In *Emile* and its unfinished sequel, Rousseau articulates a psychological theory about the dynamics of romantic love that highlights love’s imaginary character and the tragic limitations that such imaginariness imposes. He also shows that the psychological difficulties attending the marital relationship are aggravated by the necessity of social incorporation: whether in the bustling salons of Paris or the suffocating hush of the farmhouse, even our impeccably educated lovers cannot, for all their individual merits, seem to make things work. Theirs is a best case, and its failure is suggestive of broader problems with romantic association in particular and, perhaps, of human association more generally. Yet *Emile* is not Rousseau’s only, or perhaps even his final, word on romantic love. To readers of Rousseau’s own time, in fact, it was not *Emile* but *Julie* that cemented the great Genevan’s reputation as a knower of things romantic. In the wildly popular epistolary novel, of which Rousseau claimed only to be the “editor,” the same tragic dynamics seen in *Emile* are reproduced in an illicit romance that occurs between an aristocratic pupil (Julie) and her bourgeois tutor (St. Preux). Unlike Emile and Sophie, St. Preux and Julie are not perfectly educated. Also unlike Emile and Sophie, they are not allowed to choose their own spouses and thus are never formally united: learning of his daughter’s intention to wed her
bourgeois tutor, Julie’s staunchly aristocratic father emphatically opposes her plans and intervenes violently in order to prevent them from coming to fruition (J 142–43). This turn in the narrative, though compelling from a dramatic point of view, denies the reader the opportunity to directly observe how St. Preux and Julie would have fared in the event of their union and makes it more difficult to generalize from Emile and Sophie’s very different case.

In seeking to generalize, then, one must reason from a counterfactual and, in such cases, there are inevitably plausible arguments on either side of the question. On one hand, there is no denying the unique and even miraculous character of St. Preux and Julie’s love for each other. They seem never to tire of expatiating on the exceptional character of their connection, and in one of the more affecting—and prescient—passages in the novel, Julie tells St. Preux what all lovers long to hear and say: “Our destinies are forever united, and we can no longer be either happy or unhappy if not together. Our souls have, so to speak, touched at every point, and we have everywhere felt the same cohesion” (J 44). Such grand pronunciamentos would be easier to dismiss if they issued only from the lovers themselves, but one finds nearly all the principal personages in the novel deeply impressed by the intensity of Julie and St. Preux’s relationship. It frequently occasions jealousy in Claire and astonishment in Milord Edward; the latter, himself an erstwhile admirer of Julie, says he has “seen nothing so extraordinary” as the connection shared by the two lovers, and he is so moved by the depth and charm of their love that he offers them romantic asylum in England (161–64). What is more, we find at the work’s end that Julie and St. Preux never stopped loving each other—that in fact their love had endured despite all the obstacles that impeded its full growth and development. On the basis of all this, there is a strong temptation to conclude that St. Preux and Julie’s love is exceptional—that it is “outside the rules” that confined and ultimately undid Emile and Sophie—and that its indestructibility consists in its very distinctiveness.

After all this has been said, however, there is still plenty of room to question such a conclusion. The lovers’ self-assessments, while often insightful and always earnest, are also untrustworthy. Their correspondence, as Rousseau himself acknowledges in the work’s second preface, is full of exaggeration, self-deception, and childish rhodomontadizing (J 11). In lucid moments, Julie herself wonders about the robustness of the love she and St. Preux share, recalling the circumspection that Rousseau expresses as his own
in *Emile*. “To me,” she tells an increasingly randy St. Preux early in their courtship, “the slightest alteration of our present situation can only be for the worse. No, even were a happy bond to unite us forever, I know not whether the surfeit of happiness would not soon be its demise” (42). Julie’s pessimism about her prospects for felicity—even in a marriage—is striking, especially in light of St. Preux’s naïve unwillingness or inability to conceive of the passing of his love for Julie (e.g., 94–95). The assessments of others prove somewhat unreliable as well: Julie’s cousin Claire believes the generous view that Milord Edward takes of Julie and St. Preux’s relationship is less the product of disinterested observation than of the passionate attachment he feels for his friends (167). This attachment—precisely because it is so passionate—recommends Milord Edward’s zeal in friendship more than his acuteness of judgment. Rousseau himself cannot resist poking fun at the affable bombast of the soi-disant sage, appending an affectionately derisive remark to some of Milord’s more affectedly abstract ruminations: “I like the muddle of this letter, in that it is totally in good Edward’s character, who is never so philosophical as when he behaves foolishly, and never reasons so much as when he does not know what he is talking about” (431n). Milord always means well but rarely knows how to help.

Finally and perhaps most decisively, it would seem that Julie and St. Preux’s love endures throughout the novel not in spite of but because of the obstacles that impede its development. If Rousseau is clear about anything in *Emile*, it is that love has a life cycle—it grows, matures, and dies. Applied to the novel, this theory suggests that the very circumstances that conspire to arrest the development of Julie and St. Preux’s love also keep it from dying. The image of Julie calcifies in St. Preux’s memory because intervening circumstances prevent him from perceiving or coming to terms with the disproportion between the perfect image and the imperfect person. Had their relationship been given space to grow, it is difficult to believe that the outcome would be different from or preferable to what happened to Emile and Sophie. These, to be sure, are only prima facie considerations, but they are compelling enough to cast sufficient doubt on the view that the uniqueness of St. Preux and Julie’s attachment is sufficient to guarantee its long-term success.

I incline toward this more circumspect view and below I will give it more systematic and persuasive exposition. More specifically, I intend to establish two general propositions. The first is that there is little reason to believe that Julie and St. Preux’s love is immune to the processes of decline
that undo Emile and Sophie and appear to beset all romantic relationships. The second, following from the first, is that if St. Preux and Julie’s love is liable to break under the weight of habit—if their imaginary conceptions of each other are effaced by the harsh and unflattering lights of reality—then the transition from love to friendship would seem to be difficult and ultimately impossible for such intense lovers. Thus Julie confirms and builds on the tragic teaching of Emile.

In arguing thus it will be necessary to closely examine Part I of Julie in light of the possibility raised by Milord Edward (called Bomston hereafter) early in Part II: he offers St. Preux and Julie romantic asylum in England, where they can enjoy their love sheltered from the “gothic maxims” of Julie’s implacable and barbarous father. St. Preux is predictably enthusiastic about the whole affair, but Julie—after seeking the counsel of her “inseparable” cousin Claire—refuses Bomston’s offer. Her rejection is grounded in her (and Rousseau’s) pessimism not only about the durability of love but also about the possibility of friendship after love has faded. Julie herself betrays a certain circumspection concerning the ultimate fate of their union consistent with the theory announced in Emile but inconsistent with relevant alternative hypotheses. What is more, St. Preux’s reaction to his tryst with Julie more than justifies her pessimism: as the psychological theory of Emile predicts, St. Preux’s affections for Julie begin to diminish immediately after consummation. The necessity of love’s passing requires us to consider the possibility of transitioning from love to friendship as well as the possibility of transitioning from friendship to love. Julie, however, casts doubt on both of these propositions: the memory of lost love creates resentment rather than affection and renders bitter the “sweet habit” of conjugal solicitude, and friendship cannot become love because it is characterized by a form of transparency precluded by the illusions of love.

Should I Stay or Should I Go? Julie’s Divided Loyalties

The first movement of Julie is also its most romantic. The opening theme—“I must flee you Mademoiselle, that I can see”—introduces a visual metaphor and suggests that we are blind while under love’s spell (J 25). The coda—an angry St. Preux protesting the forced separation from his lover—reintroduces visual language but for a different and even contradictory purpose: as he repeats “What! Not see her again!” in increasingly mournful
tones, there is a suggestion that he is blind without love and that death in the service of intense passion is preferable to life spent under the anesthesia of petty pleasures (151; emphasis added). To this tension Julie joins many others, and a central debate among critics of the work is less about whether it possesses a bipolar or dialectical structure than about what specific opposition best explains the tensions in the text. For Schiller (1979) they were “intellect” and “sensitivity”; for Starobinski (1988), “transparency” and “obstruction”; and for Shklar (1969), “inclination” and “duty.” Starobinski, though he offers a dialectical interpretation of Julie, has some reservations about doing so. He confesses that “some ambiguities remain” after his dialecticized interpretation is complete: “Are the antithetical terms, passion and virtue, ever really reconciled? Is passion really transcended? Does the synthesis really take place? . . . All these questions must be asked, and the difficulty of answering them points up the danger of accepting unreservedly a ‘dialectical’ interpretation such as the one sketched here” (114, cf. DeMan 1979).

I join Starobinski in such concerns, and to them I add that Julie seems to be less about the resolution of problems than about their fundamental intransigence. And to be sure, one such problem is the tension between virtue and happiness. But it is neither the only nor the most important problem the text confronts. Indeed, the difficulties faced by the novel’s principal characters—the internal contradictions, the feelings of alienation and isolation, the self-deception, the crippling emotional dependence—are not presented as accidental or transient conditions that admit of synthesis or final resolution, but rather as perennial and ineliminable features of their (and our) individual and collective lives. Julie teaches that these enemies must be fought but can never be defeated. They crowd the text and animate all the action; they are always lurking underneath all the delusions, mistakes, errors in judgment, and deficiencies in self-knowledge that propel the plot forward. It is to their rhythm that the tragedy marches inexorably forward, and it is on their terms that Julie’s symbolic sacrifice/suicide occurs. Her death, of course, is meant to remind us of Jesus’s, but in the end we find that Julie’s desires were decidedly un-Christlike, for she loved and physically desired St. Preux all along. If God exists then He was either unwilling or unable to cure Julie’s illness. His earthly stand-in, Wolmar, tried his best but, in the end, could only throw up his hands. For all his machinations and foresight, not even he could resolve the difficulties that threaten and finally undermine the fragile happiness of which human beings are capable.
But we must ask: are our difficulties as stubborn and severe as that? It is one thing to say Rousseau’s characters make things difficult for themselves and quite another to say there is no good solution to the problems they face. Things may have turned out differently and, yes, perhaps even more happily. What, for instance, if Julie had accepted Bomston’s offer to give her and St. Preux an estate in England? We, of course, want to believe things might have been different had the lovers been united; we are on their side and, as Rousseau’s heirs, are enlightened enough to prefer his voluntaristic theory of marriage to the “gothic maxims” that prevent their union. However, Julie does not accept Bomston’s offer, choosing instead to stay in the Vaud with her parents. The entire novel turns on this decision and becomes incomprehensible if we cannot understand why Julie did what she did. Of course, she offers an account on this score and it is plausible enough: she expresses concern about her mother’s health, her father’s violent temper, and their advancing age. She is, in addition, almost certainly worried about the prospect of her increasingly enfeebled maman receiving another beating at the hands of the “best of fathers” (J 143). “The question,” she tells Bomston, “is not whether I have the right to order my life against the will of those who gave it to me, but whether I can do so without mortally aggrieving them, whether I can flee them without casting them deep into despair” (170). “Can I,” she goes on, “pitilessly desert those thanks to whom I breathe, who sustain the life they have given me, and make it dear to me . . . ? A father approaching sixty! A mother forever sickly!” To such considerations she appends the now foregone conclusion: “My parents will make me unhappy . . . but for me it will be less cruel to lament in my misfortune than to have caused theirs” (171). Julie would leave, but her heart bids her stay.

Such considerations are not inapposite, and they are offered sincerely. The “shame and regret” of desertion and neglect very possibly would have presented an insuperable obstacle to Julie’s happiness, especially given her extreme susceptibility to feelings of moral guilt (J 170). Yet her rationale ultimately creates as many questions as it answers, and even the most charitable interpretation of her account shows that it fails to resolve the concerns it addresses. Indeed, the arguments she offers on behalf of staying with her parents cut both ways, and they might actually be advanced even more forcefully on the other side of the controversy. If, for instance, she is concerned about “mortally” aggrieving someone, then the obvious candidate is St. Preux rather than her parents: his fascination with and desire for suicide
recur throughout the novel, and he has already threatened to kill himself once by the time Julie refuses Bomston (76). Does she think someone as sensitive as her lover will bear the bad news with more aplomb? Even a superficial familiarity with St. Preux’s character speaks rather forcibly against this notion: a more drastic or less dignified reaction can scarce be imagined (see esp. 151). What requires emphasis, however, is that Julie has conflicting duties and is going to hurt someone—perhaps “mortally”—no matter what she chooses to do (165). As a consequence, we see that her vivid appeals to the horrors of her parents’ suffering do not and cannot decide the matter. Julie herself appears to recognize this when she confesses to Bomston that she “cannot answer” his arguments on behalf of going to England with St. Preux (171). Bomston’s account on this score is compelling and Julie’s response to him is hardly determinative. She must, then, have other unstated reasons that perhaps she does not wish to disclose to Bomston.

In beginning, to give shape and coherence to these unstated reasons, we should begin by noting Julie’s response to Bomston appeals to the interest she has in her own happiness rather than to the duties she owes her parents as an ethical matter. She does not, as Shklar’s interpretation suggests, argue that her heart carries her to Kent but her duties keep her in Switzerland. Julie is not the deontologist she is often made out to be. Instead, she says she is staying because she will be less happy in England than she will be at home: the “shame and regret” of leaving her parents outweigh all other considerations, and the remorse felt for her negligence would poison the rest of her life. The tension she feels is thus not between duty and love, but between competing forms of love; the relevant opposition is not between the heart and the mind but within the heart itself: “Such is the source of the reproaches of a terrified conscience, and of the secret murmurs that rend my heart” (J 170; emphasis added). As is so often the case in Rousseau, the desires of the heart are couched in the language of conscience. Julie chooses her parents over St. Preux, and does so as a being whose primary concern is, if not exactly the increase of happiness, then at least the reduction of unhappiness.

The obvious answer is that Julie simply loves her parents more than she loves St. Preux and chooses to stay with them for that reason. This explanation has the virtue of looking for Julie’s inner conflict in more or less the right place: rather than search for a tension between “passion” and “duty,” the proponent of this view begins by looking at tensions within the passional realm. The evident tension appears to be between pity and love, and it is decided in favor of pity; the prospect of her parents’ suffering is simply too
awful for Julie to consider, and the anticipation of their suffering is more painful than the loss of her love. This view, however, is also problematic, for Julie often describes herself and her personality as defined by its need for romantic love. Julie’s interest in the sexual association is identity-constitutive—“Love,” she tells St. Preux, “will be the major business in our lives”—and ceteris paribus it should take priority over her abusive father’s emotional bullying (J 89). Indeed, the posture Julie strikes in her letter to Bomston rings somewhat hollow because it is inconsistent with everything she has done to that point in the novel: were she as devoted to her parents’ happiness as she affects to be in her letter to Bomston—were she consistent in privileging their wishes over those of St. Preux—then she never would have gotten involved with her tutor in the first place. In order to take seriously the proposition that Julie loves her parents more than she does St. Preux, we would need to know why she loves her parents too much to marry St. Preux but not enough to have resisted his advances. This, I think, is a rather tough row to hoe, even if such a case could be made that it is more plausible to take the arguments Julie makes to Bomston as a sincere but incomplete statement of her actual view. What, then, is the unstated source of Julie’s hesitance to join St. Preux in England? If neither duty nor overweening guilt can all the way explain why Julie elects to stay home, then what does?

Tanner (1982) finds an answer in Julie’s class prejudice. Ever the daddy’s girl, Julie shares her father’s reservations about St. Preux’s social status and, on his interpretation, never intended to wed him in the first place. St. Preux thus becomes a bourgeois Mandingo, a boy toy over whom Julie exercises—often cruelly—an absolute and nonreciprocal empire. Though searching in many ways, Tanner’s interpretation is not especially convincing in this regard, for it is difficult to see how Julie could have loved St. Preux as she did if she were as devoted to her father as Tanner’s interpretation makes her. Indeed, the very fact that Julie recognized St. Preux as a semblable and as worthy of affection speaks forcibly against the notion that her reservations about him are motivated by class differences. An interpretation that narrows Julie’s motives thus cannot explain why there is a love story in the first place.

There is, however, a more compelling possibility for explaining Julie’s unwillingness to run away to Kent. It is that Julie has quite reasonable reservations about St. Preux in particular, and about male desire more generally, that look very much like Rousseau’s own. Part I of the novel gives particularly clear expression to Julie’s circumspection about the very love for which her heart is made, confirming the tragic psychology of romantic love articulated
in *Emile*. She not only sees the unhappy fate that awaits St. Preux and her with stark and horrid clarity; she also perceives its fundamental cause. Like Rousseau, Julie sees the physicalization of romantic love as both inevitable and destructive, and also like Rousseau she senses that men are inconstant and unreliable romantic partners. Julie’s presentiments about the variability of male romantic passion are, Rousseau claims, known to all women but go unperceived by even the best-educated men. One sees this clearly at the end of *Emile*, where Jean-Jacques addresses the young couple and saves for their wedding day the unsettling observation that their love will die. Emile, like St. Preux, cannot conceive the idea: believing his Sophie to be an inexhaustible source of delight, he laughs to himself and at anyone who would follow Jean-Jacques in considering the possibility of his love for Sophie ever waning. The tutor, of course, knows his pupil is simply unable to understand the logic of his own desires, but the impeccably educated Emile hasn’t the slightest idea about the mutability of sexual passion. Even the finest and most reflective young men have virtually no comprehension of their own drives and view the romantic situation with an almost shocking lack of foresight. Emile’s myopic focus on consummation calls immediately to mind Machiavelli’s Callimaco who, after so much ingenious scheming to seduce the married Lucrezia, has absolutely no idea what to do with her after he finally succeeds in doing so.

Sophie, however, cannot hide her “curiosity,” and she listens closely to Jean-Jacques’s discourse on how to stoke love’s first fires. Her anxiety, though felt obscurely, is not unfounded.“Men,” Rousseau explains, “are less constant than women... The woman has a presentiment of the man’s inconstancy and is uneasy about it” (*E* 476). Julie, for her part, has a far more sophisticated grasp of male inconstancy than does Sophie, and the first part of the novel bearing her name reveals this awareness in striking ways. It tracks the development of Julie and St. Preux’s love and its movement, which is both an ascent and a descent, from the spiritual to the physical realm. And as the sentiments of love increasingly require corporeal expression—as the needs of the soul find their ultimate expression in the satisfaction of the body—so, too, do they grow more unstable. The tension of interest here is thus neither between love and duty nor is it between paternal and romantic love; there is, instead, a tension within the bodily and spiritual elements—the “physical” and “moral” parts—of love itself. And *Julie*, like *Emile*, shows that such a tension is not susceptible of resolution. It is perennial and congenital, not provisional and reconcilable.
At the novel’s beginning, love has virtually no physical dimension. It is almost purely ideational and psychological; it seeks not sex so much as the peculiar form of recognition that attaches to sexual attraction. The desire for this kind of acknowledgment will, of course, ultimately find a specifically sexual expression, but for now the desires of the body are subordinate to those of the psyche. In his confession to Julie, St. Preux claims that he shares with her a unique way of viewing the world and that their suitability for each other consists in this shared distinctiveness. “Not having acquired the uniform prejudices of the world, we have uniform ways of feeling and seeing, and why should I not dare imagine in our hearts the same accord I perceive in our opinions?” (J 26). Here and throughout the letter, St. Preux’s primary concern is to create a zone of exclusivity for Julie and himself. He wants to keep the homogenous world and its “uniform prejudices” out of sight so he may feel Julie’s gaze fixed firmly and exclusively on him. Being seen by Julie is, at least for the time being, enough for St. Preux. Bodily desire is nowhere in evidence, and this is, for Rousseau, as it should be: sex isn’t especially interesting unless it is joined to exclusive emotional commitment. “Possession,” he observes in *Emile*, “which is not reciprocal is nothing.” Without the special assurances of one’s beloved and the gratification that comes with an intense and exclusive union, a “mule driver is closer to happiness” than a voluptuary (E 349). At first blush, then, love seems to live its life not in the dimly lit boudoir (or the musty chalet) but rather in the celestial regions of the mind.

Yet the desires of the body, so quiet in the first letter, are not long in making themselves known. After Julie confesses that she loves St. Preux as he loves her and thereby satisfies his initial desire for recognition, he begins to not-so-subtly hint that a love such as theirs must be physicalized: “What, fair Julie, are the strange caprices of love! My heart has more than it hoped for, and is not content. You love me, you tell me so, and I sigh. This unfair heart dares desire still more, when it has nothing more to desire” (J 38).¹ His love for Julie, once an ideational unity, is now a violent compound made up of imaginary and bodily elements; it has been reduced to “warring with itself” and demands a pittance for its struggle. “What then,” St. Preux crassly inquires, “will be the reward for so pure an homage if it is not your esteem, and what good to me is perpetual and voluntary abstinence from all that is
sweetest in the world if she who demands it is wholly ungrateful to me?” (39).
The paradoxical reward for abstinence is its negation. After reaffirming his
determination to love Julie as she needs rather than how he likes, he stirs her
pity and her too-developed sense of guilt by reminding her of his own needs:
“I languish and waste away; fire courses through my veins; nothing can
extinguish or damp it, and I stir it up by trying to contain it. . . . I complain
not of my fate. . . . Yet a real torment pursues me, I seek in vain to flee it. . . .
I would wish to live for you, and it is you who deprive me of life” (43).

Julie’s response to St. Preux’s coaxing reflects both her lucidity of mind
and the depth of her circumspection. She expresses an admirable awareness
of the dynamics of romantic love in the very act of submitting to them. She
knows St. Preux desires her sexually and that his imagination has been
stirred by the prospect of consummation. Indeed, her own imagination has
been stirred, and she shares his desires. Yet she insists that the physicaliza-
tion of their love will lead to its demise:

Some sad foreboding arises in my breast and cries to me that we are enjoying the
only happy times that Heaven may have allotted us. For the future I can glimpse
only absence, tempests, troubles, contradictions. To me the slightest alteration of
our present situation can only be for the worse. No, were a sweet bond to unite us
forever, I know not whether the surfeit of happiness would not soon be its demise. The
moment of possession is a crisis for love, and any change is dangerous for ours;
from now on we can only lose by it. (J 41–42; emphasis added)

Julie here considers love’s best case—a marriage—and can nonetheless see
nothing but “tempests” and “contradictions.” In doing so, she does more
than rearticulate her father’s class prejudice. Her concern is not simply politi-
cal; it is also psychological. She intuits what Rousseau explains theoretically
in Emile, namely, that the sweetness of love consists most fully in the anticipation
of consummation, and that the act itself is bound to disappoint the
high expectations to which its antecedent hopes give rise. Julie and St. Preux,
like Emile and Sophie, are happiest before consummation because they have
everything to expect and nothing to regret. She does not want to alter the
“present situation” because she knows that to physicalize love is to push it
toward the grave: in saying that the “surfeit of happiness” would soon
“become its demise,” Julie is calling attention to the limited and tragically
compromised character of sexual love. For Julie as for Rousseau, to consum-
mate love is also to destroy it.
She therefore seeks to defer physicalization yet again, telling St. Preux that “we are happy as we are; nothing makes it clearer to me than the vexation I experience at the slightest change of situation” (J 49). Ironically, the letter ends with Julie conceding to St. Preux’s prodding by proposing the fateful meeting at the bower: “It shall not be said that [St. Preux] must ever show deference and I never generosity . . . I want to make him feel, in spite of vulgar prejudices, how greatly what the heart gives surpasses what insistence seizes” (51). Though Julie, unlike Emile and Sophie, is undeceived about the nature of romantic love, she is nonetheless too susceptible to its sway to resist it. On the one hand, she is acutely aware of her “thirst for love” and of the need for “eternal attachment” that it put in her heart, and she seeks out the belle âme St. Preux for his distinctive qualities of mind and heart. These qualities are, of all the virtues, the “least subject to disaffection” and the most conducive to the “eternal attachment” she so desires (50). On the other hand, however, Julie’s own language reveals her circumspection about the likelihood that her need for enduring love will be satisfied: note that St. Preux’s virtues are not immune but rather are “the least subject” to disaffection. In the fullness of time, everyone becomes a tiresome bore. In writing to her lover as she does, Julie is doing little more than yielding to the requirements of her own moralized sexuality. If in her letter she emphasizes how the “moral” elements of love direct and dictate its “physical” expression, the actions that follow show how the needs of the body influence and regulate the moral imagination. The secret of the bower is her recognition of and concession to the inescapably corporeal character of romantic love. If love is a dance between the body and soul, then it is in letter XIII that the body begins to lead.

Physical need, excited rather than exhausted by a kiss under the bower, asserts itself with ever growing strength. St. Preux becomes so unmanageable that Julie banishes him to the Valais country. From this mountainous and secluded region he whines until he is allowed to return, and even threatens suicide in order to shorten the duration of his exile. Julie bears the separation with considerably more dignity, though she is so affected by St. Preux’s absence that she becomes ill. Her sickness, of course, is representative of the inner turmoil that her love for St. Preux has caused; it is a physiological expression of the despair created not so much by his absence as by the prospect of his return. Banishing him to the Valais was a temporary fix; she knows he is coming back—for she cannot live without him—but she also knows that his reappearance is the reappearance of a bodily need whose...
satisfaction is, so to speak, the beginning of love’s end. Despite her awareness of this she takes advantage of her parents’ absence by proposing to St. Preux a rendezvous at a nearby chalet that “serves as a shelter for hunters and should serve only as a sanctuary for lovers” (J 92). Their tryst is delayed but finally consummated toward the end of part I.

St. Preux’s night with Julie is the signal event in his life. He spends the rest of the novel trying to forget it. His immediate reaction underscores this importance, but it also reveals an important shift in his feelings for her and in the dynamics of their relationship. He understands that things have changed between them without quite understanding what that change means. “Oh let us die, my sweet Friend!” he bellows ecstatically in the letter that follows consummation, “let us die well beloved of my heart! What use can we make from now on of an insipid youth of which we have exhausted all the delights?” (J 120). These exclamations are appealing indeed, for St. Preux goes on to explain that he perceives a change within himself, reporting that his feelings for Julie “have somehow have acquired a less impetuous, but sweeter, tenderer, and more enchanting character” (121). This change, he goes out of his way to emphasize, is qualitative rather than quantitative: the moment after consummation, St. Preux loves Julie not more or less but differently. His feelings have been altered “in nature” and have become “more affectionate” and “more varied” as the “frenzies of love” are alloyed with the “gentle pleasures of friendship” (121). St. Preux’s new mode of address reflects his more diffuse love for Julie, for he refers to her not only as his “mistress” and “wife” but also as a “sweet friend” and a “sister” (120, 122).

But this same letter provides reason to question the conviction that St. Preux offers so sincerely. As a preliminary matter we must ask: if his love for Julie is undiminished, why does he want to die? If it is true that “the delights” of youth have been “exhausted,” it is difficult to understand how St. Preux can tell Julie that his love for her is as intense as it was before. We can begin to understand St. Preux’s evolving understanding of his relationship with Julie by noting that, as a general matter, feelings of emptiness and even desperation often follow defining life experiences. To take a mundane example, children commonly enjoy unwrapping their Christmas presents far more than playing with them. To the parent who might say, “But now you can actually play with them. They belong to you!” the child might retort that the whole point was to open them. There is something of this attitude, raised to a higher pitch, in St. Preux’s postcoital exclamations, for what they reveal
above all else is an emergent awareness that there is nothing beyond what was just experienced; the act of possession surpasses the experience of ownership.

If we take St. Preux at his word, his claim that his feelings have not diminished is merely a way of protesting too much; his very need to insist that he does not love Julie less is itself the most telling evidence that he does. It might be, of course, easier to dismiss St. Preux’s wish to die with Julie as a peculiar form of pillow talk, an intimate disclosure that, while not exactly insincere, is nonetheless not to be taken literally. But this cannot be done without first acknowledging that this is neither the first nor the last time that St. Preux expresses a wish to die with Julie. To dismiss such language as mere rhetoric is also to dismiss the possibility that life after consummation will never attain the felicity of life before it. Rousseau himself was so alive to the connection between love and death that he considered ending the novel at the end of Part IV, with Julie and St. Preux drowning together in a storm. To ignore what St. Preux says on this head would be more justifiable if he repeated it less often. Thus it seems right to say with Shklar (1969, 138) that St. Preux “does not really want to live with [Julie], but to die with her.” This is precisely what the theory of love articulated in *Emile* would predict.

Perhaps more tellingly, the letter’s conclusion, where St. Preux acknowledges that he does not love as deeply as Julie does, is a subtle form of admission that squares with a more literal interpretation of the letter’s beginning. When with “self-shame” and “mortification” he acknowledges that she “is better able to love” than he, St. Preux is less praising Julie’s seemingly infinite capacity for love than acknowledging that his own feelings are changed. Had they not diminished, he would have nothing to confess and no discernible reason to be ashamed of himself. Thus it is St. Preux’s “mortification” that ultimately exposes an ugly truth about sexual love generally but, as we saw earlier, of specifically *male* sexual desire. His confession is not quite buyer’s remorse, but it reveals the anxious conscience of a sincere though naïve lover who got more than he bargained for and is now trying to understand—and delicately explain—why, the following day, he finds his feelings so changed.

Even one who believes St. Preux’s claims about his new and “more varied” love has reason to be concerned about the stability of the sentiments he expresses. On this score it is very revealing that St. Preux should feel the need for fraternal and familial affection only after having consummated his sexual relationship with Julie, for the new variability and diffuseness in his love for her actually indicates a kind of nascent dissatisfaction with romantic
love proper. Before consummation, all of St. Preux’s psychic energy was invested in Julie as a lover and a sex object; he had no family, no friends but Claire (Bomston has not yet appeared), and no evident want of either. Such needs come into being only after love has tried but failed to satisfy his desire for wholeness on its own. The sexual experience, for all the depth of meaning that Rousseau coaxes out of it, is nonetheless characterized by a persistent absence, a nagging dissatisfaction, an obscure but overwhelming awareness of its own insufficiency. The gap between expectation and reality persists not because the reality of love is terribly low, but because the expectations it generates are so incredibly high; love would satisfy us more if it wanted less. But Rousseau knew that eros brooks no compromise, and it is only when St. Preux is confronted with the fact that love qua love cannot satisfy his want of wholeness that he seeks out the supplemental satisfactions of friendship and fraternal love. St. Preux has always wanted Julie to bridge all the divisions and satisfy all the desires in his soul, and this remains true after consummation. Yet he now knows in some vague and inarticulable way that she cannot do so exclusively in her capacity as a lover; she must now also fulfill the roles of “sweet friend” and “sister.” It is the dissatisfaction produced by love that create the need for fraternal and familial affection. Rousseau hints at this point when he says that “from the need of a mistress is born the need of a friend” (E 215). The disappointment that sets in after consummation—which in St. Preux’s case is almost immediate—catalyzes other social needs and requires their harmonious integration into our psychic lives.

We must then ask the question: can it work? Can these derivative forms of affection conjoin to or stand in effectively for love? St. Preux’s letter gives us no reason to think so, for though he seeks to supplement his already-flagging romantic passion for Julie with other forms of intimacy it is evident his new expectations of her are entirely unreasonable. No one can sensibly be expected to simultaneously fulfill the roles she is now charged with fulfilling: the absurdity of it all is summed up in his grotesque insistence on calling her his “sister.” And yet love demands comprehensive satisfaction: feeling the singular mix of dissatisfaction and ecstasy that characterizes limit experiences—romantic or not—St. Preux sees nothing wrong with or impossible about combining the roles of sex object and sibling, of terrestrial goddess and devoted materfamilias, of carnal seductress and chaste wife. All his emotional energy is still fixed exclusively on a single person, but that energy has lost its some of its concentration and now seeks multiple kinds of social gratification. He wants Julie to be the exclusive source of his consolation and
contentment and he seems to believe—very sincerely but very incorrectly—that this is possible.

A less literal but more sympathetic way of interpreting St. Preux’s response is to note his growing awareness that the transports of love are of themselves insufficient. For the first time, he clearly sees that romantic passion must be joined to—and eventually replaced by—the intimacy of friendship and mutual esteem in order for a relationship to endure. As we have already seen, this is consistent with the position taken by Jean-Jacques the tutor (if perhaps not by Rousseau the author) in *Emile*, and it is also consistent with what St. Preux says earlier in the text: mulling the prospect of eternal union with Julie, he conjectures that “a long and sweet intoxication would leave us oblivious to the passage of years: and when old age finally slakes our first ardors, the habit of thinking and feeling together would put in the place of their transports a no less tender friendship” (*J* 68). St. Preux believes the transition from love to friendship would be unproblematic, and why should he not? After all, he loves his Julie in all the ways it is possible to love her, and with all the intensity of which his heart is capable. He can imagine that such a love could change its nature but not that it could diminish or disappear. Why, then, should she not join him in Kent under Bomston’s protection?

Two answers suggest themselves. First, St. Preux himself appears to have contradictory understandings of the dynamics of romantic love. Though he initially indicates a belief that a specifically romantic passion will eventually expire and turn into something closer to friendship (*J* 68), he claims later that romantic love builds on itself and, far from slackening over time, instead intensifies: “No, Julie, I cannot see you everyday simply as I saw you the day before: my love is bound to increase and grow incessantly with your charms, and you are for me an *inexhaustible* source of new sentiments that I would not even have imagined” (94; emphasis added). St. Preux thus has contradictory theoretical expectations about the effect time has on romantic passion: in one letter he claims that love is slowly replaced by friendship (68), but just a few letters later (94) he insists that love is susceptible of infinite expansion and growth. For all his speechifying about the nature of love, St. Preux does not appear to have a clear idea about whether—or how long—it can last. Even if we are inclined to attribute this latter view to a temporary lack of intellectual lucidity,³ for St. Preux is not thinking clearly at all at this point in the novel, we are also obliged to note that this is neither the first nor the only time that St. Preux’s reason deserts him. His
emotional instability is a constituent part of his moral personality. One can certainly imagine that Julie might have concerns about running away with such a person.

Second, and assuming that a lucid St. Preux would recognize the necessity of some type of transition from love to friendship, we find that Julie does not view such a transition with the same optimism that St. Preux does. In fact, she indicates that the memory of expired love would make such a transition unbearable. “I see, my friend,” she tells St. Preux, “from the temper of our souls . . . that love will be the major business of our lives . . . for us, the slightest cooling would soon become the languor of death; an invincible distaste, a perpetual tedium, would follow the extinction of love, and we would scarcely survive long once we had ceased to love” (J 89; emphasis added). To this she later adds, “A love such as ours inspires and sustains the soul as long as it burns; as soon as it goes out the soul lapses into languor and a worn-out heart is no longer good for anything” (185). On Julie’s understanding the passing of love, far from being a smooth and natural transition, is instead an acid that erodes the very foundations of the marital union. When one confronts the necessary disproportion between the perfect imaginary model and the decidedly imperfect lover, the present is poisoned by the memory of what the beloved used to be. Memory, or rather nostalgia, induces despair and casts both present and future in a harsh and unflattering light. In so doing, it does for spent love what the imagination does for romantic passion: the one exaggerates the virtue of the beloved and the other his vices.

Lovers never see each other as they are. From Julie’s perspective, then, the transition from love to friendship is a dreadful and insoluble problem. It is a source of inevitable disappointments and undignified compromises. Our love for what once was overwhelms and finally crushes our attachment to what is. Shklar (1969, 86) is therefore correct to say that marriage “illustrates the network of insuperable difficulties that society puts in the way of human contentment,” but it must be added that it is not simply “society” or the “empire of opinion” that blocks the path to shared happiness. It is, rather, the very structure of romantic desiring that poses the final and decisive difficulty. Love’s peculiar psychological dynamics are thus what give true force to Shklar’s accurate conclusion that “Julie would not have been happy with Saint Preux, and she was miserable with the excellent Wolmar” (86). Marriage without love is intolerable, and love within marriage is impossible. Julie
had already scaled Olympus and walked with the gods. How could the view from Kent hold her interest?

### From Friendship to Love? The Marriage That Never Was

Having revealed the difficulties that memory poses for the transition from love to friendship, *Julie* investigates a final possibility: if love does not easily give way to friendship, perhaps friendship might evolve into love. This possibility is explored in the form of Julie’s efforts to unite St. Preux and her cousin Claire, but there are at least two compelling prima facie reasons to think her plan would fail. First, we saw in chapter 3 that Rousseau clearly demarcates the psychological foundations of friendship from those of sexual love, and thus builds a relatively impermeable wall of separation between these two largely discrete associational types. Transitioning from one to the other is thus a difficult process fraught with uncertainty; it involves a comprehensive psychic reorientation, a transformation in the way that we “see” the other person. The form of forgetting that this transformation embodies is especially problematic in *Julie*, where the characters have difficulty recognizing each other because they remain so strongly connected to their past experiences and former lives. Second, relationships are for Rousseau path-dependent phenomena. The initial stages of an association are, as Rousseau’s emphasis on Emile and Sophie’s “first encounter” suggests, decisive for determining the course of its development. One does not simply change the nature of a relationship that, like Claire and St. Preux’s, is twelve years in the making (see *J* 629). Love, unlike friendship, tends to arise quickly and spontaneously or not at all; one recognizes a lover immediately but a true friend only over time. These reasons notwithstanding, St. Preux and Claire have developed an intimate and even flirtatious relationship over the course of St. Preux’s exile and return, and both confess to having developed a strong physical attraction to the other. Everything, including Julie’s blessing, seems to gather in favor of their union. Thus we would seem to have reason to question our initial pessimism about the transition from love to friendship. Yet St. Preux ultimately balks at the prospect (555), and Claire accepts the idea only after expressing some serious reservations (532).

St. Preux’s rejection of the idea is unequivocal. His heart, he tells Julie, is spent for love, and though he is physically attracted to Claire he lacks the
energy and the disposition necessary for loving her. His reasons are complex—residual feelings for Julie clearly remain—but among the most important is that she does not stir his imagination as Julie did (and continues to do): “Content with her charms, my heart does not lend them its illusion; she is lovelier to my eyes than to my imagination, and I am more apprehensive when she is nearby than when she is far away” (J 556). The disturbances Claire introduces are physical but they do not populate the imagination with the illusions love creates. “For all that,” St. Preux asks his former lover, “does [attraction] become love? Julie, ah, what a difference! Where is the enthusiasm? Where is the idolatry? Where are those divine distractions of reason, more brilliant, more sublime, more powerful, a hundred times better than reason itself?” (556). Illusion is the source of romantic enthusiasm, and Claire—as her name suggests—cannot inspire it because she does not stir the imagination. St. Preux cannot idolize what he knows to be flawed, and he is too acquainted with Claire to think her perfect in any way. Because no veil hides her there is no temptation to see what the veil hides; her very transparency keeps his imagination quiet. St. Preux goes on to explain that, having experienced the full transports of love, he could never be happy in a relationship that lacked the emotional intensity that seemingly only love can supply: “Grace, beauty, merit, attachment, fortune, all would conspire to my felicity; my heart, my heart alone would poison it all, and make me miserable in the bosom of my happiness” (558). St. Preux’s misery would create an intolerable situation both for himself and for Claire. Thus he makes his declaration: “I love [Claire] too well to marry her” (558).

Claire shares many of St. Preux’s reservations, and like him she reports that her heart is not capable of the sort of attachment that love requires. Though she confesses she is quite in love with St. Preux, she adds that she would have “driven him crazy” and that she has always thought about a marriage with him “with disdain.” Her love for St. Preux ultimately amounts to little more than a refracted form of her love for Julie: Claire tells her cousin, “I derived all my sentiments from you; you alone were everything to me, and I lived only to be your friend” (J 526; see Disch 1994). The chief advantage of marrying St. Preux would thus not be the union itself so much as what it would procure for Claire—namely, more and more intimate access to her Julie. Claire’s erotic attraction to her cousin is most evident when she defers to her cousin’s judgment in the matter of marriage: “Take . . . the responsibility of my conduct, I confide its direction entirely to you. Let us return to our natural state and exchange callings, it will be better for us
both. Govern, I will be docile; it is for you to will what I must do. . . . Keep my soul enclosed in yours, why should inseparables have two?" (J 532). Prudential concerns and the simulacrum of love make Claire willing to marry St. Preux, but only on the condition that her soul remain in Julie’s custody. Friends like Claire and St. Preux may get married, but they will never live for one another.

The concerns voiced both by St. Preux and by Claire speak directly to the paradoxical and ultimately tragic role Rousseau assigns to love. It is man’s greatest and most powerful desire, and as such it creates new and exciting social and psychological possibilities that would not otherwise exist. Absent love, there can be no restoration of the Golden Age (see Shklar 1969) or any real happiness in domestic society; life without marriage is undefined and incomplete, and marriage without love is cramped and suffocating. Yet when love expires—as it most assuredly does—it casts a long and dark shadow in the memory; the remembrance of lost love poisons lovers, facilitates resentment between them, and erodes the bonds of esteem that keep a marriage alive once love itself begins to slacken. Thus love forecloses on the very possibilities it creates. We are no more happy with love than we are without it. This is the teaching of Julie.

The Horizon in Every Direction: The Citizens of Clarens

In problematizing the romantic rituals on which the household is based Rousseau also problematizes the idea of the happy household and, with it, the idea of the household as such. This problematization clearly has consequences that extend beyond the domestic sphere, but exactly what those consequences are depends on how the relationship between the domestic and political worlds is theorized. On one understanding of this relationship, the family cultivates our basic moral and social dispositions and, in so doing, serves as an important catalyst of political socialization. Politics requires sociability and sociability requires families. Hence the family’s role as a socializing agent is on the whole continuous with the needs of the state and not viewed as essentially threatening to its continued health. Were Rousseau to view the relation between the domicile and the polis in this way—as it sometimes appears—then the destabilization of private spaces we have seen in Emile and Julie would seem to have grave consequences for his political vision, for to the degree that the family structure...
fails to provide a stable site of moral training the state is robbed of good citizens.

There is, however, a second way of conceiving the relation of household and state, one more typical of classical thought and most fully embodied in Plato’s claim that perfect justice requires the abolition of the nuclear family (Rep. 449c–d, 457d–61c). The Socratic view posits that the family is not an agent of but rather a rival to the state; far from cultivating strong civic dispositions and ordering the soul in accordance with justice, domestic life encourages an undue attachment to one’s own and distracts citizens from the higher and nobler calling of civic engagement. To the degree that Rousseau follows Socrates in viewing the domicile as in some way competing with the state for the scarce psychological and emotional resources that human beings have, the political consequences are less grave, for the instability of the family unit—far from bringing the polity down with it—instead creates a new and bigger space for politics that was not available before.

Though the interpretation of Emile and Julie advanced in the previous two chapters inclines toward the latter alternative, many readers of Julie favor the former, compatibilist view. We have, for instance, already seen that Tony Tanner’s politicized reading emphasizes questions of social class and, in so doing, makes it possible to read Julie both as an indictment of feudal inequality and as a critique of the emerging bourgeois family and its rigid insistence on sexual monogamy. Nicole Fermont (1997) has also sought to understand the domestic community of Claresns in terms of its social and political importance but argues that Julie has not just a negative or critical function but also represents a model of private life that resolves a series of thorny political problems posed by the Social Contract. She argues that Julie presents a “vision of the ‘private worlds’ of citizens” that “fleshes out human aspects of the common life left out of The Social Contract” and that the presentation of the household in Julie helps to mitigate the conflicts that can arise between political society and the various “partial societies” that exist within it. To this she adds that the moral training one receives in a healthy household will prove politically salutary: the “autarkic nature of the household provides the citizens with the material possibilities for free choice while creating an institution that will educate his heart and provide him with sound habits” (119; cf. SC II.3, 61–62). The household described in Julie is thus precisely the kind required by the regime of the Social Contract.

Our analyses of Emile and Julie, without denying Rousseau’s rejection of Socrates’s radical collectivism, nonetheless cast serious doubt on arguments
like Fermon’s for at least three reasons. First, it is rather difficult to see how the stringent demands of the just regime can be unproblematically integrated into the private, introspective, and leisurely lifestyle depicted in the novel. If there is no conflict between politics and the household in Julie, it is not because the problem has been resolved but rather because it does not arise: politics make no demands on anyone’s time or attention, with Julie’s feckless uncle, who is constantly reading the papers and talking about international affairs, being the exception that proves the rule (e.g., J 168, 250).

And Fermon’s characterization of the household as an autarkic social unit only makes things worse, for if the household is truly autarkic then the superaddition of the political is at best gratuitous and at worst harmful to domestic society and the well-being of its members. Clarens is a closed and self-sufficient social system that does nothing to motivate those who live there to engage those who do not. Wolmar’s decision to charge St. Preux with the education of his children is telling (to say nothing of its irony), for he is the furthest thing from a citizen and is incapable of providing a public or political education. To the contrary, Wolmar’s children will be raised much as Emile was—at a distance from political society and its tumults—and will know Clarens not as a “waystation” to political justice but as a substitute for it. It is their true fatherland, their horizon in every direction.

The uncombinability of the political and domestic solutions are indicative of deeper fissures in Rousseau’s moral universe, for there seems to be something about the goods themselves that resist joint realization in a space of a single life. The philosopher may comprehend the whole good, but he does so at the cost of enjoying it in the normal fashion. The inward St. Preux will never know the pure “public joy” relished by citizens of Geneva (LD n. 136). The Spartan Pedaretus will never feel the individualistic pleasures of deep introspection or the happiness of discovering himself a part of a universal cosmopolitan brotherhood. Our experience with the good we seek is fragmentary, disintegrated, incomplete. Reflections like these are what led Rousseau to say that the educations of “men” and “citizens” must be different and incommensurable, and why he characterizes the process of citizen-craft as a kind of “denaturing.” Unlike Socrates, however, Rousseau does not explicitly prioritize political over domestic life. It is not at all clear that he views the way of life embodied by the household as a self-sufficient social unit as lower than or subordinate to the higher calling of political life. For all its drawbacks and difficulties, the vision of the good represented in private society—whether at Clarens, Emile and Sophie’s farmhouse, or Rousseau’s own fascinating reverie
at the end of Book IV of *Emile*—emerges from Rousseau’s work as a worthy albeit problematic alternative to its political counterpart.

Second, there is among *les belles âmes* a culture of servility quite at odds with the spirit of self-command characteristic of the Rousseauan citizen. St. Preux is simply unable to give himself direction and wishes only to be governed, first by Julie and later by Wolmar. He is hopelessly and eternally dependent on the powers of others. Claire, as Lisa Disch (1994) has nicely shown, displays a degree of independence not exhibited by St. Preux in her willingness to question the characteristically “masculine” form of power embodied by Wolmar, but in the end she is every bit as subject to Julie’s feminine “empire” as is St. Preux. And though Julie undoubtedly displays extraordinary self-command in her heroic struggle against temptation, it must be admitted that her struggle itself is in part a function of an excessive emotional dependence on her father. Julie herself is under the sway of the *maison paternelle* and unable to fully see or act out effectively against its injustice. Her father, the dupe of his own prejudices, knows his daughter well and—like all despots—is more than willing to resort to both emotional and physical abuse in order to impose his will. However, Julie is either unable or unwilling to identify her father’s cruelty for what it is, preferring either to make excuses for his behavior or to unfairly condemn her own. Exercising neither voice nor exit, she docilely accepts the husband chosen for her even though she understands all too well that the consequences will quite literally be fatal. Her moral posture toward earthly authority—whether it be her father’s despotic rage or Wolmar’s distant sangfroid—more closely resembles the gentle resignation of the “true Christian” than it does the proud defiance of the citizen: where the former “knows how to die” but not how to win a battle, the latter seeks victory because informed with “a burning love of glory and homeland” (*SC* IV.8, 129). Julie’s submissiveness before her father is thus rather different from the submissiveness of a good citizen before the law. From the perspective of a would-be lawgiver seeking to instill civic-spiritedness through education, the kind of moral instruction utilized at Clarens simply does not fit the bill.

Third, and relatedly, we should hope for the sake of citizens themselves—whoever they turn out to be—that the unstable and unhappy domestic life depicted in *Julie* does not “flesh out” the private lives of citizens, for a quick inventory reveals that there is hardly a single character in the novel who is well-adjusted or content with his lot. We cannot avoid the conclusion that Clarens, for all its virtues as an estate, was nonetheless a failure. It did not succeed in curing either Julie or St. Preux of the psychic devastation wrought...
by their tragic love: Julie, crushed by the weight of her obligations, is so miserable that she commits suicide as soon it is possible for her to do so, and Claire and St. Preux are ready to follow suit when they learn of Julie’s fate. People so invested in their private lives and associations are far better than are the average bourgeois, who does not care about anything enough to contemplate suicide. But they are not to be compared to Cato who, as Bomstom reminds St. Preux, killed himself for the sake of his lost republic rather than for the sake of his lost love (J 322). There is nothing “civic”—and indeed, something rather uncivic—about the virtue exhibited by the novel’s principal characters.

Love’s Failure: Implications and Conclusions

In both Emile and Julie we find that elaborate, artificial, and unsustainably fragile imaginative constructions are imposed in order to generate the psychic energy necessary to maintain social affection. Rousseau’s turn to the imagination, however questionable prima facie, is made necessary by his insistence on man’s natural associability. He seizes on the promise of the imagination because the act of imagining, whatever else it may be, is a private or solitary activity. If we prefer our imaginings to the objects they represent, we do so not only because images are perfect and people are not but also because our images are ours in a way that another person never could be. They, and not others, are immediate expressions of our moral personalities; they create and control us even as we create and control them. The pedagogic project of Emile and, to a lesser extent, the romance of Julie explore the possibility of establishing this process of reciprocal governance between persons; we have seen, however, that the best it can hope to do is establish it within them. In the final analysis, then, it is the imagination—not the incorporated other—that is regulative.

An implication of the privateness of imaginary activity is that even when we dream of others we have a tendency to forget them, and to fashion in their stead imaginative re-creations that, by their very perfection, are inaccurate depictions of the flawed objects they represent. Both Emile and St. Preux engage in this process with ultimately unsuccessful results: where the former has difficulty coping with the disappearance of his perfect Sophie and seeks solace in the “too attractive liaisons” of Paris, the latter is denied the opportunity to wed his beloved and is haunted by his perfect image of
her for the rest of his life. We are thus led to the somewhat melancholy conclusion that the imaginative re-creations to which Rousseau turns in order to catalyze romantic love mediate and disrupt the relation between I and thou even as they make that relation possible. Imaginary embellishments help to bridge the gap between self and other, but we must remember that Rousseau's purpose was not to bridge this gap but to shorten its distance. Judged by this standard, the educational project of Emile cannot be considered a success, and St. Preux's turbulent romance with Julie becomes even more flawed than it appears to be.

Of course, it is necessary to wonder what these failures suggest about Rousseau's more general social and political concerns. Though I will take this question up more thoroughly in the final chapter, I will anticipate that analysis here by simply suggesting that what Emile and Julie tell us about the attenuated nature of human connectedness has important implications for how we read the Social Contract and Rousseau's other political works. For instance, the failure of Emile's education tends to vitiate Frederick Neuhaus's (2008, 23) claim that it is best understood as a blueprint for a new form of "modern" citizenship that supplants and even surpasses the classical conception. If Emile's education is as unsuccessful and his connection to political society as attenuated as my analysis has shown, then it would have been very odd indeed for Rousseau to make it the pedagogic basis for the political project outlined in the Social Contract. Any hope of bringing a just and durable regime into being, far from relying on a conception of citizenship as unstable as the "modern" alternative embodied by Emile, would seem to require at least a partial recovery of something like the classical conception of the citizen.

Julie, too, discloses the basic discontinuities between the requirements of the domestic and political spheres. Hardly a word about politics is spoken by any of the novel's hero(in)es, and the virtues and vices on display are not "civic" in any identifiable way. Their identities are formed and expressed by the domestic context in which they subsist and from which they draw their happiness (or lack thereof); their hopes are confined by the horizons of Clarren and carry them back there, at least in St. Preux's case, from the ends of the earth; their emotional and intellectual needs are created and satisfied by each other and do not require the stimulation of the outside world. Their social world is closed and self-sufficient. The family, far from simply being a site of moral habituation that is continuous with state purposes, is instead a site of identity-construction that rivals state purposes. Put another way, the
family as depicted in Julie is precisely the kind of “partial society” that Rousseau seeks to delimit in the regime described in the Social Contract; its claim on our identities and as the source of our deepest satisfactions must be neutralized if the sociological preconditions for genuine political justice are to be achieved.

Though the above analyses of Emile and Julie reveal the domestic solution to the problem of human dividedness to be problematic in decisive respects, they also do much to point up the difficulties with the “political” solution as well. Indeed, the psychological difficulties that attend the realization of the double object in the context of Emile’s education would appear to be even more severe in the case of the classical citizen. Public education of the classical sort requires that citizens make virtually no distinction between themselves and the political whole of which they are parts. To effect this unnatural union, the state substitutes the illusions of nationalism for the those of love—patriotism replaces gallantry at the core of human identity. Yet nationalistic fictions would seem even more difficult to sustain than romantic ones because of their remoteness from natural self-love: public education involves not just the redirection and extension of natural desires, as in Emile’s education, but a wholesale transformation of human nature (E 39; SC II.7, 68). If one could imagine a pedagogic enterprise more radical, more ambitious, more difficult, or less likely to succeed than Emile’s domestic education, the public education that Rousseau recommends for the citizen is a plausible candidate.

That Rousseau sees decay as inevitable in the domestic world is, it seems, a function of an extraordinarily deep circumspection about the durability of healthy human association. His pessimism reflects a peculiarly modern concern, one in which he participates more reluctantly but perhaps more fully than do any of his predecessors. Rousseau saw clearly that previous modern thinkers had failed to explain the distinctively human desire for wholeness through social connectedness, but his own attempt to generate such an explanation is beset by similar limitations. He thus ultimately distinguishes himself from other moderns less by his successful resolution of the problem of human connectedness than by his acute awareness of and fruitful engagement with it. The effort to reconstruct eros with the materials furnished by modern philosophy is something like trying to build a palace from mud and twigs. Rousseau knew this from the very beginning, and both Emile and Julie disclose this awareness subtly but unmistakably.