

BLIND LOVE, ROMANTICISM, AND ROUSSEAU'S NOVEL *JULIE OU LA NOUVELLE HÉLOÏSE*

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RESUMO

Este artigo averigua em que medida o romance epistolar de Rousseau *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* modifica o paradigma visual da antropologia do século XVIII, como se pode constatar na ideologia da natureza substancial rousseauniana, ao introduzir uma dinâmica que produz *obscurité* — uma inatingível dimensão de interioridade. A argumentação conduz à proposta de que as estratégias de ocultação do sujeito, mascarando e transformando a sua negrura/escuridão epistemológica num regime de virtude acutilante, recriam aspetos centrais da mentalidade romântica. O termo *obscurité* é mostrado como uma dinâmica semântica de “dessubstancialização” originada pela *ferida de amor* que requer permanentemente o *supplément* (Cohen, Derrida). A necessidade de subordinação sob o “olhar onisciente” de Wolmar concretiza um processo de sublimação, no qual a semântica obscura do amor é transferida para áreas legítimas de expansão ontológica, tais como sonhos, memórias, melancolia e mesmo morte sacrificial — verdadeiros precursores do romantismo. Exemplos correlatos, enquadrados no contexto da pintura romântica, ilustram como Rousseau constrói estes fenómenos de limiar como substitutos semânticos (e espectrais) do afeto amoroso o qual é cada vez mais transposto para a dimensão retórica das cartas.

Palavras-chave: romance epistolar, Romantismo, *obscurité*, *supplément*, olhar.

ABSTRACT

The article examines to what extent Rousseau's epistolary novel *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* modifies the visual paradigm of eighteenth-century anthropology, as seen in Rousseau's ideology of substantial nature, by introducing dynamics which produce *obscurité*, an unattainable dimension of inwardness. The argument leads to the proposal that the subject's strategies of hiding, masking and transforming its epistemological darkness in the penetrating regime of virtue create central aspects of the romantic mind. The term *obscurité* is illustrated as a dynamic of semantic "desubstantialisation" originated from the love-wound which permanently requires the *supplément* (Coelen, Derrida). The need for subordination under Wolmar's "omniscient eye" effects a process of sublimation, in which the obscure semantics of love are transferred into legitimate areas of ontological diffusion, such as dreams, memories, wistfulness and even sacrificing death, the very precursors of romanticism. Respective examples, set in the context of romantic painting, illustrate how Rousseau constructs these threshold phenomena as semantic (and specter-like) substitutes for the love affect which is also more and more transmitted into the rhetorical dimension of the letters.

Keywords: epistolary novel, romanticism, obscurity, *supplément*, eye.

Rousseau's literary position in late eighteenth century seems to be located at a crossroads, especially when we consider the treatment of the visual paradigm that – as described by Chris Jenks and Barbara Maria Stafford – motivates Enlightened ambitions to reveal evident truth.¹

1 On the "visual paradigm" noted in Western culture since the early modern period, see Chris Jenks, "The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture," in *Visual Culture*, Chris Jenks, ed. (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 142-160. Jenks refers to Wittgenstein's dictum that "a picture is

On the one hand, Rousseau obviously shares the heritage of Enlightened anthropology which underlies – like a philosophical substratum – the age of sensibility. Drawing on the Cartesian method, epistemological optimism suggests a perfect intelligibility or “insight” into the object of cognition, which can be gained by deducing from reason to effect.² The result would be self-evident truth, which has been made visible by the light of reason. So man and his nature – understood as the *machine mouvante* – can be read by using indexical codes, reducing the unity of body and mind to a conditional pattern of stimulus and reaction following the scheme “if x, then y.”³ The ethical impact of the *homme sensible*, his sincerity and virtue, is based on the undeniable reliability of his machine, a highly delicate sensorium whose inner dynamics can, however, be laid bare.

On the other hand, Rousseau's writing is characterized by decisive moments in which he transforms this epistemological optimism about the evidence of human nature, as articulated in the inherited visual paradigm. These changes already announce the imminent

a fact,” “a logical picture of facts is a thought.” On Stafford's study of visual culture during the Enlightenment, see Barbara Maria Stafford, *Body Criticism. Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press, 1991) and *Artful Science. Enlightenment, Entertainment and the Eclipse of Visual Education* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

2 Regarding the epistemological optimism, Descartes writes in *Discours de la Méthode*: “Il n'y en (= objects of cognition) peuvent avoir de si éloignées, auxquelles enfin on ne parvienne, ni de si cachées qu'on ne découvre.” René Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode*, Christian Wohlers, trans. (Hamburg: Meiner, 2011), Seconde Partie, 19, p. 32. Even though sensualism and empiricism claimed to contradict Descartes in their main intentions, the concept of the *homme sensible* seems to be connected to the empiristic aspects of the Cartesian method.

3 See Dominik Perler, *René Descartes* (Berlin: Beck, 2006), esp. chap. V.2, “Folgelasten der Dualismus-These,” pp. 180-187. Regarding the semiotics implied in the stage-like practices of Enlightened anthropology, the study refers to Erika Fischer-Lichte whose fundamental research “Semiotics of theater” described the indexical sign on the stage in the Enlightenment. See Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Semiotik des Theaters: Vom “künstlichen” zum “natürlichen” Zeichen, Theater des Barock und der Aufklärung* (Tübingen: Narr, 1983), vol. 2, pp. 151-177, esp. pp. 171-172.

Romanticism of Rousseau's mental universe. André Monglond in particular has extrapolated a *sensibilité romantique* in the second half of the eighteenth century, which can also be seen in relation to *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*.⁴

In order to consider Rousseau's threshold status in this respect, let's have a short look at Caspar David Friedrich's well-known *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*, a painting from around 1818 that depicts an essential situation of the Romantic view. Although Friedrich is considered part of the German Romantic period, his painting gives us some decisive hints for tracking the modification of the visual paradigm at the end of the eighteenth century in France.

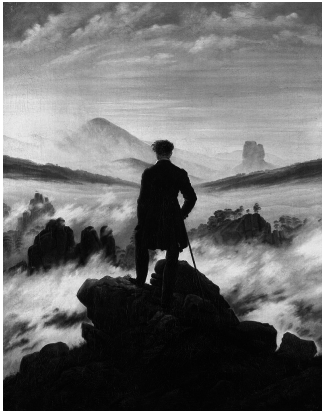


FIGURE 1: Caspar David Friedrich,
Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer
(around 1818)

What is depicted here illustrates the Romantic notion of the corresponding landscape, as insightfully studied by Gerhard Hess and Rainer Warning.⁵ The wanderer, holding a superior position on a

4 See André Monglond, *Le Préromantisme Français, Le Héros préromantique* (Paris: José Corti, 1965), vol. 1, pp. 97-150.

5 See Gerhard Hess, *Die Landschaft in Baudelaires 'Fleurs du Mal,'* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1953) pp. 14-23; see also Rainer Warning, "Romantische Tiefenperspektivik und moderner Perspektivismus. Chateaubriand – Flaubert – Proust," in *Romantik. Aufbruch zur Moderne*, Karl

rock, contemplates a landscape formed by smaller rocks, trees, an open field and distant mountains in the background. The wanderer's superior position accentuates the opposition of the human subject and of nature, his intimate counter-part. The wanderer's synoptic view as attributed by his superior position articulates the constituting moment of the reassuring correspondence between the man and his natural surroundings. The correspondence is based on the very possibility of contemplating nature as if it were one's own soul. Romantic correspondence presupposes the optimism of being able to identify oneself, even in the most pain-ridden moments, to recognize oneself and one's own nature in real nature as in a true mirror.⁶ This quasi-metaphysical dynamic assures personal and existential reintegration. The destabilized subject can come back to "mother nature" and find a place in the universal harmony which binds all beings together in a kind of *analogia entis*.⁷ In late Rousseau's *Réflexions du promeneur solitaire* we find prominent examples of those corresponding landscapes.⁸

Aside from the moment of existential saturation and sovereign overview, rooted in the synoptic ability of the wanderer, there is another striking aspect to this painting. There are many contrasts in colour, of bright and dark parts. The wanderer looks at a kind of bottomless abyss, partly covered by mist. He stands at the very edge of the rock, as if on a threshold to a space that seems to vanish in the distant background, also on a temporal threshold at sunset, between day and night. These elements of the painting articulate – in addition

Maurer, Winfried Wehle, eds., (München: Fink, 1991), pp. 295-324.

6 See Hess, *Die Landschaft in Baudelaires 'Fleurs du Mal,'* p. 16.

7 See Warning, "Romantische Tiefenperspektivik," pp. 295, 301.

8 See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, S. de Sacy, ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), for example the *Cinquième Promenade*, pp. 93-105, which describes the harmonious state of the narrator by looking at the peaceful shores of Lake Biel.

to the auratic correspondence between man and (his) nature – a troubling moment of uncertainty, an unreachable dimension that is unattainable to the spectator's view. Nature is not only hidden in some parts and unrecognisable, it is also removed, mysteriously veiled.⁹

With Friedrich's painting in mind, let us return to Rousseau, for whom successful insight into human nature is not as certain as Enlightened anthropology might suggest. He is interested in exploring the difficulties in conceptualizing man by patterns of evidence. Rousseau deals with the Cartesian heritage, the indexicality of the sensitive soul, but introduces dark aspects and opaque grey-zones which disturb the ideology of anthropological evidence. His long epistolary novel *Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse* is located at the threshold between *sensibilité* and pre-Romantic writing. It focuses on abysmal aspects of the soul that the subject has to confront in a world of visibility that is still impregnated by indexical thinking.

My study will illustrate how Rousseau introduces structures of *obscurité* in the ideology of nature and evidence, as seen in the regime of virtue. This line of argument leads to the proposal that the subject's strategies of hiding and transforming its epistemological darkness in the penetrating regime of virtue create central aspects of the Romantic mind, such as nostalgia, mournfulness and longing desire. My argument tries to explore in particular to what extent the strategy of dealing with unattainable aspects of inwardness in the regime of visibility creates and supports a rhetorical dimension of the text,

9 In this context see also Diderot's early sensibility for the mysterious, *romanesque* moments inscribed in the painted landscape, as described in *Salon de 1767*: "[...] que la lumière, la couleur soient celles [...] de l'instant unique, que les arbres [...], le sol même rappellent 'les ravages du temps, l'instabilité des choses, et la vétusté du monde. [...] [Q]ue les campagnes non bornées doivent, en se dégradant, s'étendre jusqu'à l'horizon [...] confine avec le ciel, et l'horizon s'enfoncer à une distance infinie [...].'" Denis Diderot, "Salon de 1767," in *Œuvres, Esthétique – Théâtre*, Laurent Versini, ed. (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1996), vol. IV, pp. 644-645.

articulated in obscure zones of ambivalent, diffused or veiled meaning. This rhetorical dimension seems to me the essential channel of communication used by the epistolary novel between the protagonists and the reader.

THE LOVE-WOUND AS LOST ORIGIN AND THE LETTER AS SUPPLÉMENT

The starting point of my argument is when Saint-Preux first falls in love with Julie (I,1). The first encounter constitutes a key-moment that generates a self-refuting dynamic: “[V]os attraites avaient ébloui mes yeux [...]”¹⁰

Julie’s overwhelming virtue shines from her in such a manner that Saint-Preux is blinded. The transparency of Julie’s being, her self-identity which she develops as an admirable accomplishment thus causes its very opposite. Bringing unevenness to the logical and evident surface of human nature that seemed to be captured by deducible mechanisms, the undermining dynamic described gains a peculiar power of its own that leads into darkness. It opens an area that rejects being evidenced or illuminated at all. So the text articulates a turning-point when self-identity and semantic transparency turn unpredictably into a destructiveness that effects the loss of sense and meaning. Virtue is then threatened in and by its own existence, causing blind furor and passion. Rousseau’s discourse of love is essentially characterized as a generator of this self-refuting agency: By initiating the conflict, which has been described as a hindered love, blocked by social prejudice, Rousseau exposes the actual problem, of which love serves as a mere illustrator: In virtue grows the germ of death and self-destruction, the annihilation (“anéantisement”¹¹)

10 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, René Pomeau, ed., Jacques Berchtold and Yannick Séité, pref. (Paris: Garnier, 2012), p. 6.

11 On the notion of “anéantisement” for example *ibid.*, pp. 166 (II, 1), 288 (III, 1), 577 (V, 5).

of all meaning. Virtue is no longer a transparent concept as it was supposed to be.

Within this malignant dynamic of virtue, the epistemological darkness is inevitably connoted with the topos of the love-wound. Being in love means having a love-wound. Saint-Preux complains about his love-pain as follows (I, 1):

“Je vois avec effroi quel tourment mon cœur se prépare. Je ne cherche point à flatter mon mal; je voudrais le haïr, s’il était possible. [...] Taris- sez, s’il se peut, la source du poison qui me nourrit et me tue. Je ne veux que guérir ou mourir, [...]. Oui, je promets, je jure de faire de mon côté tous mes efforts pour recouvrer ma raison, ou concentrer au fond de mon âme le trouble que j’y sens naître. [...] [S]oyez hélas! une autre que vous-même, pour que mon cœur puisse revenir à lui.”¹²

The text articulates the actual wound only in descriptive terms: “quel tourment,” “mon mal,” “la source du poison,” “je ... veux ... guérir,” “le trouble.” Similar to a spring, the wound seems to have somehow unconceivable yet powerful potency that spreads contradiction and perturbation and in this rejects any logical pattern. So Saint-Preux feels curiously nurtured and killed at the same time. The tumultuous workings of the wound act deep in his heart and seem to remove the ground of Saint-Preux’s being so that he loses certainty about his own identity, but later accentuates that love for Julie provides him with his higher destination of being and letting him find himself.¹³

All these attributes of the wound are mentioned *ex negativo* in Saint-Preux’s cry for salvation. He obviously wants to be healed; the

¹² Rousseau, *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, p. 7.

¹³ Ibid.

dispersive power of love shall be domesticated by any act of concentration (“concentrer au fond de mon âme le trouble”) which – at some point – stops the dispersive power and brings back rationality and all its ordering dynamics into its rights.

The wound as we can read it in the letter to Julie suggests a *quasi*-real starting-point of Saint-Preux's love, an origin which seems to be lost forever – like the reality prior to writing. Therefore we can talk of a *quasi*-origin, with reference to Derrida's notion of the “*quasi*-transcendental.”¹⁴ The described wound itself is only the lasting trace *ex post* of the (*quasi*-real) love-wound, trace itself of the (*quasi*-real) falling in love, a sign of mere negativity, a material, paper signifier which cannot be signified definitely but whose meaning is always in process or progress, involved in the never-ending escape from actually *being* a meaning. From this point of view and given Saint-Preux's cry for salvation, which is implied in the love-pain, the described wound can be regarded as a *mise en abîme* not only of love, but of the whole letter-corpus that has been written out of the pain of love, born out of the love-wound as Julie states (III, 18): “[...] [E]t ce qui devait vous faire taire fut précisément ce qui vous fit parler: vous écrivîtes.”¹⁵

Suggesting this *quasi*-causality of loving and writing the text indicates the essential moment of its own anatomy. Obviously the wound wants to be healed; the lost origin shall be regained and receive substitutive or supplemental meaning. Love wants to be expressed, in order to re-establish or create the virtual and pre-destined union between the lovers. It is to this virtual union, which is only concrete in the very reflection on the pupils of Julie and Saint-Preux at the first moment they see each other to which Saint-Preux alludes to in the

14 See Jacques Derrida, “La série: questions (quasi) transcendantes,” in *Jacques Derrida: par Geoffrey Bennington et Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), pp. 248-263, esp. p. 248.

15 Rousseau, *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, p. 320.

second part of his letter, pointing out the “conformité secrète,” “des manières uniformes de sentir et de voir,” “cet accord [qui] venait de plus loin.”¹⁶ The wound which is itself non-meaning requires meaning to be healed. The letters try to make up for the loss of meaning, though they cannot be anything more than the subsequent trace of love and a *supplément* to the reality that is implied in the first moment.

The letters between the lovers therefore necessarily contain a rhetorical dimension of semantic unreliability. They constitute a zone of unconceivable or obscured meaning. The written word never means what it seems to mean, rather ambiguity is omnipresent, the abysmal dynamic of fleeing semantics which absorbs meaning, rejects sense and generates different readings. The obscure semantics of the letter (as effectuated by blind passion) might be, as I will conclude in the second part of my study, the actual level of communication between the lovers and their (intra- and extradiegetic) addressees, the hiding-place of their passion in a paternalistic society which endeavours to build up a regime of visibility, perfect virtue and evident truth.

DERRIDA'S DANGEROUS SUPPLÉMENT

The main theoretical input on the issue of the rhetoric of the letter is Derrida's notion of the *supplément* as developed in *De la Grammatologie* (1968).¹⁷ Dealing with Rousseau's *Confessions* Derrida introduces the notion of *supplément*, referring to the author's attempt to withdraw from the public world and to represent himself exclusively through the written word.¹⁸ The *supplément* plays on the opposition between presence (of speech) and re-presentation (in

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁷ See Jacques Derrida, “ce dangereux supplément ...,” in *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967), pp. 203-234.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 204-206.

writing) as well as of speech and writing (*parole – écriture*).¹⁹ Among the many observations Derrida makes regarding Rousseau, I will focus on three aspects which seem to be relevant for our context. First, there is the dangerous potential for mimicry in the *supplément*.

“[L]a parole étant naturelle ou du moins l’expression naturelle de la pensée, la forme d’institution ou de convention la plus naturelle pour signifier la pensée, l’écriture s’y ajoute, s’y adjoint comme une image ou une représentation. En ce sens, elle n’est pas naturelle. Elle fait dériver dans la représentation et dans l’imagination une présence immédiate de la pensée à la parole. Ce recours n’est pas seulement ‘bizarre’, il est dangereux. C’est l’addition d’une technique, c’est une sorte de ruse artificielle et artificieuse pour rendre la parole présente lorsqu’elle est en vérité absente. [...] L’écriture est dangereuse dès lors que la représentation veut s’y donner pour la présence et le signe pour la chose même. Et il y a une nécessité fatale, inscrite dans le fonctionnement du signe, à ce que le substitut fasse oublier sa fonction de vicariance et se fasse passer pour la plénitude d’une parole dont il ne fait que suppléer la carence et l’infirmité.”²⁰

The written word that works as a *supplément* has no positive meaning that could be made evident under the transparent surface of the signifier. Instead, the written word only *simulates* the presence of meaning and tries to let us forget about its mimic character. The *supplément* is thus – due to its deceptive, actually opaque nature – dangerous. Rousseau, according to Derrida, admits that there is a dynamic of semantic escape in the word itself but rejects at the same time the power caused by this permanent undermining: “En fait,

19 Ibid., pp. 207-209.

20 Ibid., pp. 207-208.

Rousseau avait éprouvé le dérobement dans la parole même, dans le mirage de son immédiateté. [...] Ayant d'une certaine manière, disions-nous, reconnu cette puissance qui, inaugurant la parole, disloque le sujet qu'elle construit, l'empêche d'être présent à ses signes, [...] Rousseau est néanmoins plus pressé de la conjurer que d'en assumer la nécessité."²¹

The threatening power of the *supplément* that Derrida observes in the *Confessions*, has its very legitimation in *Julie*. Nevertheless, the dangerous aspect of supplemental writing is, as I see, neutralized or inclined towards a hidden acknowledgment of the actual power and necessity of supplemental writing when it comes to the poetics of the epistolary novel.

This acknowledgment arises because the simulating moment of the *supplément*, which validates the permanent withdrawal of meaning into an unachievable *abîme*, corresponds with the necessarily rhetorical nature of the love-letter and its fatal nature to simulate the presence of love by (re)creating the abysmal love-wound as a textual dimension. Writing the letters can never reach the lost origin or signify it. The endless chains of supplements provided by the text are interlinked and knotted, shifted and mirrored in permanent oscillations. The virtuality of the ever-differing meaning that permanently evades, constitutes the inconceivableness of the text and evokes its *abîme*. The supplemental dynamic deceptively feigns the love-object which actually has already escaped elsewhere. Derrida states:

“[L]e concept de supplément et la théorie de l'écriture désignent [...] en abyme, la textualité elle-même dans le texte de Rousseau. [...] Toute une théorie de la nécessité structurelle de l'abîme se constituera peu à peu

21 Ibid., pp. 203-204.

dans notre lecture; le procès indéfini de la supplémentarité a toujours [...] déjà inscrit l'espace de la répétition et du dédoublement de soi. [...] [L]e désir de la présence naît [...] de l'abîme de la représentation, de la représentation de la représentation, etc. Le supplément lui-même est bien, à tous les sens de ce mot, exorbitant."²²

Such an exorbitant reading of the text rejects the closed system of evidence ("la sortie hors de la clôture d'une évidence"²³) and inaugurates the trace that indicates the abysmal dynamic of *différance*.²⁴ Relating Derrida to the epistolary novel, we can point out the following: the *abîme*, regarded as the infinite process of supplementarity of the letter-text, figures as the love-wound, the written trace of the *quasi*-prior love-union. By the permanent differing of its meaning, lacking the healing reunification with a definite concept, the written letter always lets the violation shine through that it is effected by. The supplemental energy which goes along with the posteriority of the very genre of epistolarity cannot be stopped and naturally enters the process of reading as well as the process of interpretation.

The second aspect of Derrida's exploration of the *supplément*, which applies to my argument, is the unsatiable desire that informs the *supplément* in writing to reconstitute the presence of speech: "[L]e désir de la présence naît [...] de l'abîme de la représentation, de la représentation, etc.,"²⁵ "[...] le désir de la présence [...] porte en lui le destin de son inassouvissement."²⁶ With respect to Rousseau's *Julie*, the desire for meaning or re-presentation of love seems to be the basal motivator not only on the level of the *énoncé*, but also as

22 Ibid., p. 233.

23 Ibid., p. 232.

24 Ibid., p. 206.

25 Ibid., p. 233.

26 Ibid., p. 206.

the strong intention of the lovers to correspond to each other and producing the essential structures of the *histoire*. Furthermore, this desire for supplemental meaning is the decisive moment of semantic vitality that affects the conceptual level of the text itself and adopts it as a refuge for rejected passion.

Third, and finally, Derrida mentions a blocking frame, an interdiction which interrupts the natural expression in speech so that supplemental writing becomes necessary: “Quand la nature, comme proximité à soi, vient à être interdite ou interrompue, quand la parole échoue à protéger la présence, l’écriture devient nécessaire. Elle doit d’urgence s’ajouter au verbe.”²⁷ In the context of *Julie*, this blocking frame is obviously incorporated in the social hierarchy and the requirements of the ideology of virtue and paternalistic authority, the substratum of the age of *sensibilité*.

COELEN: *OBSCURITÉ* AND INFINITE OSCILLATIONS

With regard to the notion of obscured meaning, as it occurs in Derrida’s reflection of the *supplément*, Marcus Coelen’s approach offers heuristic value.²⁸ Coelen develops the notion of *obscurité* to describe the phenomenon of semantic opacity as seen in Proust as the very unreachable point where conceptual meaning is intermingled to such a degree that it is densely and indissolubly knotted, similar to Derrida’s *abîme* as engendered by the *supplément*.²⁹

“The dimension of a ‘tour un peu particulier’ is gently insinuated on the first page of the *Recherche*, with all its ‘réflexions’ leading to an area ‘comme une chose sans cause, incompréhensible, comme une chose vraiment obscure,’ an area in which the simulation of fiction becomes

27 Ibid., p. 207.

28 See Marcus Coelen, *Die Tyrannei des Partikularen* (München: Fink, 2007).

29 Ibid., pp. 13-22.

itself fictitious [...] the obscurity thickened, knotted or painted over a 'point' [...] *vraiment obscure*. Therefore in Proust it always 'oscillates' around this point that is not simply 'blank,' but has an impenetrable opacity and, nevertheless, contains nothing. [...] The literary definition of this point *in* the crisis becomes a question of signification which uses the figures of experience [...] in order to simulate signification."³⁰

These concepts as developed by Derrida and Coelen deliver the frame for my argument. In the following, I will deepen the aspect of the blocking system, Derrida alludes to, and which I mentioned above as the regime of visibility created by a paternalistic society.

HANDLING THE OTHERNESS OF LOVE IN THE REGIME OF VISIBILITY: DISSIMULATION AND MASK

We have seen how Rousseau creates structures of *obscurité*, by contaminating the discourse of virtue with abysmal dynamics that are similar to *différance*. In virtue grows the germ of death as it effects passionate love. The *différance* of passion works on the linear effectivity of virtue and its didactical claim by darkening the aura of virtue and deviating its effects against virtue itself. To go further in the argument and to illustrate the generative function of the ideology of virtue regarding central aspects of the Romantic mind, we have to

30 Ibid., p. 13-14. Translation by Alexandra Schamel. The German original version is: „Sanft ist auf der ersten Seite der *Recherche* die Dimension eines 'tour un peu particulier' angedeutet, mit der alle ihre 'réflexions' in eine Gegend führen 'comme une chose sans cause, incompréhensible, comme une chose vraiment obscure', einen Bereich, in dem das Fingieren der Fiktion selbst fiktional wird, ohne dabei 'Reflexion' oder 'Selbstreferenz' zu sein. [...] [N]ur das bis zur Unkenntlichkeit Verdichtete, Verknotete oder Übermalte eines 'Punktes' [...] *vraiment obscure*. Deshalb 'schwindelt' es bei Proust immer um einen Punkt, der nicht schlicht 'leer', sondern von undurchdringlicher Opazität ist und trotzdem nichts enthält [...]; die literarische Bestimmung dieses Punktes *in* der Krise wird zu einer Frage nicht der Erfahrung, sondern der Benennung, die sich aber den Figuren der Erfahrung bedient, um Benennung nur vorzutauschen.“

explore the problem of confrontation between the abysmal *obscurité* as implemented in passion on the one hand and the structure of the narrated world, the world Julie and Saint-Preux live in, on the other. This confrontation is insinuated in Julie's reaction to Saint-Preux's love (I, 3):

"O Julie! je le vois avec amertume, mes plaintes troublent votre repos. [...] [T]out décèle à mon cœur attentif vos agitations secrètes. Vos yeux deviennent sombres, rêveurs, fixés en terre; quelques regards égarés s'échappent sur moi; vos vives couleurs fanent; une pâleur étrangère couvre vos joues; la gaieté vous abandonne; une tristesse mortelle vous accable."³¹

Julie's response to Saint-Preux's blind passion implies a secret reality, namely that of the disturbing love-wound, which works as "agitations secrètes." Julie's being in love, however, does not gain a conceptual value of its own, but is stated exclusively by its effects on her behavior. These effects evolve metaphorically as a darkening or shadowing of vital substance, such as Julie's usual vivacity and cheerfulness, into dream and mournfulness, as well as a darkening of her open view that is also deviated. The love-wound is thus present *ex negativo*, but undeniably initiating a dynamic of absorbing vitality, of alienating familiar meaning. In this respect, we can also observe that the wound actually requires additional concepts that provide semantic space to describe the darkening effects: "sombres," "rêveurs," "pâleur étrangère," "tristesse mortelle," "accabler". These effects of the wound insinuate a reality of dissimulation from Julie's side. She obviously intends to hide the disturbing secret of having a love-wound and its darkening effects from those around her.

31 Rousseau, *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, pp. 10-11.

Julie has to conceal her trouble because it is incompatible with the paternalistic society, represented by her father, Baron d'Étange. From the very beginning of the love-plot, the necessity of concealing inner feelings is interwoven with the gradual evolution of passion. The conspiratorial strategy to hide the love-affair and correspondence with Saint-Preux from Julie's parents even serves as the motivator for the plot to continue. Sometimes this hiddenness grows into real dissimulation, passion effectuating such a 'carnevalistic' change of concepts. For example, the first kiss in the forest of Clarens intensifies the passion between the two and leads to Saint-Preux's sudden departure for Valais. This departure motivated by love, however, has to be masked as urgent business Saint-Preux supposedly has to do in Sion (I, 15): "Tout cela doit être fait naturellement et sans aucune apparence de mystère."³² Nature becomes mere appearance.

The strategy of hiding, dissimulation and mask is obviously born out of the fact, that the paternalistic society establishes a highly vigilant regime of visibility. The Baron d'Étange defends the ideology of evident truth as something to be seen in the sanctified meaning of ethical and corporative notions such as *honnêteté* and *bienséance*.³³ These social values, considered as truth, inform the untouchable, highly meaningful and clear words of D'Étange's authority to block the passionate love of his daughter to a non-aristocratic man, once critically stated by Bomston as "la parole irrévocable"³⁴ (III,1). Significantly, the Baron rejects Saint-Preux as a *bel esprit*, a "diseur de riens"³⁵ (I, 63).

The paternalistic authority, provider and foundation of the society's ethics, is attributed as having permanently open eyes and ears.

32 Ibid., p. 40.

33 See for example *ibid.*, pp. 148, 330.

34 Ibid., p. 290.

35 Ibid., p. 148.

It is obsessed with reading and interpreting signs by using indexical codes: “On soupçonne, on conjecture, on nomme.”³⁶ Julie also often refers to her position with respect to her parents as “sous leurs yeux”³⁷ or “sous les yeux d’une mère”³⁸ and emphasizes the danger for her and Saint-Preux if they would stay together in the country: “[...]... [D]u moins on l’aurait soupçonné, ... L’indiscrète avidité du présent nous ôtait toute ressource pour l’avenir.”³⁹

The question of how to handle the semantic otherness of love within the regime of visibility and in light of its moral codes structures the central conflict in *Julie*. The fact that the legitimation of passionate love can be noticed as a powerful structural reality in the novel indicates the unsatiable desire of the protagonists to communicate their feelings to each other by any means, to provide their abysmal love-wound with supplemental meaning. In this respect, substitutive places are to be found where the obscured semantic of love as required by the love-wound can come into its right and thus gain a reality.

These substitutive places represent the essential moments in the topographical structure of the *histoire* (as formed from the letters) where the obscured passion is exposed to the reader. Such places are, for example, the little forest where Saint-Preux and Julie have their first kiss (I, 14) or the chalet near the source of the Vervaise (I, 36), Fanchon’s place (I, 53), or Julie’s closet (I, 54). Significantly, these places in the narrated reality give secret room to the semantic fluctuations of *obscurité*. These abysmal places are evoked by different means as in-between zones whose topography seems to have adopted the character of thresholds, declaring the ambiguity of definite

36 Ibid., p. 147.

37 Ibid., p. 89.

38 Ibid., p. 118.

39 Ibid., p. 97.

functions, times and states of mind. These places are – even though they are still quite legible on the conceptual level – melting hotspots where several semantic layers are activated at the same time. For instance, the first kiss takes place at sunset in the welcome darkness of the little forest: “le soleil commence à baisser, nous fuyons tous trois dans le bois le reste de ses rayons.”⁴⁰ The kiss itself is articulated as a *blanc* that curiously ambiguates Claire, the first and substitutive aspirant to receive it, and Julie, the actual beloved and real agent, in a sort of game that in the end remains opaque for the reader, only indicated by gestures, mutual regards and Claire’s mocking attitude, “un air plaisamment suppliant.”⁴¹ Furthermore, the chalet, usually serving as a place for hunters, is attributed the additional function of a love nest, the dairymaids turning out to be matchmakers who are familiar with the love-secret. Julie adds another intertextual layer by introducing Montesquieu’s ‘temple of Gnide,’ the very place where two separated lovers come together under Venus’s protection.⁴² The setting of the chalet near the source of the Vervaise indicate additionally the permanent fluctuation of sense, corresponding with the notion of the love-wound that Saint-Preux has earlier compared with a spring (I,1).⁴³ Furthermore, the hedges and a nearby forest imply a borderline of the protected area and block the direct view, dedicating the place merely to the “auspices” of mother nature, “mère commune.”⁴⁴ This setting subtly establishes an internal difference in the concept of nature: nature as conceptualized by the vigilant society and nature as something that integrates passion and corresponds to it, in other words: Romantic nature.

40 Ibid., p. 38.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., pp. 87-88.

43 Ibid., p. 7.

44 Ibid., p. 88.

AT THE END OF REALITY: JULIE'S DILEMMA AS A PLATFORM
FOR *OBSCURITÉ*

The conflict in *Julie* comes to a decisive moment when the paternalistic authority ends the real relationship of Julie and Saint-Preux in I, 63.⁴⁵ The dispute between the Baron d'Étange, Julie's mother and Julie herself illustrates the ethical values that the father promotes as a mouthpiece of society: "l'honneur d'une maison."⁴⁶ The father's role is to maintain order which is undeniably connected to this notion of honor and obviously threatened by Julie's unnatural relationship: "[...] [Il] fera pis encore si je n'y mets ordre: mais je veillerai [...] aux soins que vous [= la mère de Julie] remplissez si mal."⁴⁷ The last phase of the dispute illustrates the potential violence of the social system and its regime of visibility. The darkening dynamics of passion and blind furor seem to invade and undermine the prominent pattern of sensibility, such as the harmonious love among all family members. Just as in the pattern of virtue, a turning point is inscribed in the plain evidence of paternal love, in its perfect form of overwhelming care for the daughter, with the result that the concept starts to oscillate unpredictably between tenderness and hidden cruelty.

At the same time, the potential for violence as illustrated – even though it is rejected by the father himself as being Saint-Preux's fault – serves to affirm the untouchable authority of the father's words and to build the very tragic moment, which is Julie's dilemma. Because of their potential cruelty, Baron d'Étange's irrevocable words are empowered to create a new reality. His words figure as a performative speech act that definitely finishes the relationship between the two lovers and interdicts the natural (direct) speech, the *parole* between them in real encounters: "Je vous défends de le voir

45 Ibid., pp. 147-153.

46 Ibid., p. 148.

47 Ibid.

et de lui parler de votre vie, et cela autant pour la sûreté de la sienne que pour votre honneur.”⁴⁸

After the dispute, Julie confesses her inner situation to Claire (I, 63):

“Je ne puis bien te dire quelle évolution s’est faite en moi, mais depuis ce moment je me trouve changée; il me semble que je tourne les yeux avec plus de regret sur l’heureux temps où je vivais tranquille et contente au sein de ma famille [...]. Dis, cruelle, dis-le-moi, si tu l’oses, le temps de l’amour serait-il passé, et faut-il ne se plus revoir? Ah! sens-tu bien tout ce qu’il y a de sombre et d’horrible dans cette funeste idée? Cependant l’ordre de mon père est précis, le danger de mon amant est certain. [...] Sais-tu ce qui résulte en moi de tant de mouvements opposés qui s’entre-détruisent? Une sorte de stupidité qui me rend l’âme presque insensible, et ne me laisse l’usage ni des passions, ni de la raison.”⁴⁹

D’Étange’s performative speech act actually creates the platform that exposes to Julie the abysmal reality of *obscurité*. The protagonist, confronted with the claim of the paternal authority as well as with the claim of her unsatiable desire for Saint-Preux, experiences a position of existential uncertainty *between* the times and *between* familiar feelings. This existential uncertainty is reflected by syntactical and lexical means that indicate the openness of the situation, that it is inaccessible to epistemological reach (“Je ne puis bien te dire”), and has a diffuse ontological status (“il me semble”). Julie’s continued questions accentuate her position of being ‘between,’ as if she was looking from an alienated outside in at the happy time that she had with her parents as well as her happy time with Saint-Preux,

48 Ibid., p. 151.

49 Ibid., p. 152.

not knowing which one of the two periods is over. In contrast to the irrevocable reality of evident and deducible truth that her father represents and which is indicated by the only statement clause in this passage (“Cependant l’ordre de mon père est précis, le danger de mon amant est certain.”), she is unable to deduce a clear action (“résulter”) from her affective status, as it is permanently shaken by a self-refuting dynamic. This dynamic is the very center of the painful dilemma Julie is entangled in: Her love to her family will destroy her love to Saint-Preux; her love to Saint-Preux will cut her off from her family and expose him to the danger of social discredit as well. The dilemmatic situation cannot be mastered by any of Julie’s abilities; neither reason nor passion would help.

Julie’s letter accentuates her ‘position between’ as a blank inner situation in the center of changing notions that are swirling around her in a restless syntactical movement (“l’heureux temps,” “tranquille,” “contente,” “temps de l’amour,” “l’ordre de mon père,” “danger de mon amant”) without being able to signify her very own status. Rousseau depicts a situation that cannot be easily forced into categorical order: that is, a darkened situation that cannot follow the logical channels to becoming clear, evident and captured by the forces of lightful reason – all the procedures usually acting in the regime of visibility. In the dilemma and its contradictory, indissoluble nature rather exerts the power of *obscurité*, the spring-like, self-refuting dynamic of giving and escaping signification. Claire states (II, 5): “[...] ici, quelque parti que tu prennes, la nature l’autorise et le condamne, la raison le blâme et l’approuve, le devoir se tait ou s’oppose à lui-même.”⁵⁰ Facing this threshold-like ambivalence as effected by escaping sense, Julie in fact states that she is “au bord de l’abîme.” (I,

50 Ibid., p. 178.

65)⁵¹ A kind of dumbness (“stupidité”⁵²) or blindness are attributed to her inability to find the way out of the dilemma, or to deduce an evident result, indicating the validity of abysmal ambivalence: “[...] je ne fais que flotter entre des passions contraires: ma faible cœur n’a plus que le choix de ses fautes; et tel est mon déplorable aveuglement.”⁵³ The virtual, but existent reality of the abysmal love-wound figures in this dilemma, builds it up and – in the very difficulty of being blocked by the tyranny of paternalistic love and the interdiction of the “parole naturelle”⁵⁴ – claims its right for supplemental meaning.

MEILLERIE OR LEAVING THE *ABÎME*: LOVE-PASSION AND ITS AFTER-LIFE IN AREAS OF ONTOLOGICAL DIFFUSION

In this dilemma, it seems significant that Julie rejects Bomston’s offer to follow him to Yorkshire and marry Saint-Preux there, where no social prejudice would prevent them from living out their destiny for each other (II, 6).⁵⁵ That would simply be too easy a solution for Rousseau.

Instead, Julie’s rejection of the obvious legitimation of her love empowers the narrative space that illustrates how she manages *with-in* the regime of visibility, how she finds supplemental meaning as required by her love-wound to validate the darkened semantics that love needs to communicate itself. We will see the extent to which Julie’s capacity to handle her dilemma within the regime of visibility a) leads to Rousseau’s position as a pre-Romanticist and b) can serve as an illustration of the literary capacity of the epistolary novel itself.

51 Ibid., p. 158.

52 Ibid., p. 193.

53 Ibid., p. 177.

54 See Derrida, “ce dangereux supplément ...,” p. 207.

55 Ibid., p. 183-186.

The dilemma finally engenders Julie's decision as expressed in her letter to Bomston (II, 6): "Va, donc, douce chimère d'une âme sensible, ...! va te perdre dans la nuit des songes; tu n'auras plus de réalité pour moi."⁵⁶

This decision can be regarded as a performative speech act. It corresponds to the father's performative speech act that forbade Julie's love in actual presence or reality. Julie's appeal empowers the dynamic of a transformation process. It can be understood as an attempt to domesticate the abysmal dynamic of *différance* by forcing it into legitimate concepts. The transformation process is initialized in Julie's apostrophic address of passion as mere imagination ("chimère"), a significant change of concepts that activates the dispersing of love from the intrafictitious reality ("plus de réalité", "se perdre") and entitles it to the dark area of dreams. Julie's apostrophe thus implies a conceptual transformation in the course of which the unconceivable semantics of passion are transferred into imaginative areas of ontological diffusion, such as dream, but also remembrance, mournfulness and nostalgia. On the semiotic level, this transformation process means that *obscurité*, as delivered and requested by the love-wound, gets into the scope of notions that already and legitimately provide semantic diffusion by the concept itself. To this transformation process that implies a semiotic dynamic of semantic substitution, Saint-Preux refers in his complaint after cherishing Julie's amulet that brings him back the mere illusion of her presence (II, 24): "O douces illusions, o chimères! dernières ressources des malheureux! ah! s'il se peut, tenez-nous lieu de réalité! Vous êtes quelque chose encore à ceux pour qui le bonheur n'est plus rien."⁵⁷

56 Ibid., p. 185.

57 Ibid., p. 268.

Passion that cannot gain value in reality reaches out to these thresholds of consciousness as its “ressources,” that – mostly implementing the time-factor – provide passion with a kind of legitimate after-life. These threshold states do not dispose of a substance of their own but are states *between* rational categories and patterns of evidence, grey-zones of mere semantic relativity, that are nourished from a past, original experience; this experience is then worked over and over again by imagination. In contrast to the rigid, crystallizing ontology of reason, the thresholded areas are marked by a soft ontology, as I would call it following the notion of the text (“douces chimères”), and use a shadow-like phenomenology. That way the presence of love and unconceivable passion is revalidated in a legitimate conceptual ‘outfit.’ To exemplify the process of transformative sublimation that the darkened love semantics have to undergo in the regime of visibility, I will have a closer look at Saint-Preux’s and Julie’s stay in Meillierie as described in Saint-Preux’s letter to Bomston (IV, 17).⁵⁸

After the turbulent boat ride over Lake Geneva, Julie and Saint-Preux are forced to land at Meillierie. This place is depicted as containing a special signification for Saint-Preux because he stayed there ten years before as an ‘expatriate’ after he had to leave Julie’s home. The letter – thus introducing two time-levels – describes Saint-Preux’s attempt to reignite the past passion and to validate it in the presence of the actual encounter with Julie by using the metonymical power of the place: “En les revoyant moi-même après si longtemps, j’éprouvai combien la présence des objets peut ranimer puissamment les sentiments violents dont on fut agité près d’eux.”⁵⁹

58 Ibid., pp. 497-505.

59 Ibid., p. 502.

But Saint-Preux's attempt fails. The failure illustrates not only the deviating dynamic of the conceptual transformation that passion has to undergo, but it also shows the contours of the shadow of passion and its pre-Romantic appearance. With regard to Saint-Preux's appeals to activate the metonymical dynamic of the place, it seems significant that the letter exposes the particularly textual outfit of the passion once experienced there: Saint-Preux presents Julie's old monogram on the trees as an auratic lettering that seems to incorporate her; furthermore, there are the verses of Petrarca and Tasso that are written all over the place and finally the trees and the pebbles integrated in this process of producing the textuality of love and thus gaining a semantics of writing material.⁶⁰ This focus on the textual dimension of love seems to point to the deeper intention of Saint-Preux's letter, namely its contentual and structural culminating point, the exposure of the *abîme* of meaning (as enacted by the obscurity of love) and of its transtemporal power. The affirmed textual dimension of love indicates the very supplemental character of love as a *written letter*, that forever attempts to regain the fleeing semantics and thus is necessarily involved in the differential dynamics of a permanent *mise en abîme*, an endless postponement of the final meaning into mirror-like reflections. Saint-Preux's insatiable desire to provide the love-wound with endless supplemental meaning, as visible in his previous writing at the place and on the place, is then projected towards his natural environment (still on the former time-level), as he once confronted the real abyss near his writing-place: "voilà le bord où d'un œil avide et sombre je mesurais la profondeur de ces abîmes."⁶¹ The attractive power of the abyss requesting meaning and at the same time abolishing it, this devouring, source-like abyss

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

seems to have a seductive force on Saint-Preux to experience the fascinating *anéantissement* of all meaning as a kind of freedom: the freedom from the necessity of being meaningful and readable at any means, and finally to deliver oneself to death – evoking Derrida's "mort [...] [,] mouvement de la différence."⁶²

The metonymical power of the place is then evolved to engender the threatening situation of a re-entering of the attractive abysmal passion into the actual present, Saint-Preux's encounter with Julie (on the second time-level). For as he remembers the intense attraction of the abîme, Saint-Preux approaches it anew (on the second time-level), as in an involuntary attempt to validate its abysmal dynamic immediately.⁶³ But significantly, Julie intervenes: "[M]ais Julie, qui, me voyant approcher du bord, s'était effrayée et m'avait saisi la main, la serra sans mot dire en me regardant avec tendresse et retenant avec peine un soupir."⁶⁴ The de-escalation of the situation is due to the performative force of Julie's former speech act that expelled passion from reality. For in the regime of visibility, there is no *real* place for unconceivable love. From this perspective, Julie's gesture is not the sign of tender love, but is rather to be understood as a deviating gesture that turns the exposed passion into a legitimate conceptual after-life, illustrating Saint-Preux's words: "ces temps, ces temps heureux ne sont plus [...]; et nous vivons."⁶⁵

The detour that Julie initiates is the starting point of the transformative process that the concept of love undergoes at the letter's end. Rousseau depicts a scene in which several attributes indicate the upcoming romantic setting and state of mind. This setting seems to be generated as a result of the fact that unconceivable passion is

62 Derrida, "ce dangereux supplément ...," p. 206.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., p. 504.

not allowed to live in visibility and reality, but cannot die either, and thus adopts and appropriates the realms of reality that are provided legitimately by the notion of semantic dilution and ambiguity: Day-dreaming, remembrance and melancholy, shadowed negatives of passion as condemned to live ‘in limbo’ on the very threshold and at the margin of bright reason.

In this context, referring to Le Tourneur, one of the first interpreters of *romantisme* in late 18th century, André Monglond signifies the *romantique* as “l’incommunicable dans les impressions” of a landscape and leads it to the state of *mélancolie*.⁶⁶ This state catches the very escaping moment between present and past, implying remembrance and developed as the painful impression of the vaguely contoured after-life of former happiness. The pre-Romantic perception is marked by this experience of not being allowed to live the inconceivableness of love and cannot help but project this desire to the outside nature. Structures of infinity, of abysmal *obscurité* are implemented in the natural environment.⁶⁷ *Obscurité* seems to be inherent in the “contact immédiat avec un lointain passé.”⁶⁸ The pre-Romantic perception thus develops the *mystère* of the landscape.⁶⁹ By imagination, the remembrance engenders the dark semantic reverse of a euphoric outer datum (for example the song of a bird), that even raises melancholy and *tristesse*. With this connections in mind, let us look at the following passage (IV, 17):

“Insensiblement la lune se leva, l’eau devint plus calme, et Julie me proposa de partir. Je lui donnai la main pour entrer dans le bateau; et, en m’asseyant à côté d’elle, je ne songai plus à quitter sa main. Nous

66 See Monglond, *Le Prérromantisme Français*, p. 111.

67 Ibid., p. 123.

68 Ibid., p. 121.

69 See also ibid., pp. 123-126.

gardions un profond silence. Le bruit égale et mesuré des rames m'excitait à rêver. Le chant assez gai des bécassines, me retraçant les plaisirs d'un autre âge, au lieu de m'égayer, m'attristait. Peu à peu je sentis augmenter la mélancolie dont j'étais accablé. Un ciel serein, les doux rayons de la lune, le frémissent argenté dont l'eau brillait autour de nous, le concours des plus agréables sensations [...] rien ne put détourner de mon cœur mille réflexions douloureuses."⁷⁰

The essential elements of the scene as presented in Saint-Preux's letter seem to be anticipated in Jean-Marie Morel's *Théorie des Jardins* (1776).⁷¹ André Monglond has extrapolated these attributes indicating a pre-Romantic landscape that inclines towards mysterious characteristics, such as solitude, calmness, and deep sentiment.⁷² The parameters of infinity inscribed into the structure of those mysterious landscapes, indicated by the permanent flowing of water (for example of a river or a creek), but also by the oscillating (often: moon) light on the surface of water as well as the hiddenness of the place that is at some point shielded from an outside area:

"[...] Morel ménage son clair de lune. Il lui [= Morel] faut [...] les eaux d'un lac ou d'une paisible rivière. Ailleurs, les rayons, se glissant et s'échappant à travers le feuillage [...]. La surface tranquille d'un lac augmente le calme d'une scène paisible et rend plus mélancolique une perspective qui l'est déjà. [...] [L]es eaux [...] [c]oulant entre des arbres touffus qui les noircissent de leur ombre."⁷³

70 Rousseau, *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, p. 503.

71 See Jean-Marie Morel, *Théorie des Jardins*, First ed. (Paris: Pissot, 1776).

72 See Monglond, *Le Prérromantisme Français*, pp. 116-119.

73 Ibid., pp. 118-119.



FIGURE 2: Charles-Édouard Crespy le Prince, *Promenade de Julie et Saint-Preux sur le lac de Genève* (1824)

Returning to our letter, we can observe that even Julie's presence seems to have lost its power. Saint-Preux prefers her absence and the hope of seeing her even more than an actual encounter. The dynamic of transfer disregards reality and empowers imagination. The insatiable, unfulfilled desire is thus validated as self-sufficient affect. Despair and furor are turned into wistfulness and peculiar peace, described by Monglond as "incertitude délicate,"⁷⁴ and evoking Julie's de-escalating gesture as an operator of the change of concepts:

"Là mes vives agitations commencèrent à prendre un autre cours; un sentiment plus doux s'insinua peu à peu dans mon âme, l'attendrissement surmonta le désespoir, je me mis à verser des torrents de larmes, et cet état, comparé à celui dont je sortais, n'était pas sans quelques plaisirs."⁷⁵

Even though the dynamic of transferring the unconceivable love-affect and its darkened semantics into legitimate areas of

74 Ibid., p. 122.

75 Rousseau, *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, p. 504.

ontological diffusion and evident concepts has been intensively explored, in particular by Starobinski, the analytical focus of this perspective mostly remains on the level of the narrated world and presupposes the intact concept.⁷⁶ My argument, however, will now focus on the rhetorical dimension of the text and its strategies to provide the possibility of refuge for the unconceivable passion. The correlation of letter-writing and abysmal dynamic, as seen in the passage of Meillerie, seems to require a focus on the abysmal dynamics that are anchored in the letter-text itself, which Derrida pointed out to be the “*dérobement dans la parole*.”⁷⁷

UNDER WOLMAR'S *ŒIL VIVANT*

The regime of visibility as established at Julie's home is continued after her marriage. The efforts to read from the very bottom of the heart in order to find evident truth is even intensified in the direct communication and the observational atmosphere of Wolmar's household that seems to raise the didactic purposes of Enlightened anthropology to an almost hygienic attitude. The starting point of this regime of visibility is indicated by the union between the three protagonists created by Wolmar himself (IV, 6):

“Alors, prenant la main de sa femme et la mienne, il me dit en la serrant: ‘Notre amitié commence; en voici le cher lien; qu’elle soit indissoluble. Embrassez votre sœur et votre amie; traitez-la toujours comme telle; plus vous serez familier avec elle; mieux je penserai de vous. Mais vivez dans le tête-à-tête comme si j’étais présent, ou devant moi comme si je n’y étais pas: voilà tout ce que je vous demande.’”⁷⁸

76 See Jean Starobinski, *La Transparence et l'Obstacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), esp. chapt. V, pp. 113-148.

77 Derrida, “ce dangereux supplément ...,” p. 203.

78 Rousseau, *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, p. 406.

The holding of hands establishes the regime of visibility with Wolmar at its very center, validating complete openness and authenticity (“franchise,” “sincérité,” “vertu”⁷⁹) and the banishment of any secret or mystery:

“[...] [N]e fais ni ne dis jamais rien que tu ne veuilles que tout le monde voie et entende; et, pour moi, j’ai toujours regardé comme le plus estimable des hommes ce Romain qui voulait que sa maison fût construite de manière qu’on vît tout ce qui s’y faisait.”⁸⁰

Transparency of all actions, thoughts, and hearts should be accomplished. Wolmar’s household, its highly elaborate order of work and social events and its economic organization, carefully managed and nourished by didactical ambition, enacts this regime of visibility as an impressive system. Its ethical profile and carefully established structures make it seem unassailable. Its secret and relentless power is based on its monstrous integrity: There are no dark spots, no obscure coins that haven’t been considered yet; there is complete presence and Enlightened transparency.

The union of friendship anticipates the ideology of presence and transparency that also informs the relationship between Julie and Saint-Preux. So Saint-Preux points out: “Je commençais de connaître alors à quel homme j’avais affaire, et je résolus bien de tenir toujours mon cœur en état d’être vu de lui.”⁸¹ Henceforth Wolmar, the doctor-like observer, is the unavoidable third between the two, the witness who reads permanently to the bottom of their hearts and makes evident what is hidden and obscure.⁸² He watches over the

79 Ibid., p. 406.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid., p. 407.

82 See the fundamental study of Jean Starobinski regarding this constellation, Jean Starobinski,

validity of the sanctified concepts “sœur” and “amie” that he prescribed for Saint-Preux’s relationship with Julie and tries to maintain the semantic hygiene of their relationship.

The profanation of the grove as initiated by Wolmar illustrates his rigid practice of making evident. The repetition of the kiss in the presence of Julie’s husband (IV, 12) prostitutes the unconceivableness of love, brutally clarifies the unattainable abîme of its signification and exposes it to a presence and evidence that immediately kills the vital moment of its supplemental nature.⁸³ And Julie can actually admit, concerning the second kiss (whereas the original one remains unmentioned): “Ce baiser n’eut rien de celui qui m’avait rendu le bosquet redoutable.”⁸⁴ From this point of view, tyranny and inflexibility turns out to be the semantic reverse of Wolmar’s smiling *francheté* and perfect ethics.

THE ‘THIRD BETWEEN’ AS A PATHWAY FOR THE RHETORIC OF THE LETTER

Saint-Preux’s referring to a third between him and Julie can open another perspective: “[...] [J]’aspire toujours à voir un tiers entre nous.”⁸⁵ might allude to the Derridean ‘work of the *supplément*,’ which means that the unsatiable desire effectuated by the love-wound gains supplemental meaning and can be communicated to the beloved despite the system of evidence and by blocking its penetrating force. The undeniable third party might then indicate a hidden pathway for the darkened semantics of love in the hard ontology of Wolmar’s evidenced reality, a third *between the concepts* that are explicitly evoked by the written text. This third dynamic might be

L’œil vivant (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), pp. 91-188, esp. pp. 119-124.

83 Ibid., pp. 473-479.

84 Ibid., p. 479.

85 Ibid., p. 407.

created by the letter-text, but is not readable as its literal, evident meaning that would be within the visible scope of Wolmar's reading eye. Instead, this third might be a mere voice, not tied to a corporeal letter-body, but lacking a semantic substance, existing as a mere relation between evoked concepts, a shadow-like phenomenon of *obscurité*, a glimmering moment or semantic *ambivalence*. To this 'semiotic' transformation-process Saint-Preux's statement about passion's remaining quality, but changing form might also relate: "Tout ce que je sais très certainement, c'est que si mes sentiments pour elle n'ont pas changé d'espèce, ils ont au moins bien changé de forme; que j'aspire toujours à voir un tiers entre nous [...]." ⁸⁶ The specter of unconceivable passion flits through the text, being/not being the opaque third between writer and addressee/reader, constituting the essential level of communication in the rhetorics of the text. From this point of view, Saint-Preux's fright after his nightmare is significant as it reflects the scepter-like phenomenon of *obscurité* on the level of the *histoire*. The lover's past passion seems to be transferred to a kind of after-life and surrounds him like a demon complaining about its lost existence (V, 9):

"À ce dernier réveil ma terreur fut si forte que je ne la pus vaincre étant éveillé. Je me jette à bas de mon lit sans savoir ce que je faisais. Je mets à errer par la chambre, effrayé comme un enfant des ombres de la nuit, croyant me voir environné de fantômes, et l'oreille encore frappée de cette voix plaintive dont je n'entendis jamais le son sans émotion. [...] [J]e m'enfuis de ma chambre." ⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 604.

The implementation of the isotope of the specter anticipates the generative dynamic as effectuated by the paradigm of visibility: The hidden forces of unconceivable meaning, not allowed in the regime of visibility and its ideology of evidence, visible truth, and readability of the heart all survive as textual *phenomena*. This rhetorical effect can also be attributed to the pre-Romantic fascination of the undead, the dark side of nature, the mysterious, and the specter-like.

JULIE'S TRACE OF LOVE: VIRTUOUS RENOUNCEMENT AND EMPOWERMENT OF THE *ABÎME*

In order to further legitimate the rhetorical dimension of the text, as insinuated in Saint-Preux's unsatiable desire to see the third, Julie's renouncement of her love for Saint-Preux is informative as well (II, 6): "[...] oubliez vos aimables projets, et qu'il n'en reste de trace qu'au fond d'un cœur trop reconnaissant pour en perdre le souvenir."⁸⁸ The official reading of this appeal is that it is a renunciation or self-denial. It seems quite honorable within the regime of visibility and virtue, that passionate love is overcome and has left behind nothing more than a mere trace. On the other hand, this trace is treacherous as it actually indicates an empowerment of *obscurité* by *mise en abîme*. The trace necessarily associates the love-wound that is itself a trace of the initial falling in love and that is the (*quasi*-original) motivator of the whole letter-writing as a mere trace: the written letter figures as a mere signifier that requires endless signification, an unfathomable semantic *abîme*. All letters are then to have a rhetorical dimension to their meaning, a powerful rhetoric that Derrida estimated as the "désaisissement spéculaire qui [...] opère comme une puissance de mort au cœur de la parole vive."⁸⁹ Julie's act of renunciation turns

88 Ibid., p. 185.

89 Derrida, "ce dangereux supplément ...," p. 204.

out to be an act of empowerment that validates the wound and legitimates a lecture that focuses on ambivalences – the very moments in which the unconceivableness of love and its abysmal *obscurité* find a refuge.

CLARENS REVISITED: THE AMBIVALENCE BETWEEN FRIENDSHIP AND LOVE

In order to illustrate the dynamic of *obscurité* that works on the rhetorical level of the text and constitutes the essential level of communication between writer, addressee, and reader, I have chosen Saint-Preux's letter to Bomston, which describes the first encounter after Julie's marriage with Wolmar (IV, 6):

“A peine Julie m'eut-elle aperçu qu'elle me reconnut. A l'instant, me voir, s'écrier, courir, s'élancer dans mes bras, ne fut pour elle qu'une même chose. A ce son de voix je me sens tressaillir; je me retourne, je la vois, je la sens. O milord! ô mon ami ... je ne puis parler ... Adieu crainte; adieu terreur, effroi, respect humain. Son regard, son cri, son geste, me rendent en un moment la confiance, le courage, et les forces. Je puise dans ses bras la chaleur et la vie; je pétillie de joie en la serrant dans les miens. Un transport sacré nous tient dans un long silence étroitement embrassés, et ce n'est qu'après un si doux saisissement que nos voix commencent à se confondre et nos yeux à mêler leurs pleurs. M. de Wolmar était là; je le savais, je le voyais, mais qu'aurais-je pu voir? Non, quand l'univers entier se fût réuni contre moi, quand l'appareil des tourments m'eût environné, je n'aurais pas dérobé mon cœur à la moindre de ces caresses, tendres prémices d'une amitié pure et sainte que nous emporterons dans le ciel!”⁹⁰

90 Rousseau, *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, pp. 402-403.

Saint-Preux's letter to Bomston depicts the encounter by subtly implementing a semantic layer that evokes the old passion and that makes it difficult, in the end, to identify the real nature of this reunification, which oscillates between the notions of friendship and love. The letter thus seems to deliberately obscure the transparency of the writing, to darken its meaning so that to the reader (to the real one as well as to the intradiegetic one, Bomston) passion remains a possible reality to be communicated.

Julie's first reaction in this encounter contains the germ of articulating the old love, as evoked in particular by her first seeing of Saint-Preux. This first sighting differs from the sightings in the regime of visibility: "À l'instant, me voir, s'écrier, courir, s'élancer dans mes bras, ne fut pour elle qu'une même chose." In contrast to the analytical and sober seeing in the regime of visibility that tries to gain evident knowledge of the object of its vision, Julie's seeing of Saint-Preux 'was all in one' with her screaming for joy, running towards him, and embracing him. Julie's seeing motivates her action and is thus the essential element of affective recognition: "[...] elle me reconnut." The sentimental topos of recognition undeniably brings along a treacherous temporal moment, as recognizing Saint-Preux after ten years seems – in the very epistemological structure of the re-identification – to evoke metonymically the passionate time itself that Saint-Preux has originated by his being. In the following, this retrospective temporal moment is evolved and is sent to the text-surface: "je me retourne, je la vois, je la sens." By using the present tense the text not only eliminates the posteriority of the letter-writing but furthermore – given the temporal moment as implemented before by the element of recognition – curiously seems to activate the presence of the past love itself. By this strategy, the concept of 'retourner' gains additional semantic aspects. It not only signifies Saint-Preux's spatial movement, but also his movement in time, backwards to happier

days. The concept actually oscillates between two categories, that of moving in space and that of moving in time; and so the following: “je la vois, je la sens” – simultaneously plays on the level of presence and past. This ambivalence that darkens the meaning of the written text announce the *obscurité* as governed by passion and its distracting, explosive dynamics that tear and request the semantic scope of concepts and escape from final signification, from being signified at all. Corresponding to this dynamic, Saint-Preux’s writing turns to a mere stumbling: “O milord! ô mon ami ... je ne puis parler ...”

Following this a certain disinhibition takes place framed by the act of disintegrating the encounter out of social conventions and human understanding: “Adieu crainte; adieu terreur, effroi, respect humain.” The letter evokes a quasi-platonic communion between Julie and her lover, who drinks from her pure life. This forceful fluctuation between the two lovers which constitutes a sort of isolation alludes to the fluctuation of all sense and meaning that is effectuated by mutual passion.

The text further ambiguates the meaning of this embrace. The inner communion that takes place is described as “transport sacré.” The attribut “sacré,” already used to signify the “nœuds sacrés” of marriage,⁹¹ suggests the outstanding passion to be legitimate and indissoluble by any human or social claims. But this profile of the affection between the two protagonists obviously runs counter to the reality of Julie’s actual marriage, which is indicated by Wolmar’s presence (“M. de Wolmar était là.”) So one questions how the “transport sacré,” especially Julie’s, can take place at all under Wolmar’s eye without being discredited. The suspicion of unreliability – the darkening intermingling of the concepts of “transport sacré” and “amitié” – is thus based on the very structure of the situation itself

91 Ibid., p. 414.

as presented by Saint-Preux's letter. Is Julie's inner affection towards Saint-Preux true, or is it merely Saint-Preux's imaginative exaggeration? Can it be passion in the presence of Wolmar who does not disapprove of the embrace or intervene? Is it then just friendship? But if so, how can the obvious inner participation of Julie be explained, merely by Saint-Preux's imagination? This seems improbable, too. In any case, there remains a semantic grey-zone between passion and friendship, a contradictory dynamic that is continued till the end of the paragraph. The reality of true love and blind passion is there confronted with Wolmar's actual reality, the reality of observation, and this by Saint-Preux's question: "[J]e le savais, je le voyais, mais qu'aurais-je pu voir?" The contradictory dynamic effectuated by *obscurité* structures the surface of the text and incarnates as the obvious logical break of seeing and not seeing at the same time. At that point, the concept of passion seems to stabilize, but is darkened anew when Saint-Preux himself evokes the profile of "amitié" in the end in a sort of pathetic summary of the state of affection between him and Julie: "tendres prémices d'une amitié pure et sainte que nous emporterons dans le ciel!" Mere "amitié" is barely convincing as a fitting concept, given the previous implementing and representation of attributes of blind passion during the encounter. And Julie's attribute for the relationship ("Quoiqu'il soit mon ancien ami [...]")⁹² which is that of a friend, suffers the same discreditation.

This short interpretation might illustrate the textual strategies that darken the transparency of single concepts and whole text passages, starting on a microscopic level, in order to create a level of improper meaning or unreliability of the textual messages. The rhetorical dimension of the text provides a hidden pathway for the unconceivableness of the love-passion.

92 Ibid., p. 403.

JULIE'S ELYSÉE AND THE HIDDEN VOICE OF PASSION

There are other examples of semantic ambiguity deliberately created by the text, as in Saint-Preux's letter to Bomston that describes Julie's Elysée (IV, 11).⁹³ From the very beginning of his letter, Saint-Preux tries to stylize the garden as a secret place that blurs the categories of time and space and introduces its visitor into a different reality that reflects a kind of illusionary space, like a spectacle.⁹⁴ On the one hand, the spectacle as accessible in the garden is the spectacle of nature. Julie, who created the garden with Wolmar's assistance, has carefully fashioned and corrected nature by cultivating the meadows and planting the trees. The purpose is to reveal the unique variety, truthfulness, and innocence of nature, exposed in the arrangement of domestic plants and herbs and the composition of garden flowers and wild flowers.⁹⁵ Saint-Preux's letter uses expressions of admiration and disbelief regarding these thoughtful gardening-plans that seem to be born out of the innocent care for nature, selfless love, and respect for the sublime natural order – modeling the spectacle of virtue and mere naturalness having come to its right.⁹⁶ In Saint-Preux's detailed description of the Elysée, however, another semantic dimension can be extrapolated that darkens these first attributions. To explore this dimension of the text, let us have a look at the following passage:

“Je me mis à parcourir avec extase ce verger ainsi métamorphosé; [...] On y voyait briller mille fleurs des champs, parmi lesquelles l'œil en démêlait avec surprise quelques-unes de jardin, qui semblaient croître naturellement avec les autres. Je rencontrais de temps en temps des

93 Ibid., pp. 453-472.

94 Ibid., pp. 453-454.

95 Ibid., pp. 455-456.

96 Ibid., pp. 457, 461, 468-469.

touffes obscures, impénétrables aux rayons de soleil, comme dans la plus épaisse forêt; ces touffes étaient formées des arbres du bois le plus flexible, dont on avait recourber les branches, prendre en terre, et prendre racine [...]. Dans les lieux plus découverts je voyais ça et là [...] de genêt, de trifolium, qui paraient la terre en lui donnant l'air d'être en friche. [...] Alors seulement je découvris, non sans surprise, que ses ombrages verts et touffus, qui m'avaient tant imposé de loin, n'étaient formés que de ces plantes rampantes et parasites, qui, guidées le long des arbres, environnaient leurs têtes du plus épais feuillage, et leurs pieds d'ombre et de fraîcheur. [...] Vous concevez bien que les fruits ne s'en trouvent pas mieux des toutes ces additions; mais dans ce lieu seul on a sacrifié l'utile à l'agréable [...]."⁹⁷

Even if Saint-Preux accentuates his enthusiasm in experiencing the cultivation of the vineyard, his description of accomplished nature contains irritating moments that germinate in(to) essential concepts and seem to lead to another level of meaning, revealing a different spectacle performed by the Elysée. The legitimation of this level is brought along by Saint-Preux's own words at the end of his letter: "Il [= l'Elysée] me peignait en quelque sorte l'intérieur de celle qui l'avait trouvé; je pensais qu'avec une conscience agitée on n'aurait jamais choisi ce nom-là."⁹⁸ This remark reveals the supplemental layer that underlies the description of the Elysée and draws the attention to the hidden voice that Saint-Preux has heard in this garden and that he wants both Bomston and the reader to hear by reading his letter. It is Julie's inner voice that reflects her inwardness as expressed by her garden-arrangements. Her arrangements carry essential information about her very own nature that has been

97 Ibid., p. 456.

98 Ibid., p. 470.

artificially cultivated as well. In her marriage to Wolmar, Julie seems to be happy, she seems to grow quite naturally (“sembler croître naturellement”). But aren’t there some dark bushes in her heart that cannot be clarified by any effort? And isn’t this darkness based on her pain of being curbed, of being adjusted to the moral and corporate requirements of society that legitimates itself as the ‘natural order’? Julie has been forced to put down roots a quite foreign soil that is not her intimate affection. Her inner life is thus similar to a wasteland that lacks water, in particular the vital dynamics of passionate love. Wolmar’s reality is alluded to in the “ombrages verts et touffus.” Saint-Preux was impressed by them, but having a closer look, he discovers that these plants are mere parasites operating on vital nature. Isn’t this irritating moment operating in Wolmar’s world, too? He seems impressive at first sight due to his decency and didactical care, but his omnipresent order and observation create paradoxically the suffocating reality of a prison. Julie suffocates in his open house, as its relentless transparency eliminates her personal freedom and integrity. Implying this violent aspect of being obliged to the official natural order, of being adjusted as Wolmar’s wife, Julie documents her struggle in II,7⁹⁹ and – in an already prosaic attitude and mocking Wolmar’s hygienic anthropology – confesses her agony to Claire in VI, 6: “On étouffe de grandes passions; rarement on les épure.”¹⁰⁰ Later on she states: “[...] [Q]uand il ne les faudra plus étouffer, on n’aura plus à les craindre.”¹⁰¹ When Julie learned that her husband has read all her correspondence to Saint-Preux, that she is completely seen through by him, experiencing the destructive moment of Wolmar’s confidence in her virtue, she confesses to Claire that her inner state is being shorn of personal integrity and

99 Ibid., pp. 186-189.

100 Ibid., p. 652.

101 Ibid., p. 659.

self-conscience: “J’ai perdu le droit de compter sur moi”¹⁰², and: “Je n’ose plus me fier à rien de ce que je vois ni de ce que je sens.”¹⁰³ Virtue is the prescribed nature for her from which she cannot escape. Julie sacrificed her whole life to transparency. She is about to become completely transparent and curiously changing into a specter.

As shortly illustrated here, the supposedly harmonious depiction of an artificially ennobled nature is disturbed by the dysphoric impact of correlating concepts that reflect Julie’s inwardness in other letters within the multi-perspective scope of epistolarity. By lexematic or isotopical correlations the attributes that describe the garden are ambiguous. This conceptual disorder or oscillation in several fields of meaning is to be considered as the undermining dynamic of *obscurité* as implemented by the discourse of love and passion that raise their interdicted voice in the *supplément*. The love-wound communicates itself *ex negativo*, as a trace-like disorder of concepts. The disturbing voice that constitutes the essential level of communication between Saint-Preux, Bomston, and the reader rises out of the narrowness of Julie’s suffocating existence. Bomston, who has always been highly interested in Julie’s destiny for Saint-Preux, seems to the writer the dignified addressee to understand the hidden message so that Saint-Preux’s words themselves start to oscillate in a new perspective: For the pretended Elysée, the pre-Romantic garden performing Julie’s inner tragedy and correlated to her inner universe “... on n’aurait jamais choisi ce nom-là.”

“JAMAIS VOUS NE LA REVERREZ... LE VOILE... JULIE’S N’EST ...”:
JULIE’S DEATH OR THE PHANTOM OF VIRTUE

The undermining dynamics of *obscurité* as effectuated by the

102 Ibid., p. 482.

103 Ibid., pp. 482-483.

love-wound dominate the whole part of the novel that deals with Julie's marriage and life with Wolmar (after III, 20). As a result, like the accomplished nature of the Elysee, Julie's virtue – in particular her calmness when facing death – remains ambivalent. Julie's personality as transmitted by the text seems curiously distant. Her virtue lacks substance or reliability. A bitter aftertaste remains when reading Wolmar's assuring passages, a certain unreliability of the letter that tries to make Julie's accomplished nature believable. The reader cannot help but wonder if there might be a whole reality behind these literal assurances, unexpressed by the word, but being transmitted as a kind of hidden *abîme*, an unconceivable reality of otherness that feels like suffocation, pain and death.

The undermining dynamics of *obscurité* have changed Julie into a kind of specter. In this context, the protagonist's revival after her official death is significant. It accentuates the ambivalence of her specter-like existence. The status of passion as a state between life and death is also implied in Saint-Preux's last letter (VI, 7) that evokes the scar in his heart as an ambivalent sign that characterizes his own existence after Julie's marriage and while living in her house with Wolmar.¹⁰⁴ The scar indicates the vanquished/vanished passion as well as its unvanishable having-been/the unvanquishable fact that it had existed, giving passion a kind of after-life in limbo between life and death, the after-life as a powerful trace, however, a "sceau respecté," that crucially structures Saint-Preux's actual life, as he can never love again: "La blessure guérit, mais la marque reste; et cette marque est un sceau respecté qui préserve le cœur d'une autre atteinte. [...] Dussé-je vivre des siècles entiers, le doux temps de ma jeunesse ne peut ni renaître pour moi, ni s'effacer de mon souvenir."¹⁰⁵

104 Ibid., pp. 662-675, esp. p. 663.

105 Ibid., p. 663.

In the end, only Julie's voice remains, the thin voice of a phantom out of the grave that a horrified Claire seems to hear quite clearly: "Claire! ô ma Claire! où es-tu? que fais-tu loin de ton amie? ... Son cercueil ne la contient pas tout entière ..." ¹⁰⁶ Julie entombed in the grave has achieved ultimate distance. She cannot be reached by any means of signification, and this curious distance is caused by her un-lived passion. Her passion cannot be eliminated but must continue to live – as a ghost-like phenomenon that is always around her, like a veil that cannot be removed, and that is the veil of death, the complete *anéantissement* of all meaning.

From this point of view, the inner cleft as transmitted by the text within Julie's attitude facing her own end – between a pious disdain of death and a strange otherness that seems to welcome death (in a quite profane way in VI, 11¹⁰⁷) – leads to the supplemental meaning of the protagonist's pretended sacrifice, her sudden jump into the water to save her son, which at first sight is an act of selfless maternal love. But this reading remains ambivalent. For by absorbing the many convulsions of her life and inner universe as documented in detail by her letters – Julie's death is constructed as a concept, whose signification loses itself in the abysmal obscurity between virtuous sacrifice and the voluntary act of self-liberation – recalling the unfathomable folds of virtue around her heart: "une voile de sagesse et d'honnêteté fait autant de replis autour de son cœur, qu'il n'est plus possible à l'œil humain d'y pénétrer" ¹⁰⁸ (IV, 14). This ambivalence

106 Ibid., p. 733.

107 Ibid., p. 701: "[...] [E]t au lieu de se préparer à ce moment terrible, au lieu de mettre ordre à sa conscience, elle s'amuse à parrer sa chambre, faire sa toilette, à causer avec ses amis, à égayer leur repas; et dans tous ses entretiens pas un seul mot de Dieu ni du salut! Que devais-je penser d'elle et de ses vrais sentiments? [...] Tout cela formait à mon sens une énigme inexplicable."

108 Ibid., p. 492.

sometimes interrupts Wolmar's assurances so that he has to admit: "Je vis aussi briller dans ses regards je ne sais quelle secrète joie [...] dont je ne démêlais la cause."¹⁰⁹ (VI, 11) This obscurity can be attributed to the disturbing and accusing voice of passion. The dying Julie actually sacrificed herself *to* virtue and has not sacrificed herself *out of* virtue. The virtue 'prescribed' to her by Wolmar hasn't cured her, but has killed her. As she feels imprisoned in her transparent existence, death seems to be the only, thus fascinating way out of the transparent world of complete evidence. Is she finally dedicated to death as a provider of the fascinating freedom of meaning? From this point of view, she might have succumbed to the spring-like water, and plunged herself into the abîme, following its siren-like voice.¹¹⁰

109 Ibid., p. 698.

110 With this ambivalence one might associate Goethe's ballad *Der Fischer* (1779), the end of which signifies the trembling moment of semantic uncertainty in the fisherman's being attracted by the mermaid's voice: "Halb zog sie ihn, halb sank er hin." Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Der Fischer," in *Gedichte*, Stefan Zweig, pref. (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1982).