III. Ethical allegory

If the self is not, in theory, a privileged category through which all deconstructions of metaphorical patterns would have to proceed, then the sequel to any theory of metaphor will be a theory of narrative centered on the general question of referentiality and not on the pronominal substitutions that organized such texts as Narcisse and Pygmalion. Texts may (and indeed will) continue to contain such substitutions but they will no longer constitute the main narrative articulations. Rousseau’s major effort at narrative fiction, the novel Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse, contains elaborate substitutive patterns involving the polarity of self and other not only with regard to two main protagonists Julie and Saint Preux but also involving the main bit blank blank characters. If this were not the case, “love” could not be the important thematic ingredient that it obviously still is in Julie. But the very clearly marked subdivision of the novel in two parts, underscored by thematic and figural blank as well as by Rousseau’s own statements about his work, can no longer be interpreted by means of this pattern. What is involved in this transition determines one’s understanding of the text as a whole and necessitates the blank further elaboration of the groundwork established in the Second Discourse with regard to a general theory of figure.

Much has gone astray in the critical reading of Julie because not even the generalized status of selfhood and consciousness has been recognized, let alone the more complex (and still undefined) question of referentiality in general. I am not only thinking of the litteralism that debates the priorities between the assumedly “real” correspondence between Mme. D’Houdetot and Rousseau and the fictional letters that pass between Julie and Saint Preux, or that speculates and passes judgment on the psychological verisimilitude of
the ménage a trois at Clarens. All this is a little like speculating whether Fichte’s absolute I rides on horseback or stands on a mountain top, or whether Kant’s categorical imperative has dark or blue eyes. The more Rousseau tried to avoid any particularization, by reducing distinctive physical traits to the minimum needed for allegorical signification\(^{(1)}\) or by making the epistolary style almost intolerably uniform\(^{(2)}\), the more readers have felt free to fill the space thus allotted to their imagination with trivia (2A); [somewhat later a] this kind of self-indulgence is not what I have in mind in the discussion of misreading. In this respect, the reaction of blank among his contemporaries or followers who debated the book as a moral and not a psychological challenge\(^{(3)}\) were well ahead of modern historical critics. 150 years of assumedly realistic fiction seem to have blinded us to the level of figural abstraction that should be obvious in a work in which “characters” [are] have little more human individuality than the theological virtues, the five senses or the parts of the body.

But even on a much more refined level of awareness, when Julie is read as a novel of inwardness that might anticipate Adolphe, say, or Oberman, or even some aspects of the Recherche, we are still dealing with a contingent and basically uninteresting misreading. For one thing, such a reading keeps considering Julie, if it considers it at all, as if it would have preferred it to be the Confessions or the Reveries. rather than what it is. It would have to dismiss blank blank of the novel as unfortunate ballast.
“Il est vraiment regrettable, writes Charles Guyon, the latest editor of the Nouvelle Héloïse, que dans sa Précédent dialoguée et même dans son récit des Confessions, (Rousseau) ait mis si fortement l’accent sur les différences qui séparent les deux premières parties et le reste de son roman . . .” (O.C I, p. XLII). Something of this “il est vraiment regrettable . . .” lingers on in much less naïve readers, who still would have wished the book to be somehow different. The critics most astutely responsive to the seduction of Rousseau’s inwardness, Marcel Raymond and Georges Poulet, have little or nothing to say about Julie and have to emphasize passages from the Rêveries at the near-expense of the entire work. This could, of course, be entirely legitimate and it is in accordance, moreover, with the impact of Rousseau on a literary lineage that includes prestigious names. The weight of this historical authority makes it nearly impossible for us to read Julie; we need to forget too much to make this again possible. But the ideological investment, ethical, religious, and political, in the misreading of Rousseau is considerable enough to make the effort to reverse the established trend of interpretation worthwhile. It would, among other things, open up the intriguing possibility of re-reading the texts that seem to belong to the genealogical line that starts with Rousseau in the light of what Julie “actually” says rather than in the light of what we regret that it does not say.

Serious attempts to come to terms with the structure and diction of Julie have always tended towards a bi-polar, dialectical reading, the main issue being the definition of the two poles when conflict engenders the text of the novel. Schiller referred to them as sensitivity (Empfindlichkeit) and intellect (Denkkraft) or, in terms of genre, (implicitly) as idyll and elegy (a much more productive opposition, since it is based, in his terminology, on absence or presence of a referential moment); dialectizing Marcel Raymond, Starobinski reads the novel as a dialectic of immediacy (transparence) and
mediation (obstacle); Burgelin

But whatever name is given to the polarities, it is generally agreed that the dialectical progression fails. The tension between immediacy and mediation allows to coordinate the experience of nature with that of an individual consciousness that overcomes the obstacles of otherness by an act of love: “la transparence des couers restitue a la nature l’éclat et l’intensité qu’elle avait perdu” (Staro, T+O., p. 105); it also makes it possible to pass from individual passions, such as love, to the social dimension of the state. Here difficulties begin to arise, for the political and economic theory of Clarens proves to be something of an embarrassment to whoever thinks that Rousseau could conceive a political order only if it made allowance for the unmediated presence of a consciousness to itself. Some reject Julie’s political model as utopian or mere totalitarianism; others, like Starobinski, try valiantly to rescue what can be rescued, but are forced to conclude that “.” (T+O., p. 142) The ambivalence is at its most obvious in the passage from political to religious language (the final conflict between Julie’s faith and Wolmar’s atheism), which appears to be a gesture of evasion before the unresolved tensions of the political world: “.” (T+O., 140). And within the religious consciousness, the same impossibility of reaching a true synthesis persists: on the one hand, like the Vicaire Savoyard (read superficially), Julie seems to advocate a theophany, a natural religion; on the other hand, an unmediated encounter with god is still being promised, in a realm that lies beyond death: “” (T+O., 145).
The dialectics of love and of political morality are finally superseded by a religious experience that is no longer dialectical in any sense and that simply obliterates the entire preceding development. “.” (T+O, 148) The literary consequence of this choice takes the form of a return to the augustinian confessional mode. In this reading, too, Julie is only a momentary deviation transcended by a spiritual experience that leaves it far behind. Or, if one asserts that Rousseau always remained tempted by political reflections and by novelistic modes, then he failed to make up his mind, although he had clearly articulated the choice that confronted him. Perhaps the failure of the dialectic is not the failure of Rousseau but the unavoidable consequence of positing an antithetical model where none exists. Which forces us, however, to discover relationships which, in Wordsworth’s terms, would have to be “finer than mere opposition.” (the Essay on Epitaphs for exact quotation).

In the very passage in which Julie speaks of a confrontation with God, the encounter is not described as transparency but by means of a metaphor, the curiously unreadable metaphor of reading which no one ever seems to want to read: the communication does not occur in the form of a perception (“L’Etre éternel . . .ne parle ni aux yeux ni aux oreilles, mais au coeur”) but the unmediated contact (i.e. not mediated by sensory perception) occurs as a “reading”: “une communication immédiate, semblable a celle par laquelle Dieu lit nos pensées des cette vie, et par laquelle nous lirons réciproquement les siennes dans l’autre, puisque nous le verrons face-a-face .” (O. C. I, 728). A note draws further attention to the verb: “Cela me paroit tres bien
dit: car qu’est-ce que voir Dieu face-a-face, si ce n’est lire dans la suprême intelligence?”

The act which, for Starobinski, marks the telos of the work (although Julie seems to speak about it with less solemnity more “blank” than the commentator) is represented by Rousseau as the act of reading. The question of the relationship, in the *Nouvelle Heloïse*, between love, ethics, political society and religion, as well as the possible existence of a hierarchical order of these experiences, will depend on the implications of a term whose meaning is by no means transparent. And so will the question of the rhetorical mode of the narrative, if it turns out that the thematization of “reading” is linked to distinctive rhetorical properties [What can be discovered from the Nouvelle Heloïse about the problematics of reading?]

People read a lot in this book, for there can be no better way to thematize the ever-present necessity to read than the epistolary novel. Unlike Laclos’s letters in the *Liaisons dangereuses*, which are as directly effective as bullets, the letters of the Nouvelle Heloïse rarely set out to accomplish anything specific beyond their own reading; apparent deviations from this norm turn out, at more careful consideration, to be hardly exceptions at all. It is clear, at any rate, that Rousseau’s text does not exploit the narrative possibilities of the letter as “actant”, as plot-agent. The letters are obviously reflective and retrospective interpretations of events rather than being themselves events, which is why they connote reading rather than writing. Hence also the Ciceronian (Richardsonian), declarative style defined to be read rather than visualized. Not that the act of reading is innocuous, far from it. It is the starting-point of all evil: “Celle qui, malgré ce titre, en osera lire une seul page, est une fille perdue . . .” (Préface, p. 6) echoed by Julie, as the reader of St. Preux’s letters: “. . . vous écrivites. Au lieu de jetter au feu votre premiere lettre, ou de la porter a ma mere, j’osai l’ouvrir. Ce fut la mon crime, et tout le reste fut forcé, Je voulus m’empêcher de lire.” (L. 342).
But the evil of the letters does not reside in the desire they convey; as we know from the
*Essai*, this would much more effectively be performed by mimicry and gesture than by
writing; part of the realistic oddity, bordering on the ludicrous, of the novel is that the letters
are so didactic. Nor are they an invitation to shared erotic or passionate emotions as in the
Paolo and Francesca blank. What Julie and Saint Preux will read together is an austere
reading-plan (57) that includes “ni poètes ni livres d’amour, contre l’ordinaire des lectures
consacrées a votre Sexe.” (61) There is little trace, in their relationship, of a desire
mediated by literary substitutes: “Qu’apprendrions nous de l’amour dans ces livres? Ah, Julie
notre coeur nous en dit plus qu’eux, et le langage imité des livres est bien froid pour
quiconque est passionné lui-même.” (61) The temptations emanating from literary
inscriptions (as in the Petrarch quotation found at Meillerie) is a genuine danger that must be
fled (the Meillerie letter, ref?) and that the text of the novel tries to avoid being at all costs, at
the risk of heroic boredom. The extensive presence of literary antecedents, much in
evidence throughout the novel (beginning with the title), in direct quotation as well as
allusively, never means a quixotic mystification that would imply the simply referential
displacement of a desire. Intertextuality in *la Nouvelle Heloïse* is a more complicated
structure. The danger of reading is a much more general and insidious threat that no
conversion, however radical, could ever hope to remove.

The best place in the text to find guidance on the key-word “lire” is without doubt the
Seconde preface, sometimes referred to as “dialogue sur le roman”, and staging a
confrontation between author and reader (O.C. I, pp. 12-30) in the conventional form of an
apologia. Despite its largely traditional terminology, this brief text has little in common with
the habitual discussions of the comparative merits of fiction and history in the 18th century, and
therefore demands to be read in its own right—much in the same way that *Julie* also fails
to fit conveniently among the established conventions of 18th century
The question around which the entire imaginary debate of the preface circles is not that of verisimilitude (granted by both interlocutors to be non-existent in Julie, in realistic detail as well as in more general terms), but that of the text’s referential status. Did the model for the main characters of the narrative exist outside the language of the fiction or not? “Cette correspondance est-elle réelle, ou si c’est une fiction?” If the question is merely a gesture in the direction of a well-established conception (for which Montesquieu’s Temple de gnide seems, in this case, to have been the particular model\(^{(3)}\) according to which the writer pretends to be the editor and not the author of the fiction he conveys thus making him into a historian rather than a teller of tales—then it hardly seems a suitable theme for an introduction to a text that takes itself so seriously. Nor would this explain Rousseau obsessively returning (in the 4\(^{th}\) Rêverie) to the same considerations\(^{(1)}\), when questions of truth, lie and fiction are at stake. Least of all would the conventionality of the question explain the theoretical interest of the text, unless one recognizes that the convention itself reflects a fundamental linguistic tension. If this is the case, then Rousseau is one of the very few writers of the 18\(^{th}\) century to realize what is involved in this blank mechanically conventional game.

The dialogue starts out from what seems to be a clear and classical antithesis: the narrative text can be either the “portrait” of an extra-textual, particular referent or a “tableau”. The “tableau” does not have a specific referent and is, as such, a fiction (“tableau d’imagination”, 9). Common sense tells us that Julie is a “tableau” and Rousseau states as much, in no uncertain terms, in the actual Preface.\(^{(2)}\) We are never supposed to take literally the assertion of the title page that the letters of the two lovers, “habitants d’une petite ville au pieds des
Alpes” have been “recueillies et publiées” (and not written) by J.J. Rousseau. This does not mean, however, that the opposite of this statement, namely that Rousseau is the author of the letters is simply true without any reservations and that this word “author” can be understood without ambiguity. What seems to be at stake here is the figural status of this very title page as a kind of gate through which we are drawn into the textuality of the text. [A language of mystery and mystification hovers around many words present or absent on this page, the epigraph from Petrarch, blankblankblank Rousseau’s own desire, or of his civic designation as citoyen de Geneve none of which mentioned, the mention, on the other hand, of his full name (understood by the aggressive assertion of responsibility in the Preface) and, of course, the absurd claim merely to be the editor of the letters.]

If Julie is then not simply a “portrait”, a diegesis of a sensory or mental presence, action or person, what then does it mean for a text to be a “tableau”, a fiction? For the neo-classical reader that N seems to be (call him Butteaux, or Marmontel(1) or almost any writer on fiction at the time) the way back to referentiality and meaning (truth) is easy enough: fiction and truth are reconciled through the concept of man as a universal: “toute figure humaine doit avoir les traits communs a l’homme, ou le Tableau ne vaut rien.”; “... dans les Tableaux de l’humanité chacun doit reconnoiter l’Homme.” (21) The idea of “man” as a well-established, general concept is rejected by Rousseau, this is predictable enough, since the 2nd Discourse and the Essai made the very word “man” the target of their epistemological critique of concepts in general. Behind the recurring word lurks the unknown, unpredictable and unreliable monster or “giant”; N’s protestations would, in fact, explicate the conclusions of Rousseau’s anthropology: “... les Monstres inouis, les Géans, les Pygmées, les chimeres de toute espece; tout pourroit être admis spécifiquement dans la nature: tout seroit défiguré, nous n’aurions plus de modele commun ...” (21) Without taking away the terror, the same feeling of
unpredictability could just as well be stated in positive terms, as an assertion of freedom, of infinite possibilities and renewals (modernity, if one wishes, is opposed to neo-classical conservatism), as in the quotations from the Social Contract that Hölderlin was to use as a motto for his “Hymne an die Menschheit”: “Les bornes du possible dans les choses morales sont moins étroites que nous ne pensons: Ce sont nos foiblesses, nos vices, nos préjugés qui les rétrécissent. Les ames basses ne croyent point aux grands hommes: de viles esclaves sourient d’un air moqueur a ce mot de liberté.” (Contrat Social, p.) Those “grands hommes” are in a very literal sense like the “giants” of the Essai (or like Nietzsche’s “meta-men” Uber-mensch). The same positive tone can be heard in the 2nd Preface: “Qui est-ce qui ose assigner des bornes précises à la Nature, et dire: Voila jusqu’ou l’Homme peut aller, et pas au dela?” (20) or, reversedly, is still within the same metaphor: “Oh Philosophie! Combine tu prends de peine a retécir les coeurs, a render les homes petits!” (28)

The pathos of these statements, regardless of whether they are expressions of terror or exalting prophecies, stems from the referential indeterminacy of the metaphor “man”. The anthropological “tableau” is indeed a fiction, bewildered by its own suspended meaning. It depicts human passions, (fear, pity, love, freedom) but these passions all have the self-deceiving structure that we know from the Discours and that enables the narrative of their deconstruction to unfold. In the case of Julie, the passion that has been released happens to be love, since this is the traditional “romanesque” topic, without which it would be difficult to publish a novel, let alone sell it. But any passion could have done just as well, and one could imagine, for example, a novel of pure fear, or pure curiosity/suspicion (like Proust’s). On the thematic level, it is not the presence of love as opposed to fear that sets apart Julie from the Discours, since the determining structure is that of passion, which both have in common; if the distinction can at all
be phrased in thematic terms that it is more likely to be found in the supplementary blank in *Julie*, of an ethical element essentially absent from the *Discours*.

Like “man”, “love” is a figure that that dis-figures, a metaphor that confers the illusion of proper meaning on a suspended, open structure. In the naively referential language of the affections, this makes love into the forever repeated chimera, the monster of its own endless aberration, always oriented towards the future of its own repetition, since the deconstruction of the illusion only sharpens the intolerable uncertainty that created the illusion in the first place. In this same affective language, the referential error is called desire and the “voice” of this desire can be heard throughout Rousseau’s writings: “Tel est le néant de mes chimeras que si tous mes rêves had turned into reality, I would still remain unsatisfied: I would have kept on dreaming, imagining, desiring. In myself, I found an unexplainable void that nothing could have filled; a longing of the heart towards another kind of fulfillment of which I could not conceive but of which I nevertheless felt the attraction.” (Lettre a Malesherbes, I, 1140) The 2nd Preface says the same thing in slightly more technical terms and establishes the link with figural language: “L’amour n’est qu’illusion; il se fait, pour ainsi dire, un autre Univers; il s’entoure d’objets qui ne sont point, ou auxquels lui seul a donné l’être; et comme il rend tous ses sentiments en images, son langage est toujours figuré.” (46)

However negative the referent of passion may have become (“le néant de mes chimeres”, “le néant des choses humaines” *Julie*, p.) it is clear that, from the moment the figurality of the language of passion is taking for granted (“son language est *tousours* figuré”), we return in fact to a referential model. The unproblematic figurality of the metaphor “passion”, “love” restores its proper meaning, albeit in the form of a negating power that prevents any specific meaning from coming into being. The semiological structure is the
same blank with the word “géant” that postulates difference (in the form of an established non-identity of inside and outside) as necessary to its origination and this becomes the metaphor of its own concept. The very pathos of the negativity (regardless of whether it is valorized positively or negatively) indicates that the presence of desire has replaced the absence of determinacy? and that, the more the text desires the actual existence of any referent, real or ideal, and the more fantastically fictional it becomes, the more it becomes the representation of its own pathos. Pathos is hypostasized as a blind power, or mere “puissance de vouloir”, but it stabilizes the semantics of the figure by making the figure “mean”, without ambiguity, the pathos of its de-construction. The second Preface acts out this movement: by deconstructing the metaphor “man”, the speaker called shifts from anthropological generality to “love” as pure pathos, but the figurality of the language of love implies that pathos itself is no longer figure but substance. In the terminology of the text, the “tableau” has become a “portrait” after all, not the portrait of universal man, but of de-construction as passion. R’ sensible interlocutor understand this well enough and knows that, as soon as the return to (mimetic literal) representation is in fact granted, the impersonal desire is again susceptible of being represented by the metaphor of a subject. The “tableau” becomes in fact the “portrait” of the author’s desire in which he represents himself “comme il veut s’y monter”; R started out by deconstructing the referential system based on the metaphor “man”, but has reinvented for it a new referential system based on the pathos of a temporal predicament in which man’s self-definition is forever deferred. [The original polarity of portrait and tableau, mimesis and (with some terminological adjustment) diegesis does not engender a blank dialectic, since the “tableau” turns out to be the “portrait” of its own negation (as portrait), the blank of fiction as the refusal to
It seems to be impossible to conceive of a purely intra-textual (diegetic! no) model that does not engender referential statements. The “tableau” irrevocably transforms into a “portrait”.

In the process, however, the original system undergoes some transformations. At the beginning of the text tableau and portrait were associated with the author and editor respectively: if the work was imaginary, then Rousseau had to be the author; if it were an actual correspondence, then Rousseau was surely the editor (and we are concerned with the figural status of the latter, puzzling assertion). We have now moved on to a work that de-constructs its own referential status, but find that such a work can be read as the portrait of its own negative gesture. It follows that, if the work indeed represents “des objets qui ne sont point”, then Rousseau has to be the author, since Julie is the object, par excellence, that could not exist. A dialectical exchange leads to a new synthesis in which the “portrait” now has a specific author; instead of being paired with editor, portrait is now paired with author. As such, unlike the literal portrait of a real Julie, it becomes again “interesting” and comprehensible, as all pathos is bound to be. The original pairing (portrait/editor and tableau/author) was self-defeating: says R., “Si ces Lettres sont des Portraits, ils n’intéressent point: si ce sont des Tableaux, ils imitent mal.” (10) This original impasse is resolved in the de-constructive narratives of which the Second Discourse or the Essai are perfect examples: the invitation is “good” for it is free of any trace of distortion or wishful mystification; on the other hand, it is interesting since it portrays a pathos that all can understand and share. If read as a de-construction of
A reading of Julie as a de-construction of “love” is not only possible but necessary; any reading that remains short of this should not even be given consideration. Such a reading is entirely comprehensible, the figure of this comprehensibility would have to be represented, in the system of the text, by the fact that Rousseau can be identified as the author of the letters. Starting out from a polarity that opposes figural to referential language (and that assures the possibility of distinguishing between them), a dialectical progression allows for a consistent reading. This reading is not essentially different from the readings of the Second Discourse and of the Essai; both are de-constructive narratives aimed at metaphorical seductions and, from a rhetorical point of view, nothing would then distinguish the discursive language of the Discours from the language of the novel. This dialectic is a constitutive part of the text and a necessary moment in its interpretation. Any reading of La nouvelle Héloïse has to follow the limit given in the Preface and has to start out as a dialectic of referent and figure. This does not mean, however, that it can stop there.

Rousseau himself, at any rate, does not allow the synthesis to come to rest. Pressed by N to affirm or deny his authorship, he keeps refusing, not in the name of prudence, modesty, or shame, but for reasons of truth: “N. Quand je vous demande si vous êtes l’auteur de ces Lettres, pourquoi donc échappez-vous ma question? R. Pour cela même que je ne veux pas dire un mensonge. N. Mais vous refusez aussi de dire la vérité? R. C’est encore lui render honneur que de déclarer qu’on la veut taire . . .” (p. 28) “Taire la vérité” does not mean here to conceal something one knows, but not to proclaim as known something no one could ascertain: “Qui peut dire, si je ne suis point dans le même doute ou vous êtes? Si tout cet air de mystère n’est pas
peut-être une feinte pour vous cacher ma propre ignorance sur ce que vous voulez savoir? (namely, the authorship of the letters) (p. 29). The statement should be taken seriously; trying to blank it as deceitful would be the naive kind of suspicion that prevents the interest of a text from coming to the fore. What can it mean, in this context, for the author of a text to claim that he doesn’t know whether he is or is not its author? We speak perhaps all too easily, nowadays, of the impersonality of the act of writing (disparition élocutoire qui laisse l’initiative aux mots—quote? Mallarmé) and the thoughts of an author as “blank”, as being written by its text (blank, verbe intransitif) is no longer startling.\(^1\) Are we to understand Rousseau’s statement in these same terms?
Unlike the 2nd Discourse and the Essai which deal with the origination of language and consequently with “writing”, it is clear that the Second Preface to Julie deals with reading in its relationship to writing. If to read is to understand writing, then it presupposes a possible knowledge of the rhetorical and referential status of what has been written: we have to know, for example, whether the text is simply referential, or complicated by figural elements, whether the figural elements are in turn being put in question, etc. To understand primarily means to determine the referential mode of a text, and we tend to take for granted that this can be done. We assume that a simply referential discourse can be understood by whoever knows the lexicological and grammatical code of a language.\(^{(1)}\) Neither are we helpless when confronted by a figure of speech: as long as we can distinguish the figural from the literal meaning, we can translate the figure back to its proper referent. We don’t usually assume, for example, that someone suffers from hallucinations merely because he says that a table has four legs; the context itself separates the figural meaning of the catachresis from its literal statement.\(^{(2)}\) Even if, as is said to be the case for poetic language, the figure is polysemous and engenders various proper meanings, some of which may even contradict each other, the large subdivision, on the one hand, a literal meaning and, on the other hand, a set of figural meanings that may constitute semantic constellations of considerable complexity, still prevails. There can be no reading unless we postulate the possibility of distinguishing between literal and figural language, between signification and symbolization. Any reading always involves a decision about the literality and/or figularity of a certain segment of language. This decision is not arbitrary, since it is based on a variety of textual and contextual factors (gramma, lexicology, tradition, usage, tone, declarative statement, etc.). But the necessity of making such a decision cannot be avoided, or the
entire order of discourse would collapse. The situation implies that figural discourse is always understood in contradistinction to a form of discourse that would not be figural; it postulates, in other words, the possibility of reference as the telos of all language. It may be possible, in principle, to write without any referential control, selecting and lining up words at random, but it is not possible to read without postulating the possibility of reference, even as its negation.

The deconstructive critical thrust of Rousseau’s theory of language, in the Second Discourse and in the Essai, undermines this assumption of reference. In these texts, the deconstruction, of denomination as a primal linguistic act, in fact puts in question the existence of referential language, except as an aberrant metaphorical figure that conceals the radical figurality of language behind an illusive ability properly to refer or to mean. As a result, the assumption of readability, which is itself constitutive of language, not only can no longer be taken for granted but is found to be aberrant. //There can be no unreadable writing, but all readings are misreadings in that their assumed readability is unfounded. Everything written has to be read, and every reading is susceptible of logical verification, but the logic of verification is itself unverifiable and therefore unfounded in its truth-claims.\(^{(1)}\)

The Second Preface confirms and expands the conclusions of the earlier theory [the possibility of reference is considered from the point of view of the reader—correctly so, since it is linked to his activity rather than to the writer’s.] N is, as a reader, dependent on the possibility of reference and represents this need metaphorically by the assumption that the author holds the key to the referential status of his language. N, who proposes the original antithesis of portrait and tableau (referential and figural discourse) that will organize the dialogue, tirelessly questions the author. This “author” is not a subject, but
the metaphor for readability in general. But since the author intervenes only to the extent that he is supposed to *control* the rhetorical mode of his text, he becomes the metaphor of a controlled will or intent, of a subject. Unlike N, Rousseau is supposed to know whether the text of *Julie* was merely copied (or quoted) from a previous text or whether he invented it as his own creation. Although, at this moment in the dialogue, N expresses a preference for the first alternative (which would imply the actual existence of Julie), he could nevertheless accommodate himself to face both possibilities: asked if he responds to the pathos of the text, he replies that he doesn’t, but adds: “Je conçois pourtant cet effet par rapport a vous. Si vous êtes l’auteur, l’effet est tout simple. Si vous ne l’êtes pas, je le conçois encore . . .” (p. 18).

What he could however not tolerate is the impossibility to distinguish between the two alternatives. This would leave him dangling in an intolerable state of semantic irresolution. The mere confusion of fiction with reality, as in the case of Don Quijote, is mild and curable compared to this radical dislexia. R’s statement denying that he knows whether he is the author of his own text leaves N in a predicament that his imagination does not even begin to grasp. He much rather assumes that R. is mystifying him deliberately by withholding information which is obviously within his grasp. The relationship between author and reader is then seen as one of simple deceit. The author is a liar, an unreliable narrator open to moral censure or suspected, at best, of playing a frivolous game of hide-and-seek. The novel would be a riddle rather than an enigma, with a definite answer known from the beginning and artificially withheld. Like in a poor detective story, the text is generated by the mere deferement of a known secret. It is painfully clear to any reader of the Nouvelle Héloïse that this is not the structure of a novel not distinguished by dramatic suspense:
N. “Quant à l’intérêt, il est pour tout le monde, il est nul. Pas une mauvaise action; pas un méchant homme qui fasse craindre pour les bons. Des événements si naturels, si simples qu’ils le sont trop: rien d’inopiné; point de coup de Théâtre. Tout est prévu long-temps d’avance; tout arrive comme il prévu . . .” (33. p. 13) The only suspense would be introduced by Rousseau’s willful refusal to reveal the keys to his roman a clef.

The conclusion is absurd, but unavoidably linked to the initial assumption of the author’s authoritative access to the rhetorical status of his text. Taken literally, Rousseau’s assertion that he doesn’t know whether he or his characters wrote the letters that make up Julie, makes little sense. When we realize however that R here is merely the metaphor of a textual property (readability), a different inference becomes apparent. For example, if we choose to keep the metaphor—that R is just as unable as N to read Julie and that being an author in no way frees one from the predicament that threatens the reader. Or that we can reverse the priority which makes us think of reading as the natural consequence of writing. It now appears that writing can just as well be considered the linguistic correlative of the impossibility to read. We write in order to conceal our foreknowledge of the opacity of words and things.

In the Second Preface we come closest to being caught in the wake (sillage) of this inference in passing from the terminology of reference and figure (portrait et tableau) to that of textuality. N wants to find a statement within the text that establishes the borderline between text and external referent, thus clearly marking off an intra-textual from an extra-textual field.
He thinks to have found it in the epigraph on the title page, a passage from Petrarch which/that, in Rousseau’s own translation, reads as follows: “le monde la posséda sans la connaître, et moi je l’ai connue, je reste ici-bas à la pleurer.”

(1) “Ne voyez-vous pas que votre épigraphe seule dit tout?” says N., assuming that way the author thus admits to the existence of the live model. The authority of the quotation is, of course, anything but decisive: it is highly ambivalent in itself; it is not Rousseau’s own statement but is taken out of a complex context; it is not even Petrarch’s statement, since Petrarch borrows it freely from Saint John, where it refers to god as logos, etc. To all these possibilities of doubt, R. adds the one less likely to come to mind: “car qui peut savoir si j’ai trouvé cette épigraphe dans le manuscrit, ou si c’est moi qui l’y ai mise?”

(2) Even if Rousseau had merely copied the correspondence, this would in no way establish its referentiality, since it might have been written by someone who, as his use of epigraphs shows, was just as much in need of referential reassurance as R and N admit to being. The author of the letters may not have acted, copied or portrayed, but merely quoted. And it is impossible to determine where quotation ends and “truth” begins, if by truth we understand the possibility of referential verification. The very statement by which we assert that the narrative is rooted in reference can be an unreliable quotation / the quotation of a quotation; the very document, the manuscript, produced in evidence may point back, not to an actual event, but to an endlessly regressive list of quotations reaching as far back as the supreme transcendental signified god (mise en abyme), none of which can lay claim [to] referential authority.
The Second Preface thus links a de-constructive theory of reading with a new sense of textuality. The innumerable writings that organize our lives are made intelligible by a pre-ordained agreement on their referential authority; this argument, however, is merely contractual, never constitutive. It can be broken at all and every piece of writing can be questioned with regards to its rhetorical mode, as *Julie* is being questioned in the *Preface*. Whenever this happens, what originally appeared to be a document or an instrument, becomes a text and, as a consequence, its readability is put in question. This questioning points back to former texts and engenders, in its turn, other texts by means of which the closure of the textual field is attempted [in formalized literary texts, this happens by means of title pages, epigraphs, beginnings and endings, any referential borderlines in general]. But each of these statements can in its turn become a text, just as the statement from Petrarch or Rousseau’s assertion that the letters were “recueillies et publiées” by him can be made into texts—not by simply claiming that they are lies, whose opposites are true, but by exposing (the arbitrariness of) their dependence on a referential agreement that took their truth or falsehood for granted. The Saussurian semiological arbitrariness of the sign is confined to the linguistic field, but the arbitrariness of figure (and of reference) extends beyond it. The same applies, of course, to the text of the *Preface* with regard to the main text of *Julie*; rarely has a preface been less able to shed light on the meaning of the text it introduces, to the point of thematizing this very inability into the knowledge of an ignorance which the main text, in its turn, will have to put in question. We can no longer be certain, at this point, whether the preface was written for the [the] main text or the main text for the preface.⁽¹⁾

The rhetorical mode of such structures can no longer be summarized by the simple term of metaphor, although the de-construction of metaphorical figures remains constitutive for their production. They take into account the fact that the de-constructive narrative
can be folded back upon itself and become self-referential (to blank its own pathos). By *refusing*, for reasons of truth and falsehood, to confirm the referential authority of this “repli”, Rousseau unsettles the metaphor of reading as deconstructive narrative and substitutes for it a more complex structure. The paradigmatic unit that makes up all texts consists of a simple figure (f. ex metaphor) and its deconstruction, a (triadic) narrative pattern described earlier. But since, it turns out, this model cannot necessarily be closed off by a final reading, it engenders, in its turn, a supplementary figural superposition, which tells of the unreadability of the prior narrative. As distinguished from the primary deconstructive narratives centered on metaphor, *we can call, with* there is some historical precedent in favor of calling such narratives to the second degree “allegories”.(1) Allegorical narratives narrate the story of their unreadability, as distinguished from metaphorical narratives that tell the story of their inability to name. The difference is a difference of degree, not of kind; one could say, naively, that allegories like *Julie* know more about figural language than anthropological discourses like the *Essai*, but its additional knowledge does not erase the previous one. Allegories are always allegories *of* metaphor and, as such, they are always allegories of the impossibility of reading—sentences in which the referential “of” has itself to be “read” as a metaphor.
In the text of the *Second Preface*, the point at which the allegorical mode asserts itself coincides with the moment at which R. admits his inability to read his own text and thus relinquishes his sovereign position with regard to it. The statement undoes both the intelligibility and the seductiveness that the narrative owed to its deconstructive rigor. The admission therefore occurs against the inherent logic by means of which the text came into being. It disrupts and confuses the grammar of the narrative and disarticulates it in a way that appears perverse. [The traditional interpretation of the *Nouvelle Heloïse*, in the critics’ feeling of regret about the way the novel develops, a reaction anticipated in the *Preface* in R’s insistence, against the readers’ inclination, on the importance of the Second half.] To the metaphorical figure of the author, the moment of reversal appears opposed to his natural interests. It is a renunciation, the sacrifice of one kind of will to another, and it implies therefore a shift in valorization. Before the reversal, the deconstructive process functioned within an epistemological system governed by polarities of truth and falsehood that moved parallel with the text itself. Far from interfering with each other, the value system and the text promote each other’s elaboration; hence the relative ease of the deconstructive language of the *Second Discourse* despite its figural complications, or of the (deconstructive) language of passion in the
first part of *Julie*, which is said to be “comme une source vive qui coule sans cesse et ne s’épuise jamais” (p. 15). But within the allegory of misreading, the imperatives of truth and falsehood oppose the narrative syntax and manifest themselves at its expense. We can choose to call them ethical, in which the term “ethical” denotes the existence of two differential value systems. The allegory moves from a deconstructive to an ethical discourse, for reasons that have nothing to do with a subject (nor, *a fortiori*, with intersubjective relationships) but that are co-extensive with the recognition of the rhetoricity of language. Morality is a version of the same linguistic aporia that gave rise to such concepts as “man” or “self” and neither the cause nor a consequence of such concepts. In Rousseau, ideas of good and evil are primarily associated with truth and falsehood and not with the concerns of the subject for itself or for others. The predominantly “moral” tone of the decisive moment of referential abdication, in the *Second Preface*, makes this clear.

But the Preface, as well as the main text, are ethical not only in this fundamental sense. They are also moralistic in a very practical way that is steadily bordering on the commonplace. In the Preface, for example, this tone, all too familiar to readers of *Julie* and of *Emile*, is apparent in R.’s lengthy considerations about all the good that his book will be able to do for its readers.\(^1\) The discrepancy between the *persona* of R as the moralist of deconstruction and that of the man of practical wisdom is puzzling.\(^2\) From the first, one has to expect a mental attitude that is highly reflective, persistently aware of the discrepancies between the formal and the semantic properties of language, fully responsive to the seductive plays of the signifier yet, at the same time, suspicious of their powers of semantic
mystification. It supposes an austere epistemological rigor in the pursuit of deconstructive critiques, regardless of consequences, the most rigorous gesture of all being that by which the writer severs himself from the intelligibility of his own text. Yet, while holding up this attitude as morally exemplary, Rousseau nevertheless, in the same breath, discusses its consequences in very practical, utilitarian terms. The same man who seems open to reproaches of sophistry and over-subtlety when he dodges signification with phrases such as “si elles furent, elles ne sont plus,” or with hard-to-follow evasions on the status of epigraphs, also speaks naively about his desire to be useful: “pour rendre utile ce qu’on veut dire, il faut d’abord se faire écouter de ceux qui doivent en faire usage”, “quand on veut être utile, il faut se faire lire en Province”, “peut-être deux époux trouveront dans ce recueil de nouvelles vues pour rendre leurs travaux utiles, etc.”. We find back the same mixture of epistemological refinement and pragmatic naïveté <naïve utilitarianism> that is characteristic of much or Rousseau’s writing and, that is of course, much in evidence in Julie and whenever the “poetic” aspects of Rousseau have to be reconciled with his political and social concerns.

The mixed aspect of Rousseau’s allegorical diction is less surprising if one keeps in mind that his radical critique of referential meaning never implied that the referential function of language could in any way be avoided, bracketed or reduced to being one linguistic property among others—as is postulated, for example, in contemporary semiology which, like all formalisms, could not exist without this postulate. Rousseau never allows for an aesthetic reading in the Kantian sense, in which the referential determination would remain suspended or be non-existant. Such a reading does not exist on the purely epistemological, pre-moral level, where it would be the mere play of the signifier (“la liberation du sigifiant” (Barthes)), nor does it exist in the allegory, when the deconstruction of signification has
taken on ethical dimensions (and when the aesthetic contemplation would be more like that of the beautiful soul). The impossibility of a purely aesthetic judgment is built within Rousseau’s linguistic model as aberrant figure. Suspended meaning is not, for him, disinterested play, but always a threat or a challenge. There is room, within his thought, for “aesthetic” moments of tranquility—one thinks of Julie’s garden, for example or of [ ]^{(1)}—but such moments have a pragmatic rather than a theoretical interest; in Kant’s terms, they could never be “pure” (rein). The loss of faith in the reliability of referential meaning does not free the language from referential coercions, since the assertion of the loss is itself governed by considerations that are referential with regard to truth and falsehood. Kant’s concept of aesthetic freedom is, in Rousseau, a metaphor for the indeterminacy of signification and can thus never be the source of any judgment, nor a license to elaborate modes of judgment that would no longer be dependent on concepts. (Kant)

The concept, in Rousseau, always retains a referential moment, the supply (réserve) of difference that the concept acknowledges by concealing it. But since the convergence of the referential and the symbolic <figural> signification can never be established, the reference can never become a meaning. In Rousseau’s linguistics, there is in fact no denomination but only connotation and “wild” connotation at that; the loss of denominational control means that every connotation has equal claim to referential authority but no statute in which to ground this claim. When Kant, using music as his main example, was in fact to base aesthetic judgment on non-signification, his semiological insight was gained at the cost of a repression which made theoretical poetics, a branch of applied linguistics, into aesthetics, a branch of applied psychology.
The persistence of the referential moment prevents the confinement of the allegorical narrative to a merely epistemological and ethical system of valorization. Since the epistemological mediation is now known to be unreliable, and since it is impossible to leave the narrative suspended in its own aesthetic gratification, the allegory speaks out with the referential directness of a *praxis*. The ethical language of persuasion and exhortation (the illocutionary speech-acts that predominate in Julie’s preaching tone that contemporary readers find so hard to take) becomes inevitably perlocutionary and acts upon a practical world of needs no longer necessarily structured along linguistic lines. This passage from “pure” epistemological to practical morality (Rousseau speaks elsewhere of “morale de pratique”[1]) not only lends itself very well to thematization that proceeds beyond the mere enunciation and development of themes to their pragmatic manifestations as well. The *Nouvelle Héloïse*, for instance, can be read as a thematization of the movement from metaphorical meaning (in the first part) to a more contractual type of meaning (in the second section on Claresns). At the same time however, Rousseau is concerned, more explicitly in the *Second Preface* but in fact throughout the text, with the practical impact of this thematization upon the reader. And although what he actually says about this may be quite silly (silliness being deeply associated with referentiality) the co-presence of thematic illo-cutionary discourse with its practical correlates points to an inherent property of all allegorical modes. The resulting *praxis* is, however, not only devoid of authority (since it is itself the consequence of epistemological abdication) but it occurs again in the form of a text. The *Second Preface*, however practical it may sound, is not more of an act than the rest of the novel; this ambivalence is inherent within a mode which is, per definition, unable to escape from
into a realm that would no longer be reminiscent or generative of texts. The term “speech-act” is itself an aporia that unfolds its circumvoluted complications in allegorical narratives such as Julie.\(^{(3)}\) Reading is a praxis that thematizes its own thesis about the impossibility of thematization, and this makes it inevitable <unavoidable> (though hardly legitimate) for allegories to be interpreted in thematic terms.

By moving, under the guidance of the *Second Preface*, from metaphorical de-construction, first, to the theoretical and then to the practical ethical dimension of allegory, we have had to reintroduce the concept of need (*besoin*) which, as distinct from passion, originally served Rousseau to distinguish language-structured from non-verbal entities. Just as it is impossible to understand the historical condition of man without inventing a fictional state of nature, and just as it is impossible for a linguistic statement not to connote a referential meaning, it is impossible for a passion not to hypostasize a need from which it would be the supplementary displacement. Passions are then conceived as displaced, pathological needs,\(^{(1)}\) which is also why they are affectively valorized in terms of pleasure and pain. The allegory inevitably shifts from an epistemological and ethical to a eudaemonic vocabulary. In its more homely and domestic forms, this vocabulary generates the mixture of erotic sweetness and deceit, of doux modèle” (p. 13) with “âgres baisers” ( ) that hangs over much of Rousseau’s fictional writing.\(^{(2)}\) He himself compares *Julie* to the “soave licor” (Tasso) that hides the bitterness of the actual statement, and this slightly nauseating flavor is familiar to all readers of *Emile* and *Julie*. A reader in need of a change in taste can console himself with the *Social Contract*.

As soon as the eudaemonic valorization reaffirms itself, as mere sensation or erotic desires
the relapse into the seductions of resemblance and metaphor is equally unavoidable. For the structure of needs, unlike those of passions, is unproblematically based on a constitutive affinity between intent and object; the link between blank and blank, for example, is truly necessary, as is the link between eros and blank. It takes us back to a world of analogical and metaphorical models. In allegorical language however, needs as such play no part, since this language (literary language conceived as allegory) has to do with (concepts) and not with sensation or imagination. Needs enter literary discourse only as the aberrant proper meaning of metaphors against which the allegory constitutes itself. Their reappearance, at the end of the deconstructive process, is due to epistemological constraints inherent in language and not to the need’s own, actual strength: [if this were what is at stake, the need would have needed to involve itself with language in the first place]. The reintroduction of intentional, ethical, or eudaemonic values into the allegory is not itself intentional: it is a structural necessity of the deconstructive discourse without which it would cease to function. The entire notion of a non-verbal realm governed by needs may well be a speculative hypothesis that exists only, to put it all too intentionally, “for the sake of” language: (quote from Geburt d. Trag Nur als Kunst blank.)

The relapse of allegory into a pattern of metaphorical signification may well be the moment at which the seductive power of metaphor to connote proper meaning comes closest to being truly overcome. Be this as it may, the existence of this moment in Rousseau’s allegories first has to be documented. And, by alluding to its existence, we have in fact moved away from the Preface into the main text of Julie.

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The long recapitulative letter by means of which Julie explains to Saint Preux the reasons for her marriage begins with a clever example of metaphorical de-
construction. In the parable from the Essai, the reading had to infer perhaps more than present interpreters might be willing to tolerate. Much less exegetic leeway is left one in the case of this text, so explicit that little remains to be done except to point out what is being stated. [One of the reasons that warrants the necessity of going through the motions of an exercise unlikely, for the reason just mentioned, to open up new questions is that it may strengthen, by repetition, what had been established before.] Nevertheless, the few existing interpretations of this key-passage, informative as they are on details, are all marred by such overriding concern with psychological verisimilitude as to be practically useless. If one feels troubled by “realistic” questions such as motivation, affective consistency, or religious controversy, it may help to think of St. Preux and Wolmar as two aspects of the same entity, two stages of a single principle, only distinguished by the metaphor of their different age—just as St. Preux and Wolmar are to be distinguished from Julie and Claire by the metaphor of the sexes or St. Preux and Julie distinguished from Wolmar and Claire by that of light and reason.

That the passions are to be understood in structural rather than in simply referential terms had clearly been stated in an
earlier recapitulation in which the deconstructive insight had also [ ].\(^{(1)}\) Passion—in this case the happiness associated with love—is not something that, like the senses, belongs in proper to an entity (or to a subject) but, like music, it is a system of relationships that exists only in terms of this system: “C’est que la source du bonheur n’est toute entière ni dans l’objet désiré ni dans le coeur qui le possede, mais dans le rapport de l’un et de l’autre . . .” (p. 225)\(^{(2)}\). As we know from the texts centered on selfhood, this “rapport” can be stated in terms of a dichotomy of self and other that engenders a chain of contrasting polarities. Having gone through this process of metaphorical substitutions, Julie describes it as based on the presumption of an analogical resemblance between body (outside) and soul (inside) [in which the outside <visible> [is] drawn inside and then (by way of the interiorized figure linking body to soul) transferred from the other to the self by ways of a blank system of excess and lack.] We move from “sens” (outside) to sentiment (inside), from visage <traits> (outside) to âme (inside) <from voir (o) to sentir (i)> and then shifting the model from the other to the self on the basis of a need, a shortcoming in the self] “Je crus voir sur votre visage les traits de l’ame qu’il faloit à la mienne. Il me sembla que mes sens ne servoient que d’organe à des sentimens plus nobles; et j’aimai dans vous, moins ce que j’y voyois que ce que je croyois sentir en moi-même.” (p. 340). The chain of substitutions shifts from “visage” (outside) to “âme” (inside) by
ways of “traits” which are said to be both in - and outside (traits de l’âme) / ; at the same time, we pass from “sens” and “yeux” (o) to “sentiment” (i) by ways of the synecdoche “organe” (mes sens ne servaient que d’organe à des sentiments . . .).

“Voir” and “sentir” make the transference to the categories of self and other, since now to “see” the other is to “feel” the self (“j’aimai dans vous, moins ce que j’y voyais que ce que je croyais sentir en moi-même”); this latter transfer occurs because the self is said to be in need of the other, to be lacking in something that only the other can provide: les traits de l’âme qu’il fallait à la mienne. The shortcoming is filled, as it were, by the soul of the other, which is of course also his body. The dynamic structure requires a valorization achieved by calling the desired feelings “noble”; the continuity from eudaemonic <sensory> to ethical valorization is part of the same metaphorical and analogical system. But the system described in detail is no longer considered to be authoritative: there is constant emphasis on possible delusion: “je crus voir . . .” “il me sembla que . . .” “je croyais sentir . . .”, modalities that throw their shadow on the parallel verbal construction extending from “je crus voir . . .” to “il me sembla que . . .” to “je croyais sentir . . . “ and finally to “j’aimai dans vous . . .”. Under the impact of so many mental reservations, the verb “aimer” has indeed become an <aimer almost acquires an> optative mode [for the blank are not just there] to spare the reader’s feelings.] And it is blank bluntly stated that all these exchanges were indeed based on an aberration which now belongs to the past “ Il n’y a pas deux mois que je pensois encore ne m’être pas trompée . . .”. Love must now be called blind in a way that differs considerably from the commonplace usually associated with the blindfolded Cupid, all the
more since blindness is stated within a (negative) context of truth and falsehood:
“l’aveugle amour, me disois-je, avoit raison” (340). The self-destructive power of
passion is not due to any outside cause but is based on an unwarranted assumption
about the coherence of a world in which the resemblance of appearances would
warrant the affinity of essences. The passage explicitly rejects the notion that the evil
consequences of passion might stem from any social or atavistic parental pressure: “je
pensois encore ne m’ètre pas trompée; l’aveugle amour, me disois-je, avoit raison; . . .
je serois à lui si l’ordre humain n’eut troublé les rapports de la nature . . .” (340).
From a narrative point of view, the statement shifts the pattern of referential authority
from a representational (diegetic) to a mimetic, deconstructive <critical> narrative, for
up till then, the interest of the action had been primarily based on the elements now
found to be fallacious: Julie and St. Preus have been presented as stock-characters in a
situation of bourgeois tragedy, persecuted by the social prejudices of class and wealth
and by the prejudices of a tyrannical father. The reader’s responses are solicited
according to the rules of this plot, thus maintaining the homology between
enunciation and understanding that characterizes diegetic narratives. To the
homology in the narrative, between represented actions or situations and the blank
emotions or reflections, corresponds a symmetrical homology between narration and
reading. With the discovery, in retrospect, that this symmetry is an illusion, the entire
narrative has to be restructured along different lines. The reading has to check itself
at all points, in quest of clues that puncture the surface and reveal the holes and the
traps hidden inside. Reading now requires the vigilance of a mind no longer allowed
to trust what it hears. Areas of the text that were

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obscured by the succession of predictable events and feelings become again apparent as a new network of narrative articulations replaces the first. What appeared at first as a series of lyrical moments, separated from each other by the well-rounded completeness of each particular letter, becomes, in the recapitulation, a narrative chain of successive errors, as misleading for the reader as they were for the characters—not unlike the sequence of historical catastrophies by which, in the Second Discourse and in the Essai, mankind has been brought down to its present sorry state.

Like all metaphorical structures, the first part of the Nouvelle Héloïse consists of a chain of substitutions and, like all deconstructive narratives, the second reading called forth by the summarizing letter, reveals the weakness of the links by means of which the concatenation of polarities had been achieved. The relationship between Julie and St. Preux is told as a substitutive movement in which self and other constantly exchange their identity, as if they were a single androgynous being whose unity could not be disturbed by internal exchanges: “Viens te réunir à toi-même” (p. 146) Julie tells St. Preux, and she is for him like the omnipresence (parousia) of the aether: “Je te vois, je te sens par tout, je te respire avec l’air que tu as respiré; tu penetres toute ma substance.” (p. 147) or, in another “Platonic” passage (Symposium, 189/190.-716): “je t’imaginerois d’une espece plus pure, si ce feu devorant qui pénètre ma substance ne m’unissoit à la tienne et ne me faisoit sentir qu’elle sont la même” (116)1/ It is not surprising that their sexual union is linked from the start with an imagery of incest:
not very long before their first embrace, St. Preux will say: “Je frémirais de blank la main sur
tes chastes attriats, plus que du plus vil inceste, et tu n’es pas dans une sureté plus inviolable
avec ton père qu’avec ton amant”—a sentence which, in retrospect, adds still another
dimension to the already embarrassing scenes between Julie and her father.\(^{(1)}\) / “Je ne suis
plus à moi, St. Preux had said somewhat earlier, mon âme aliénée est toute en toi” (p. 101)
and, in response, Julie can see herself as totally immolated before and replaced by the other:
“Sois tout mon être, à présent que je ne suis plus rien . . .” (p. 103). We are familiar with the
self/other substitutions from Narcisse and Pygmalion and know how they are transferred from
the relationship between the lovers to the relationship between the author and his text (or
vice-versa: the following sentence could have come directly out of Pygmalion (and out of all
the tradition that stands behind it): “Tu m’as laissé quelque chose de ce charme inconcevable
qui est en toi, et je crois qu’avec ta douce haleine tu m’inspirois une ame nouvelle. Hâte toi,
je t’en conjure, d’achever ton ouvrage. Prend de la mienne tout ce qui m’en reste et mets tout
à fait la tienne à la place.” (p. 150)

If the substitutions could indeed occur within the totality of a single androgynous
being, they would still engender other metaphors by which this same unity would be
expressed, be it in the form of myths or of images such as the “yolk and white of the one
shell” [blank Yeats also claims blank inspiration of Plato]. A full cosmos is an inexhaustible
reservoir of non-conflicting images. But the polarities that stem from an illusory plenitude
will lead to ever-widening conflicts and dissonances and generate a very different type of
story. It would be too lengthy a task to trace in detail the strategies that structure the first
three parts of La Nouvelle Héloïse. They include all conceivable categories, intertwined in
configurations that never stabilize, for whenever a substitution has taken place, a new
unbalance, by excess or by default, is revealed and
requires new displacements. To consider briefly only the most obvious among these categories, on level of spatial, topographical organization, the first half of La Novelle Héloïse is a series of uncoordinated, erratic movements, a succession of flights and returns put in motion by the very first sentence of the book: “Il faut vous fuir, Mademoiselle, je le sens bien . . .” St. Preux’s incessant comings and goings, from the Valais, to la Meillerie, to Paris, finally literally to the end of the world (Patagonia!) are reminiscent of the restless pacing up and down of Pygmalion in his atelier. Nor are these movements comparable to the same dance of a swarm of insects around a single light, which, in this case, would be Julie. This would invest all attributes of being into one of the two poles and thus create a very different, monocentric and circular system. It is clear, even from the few examples quoted above, that the substitutions cannot occur in one single direction and that they have to travel from St. Preux to Julie as well as in the opposite direction. St. Preux’s geographical agitation has its counterpart in the vacillations and “langueurs” of Julie’s state of mind; between his “outside” and her “inside,” develops an interplay of complicated and by no means balanced exchanges.

The temporal pattern is equally unstable. Separated from Julie by the breath of the lake, St. Preux writes to her the type of ode to the glories of the moment of which numberless examples exist in the petrarchan tradition. A recurrent theme exalting or denouncing the seduction of the moment runs through the book, it is counterbalanced by the contrasting valorization of duration for its own sake: “le sentiment s’éteint à la fin; mais l’âme sensible demeure toujours” (Prèf. p. ). Duration is indeed the privileged mode of the system in quest of its own authority, and striving for a state in which events are not changes but the confirmation of a sameness no longer threatened by anything outside
itself. It is the proper temporal mode for a lengthy, monodic and monotonic narrative practically devoid of events, towards which the Nouvelle Héloïse seems, at times, to be tending, a narrative in which the voiding of signification would no longer be experienced as a loss or a tension.\(^{(1)}\) In an allegorical narrative of this type, duration has to be valorized positively as the attraction of what is known to be least attainable. The text does however not describe this dialectic of instant and duration <of sameness and change>, in which the seductions of the moment must acquire also those of stability, as leading to a stable synthesis. Duration, the coincidence of an entity with its own present, requires the vocabulary of an inwardness detached from anything that is other or elsewhere, containing nothing desirable that is not already possessed. It evokes a fulfillment no longer associated with desire, since desire is precisely a structure oriented towards the other and organized around the moment that separates non-possesion from possession. St. Preux describes “l’heure de la jouissance; c’est pour l’heure qui la suit” (149, note), this transfer of attributes derived from desire into a new, tranquil state that denies desire: “. . . je t’adorois et ne desirous rien. Je n’imaginois pas même une autre félicité . . . Quel calme dans tous mes sens! Quelle volupté pure, continüe, universelle! Le charme de la jouissance étoit dans l’ame; il n’en sortoit plus; il duroit toujours. Quelle différence des fureurs de l’amour à une situation si paisible!” Duration appears as a totality which constitutes a autonomous inwardness, yet it borrows “jouissance” and “volupté” from a restless outside world governed by “fureurs de l’amour”, which are anything but continuous and transparent. It remains linked to this world by sensations and memories (“Il est un âge pour l’expérience; un autre pour le souvenir” (16), and it is by ways of this metonymic link that the metaphorical illusion of duration is achieved. The ambiguity fully appears when the
consciousness, as duration, has to realize that it can only come into being at the expense of the passion which produced the inwardness in the first place. At the end of the paragraph from which the previous quotation is taken, St. Preux asks the by no means only rhetorical question: “Julie, di-moi donc si je ne t’aimois point auparavant, ou si maintenant je ne t’aime plus?” The substitutive exchange between properties of instantaneity and duration engenders an unhappy consciousness: it occurs in a state of “abatement” (149), “dans la honte et l’humiliation de moi-même” (149) and leads to St Preux’s later statement that “. . . nous recommençons de vivre pour recommencer de souffrir, et le sentiment de notre existence n’est pour nous qu’un sentiment de douleur.” (336). This mood is obviously not compatible with a substitution striving for repose. Neither can it compromise by substituting memories for presence, or by the aesthetic contemplation of its own soul made “beautiful” by the painful sacrifice of the passion that created it

(1)

The Nouvelle Héloïse would be a very different (and a much shorter) text, more like Werther or the Mignon chapter in W. Meister or Sylvie, if the sense suggested to St Preux by Claire had been allowed to stabilize the narrative: (après avoir fait le sacrifice de votre amour) “Vous vous direz, je sais aimer, avec un plaisir plus durable et plus délicat que vous n’en goûteriez à dire: je possède ce que j’aime. Car celui-ci s’use à force d’en jouïr; mais l’autre demeure toujours, et vous en jouïriez encore, quand même vous n’aimez plus.” (320)

(1)

As long as we remain within a model based on blank and substitutions (as when Claire calculates in the same passage that “le véritable amour a cet avantage . . . qu’il dédommage de tout ce qu’on lui sacrifice, et qu’on jouït en quelque sorte des privations qu’on s’impose par le sentiment même de ce qu’il en coûte et du motif qui nous y
porte.” (320)
The peripeteia (reversal) of the allegory occurs, then, as the deliberate rejection of the pattern of analogical exchanges that has structured the narrative up to this point. The reversal is no longer, as was the case in the *Discours* and the *Essai*, left implicit in the declining movement, the “pente inévitable” (353), of the narrative of error. It asserts itself as an outspoken decision that sharply divides the novel a before and an after, entirely modifies the circumstances and the setting, and allows for the retrospective vision that wraps <envelops> the entire succession of blank events into a single narrative unit. There are few clearer literary examples than this letter of the power of narrative organization engendered by deconstructions of metaphor, especially if one includes its effect on the reading of the
part of the novel that precedes it. The allegory of unreadability begins by making its pre-text
highly readable: there is not a single episode, practically not a single word, in the more than
hundred letters that come before the turning point that it not clarified, situated and accounted
for by the second reading that it forces us to undertake. Nor does it hesitate to draw the right
conclusions from the discovery of its earlier aberrations, all the “erreurs” “illusions” and
“égarements” which Julie now sees for what they are. In the place of “love,” based on the
resemblances and the substitutions of body and soul or self and other, appears the contractual
agreement of marriage set up as a defense against the passions and as the basis of social and
political order which has to be respected “parce que c’est le premier devoir qui lie la famille
et toute la société” (357). The shift to ethical valorization is clear enough; more important is
the fact that Julie’s decision does not occur under the pressure of circumstance or of moral
imperatives but as the result of an epistemological insight into the unreliability of a rhetorical
figure: erotic love is not censored and rejected for ethical reasons but shown to be based on
the same assumption that makes metaphor epistemologically unreliable. This rejection is
neither a moral nor a psychological statement about the nature of love; it has ethical and
psychological consequences (as when Rousseau states, in passing, “Quand (les rapports qui
l’ont fait naître) sont chimeriques, il dure autant que l’illusion qui nous les fait imaginer”) (note, p. 341) but, in its inception, it stems from the critique [of the referential signification]
(blank) of a figural structure. The emotional tonality of Rousseau’s discursive prose tends to
make one overlook the structural rigor of its framework. Julie’s decision is therefore not, in
itself, a moral but an epistemological one. It acquires its moral dimension from the fact that
it moves against the “natural” logic of the narrative and of its understanding.
This, too, is not self-evident. For it appears, as was just pointed out, that the first effect of the decision is one of clarification that permits a convincing and coherent interpretation of the first half of the novel. The complexity of the passage, which also marks the transition to the allegorical mode (and roughly corresponds, to R’s actual statements in the Preface), stems from the fact that, at the moment when Julie acquires a maximum of insight in the epistemology of figural diction, the control over the rhetoric of her own discourse is lost, for her as well as for us. The retrospective clarity gained at midpoint with regard to the first half of the narrative does not extend to the second part; no equivalent recapitulation is possible at the end of the novel for (as we shall try to show later) the religious avowals (VI, 8 and ?) of the last book are nowhere held up as being true insights. The readability of the first part is obscured by a more radical incomprehensibility that projects its darkness backward and forward over the entire text. Deconstructions of figural models engender texts of remarkable lucidity (as the beginning of letter XVIII is remarkably lucid with regard to the past events it interprets) but they engender, in their turn and, as it were, within their own texture, a darkness more redoubtable than the error they dispelled.

In this text (III, 18) darkness falls when it becomes we notice that Julie’s language at once repeats the patterns that she had just denounced as errors. Not only does she continue to use a metaphorical diction (which would be, by itself, of little consequence, as long as the figures would be ornamental or expressive) but she construe the new world into which she is moving as an exact repetition of the world she claims to have left behind. If this is so, then it can be said that Julie is unable to “read” her own text, unable to recognize how its rhetorical mode controls its referential meanings. She loses
control, not only over the inferences that her statements may acquire for others, but also over her own understanding of her discourse.  [in note By the play of notes by means of  he claims to acquire a distancing perspective upon Julie, Rousseau may seem to escape from this obfuscation at the expense of his character.  But this is not the case, for this pattern is anticipated in Julie herself, whose lucidity with regard to the deconstruction of her past experience is never in question and who is perfectly capable of the same distance with regard to her former aberrations as Rousseau allows himself with regard to her, yet remains entirely unable to avoid their repetition.  R’s statement, in the Preface, of helplessness before the opacity of his own text is similar to Julie’s relapse into metaphorical models of interpretation at her moment of insight.

The repetition differs however from its earlier, passionate version, not in structure, but in terms of the referential mediation within which it takes place. We move from an erotic and passionate into an ethical and religious mode, into the odd stratification of pragmatic, practical reason with a language of high morality and desire that we also found in the Preface. Adultery, for example, is denounced, [blank in the same letter, as contrary to the interests of a society “fondé sur la foi des conventions”(2) for the most practical of reasons: fathers should not be forced to support children they have not procreated, families are disrupted by the constant necessity to lie and to cheat, it threatens continuity of the succession, or even more frivolously, one should not break the existing rules too lightly since it is so hard to lose the habit once one has done it. On the other hand, virtue is spoken of in a language of religious awe that has hardly been heard, up to this point, in the novel and that has led critics to literal-minded speculation as to whether or not Julie underwent a religious conversion.(1) Actually, there is nothing in the structure of Julie’s relationship to virtue or to what she calls God that does not find its equivalent in the structure of her previous and now so rigorously demystified relationship towards St. Preux.

This relationship was based, it will be remembered, on the metaphor of a
subject that differed from another as plenitude differs from lack, and that was able to exchange the default of the one for the excess of the other because a basic affinity compelled them to enter into a relationship of reciprocity. Julie insists at length on the need for this reciprocity:\(^1\): “L’amour que j’ai connu ne peut naitre que d’une convenance réciproque et d’un accord des ames. On n’aime point si l’on n’est aimé; du moins on n’aime pas longtemps.” (341). A plenitude that remains entirely distinct and self-sufficient would be of little use, since it could have no need or will to change anything: from the moment one imagines that it gives out of its own excess, as an overflowing, one assumes in fact a need on both sides of the polarity; the sign may vary from plus to minus but the need itself remains. This necessary condition of reciprocity or resemblance is introduced by means of the analogy between outside and inside that allows Julie to recognize the affinity between herself and St. Preux by merely looking at his face. Such an exchange is not a “conversion” but based on an identity, that may turn out to be illusory but has to assumed for the structure to come into being.

Having replaced this metaphorical by an ethical model, Julie at once has to invent an entity called God in order to duplicate the structure <model> she has presumably discarded. God has to be entirely unlike herself in his self-sufficiency and omnipresence: “Rien n’existe que par celui qui est ” (358) and, as such, “(il) n’a point parmi les êtres sensibles de model auquel on puisse (le) comparer.” (358). Yet he is at once anthropomorphized, precisely by being given the very attribute by means of which the substitutive exchange with St. Preux could start: he is given a face and a voice or language. He exists, like St. Preux, as a combination of “traits” which make it possible to “read” his substance: “tous ses traits liés à l’essence infinie se représentent toujours à la raison et lui servent à rétablir ce que l’imposture et l’erreur en ont altéré” (358) and these
the configuration of these “traits” (cf. with regard to St. Preux: je crus voir sur votre visage les traits de l’âme qu’il falloit à la mienne) (340) make up a face, l’“effigie intérieure” (358) This face and voice (“la voix secrète qui ne cessant de murmurer au fond de mon cœur”) can have no greater authority than St. Preux, since their comprehension depends on the same rhetorical code that proved fallacious in the first instance. Consequently, it will be difficult to tell apart the discourses addressed to St. Preux from those addressed to God or to virtue; [To St Preux, admonishing him not to forswear his love: “Laisse, mon ami, ces vains moralistes, et rentre au fond de ton âme; c’est là que tu retrouveras toujours la source de ce feu sacré qui nous embrasa tant de fois de l’amour des sublimes vertus; c’est là que tu verras ce simulacre éternel du vrai beau dont la contemplation nous anime d’un saint enthousiasme . . .” (223); “Ce divin modèle que chacun de nous porte avec lui nous enchante malgré que nous en ayons; si tôt que la passion nous permet de le voir, nous lui voulons ressembler . . .” (224)] both are based on the same “simulacra éternel”, (p. 223), “modèle divin” (224 and 358), “image (que) nous portons en nous-mêmes” (358) which we are able to perceive and to emulate: “; si tôt que la passion nous permet de le voir, nous lui voulons ressembler . . .” (224). Both become the two-sided exchange of a dialogue in which the words carry shared substances that can be given and received: Julie’s prayer, for example, far from being a radical loss of selfhood before an unintelligible otherness, addresses a kind of over-self that does not differ from her in kind. Attributes circulate freely between her and god, just as the words circulate freely within the transparency of a representational model of expressive voices and faces:
“Je le vois, je le sens; la main secourable . . . me rend à moi, malgré moi-même”; “Je veux, lui dis-je, le bien que tu veux, et dont toi seul es la source”; “Rends toutes mes actions conformes à ma volonté constante qui est la tienne . . . “. What Julie wishes to receive from God are precisely the same attributes of selfhood and will (the prayer repeats “je veux” 6 times, like an incantation) that she requested from St. Preux: “l’âme qu’il fallait à la mienne” to constitute a complete self, to achieve individuation. And she identifies this received selfhood, as with St. Preux, by the interpretation of certain signs through which the divinity manifests itself: a face, a voice, or most of all, emotions (“torrent de pure joie” “sentiment de paix”, “la charme de la méditation”, the satisfaction of being “plus fort, plus heureux et plus sage” (359)) etc. that postulate a continuity between these signs and their signification, just as her own sense of selfhood (“ce que je croyais sentir en moi-même”) could be read off from St Preux’s countenance. The concatenation between self, feeling, sign (trait) and outer appearance (visage) is a constant network in the relationship between Julie and God, as it was in the relationship between St. Preux and Julie. It is therefore not surprising that, in a paragraph first addressed to St. Preux, Julie exclaims, “Ah, j’ai trop appris ce qu’il en coûte à te perdre pour t’abandonner une seconde fois!” (355) the statement could be addressed just as well to her lover as to the actual grammatical antecedent in the sentence, divine virtue. Neither is it surprising that virtue will later be identified, by Wolmar, as a passion among others structurally akin to love.\(^1\)

It will not do to interpret the love for St. Preux “platonically”, as a prefiguration of a divine love temporarily directed towards an imperfect being,
until the divine revelation comes along: the deconstruction of the very structure of the relationship is too thorough, and the difference between part I and part II of the novel, between the love for St. Preux and marriage to Wolmar, too wide to allow for such a reading. Guyon may be right, in a way, to stress that a degree of similarity prevails in the analogical structures giving rise to the metaphors of inwardness, self, will, joy etc. that keep recurring in the second part. But this very similarity is recognized, in Part II, as a pattern of error that remained hidden in Part I; instead of unifying the totality of the text, it undoes whatever illusion of unity the first half tended to convey—for the repetition of error is much more disturbing once the error has not only been clearly identified as such but after the reasons for its occurrence have been diagnosed with all possible exactness. Nor is the opposite pattern more convincing. The repetition of metaphors of passion in Julie’s addresses to God cannot be interpreted (as the symmetrical opposite of the platonic reading) as a simple confusion of the divine with the erotic, a psychological delusion akin to that of a quixotic character like Madame Bovary, despite the fact that her addresses to God often sound like speeches of seduction and indeed work as such on St. Preux.\(^1\) The rigor of Julie’s insight into the aberrant pattern of “romantic” love finds not even a remote equivalence in Flaubert’s heroine. Neither does the concomitant control of Flaubert over his fiction find an equivalence in Rousseau’s confusion with regard to his. The problem is not that Julie remains mystified, but that a totally demystified language, regardless of whether it conceives of itself as a consciousness or not, is unable to control the recurrence, in its readers as well as in itself, of the same mystifications. Julie, the best conceivable critical reader is apparently unable to read her own [critical] text critically. [The recognition of this inability to read coincides, in the allegory, with the predominance of religious themes.]
Thus the text of Letter 18, so clarifying as a recapitulation, bodes little good for the clarity of what it proleptically announces. It will be followed by the long description of the political order in the community of Clarens, of which we don’t know whether it is to be the constitutional model of a state, a wistful utopia, a mere phantasy or, as some critics seem to think, an unfortunate diversion from the unresolved problematics of the self. When the language of selfhood returns, as in the concluding part centers again on relationships between Julie and St. Preux, it is again, as in III, 18, in terms that are not political and not even primarily ethical, but religious. Our reading (which has not progressed beyond the Preface and beyond the retrospective impact of the reversal) tries to account for the emergence of the ethical valorization in a type of narrative (allegory) that moves beyond the deconstruction of rhetorical figures to the indeterminacy of meaning and the impossibility of reading. This first attempt at formalization of the rhetoric of allegory does not allow us to come to any decision as to whether the carefully worked out political constitution of Clarens is to be considered as exemplary or aberrant, a question which is, of course, of importance for the relationship between Julie and the Social Contract and for R’s political theory in general. It allows at most to assert that such a question exists, and that Clarens, a narrative episode in an allegory, is not necessarily to be considered “truthful”, since it appears within a text that has severe misgivings about its own referential authority. But we remain unable to answer the question raised by Starobinski as to the relationship between the political aspects of Clarens and the religious considerations in the concluding letters, a question allegorized in the somewhat bizarre episode of Wolmar’s atheism. This question could possibly be dealt with in terms of the novel alone but since we dispose, in Rousseau’s work, of at least two more systematic treatises involving religious and political theory, the Profession de foi from Emile and the Social Contract, it may serve time to bring them to bear on the second half of the Nouvelle Heloïse.
97 (missing)