pomme était trop grosse, elle ne put passer par le trou. . . . A force d'adresse et de temps je parvins à la partager, espérant tirer ensuite les pièces l'une après l'autre; mais à peine furent-elles séparées, qu'elles tombèrent toutes deux dans la dépense. Lecteur pitoyable, partagez mon affliction. (I, 36-7)

1959-64), I, 1123.

⁷J.-J. Rousseau, Correspondance générale, XII, 26;

Rousseau predisposes the reader to share in his paternal tenderness, and invites his affectionate indulgence, by repeated use of the word "petit"⁸ in connection with his youthful self:

. . .j'étais bien pris dans ma petite
taille. . . . (II, 51)

Mon petit pécule était parti. . . . (II, 64)

Madame de Warens voulut savoir les
détails de ma petite histoire. . . . (II, 57)

Madame Sabran trouva le moyen de
m'arracher. . .un petit ruban. . .que
Madame de Warens m'avait donné pour ma
petite épée. . . . (II, 64)

. . .je vis porter mon petit paquet
dans la chambre qui m'était destinée. . . . (III, 113)

Rousseau's use of picaresque techniques springs partly from a need to compensate for personal shortcomings, and to bask in remembered warmth, the emotional deprivation of his youth having resulted in an insatiable craving for human affection, admiration and approval.

Some distortion in his presentation of his early years was also rendered highly probable by the fact that to hold forth at great length on his first-hand experience of hunger, poverty, misery and servitude, would be to play into the hands of his enemies, who, however little they may

letter of 4 November 1764.

⁸c.f. Rousseau's technique here and that of Marivaux, particularly with regard to his Marianne; see La Vie de Marianne, p. 60.

have known of Rousseau's past before the publication of the Confessions, used what they did know against him. Diderot, whose misguided attempts to help Rousseau manage his life had aroused a pathological resentment on the part of the latter, and caused the friendship to collapse, charged Rousseau with changing religion for his own ends, thus betraying, perhaps, a former confidence on the subject of Rousseau's original conversion at Turin. Voltaire, a far more formidable enemy, who had been mortally wounded by Rousseau's curt and hostile replies to his initial overtures, lent added weight to his extraordinarily vicious campaign of denigration, by frequent allusion to Rousseau's lack of breeding and education. Rousseau having been unwise enough to boast, in his Lettres de la Montagne of having been secretary to the French ambassador at Venice in 1744, Voltaire unearthed, through unscrupulous contacts, Rousseau's own dispatches from the embassy; letters in which he had complained, "J'ai été deux ans le domestique de M. le comte de Montaigu. . . .J'ai mangé son pain. . .", and protested bitterly, "Il m'a chassé honteusement de sa maison".⁹

Voltaire, having made public mention of Rousseau's former condition of lackey, and waited just long enough for word

⁹Voltaire, Correspondance, ed. Besterman (Geneva: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1961), LXIII (October-December 1766, "Rousseau"), 36; letter of 24 October 1766, Voltaire to David Hume: no. 12735.

of this to reach Rousseau's ears; having in his own hands a letter in which the incensed Rousseau denied all charges of ever having been a lackey, published, in his letter to Hume, extracts from Rousseau's original dispatches, and concluded with malicious glee, "Voilà un secrétaire d'ambassade assez peu respecté, et la fierté d'une grande âme peu ménagée".¹⁰

Voltaire also indulged in some refined sniping at Rousseau's "gouvernante" Thérèse, whom he describes as "la belle Mlle. Levasseur, sa blanchisseuse, âgée de cinquante ans".¹¹ He took pains to correct Rousseau's grammar, sometimes purely for his own satisfaction, as the marginalia on his personal copies of Rousseau's work will show. Perceiving that Rousseau saw in his own Emile the model of perfect manhood, Voltaire referred to him as "un gentilhomme menuisier",¹² informed a correspondent, ". . .je n'ai point encore cette 'Education' de l'homme le plus mal élevé qui soit au monde",¹³ and commented in the margin of the work ". . .c'est une brute qui ne connaît pas une seule vertu sociale".

¹⁰Voltaire, Correspondance, LXIII, 36.

¹¹Ibid., p. 68; letter of 3 November 1766, to de Chabanon: no. 12757.

¹²Voltaire, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Moland (Paris: Garnier, 1880), XXX, 573.

¹³Ibid., XLII, 125.

Perhaps then, picaresque embellishment was adopted partly as a means of maintaining Rousseau's dignity in the face of such onslaughts, and of defending his humble origins. He himself affects to dismiss the criticism he anticipates:

. . .qu'on ne m'objecte pas que n'étant qu'un homme du peuple, je n'ai [sic.] ren [sic.] à dire qui mérite l'attention des lecteurs. Cela est très vrai des événements de ma vie: mais j'écris moins l'histoire de ces événements en eux-mêmes que celle de l'état de mon âme. . . .14

Whether intentionally or no, picaresque embellishment does serve the purpose of drawing a veil over various occasions when Rousseau's fortunes were at their lowest ebb; it allows him for example to describe his departure from the surveyor's office at Chambéry (whence he may well have been discharged, as a very minor employé, when work was short),¹⁵ in these terms:

. . .je cours remercier fièrement M. Coccelli, directeur général du cadastre comme si j'avais fait l'acte le plus héroïque, et je quittai volontairement mon emploi, sans sujet, sans raison, sans prétexte, avec autant et plus de joie que je n'en avais eu à le prendre il n'y avait pas deux ans. (V, 216)

Picaresque embellishment also serves to entertain

¹⁴Rousseau, Confessions, p. 788.

¹⁵See G. Daumas, "Notes sur le séjour de Rousseau à Chambéry", R.S.H., Fasc. 66 (1951-2), 109-115.

the reader. Rousseau intended that the reader of the Confessions should sit in judgement upon him, and acquit him; he therefore endeavoured to persuade him, by the subtlest of means, to adopt a sympathetic attitude. Picaresque techniques are particularly appropriate for one who would portray an endearing vagabond, and Rousseau is entirely successful in his use of them. Having been admitted into his forgotten past; having seen him turn from a precocious and adulated child into an abandoned adolescent; having admired his spirit in setting forth light-heartedly across the Alps, and having suffered and rejoiced with him as the graph of his fortunes soars and plummets, are we not more inclined to look mercifully upon Rousseau's sins, than if he had made no attempt whatsoever to win our sympathies? Etienne Dumont rightly remarks:

La composition de Rousseau est fort
travaillée. . .son ton familier est encore
plus soigné que son ton noble, ses morceaux
de badinage et d'ironie ont été peut-être
plus retouchés que ses morceaux de verve. . ., ¹⁶

--and the reader is conditioned as he reads. Rousseau is particularly successful in diverting and amusing the twentieth-century reader, who is rarely repelled by the confessional pages in any event.

¹⁶Dumont, "Rousseau jugé par Etienne Dumont", A.J.J.R., XXII (1933), 173.

We would conclude then that Rousseau came to embellish the story of his early years for a number of equally valid reasons. For a man of his imagination, writing under his particularly distressing circumstances, the temptation to embroider the narrative--to linger over delicious memories and let more painful ones lie, was irresistible. "Ma mémoire", he tells us at the beginning of the Second Part of the Confessions, "qui me retrace uniquement les objets agréables, est l'heureux contrepoids de mon imagination effarouchée, qui ne me fait prévoir que de cruels avenir". (VII, 322)

We should emphasize however, that the emendations made by Rousseau as the definitive draft of the Confessions began to take shape, are essentially stylistic in origin. Rousseau was unaware of his own motives in resorting to "ornement"; passionately honest, he would not willingly have set out to misrepresent himself. Although he evidently felt on re-reading the Confessions that he had somehow strayed from the truth, he attributed any minor distortions to his unreliable memory, as we have seen in Chapter III. In the Confessions itself, Rousseau has been careful to specify:

J'écris absolument de mémoire, sans monuments, sans matériaux. . . . Il y a des événements de ma vie qui me sont aussi présents que s'ils venaient d'arriver; mais il y a des lacunes et des vides que je ne peux remplir qu'à l'aide de récits aussi confus que le souvenir qui m'en est resté. (III, 144)

A closer examination of Rousseau's attitude to memory reveals, however, a singular disinclination on his part to

accord any significance at all to facts. As he declares in the introduction to MS. N., "Les faits ne sont ici que des causes occasionelles".¹⁷ Rousseau held the unorthodox conviction that a remembered feeling is of far more consequence than a remembered fact. His indifference to questions of chronology is supreme. Of his idyllic summer in the house at Les Charmettes--a summer over whose correct dating critics and historians battled for fifty years!--he mentions absently,

Autant que je puis me rappeler les
temps et les dates, nous en primes
possession vers la fin de l'été de 1736. (V, 258)

In conversation with Bernadin de Saint-Pierre, Rousseau relates that his mother died when he was two, that he left Geneva at fourteen, and went to Lyon--facts which stand in direct contradiction to the text of the Confessions.¹⁸ He also places his delightful night "à la belle étoile" on this journey. These variations in the facts are not to be attributed merely to an unreliable memory; they are the direct consequence of Rousseau's own priorities in writing his autobiography; priorities of which the reader can scarcely fail to be aware:

En me livrant à la fois au souvenir
de l'impression reçue et au sentiment
présent je peindrai doublement l'état de
mon âme, savoir au moment où l'événement

¹⁷Rousseau, Confessions, p. 788.

¹⁸Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Vie et ouvrages de J.-J. Rousseau, pp. 38-40.

m'est arrivé et au moment où je l'ai décrit. . . .¹⁹

We must surely object, with Starobinski, "Mon émotion présente n'est-elle pas comme un prisme à travers lequel ma vie ancienne change de forme et de couleur?"²⁰ and with Marcel Raymond, "Mais en général, les souvenirs s'intègrent au présent sans l'annihiler, ils lui empruntent quelque chose de sa couleur".²¹

When Rousseau maintains, "Il y a une certaine succession d'affections et d'idées qui modifient celles qui les suivent, et qu'il faut connaître pour en bien juger", he is inadvertently revealing that his viewpoint is predetermined and quite inflexible. Sartre in La Nausée advances the theory that, in retrospect, we impose a completely gratuitous notion of personal destiny upon the haphazard meanderings of our own lives:

. . . les événements se produisent dans un sens et nous les racontons en sens inverse. . . la fin est là, qui transforme tout.²²

In specifically stating that his story would be based

¹⁹Rousseau, Confessions, p. 791.

²⁰Jean Starobinski, La Transparence et l'obstacle, p. 245.

²¹Marcel Raymond, J.-J. Rousseau. La Quête de soi et la rêverie (Paris: Corti, 1962), p. 203.

²²J.-P. Sartre, La Nausée (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), pp. 60-61.

upon remembered feelings, Rousseau in fact left himself free to re-create a self. Thus it happened that, as Marcel Raymond points out, ". . .l'histoire de son âme, qu'il nous avait promise, est devenue à son insu la légende où le mythe de son âme".²³ Hence Rousseau's own bewilderment on contemplating his finished work, which had emerged from the mould slightly distorted; essentially true, yet unfamiliar.

In conclusion, then, we may account for picaresque embellishment in the early books of the *Confessions*, in various ways. Firstly, the work represented for its elderly, unhappy and isolated author, a flight into a rosier world; he was unable to refrain from occasionally giving a picaresque touch to the narrative, thus affording himself a good deal of retrospective gratification. Secondly, the adoption of a slightly romanticized picture of his early life was expedient as a protective measure; Rousseau had already had experience of the supercilious malice of his well-born, well-educated critics, and meant his readers to infer that a humble social station was not without its peculiar charms. Lastly, the picaresque content served to create a measure of sympathetic understanding between reader and narrator, predisposing the former, to look with a merciful eye on the latter's sins. It is doubtful whether Rousseau himself was aware of his possible motive in making

²³J.-J. Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-1964), I, xxxvii.

the "ornements", "détails", or "additions" to which he refers; engaged upon the artistic refinement of certain episodes as an end in itself, he cannot have realized the extent of his desire to enhance his own attractiveness.

Since Rousseau mistakenly imagined the only authentic memory to be an affective one; since, accordingly, he had never placed any importance upon facts; and since he had in any case forgotten much of the factual basis for books I to VI of the Confessions by the time he came to write them, his tendency to embellish the events and circumstances of his youth was rarely countered by any scruples as to historical authenticity. Thus, with a desire to escape from his everyday surroundings, a vivid imagination, and a wealth of images drawn from both real life and fiction constantly fermenting within him, Rousseau came to make of certain pages of the Confessions a delightful picaresque novel. For the embellishment which evidently troubled Rousseau's own conscience, his readers are duly grateful.

CONCLUSION

We have attempted in this study to examine various aspects of the relationship of the Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, books I to VI, to the picaresque novel. Critics have often commented in passing, that imaginative reconstruction plays a considerable part in the composition of these early books. While modern scholarly research has tended to disprove the assertion that Rousseau actually lied about his youth, nevertheless certain pages of the Confessions obstinately retain the stamp of fiction; our purpose here has been to indicate why.

Rousseau was better acquainted with the fiction of his day than he cared to admit. Highly imaginative, he became completely absorbed in what he read, and retained from his reading any image which particularly pleased him. During his years in Paris he undoubtedly became familiar with the themes of the picaresque novel; Gil Blas was still in considerable demand during the 1740's, and the English picaresque renaissance was making itself felt in France.

When Rousseau came to write his Confessions, the pleasure of creative writing tempted him; when memory failed him, or failed to interest him, he yielded to temptation and indulged in imaginative embellishment; this much he himself admits. He does not however insist, as we would, on the

specific nature of this embellishment.

More often than not, Rousseau's "additions" are distinctly picaresque. He himself must have realised that the story of his early life was a picaresque novel in embryo; the picaresque novel in the eighteenth century offered an example of how humble beginnings may goad the brilliant individual into rebellion at his lot, and inspire him to realize his own potential; Rousseau was thus, in one sense, the living embodiment of picaresque aspirations fulfilled.

For this reason and for others, Rousseau persistently embellishes his narrative with picaresque detail. For every instance of a remarkable parallel between the Confessions and the picaresque novel as cited in our third chapter, a dozen more exist. With his delicate feeling for the most appropriate image, Rousseau unconsciously drew upon his knowledge of contemporary fiction during the laborious composition of his Confessions, interweaving the piquant anecdote and the sober truth, and lending his picaresque pages a novel veracity by so doing.

We would suggest that a close study of the Confessions reveals a greater debt on Rousseau's part to the fiction of the early eighteenth century, than he himself was ever aware of. Yet his appropriation of certain picaresque conventions was not coarse plagiarism. On the contrary, as the nineteenth century was to show, the picaresque tradition gained immeasurably from the voluntary enlistment of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the ranks of the happy few.

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C.L.S. - Comparative Literature Studies
P.M.L.A. - Publications of the Modern Languages Association
of America
R.H.D. - Revue d'Histoire Diplomatique
R.H.L.F. - Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France
R.L.C. - Revue de la Littérature Comparée
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