



# Gravelot's illustrations for "La nouvelle Héloïse"

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## Gravelot's Illustrations for *La nouvelle Héloïse*

**N**EARLY a decade ago, the author of this essay wrote about the preliminary sketches made for the *Théâtre* of Pierre Corneille by Hubert François Bourguignon (1699-1773), generally known by an assumed name, 'Gravelot.'<sup>1</sup> These drawings had been deposited by the writer in the Department of Graphic Arts of the Harvard College Library. A few years later (1955), he was able to present to the Library twelve early sketches for John Gay's *Fables*, London, 1738. Then, in 1959, Mr and Mrs John Fleming of New York made a similar — and more important — gift of eighteen studies for the first edition of Jean Jacques Rousseau's famous *La nouvelle Héloïse*, one of the most widely read novels of the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> All these Gravelot series had a similar provenance: successively proceeding from the Marquis de Fourquevaux, Emmanuel Bocher, and Louis Olry-Roederer collections. And surely no finer pedigree is possible. Louis Olry-Roederer finally possessed one of the best libraries of eighteenth-century French 'livres de luxe' ever put together. Other Gravelot drawings from his collection are now scattered all along the Atlantic seaboard of America; for Dr A. S. W. Rosenbach, who brought them from France to America earlier in this century, sold a number of lots separately to various collectors and institutions. Now, thanks to Mr and Mrs Fleming's gift, Harvard can claim to have perhaps the largest, as well as certainly the best, single group in America, since other, smaller lots of Gravelot drawings were already in the Department of Graphic Arts from previous deposits.<sup>3</sup>

In this article no attempt will be made to discuss the Corneille

<sup>1</sup> 'Preliminary Sketches for Gravelot's Corneille,' HARVARD LIBRARY BULLETIN, V (1951), 197-208, with reproductions.

<sup>2</sup> The studies are recorded in Henry Cohen, *Guide de l'amateur de livres à gravures du XVIIIe siècle*, 6th ed., rev. by Seymour De Ricci (Paris, 1912), col. 905.

<sup>3</sup> The most recent acquisition by the Library is a drawing, one of two known, for an abortive edition of *Don Quixote*, presented by George L. Lincoln, '95.

drawings, the artist's life, his personality, or his method of working. All these subjects were treated in 1951 as thoroughly as was warranted. What is now planned is to show why the *Nouvelle Héloïse* drawings are especially significant — not only for Gravelot, but for the study of eighteenth-century book illustration.

As was stated in the article of 1951, these illustrations, published in 1761, were a great feather in Gravelot's cap.<sup>4</sup> Even more than his designs for Boccaccio's *Decameron*, issued four years earlier, they established the artist's reputation on the continent of Europe. For one reason, they had the important merit of being made for a contemporary novel, and for a very controversial one at that. Increasingly, Rousseau's egalitarian principles were to permeate, and, eventually, to help break down the fragile equilibrium of the French aristocracy. Therefore, Gravelot's illustrations achieved widespread notice as Rousseau's most celebrated work went into many pirated as well as authorized editions. By 1781, in France, the celebrated artist J. M. Moreau le Jeune<sup>5</sup> determined to rival them with an equal number of illustrations. Finally, in 1804, after the French Revolution, P. P. Prud'hon also tried his hand, although less successfully. Moreau's illustrations are actually splendid — among that great artist's very best. But still Gravelot's illustrations are the standard ones for this novel, and doubtless will always remain so, even though Gravelot never became as renowned as either of the other two artists.<sup>6</sup>

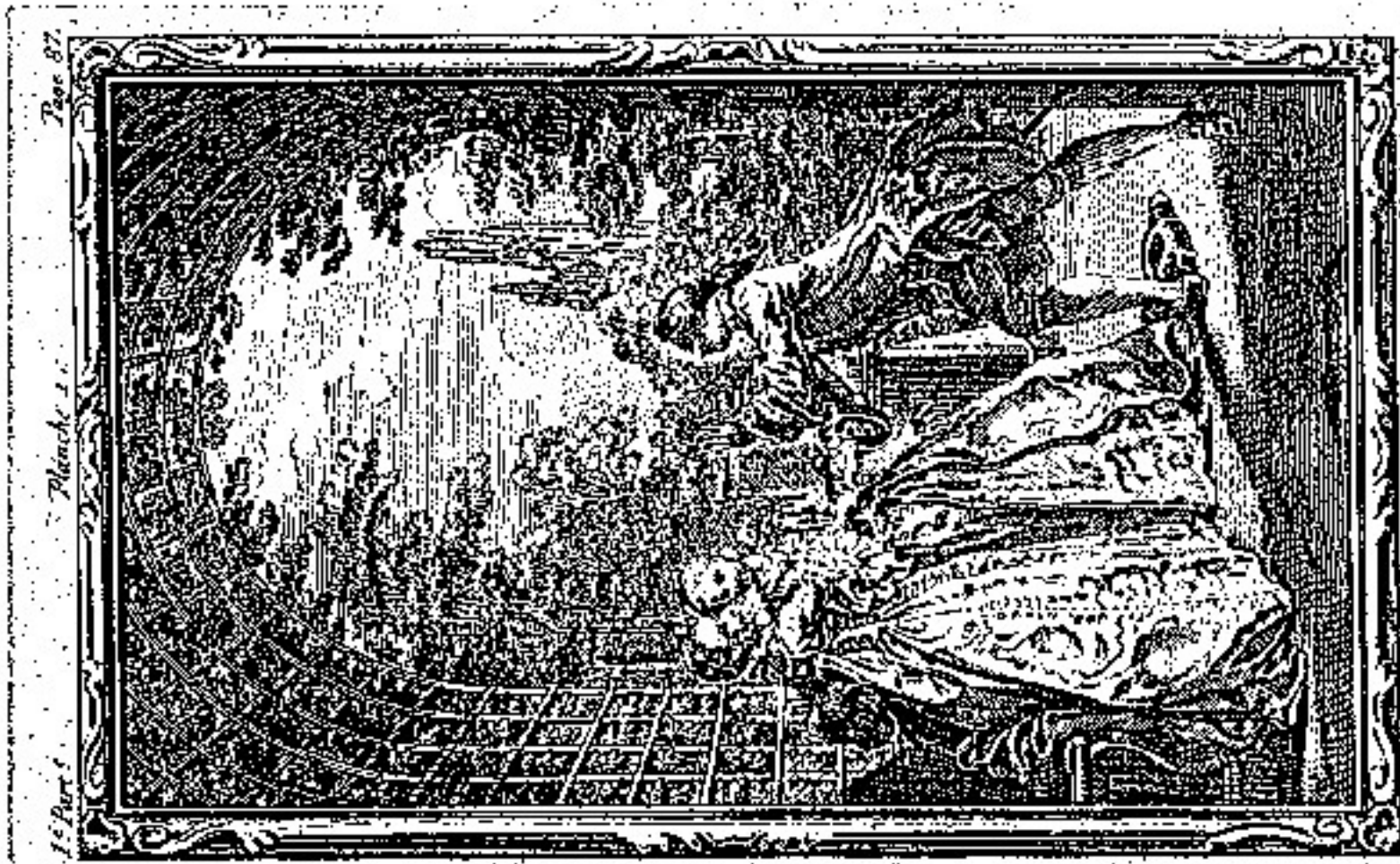
There are several unusual reasons why this is the case. One of them has its origin in Jean Jacques' vanity. Of course, practically all authors are dissatisfied with any artistic interpretations of their texts. It is a well nigh impossible feat to render the scenes, the people, or the ambience quite as the writers imagine them. Therefore many authors resist illustration, even though they realize that drawings by a famous artist may help with sales. Yet in no time or place except at the present moment was illustration more sought after than in France during the years 1719 to 1789. It was a fashion that the Regent of France, Philippe d'Orléans, himself inaugurated by making the drawings for a small but then immensely popular book, *Les amours de Daphnis et Chloë*. Thus Jean Jacques Rousseau, although a citizen of republican Geneva, in writing

<sup>4</sup> HLB, V, 198.

<sup>5</sup> Cohen-De Ricci, *Guide*, col. 906.

<sup>6</sup> Baron Roger Portalis, *Les dessinateurs d'illustrations au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris, 1877), p. 279, considers that both Moreau and Prud'hon excelled Gravelot's designs, but does not disagree with this conclusion.





Le premier baiser de l'amour.

Paris. Blanchet & Co. Page 87.

PLATE Ib

ENGRAVING, DUTCH EDITION, 1761

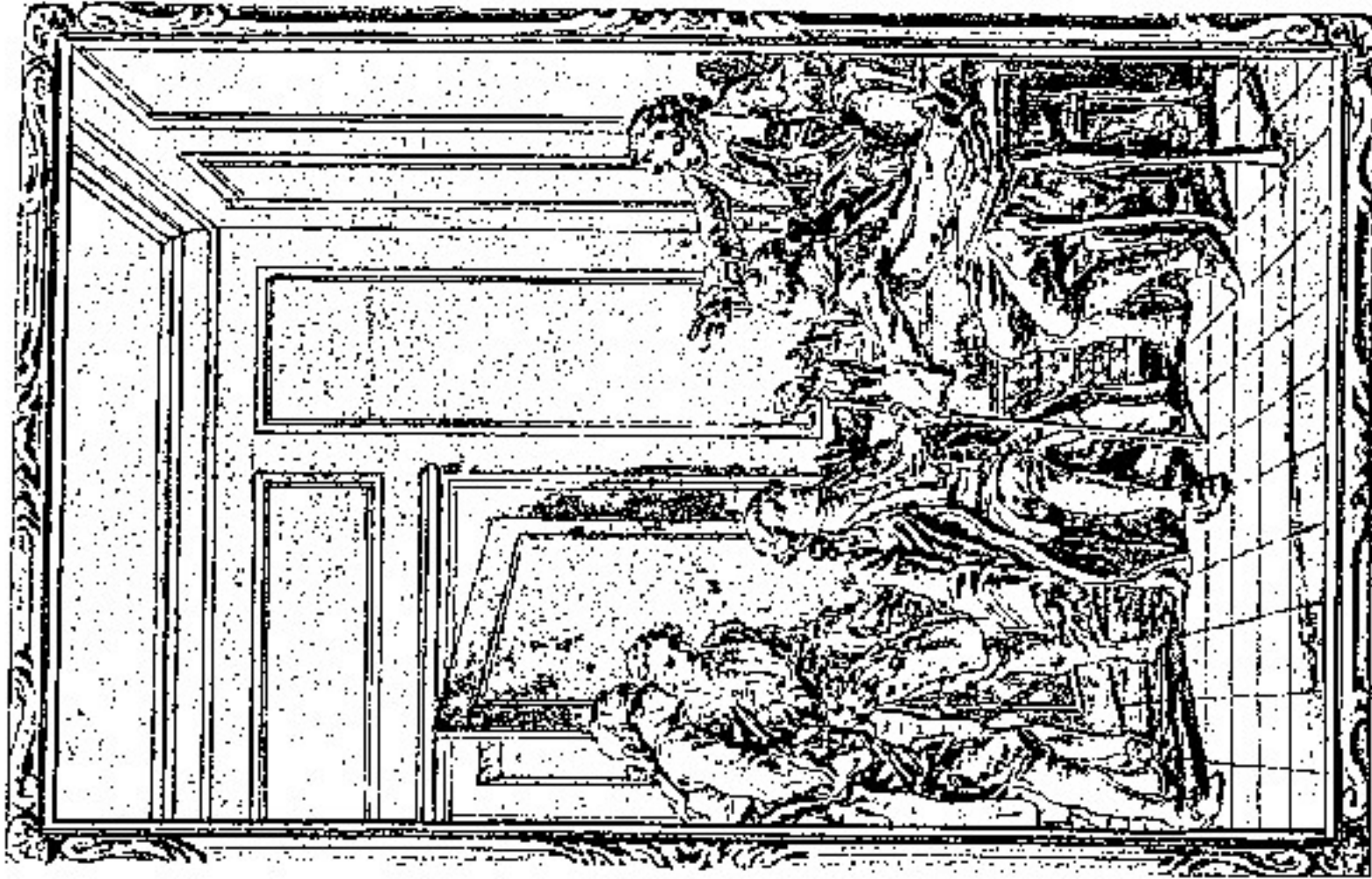


Le premier baiser de l'Amour.

Paris. Blanchet & Co. Page 91.

PLATE Ia

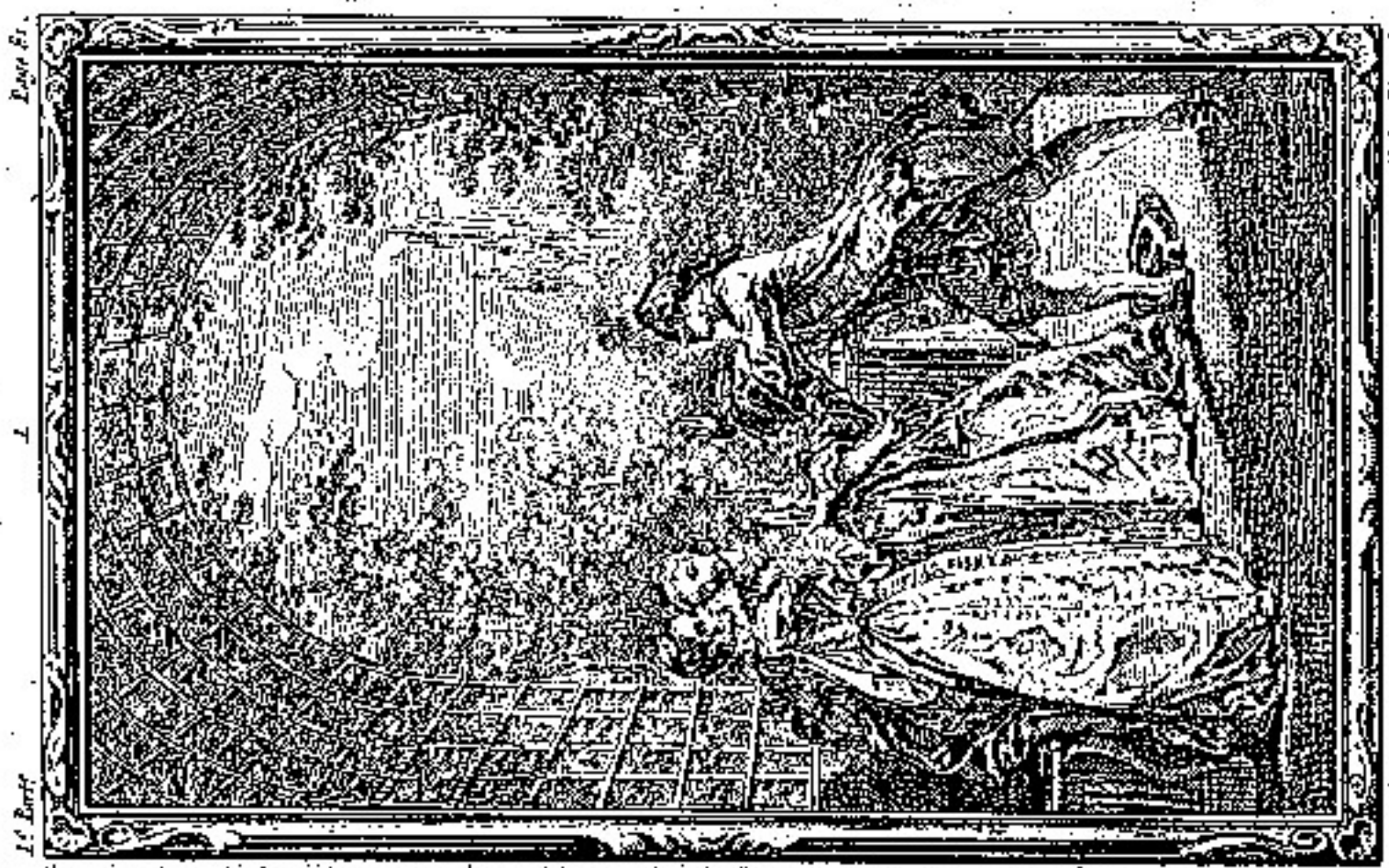
FINISHED DRAWING



*Le musée de la valeur.*  
*De Paris p. 364*

PLATE IIb

FINISHED DRAWING



*Le premier baiser de l'amour.*

PLATE IIa

ENGRAVING, FRENCH EDITION, 1761



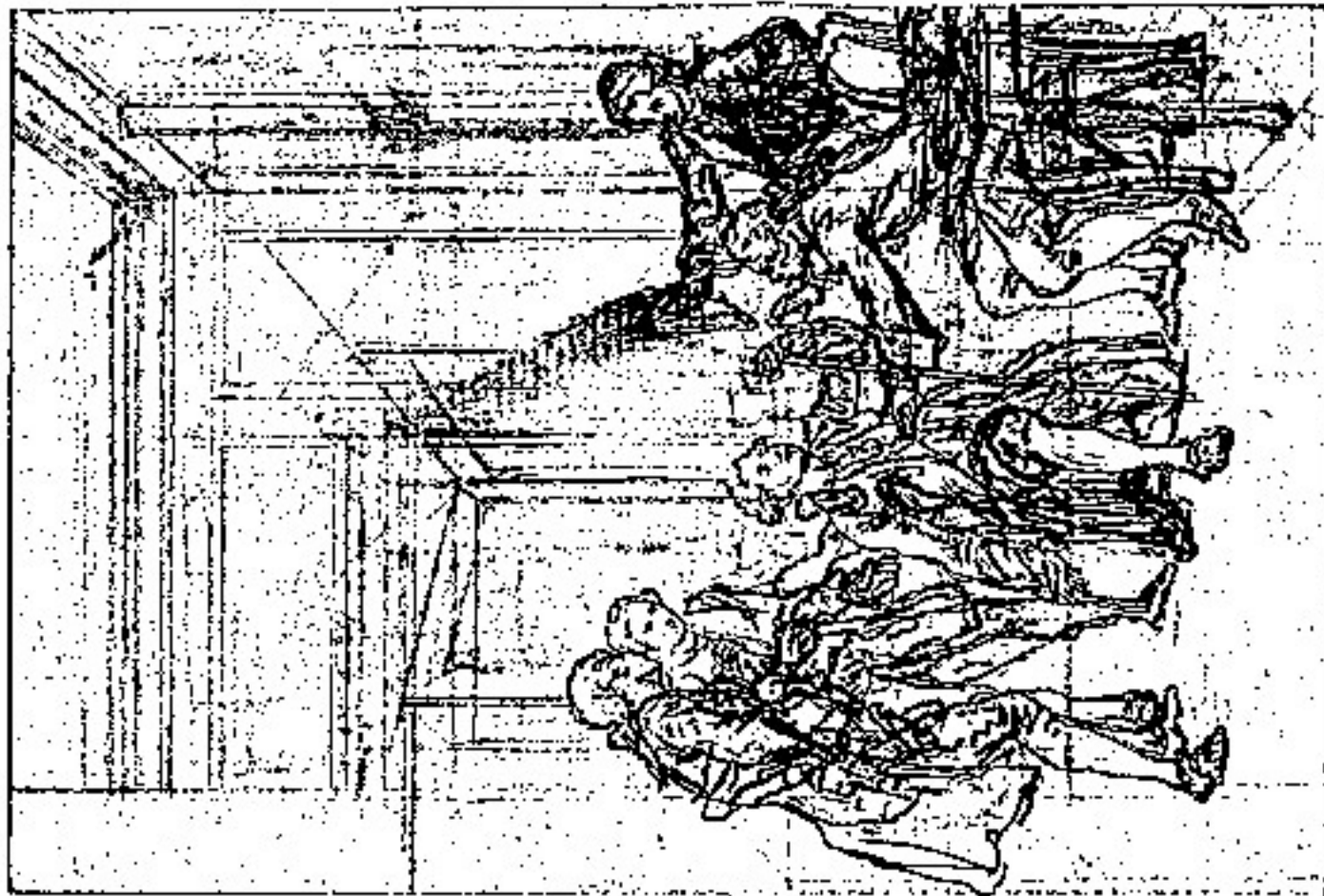


PLATE IIIa

SKETCH FOR 'L'HEROISME DE LA VALEUR'



PLATE IIIb

SKETCH, SECOND STAGE, FOR 'LA CONFIANCE DES BELLES AMIES'

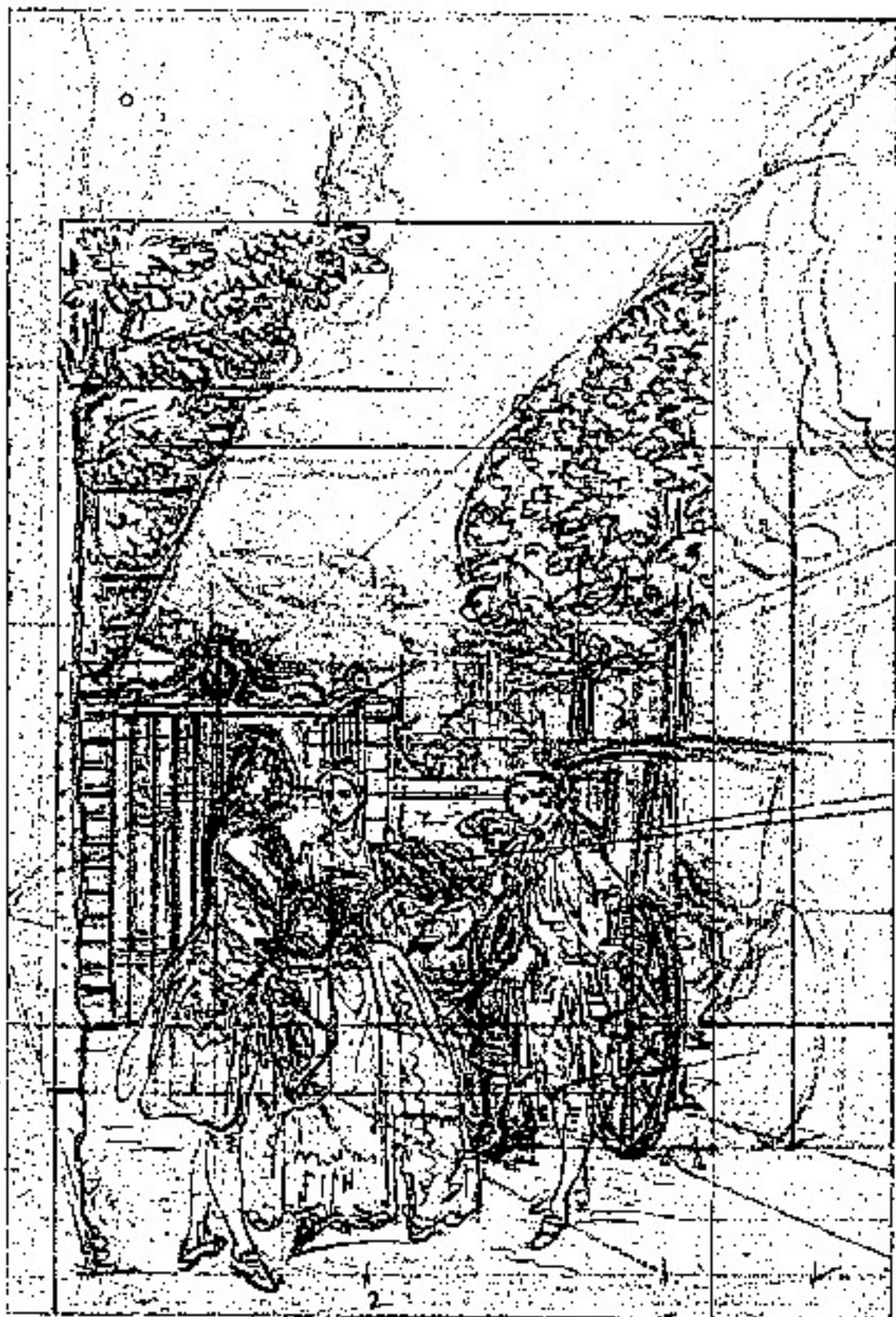


PLATE IVa

SKETCH, THIRD STAGE, FOR 'LA CONFIANCE DES BELLES AMES'

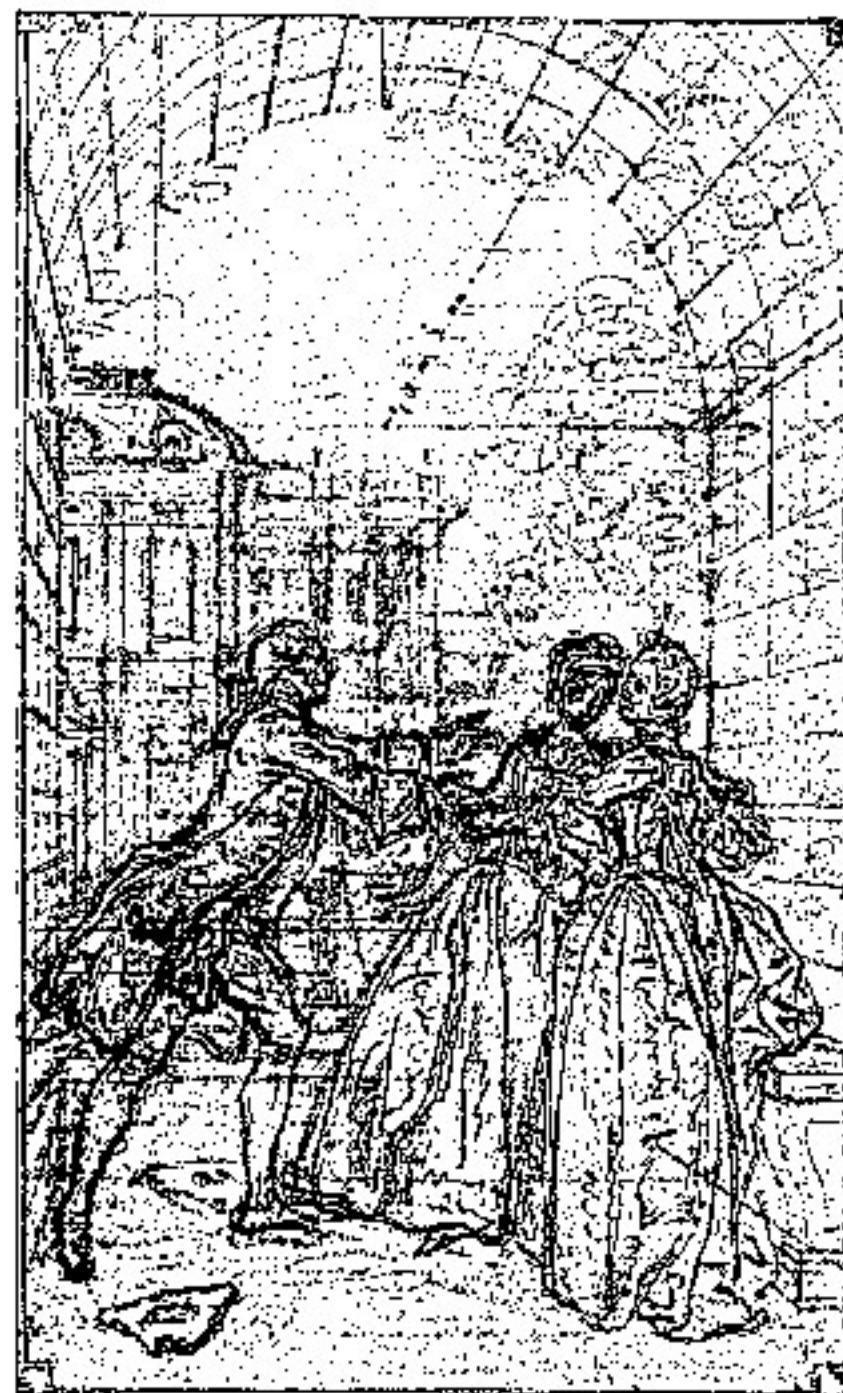


PLATE IVb

SKETCH FOR 'LE PREMIER BAISER DE L'AMOUR'



a book with a rather similar title, *Lettres des deux amans* (for this was the first title to *La nouvelle Héloïse*), saw that he was facing a dilemma. No illustrations at all might easily fail to satisfy popular taste — particularly where a love story was concerned. Yet to leave the artist free would be to risk all his own (very tender) sensibilities. Therefore he sat down and very carefully outlined, in a special foreword,<sup>7</sup> the duties of the artist who should illustrate his work. Some authors had certainly written such directions before. The writer of this essay only a few months ago acquired Alexander Pope's original red chalk sketch and autograph manuscript instructions for a frontispiece destined to adorn the 1745 edition of his famous *Essay on Man*, which had previously appeared without illustration. But it was quite a novel idea to propose to publish the instructions together with the artist's illustrations, thus forcing the unfortunate man to prove *how exactly* he was able to follow these dictates! Even the irascible Voltaire, hardly to be described as a person who was easy to please, did not impose on Gravelot such a rigid obligation. Indeed, there is reason to believe that he *purposely* left the artist free when he commissioned the edition of *Corneille* a very few years later.<sup>8</sup>

Once Rousseau's diabolical plan was made, he cannily arranged to leave to a young Genevan banker friend, named Coindet, the responsibility, and also the whole expense of finding a suitable (or should one say a sufficiently tractable?) artist.<sup>9</sup> He then concentrated on writing his 'pronunciamento,' which began (freely translated) as follows: 'Most of the subjects [for the illustrations] are detailed so that they may be much better understood than would be possible [simply] by [studying] their execution: for, in order to make a satisfactory drawing, the artist should not simply conceive [a scene] in his own way, but as it is in nature [i. e., in Rousseau's mind!]. The pencil cannot distinguish a blonde from a brunette, but the imagination, which guides it, should have the facts clearly in mind. The etcher's burin will poorly handle lights and shades, if the engraver does not also appreciate the colors . . .' Herein lies Rousseau's excuse for his special publication. He cannot conceive of an artist's having an equally gifted vision. He must tell him exactly what should be imagined even in the artist's innermost domain.

<sup>7</sup> Published at the beginning of his *Recueil d'estampes pour La nouvelle Héloïse* (Paris [and Amsterdam], 1761), 12mo.

<sup>8</sup> Portalis, *Dessinateurs*, p. 277, and HLB, V, 199.

<sup>9</sup> Portalis, *Dessinateurs*, p. 277.



The result is a naïve series of verbal profiles and exactly detailed scenes, as hard for an artist to follow as perhaps any that were ever given — and the more so since they were to be made — and were made — public. Here is an example: 'Julie is the principal character. Blonde, [she has] a sweet face, tender, modest, enchanting. . . .' But when it came to the twelve scenes, Rousseau was even more exacting and precise: 'Second Plate . . . This scene takes place in a very simple room. Five people quite fill the picture. Milord Edouard, without his sword, and leaning on a cane, throws himself on his knees before his friend, who is seated at the side of a table on which are his sword and his hat — also a book, which is closer to him. The humble posture of the Englishman must have no trace of shame or timidity . . .' Really, it would be hard to conceive how the artist could be expected to represent the English Milord leaning on his cane, and yet throwing himself on his knees, particularly if this must be accompanied by an air showing 'no trace of shame or timidity'! In this instance, Rousseau's instructions have been given in some detail, in order that the reader may judge for himself with what skill and success Gravelot accomplished the task set him (see Plate IIb).

Meanwhile, Rousseau, always in need of money, had already sold his manuscript of *La nouvelle Héloïse* to a Dutch publisher, one Marc Michel Rey of Amsterdam. But this did not prevent him from wishing for the advantage of a Paris edition as well. M. Lamoignon de Malesherbes, arbiter of the French book trade and son of the Chancellor Lamoignon, obliged him, but then proceeded to lay down conditions and to censor the text 'by more than one hundred pages.' Rousseau, while continuing to profess the highest regard for M. de Malesherbes, manages to convey the impression that he found this well-meant patronage distinctly irksome.<sup>10</sup> M. de Malesherbes quite naturally refused to allow the sale of the uncensored first (Dutch) edition in France till the French publisher could sell out his printing. And although this actually soon brought Rousseau an extra profit, he characteristically insisted that this gain was 'malgré moi-même,' that it was really owed to the publisher Rey (as indeed it was). Yet when it came to settling with Rey, Rousseau offered him only *half* of it. Not surprisingly, the publisher was a bit hurt, and refused the offer. Rousseau concludes: 'For these hundred pistoles, I had the annoyance . . . of seeing my book dread-

<sup>10</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Les confessions*, ed. Louis Martin-Chauffier (Paris, 1933), p. 503.

fully mutilated, and of being forbidden the sale of the good edition until the bad one was exhausted.' One's heart bleeds for Rousseau; he was always feeling thwarted.

Nevertheless, as far as Gravelot was concerned, the author displayed himself more generously inclined. In a letter to a friend, the Chevalier de Lorenzi, dated 31 October 1760, he said he was 'very pleased,' for the illustrations 'will make, I think, one of the most agreeable series of engravings that has appeared in a long time, and I hardly question that if one may hope the book will have some success, they will hardly fail to contribute to it greatly.'<sup>11</sup> Then, almost as an afterthought, he added, wistfully, '*The pity is that they will have to appear separately.*' The reader may well ask why, and there seems to be only one logical explanation. When he wrote the text of his *Recueil d'estampes*, with its very strict instructions to the artist, Rousseau had been skeptical as to the results. So much so, that, as has been before stated, he refused to take either the trouble or expense of finding and paying the artist and his engravers for their work. Naturally, a Swiss banker would insist on having some chance to regain his costs. So the separate issues of the plates, the profit on which would accrue to Coindet, must have been arranged from the start. Converted at the last moment by Gravelot's ability, Rousseau only then began to bemoan his own lack of faith, or the fact that the profit on the illustrations would not be his also. There was evidently no question of censorship involved. Gravelot had also succeeded in making the plates uncontroversial, as evidenced by the failure of any censor, French or Dutch, to take action. Thus all twelve 'vignettes,' as they were called, and the *Recueil* text appeared without any recorded difficulty in two separate printings, first at Paris, in March, 1761, followed by that at Amsterdam.<sup>12</sup>

The Amsterdam text of the *Recueil* followed that of Paris, but the engravings were executed by two distinct groups of artists — one Dutch, the other French. These engravings are so similar in quality, effect, and even in detail (see Plates Ib and IIa) that Cohen-De Ricci can hardly be right in suggesting that the Dutch engravings failed to please the Paris booksellers.<sup>13</sup> The decision to have two separate series must have been rather a matter of national pride, craft regulations, or

<sup>11</sup> Quoted by Portalis, *Dessinateurs*, pp. 278-279.

<sup>12</sup> Avenir Tchermertzine, *Bibliographie d'éditions originales et rares d'auteurs français* (Paris, 1927-34), X, 40; Théophile Dufour, *Recherches bibliographiques sur les oeuvres imprimées de J.-J. Rousseau* (Paris, 1925), I, 83-87.

<sup>13</sup> *Guide*, col. 904.



simple convenience in not having to ship the copperplates back and forth when a new printing from them became necessary. For already, by this time, there had been published both the properly authorized Dutch edition of the whole text (in December, 1760) and the emasculated Paris version, with the same (though false) imprint, called the 'Edition de Robin' (in February, 1761).<sup>14</sup> Both editions were in six volumes, duodecimo, and superficially as closely resembled each other as the two series of engravings. But on closer examination the cuts of the French censor become apparent, as do one or two additions and subtractions by the author's hand.

One of the additions is a second version of the preface, in dialogue form, which Rousseau wrote somewhat later than the short and simple one in the earliest Amsterdam edition.<sup>15</sup> The first preface was printed in large type and extends to slightly less than ten pages. The second preface, in smaller type, comes to nearly fifty-five pages, added to which Rousseau has inserted a page and a half of advertisement and nearly three pages of errata for the first volume of *La nouvelle Héloïse*. But this second preface was also published separately, in still larger type, Paris, Duchesne, 1761, with a text running to ninety-one pages. And this separate edition is linked bibliographically with the Paris edition of the *Recueil d'estampes*, with its twelve plates, also published by Duchesne, 1761. The evidence is contained within the two works themselves.<sup>16</sup> First, in the preface, the very last words (page 91), in small italics, state (translated) that 'the privilege [for this book] will be found at the end of the Recueil d'Estampes de la Nouvelle Héloïse, which will be published immediately.' When we turn to the 'Privilège du Roi' at the end of the *Recueil* (pp. 44-46), we find that it concerns a single work, *Préface de la Nouvelle Héloïse, ou Entretien sur les Romans, avec le Recueil d'Estampes*: the double title is referred to throughout the privilege as the 'Ouvrage.' Furthermore, the 'Approbation' at the end of each piece is dated 10 February 1761 and signed 'Gibert.' Finally, the last page, 47, of the *Recueil* (before the plates) lists a 'mistake to be corrected in the Nouvelle Préface, page 26, line 5 . . .'

This essential unity of the Paris editions of the separate *Préface* and

<sup>14</sup> Dufour, *Recherches bibliographiques*, I, 88.

<sup>15</sup> Both this preface and the first preface, together with the plates, are contained in a copy of the Amsterdam first edition on deposit in the Department of Graphic Arts, in a very nearly (if not actually) contemporary binding.

<sup>16</sup> Apparently first noted in Bulletin 4, 1958, of the bookseller Nicholas Rauch of Geneva, p. 47 (lot 220).

the *Recueil* was recognized by a great collector, the Prince d'Essling, who had his copies of the two pieces bound together, apart from the text as first issued, in (nineteenth-century) full red levant gilt extra, with blue silk doublures, and his arms on the covers.<sup>17</sup> Such treatment would not be correct for the two Dutch editions of these same pieces. For there was a separate Dutch edition of the new *Préface*, as well as of the *Recueil*.<sup>18</sup> But at the end of his edition of the *Préface*, Marc Michel Rey, the Amsterdam publisher, declares: 'Immediately after the publication of this work you will be able to find the 12 plates that have been engraved for . . . *la nouvelle Héloïse*.' And at the end of his edition of the *Recueil* the very last words are: 'The new preface . . . is for sale separately.'

Altogether, the publication of the illustrations for *La nouvelle Héloïse* proved a very extraordinary affair in the history of eighteenth-century book illustration. But how did the young banker friend of Jean Jacques Rousseau come out? That the author alternately patronized him, and then scolded him for taking liberties in their personal relations, is proved by many letters in Rousseau's correspondence.<sup>19</sup> But whether Coindet himself was ever fully repaid for his *expenses* and *trouble* is far less certain. It could not have been an ideal arrangement for either party, or for the publishers Duchesne and Marc Michel Rey, who were plagued by their own competitive relations, the mass of counterfeit editions,<sup>20</sup> and the importunate Rousseau, who abused nearly everyone, including the honest and hard-working Rey, who served him so well for many years.<sup>21</sup>

Gravelot emerged, one hopes, quite well. His reputation in France was established, as has been said, and his finished drawings were finally attached to one of the two manuscripts of the *Nouvelle Héloïse* text that Rousseau wrote out in his own hand for presentation to his distinguished patronesses, Madame d'Houdetot and Madame la Maréchale

<sup>17</sup> This copy, which provided the point of departure for demonstrating the linkage between the two pieces, as noted in Bulletin 4 of Nicholas Rauch (see note 16, above), is now on deposit in the Department of Graphic Arts.

<sup>18</sup> A copy of the Dutch edition of the *Recueil* is included in the same set of the work at Harvard that contains both prefaces, but in Vol. VI, not in Vol. I.

<sup>19</sup> For example, in *Correspondance générale de J.-J. Rousseau*, ed. Théophile Dufour and Pierre Paul Plan (Paris, 1924-34), IV, 59-60, V, 304-305.

<sup>20</sup> Dufour, *Recherches bibliographiques*, I, 92.

<sup>21</sup> *Lettres inédites de Jean-Jacques Rousseau à Marc Michel Rey*, ed. Johannes Bosscha (Amsterdam, 1858), pp. 71-112.



de Luxembourg.<sup>22</sup> Manuscript and twelve carefully finished drawings (for examples, see Plates Ia and Ib) are now in the library of the Chambre des Députés in Paris. The almost feminine fastidiousness that Rousseau took in the preparation of these manuscripts is recorded,<sup>23</sup> and it goes far to explain his exacting role towards Gravelot. Rousseau even experimented with different papers, with ink-drying powders, and finally chose a 'nonpareille bleu' cord with which the leaves should be sewn together! No wonder he felt he could almost guide the artist's hand, and corrected his drawings rigorously.<sup>24</sup> The result can be felt in the finished pen, bistre, ink, and wash designs; for sometimes they are a bit hard, dry, and lifeless.

Not so the eighteen preliminary sketches that Mr and Mrs Fleming have given to Harvard. In nearly every case they are free and spontaneous (see Plate IIIa and especially Plate IIIb). As with the Corneille sketches, one can see how Gravelot changed his mind and improved his composition, especially when there is more than one preliminary sketch to compare with the finished drawing and the final engraving, as in 'La confiance des belles ames' (see Plates IIIb and IVa). Actually, there are four known stages of this drawing, for the sketch shown in Plate IIIb has an even freer, and presumably earlier, drawing on what is the verso of the sheet as mounted. This series enables a student to follow the progressive development of the composition in the artist's mind, which is rather more varied in fact than would seem possible in the face of the detailed directions. The last two drawings, of which Plate IVa is the earlier (preceding the finished drawings in the library of the Chambre des Députés), are really very close to each other, with the finished drawing particularly close to the final engraving. Here Gravelot even sketched in the outline of the frame, but omitted all shading, and lettered in a different title, 'La matinée à l'angloise,' from that found in the published illustration.

But those few other drawings that are thus fully developed (as for the published plates 8, 9, and 12) are less exciting than the earlier stages, where the movement is more vivid. Such a sketch as 'Le premier baiser de l'amour' (Plate IVb), the first illustration in the first volume, is of great quality: it not only has more life than the finished drawing (Plate Ia), but has a much stronger architectural background than the

<sup>22</sup> *Lettres inédites*, p. 71.

<sup>23</sup> *Lettres inédites*, p. 71.

<sup>24</sup> *Correspondance générale*, V, 334, 338.

setting of trees in the final version. Was the architectural scene considered by Rousseau too public for a 'first kiss'? We do not know, because the author this once neglected to specify exactly in his printed instructions! The last of the sketches at Harvard is for an engraving that did not appear until the four-volume edition, Paris, Duchesne, 1764. It is entitled 'L'amour maternel,' and is in a quite advanced state — before much shading, to be sure, but with frame, caption, and Gravelot's name as the draughtsman.

As to the two sets of engravings for the Amsterdam and Paris editions of 1761, the differences, as before suggested, are minimal. All the engravings are reversed both from the eighteen sketches in Mr and Mrs Fleming's gift and from the full set of finished wash drawings in the library of the *Chambre de Députés*. As might be expected, the French engravers, Le Mire, Ouvrier, Lempereur, Augustin de St Aubin, Aliamet, Choffard, and Flipart, are, on the whole, superior to the Dutchmen, van Frankendaal and Folkema. There is somewhat greater technical skill displayed, which shows itself particularly in a slightly increased freedom where action is concerned (compare Plate IIa, French, with Plate Ib, Dutch). The Dutch engravings tend to exhibit stronger contrasts of light and shadow, to be a little stiffer in pose, and to lack a very few niceties of ornament. If only the text of the French edition had been equal to that of the Amsterdam one, one would have little basis for choice between the two sets when wishing to add to a library!

PHILIP HOFER

#### *Note on the Plates*

Plates III and IV are reproduced from the original drawings, Plate Ib from a copy of the Dutch edition of *La nouvelle Héloïse*, 1761, and Plate IIa from the Prince d'Essling's copy of *Recueil d'estampes*, Paris, 1761, all on deposit in the Department of Printing and Graphic Arts, Harvard College Library. Plates Ia and IIb are reproduced from photographs of the finished drawings in the library of the *Chambre des Députés*, Paris, with kind permission, and thanks to the assistance of M. Georges Heilbrun, of Paris.

The reproductions are the size of the originals, except in Plates Ia and IIb, which are reduced from 6 1/8 by 3 3/4 inches.



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