

## FROM ANIMAL TO ENVIRONMENT: THE NARRATIVE OF A RESEARCH ON NATURE FROM THE 18TH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT DAY

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**Abstract.** This paper is the text of a lecture given at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski on 2 November 2023 at the invitation of Professor Irena Kristeva. Its purpose is to retrace the path of my research, from the question of the Animal in the eighteenth century to the theme, at the same time, of the environment associated with the construction of the modern Ego and which gave rise to my latest book published in 2020: *Figures of the Self and the Natural Environment in the Eighteenth Century*. Throughout, the common thread remains to understand the link between these two processes and the new Anthropology being established at the time, whether in terms of the new definition of Man in general in relation to the Animal, or of the Self in relation to the natural Environment. At the same time, this sensitivity to Nature paved the way for our contemporary ecology, both scientific and political.

**Keywords:** nature; environment; self; 18th century; animal; ecology

My paper<sup>1</sup> will focus on the link that can be established between the emergence of new figures of the Self in the 18th century and the growing relationship with the natural environment in that same century, two fundamental and almost concomitant mutations at the foundation of our Modernity. This link was the subject of my book published in 2020: *Figures du moi et environnement naturel au XVIIIe siècle* [in English: *Figures of the Self and Natural Environment in the 18th Century*] (Éditions de la Sorbonne).

But first, perhaps a personal word to clarify the origin and nature of the link I have with my object of study and also what has been my research path on this vast theme. It will also allow me to talk about an earlier work, that of my thesis, which dealt with the question of the Animal in the 18th century, a work published in 2006 under the title *Rousseau, l'animal et l'homme* [*Rousseau, Animal and Man*] (Éditions du Cerf), and with which the present book is in continuity. For me, the relationship with Nature is not only an academic object like any other; on the contrary, it has deep roots that go back to my childhood. I was a child who was constantly

immersed in Nature, which, it's true, was right across the street from me, like a modest little Emile in a way, but – alas, no doubt – without a preceptor according Rousseau's views...

Logically, I wanted to become a natural science teacher until, as a teenager, I fell into the Humanities, and more specifically Philosophy. I went on to become a professor in Philosophy after studying both Philosophy and Literature (as I had a dual education). However, my relationship with Nature kept coming back to me and, having finally become aware of this insistence, I decided in the 1990s to write a thesis on the question of the Animal in philosophical History and Thought. It wasn't fashionable at the time and wasn't considered a serious subject. At any rate, the subject had to be delimited, as it was naturally too broad. As the 18th century was already my favourite century, and Rousseau an author I'd known for a long time, the choice wasn't very difficult. However, it was not at all arbitrary. For a long time now, I had been noticing the singular importance that the Animal had taken all along the 18th century - since the Animal is to be found everywhere as a kind of obligatory crossroads of Thought - and this had already made me wonder: why this promotion? What was the reason for it? What was behind it?

Of course, there were situational reasons: the scandal caused by the Cartesian animal-machine, the use of this scandal in the quarrel between the Jesuits and the Jansenists, the revaluation of animal capacities in the empiricist perspective that became dominant in the 18th century and even more so among the materialists who used it as an argument against the distinction between Man and Animal, the retreat of Religion, the new importance assumed by the life sciences, and the widespread critical atmosphere in the debates of the Age of Enlightenment. Therefore, at that time in History, everything was undoubtedly in place to bring the animal question in the front of the scene. But all these reasons, however valid, seemed to me to be insufficient, and I had to find the missing piece that would give it both its foundation and its unity. The argument of my thesis was that this promotion of the Animal was an essential part of the reconfiguration of the image of Man in the Age of Enlightenment. Indeed, this century seems to be the matrix of the conception we have of ourselves, of the self-definition of modern Man, namely a fundamentally naturalistic and individualistic conception. Prior to the 18th century, the definition of Man was quite different, and posed in metaphysical and religious terms. Man was first and foremost the centre and the end of God's creation of the world. He was defined in a scale of beings that places him in a median position, as both on the one hand a participant in a privileged link with the divine plane, that of the Creator, to which his Soul belongs, and on the other hand as belonging to the plane of creatures to which he is attached by his body, his needs and his passions.

The modern image of Man is quite different. Made possible by the historical factors already mentioned, this new Anthropology is constituted globally no longer by relating the human being to a metaphysical and transcendent plane, but on the con-

trary by rooting him in immanence, in existence within the world, and by shifting the boundaries of comparison, moving from the relationship to God to the relationship to other living beings, and in particular to the closest: the Animal. As a result, the mode of relationship is also no longer the same: the relationship of opposition that prevailed between Man and Animal is now tending towards a relationship of composition. Particularly as a result of rejection of Descartes' innate ideas, humans and animals now share the same ontological and epistemic basis, not only physically but also intellectually. Both initially start from the same spiritual "Tabula rasa" (to use Locke's famous expression), they will later differentiate themselves according to their different needs, activities, contexts and lives. Difference is certainly maintained, but it is no longer initial; it no longer resides in being but in becoming. Difference has become differentiation and therefore resides in the transformation of a fundamental unity. The human becomes a transformation of animality, a certain animal, undoubtedly to set aside, but for reasons that have nothing to do with a difference in essence. This new Anthropology is the inevitable fruit of the new empiricist and materialist conceptions that are taking hold, at least for the empiricist movement, pending the 19th century which, after a period of reaction in its first half, will confirm these views with decisive scientific support, first Darwinism and then Genetics. Of course, there are many nuances, and a lot of 18th-century authors retain an underlying spiritualist base, but it is often difficult to detect the tactical part of this in view of the ever-present theological censorship – so, for example, we can doubt Buffon's sincerity, and less clearly that of Condillac, while Rousseau, for his part, seems to be completely sincere – and the overall trend is indeed towards this naturalisation of the human essence. Admittedly, the 19th century opposed this naturalisation of the human essence by proposing a new definition of the Self, this time on a historicist and culturalist basis, the framework of definition becoming the historical movement of culture and, more precisely, of cultures, each referring to a national soil and rooted in a territory. However, on the one hand, this new image of Man was part of a wider naturalist framework (as we can see from all the references to Nature in the discourse of the time, which referred the nation to the land, to the national soil, and so on) and, on the other hand, this historicist and culturalist movement, it seems to us, came to a halt from the second half of the 20th century onwards.

To return to the development of my research, it was therefore entirely logical that, after this work on the question of the Animal, I should continue this analysis of anthropological naturalisation in the 18th century by extending this movement to the relationship with Nature in general, which is what I have been working on for some twenty years, resulting in the book *Figures du moi et environnement naturel au 18e siècle*.

The promotion of the Animal in the 18th century was in fact supported by the promotion of Nature in general in that same century; this promotion of Nature was

the subject of Jean Ehrard's seminal work, *L'Idée de nature en France dans la première moitié du XVIIIe siècle* (*The Idea of Nature in France in the First Half of the 18th Century*) (Ehrard 1994). It has long been well known that this century was the century of Nature, which is to be found everywhere, in the sciences, the arts, literature, aesthetic theories, philosophy, morality and even law and politics with the school of natural law. At the same time, however, this century was also one of recognition of the individual. As it can be seen, for example, in literature, individuals can now relate to themselves directly and without justification, without having to go through the obligatory mediation of higher authorities, such as religion, the family, political power and all the authorities and communities that make up society. This self-centred form is expressed in the term "moi" in French language, which became established in the 18th century, in a self-referential gesture that became part of language. In literature, it was the rise of autobiographical narratives, whether religious conversion narratives, which flourished from the end of the 17th century onwards, as Georges Gusdorf clearly showed in volume 7 of his vast collection *Les sciences humaines et la pensée occidentale* (Gusdorf 1976), or then, from the beginning of the 18th century, the genre of memoir novels – the "roman-mémoires" in French – and then the Confessions, which developed in the second half of the century.

The two phenomena – the rise of the Self and the emphasis on Nature – are therefore concomitant. But is there a link? The point of my book, *Figures du moi et environnement naturel au 18e siècle*, is to show this, and to do so by indicating that the link is constitutive rather than contingent.

At this point I need to stop for a moment to justify the use of the term I associate with the term "Nature", that of Environment. The term "Environment" may be deemed anachronistic, and indeed it undoubtedly is. But it seems to me that it is the term that best reflects the changing meaning of the notion of Nature in this century. Previously, Nature was perceived either from a theological angle – as a collection of creatures, an ontological level degraded essentially as a result of the fall of Adam and Eve - or from a scientific angle – as a mathematical system of laws that make the world intelligible, a conception that became established in the 17th century with Galileo and Descartes. The two meanings, theological and scientific, are not incompatible; on the contrary, they are historically complementary. Indeed, the hypothesis of an engineer God having fundamentally created a world in order according to mathematical laws assures the scientist in advance of the possibility of finding these laws. In both cases, however, Nature is essentially a representation, a vision of the mind that filters the perception of real Nature. In the 18th century, a fundamental shift took place, by the fact that Nature came to be valued above all as presence, as a reality immediately and concretely valid for itself and by itself, and no longer as an idea and in reference to external, theological or intellectual norms. Then, it is no longer Nature in itself but the relationship to Nature that is now at

the centre. We can see how the notion of Environment is appropriate here in that it captures this relationship of the concrete, enveloping presence of Nature for the human Subject. This mutation goes hand in hand with the rise of Sensibility, another rising star of the century, which appears to be the medium which connects the Self and Nature as Environment.

In that light, Sensibility is not only the epistemic notion that provides the theoretical basis for the empiricist conception of knowledge, it is a renewed mode of giving of the world, a renewed type of openness to being and to oneself, and as such has an existential and moral meaning. It is thus a new way of defining the human Self. From then on, Nature emerges as the spontaneous and immediate sensitive horizon, the given and original Environment whose richness is like a nourishing soil for this Self sensitive to itself and to exteriority. Jean-Jacques Rousseau is, of course, the author who will bring these processes to fruition most clearly, and who will literally celebrate these new nuptials of the Self and Nature with new aesthetic forms. But the process began even earlier, in the first half of the century, with a kind of maturation of the sensitive Self that was very evident in literature with the rise of the genre of memoir novels, particularly those of Marivaux and Prévost. In these novels of the first half of the century, where the Self as such addresses the reader and tells his own story without the need for justifications, Nature is not yet present, as if the sensitive Self needed time to take shape before opening up to external natural reality. It was not until the 1760s that this link with the natural Environment began to be formed. Not only Rousseau but also Diderot bore witness to this.

To illustrate this, I'm going to give Diderot the floor in a rather surprising passage. It is from the opening pages of the second Interview with Dorval (which follows the play *Le Fils naturel*). This passage serves our purpose all the more because it celebrates Nature not directly but through the effects it produces on the spectator's sensibility:

Dorval had arrived first. I approached him without him noticing me. He had abandoned himself to the spectacle of Nature. His chest was raised. He was breathing heavily. His eyes were attentive to every object. I was following the various impressions on his face, and I was beginning to share his transport, when I exclaimed, almost without meaning to, "He's under a spell". He heard me, and replied in an altered voice: "It's true. This is where you see Nature. This is the sacred shelter of enthusiasm. Has a man received genius? He leaves the city and its inhabitants. He likes, according to the attraction of his heart, to mingle his tears with the crystal of a fountain [...]; to walk lightly on the soft grass of the meadow; to cross, with slow steps, the fertile countryside; [...] to flee to the depths of the forests. He loves their secret horror. He wanders. He seeks a den that inspires him. Who mixes his voice with the torrent that falls from the mountain? Who feels the sublimity of a deserted place? Who listens to himself in the silence of solitude? He does. Our poet lives on

the shores of a lake. He looks out over the waters, and his genius spreads out. It is there that he is seized by that spirit, sometimes tranquil and sometimes violent, which lifts his soul or soothes it at will... O Nature, all that is good is contained in your bosom! You are the fecund source of all truths<sup>2</sup>! (Diderot 1980, p. 98)

After that, of course, I can't avoid quoting Rousseau at this point. Here, then, is the well-known but still remarkable passage from the third of his *Letters to Malesherbes*, where Nature as an Environment literally floods the Self with happiness, both physically and emotionally:

What times would you believe, Sir, that I remember most often and most willingly in my dreams? [...] my solitary walks, [...] those quick but delicious days I spent entirely with myself, [...] my beloved dog, my old cat, with the birds of the countryside and the deer of the forest, with the whole of Nature and its inconceivable author [...] It was there that it seemed to display an ever new magnificence in my eyes. The gold of the broom and the purple of the heather struck my eyes with a luxury that touched my heart, the majesty of the trees that covered me with their shade, the delicacy of the shrubs that surrounded me, the astonishing variety of the herbs and flowers that I trod under my feet kept my mind in a continual alternation of observation and admiration: the concurrence of so many interesting objects competing for my attention, constantly drawing me from one to another [...] often made me repeat to myself: No, Solomon in all his glory was never dressed like one of them<sup>3</sup>. (Rousseau 1959, pp. 1139 – 1140)

Let us be more precise. This connection between Self and Nature is not undifferentiated; on the contrary, it is modulated and branched out in a determined way. This relationship in fact appears as the decisive point that allows figures of the modern Self to constitute themselves according to the type of relationship to nature that they adopt.

So, these figures of the Self in the 18th century seem to me to be four: the fragile Self (the “moi fragile” in French), which is in fact more a general figure than a determined one, the framed Self (the “moi cadre” in French), the strong Self (the “moi fort” in French) and the saturated Self (the “moi saturé” in French).

Let's take them up again in that order.

The fragile Self, as it has been said, is more a general figure than a specific one. It is the general figure of the Self as it results from a kind of ontological shipwreck at the end of the previous century, which saw the metaphysical and theological structures of the Subject gradually disjoint and disintegrate. In the 17th century, the Subject, or Self, was constituted by the solid idea of a Soul, a kind of individual essence that defines us and predates our physical existence in the world. Even Descartes, who was highly critical of the traditional notion of the Soul and literally deconstructed it, however did not destroy it. On the contrary, he reduced and intellectualised the Soul by defining it by Thought alone, without retaining the function of vital animation that both ancient tradition and Christian doctrine accorded it. But, reduced in this

way, the Soul survives more than ever and is even strengthened by being defined as a substance, that means a being immediately ontologically dependent on God without owing anything to creatures. In this way, the relationship with the external world and with Nature, although of great importance, appears to be secondary. From then on, the Cartesian Subject, substantially solid, intellectually armed by innate ideas, possesses within himself all the equipment required to confront the world. Even if he is open to external experience - this is the very vector of science – even if he is traversed and structured by the union of Soul and Body, the source within him of needs and passions, he is already fundamentally constituted prior to these external or internal confrontations.

On the other hand, the Self at the end of the 17th century is in an entirely different situation: as a result of the critical activity of empiricist and materialist doctrines, it is now like an orphan of the metaphysical world of essences from which he drew his consistency. Deprived of the internal framework of innate ideas, he appears as a naked and fragile Self, returned to his contingency and finitude, stripped of all ontological justification, whether metaphysical or theological. It is the empirical Self of Locke, then of Hume, forced to constantly recapitulate his memories in order to link them up and merge them into the continuity of his being, in order to constitute his unity, which is made up of nothing but fragments of existence. He is therefore a sort of autobiographical being, who draws his substance solely from his memory, a 'Self made Self' as I call him in my book. His unity is not in fact substantial but results from his permanent activity which, like Penelope's canvas, must constantly absorb the multiplicity of sensations and memories in an ever-renewed synthesis. A fundamentally worried Self, always on the brink, a multiple Self which, like a tireless seamstress, conjugates and conjures up this multiplicity which constantly invades him.

This figure of the fragile Self is in fact the matrix of all the other figures of the Self that will appear over the course of the century. We now understand the crucial role of the relationship with Nature in the development of this Self. This fragile, indeterminate Self can only draw his substance from the external sensitive world, namely from Nature, and it is his position in relation to Nature that will enable him to determine himself. We will now examine the other three figures of the Self: the framed Self, the strong Self and the saturated Self.

These different figures of the Self are in fact less types than precisely figures of the one and the same multiple Self which is that of the 18th century. This is why they are not very fixed and can easily pass from one to the other, without contradiction.

Let's start with the framed Self. Broadly speaking, this is the Self which, reacting against his fundamental indeterminacy, gives himself a constraining framework of thought and existence enabling him to orientate himself and give himself meaning. This framework is usually theological, but not always. The author who seems to

me the most emblematic to illustrate this figure of the framed self is the Swedish naturalist Linnaeus. Linnaeus was an author who was part of the vast movement known as natural Theology, a movement that developed considerably from the end of the 17th century onwards and consisted of systematically searching Nature for signs of divine Providence. The approach is finalist: Nature, seen as the realisation of God's plan, is thought of as a set of means to achieve the ends that God has set for it, it is to say essentially to respond to human needs and to foster as far as possible the human religious vocation. There is a reason for everything. Rising tides are intended to help ships to get into port, and falling tides to help them to get out from port. The moon is the star that, at night, provides men with the subdued light they may need, without disturbing their sleep. And so it goes on. The human Self thus escapes his fundamental dereliction and circulates in a world saturated with meaning, flashing with a thousand signals that enable him to verify at every step the divine solicitude that has foreseen everything. The scholar thus becomes the scrupulous recorder of all the God's views he can collect from Nature. This was the very project of Linnaeus, who saw Nature as the clear and obvious realisation of God's will, and who listed every aspect of it in his vast *System of Nature*, which was scientifically very consistent but whose systematic providentialism drew ironic criticism from Buffon.

The “strong Self” is a completely different figure of the Self: free from any already established framework set up, it is rather this Self that establishes his own framework that structures his relationship with Nature by dominating it. To continue the patronage of these different figures of the Self, I have chosen Buffon as the emblematic figure of the strong Self. Intendant of the King's Garden in Paris (which later became the Jardin des Plantes), industrialist and owner of forges at his home in Montbard in Burgundy near Dijon, editor and director of the immense *Histoire naturelle*, one of the best-sellers of the century, Buffon is a clearly dominant figure who administers Nature as he administers everything around him, undoubtedly prefiguring the bourgeois Self of the 19th century.

The relationship with Nature, for this strong Self embodied by Buffon, therefore consists in seizing this Nature in order to impose on it ends that are no longer God's ends this time, but Man's ends. In a gesture that is clearly, and without any embarrassment, anthropocentric, Man is thus called by Buffon “the great and final work of Creation”<sup>4</sup> (Buffon 1761, p. 559) called upon to perfect and complete Nature; let's quote him and pay attention to the contrast with Diderot's and Rousseau's texts we have already referred to:

The whole face of the Earth today bears the imprint of Man's power, which, although subordinate to that of Nature, has often done more than it, or at least has assisted it so marvellously, that it is with the help of our hands that it has developed to its full extent, and that it has arrived by degrees at the point of perfection and magnificence where we see it today<sup>5</sup>. (Buffon 1761, p. 585)

But Man here is above all the individual and, even more than anthropocentrism, we can speak here of a true egocentrism; let us quote again Buffon, who expresses this idea in a brutal and striking shorthand: “Raw nature is hideous and dying; it is I, I alone who can make it pleasant and alive” (Buffon 1764, p. xiii). Of course this ‘I’ – ‘it is I, I alone’ – is standing for Man in general but it is indisputably from an individual point of view, precisely the one of the Self.

There are, of course, other figures of the strong Self. Locke himself, although linked to the figure of the fragile and restless Self, presents certain aspects of the strong Self in his conception. The Lockean Self is in fact constantly working on Nature and transforming it according to human views. It is a proprietary Self, which consolidates and founds his being through his possession, his domain, which gives him consistency and therefore precisely strength. Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe can be seen as an incarnation of the Lockean Self, dominator and administrator of his island.

But we can see the difference with Buffon, whose strength is much more certain of itself and posited *a priori* rather than as the end of a process of becoming.

Closer to Buffon than Locke or Robinson Crusoe, the fictional figure of Wolmar, who administers his domain in an extremely rational and calculated way, can also be linked to this register of the strong Self in Rousseau’s *The New Heloise*.

But some of these figures show other possible faces of the strong Self, provided that he does not become locked into his project of domination and, on the contrary, agrees to give it up. This is how I see the character of Jacques in Diderot’s *Jacques le Fataliste*, even though it may seem paradoxical. This Self does not seem to me to be reducible to a fragile Self. Flexible, adaptable, always taking a step back from events, which gives him a marked philosophical side, possessing a powerful vitality that is also expressed by an inexhaustible capacity to speak and reply to his master, Jacques does indeed possess an indisputable strength. However, far from wanting to control other people, things and events, this strength accepts them on the contrary as part of the overall determinism of Nature, which decisively separates force and domination.

Let’s go now to the figure I call the “saturated Self”, the most prominent figure of the last period of the 18th century before the Revolution, and which will reappear and flourish in various ways with Romanticism. This saturated Self corresponds to the sensitive Self – the “moi sensible” in French – embodied in the literature of the novel, known precisely as the sensitive novel – the “roman sensible” in French –, and of which Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle Héloïse* once again appears indisputably as the symbol. Saint-Preux in this novel embodies this saturated Self in an exemplary way. I have called him “saturated” because this Self is invaded and overwhelmed by his own affects, which he has no control over and which constantly sway him from exaltation to despondency and despair. As a result, he projects this uncontrollable and oppressive mass of emotions onto the surrounding Nature, making it

both a canvas for projection and a response to his states of mind. In this way, Saint-Preux falls into ecstasy in front of landscapes, which he uses as a witness to his feelings, thus foreshadowing the landscape-state of mind (the “paysage-état d’âme” in French) of the Romantic literature to come. He enters into a kind of intimate dialogue with Nature, making this one a real character in the novel. Rousseau himself is part of this psychology of the saturated Self, describing his own relationship with Nature from this perspective. Witness, for example, a series of letters he wrote to the Maréchal de Luxembourg and where he warned him in advance of the possible lack of objectivity in the descriptions of his travels that the Maréchal de Luxembourg had requested of him; let’s quote one of these letters:

Trees, rocks [...] are so many isolated objects, each of which gives little emotion to the beholder, but the common impression of all this, which unites it in a single picture, depends on the state we are in when contemplating it. This picture, although always the same, is painted in as many ways as there are different dispositions in the hearts of the spectators, and these differences, which make up our judgements, do not only take place from one spectator to another, but in the same one at different times<sup>7</sup> (Rousseau 1997, pp. 25 – 26).

### **Conclusion**

At the end of this lecture, we will conclude this restitution of my research and of its results concerning the importance of the relationship to Nature in the formation of the modern Self by insisting on the consequences this link had on the birth and the development of Ecology. Indeed, we can better understand the root of the modern and contemporary sensitivity to Nature that underpins today’s Ecology movements. Long before the emergence of scientific Ecology at the end of the 19th century as a consequence of the Darwinian Revolution and the awareness of the interspecific solidarities that it makes possible, and long before the birth of political Ecology which, for its part, is based on the awareness of the negative effects of human industry on Nature, well before these two movements, a ground of sensitivity to Nature as an Environment was formed in the 18th century that would enable the reception of this scientific, and then political, Ecology. In a way, it was a subjective Ecology, an Ecology of sensitivity linked to the formation of a permeable Self, a Self in open relation to his Environment, what we might call an egological Ecology, which preceded and authorised both the objective Ecology and the political Ecology of today. In the meantime, it would have been necessary to overcome the illusions of the historical and political Self characteristic of the 19th century, which projected all his expectations onto Society without taking sufficient account of Nature, which is our world.

## NOTES

1. The first version of this paper was delivered as lecture on 2 November 2023 at Sofia University. I would like to warmly thank Professor Irena Kristeva for inviting me to Sofia University to retrace the path of my research and report on its currents results, and to all participants in the ensuing discussion.
2. Translated by me as for all the quotations of the paper [French text: “Dorval était arrivé le premier. J’approchai de lui sans qu’il m’aperçût. Il s’était abandonné au spectacle de la nature. Il avait la poitrine élevée. Il respirait avec force. Ses yeux attentifs se portaient sur tous les objets. Je suivais sur son visage les impressions diverses qu’il en éprouvait ; et je commençais à partager son transport, lorsque je m’écriai, presque sans le vouloir : “Il est sous le charme.” Il m’entendit, et me répondit d’une voix altérée : “Il est vrai. C’est ici qu’on voit la nature. Voici le séjour sacré de l’enthousiasme. Un homme a-t-il reçu du génie ? il quitte la ville et ses habitants. Il aime, selon l’attrait de son cœur, à mêler ses pleurs au cristal d’une fontaine [...] ; à fouler d’un pied léger l’herbe tendre de la prairie ; à traverser, à pas lents, des campagnes fertiles ; à contempler les travaux des hommes ; à fuir au fond des forêts. Il aime leur horreur secrète. Il erre. Il cherche un antre qui l’inspire. Qui est-ce qui mêle sa voix au torrent qui tombe de la montagne ? Qui est-ce qui sent le sublime d’un lieu désert ? Qui est-ce qui s’écoute dans le silence de la solitude ? C’est lui. Notre poète habite sur les bords d’un lac. Il promène sa vue sur les eaux, et son génie s’étend. C’est là qu’il est saisi de cet esprit, tantôt tranquille et tantôt violent, qui soulève son âme ou qui l’apaise à son gré... O Nature, tout ce qui est bien est renfermé dans ton sein ! Tu es la source féconde de toutes vérités !”].
3. [French text: “Quels temps croiriez-vous Monsieur que je me rappelle le plus souvent et le plus volontiers dans mes rêves ? [...] mes promenades solitaires, [...] ces jours rapides mais délicieux que j’ai passés tout entiers avec moi seul, [...] mon chien bien-aimé, ma vieille chatte, avec les oiseaux de la campagne et les biches de la forêt, avec la nature entière et son inconcevable auteur [...] C’était là qu’elle semblait déployer à mes yeux une magnificence toujours nouvelle. L’or des genêts et la pourpre des bruyères frappaient mes yeux d’un luxe qui touchait mon cœur, la majesté des arbres qui me couvraient de leur ombre, la délicatesse des arbustes qui m’environnaient, l’étonnante variété des herbes et des fleurs que je foulais sous mes pieds tenaient mon esprit dans une alternative continue d’observation et d’admiration : le concours de tant d’objets intéressants qui se disputaient mon attention, m’attirant sans cesse de l’un à l’autre [...] me faisait souvent redire en moi-même : Non, Salomon dans toute sa gloire ne fut jamais vêtu comme l’un d’eux.”].
4. [French text: “le grand et dernier œuvre de la création”].
5. [French text: “La face entière de la Terre porte aujourd’hui l’empreinte de la puissance de l’homme, laquelle, quoique subordonnée à celle de la Nature, souvent a fait plus qu’elle, ou du moins l’a si merveilleusement seconde, que c’est à l’aide de nos mains qu’elle s’est développée dans toute son étendue, et qu’elle est arrivée par degrés au point de perfection et de magnificence où nous la voyons aujourd’hui.”].

6. [French text: “La nature brute est hideuse et mourante ; c'est *moi, moi seul* qui peux la rendre agréable et vivante”].
7. [French text: “Des arbres, des rochers [...] sont autant d'objets isolés dont chacun en particulier donne peu d'émotion à celui qui le regarde mais l'impression commune de tout cela qui le réunit en un seul tableau, dépend de l'état où nous sommes en le contemplant. Ce tableau, quoique toujours le même, se peint d'autant de manières qu'il y a de dispositions différentes dans les coeurs des spectateurs, et ces différences, qui font nos jugements, n'ont pas lieu seulement d'un spectateur à l'autre, mais dans le même en différents temps.”].

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