Fear, Pity, and the Master: Rousseau and the Status of Mimetic Structures

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> -Lorsque j'emploie un mot, MOI, dit Dodu Mafflu d'un ton plutôt méprisant, il dit juste ce que j'ai décidé de lui faire dire, ni plus ni moins.
> -La question est de savoir, dit Alice, si vous avez le pouvoir de faire dire aux mots tant de choses équidistantes, multiples et bourriglumpies de variantes infinies.
> -La question est, dit Dodu Mafflu, de savoir qui est le Maître, et c'est tout.
> *Alice au pays de merveilles* (translation: Antonin Artaud)

> You call me "teacher" and "master," and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do. Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it. (John 13: 13-17)

Chance often provides for great discoveries, and simplicity is indispensable for their organization. Mankind adores classifying and categorizing, making meaningful connections à la Karl Jaspers, but how to do so in a so-called postmodern historicity full of fads? Are we doomed to eternal deconstruction? Although a complete comprehension of the being we are ourselves remains forever out of the reach of fallible man, it is no less true that by trying to understand and by articulating the means of understanding, one can contribute at least something to general knowledge, which is not the prerogative of *zòon* or *ànthos*, but of *ànthropos* strictly speaking. The task is worth the pleasure. This essay inserts itself into this perspective, which takes as its departure point some works by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Faithful to the call of Tzvetan Todorov, there will be here no "privilege accorded to the unconscious over consciousness, to sensation over the concept, to the crude material over the elaborated product."(1) It would be preferable to follow the path of those who attempt

“what is more difficult than it appears, to *think* along with the author.”(2) Of course, as any reader of Rousseau knows, trying to take his entire oeuvre into consideration is tantamount to abandoning oneself to an enterprise which, though it be agreeable, would only be exhaustive after a lifetime of labor. A first restriction must be made, since it is necessary to concentrate on some texts at the expense of others by isolating a clearly defined and legitimate *Ansatzpunkt*. Too many critics have a tendency to spoil Rousseauian thought when they renounce the principle of parsimony: the simplest answer is usually the correct one.

Wanting thus to consider only the essential as much as possible, let us firstly propose as a problematic a subject Rousseau treats theoretically and ardently: the relation between self and other within society. This problem is for Rousseau a concern that not only colors his texts but his life as well, for the eternal exile never stops insisting on the singularity of his state with respect to the social body as a whole. It is also known that the founding work of René Girard,(3) precisely because of the simplicity with which it translates the nature of human relations, offers a means both helpful and efficient to seize Rousseau’s intentions. Relations between individuals stand at the core of the human experience, and are therefore the best foundation upon which to lay Rousseau’s thought. Beginning with the *Lettre à d’Alembert* in which the stakes of an eventual mimetic crisis threatening to explode and ultimately destroy Geneva are at work, we will pass to *Emile* to study the unique relationship between master and slave, then to the ninth promenade of the *Rêveries*. This promenade, often swept aside by modern critics, bears witness to the actual personal life of Rousseau and demonstrates the fashion in which he tries to mediate, with all the wisdom he acquired in the world, human passions excited by the increasing desire to appropriate. It is hopeful that this investigation will offer some insight as to how Rousseau exploits the sentiment of pity, although definite conclusions may prove more elusive; this paper represents only a preliminary effort to work through aspects of Rousseau’s writings. Through pity he draws what constitutes for him the ideal state of man who can never return to the lost paradise of the noble savage. Communally shared compassion but never exclusionary and elitist commiseration: such is the basis of the society sketched by Rousseau.

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The *Lettre à d’Alembert*: Freezing Mimetic Desire

The *Lettre à d’Alembert* remains perhaps the best illustration of the Rousseauian attitude against the dangers of mimetic violence in a social context very dear to the philosopher’s heart. Too often cited as a denunciation *in extenso* of the theatre itself and retained in the collective memory of modern readers due to its treatment of Molière’s plays, the *Lettre* shows itself to be, after a careful reading, something more: a work whose complexity should rightly prohibit its being cast aside into the domain of the so-called anti-theatrical

ecclesiastical writings popular in the period. Rousseau's intention in the text is definitively linked to his ideal conception of the republican state, as the English language translation well testifies.(4) It is crucial to remember that the *Lettre* is a response having nothing to do with spectacles as such; as a work of epistolary polemics, it is destined to refute d'Alembert's suggestion that Geneva would profit from a national theatre. In this sense, Rousseau writes in defense of his beloved native city, and although he often recriminates against the negative social effects of the theatre, the citizen of Geneva makes every effort to make a clear distinction between the nature of the theatre and the utility of mimesis in a given civil order, notably in what was formerly the Republic of Geneva. It will be seen that the analysis of the spectacle as a scene of representation has only secondary importance in the *Lettre*; the notion of mimetic art is subordinated to a greater question: the primacy of the relationship between government and citizen, which itself operates in a mimetic manner. These two separate issues must remain apart in order to grasp the extent of the social consequences that Rousseau believes will inevitably result from the establishment of a national theatre.

"L'homme," writes Rousseau, "devient si différent de lui-même qu'il ne faut plus chercher parmi nous ce qui est bon aux hommes en général, mais ce qui leur est bon dans tel tems ou dans tel pays" (*OC*. V: 16)(5) [Man . . . becomes so different from himself that one ought not to seek among us for what is good for men in general, but only what is good for them in this time or that country.]

It is precisely upon this statement that the logic of Rousseau's argument reposes. Unlike those of his contemporaries who theorize mimetic representation in a metaphysically positivist manner, Rousseau claims to be able to demonstrate that the utility and even the necessity of the spectacle depend on a synchronically normative study of a given society and the manner in which it uses the spectacle. If he offers any concrete example that confirms the correct use of the theatre, it is assuredly the privilege accorded to the Greeks. These latter are an exception to what Rousseau calls the universal prejudices inherent in the actor's profession. He cites six reasons for which the actor in Greek tragedy succeeded in moving the spectators through appeals to both honor and glory, of which several, their validity notwithstanding, seem outside the scope of this discussion. There are, however, two that give pause:

> 2°. Comme la Tragédie avoit quelque chose de sacré dans son origine, d'abord ses acteurs furent plustôt regardés comme des Prêtres que comme des Baladins.
>
> 4°. Ce Peuple, enthousiaste de sa liberté, jusqu'à croire que les Grecs étoient les seuls hommes libres par nature, se rappelloit avec un vif sentiment de plaisir ses anciens malheurs et les crimes de ses Maitres. Ces grands tableaux l'instruisoient sans cesse, et il ne pouvoit se défendre d'un peu de respect pour

> les organes de cette instruction. (*OC*. V: 71)
>
> [2. Since tragedy had something sacred in its origin, at first its actors were regarded as priests rather than buffoons.
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> 4. This people, so enthusiastic about its liberty as to believe that the Greeks were the only men free by nature, recalled with a vivid sentiment of pleasure its former misfortunes and the crimes of its masters. These great depictions ceaselessly instructed the people, which could not prevent itself from feeling some respect for the organs of this instruction.]

The statement that there was "something sacred" in the theatre of ancient Greece, which is to say in the scene of representation, has been elaborated by post-Girardian works on the historical implications of the violence of mimetic rivalry. The Greeks, being able to recall the crimes of the past, certainly realized that confidence in an enduring social order was not something to be tenaciously held. The notion of the spectacle as a pedagogical tool for the Greeks is in fact derived from the anthropological vision of the cultural (although Rousseau himself does not elaborate this point) insofar as the spectators' identification with the tragic victim takes place at the moment at which they are no longer able to believe in the stability of the social order as a means to defer the violence of necessary social differences. As Eric Gans has pointed out, "yet such a loss of confidence [in the permanence of the social order] is a necessary consequence of generalized resentment, which inspires in the members of advanced societies a wholesale critique of such differences."(6) Tyranny, one of those "former misfortunes" to which Rousseau alludes, "signifies the submission of the entire social hierarchy–with the significant exception of the barrier between citizen and slave–to the critique of resentment."(7) Everyone being subjugated equally before the tyrant, differences between particulars evaporate and each is subject to resentment on the same terms.

3

If the Greeks could profit from the tragic spectacle, it is precisely because they could see in it, through the portrait of the tyrannical protagonist, the consequences resulting from an individual desire to occupy the central social space of victimization around which all others are situated without having first acquired the approbation of the collectivity. It is thus understandable that for the Greeks tragedy taught not to desire the usurpation of the sacrificial mechanism through an attempt *to make oneself* a victim since such an action would incontestably result in failure. It is inadvisable to maintain that Rousseau himself conceived the spectacle in like terms, but by isolating the respect, or at least the tolerance, that the Greeks had for their theatre in facts drawn from their collective past, he possessed the intuitive knowledge of the sacred significance of tragedy, that which was unique for a given people at a given time, exactly the reason for which Greek actors were considered

something approximating priests. The deferral of violence in the tragedy operating according to the anthropological model confirms that tragic representation served a specifically useful purpose for the Greeks: tragedy was able to preserve the communal agreement against the explosion of mimetic violence omnipresent amid the undifferentiated masses under tyrannical regimes. Given the exception made for Hellenic theatre in the *Lettre*, Rousseau does not contend that spectacles as such lack social value; mimetic representation cannot be divorced from the social structure in which it exists.

If the Greeks of old enjoyed a sacred theatre, the Genevans of the XVIIIth century have no more need of it. Once again, it is important to specify that which makes Geneva a privileged refuge in Rousseau's mind. "Dans une grande ville," he writes, "la police ne sauroit trop multiplier les plaisirs permis, ni trop s'appliquer à les rendre agréables, pour ôter aux particuliers la tentation d'en chercher de plus dangereux" (*OC*. V: 54) [In a big city . . . the police can never increase too much the number of pleasures permitted or apply itself too much to making them agreeable in order to deprive individuals of the temptation of seeking more dangerous ones.] This denunciation is of course directed at Paris, meeting place for the Enlightenment *philosophes*, domicile of M. d'Alembert, and the requisite second element in the dichotomy within which Geneva will be defined. Sloth and avarice run rampant where the number of inhabitants increases to such an extent that the sheer size of the collectivity surpasses the available supply of labor. Ones thoughts turn to the Roman wisdom of *panem et circenses*: whether or not the spectacle instructs, it is better that the people gather together for a while in a place where the real threat of violence between individuals does not normally exist. "Geneva does not have twenty-four thousand souls,"(8) writes Rousseau. It is a little city whose relatively small population merits a different sort of consideration. It is about Geneva that d'Alembert wrote; it is in defense of Geneva that Rousseau responds. The *Lettre* remains in the final analysis an epistle and plea for the Republic.

Rousseau draws from d'Alembert's article two points against which he argues: prior to the project to establish a theatre at Geneva, the *Lettre* first aims at the insinuation that "[p]lusieurs Pasteurs de Genève n'ont . . . qu'un Socinianisme parfait" (*OC*. V: 10) [many pastors of Geneva have . . . only a complete Socinianism.](9) Rousseau treats the Genevan ministers quite briefly, but the fact that he begins his reply by defending them is revealing. The role of the ministers constitutes the central point around which Rousseau's "theory of Geneva" turns. What he wishes to protect is not the official Calvinism; rather, it is what the religious authority represents symbolically: the ministers are defendable to the extent that they publicly fulfill their task of incarnating the unity of the official dogma.(10) The pastor, his faith notwithstanding, has only the function of representing that in which he believes: "il ne représente que lui-même, il ne fait que son propre rolle" (*OC*. V: 74) [he represents only himself, he fills only his own role.] In other words, he has a socially recognized role unique to him that he must, in a sense, "act." Of course, the ministers are not alone in possessing such established modes of behavior, but their belonging to the religious sphere easily dictates the nature of the persona.

With respect to the other constituents of Genevan society, they must be ordered as well so that each ends up with an individual part of the collective whole, a civic role within the community. To accomplish this, Geneva has recourse to its sumptuary laws. “Il me semble que ce qui doit d’abord frapper tout étranger entrant dans Genève,” he writes, “c’est l’air de vie et d’activité qu’il y voit régner” (*OC* . V: 85) [It seems to me that what ought first strike every foreigner coming to Geneva is the air of life and activity which prevails there.] The city gives the impression that it is alive, it appears in a certain fashion that defines it, and other larger cities cannot present such a spectacle. Each quarter of the city that Rousseau describes possesses a unique aspect through which the entire municipality thrives as a living spectacle. The sumptuary laws not only aim to regulate consumption during periods of possible shortages, they also ensure that each citizen visibly manifests the requisite appearances (*le paraître*)(11) worn over that which is his true natural being (*l’être*). In other words, the laws make everyone into a social actor within the living spectacle that is life in Geneva. Due to the importance Rousseau accords to the role of the ministers, it should not be argued, as some critics do, that he opposes the existence of appearances as such. His conception of society is that of a kind of marriage between being and appearances in a fixed *theatrum mundi*. In this respect, Rousseau’s attitude is rooted in the defense of the ministers and extends from them to incorporate all the other members of the community. His goal consists in the theorizing of social existence in which natural being joined with appearances form a mask which grafts itself onto each citizen’s face, defining him as a social entity. Obviously, such an approach would never bear fruit in a large city, but Geneva’s size permits the possibility of envisaging some success for the enterprise. Rousseau admits (and desires) that a certain so-called civic theatricality reigns in what he believes to be the stable republic, on the condition that this social spectacle is grounded in a contract between citizens who understand and accept it. Yet there is little here to motivate someone to acquiesce to such a system, except the simple desire to preserve the status quo.

4

What can be used to bind the people together? To what noble aspiration can the hearts of the people be drawn so that one would be happy to live in Geneva? For Rousseau, it is through a foundation of communally shared pity that the affective bonds of a people can succeed in creating national unity; in this way, the importance of mores(12) surpasses that of reason,(13) and places him squarely against, most notably, John Locke. Pity, elaborated many different ways in Rousseau’s work, here holds a generalized definition, dialectically defining itself against reason. It signifies the non-reasonable sentiments linking man to man; its sense is natural and heartfelt, never logical or empirically definable. Now it follows from the sumptuary laws that there are in Geneva “plus d’esprits originaux, plus d’industrie inventive, plus de choses vraiment neuves; parce qu’on y est moins imitateur, qu’ayant peu de modéles, chacun tire plus de lui-même . . .” (*OC*. V: 55) [more original spirits, more inventive industry, more really new things because one is less imitative, having few models, each draws more from himself . . .”] With this sentence the anthropological model can be

employed to formulate the vision of the state that Rousseau sketches in the *Lettre*. He knows that, in the classical spectacle, the purging of the passions that "are opposed to the propriety that triumphs in the end"(14) would strip the Genevans of the very (passionate) affective bonds upon which their civic identification depends. Further, "these passions are *specific*; the disorder that they create is only such according to a given social order."(15)

Given the nature of the government put forward by Rousseau, the threat of the theatre becomes clear. Its cathartic function expels the necessary passionate element and these passions, regulated within tightly ordered Genevan society, are good. Rousseau makes every effort to eliminate the conditions of the possibility of mimetic violence, for each citizen has already a role to play which the strength of the sumptuary laws maintains and, consequently, the probability of a violent crisis resulting from imitative rivalry diminishes. The origin of any appropriative gesture would not ideally be found in a *freely* desiring subject; the desire to possess would be instilled into the individual as a function of his appropriate social role. Such was not of course the active reality in Geneva at the time, yet it would seem less probable that a people who "n'a le nécessaire qu'autant qu'il se refuse tout superflu" (*OC* . V: 85) [has what is necessary only insofar as it denies itself every excess] would suffer excessive violent crises if it were content to see only the strict utility of those exterior objects which belong to it by right. There is thus small risk that, for example, the baker would covet the luxurious trappings of the banker because what one desires differs essentially from the other. The individualism of each person ensures that each would almost naturally want to resist comparing himself to and through others.

This idealized vision, truthfully, appears practically as an impossibility. All the same, it explains the displeasure Rousseau feels for the classic spectacle performed in XVIIIth century Europe whose stagings exhibit new desirable objects as well as conflicting sentiments linked to a foreign social order in situations that the Genevans would not recognize: "[i]l ne s'agit que de piquer la curiosité du peuple" (*OC*. V: 25) [the only object is to excite the curiosity of the public.] As soon as curiosity enflames the imagination and pushes it to desire something new, the desires of many will inevitably converge on the same object. It might be a new or rare object, or even a common one whose acquisition had hitherto interested only those who had the habit of owning it, but following the theatrical production in which the object (or sentiment) takes on an uncommon importance, the entire stability of the mimetic system destabilizes and degenerates. For Rousseau, the classic spectacle rivals the civic spectacle, and the former would be for Geneva the worst manifestation of imitation that one could imagine. If the republic is to survive, it must insist on obedience: the role one receives is without exception the best. Further, the communal pity that unites the Genevans and constitutes the basis of their nation would be threatened by the arrival of a troop of actors. The city depends on the compassion that its citizens feel for each other and this process only works if civic identification is made according to sentiment. One desires to be that which one is while desiring also to respect that which the other is. Thus it would be difficult for one to grow angry with another because of

possessions, even if the other possessed more, for the affective bonds of each reinforce compliance to established mores which, writes Rousseau, have made Genevan society possible.

Emile's Tutor: The Manipulative Transparent Master

Emile remains a masterpiece: the author himself, Madame Germaine de Staël, Immanuel Kant, all considered it his best work, and Robespierre had the habit of waving it before the constituent assemblies while crying out in appeals to the authority of the citizen of Geneva. Although its full title is *Emile, ou de l'éducation* (*Emile, or On Education*) and it presents itself as a manual on education destined for the instruction of the young, it exists only as a novel replete with literary mechanisms that make it more than a treatise or mere practical guide.(16) The characters enjoy a life as real as possible in the universe of the novel; moreover, the celebrated profession of faith of the Savoyard vicar transmits Rousseau's weighty views on religion and God. As Michel Launay points out, Rousseau had compelled himself not to make his book a treatise on education or a pedagogical manual.(17) The relationship between tutor and pupil functions according to Rousseau's model of transparent identification, described in the text by the authorial voice in Book II:

> . . . c'est [un art] de gouverner sans preceptes et de tout faire en ne faisant rien . . . Dans les éducations les plus soignées le maitre commande et croit gouverner; c'est en effet l'enfant qui gouverne. Il se sert de ce que vous exigez de lui pour obtenir de vous ce qu'il lui plait . . . qu'il croye toujours être le maitre et que ce soit toujours vous qui le soyez. Il n'y a point d'assujetissement si parfait que celui qui garde l'apparence de la liberté . . . Ses travaux, ses jeux, ses plaisirs, ses peines, tout n'est-il pas dans vos mains sans qu'il le sache? Sans doute, il ne doit faire que ce qu'il veut; mais il ne doit vouloir que ce que vous voulez qu'il fasse; il ne doit pas faire un pas que vous ne l'ayez prévu, il ne doit pas ouvrir la bouche que vous ne sachiez ce qu'il va dire. (*OC*. IV: 362-363)
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> [. . . It is [an art] of governing without precepts and doing everything by doing nothing . . . In the most careful educations, the master commands and believes he governs. It is actually the child who governs. He uses what you exact from him to obtain from you what pleases him . . . Let him always believe he is the master, and let it always be you who are. There is no subjection so perfect as that which keeps the appearance of freedom . . . Are not his labors, his games, his pleasures, his pains, all in your hands without his knowing it? Doubtless he ought to do only what he wants; but he ought to want only what you want him to do. He ought not to make a step without your having foreseen it; he ought not to open his mouth without your knowing what he is going to say.]

All the conditions for the possibility of mimetic rivalry are in place. The reader would thus expect that some tension will develop between the disciple and his model, but the tutor's methodology reposes on an illusion insofar as he is supposed to evaporate before Emile in such a manner that the child will not view him as a master. No external mediation is permitted; he who is the more aware must dupe the child so that the latter will grow up believing himself to be the king of all he surveys. It is precisely this "appearance of freedom" that must be preserved; Emile must never see the hand of the master raised against him. Thus, neither resentment nor rivalry could stop the development of what Rousseau calls "mon élève, ou plustot celui de la nature" (*OC*. IV: 361) [my pupil, or rather nature's]. The transparency of the superior player ensures for the moment that the possible violence between him and his charge cannot materialize. If, as Girard has pointed out, it is true that "the passive obstacle that the possession [of the object of rivalry] constitutes would not appear as a gesture of calculated contempt . . . if the rival were not respected," Rousseau's genius consists in effacing the rivalry so that it cannot "exasperate the mediation"; he truly understood intuitively the inherent danger of mimetic violence.(18) The tutor appropriates nothing: Emile acts always for himself without realizing the mastery the other holds over him.

If the master hides his intentions behind a mask that betrays nothing, Girard's master/slave *dialectique romanesque* nicely interprets the dyad formed by the two personages. The tutor remains the mediator of Emile's desires, but the object of these desires does not appear to the child. The tutor's advantage is his ability to exploit Emile's youth who, raised outside the social sphere, cannot yet distinguish what would be a desirable object. "L'enfant élevé selon son âge est seul. Il ne connoit d'attachements que ceux de l'habitude; il aime sa soeur comme sa montre, et son ami comme son chien" (*OC*. IV: 500). [The child raised according to his age is alone. He knows no attachments other than those of habit; he loves his sister as he loves his watch, and his friend as his dog.] Being outside society, Emile is sheltered from worldly prejudices, unable to differentiate between the value of a human being and that of a thing. As Girard has pointed out: "The secret of success, in both business and pleasure, is dissimulation. On must dissimulate the desire one feels and simulate the desire one does not feel. One must lie."(19) In a sense then, the tutor lies by training Emile's eye not to see objects as things that one desires to appropriate. Whereas indifference "is never pure absence of desire,"(20) that of the tutor has as its cause the desire to ensure that Emile does not desire.

It is only at the end of the book when the two part that the tutor reveals the extent of his power: "[j]usqu'ici tu n'étois libre qu'en apparence; tu n'avois que la liberté précaire d'un esclave à qui l'on n'a rien commandé. Maintenant sois libre en effet; apprends à devenir ton propre maitre . . . (*OC*. V: 818). [Up to now you were only apparently free; you had only the precarious freedom of a slave to whom nothing has been commanded. Now be really free;

learn to become your own master.] Thomas Kavanagh's important Girardian reading of *Emile* highlights the importance of this last sentence, insisting that individual liberty must, according to Rousseau, "depend on, and dialectically define itself against, a prior and primordial perception of the self as slave and of the other as master."(21) This is the kind of personal perception Emile had of himself (unbeknownst to him, of course) that he will not admit until he feels threatened by his nascent sexual passions. Up to the beginning of adolescence, "Emile n'a que des conoissances naturelles et purement physiques . . . Emile est laborieux, tempérant, patient, ferme, plein de courage" (*OC*. IV: 487) [Emile has only natural and purely physical knowledge . . . Emile is laborious, temperate, patient, firm, and full of courage]. But near his fifteenth birthday, the situation changes: "Comme le mugissement de la mer précède de loin la tempête, cette orageuse révolution s'annonce par le murmure des passions naissantes: une fermentation sourde avertit de l'approche du danger" (*OC*. IV: 489-490). [As the roaring of the sea precedes a tempest from afar, this stormy revolution is proclaimed by the murmur of the nascent passions: a mute fermentation warns of danger's approach.] The facility with which the tutor had been able to dissimulate the truth of his transparent mastery will no longer be sufficient to suspend the violence resulting from Emile's eventual realization that there are objects of desire exterior to the self to which his passions call him. Rousseau terms this the "second birth" when "l'homme nait véritablement à la vie et que rien d'humain n'est étranger à lui" (*OC*. IV: 490) [man is truly born to life and nothing human is foreign to him]. But thanks to Emile's careful education, Rousseau

> ne doute pas un instant . . . qu'il ne vienne de lui-même au point où je veux le conduire, qu'il ne se mette avec empressement sous ma sauvegarde, et qu'il ne me dise avec toute la chaleur de son âge, frappé des dangers dont il se voit environé: O mon ami, mon protecteur, mon maitre! reprenez l'autorité que vous voulez déposer au moment qu'il m'importe le plus qu'elle vous reste; vous ne l'aviez jusqu'ici que par ma foiblesse, vous l'aurez maintenant par ma volonté, et elle m'en sera plus sacrée. Défendez-moi de tous les ennemis qui m'assiégent . . . Je veux obéir à vos lois, je le veux toujours . . . rendez-moi libre en me protégeant contre mes passions qui me font violence; empêchez-moi d'être leur esclave et forcez-moi d'être mon propre maitre en n'obéissant point à mes sens, mais à ma raison. (*OC*. IV: 651-652)
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> [does not doubt for an instant . . . that he will come by himself to the point where I want to lead him, that he will eagerly put himself in my safekeeping, that he will be struck by the dangers with which he sees himself surrounded, and will say to me with all the warmth of his age: "O my friend, my protector, my master! Take back the authority you want to give up at the very moment that it is most important for me that you retain it. You had this authority up to this time only due to my weakness; now you shall have it due to my will, and it shall be all the

> more sacred to me. Defend me from all the enemies who besiege me . . . I want to obey your laws; I want to do so always . . . Make me free by protecting me against those of my passions which do violence to me. Prevent me from being their slave and force me to be my own master by obeying my reason and not my senses.]

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The slave reveals the violence of his desires; Emile realizes he has been the junior partner in his relationship with his tutor. Yet instead of manifesting resentment for him who dominated, Emile accepts the necessity of the tutor's role as protector; in other words, he feels not desire but disgust for the exterior sexual object, the cause of the crisis. He calls himself slave by the revelation of his desire not to desire. Rousseau believes this declaration to be the logical result of his system. He goes so far as to say that if this end is not reached, it is the tutor's fault (*OC*. IV: 652). It follows from this process that Emile sees himself as his tutor's slave, understanding that the tutor acts as a positive mediator for him. This is accomplished by the devaluation of the object of desire that appears to the child only as the source of his ruin. Remember that Emile is supposed to feel this naturally; one could say that the unusual formation he has undergone guarantees that he fears what others desire.

Even if the child wishes to be protected from the passions that threaten him, by what means could the tutor succeed in helping him? It is important first to specify what Rousseau means by "passion."(22) Although he uses the term in varying ways, it is here essentially an affective response between the subject and something or someone exterior to the self. "La source de nos passions, l'origine et le principe de toutes les autres, la seule qui nait avec l'homme et ne le quitte jamais tant qu'il vit est l'amour de soi" (*OC.* IV: 491). [The source of our pasions, the origin and the principle of all the others, the only one born with man and which never leaves him as long as he lives is self-love.] He admits that the source is natural, which implies that all passions are natural. But self-love, being the founding passion, is also the most limited because it consists only in self-preservation: "il faut donc que nous nous aimions pour nous conserver, et par une suite immédiate du même sentiment nous aimons ce qui nous conserve" (*OC*. IV: 492). [Therefore, we have to love ourselves to preserve ourselves, and it follows immediately from the same sentiment that we love what preserves us.] Such is the rule that nature dictates to us; the first passion remains both the most individual and useful. It is opposed to its vicious counterpart, a passion born from "ces modifications [qui] ont des causes étrangères" (*OC*. IV: 491) [those modifications [that] have alien causes,] *amour-propre*.(23) The distinction Rousseau makes between these two forms of self-love is crucial:

> les passions douces et affectueuses naissent de l'amour de soi [qui] est content quand nos vrais besoins sont satisfaits . . . [mais] les passions haineuses et

> irascibles naissent de l'amour-propre [qui] se compare, n'est jamais content et ne sauroit l'être . . . ce qui rend l'homme essentiellement bon est d'avoir peu de besoins et de peu se comparer aux autres (*OC*. IV: 493)
>
> [The gentle and affectionate passions are born of self-love [that] is contented when are true needs are satisfied . . . [but] the hateful and irascible passions are born from *amour-propre*[that] makes comparisons, is never content and never could be . . . Thus what makes man essentially good is to have few needs and to compare himself little to others.]

Rousseau thus avoids mimetic violence between Emile and the tutor by limiting desirable objects to immediate needs, as was the case with the sumptuary laws in the *Lettre*. Comparisons take place within society, so keeping the child from society stops the violence that the appetite of community passions engender. Having no contact with the passions of the collectivity, Emile does not know what unnatural desire is. All the same, the problem of sexuality continues to threaten Emile, and to combat it, the tutor has a responsibility to sublimate it through appeals to the sensibility of the child. Emile "s'émeut sur les peines de ses semblables . . . il est sensible à la honte de déplaire, au regret d'avoir offensé" (*OC*. IV: 502) [is moved by the sufferings of his fellows . . . he is sensitive to the shame of displeasing, to the regret of having offended], which is to say that he pities others. Once again, the education proceeds negatively: Emile moves away from rivalry out of a fear of sorrow and pain. The subtlety of the suggestions ends up encouraging the cultivation of the "good" passions which, having no external source to which they can compare themselves, cannot contribute to violent mimesis.

The tutor does his best to steer the child clear of the path leading to dangerous passions by the description of often unpleasant images that satisfy the budding desire.(24) The slave prays the master to save him from the dangers surrounding him; if he can feel any joy at his success, it is because he wishes voluntarily to be exempt from the pains of others.(25) By way of pity, Emile can resist a bit longer the inexorable passion that never ceases to push him toward the inevitable contact with other desiring subjects. By identifying with the unpleasantness that others *feel*, Emile learns to resist identifying with the other as such, thus avoiding the creation within him of what Rousseau terms the *moi relatif* (relative self).(26) The relative self, realm of *amour-propre*, makes comparisons with others. By concentrating on undesirable feelings, Emile's pity does not thoroughly attach itself to another person; rather, it draws more from his own experiences with pain and sorrow. As these feelings intensify, Emile will delay making direct identifications. Rousseau's pity is thus at first more of a personal sentiment, since it does not incite the subject to act. Only after Emile's sense of pity is fully developed can he begin to attach himself to others through the more complete compassionate affective bonds at work in the Geneva of the *Lettre*.

The *Rêveries*: Mimetic Desire Manipulated to Defer Violence

Many studies of the *Rêveries* take as a target the fifth promenade, in which Rousseau best illustrates the singularity of his enterprise to cut himself off, ultimate victim, from society. He manages to make himself the center of a conspiracy organized by the human race making him and him alone the marginalized victim par excellence. An important consequence of the ethic announced by the esthetic of the *Rêveries* is Rousseau's effort to balance his personal victimization by putting into place an active center as a subject of representation that he will occupy alone.(27) Although it will not be necessary to extract from the text the multiple examples on which a like understanding of the book reposes, the notion of a central self remains useful since the promenades testify to a singularly experienced reality. There are, however, some scenes that indicate a true sociability on the part of Rousseau: some of these reveal the pity the exile can sense for others in society, without abandoning the privileged central position he has prepared for himself. For Rousseau, the self is sufficient for the self without needing to depend on any external mediation: the scenes evoked in the *Rêveries* are for the most part either descriptions or memories, both of which emanate from the author's consciousness. Yet, there are times when the social factor enters into consideration. Consider the event in the ninth promenade when, one Sunday, after having dined at Maillot in the Bois de Boulogne, Rousseau and his wife Thérèse Levasseur sit in the shade of a large tree. As this episode is not among the best known, it is necessary to cite the text at length:

> Une vingtaine de petites filles conduites par une manière de Religieuse vinrent les unes s'asseoir, les autres folatrer assez près de nous. Durant leurs jeux vint à passer un oublieur avec son tambour et son tourniquet qui cherchoit pratique. Je vis que les petites filles convoitoient fort les oublies et deux ou trois d'entre elles qui apparemment possedoient quelques liards demanderent la permission de jouer. Tandis que la gouvernante hesitoit et disputoit j'appellai l'oublieur et je lui dis: faites tirer toutes ces Demoiselles chacune à son tour et je vous payerai le tout. Ce mot répandit dans toute la troupe une joye qui seule eut plus que payé ma bourse quand je l'aurois toute employée à cela. Comme je vis qu'elles s'empressoient avec un peu de confusion, avec l'agrément de la Gouvernante je les fis ranger toutes d'un coté, et puis passer de l'autre coté l'une après l'autre à mesure qu'elles avoient tiré. Quoiqu'il n'y eut point de billet blanc et qu'il revint au moins une oublie à chacune de celles qui n'auroient rien, aucune d'elles ne pouvoit être absolument mécontente, afin de rendre la fête encor plus gaye je dis en secret à l'oublieur d'user de son adresse ordinaire en sens contraire en faisant tomber autant de bons lots qu'il pourroit et que je lui en tiendrois compte. Au moyen de cette prévoyance il y eut tout près d'une centaine d'oublies distribuées

> quoique les jeunes filles ne tirassent chacune qu'une seule fois car là-dessus je fus inexorable ne voulant ni favoriser des abus ni marquer des preférences qui produiroient des mecontentemens. Ma femme insinua à celles qui avoient de bons lots d'en faire part à leurs camarades au moyen de quoi le partage devint presque égal et la joye plus générale. (*OC*. I: 1090-1)
>
> [A group of about twenty little girls escorted by a sort of nun came and settled themselves quite close to us, some sitting down and others frolicking about. While they were playing, a wafer-seller came by with his drum and his wheel looking for customers to try their luck. I could see that the little girls were looking longingly at the wafers, and two or three of them, who apparently had some coins, asked if they could buy a ticket. While their governess was hesitating and arguing with them, I called the man over and told him, "Let all these young ladies draw tickets in turn and I will pay for the lot." These words filled the whole company with a joy which would have been worth more than all the money in my purse, if it had cost me so much. Seeing that they were rushing up in some disorder, I obtained their governess' permission to make them all line up on one side and then go over to the other side one by one as they drew their tickets. Although there were no blank tickets so that everyone had at least one wafer and no one could be completely disappointed, I wanted to make things even more festive and secretly told the man to use his customary skill in a different way than usual and make as many lucky numbers come up as he could, promising to make it worth his while. Thanks to this stratagem nearly a hundred wafers were distributed, even though none of the girls drew more than one ticket, for in this respect I was inexorable, not wanting to give rise to abuses or show any favoritism which might cause discontent. My wife got the lucky ones to share with the others so that almost everyone received the same number and there was general rejoicing.]

This scene represents a praxis of Rousseau's egalitarian politics. From the moment the wafer-seller appears, it is clear that the goods he has to offer are going to generate what Girard terms "the desire to distinguish oneself"(28) for those girls who have some money at the expense of the others who do not. Rousseau notices the threat that is already taking place before the nun, that is, that the wish of the few to play would certainly create animosity in those who cannot participate, and in the rivalry that would follow, the wafers would be forgotten in the violence of the dispute among them all. Rousseau wants to put a stop to this potential violence. Taking the initiative to resolve the crisis, he puts himself into the position of mediator and, by not participating in the game, he prevents the girls from recognizing the role he is playing. He himself has no appropriative desires to dissimulate for he does not covet the wafers; he does not even touch them. In this scene, he enjoys a complete indifference to the wafers because what he desires is "a desire for the absence of any desire that elects an object outside the self"(29); he wants to regulate the desire of

others in order to feel the secret joy of having done so. The entire project of the "inexorable" master turns around this axis. By increasing the number of wafers won, the simple multiplicity of desirable objects prohibits the girls from becoming envious and effectively erases the very element of desirability the wafers had when the seller appeared. After the sharing suggested by Thérèse, there is a near state of equality within the group which was moments before at the threshold of mimetic violence. The nun herself will be invited to play, which she does, and for which Rousseau admits owing her much gratitude. It is important that she participates, for if she did not, she might manifest an indifference that would rival that of the veritable master. Rousseau himself has restored order and averted the crisis. He makes himself the solution of the dispute by the control he exerts on both the desiring subjects and the desirable object. As for the girls, they all receive an equal number of wafers without feeling resentment or being subjected to violence. The "general rejoicing" in the scene results from Rousseau's good intentions; in a similar situation, another could easily manipulate the circumstances to favor a particular participant. It therefore seems unlikely that Rousseau here gives his approbation to manipulative intervention as such, for it will always be a question of the good intentions of the mediator.

8

The former episode contrasts sharply with the one that follows. It is a story from a point in Rousseau's life when "faufilé parmi les riches et les gens de lettres j'étois quelquefois reduit à partager leurs tristes plaisirs" (*OC.* I: 1092) [mingling with the rich and men of letters I was sometimes reduced to taking part in their sad pleasures.] Present at an amicable gathering at La Chevrette, Rousseau relates how, as the guests danced:

> On vendoit là des pains d'epices. Un jeune homme de la compagnie s'avisa d'en acheter pour les lancer l'un après l'autre au milieu de la foule, et l'on prit tant de plaisir à voir tous ces manans se précipiter, se battre, se renverser pour en avoir que tout le monde voulut se donner le meme plaisir. Et pains d'epice de voler à droite et à gauche et filles et garçons de courir, s'entasser et s'estropier; cela paroissoit charmant à tout le monde. Je fis comme les autres par mauvaise honte quoiqu'en dedans je ne m'amusasse pas autant qu'eux. Mais bientot ennuyé de vuider ma bourse pour faire écraser les gens, je laissai là la bonne compagnie et je fus me promener seul dans la foire. (*OC*. I: 1092)
>
> [Gingerbread was being sold. A young man in the company had the idea of buying some and throwing the pieces one by one into the thick of the crowd, and everyone was so pleased to see the yokels rushing, fighting, and knocking one another down so as to get hold of a piece that they all wanted to join in the fun. So pieces of gingerbread went flying in all directions, and girls and boys rushed about, piling on top of one another and crippling themselves; everyone thought it

> a quite charming sight. Out of embarrassment I did the same as all the rest, although inwardly I did not find it as amusing as they did. But soon, growing weary of emptying my purse to have people crushed, I abandoned the fine company and went walking by myself through the fair.]

Contrary to the preceding scene, the former "general rejoicing" gives way to selective happiness, notably that of the rich who at the expense of the less fortunate abuse their financial resources to manipulate the crowd. The observers' declared charm is linked to the ferocity with which the rivals in the crowd fight to possess an object whose value is admittedly reduced when it touches the ground. An amusement that depends on the humiliation of some is shown to be a source of displeasure for Rousseau, particularly because a single man tried to encourage violent mimetic activity when it was for the moment suspended: in the dance, "les messieurs daignèrent danser avec les paysannes" (*OC.* I: 1092) [the gentlemen condescended to dance with the peasant girls] before the introduction of the gingerbread. The happiness of the briefly united community is shattered by the gingerbread, which is only desired by some. Encouraging violence instead of suppressing it remains for Rousseau a capital sin that he routinely condemns. Walking through the fair, he intercedes in another dispute in order to heal himself of the gingerbread affair. Seeing a girl selling apples, he notices some boys who are interested in purchasing them, but who lack the money. In his habitual manner, it is Rousseau "payant les pommes à la petite fille et les lui faisant distribuer aux petits garçons" (*OC*. I: 1092-3) [buying the apples from the little girl and having her distribute them to the little boys]. The dissimulated presence abstains even from touching the fruit, for it holds no interest; balance is restored by the two parties themselves who receive what they desire without violence. As for the effect this experience has on Rousseau, he writes:

> j'avois de plus celle [la joye] de sentir qu'elle étoit mon ouvrage. En comparant cet amusement avec ceux que je venois de quitter je sentois avec satisfaction la différence qu'il y a des gouts sains et des plaisirs naturels à ceux que fait naitre l'oppulence et qui ne sont guéres que des plaisirs de moquerie et des gouts exclusifs engendrés par le mépris. Car quelle sorte de plaisir pouvoit-on prendre à voir des troupeaux d'hommes avilis par la misére, s'entasser, s'etouffer, s'estropier brutalement, pour s'arracher avidement quelques morceaux de pain d'epice foulés aux pieds et couverts de boue? (*OC*. I: 1093)
>
> [I had the added pleasure of feeling that I was the author of it. Comparing this entertainment with those I had just left behind, I had the satisfaction of feeling the difference which separates healthy tastes and natural pleasures from those that spring from opulence and are hardly more than pleasures of mockery and exclusive tastes founded on disdain. For what sort of pleasure could one derive from seeing herds of men degraded by poverty crowding together, suffocating

> and brutally crushing one another in the greedy struggle for a few pieces of gingerbread which had been trampled underfoot and covered in mud?]

Through this revelation, Rousseau demonstrates that he not only understands the nature of violence brought about by mimetic rivalry, he also admits his own desire not to desire anything outside of the self; only natural pleasures count. He works by dissimulation. The absence of interest for such and such an object is only possible for him who has withdrawn from society while placing himself inside his own sphere of victimization, where he is sheltered from the social conflicts that have expelled him. The author is once again the unacknowledged manipulator of others' desires. Rousseau writes of a joy that

> consistoit moins dans un sentiment de bienfaisance que dans le plaisir de voir des visages contens . . . C'est même pour moi un plaisir desinteressé qui ne dépend pas de la part que j'y puis avoir. Car dans les fêtes du peuple celui de voir des visages gais m'a toujours vivement attiré (*OC*. I: 1093)
>
> [consists less in the consciousness of doing good than in the joy of seeing happy faces . . . Indeed this is for me a disinterested pleasure which is independent of the part I play in it, for I have always been very attracted by the pleasure of seeing cheerful faces in public rejoicings.]

9

Seeing happy faces, tasting the contentment of others, that is, recognizing the absence of conflict. Perhaps it is a goal possible only in the esthetic scenes of the *Rêveries*, but it says much about the perspicacity with which Rousseau knew how to suppress the violence of rival passions.(30) It is also curious to note the kind of scenes which elicit Rousseau's sense of pity, since these are frequently depictions of children and the poor, who remain among the weakest and most marginalized in XVIIIth century bourgeois society. It is a testament to Rousseau's character that, near the end of his life, his own sense of compassion fuels his desire to restrain conflict and efface resentment. The *Rêveries* testify to his ability to sympathize with the hostility (real or eventual) inherent in human relations, to draw attention from the exterior and back to the self in the hope of restraining outbreaks of uncontrolled desire.

Such is the brief schema outlining Rousseau's use and manipulation of mimetic structures. The denunciation of the establishment of a classic theatre in Geneva issues from the necessity to stabilize every appropriative gesture so that it cannot converge on the same object. In *Emile*, the presence of the invisible master ensuring the child develops without ever knowing that his desires were suggested hinders rivalry with the other. The meeting of the desiring subject with the benevolent mediator who dissimilates himself to satiate enflamed desire crowns Rousseau's literary career. In all three texts examined, the

sentiment of pity plays a role in mediating desire. The affective bonds of the Genevans depend on pity; the introduction of a theatre operating to purge the passions would be a disaster in Rousseau's eyes. Pity is also the means by which the tutor deviates Emile's passions by making him think of the sufferings of others: the child's desire seeks no object of satisfaction exterior to the self. Even at the end of his life, Rousseau acts through a pity that he tries to instill in others. This dependency on pity makes the desiring subject turn his glance from the object to the desiring other, coming closer to the mediator and moving away from the object, identifying with the other's feelings, and finally returning to the self. The view is transferred from object to mediator, the true source of mimetic tension, whose influence Rousseau will try further to decrease by relying on a pity that emanates from the true human self. It is a sentiment frequently fueled by negative associations, which cause the subject to concentrate more on the *feelings* he shares with others and less on the others themselves, therefore avoiding direct identification and possible rivalry. Rousseau understood that mimetic rivalry remains man's worst enemy, and on both a philosophical and practical level, he sought to tame it.

Notes

1. ". . . privilège accordé à l'inconscient sur la conscience, à la sensation sur le concept, à la matière brute sur le produit élaboré." See Todorov's presentation in P. Bénichou *et. al.*, *Pensée de Rousseau* (Paris: Seuil, 1984).(back)

2. ". . . ce qui est plus difficile qu'il n'y paraît . . . de *penser* à la suite de l'auteur et avec lui." Victor Goldschmidt, quoted by Todorov, *op. cit.*(back)

3. *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*. (Paris: Grasset, 1961).(back)

4. Allan Bloom's translation bears the title *Politics and the Arts* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960).(back)

5. All quotations to Rousseau's work are to the edition of Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, eds, *Oeuvres complètes*, 5 vols. (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléïade, 1959-1995). This edition will be abbreviated *OC*. As for the English translations, I have generally followed those of Allan Bloom, with some minor modifications. (back)

6. Eric Gans, *The End of Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 298.(back)

7. *Ibid*.(back)

8. "Genève ne contient pas vingt-quatre mille ames," (*OC*: V: 86). (back)

9. "Socinianism was a Christian sect closely allied with the development of Unitarianism. It took its name from its founder, Fausto Sozino, an Italian of the sixteenth century who lived

in Poland for a long time, where his movement had great strength. It was popular throughout Europe and was accepted by many Protestant churches. Socinianism was anti-trinitarian and held that reason is the sole and final authority in the interpretation of the scripture. It further denied eternal punishments. Calvin had condemned the doctrine, so that the imputation in d'Alembert's article was both a daring interpretation of the doctrine of Geneva's pastors and one which was likely to be dangerous for them." Allan Bloom, *Politics and the Arts* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960) 150. (back)

10. See Patrick Coleman, *Rousseau's Political Imagination: Rule and Representation in the "Lettre à d'Alembert"* (Geneva: Droz, 1984) 20-24.(back)

11. Coleman (30-33) argues further that Rousseau does not want the static state of the citizen to change, even if such a change would better his lot in life: if one is born poor, one should remain poor.(back)

12. The Latin mores here is used as a translation for the French *moeurs*. Bloom (*op. cit.*) prefers the rather weighty "(morals [manners])."(back)

13. James A. Steintrager, "The Classical Sources of Rousseau's Lettre à d'Alembert: The Subversion of Reason in the State," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 303 (1992): 338.(back)

14. "Les passions purgées par l'oeuvre classique s'opposent à la pudeur qui triomphe à la fin . . ." Eric Gans, "Lettre sur les spectacles," *Esprit* 452 (1975): 795-6.(back)

15. "Ces passions sont *particulières*; le désordre qu'elles créent n'est tel que par rapport à un ordre social donné . . ." *Ibid*., 803.(back)

16. In passing, it should be noted that several attempts were made to raise children according to *Emile*'s precepts, and all ended very badly. The children were maladjusted and, in some cases, institutionalized. See Marilyn Gaull, *English Romanticism: The Human Context* (New York: Norton, 1988)(back)

17. "Rousseau s'était efforcé de ne pas faire de son livre un 'traité d'éducation' ou un manuel de pédagogie." *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, écrivain politique* (Cannes: CEL, 1972) 22.(back)

18. "L'obstacle passif que constitue la possession [de l'objet de la rivalité] n'apparaîtrait pas comme un geste de mépris calculé . . . si le rival n'était pas secrètement vénéré. . . . La rivalité ne peut donc qu'exaspérer la médiation [. . .]" René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1961) 22.(back)

19. “Le secret de la réussite, en affaires comme en amour est la dissimulation. Il faut dissimuler le désir qu’on éprouve, il faut simuler le désir qu’on n’éprouve pas. Il faut mentir.” *Ibid*., 112.(back)

20. “Elle [l’indifférence] n’est jamais pure absence de désir.” *Ibid*., 111.(back)

21. Thomas Kavanagh, *Writing the Truth: Authority and Desire in Rousseau* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 80.(back)

22. Globally, passion is understood by Rousseau as “an affective response on our part (with its attendant thoughts, dispositions and objectives) to the feelings, dispositions, attitudes, traits of another person particularly as these are directed towards us and incorporate an estimate [of] our standing, value or worth (in general or for that person), and/or an intent to benefit or harm us.” N. J. H. Dent, *Rousseau: An Introduction to his Psychological, Social and Political Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) 119.(back)

23. The French *amour-propre* is best left untranslated. Its English equivalent is something akin to “pride” or “vanity.”(back)

24. Two examples are the association of sexuality with painful urination (*OC*. IV: 499) and again with venereal diseases (*OC*. IV: 518).(back)

25. Francis Imbert, *L’«Emile» ou l’interdit de la jouissance* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1989), develops this idea in his fifth chapter.(back)

26. The relative self is examined in more detail by David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).(back)

27. Eric Gans, “The Victim as Subject: The Esthetico-Ethical System of Rousseau’s *Rêveries*,” *Studies in Romanticism* 21.1 (1982): 3-31.(back)

28. The French text gives “le désir de *se distinguer*.” Girard, *op.cit*., 105.(back)

29. Kavanagh, *op.cit*., 165.(back)

30. In the *Lettre*, Rousseau names certain public spectacles as suitable amusements. These include sporting events and well organized dances at which the young make public recognition of the elderly. The contentment of those united together is what makes these events useful and desirable for society. (back)