INTRODUCTION

AT the beginning of his poem 'Sylvie's Walk' ('L'Allée de Sylvie', 1747), written nearly thirty years before he began the *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (*Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*), Jean-Jacques Rousseau strikes a note that seems to resonate throughout his career:

> As I wander freely in these groves,
> My heart the highest pleasure knows!
> How happy I am under the shady trees!
> How I love the silvery streams!
> Sweet and charming reverie,
> Dear and beloved solitude,
> May you always be my true delight!

Inspired by a walk beside the river Cher at Chenonceaux, where Rousseau was living with the Dupin family, for whom he worked as a secretary, the poem evokes the ecstasies of wandering, nature, solitude, and reverie—all of which anticipate the poetic prose of the *Reveries*. However, the poem has none of the later text's invasive sense of anxiety, hostility, persecution, and torment. For as much as Rousseau's early poem and his last work seem to have in common, the Rousseau who wrote the *Reveries* was very different from the Rousseau who wrote 'Sylvie's Walk': if the poem is the work of a self-taught musician-cum-writer, increasingly well-connected, if not terribly well known, making his way working for wealthy patrons and writing, amongst other things, articles on music to be published in Diderot and d'Alembert's freethinking *Encyclopaedia* (*L'Encyclopédie*, 1751–72), the *Reveries*, by contrast, come from the pen of an international celebrity, a writer who had achieved overnight fame—and infamy—with an eloquent denunciation of the corrupting influence of celebrity-obsessed society.

Everything changed for Rousseau with the publication in early 1751, when he was thirty-eight, of his first book, the *Discourse on the*

Sciences and the Arts (*Discours sur les sciences et les arts*). Written in response to an essay competition set the previous year by the Dijon Academy, the text argues, paradoxically, that intellectual progress has fostered moral corruption and a decline in civic virtue. Here Rousseau launches upon a theme that will, in a variety of different guises, preoccupy him for the rest of his life: put simply, the relationship between self and other. From the 1750s onwards he will be centrally concerned with the problems of man in society and with the tensions between society and nature. These problems and tensions he explores in works as diverse as the *Discourse on Inequality* (*Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité*, 1755), in which he argues that inequalities of rank, wealth, and power are the inevitable result of the civilizing process; the *Letter to d'Alembert on Theatre* (*Lettre à d'Alembert sur les spectacles*, 1758), in which he argues that theatre is morally dangerous because it encourages audiences to cut themselves off from public society and indulge the most suspect of emotions; *Julie, or the New Héloïse* (*Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, 1761), one of the century's best-selling novels, a patriarchal idyll about the importance of transferring erotic longing into virtuous restraint; *Émile, or On Education* (*Émile ou De l'éducation*, 1762), a treatise on education which opens with a clear statement of Rousseau's core vision of human agency's corrupting influence: 'All is good when it leaves the hands of the Author of all things, all degenerates in the hands of man'; and *The Social Contract* (*Du Contrat social*, 1762), Rousseau's major work of political philosophy, in which he sets out his vision for a just and humane political community. With these works he adds powerful new brushstrokes to his sombre portrait of what has happened to humankind as a result of so-called progress and civilization, dissecting the forces at work that conspire to alienate humankind from their true nature. Rousseau, who proudly attached his name to all of these works (in contrast to his contemporary Voltaire, for instance, who had recourse to innumerable pseudonyms, as well as to anonymity, when publishing his controversial texts), was not afraid to take on dearly held Enlightenment convictions—such as the belief in progress—and show them to be mere assumptions and unproven contentions.

Moreover, it is precisely Rousseau's well-publicized and polemical views on society which brought him not only the celebrity he loathed but also the infamy that saw him, in his terms, driven into exile, unfairly rejected by his fellow men. In this respect, 1762 is a turning-point. Having left Paris and its literary scene in 1756, and having severed ties first with his patron Mme d'Épinay, the hostess of a famous salon, at the end of 1757 and subsequently with his sometime friends Diderot and Friedrich Melchior Grimm, an intimate of Mme d'Épinay's, in 1762 Rousseau was plunged into controversy by the publication of *Émile*, which, primarily because of the religious views Rousseau expressed in it, was condemned by the Paris *parlement*, who also issued an arrest warrant for its author. Rousseau now became convinced that there was a conspiracy against him, and this sense of persecution was to remain with him for the rest of his life. He renounced his citizenship of his native Geneva, whose authorities had also condemned him and his works, and the rest of the 1760s he spent in a kind of exile, leaving France for Switzerland, including his brief but idyllic stay on the Île de St Pierre in the Lac de Bienne, followed by an ill-fated journey to England in 1766, made at the invitation of the Scottish philosopher and historian David Hume, with whom Rousseau ended up quarrelling. He returned to France in 1767 and lived in the provinces, only returning to Paris in 1770.

In response to the events of 1762 and their traumatic repercussions, Rousseau's gaze turned inward and he wrote, if not a trilogy in the strict sense of the term, then a kind of triptych of autobiographical works. The first of these, the *Confessions*, which Rousseau started writing in 1764, are addressed to his contemporaries as he seeks to reshape the perception of his work and correct the misrepresentations of him. Determined to exonerate himself, Rousseau seeks to set out logically and systematically what he calls in Book 7 of the work the 'chain of feelings' that marked the successive stages of his being.[1] Between November 1770 and

[1] J.-J. Rousseau, *Confessions*, trans. Angela Scholar, ed. Patrick Coleman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 270. All subsequent references will be included in the text.

May 1771 he gave readings from his work to aristocrats in Paris, though these so embarrassed Mme d'Épinay that she petitioned the police to ban them. The reaction he received to his reading at the home of the comtesse d'Egmont in 1771 was so remarkable that he ends the *Confessions* with it: 'No one spoke' (p. 642), he tells us on the last page.

Beset by paranoia, Rousseau's next step, it seems, was to divide himself in two and write, between 1772 and 1776, the three dialogues that make up *Rousseau Judge of Jean-Jacques: Dialogues* (*Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques: Dialogues*), in which 'Rousseau' and 'a Frenchman' discuss the life and works of Jean-Jacques (Rousseau himself). The role played by the Frenchman in the text is crucial: so dismayed was he by his failure to win over the putative readers of his *Confessions* that Rousseau, through the Frenchman, effectively incorporates the reader in the *Dialogues* and has his alter ego, 'Rousseau', set about persuading him. The *Dialogues* also envisage the judgement of posterity, and, gripped by mental torment, Rousseau tried to place the manuscript of the *Dialogues* on the High Altar of the cathedral of Notre-Dame, Paris, on 24 February 1776 but found his way was barred by a gate. His sense of alienation and persecution was all but complete.

Having first been ignored and then divided himself in two, Rousseau finally turns in on himself in his *Reveries*, his last attempt to achieve some kind of mental and spiritual balance in his life. The turning-point seems to come with the death on 2 August 1776 of the prince de Conti, his sometime protector (and great-grandson of the prince de Conti who had protected Molière), if indeed this is what he is alluding to when he states in the First Walk that 'an event as sad as it was unforeseen' has shown him that his 'earthly fate is irrevocably fixed for evermore' (p. 5): with the prince de Conti's death, it seems, dies Rousseau's last hope of being rehabilitated. Whatever the event, it clearly triggered a change of mood and inspired Rousseau to write the *Reveries*, on which he worked from September 1776 to April 1778, leaving them unfinished at his death three months later; they were first published, like the *Confessions*, in 1782.

The *Reveries* are a kind of continuation of, or appendix to, but not actually the planned third part of, the *Confessions*.[2] It is true that they tell us some things about Rousseau's life that the *Confessions* did not, such as the episodes with his cousin Fazy and his friend Pleince recounted in the Fourth Walk. But crucially the two works are different in character and scope. Whereas in the *Confessions* Rousseau seeks to explain himself to others, in the *Reveries*, by contrast, he makes a point of addressing only himself, since all he seeks, as he spells out in the First Walk, is to understand himself: 'But what about me, cut off from them and from everything else, what am I? . . . I am devoting my last days to studying myself' (pp. 3, 7). In the *Reveries* Rousseau eschews chronology and a narrative stressing cause and effect in favour of reflection, self-analysis, and meditation. His narrative is resolutely non-linear and profoundly introspective and personal, 'the desire to be better known by people', as he also remarks in the First Walk, having 'died in [his] heart' (p. 9).

Whereas the *Confessions* enact a kind of moral vivisection—*Intus, et in cute* ('underneath, and in the flesh'), as the epigraph from Persius puts it (p. 5)—the *Reveries*, by contrast, show Rousseau apparently accepting himself and endeavouring to give himself the space in which to express himself and feel as never before what it means to exist. This is, in principle at least, neither a confessional nor a polemical work; rather, it is a work in which, as he remarks in the First Walk, he gives himself over entirely to 'the pleasure of conversing with [his] soul, for this is the only pleasure that [his] fellow men cannot take away from [him]' (p. 7). And therein, for Rousseau, lies the crux of the text: it is intended as a poignant response to, and an extended rebellion against, those who have tried to control him. Rousseau says that he finds strength in indifference towards his enemies and persecutors, and happiness in solitude amidst nature. Long reflection on his plight as a victim of persecution leads Rousseau to conclude from the outset—hence

[2] At the end of the twelfth and final book of the *Confessions*, which is divided into two parts, Rousseau refers to a putative third part, which will only appear 'if ever I summon up the strength to write it' (p. 642). Similarly, in Books 7 and 8 he refers to the need to write a supplement to the work (pp. 316, 373).

the all-important 'so' in the very first sentence of the *Reveries*, suggesting a summing up of, and a conclusion to, previous reflection—that he must accept his fate, stop fighting against it, and be, as he claims in the First Walk, 'at peace in the depths of the chasm, a poor, unfortunate mortal, but as impassive as God himself' (p. 7). He appears to move from his earlier modes of confession, self-defence, and self-justification to a stoic, self-sufficient acceptance of his fate and thereby an apparent triumph over those who seek to control him: his introspection leads him to seek out and find a remedy for his sufferings in those sufferings themselves. In other words, he turns isolation and solitude to his own advantage. He revels in the fact that, in spite of themselves, his enemies have given him an opportunity he gladly embraces: the opportunity to be alone. As he says in the Seventh Walk: 'This is my way of taking revenge on my persecutors: I can think of no crueller way of punishing them than to be happy in spite of them' (p. 70).

But is the Rousseau of the *Reveries* as happy as he claims to be? Has he really avenged himself of those whom he believes to be his persecutors? The text in fact gives no unambiguous answers to such questions. On the contrary, it gives voice to contradictions and obsessions which give us a very sharp sense of a Rousseau still working through the problems he claims to have overcome. Most obviously, this is a text shot through with such a vivid sense of there being widespread hostility towards Rousseau that it is difficult to accept that he is merely indifferent to misfortune and persecution. In addition, thoroughgoing self-analysis does not prevent Rousseau from engaging in more or less subtle self-defence, even self-exoneration: whereas, from the outset, his persecutors are characterized by their extravagant cruelty ('in the refinement of their hatred they have continued to seek out the cruellest forms of torture for my sensitive soul', p. 3), he praises himself, in contrast, as 'the most sociable and loving of human beings' (p. 3) and, later, as 'the most trusting of men' (p. 64) and 'the most sensitive of beings' (p. 84); in the Fourth Walk, Rousseau deftly embeds his passing, even self-pitying admission that he lied as a youth about the theft of a ribbon, and had a kitchen maid sacked to save himself, within a complex argument about the relativity of truth and

falsehood, an argument that ultimately celebrates the man—implicitly Rousseau himself—who holds to truth to the point of self-sacrifice; and in the Ninth Walk, his oblique attempt to rationalize his decision to place in the Foundlings' Hospital the five children he had between 1746 and 1751 with his long-time companion Thérèse Levasseur is set within an elaborate, self-justificatory illustration of how good he is with children. And lastly, whatever we may think of Rousseau's view of himself and of others, it is difficult not to be moved by the suggestions in his text that he is not as happy as he claims to be: for instance, having noted at the end of the Seventh Walk, with now familiar but nevertheless striking recourse to hyperbole, that he is still 'in the midst of the most miserable fate ever endured by a mortal' (p. 82), in the Ninth Walk he goes on to give pained expression to his insatiable longing for happiness with other human beings:

> Oh, if I could still enjoy a few moments of pure, heartfelt affection, even if only from a babe in arms, if I could still see in people's eyes the joy and satisfaction of being with me, how these brief but sweet effusions of my heart would compensate me for so many woes and afflictions. Ah, I would no longer be obliged to seek among animals the kind looks that I am now refused by human beings. (pp. 97–8)

There is here none of the God-like impassivity and self-sufficiency he claims for himself elsewhere in the text (pp. 7, 19, 55–6); on the contrary, this is the very human Rousseau who lays himself bare, in all his weakness and fallibility, through the words on the page.

It follows, then, that this is no straightforward text about a man fleeing society and finding happiness in total seclusion. It is true that as early as 1756, as Rousseau records in Book 9 of his *Confessions*, the great critic of society felt the need to be on his own: 'There I was at last, then, at home in my own pleasant and secluded retreat, master of my days, free to spend them living that independent, even, and peaceful life for which I felt I had been born' (p. 403). But Rousseau's love of solitude is not simply a form of misanthropy, since he also insists from the outset on his own sociability. What he turns away from is not society per se, but rather the forms of social contact and interaction that supposedly

polite society expects of him, notably conversation, an art at which he feels he does not excel, as he makes clear in the Fourth Walk (p. 42). What he is opposed to is what he sees as the opacity that contemporary social relations impose between people. Solitude is a response to the specific realities of a particular society, since that society cannot in principle provide the kind of interaction he desires: the strictly codified norms of courteous behaviour are repellent for Rousseau, since they impede, according to him, true communication and undermine authentic sociability. It is precisely because his desire for authentic sociability is frustrated by conventional society that Rousseau feels alienated from it, and this is why he escapes the world of men in order to recover the true nature of things.

From the demands of corrupt society Rousseau turns to the world of nature. Walking alone in nature guarantees and even intensifies his sense of self, as he observes in the Second Walk: 'These hours of solitude and meditation are the only time of the day when I am completely myself, without distraction or hindrance, and when I can truly say that I am what nature intended me to be' (p. 11). His happiness comes in part from his being at one with nature, which was a refuge for Rousseau from the anxieties of life, providing him with relative solitude and a rich source of distractions, both of which offer him peace of mind: the Île de St Pierre, described with such memorable intensity and poetic vividness in the Fifth Walk, is a kind of asylum, a prison where Rousseau would gladly be holed up for the rest of his days, the island's isolation mirroring his own desire to live a carefully circumscribed life. Rousseau finds hope in the refuge of nature, and in so doing he offered future generations of people living with anxiety the possibility of an inspired cure.

The diversity of nature keeps Rousseau busy and helps him not to think unpleasant, unwanted thoughts. Rousseau delves into this diversity through his interest in botany. If, in the Seventh Walk, Rousseau presents botany as an easy, even lazy pastime, this cannot hide the fact that he was, in reality, a serious, even systematic botanist, as suggested not only by the Fifth Walk, but also by his surviving herbaria, his correspondence with leading French botanists such as Pierre Clappier and Marc-Antoine Claret de La Tourrette, and such posthumously published works as the *Elementary Letters on Botany* (*Lettres élémentaires sur la botanique*), which he wrote to teach botany to Madeleine-Catherine Delessert, the daughter of his long-standing friend Mme Boy de la Tour, and the *Fragments for a Dictionary of Botanical Terms* (*Fragments pour un dictionnaire des termes d'usage en botanique*), both of which he worked on in the early 1770s. It is unsurprising, then, that Rousseau should posit a kind of parallel between his work as a botanist and his aims in writing the *Reveries*, for he is to be as scientific in one as he is in the other, hence the image in the First Walk of the 'barometer' and the soul as a kind of natural element to be measured (p. 9). He is the writer-scientist whose object of analysis is himself.

This self-analysis is structured around a series of ten walks, the last left unfinished at Rousseau's death. Walking was Rousseau's preferred mode of transport. From an early age he developed what he calls in Book 2 of the *Confessions* a 'passion for walking' (p. 53), and the journeys he seems to prefer are those guided by chance: he delights in peripatetic randomness, or what he calls 'the pleasures of going one knows not where' (p. 57). Such walks, crucially, allow his mind to wander, too, as he tellingly observes in Book 9: 'I can meditate only when walking; as soon as I stop, I can no longer think, for my mind moves only when my feet do' (p. 400). To walk is to meditate and to muse. In the midst of nature, Rousseau finds freedom to think, as he explains in Book 4:

> There is something about walking that animates and activates my ideas; I can hardly think at all when I am still; my body must move if my mind is to do the same. The pleasant sights of the countryside, the unfolding scene, the good air, a good appetite, the sense of well-being that returns as I walk . . . all of this releases my soul, encourages more daring flights of thought, impels me, as it were, into the immensity of being, which I can choose from, appropriate, and combine exactly as I wish. (p. 158)

These 'flights of thought' are the essence of the reveries that give Rousseau's last work its title.

Rousseau was not the first to write about reverie. We know from Book 1 of the *Confessions* (pp. 8–9) that Rousseau was from an

early age an avid reader of romance fiction, including the works of Madeleine de Scudéry, who, in Part 2 of her *Clélie* (1654–60), shows Cléodamas and Bérélise in a garden, giving themselves over to the charms of reverie, a state of heightened sensibility and inner pleasure, freed from social constraints. For these characters, reverie is a passing moment of release and interiority. A similar sense of release is conveyed, albeit in a very different form, in Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* (*Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, 1686), which also figured amongst Rousseau's early reading: the philosopher conversing with a Marquise in her garden at night gazes up at the stars and is plunged into a reverie, a delightful 'disorder of thoughts'. This notion of the lessening of the power of reason and the emphasis on feeling also appeal to the sensualist philosophers of the eighteenth century, amongst them Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, who evokes the freedom of reverie in his *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* (*Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*, 1746): after a hard day's work, he argues, the mind enjoys seeing ideas 'floating around haphazardly', particularly when this 'disorder' is matched by the freedom of nature as opposed to the manicured order of landscaped gardens. Momentarily removed from the world and its preoccupations, the one who gives himself over to reverie finds the pleasure of freedom in nature.

But whereas all these earlier writers envisage reverie as a kind of momentary escape, for Rousseau, by contrast, reverie is a way of life, an ongoing means of triumphing over the grim realities of the existence that others seek to impose on him. He makes of it, not a passing phase, but a key to his existence, and crucially a key to his overcoming his enemies: meditation and (self-)mastery are as one. And more than that, for Rousseau reverie is also a means of storing up a treasure trove of happy memories that will in turn bring him happiness in the future. Reverie revives the past and ensures its survival; writing, reading, and rereading are all integral to Rousseau's pursuit of happiness, as he explains in the First Walk:

> The leisure of my daily walks has often been filled with delightful thoughts which I am sorry to have forgotten. I shall preserve in writing those which come to me in the future: every time I reread them I shall experience the pleasure of them again. . . . If, as I hope, I have the same cast of mind when I am very old and as the moment of my departure approaches, reading them will remind me of the pleasure I have in writing them and, by thus reviving the past for me, will double my existence, so to speak. In spite of men I shall still be able to enjoy the delights of company, and, grown decrepit, I shall live with myself in another age, as if living with a younger friend. (pp. 8–9)

The memory of past happiness creates pleasure for him in the present of writing and will, in turn, create pleasure for him in a later present as a reader. Reverie is part and parcel of a search for lasting happiness: Rousseau's vision of happiness takes root in, and is a means of coming to terms with, the realities of unhappiness and anxiety. Reverie is also an epistemological project: writing down his thoughts is a way of his establishing the truth about himself. Whereas in the *Confessions* Rousseau was concerned with historical fact, in the *Reveries* he is concerned with the sensations of the past and happiness in the future. Writing becomes for Rousseau a means of recovering lost time: it is, in that sense, its own cure.

The idea that the *Reveries* are a kind of remedy for Rousseau finds an echo in the way in which, in the First Walk, he positions his text vis-à-vis Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* (*Essais*, 1580–95). Having, in Book 10 of the *Confessions*, poured scorn on what he saw as 'the false naivety of Montaigne, who, while pretending to confess his faults, is very careful to give himself only lovable ones' (p. 505), at the beginning of the *Reveries*, Rousseau at once likens his project to, and distances it from, that of his sixteenth-century predecessor: 'My task is the same as that of Montaigne, but my aim is the exact opposite of his: for he wrote his essays entirely for others, whereas I am writing my reveries entirely for myself' (p. 9). Of course, Montaigne's *Essays* were not quite so public as Rousseau wishes to present them: in his prefatory address 'To the Reader' ('Au Lecteur'), Montaigne stresses that he has set himself 'no other end but a private family one', adding: 'I have dedicated this book to the private benefit of my friends and kinsmen so that, having lost me (as they must do soon), they can find here again

some traits of my characters and of my humours.'[3] This notwithstanding, the numerous links between Montaigne's *Essays* and Rousseau's *Reveries* are important and add further levels of meaning to the later text.

First, both texts offer self-portraits of thinking, reflective, meditative men. In his chapter 'On Practice' ('De l'exercitation', II. 6), for example, Montaigne identifies an organic link between thinking and being that will lie at the heart of Rousseau's text: 'I am chiefly portraying my ways of thinking, a shapeless subject which simply does not become manifest in deeds. . . . It is not what I do that I write of, but of me, of what I *am*.'[4] Secondly, both texts take the form of reveries. On several occasions Montaigne uses the French term 'rêverie' to describe his own writing, though he deliberately plays with the negative connotations of the term (which persisted in eighteenth-century dictionary definitions, too). For example, he begins his chapter 'On Educating Children' ('De l'institution des enfants', I. 26) with the witty disclaimer: 'These writings of mine are no more than the ravings [*rêveries*] of a man who has never done more than taste the outer crust of knowledge.'[5] He goes further still in his chapter 'On Books' ('Des livres', II. 10):

> These are my own thoughts, by which I am striving to make known not matter but me. . . . I have no sergeant-major to marshal my arguments other than Fortune. As my ravings [*rêveries*] present themselves, I pile them up; sometimes they all come crowding together, sometimes they drag along in single file. I want people to see my natural ordinary stride, however much it wanders off the path. I let myself go along as I find myself to be.[6]

For Montaigne, 'rêverie' is a self-mocking term used with ironic modesty both to justify the fragmentary nature of his work and to invite a playful reading of it. Montaigne appears to be saying that it is sheer madness to write what he does and, worse still, to offer oneself as the subject.

Montaigne's playfulness here, evoking the movement of his thoughts and his own wanderings, points to a third link between

[3] Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. and ed. M. A. Screech (London: Allen Lane, 1991), p. lix.
[4] Ibid. 425–6. [5] Ibid. 163. [6] Ibid. 457, 459.

his *Essays* and Rousseau's *Reveries*: they are both texts written 'on the go'. In his chapter 'On Three Kinds of Social Intercourse' ('De trois commerces', III. 3), he describes how, in his library, 'sometimes my mind wanders off, at others I walk to and fro, noting down and dictating these whims of mine';[7] and in his chapter 'On Some Lines of Virgil' ('Sur des vers de Virgile', III. 5), Montaigne describes how sometimes he thinks best while he is on the move:

> But what displeases me about my soul is that she usually gives birth quite unexpectedly, when I am least on the lookout for them, to her profoundest, her maddest ravings [*rêveries*] which please me most. Then they quickly vanish away because, then and there, I have nothing to jot them down on; it happens when I am on my horse or at table or in bed—especially on my horse, the seat of my widest musings.[8]

For Rousseau, too, musings and movement go hand in hand. Walking is, as he notes in Book 3 of the *Confessions*, thought-inspiring: 'Seated at my table, with my pen in my hand and my paper in front of me, I have never been able to achieve anything. It is when I am out walking among the rocks and the woods, it is at night, sleepless in my bed, that I write in my head' (p. 111). This link between musings and movement, mentioned incidentally in the *Essays* and the *Confessions*, is fundamental to the *Reveries*, both etymologically—the French term *rêverie* is derived from the Latin verb *vagari*, meaning to wander or to roam about—and even literally, since Rousseau based his text on notes he had scribbled down on twenty-seven playing cards while out walking, which were found amongst his papers after his death.[9]

Perhaps the last and potentially most far-reaching thing that Montaigne's *Essays* and Rousseau's *Reveries* have in common is that both texts attempt to portray the twists and turns of each writer's mind. Like Montaigne before him, Rousseau forges his identity through a process of spontaneous mental combustion,

[7] Ibid. 933.
[8] Ibid. 990–1.
[9] These playing cards, which are now in the Bibliothèque publique et universitaire in Neuchâtel, are helpfully reproduced in J.-J. Rousseau, *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, ed. F. S. Eigeldinger (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2010), 171–225.

through the accumulation of thoughts and memories: like the *Essays*, the *Reveries* paint the portrait of a thinking man as he thinks—and, crucially for Rousseau, as he walks and feels. Each of the ten walks in the *Reveries* is grounded in the everyday, and it is precisely their anecdotal, down-to-earth quality that makes them so appealing. The things Rousseau does, the places he visits, the people he encounters: all these are spurs to creative introspection. It is as Rousseau observes his fellow human beings and even interacts with them that he sets about analysing himself and, in so doing, reflecting on fundamental questions about life and human nature: the experience of suffering and death; the search for individual happiness and inner peace; the need for personal morality; sociability and misanthropy; love of others; the authenticity (or otherwise) of the individual in society. For example, Rousseau's clear-sighted examination in the Sixth Walk of the mental processes that determine people's behaviour, and particularly his own, begins with his going on one of his familiar walks to the south of Paris, encountering as usual the woman with her stall and crippled son, whom he unthinkingly avoids, an instinctive action that suddenly pulls him up short and leads him to analyse the subtle mechanisms of obligation and duty at work in society. The structure of the text is determined by the chance association of ideas as Rousseau's mind wanders in tandem with his feet. In both Montaigne and Rousseau, everyday details and personal examination are the springboard for broader moral reflection.

Not that that springboard necessarily propels the two writers in the same direction, however. On the contrary, it is revealing, for instance, that Rousseau's account in the Second Walk of his accident at the paws of a Great Dane, while echoing in some respects Montaigne's account of his fall off a horse in his chapter 'On Practice' (II. 6), makes him think quite differently from Montaigne: whereas Montaigne's accident prompts him to reflect on, and prepare for, death, Rousseau's, paradoxically, makes him feel as if he is being reborn into life (p. 14).

Ultimately, though, what distinguishes Rousseau most clearly from Montaigne, as he carefully reminds us, is that he is writing for himself. In other words, not only does he take himself as his

subject, as Montaigne had done; he also takes himself as his own reader. This is what is radically new about the *Reveries*: the text is intended as a means of expression of his own self for his own self. Montaigne had observed in his chapter 'On Repenting' ('Du repentir', III. 2) that 'my book and I go harmoniously forward at the same pace';[10] in Rousseau's hands, by contrast, the writer, the text, and the reader form one, seamless whole. The unintended reader of the published text—for there is no evidence that Rousseau ever envisaged his *Reveries* being published—is thus implicitly constructed as a kind of voyeur. For some readers, that voyeurism is difficult to bear, even repugnant; for many others, however, their response has been, and continues to be, one of intense identification with Rousseau's experience.

It is precisely the power of the *Reveries* to provoke a sometimes visceral reaction in readers that explains the enduring appeal of the text and its discernible influence on generations of creative artists ever since. In the visual arts, Rousseau's depiction of the solitary individual meditating in nature appears to have influenced nineteenth-century portrait painters like Antoine-Jean Gros, whose full-length posthumous portrait of Christine Boyer, wife of Lucien Bonaparte, painted in 1801, shows the young woman as a solitary walker in a dark and mysterious wood, lost in reverie, gazing at the stream flowing past her; and Pierre-Paul Prud'hon, whose large-scale portrait of the Empress Josephine, commissioned in 1805, shows Josephine sitting in the garden at Malmaison, lost in reverie. In twentieth-century art, perhaps the most disturbing echo of Rousseau's text is to be found in the work of the Belgian surrealist painter René Magritte: in his 1926 painting *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (*Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*), Magritte responds to his mother's suicide in 1912, when he was only thirteen years old, by painting a bowler-hatted man, who was to become the iconic motif of his entire oeuvre and who effectively represents his alter-ego, with his back turned on his dead mother, who lies on a slab in the foreground. The sense of isolation expressed by Rousseau, whose own mother died when he was only

[10] Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, 909.

a week old, is here translated into the haunting visual image of a profound psychological trauma.

In music, the influential nineteenth-century Hungarian composer and pianist Stephen Heller, who spent most of his life in Paris and described himself as a solitary dreamer, wrote for the piano a series of three *Walks of a Solitary* (*Promenades d'un solitaire*, Op. 78, 80, 89) in the 1850s as well as *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (*Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, Op. 101) in 1862. And in 2004, the contemporary London-based Macedonian composer Nikola Kodjabashia called his experimental, classical/jazz crossover album *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, being inspired by Rousseau's meditative text in writing his nine variations on a traditional Byzantine chant in honour of the Virgin Mary, the seventh of which is entitled 'Seventh Walk'.

But it is on writers that the *Reveries* have exerted the most powerful influence. Writers at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries were particularly inspired by Rousseau's evocation of the relationship between walking and personal freedom. As an early example of this influence, the narrator of John Thelwall's *The Peripatetic* (1793), Sylvanus Theophrastus, echoing Rousseau in and near Paris, goes on walks in and near London, and, pursuing his 'meditations on foot', writes brief chapters about the people and places he encounters along the way, though the satirical tone he adopts strikes a clear contrast with Rousseau's text. William Hazlitt, for his part, who dismissed Thelwall as 'the flattest writer I have ever read . . . tame and trite and tedious . . . a mere drab-coloured suit in the person of the prose writer', wrote an essay on walking, 'On Going on a Journey' (1821), which shows the influence of Rousseau: much of the essay is about the relationship between walking and thinking, and he declares at the outset that solitude is better on a walk: 'I can enjoy society in a room; but out of doors, nature is company for me. I am then never less alone than when alone.' And later in the nineteenth century, in his book *Walden* (1854), the American Henry Thoreau echoes Rousseau's *Reveries* in leaving society in order to find himself in nature, in his case the woods of Massachusetts, where, he says, 'I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude'.

Rousseau's vision of the walker in nature, and particularly in mountainous landscapes, also had a particularly strong influence on what might be loosely termed Romantic writers. Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters written in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796) are a remarkable work of travel writing, in which, clearly echoing Rousseau's *Reveries*, she seeks the source of human happiness in the breathtaking grandeur of the Scandinavian landscape, which occasions a series of brilliant reveries, 'mild and enchanting as the first hopes of love', though she subtly reorients her model by insistently engaging with, rather than distancing herself from, society. William Wordsworth, for his part, followed Rousseau more closely still: journeying across the Alps in 1790, his final destination, before heading back down the Rhine, was the Île de St Pierre, the natural paradise Rousseau describes in the Fifth Walk, to which he then alludes in the famous passage on the 'one life' in the peroration to Book 2 of *The Prelude*. This semi-autobiographical, ambulatory poem, which Wordsworth began writing in 1798–9 and in which he was also inspired by Wollstonecraft's *Letters*, includes, in Book 9, the notion of 'spots of time', which echoes Rousseau's remarks about writing and memory in so far as they are, for Wordsworth, past experiences through which he can trace his own development and which continue to resonate with new meanings many years after the events themselves. The intense beauty of Rousseau's Fifth Walk is also evoked in Friedrich Hölderlin's poems 'To the Germans' ('An die Deutschen', 1800), 'Rousseau' (1800), 'The Rhein' ('Der Rhein', 1801), and 'Mnemosyne' (1802), all of which refer to Rousseau drifting in his boat on the middle of the Lac de Bienne, and in Alphonse de Lamartine's beautiful poem 'The Lake' ('Le Lac'), published in his collection *Poetic Meditations* (*Méditations poétiques*, 1820), in which the poet walks alone at the lac du Bourget, recalling a walk there the previous year with his beloved, who is now ill, and asks the lake to hold into eternity the ephemeral trace of their past happiness. A similar attempt to recover the past is found in Gérard de Nerval's remarkable novella *Sylvie* (1853), in which the newly rich narrator leaves Paris and returns to his native Valois region, north of the city, in search of 'places of solitude and

reverie': echoing the Ninth Walk, he evokes country customs and festivals; he shares Rousseau's interest in botany, and he even makes a kind of pilgrimage to Ermenonville, where Rousseau died.

The power of reverie also appealed to a number of French novelists at the beginning of the nineteenth century who gave new embodiments to Rousseau's solitary walker in their isolated, introspective, brooding, and anxious characters: Senancour's *Obermann* (1804), Chateaubriand's *René* (1805), and Mme de Staël's *Corinne* (1807) are all important in this respect. In England, meanwhile, Percy Shelley seized on Rousseau the visionary, describing him in a letter to Thomas Hogg of July 1816 as 'the greatest man the world has produced since Milton'. Shelley was a keen reader of the *Reveries*: he set Claire Clairmont, his wife's stepsister, the task of translating part of the text in August 1814; he drew on it as inspiration for the figure of the visionary poet in his poem *Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude* (1816); and in his contemporaneous essay 'On Life', he describes how 'those who are subject to the state called reverie, feel as if their nature were dissolved into the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being'. And in a slightly different vein, and despite being largely dismissive of Rousseau, Thomas De Quincey echoes the *Reveries*, as well as the *Confessions*, in his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), in which he describes how he 'often fell into these reveries upon taking opium' and how, when in the drug's 'divinest state', the opium-eater 'naturally seeks solitude and silence, as indispensable conditions of those trances, or profoundest reveries, which are the crown and consummation of what opium can do for human nature'.

The image that the *Reveries* give of Rousseau as the wandering, observant, solitary man seems to foreshadow the famous *flâneur* of the nineteenth century, but with the crucial difference that the *flâneur* could only exist in the city, detached from the crowds but endlessly intrigued by them, whereas Rousseau wanted nothing to do with them or the urban experience as a whole. Unlike the *flâneur*, who, in Walter Benjamin's famous description of him, goes 'botanizing on the asphalt', and unlike Søren Kierkegaard, who similarly likened to rural botanizing his urban tours around Copenhagen, observing his human subjects, the solitary Rousseau flees the urban in pursuit of the rural: only outside the city, in solitary communion with nature, can Rousseau really be himself. This distinction notwithstanding, it is striking that in 1862 Baudelaire considered giving the title *The Solitary Walker* (*Le Promeneur solitaire*) to what were to become his *Little Prose Poems* (*Petits Poèmes en prose*, 1869), most of which are about the Parisian metropolis, including 'The Double Room' ('La Chambre double'), 'The Crowds' ('Les Foules'), and 'Solitude' ('La Solitude'), which recall the Second and Fifth Walks of Rousseau's *Reveries*, and 'The Old Clown' ('Le Vieux Saltimbanque') and 'The Cake' ('Le Gâteau'), which echo the Ninth. By contrast, the echoes in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* (1864) are more disturbingly ironic: written, in part, as an inspired polemic against Rousseau, the novel has at its heart a 'lazy bones' who makes a career out of his idleness and seeks comfort in a world of fantasy.

The figure of Rousseau the solitary walker, communing with the natural world, has remained important into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Rousseau's influence can be seen in the life and work of the German writer and critic W. G. Sebald, for example. In *The Rings of Saturn* (*Die Ringe des Saturn*, 1995), a meditative work blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction, Sebald's unnamed, solitary narrator travels through Suffolk and, from there, back in time. Sebald went on to write an essay on Rousseau in his collection *Lodgings in a Country House* (*Logis in einem Landhaus*, 1998), which also includes a deeply personal and reflective essay on the Swiss writer Robert Walser, entitled *Le Promeneur solitaire*; and in an interview with Arthur Lubow for *The New York Times* shortly before his untimely death in December 2001, he said that, following in Rousseau's footsteps, the Île de St Pierre was the one place where he had felt truly at home. And like Sebald, the contemporary French writer Michel Butor, perhaps best known for his experimental novels of the 1950s, has also followed Rousseau to Switzerland, where, sharing his interest in botany, he has published his *Botanical Wanderings: Sites of Memory* (*Errances botaniques: lieux de mémoire*, 2003), a four-part account

of walks in the Alps, offering, like the *Reveries*, a complex reflection on the links between nature and memory, and in which Butor's words are combined with images by the Swiss painter and illustrator Catherine Ernst.

The work of a great prose stylist and a controversial philosopher, the *Reveries* still appeal to modern readers because they are the enduring testimony of an alienated person who wants to know himself, rebel against the forces that constrain him, and live as an autonomous individual. They are the work of a person who is not afraid to lay bare his psychological fragility and human vulnerability. They give a window onto the soul of someone who is different, who does not fit in, an eccentric/ex-centric that cannot—or does not want to—find a place in conventional, supposedly civilized society. Rousseau is thus at once exceptional—*the* solitary walker who is, he says in the Seventh Walk, 'completely at odds with other men' (p. 74)—and exemplary, someone whose life is, as he puts it in the preface to the Neuchâtel edition of the *Confessions*, 'a point of comparison' for everyone else's (p. 648). How he writes, what he writes about, and who and what he is all combine to make Rousseau a writer of his time, of our time, and of all times. As the twentieth-century French novelist François Mauriac pithily observed, referring to Jean-Jacques Rousseau in an appropriately familiar way: 'It is not enough to say that J.-J. is close to us: he is one of us.'

NOTE ON THE TEXT

ROUSSEAU wrote the *Reveries* between September 1776 and 12 April 1778, using as his starting point notes he took on playing cards while out walking.[1] By the time of his death in Ermenonville, north of Paris, where he had been staying with the marquis de Girardin, in July 1778, he had completed a manuscript of the first seven of the Walks; a separate manuscript contained the last three, which remained in note form and, in the case of the Tenth Walk, incomplete. Following Rousseau's death, the marquis de Girardin sent these manuscripts, together with the playing cards, to Rousseau's friend and executor Pierre-Alexandre Du Peyrou in Neuchâtel, who ensured their publication. The *Reveries* were first published in Geneva in 1782 alongside the first part (Books 1–6) of the *Confessions*; it is the text of this edition that is given by Marcel Raymond in his edition for the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Gallimard), which I have used in preparing this translation.

The *Reveries* have long been known in England. The 1782 edition was reviewed as early as June that year in the *Monthly Review*, which playfully suggested 'sublime ravings' as a possible translation for the French term 'rêveries'. It nevertheless argued that the *Reveries* were a more interesting text than the *Confessions* with which it was published: 'Though they also contain many insipid and vulgar anecdotes, such as may happen to every barber's boy who carries home the wig that his master has dressed, yet they exhibit entertainment of a higher kind . . . that will diminish the unfavourable impressions, which these *Confessions* may produce.' The *Monthly Review* continued its critique the following September, quoting at length from the First Walk, 'a rueful ditty' which, it says, 'seems to have been penned in a feverish fit'; it adds of Rousseau that 'this honest man laboured, almost from his cradle to his grave, under a certain *touch* of insanity'. It concluded that 'the best minds will find nourishment for their virtue, piety, and taste, in *many* passages of these *Reveries*, which resemble fruits

[1] See the Introduction, above, p. xxi.