

In the Workshop of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.
*Genesis and Interpretation, a book presentation*¹

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Dans l'atelier de Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Genèse et interprétation is the second book to appear in a new collection that I launched in 2022 under the imprint of the publishing house *Éditions Hermann*. The very first was devoted to a portrait by Serge Linkès of Joseph Kessel, one of the great French novelists and reporters of the 20th century. The following books in the series have been devoted to Carlo Emilio Gadda, Émile Zola, Charles Baudelaire, Virginia Woolf, and others are forthcoming.

Why this collection ? It arose from a simple observation. At the *Institut des textes et manuscrits modernes*, ITEM, the CNRS laboratory at which more than fifty years ago now was invented “genetic criticism”, that approach to literature that studies creative processes within the manuscripts of writers, researchers have, over the years, published theoretical texts – for example *Éléments de critique génétique* by Almuth Grésillon (Paris, PUF, 1994) or *Logiques du brouillon* by Daniel Ferrer (Paris, Seuil, 2011), editions of manuscripts, and themed issues of specialist reviews such as *Genesis. Revue internationale de critique génétique* in which they present their most recent discoveries. They also have published many collective works which have gone to mark out the various stations and stages in the history of this discipline : for example, *La Naissance du texte* edited by Louis Hay in 1989 or, in 2017, *L'Œuvre comme processus*, edited by Pierre-Marc de Biasi and Anne Herschberg Pierrot to draw together the results of the Cerisy conference organized by these two scholars.

But even within the broad frame of all this editorial activity there was lacking a type of book-publication that would allow those scholars who had made themselves specialists in the work of the great authors of French and other national literatures to draw together all the threads of knowledge arising out of their long experience of these authors' manuscripts and share with a wider readership all they had learned through this steady contact. This new collection, then, has been born from a wish to present a number of monographs which will, each of them, be an account of what has been learned from a single author and at the same time an independent introduction into the practice of “textual genetics”.

From the perspective of the interpretation of literature this collection also represents a sort of wager: namely, that it is possible to arrive at a fresh understanding of

¹ *Dans l'atelier de Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Genèse et interprétation*, Paris, Éditions Hermann, 2022, 222 p. This book presentation was organized thanks to the kind invitation of the Voltaire Foundation in Oxford, and took place at the Maison française (7.3. 2023).

writers if one enters their work not through the imposing portico of their published works but rather through the near-unnoticed side-door of their workshop, jammed and cluttered as it is with papers, notes, unfinished drafts and books by other authors with their margins filled with scribbled signs and remarks. It is also our intention to show that the study of manuscripts allows us to acquire analytical insights into texts, and types of comprehension of their meaning, which, had we not examined the manuscripts, would have eluded us forever.

I would like to linger for a few moments over this term *atelier* which appears in the title of the book-series. It is because whoever adopts this word has already begun to lean toward the methodology that the series is intended to showcase. It is not an easy word to translate and it is very interesting to note that the fine and subtle translation of the back cover of my book which was made especially for the present talk² makes use here of two different words: namely “studio” and “workshop”. The former word might indeed be employed where the emphasis lies on a space conceived of as that of a “creator” and the latter where it is envisaged rather as a space in which the author performs the slow and laborious tasks of his trade, much like any other artisan. In French the word *atelier* has a certain ambiguity because it comprises both of these two semantic *valeurs*. The art historian Pascal Griener has written a fine study of the notion of *atelier* in European culture and of the range of vocabulary through which, in different historical periods and different countries, the various nuances of this notion have been deployed. He examines the *ergasterion* of the ancient Greeks, the *opificina* of the Romans, the *bottega* of the Italians, the Spanish *estudio*, the German *Werkstatt*, and the English *workhouse*, later developing into *workshop*³. He mentions also that the word *studio*, which emerged in Italy during humanism, conferred a greater nobility on the work of the artist, setting him off from the mere artisan. Griener’s study analyses all of this.

Let us rather ask simply: just what is an *atelier*, in the sense in which this word was originally used in French ? In Old French *astelier* initially signified a heap of wood, a quantity of potentially artisanal materials left in a certain place. By process of metonymy the word came later to signify the place where the artisan actually set to work on these

² Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s studio is made up of a succession of symbolic places where, in the course of a life in motion, he sometimes set down his work table: among them his dungeon in Montmorency, his laboratory in Môtiers, this room “which in no way resembled that of a man of letters” on rue Plâtrière in Paris... not to mention the woods and groves of the walks he frequented with notebook and pencil in his pocket. But this workshop is above all the immense paper space made up of his working manuscripts, thousands of autograph pages now scattered throughout the world. It allows us to discover the paths of invention of a writer who was a critical thinker of the Enlightenment, to follow the birth of the *Social Contract*, the *Emile* or *The New Heloise*, and to watch Rousseau annotate Plato, Montaigne or Voltaire in the margins of the books in his library.

³ Pascal Griener « La notion d’atelier de l’Antiquité au XIXe siècle : chronique d’un appauvrissement sémantique », *Perspective. La revue de l’INHA*, n° 1, 2014, p. 13-26.

materials. The first idea to grasp, then, is that an *atelier* always involves relations to material things. The *atelier* is never an abstraction. There are always gestures, practices, and objects that need to be taken account of: in the eighteenth century it was part of the daily practice of a writer to physically handle sheets of cotton paper (so-called “rag paper”), goose-quills, lead pencils, ink and powder used to dry the ink, glue, sealing wax and a scraping device (*grattoir*) to rub out the errors in a fair copy ... Even if the ultimate aim of genetic criticism is, of course, to lead to textual analyses and interpretations, comprised in its approach is a taking into account, before performing any such analyses, of this whole documentary aspect of literary production. Another idea that is comprised within the notion *atelier* is that this latter is often a space not of individual but rather of collective labour. This is an idea that ought to be borne in mind because, even when it comes to literature, the writer only rarely writes alone (Rousseau, for his part, practiced collaborative writing in his early years as an author, for example with Diderot or, to a lesser degree, with Mme de Graffigny; later, we see this “collaboration” take other forms, such as working together with his publishers, engaging in disputations with his proof-readers; one might even so classify the interventions of the typographers in the manuscripts he submitted to be printed). We must realize that it is mostly only from the Romantic era onward that the predominant image of the *atelier* becomes that of a space in which the creator is left alone, face to face only with his own genius. It is only after this shift in conception that the “studio” can become the space of genius’s intimate struggle with madness, or of the haunting of the *artiste maudit* by some personal obsession, as in such creations as Balzac’s *Chef d’œuvre inconnu* or Zola’s *L’Œuvre*.

The two English words “workshop” and “studio”, then, bring perfectly to expression the tension that inheres within the single French word *atelier*. Rousseau was very familiar with the realities of the “workshop”, since he himself came from a milieu of artisans. His father was a Genevan watchmaker and he himself served an apprenticeship as an engraver. Later, he was to transfer into his profession as a man of letters those values typical of the artisan milieu to which he remained attached: firstly, a taste for work that was slow and laborious but that yielded, in the end, a “well-made thing”; and secondly, an appreciation of the worth of the signature (just as silversmiths and goldsmiths sealed their work with a hallmark, Rousseau, quite exceptionally for this era of frequent authorial anonymity, signed all his texts with his name on the title-page of the book). It is no wonder, then, that in *Émile* Rousseau makes time spent in the workshop of a carpenter a fundamentally important stage not just of the child’s manual, but indeed of his cognitive education.

By another aspect of his character, however, Rousseau aspired to the ideality of the “studio” – that is to say, to the *atelier* conceived as a space fit for a “creator”, or one gifted with the power to bring to birth the new. This is why, when Rousseau portrays

himself in his role as writer, he leans toward comparisons with “artists” in the strongest sense, such as the sculptor Pygmalion. He yields, indeed, so far to this inclination as to devote a whole work to this figure (his 1762 melodrama *Pygmalion. Scène lyrique*). Here, we are shown the sculptor standing alone amidst his partially completed creations, “held back in his studio by an inconceivable charm” (“retenu dans cet atelier par un charme inconcevable”⁴), to cite Rousseau’s Pygmalion’s own words, until the near-magical moment when he finally succeeds in giving life to his marble statue.

It is time, then, to explore the “inconceivable charm” of the Rousseauian *atelier*, which is composed of a series of places and of an impressive mass of papers.

Let us talk first about the different places where Rousseau, mostly briefly, set up his writing desk, during the forty years or so of his literary career. In Rousseau’s case these amount to quite a number, since we do have to do here with an author who moved constantly from place to place.

Some writers have shown a need to be “anchored” in some particular place, proven especially apt for their labours of invention, which thereby becomes the crucible of all their work. They reside there permanently, or always return there after periods spent away. (Montbard played this role for Buffon, Croisset for Flaubert). Sometimes, this place itself becomes, so to speak, one of the writer’s “works”, inasmuch as he rearranges or transforms it to concord with his own tastes. (Voltaire proceeded in this way with Ferney; Victor Hugo did so not just, most famously, with Hauteville House on Guernsey but already, before his exile, with his Paris apartment on the Place des Vosges; and the same applies to Zola’s house at Médan). Radically opposed to this model of a single, static, thoroughly self-created space for creation is the model of a multiple, mobile, transitory creative space, or a sequence of creative spaces, that is presented to us by Rousseau.

Never acquiring any house of his own and staying always in the property of other people – though often of people, such as Mme de Warens, Mme d’Épinay, Mme Boy de la Tour, with whom he had a close personal relationship – Rousseau never sought to possess a personal living and writing space. It seems almost a corollary of this that there was nothing to which he was so passionately personally attached as to the works that he had created within these spaces that had sheltered him for very short stretches of time. His books were really the “address” at which one could always be sure of finding him, since Rousseau never failed to put his name to everything he wrote.

In order to grasp and portray the way in which Rousseau arranged and organized these multiple, transitory writing-spaces I made use, in my book, both of Rousseau’s

⁴ Rousseau, *Pygmalion, scène lyrique*, in *Œuvres complètes*, édition publiée sous la direction de Bernard Gagnebin et Marcel Raymond, Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade », t. II, 1964, p. 1224.

own words and of the testimonies of his contemporaries. The result is a mix of every conceivable type and manner of spatial configuration : anonymous hotel rooms; a quarantine ward in Genoa; the little castle of the Dukes of Luxemburg at Montmorency, the modest apartments in the Rue Plâtrière that he lived in toward the end of his life in Paris... We often find Rousseau giving to these sites of his inventive activities symbolic names and metaphors which resonate with the very things that he invented there. Consider, for example, the term “the keep” (*le donjon*) that Rousseau fell into the habit of using for the space given to him to work in at Montmorency. As can be seen from the image, this space looked nothing like a “keep” in the sense of the martially-oriented architecture of the Middle Ages; it’s more like a little lodge at the bottom of the garden. The roots of this designation, then, clearly lie deeper: it was here in *le donjon* that Rousseau completed *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, a novel which, above all through the inspiration signalled in its title, points back to the Middle Ages; moreover, as the “keep” functioned in the medieval castle as the last redoubt to which the lord withdrew when under attack, it was into what he called his *donjon* that Rousseau retreated when the hostility of his former Parisian friends began to be felt. Moreover, this little lodge being for Rousseau a protective and thus a “happy” place, we may also see a certain cruel irony in his naming it with a name more accurately applied to that real “keep” of the Château de Vincennes which had been a place of imprisonment, years before, for his former friend Diderot, incarcerated after having written his *Letter on the Blind*. Apparently it was Rousseau himself who invented this name for the little lodge, since it appears nowhere in the castle’s archives before he came to Montmorency. We encounter another, similar case a few years later when Rousseau uses the word “laboratory” (“laboratoire”) to designate his work-space in the house provided for him in Môtiers, near Neuchâtel, by Madame Boy de la Tour after his having been driven out of France. This word is interesting because it stems from his training as a chemist. This was a time when Rousseau was considering giving up writing altogether. But the moment turns out to be one not of ending but of metamorphosis. Rousseau manages to bring about in himself what might be called an intellectual “effervescence”, enabling him to invent new forms. (It is at this time that he writes *Pygmalion*, for example, along with *Émile et Sophie*, etc.). If the notions “writing” and “laboratory” are linked in Rousseau’s mind at this time, this is because he has just then found in the “science of the transformation of bodies” that is chemistry a vocabulary, and a set of expressive analogies, which he can apply to his own trade as a writer. Chemical metaphors – such as fermentation or effervescence – allow him to describe the conceptual genesis of his works and the imaginative force which animates him to compose them. He is, indeed, the very first writer to employ, in French, this chemical term “effervescence” in a sense that transcends the technical.

In the eighteenth century people were feeling a growing interest in the places where authors wrote their works. The most representative example of this eighteenth-

century phenomenon is the visit paid by Hérault de Séchelles to Buffon at Montbard⁵. But Rousseau, for his part, also received many visitors, something he found increasingly irksome. One of these, who came to see him at Môtiers, drew a visual record of what he saw. He produced from this drawing an engraving which was to become very famous. But this famous engraving becomes even more interesting if one compares it with an engraving made of Voltaire at the same period, and probably by the same draughtsman. Their images set face to face, the two writers seem to embody the contrast between two authorial postures radically opposed to one another.

Rousseau appears in profile, wearing clothes of Armenian style, leaning on his elbow at his work-table. The window level with his head opens onto mountains. To the bare wall behind him there has been carelessly nailed a crumpled and frameless print representing Plato. Rousseau's right hand is resting on an open copy of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* while, a little way beyond it, a half-open musical score is balanced precariously on a book whose pages have not even been bound. The writer is looking straight ahead of him with a rather dreamy expression. Neither pen nor ink are visible on his desk – a detail which appears to confirm Rousseau's statements around this time that he had decided to give up writing. Voltaire, by contrast, has on his desk both an inkpot and a blank sheet of paper; he is clearly ready to begin writing. His eyes fixed on a spherical model of the earth, he seems to be meditating on the fate of the entire world. The engraving features an open pamphlet with the title *Changemens arrivés dans le Globe*, confirming the universal bearing of Voltaire's thoughts. The several small books, fully bound and carefully arranged, on his writing desk serve to remind the viewer that Voltaire owned a huge personal library which provided a firm foundation for his creative work. The décor exudes opulence: the oval back-rest of a richly upholstered chair, a tasselled curtain, a dressing screen; we also see a painting representing an allegory of Fame. The window is closed, revealing no landscape, since it is the world as a whole, not the particular locality where he happens to be, that occupies the mind of the great man. It is clear, then, that, in the play of the representations which orchestrate the drawing of parallels between these two great Enlightenment figures, the image of their respective writer's workshops becomes the symbolic space of a confrontation.

The path we are tracing leads us now to the last-but-one of Rousseau's many transitory domiciles (I shall not speak of Ermenonville, where Rousseau died just a few weeks after having taken up residence, since his time was so short there that it never became for him a true space of writing) : that in the Rue Plâtrière in Paris where writing has become clandestine and the writer hides from the eyes of the public behind the figure of the copyist. One of Rousseau's visitors at this time, a certain Claude Eymar,

⁵ Olivier Nora, « La visite au grand écrivain », in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, sous la direction de Pierre Nora, vol. II, Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Quarto », 1997 [1984-1992], pp. 2131-2155.

notes with astonishment that “this room does not in the least resemble that of a man of letters”⁶. But appearances are misleading, since this apartment sees the composition, under the most difficult circumstances, of *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques* (which Rousseau said he wrote in bursts of fifteen minutes a day) and then, at a somewhat serener rhythm, the *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*. The detailed account of this visit which Eymar was eventually to give includes an especially beautiful scene in which he tells of the very close attention with which he examined every nook and cranny of that room in the apartment in which Rousseau had received him. One can imagine all too well how much Eymar longed to know just what was hidden in the enigmatic locked wardrobe made of walnut wood, which clearly contained books and papers. One can also imagine how high a price he would have been willing to pay for a glance at what was written in the filled-up pages of a little notebook that he saw lying on the green cloth of the room’s small table. No such glance was possible for him. But it is possible for us and it is to this that we shall now proceed.

Let us, then, now turn to look at Rousseau’s papers. I will begin with the most basic of all questions: what exactly is a manuscript of Jean-Jacques Rousseau? If this question deserves to be posed, it’s because it allows us to establish just how far this archive of manuscripts extends. Rousseau himself once formulated a principle for defining what was a manuscript of his and what was not. He did so in the course of an exchange of letters with one of his publishers, the Parisian bookseller Pierre Guy, to whom we find him writing, with a certain irritation, in the summer of 1766:

You ask me if a manuscript that a M. Prault has brought to you from England, and that he says is a manuscript of mine, is in fact such. You really could have spared us both the trouble of your questioning me about this. You know that I employ no secretary and you are familiar with my handwriting. All my manuscripts are written in my own hand and it is simply a matter of looking to see whether this one is.⁷

The context of this letter is that of a problem of attribution – one which greatly bedevilled the writers of the eighteenth century, since unscrupulous publishers were making a lot of money at the time by publishing under the names of celebrated authors texts which were not these authors’ work. Now, this summer of 1766 was an especially delicate moment for Rousseau: his public quarrel with Hume had just begun and it was

⁶ Claude Eymar, *Mes visites à J.-J. Rousseau*, in *Ceuvres inédites de J.-J. Rousseau*, vol. 2, Paris, Dupont, 1825, p. 15.

⁷ *Correspondance complète de Jean Jacques Rousseau*, édition critique établie et annotée par R. A. Leigh, 52 vol., Genève, Madison, Banbury, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1965-1998, Letter to Pierre Guy, 2 august 1766, CC5332.

imperative to stop fake texts from coming into circulation and causing still more “crossed wires” in this dispute. Rousseau, moreover, is all the more angry with Guy because Guy has sitting on his desk one of real Rousseau’s manuscripts waiting to be published (*Dictionnaire de musique*).

First and foremost, then, “a manuscript of Rousseau” is a manuscript *written in Rousseau’s own hand*. The same, it must be noted, does not go for every “authentic manuscript” in a period like this one, in which authors putting their own work to paper was by no means the rule. To speak just of authors working in the eighteenth century, neither Montesquieu, nor Voltaire, nor Diderot, nor Buffon would have been able to make a pronouncement like Rousseau’s here. They, for their part, did indeed employ secretaries and copyists and had themselves constantly assisted by others in their acts of writing.

In the case of Rousseau, then, somewhat exceptionally for the epoch, the function of authorship was strictly connected with the practice of oneself performing the deed of writing. This resolves, indeed, one problem – that of authenticating Rousseau’s texts – but thereby creates another one. It is because Rousseau was by no means sparing in the use of his writing hand. There have come down to us a large number of manuscripts that are *in Rousseau’s hand* without thereby being writings *of Rousseau’s*. Had he really wished to be precise and preclude any misunderstanding, he ought really to have written to Guy that “all my manuscripts are written by my own hand; but not everything written by my hand is my manuscript”.

Rousseau had himself been, at various times, a copyist and a secretary. The mass of written papers produced by his hand amounts, then, to an enormous corpus the size of which, in terms of numbers of pages, has never really been estimated. I have drawn up this table (fig.1) in order to give an overview of Rousseau’s handwritten production in its entirety and to enable us to focus on those pieces of writing which are of most interest to us.

Let us first mention his production as a copyist of musical scores : this amounts to many thousands of pages, to which an exact total figure has never been put. But just by way of example, we know that during the period running from 1772 to 1777 he copied some eleven thousand pages of music. A page of Pergolese’s *Olimpiade* copied by Rousseau may be seen on the Bibliothèque nationale de France website Gallica⁸. It was the last musical score that he copied. Rousseau gave up this particular profession, which he’d begun to practice in 1731, in 1777 after having made five handwritten copies of *L’Olimpiade*, because he loved this opera very much. But Rousseau was also a copyist of texts: this is an activity of Rousseau’s much less well-known than his activity as a music-copyist. But it probably played a significant role in his life and livelihood. In particular,

⁸ <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8447160z/f22.item>

we know that he made a handwritten copy of a work commenting on Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois* authored by one of Louis the Fifteenth's "tax-farmers general", Claude Dupin, in 1749. It appears that in his youth Rousseau had even been reduced, in order to earn a living, to making handwritten copies of clandestine texts. We have no clear idea of the number of pages this copying may have involved⁹.

Let us now turn to his production when employed as a secretary, for example in Venice, or with the Dupin family, whom I have just mentioned, both in Paris and in their stately home at Chenonceau. His work as a secretary also led Rousseau to produce a vast quantity of handwritten texts. Nowadays, the greater part of what goes up for sale as "Rousseau manuscripts" in auction rooms is drawn from the vast body of notes that Rousseau produced in the service of Mme Dupin, often simply taking this lady's dictation. The so-called "Dupin papers" amount to around three thousand pages in total. Since these notes served the literary projects of someone else – such as Mme Dupin's planned book on women – is it right to lend them the prestige of the author Rousseau's name? This might, indeed, be partly justified by arguing that even this activity of compiling existing works and noting down the views of others contributed to forming Rousseau's own mind. But it appears questionable, in the end, to speak of these manuscripts as "Rousseau manuscripts", especially if the term "manuscript" is to retain its normal association with "authorship". Indeed, to call these notes "Rousseau's" is also a way of "invisibilizing" Mme Dupin's own authorial activity as an eighteenth-century *femme de lettres*. A small portion of these "Dupin papers" has recently been acquired by the National Library of Taiwan – which has officially announced this, needless to say, as the Library's acquiring some "manuscripts of Rousseau's".

Another great bloc of handwritten material within the mountainous totality of Rousseau's archive is the correspondence: that "autre de l'œuvre" ("the otherness of the work"), to borrow an expression of Pierre-Marc de Biasi¹⁰. Just how great is this bloc of writing? Rousseau wrote about three thousand letters. As far as I know, no one has ever tried to calculate the total number of pages these thousands of letters must represent. In any case, Rousseau's correspondence constitutes a fascinating "construction site" from the viewpoint of genetic criticism. As Ralph Leigh wrote: "Not only did a letter written by Rousseau tend to undergo several transformations before acquiring the form of the text which was actually sent to his correspondent; even this text sent off to its addressee was not, in every case, a letter's final form"¹¹. This last point of Leigh's is illustrated in

⁹ *Vivant ou mort, il les inquiétera toujours. Amis et ennemis de Rousseau (XVIIIe-XXIe siècles)*, sous la direction de Gauthier Ambrus et Alain Grosrichard, Paris, Noir sur Blanc, 2012, p. 42

¹⁰ Pierre-Marc de Biasi, « Correspondance et genèse. Indice épistolaire et lettre de travail : le cas Flaubert », in *Genèse et correspondances*, textes réunis et présentés par Françoise Leriche et Alain Pagès, Paris, Éditions des archives contemporaines, 2012, p. 71-93.

¹¹ R. Leigh, « Principes de cette édition », *Correspondance complète*, tome I, 1965, p. xix.

my book by the case of the reworked copy of Rousseau's letter to Voltaire on the subject of Providence dated the 18th of August 1756. This was a reworking carried out after the date of the letter's dispatch and repeated, indeed, several times. Its manuscript – which Ralph Leigh describes as “extremely puzzling”¹² – is a veritable palimpsest of version after version, with additions and over-inscriptions in ink coming to cover initial scribbles in pencil, probably made in the course of walks in the woods around Montmorency. There can be detected, moreover, in this (so to speak) “fairer copy” that Rousseau made of his own letter late in the summer of 1756 something like a sketch for a work – and for no insignificant one. We find here some early elements of the great epistolary novel that he was just then starting to write: in a few lines traced out in pencil on the final page of this manuscript there begins to take form a love-letter which celebrates the “enchanted voice” of Julie. The appeal of the novelistic imagination sounds out where one would not expect it. A real correspondence becomes the workshop for an imaginary one.

Let us now turn to the manuscripts of Rousseau's *works*, in the strict sense of this term. I have estimated the total quantity of pages represented by the manuscripts of the “works proper” at some seventeen thousand pages (fig.2). This figure is an estimate that I have arrived at on the basis of the information currently available both from the holdings of libraries and from the various editions.

These manuscripts are currently scattered all over the world. But there are two main concentrations of conservation: namely, in Switzerland and in France. The greater part of this corpus of manuscripts (some three quarters of it, or around thirteen thousand pages) relates to texts that Rousseau published during his lifetime. The remaining quarter relates to works published only posthumously, such as the *Confessions*, the *Dialogues*, and the *Rêveries*.

This distribution demonstrates the author's wish to preserve survive material witnesses to the processes of writing of his published books. Italian scholars created the notion of archival will to describe this phenomenon¹³. This corpus of manuscripts offers itself to us as the vast site of construction of a major body of work through which, to borrow the words of Jean Starobinski, “Rousseau asks us [...] to consider him through the mirror of his own work”¹⁴.

Rousseau, certainly, did not preserve every line he wrote. He was neither a Flaubert, who kept everything, nor a Buffon, who kept almost nothing. We can only say

¹² R. Leigh, « Rousseau's letter to Voltaire on optimism (18 August 1756) », *SVEC*, n° 30, 1964, p. 247-310, p. 253.

¹³ Paola Italia and Monica Zanardo (ed.), *Volontà d'archivio. L'autore, le carte, l'opera*, Roma, Viella, 2023.

¹⁴ Jean Starobinski, « Approches de la génétique des textes : Introduction pour un débat », *La naissance du texte*, ensemble réuni par Louis Hay, Paris, José Corti, 1989, p. 210.

that he kept a lot. For reasons that remain, in part, obscure to us he favoured, in this regard, certain of his works over others. He destroyed several draft versions of the *Social Contract* and abandoned a whole manuscript of this book on the Île Saint-Pierre. But he was careful to preserve almost all the preparatory material in the case of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* and a great deal of this material in the case of *Émile*. The circumstances of the itinerant life he lived led also, of course, inevitably to the loss or destruction of manuscripts. In the end, the “genetic dossiers” for certain of Rousseau’s works are more complete than they are for others. Some of these dossiers, indeed, display significant gaps. But all of them are to some degree stimulating and inspiring. For practically every one of Rousseau’s published writings at least some manuscript record of preparatory states of the text has survived.

These manuscripts are also remarkable by reason of the large number of different types that they comprise. One finds for example, torn-off scraps of paper on which there have been hastily scribbled, in ink or in lead pencil, the first bare verbal bones of an idea. In the genetic dossier of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, we find a very unusual sort of sketch or draft, set down on a writing-surface that it took us, in fact, some time to identify. It was only after a codicological enquiry into the process of fabrication of this particular type of paper, which we conducted using the holdings of the Neuchâtel library, that we came to understand what Rousseau had taken and re-used here. It was a little notebook which had previously been employed in the trade in gold leaf. At the very end of this little booklet we even find tiny particles of gold adhering to its page. We have to do here, then, with the recycling of an artifact which had never been intended for literary writing. No such use of this kind of artifact had ever been recorded prior to this discovery.

In contrast to preparatory manuscripts of this sort and right at the other end of the writing process we also find certain notebooks that Rousseau has filled with the most careful and beautiful handwriting, sometimes even attaching and sewing their pages closed with little blue ribbons. This is the case, for example, of the manuscript of *Pygmalion*. It features on its title page a note that we call a *note de régie* (a note to oneself) and which runs: “NB I don’t see that there is anything more to be done with this piece, apart from maybe removing some redundant words, such as *insensé* etc.”. Only a very few revisions have been made to the text. Everything points to the writer’s having arrived at this point at the very end, or close to the end, of his act of writing.

In some cases, however, a wave of “second thoughts” intervenes before the real end is reached. Certain notebooks which seemed to have been given the final embellishing touches become filled once again with deletions, regressing to the rough state of sketches. The work returns then into the bosom of its creator. It is the case for *La Reine Fantastique*, the “political fairy tale” composed by Rousseau in the course of the 1750s. The page presents much the same appearance as the manuscripts that Rousseau had

carefully prepared to be passed out to selected readers (with its red border and its careful and visually appealing writing). Are we dealing here with a copy originally intended for Mme Dupin but that Rousseau has now worked on further? But this manuscript ready for circulation here suddenly becomes once again a mere rough sketch.

This remarkable author's archive is made still more remarkable by its comprising, for four of Rousseau's major works, the "fair copies" that he made himself for submission directly to his publishers¹⁵. This is indeed a remarkable feature, and this for two reasons: firstly, because these "fair copies" were normally destroyed once the text was printed; secondly, because they were not usually set to paper by the author's own hand. These "print-ready copies" belonging, exceptionally for the age, to the archive of the author's own manuscripts do not, then, just allow us to observe how Rousseau continued to make improvements to his text right up to the point at which it went into the printing press. They also bear witness to how the hands of the typographers become intertwined here with the author's own writing hand. They show us how, once the author's manuscript has passed out of his own writer's workshop and into the workshop of the printers, these latter take possession of the author's prose in order to make of it a book in the concrete, material sense. These "print-ready copies" belonging to the manuscript archive bear the marks of the typographers' fingers and the notes that these artisans added (castings off) in the pages' margins to help them calibrate and compose these pages for the actual printing process.

We are dealing here, then, with a body of texts which is already of immense richness. The situation, however, is still evolving. New discoveries continue to be made. Large sets of manuscripts continue to be sold and bought at auctions. And I am sure that we will see, in the future, certain important manuscripts re-emerge that are presently feared to be lost forever.

Of these genetic manuscript dossiers two stand out as particularly substantial: that for *Emile* and that for *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. These are in fact twin dossiers. In both cases we have a number of different drafts, a number of fair copies, and finally, in each case, the manuscript delivered to the printer. Moreover, in the case of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* there have also come down to us two full manuscript copies of the novel that Rousseau made for his friends, Mme de Luxembourg and Sophie d'Houdetot. Rousseau had also planned to make a handwritten copy of *Émile*, in an especially fine and careful script, for Sophie d'Houdetot. But this plan was never carried out – probably due to their falling out.

¹⁵ N. Ferrand, « 'Alle Manuskripte stammen von meiner Hand'. Rousseau und das Druckerexemplar von *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* », in *Materialität und Materialismus. Klassiker als Produkt von Buchgestaltung, Diskurs und Ökonomie*, hgst. von S. Böhmer, D. Fulda und M. Lepper, Berlin, Wallstein Verlag, 2025, pp. 177-189 ; « La copie Rey de *La Nouvelle Héloïse* : quelle archive de la création ? », in *Archives : laboratoire de méthodes*, sous la direction de N. Ferrand, Elsa Marguin-Hamon et Pierre Musitelli, Presses de l'École nationale des chartes, forthcoming.

Why should these working manuscripts interest us ? I would like to offer you an especially striking illustration of why they should. It is one drawn from *Émile*. More particularly, it is drawn from what is called the “Favre manuscript” of this book, which consists of several notebooks full of drafts. This manuscript is conserved, physically, in Geneva but it is possible to consult it virtually on the website of the *Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau*.

The passage I want to talk about occurs just a few pages from the start of the manuscript (folio 52v). The page that interests us comprises two columns. The one on the right contains the main text. The one on the left is a sort of margin intended for whatever additions Rousseau anticipated he might possibly have to make. And it is in fact in an addition jotted into this margin that we see the birth of that formulation which (after some alterations) was to become one of the most famous *incipits* in all Enlightenment philosophy: “Everything is good as it leaves the hands of Nature the Author of Things; everything degenerates in the hands of Man”. Rousseau has crossed out the word “Nature” and replaced it with the expression, written into the space between the crossed-through line and the line above it, “the Author of Things”. This is hardly a minor revision! Whoever examines this draft manuscript becomes a direct witness to a major philosophical decision taken by Rousseau. By replacing that action of Nature which he had initially posited as the origin of all things by an action now stated to be that of the Creator Rousseau gives an entirely new orientation to his proposition. It is an act of faith which is eventually given pride of place as the very opening declaration of his treatise on education. His decision to perform this act of faith bespeaks a philosophical position which is on its way to becoming irreconcilable with the atheistic credo of certain of his former philosophical friends and allies.

The chapter which forms the core of the book (chapter 3, pp. 81-149) consists in a detailed case study of one work of Rousseau’s in particular: namely, his epistolary novel *Julie, or The New Heloise*. I try to retrace the genesis of this work by setting out, so to speak, on an imaginary table its substantial genetic dossier. This dossier comprises some seven thousand pages. I succeeded in putting it together in digital form only at the end of a long process of research with the collaboration of the National Assembly Library and the BnF in Paris, the BGE in Geneva, the BPUN in Neuchâtel, the Morgan Library in New York, etc.. It brings to light hitherto unknown versions of certain passages.

As the work undergoes repeated transformations, becoming denser with each new draft, we observe how a whole poetics of the novel-form is slowly brought to realization out of the tangled skein of rewritings. In certain comments that he writes in the margin of his own manuscript the novelist comes to stand as judge of his own work. You see some of these comments here: “NB: needs to be done over again”; “Somewhat wanting; maybe needs to be cut”; “NB all this needs to be reworked”; or “somewhat lacks bite here”.

The genetic dossier also enables us to identify and interpret the various phases of

the work's creation. For example, in the reworked "fair copy" (the so-called *copie personnelle*) one can see very clearly that the whole "status" of the text has changed. At this point, it has become a work conceived of very much in terms of its potential readership. The notes de régie which Rousseau had made on his draft have all but disappeared. But the authorial voice that had found expression through them in the *camera obscura* of the work's draft has not disappeared along with them. It has only changed its form. Rousseau now puts in the place of the earlier dialogue with himself a dialogue with his readers. It is a dialogue conducted via footnotes, the greater part of which, in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, arises during this phase of the book's composition. There will, by the end, be no less than a hundred and sixty-five such footnotes – a veritable "annotative system"¹⁶, to borrow a phrase of Yannick Séité's. It is interesting to observe the archaeology of this system. Footnotes more and more troubling for the reader now begin to appear. These footnotes question the nature of the text (what is fiction and what is non-fiction) or introduce considerations which are no longer just approbative, but now sometimes critical, regarding the characters in the story. At this stage in the process of the novel's genesis Rousseau takes certain decisions of enormous consequence: for example, that of giving to his male protagonist, whose real name and identity are never revealed to the reader¹⁷, a name that is clearly symbolic. It emerged in the course of my research that the pseudonym "St. Preux" had, at the draft stage of the composition, not yet appeared. At that point, the hero was referred to, throughout, as just "the friend", or by some other periphrastic appellation. That is to say, he existed at that stage only through his relation to the other characters, not yet with an identity of his own; he was an "empty" figure with which Rousseau was playing as a way of projecting himself into the space of his own fiction. (Rousseau says as much, indeed, quite explicitly in *The Confessions*). Rousseau's decision, then, to actually name St. Preux meant an emancipation of this character from the close bond of identification which had, up to this point, united him with his creator. In other words, the *copie personnelle*, in which this naming first occurs (fig.3), marks the moment of the novelist's maturity – that is to say, the moment of his first recognizing himself to *be* a novelist.

Rousseau is often looked on as a writer characterized above all by spontaneity, by emotion, by effusiveness. He is widely believed to have been an author who practiced a kind of "instinctive writing". This view of him needs to be corrected. He was, on the contrary, very much a writer of "second thoughts", of revision and correction, of constant self-surveillance and self-control. He was also a self-taught writer – and largely an autodidact, indeed, in almost every sphere of his endeavours – who proved able,

¹⁶ Yannick Séité, *Du livre au lire. 'La Nouvelle Héloïse', roman des Lumières*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2002, p. 279.

¹⁷ N. Ferrand, « Un voyage au long cours dans l'écriture de Rousseau. Analyse génétique d'une lettre de *Julie*, ou *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (IV,3) », in *Genesis* n° 41, 2015, pp. 165-186.

nonetheless, to make brilliant play of a literary culture which had by no means been “handed to him on a plate”. One of the most striking mechanisms of Rousseau’s literary inventiveness consists in this play. I mean that it consists in the carefully referenced cultural “moorings” which he constructs, step by step, as he proceeds with his writing, by making use of a vast heritage of literature and philosophy. In the manuscripts of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* one can observe how he adds, in the course of composition, a whole series of literary allusions, for example to Italian poetry (his quotations from which are never merely ornamental but always the product of the deepest and most serious thought). On the very eve of publication he decides to add, to the manuscript ready to be sent off to the printer, the explicit mention in a footnote of two contemporary novelists, Samuel Richardson and Mme Riccoboni. This is a decision which, so to speak, inscribes the work within its literary epoch and also makes still clearer the fact that it belongs specifically to the genre of the novel. It is also through the study of the manuscripts that we can come to comprehend the invention of that system of names and pseudonyms which forms, so to speak, the “nervous system” of the novel on which both its symbolic structure and its internal circulation of drives and impulses depends. “St. Preux” and “Héloïse”, it should be noted, are both invented at the same point within the genetic growth of the manuscripts.

I want to end by saying a little bit about Rousseau’s personal library, which forms the topic of the final chapter of the book. You will be aware that this topic of personal libraries has acquired central importance in the genetic approach to textual analysis and criticism ever since the publication of that seminal work *Bibliothèques d’écrivains* under the direction of Daniel Ferrer and Paolo D’Iorio in 2001 (Paris, CNRS éditions). This book prompts us to reflect on the particular relation that each writer tends to establish with the mass of the “already-written” and studies the way in which reading nourishes the creative process. Ferrer’s and D’Iorio’s book did not contain a chapter devoted to Rousseau. Indeed, it did not mention him at all. And for good reason, because Rousseau’s personal library has, today, almost entirely disappeared. In contrast, for example, to Voltaire, there is no single place where the books owned by Rousseau are conserved.

For a long time, I believed that it was impossible to address this topic, due to the lack of sufficient information. There are, of course, several studies devoted to “Rousseau as reader” (he had, in fact, an immense appetite for reading) but the authors of these studies were mainly interested in the question of sources, or of possible intertextualities. These, however, were not the topics that interested me. What I wanted was to arrive at an understanding of those particular methods of working that were Rousseau’s in those moments when his pen, or his pencil, was running not over a sheet of paper which had not yet been written on but rather over the already-printed page of a book lying open before him on his desk.

It is, in part, thanks (once again) to Ralph Leigh and his fine edition of Rousseau's letters that I have been able to glean information sufficient to provide a basis for an inquiry, from the genetic point of view, into Rousseau's personal library, or rather into the successive personal libraries that he acquired and sold again at various points in his life. To talk about this topic, I will begin with one especially significant episode: Rousseau's sale of the most substantial of all the personal libraries that he successively assembled, which took place in London at the beginning of 1767. Rousseau already knew at this time that he was about to leave England and, as he always did when he left a place (or always tried to do, at least, because sometimes he had no time to do so) he unburdened himself of his books. The burden was seldom a hard one to get rid of, since Rousseau did not accumulate great masses of books. He was not a bibliophile, he often bought second-hand books from bouquinistes when he was in Paris. Books were also sent to him by the publishers he worked with. As soon as he moved, he would break up whatever mass of books he had gathered, above all due to financial considerations, since sending books from place to place was a costly business. For example, when, on his moving from Switzerland to England two years before, his friend Du Peyrou misunderstands his wishes and has his Swiss books sent on after him, we find Rousseau in despair over the customs duties this is going to incur for him.

The exchange of letters between Rousseau and his British friends at the beginning of 1767 gives us some idea of what Rousseau's books looked like after they had passed through his hands. We find that they were covered in annotations. Like Voltaire, then, Rousseau was a "marginalist". He loved to write things into the books of others. This episode also reveals that the fascination with these marginal comments by writers on the work of other writers is not one that has emerged just in our own day. The eighteenth century felt the same fascination – as did, most likely, even earlier epochs.

Very few of Rousseau's books have come down to us. Happily, however, those that have are all very interesting, because each one throws a different light on how Rousseau used his books. Let us take the example of the marginal notes that Rousseau scribbled into his copies of the works of Plato (today in the British Library). Initially, indeed, these works were just part of his general education in matters of the mind. The reading of these books was useful to him in the writing of his own first philosophical works but, generally speaking, no signs are left here of any expansive or creative reading. His marking of them, then, consists mainly just in underlining words or passages. Not least for the simple reason that these are very small books: there is just no room in the margins for expansive notes. To our surprise, however, we discover that this does not apply to the books' flyleaves where he scribbles in tentative translations and tries to assimilate their content. One of them reveals a draft, hitherto unknown, of a passage of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Rousseau, in fact, took up his Plato once again in the course of composing one of the letters of this novel. Specifically, he re-read the *Phaedo* when

composing St. Preux's letter on the topic of suicide. He has, indeed, St. Preux explicitly address this dialogue of Plato's in this letter. And while he was drawing on the *Phaedo* for ideas to nourish his fiction, he jotted down a brief draft in his copy of Plato¹⁸.

A different sort of use of his personal library, however, is highlighted by Rousseau's annotation of Montaigne. Montaigne too was an author who accompanied Rousseau all his life. Rousseau's personal copy of the *Essays* was a large folio-size volume provided with very broad margins. Rousseau did not write many comments in these margins but, when he was moved to write them, they were often very long and expansive. What is fascinating in this case is that Rousseau, in these long marginal notes, improvises, so to speak, on a melody provided by Montaigne. Encouraged by Montaigne's avowedly autobiographical discourse, he too writes, in these notes, about himself; he unburdens himself; he confides. It is possible to date these marginal annotations specifically to his time at Montmorency. They are very personal, enigmatic – difficult to read, indeed, since they are written in lead pencil¹⁹. They comprise scraps and fragments of text in which Rousseau speaks of what haunts and worries him. Jean Starobinski sees in them perhaps the first lineaments of the *Confessions*. In Rousseau's case, then, we may say, the marginal note tends to adapt itself to the text onto which it is grafted, so that its nature varies greatly from one "host volume" to another – and this not only in terms of what is said in it but also as regards its form and style. The marginal notes he makes to Montaigne give us a particularly clear view of how Rousseau transforms his own self through the depth of the dialogue that he establishes with the author he is reading. The relation between Rousseau the "marginalist" and the books in which he writes these marginal notes shows how deeply he could commit himself to the experience of reading.

When Rousseau annotates Helvétius in 1758 the exchange here too is of a different nature: here, we are in the battle of ideas. Helvétius was a contemporary of Rousseau's and one of his philosophical peers. The notes this time constitute a calm discussion with a philosopher whose views he opposes²⁰. His animating impulse is to refute him and these notes, which are in this case very legible, do indeed go to form the matter for a *Refutation of Helvétius's 'On Mind'* - a work that he was considering but eventually destroyed so as not to poison further his ongoing quarrel with the *philosophes*. It is a serious exchange. Rousseau defines the terms of the debate (for example that of "sensation", posing first the question "what do you mean by sensation?" and then noting "to sense is to perceive objects; and to perceive the relations between objects is to judge") and tries to clarify them. He is sometimes mocking; but never of Helvétius's

¹⁸ *Dans l'atelier de J.-J. Rousseau*, p. 163.

¹⁹ Jean Starobinski proposed a first transcription and study of these notes in « Rousseau dans la marge de Montaigne. Cinq notes inédites », *Le Débat*, n° 90, 1996/3, pp. 3-26, article later expanded in « Rousseau : notes en marge de Montaigne », *AJRR*, n° 41, 1997, pp. 11-56.

²⁰ *De l'Esprit* by Helvétius, annotated in Rousseau's hand, is available online on the BnF's Gallica website.

person, only of the flaws in his reasoning (“oh! a very nice example!”). This set of marginal notes is also interesting because Diderot and Voltaire both made notes in their own copies of *On Mind* and one can compare the three writers’ very distinct ways of proceeding here. This annotated volume immediately became famous. It was among the books sold in London and Rousseau specified his wish that it go to someone well disposed toward him. (*On Mind* was, in any case, a banned book). Helvétius got wind of the existence of this book and asked its new owner if he could look at it. The new owner refused, however, because he had promised Rousseau that the annotated books would never leave his hands.

When Rousseau annotated the *Lettres écrites de la campagne* by Tronchin in 1763 (book today preserved at the Bodleian Library), he was writing responses to a book that concerned him personally. The notes in the margin are really a first draft of his *Lettres écrites de la montagne*. There really must be included, then, within the genetic dossier of this text the volume that you see here before you – something that is not the case in the presently available editions.

And what of his annotations to Voltaire? In the course of these researches I realized that Rousseau annotated Voltaire on at least two occasions. Firstly, he annotated a copy of the *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif* which had been lent to him by his friend A. Du Peyrou. When the book was returned to Du Peyrou he was surprised to discover that notes had been scribbled in the margins. Apparently, however, Du Peyrou (who was a great admirer of Rousseau) was very glad of this. He thanked Rousseau for having turned his copy of Voltaire’s book into something especially valuable. He also expresses surprise, however, at Rousseau’s having scribbled the letter “B” several times into the margins of this philosophical dictionary’s article on *Matière*. This prompts a fine letter by Rousseau, who urges him to be prudent in interpreting marginal notes of such extreme succinctness, not to over-interpret mere letters of the alphabet, and not to suspect him of being himself a materialist (although, in fact, Voltaire’s article was not a profession of materialist beliefs). On another occasion Rousseau annotates Voltaire without knowing he is doing it. This is the case with his notes in the margins of *Feeling of the Citizens*, a violent tract directed specifically against Rousseau himself (book today preserved at the Musée J.-J. Rousseau in Montmorency). Here the handwritten notes encircle, almost strangle these propositions advanced by an aggressive enemy. There are six altogether, all contradicting the pamphlet’s defaming lies. Part of the fascination of this object consists in the fact that it represents at once a manually annotated book and an author’s manuscript (with self-corrections, deletions and additions). Indeed, it falls at the same time even into a third category: that of “print-ready manuscripts”, since these annotations anchored by Rousseau in the text of Voltaire – because this anonymous attack did in fact come from Voltaire’s pen – were intended by him for publication just as they stood. Rousseau immediately sent it to the publisher Duchesne, who printed it.

These examples enable us to pick out more clearly Rousseau's profile as a "reading writer" and to better understand what type of laboratory of writing the books he owned represented for him. Understanding the ways in which he made use of his personal library lends a new dimension to our knowledge of his practices as a creator.

fig.1

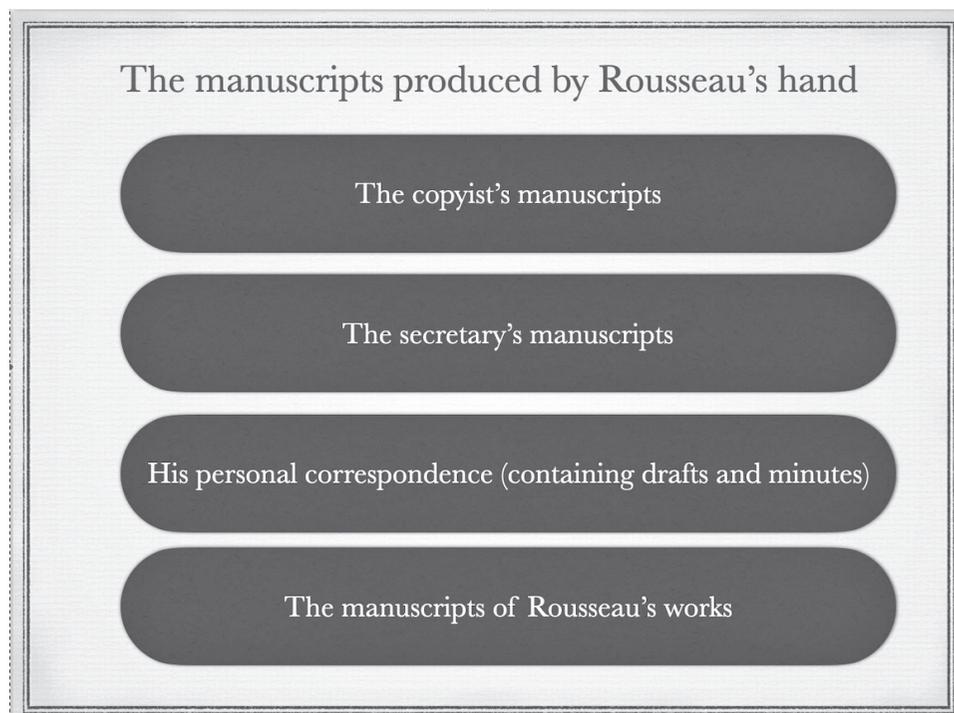


fig.2

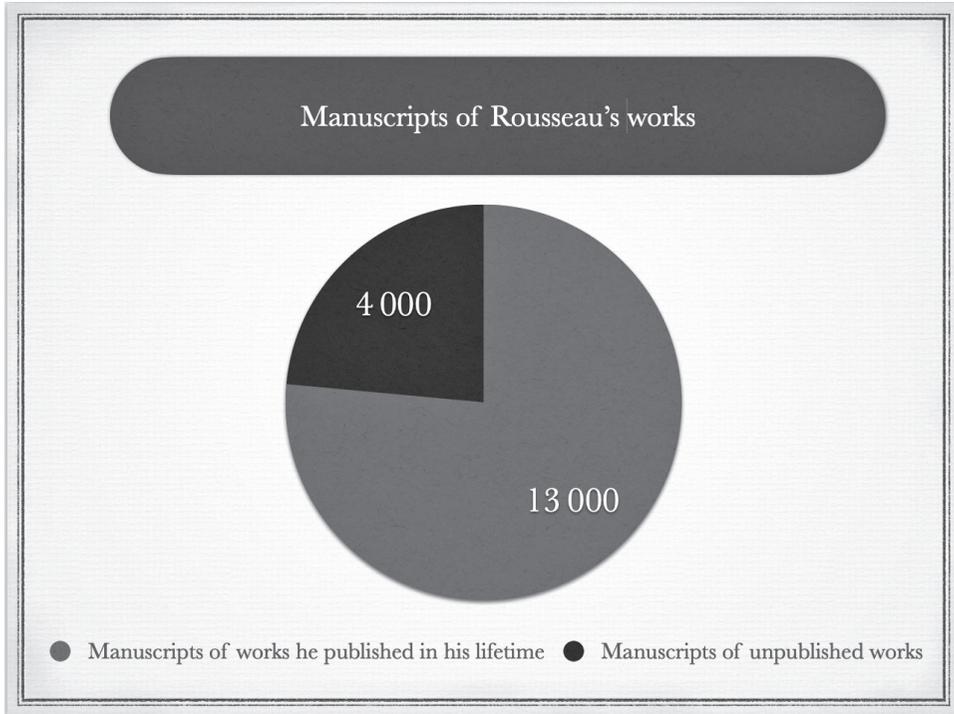


fig.3

