



R. A. LEIGH

Ralph Alexander Leigh 1915–1987

ROUSSEAU SCHOLARSHIP has flourished in the twentieth century, with the Pléiade edition of his *Oeuvres complètes*, the *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, and remarkable studies by Pierre-Maurice Masson, John Spink, Robert Derathé, Pierre Burgelin, Jean Starobinski and others among the most outstanding in any field of eighteenth-century French literature. Even in that company, Ralph Leigh's monumental edition of the *Correspondance complète de Rousseau* has been the most towering achievement of all. He was fifty years old when the initial volume, his first book-length publication, appeared in January 1965. By the time of his death, less than twenty-three years later, forty-six volumes had been published, with the remaining three volumes of text either in press or substantially mapped out — that is, over 20,000 pages and probably in excess of thirteen million words in all, of which more than three million were drafted by Leigh himself, surpassing the total of Rousseau's own contribution, with the ten million words of which he is not the author principally comprised of Leigh's transcriptions from more than 15,000 manuscripts (including drafts and fragments) assembled from dozens of libraries and archives throughout Europe and North America. Three million words — not one of them, incidentally, in his native language — would constitute about thirty volumes in their own right, if his prefaces, notes and commentaries had been so assembled. Leaving aside his other publications, and his teaching and family commitments, Leigh saw through the press more than half a million words each year over the period he produced

the *Correspondance complète de Rousseau*. There are a few impressive editions of correspondence — not least Voltaire's — which embrace more documents, but there may be no other work of scholarship on so vast a scale of which such a large proportion springs from the mind of its editor. Although he began single-handed, Leigh was eventually assisted in his transcription of the less impenetrable manuscripts by the late Ruth Hebblethwaite and, more recently, by Janet Laming, who is currently completing several volumes of indices. But he undertook himself all the research, all the journeys to libraries and private collections, all the annotations, commentaries and complex dealings with archivists. Considering its length alone, it is an utterly formidable achievement. The range and depth of scholarship which it conveys make it a work of unparalleled significance, for at least three reasons.

First, Leigh's textual notes and variants form one of the most important collections of sources ever assembled for the study of French literature and literary style in the period. The famous letter to Voltaire of 18 August 1756, the so-called 'Lettre sur la providence', is presented in full in two different versions covering nearly fifty pages (Leigh 424 and 424 *bis*), with comprehensive annotation for all the variants of the seven surviving manuscripts (of an original thirteen), whose relation to one another requires a genealogical table, duly provided by Leigh, to explain it, plus almost one hundred *explications de texte*, some of them of essay length. The surviving drafts of Rousseau's extraordinary confessional letter to Saint-Germain of 26 February 1770 are likewise presented in two versions (Leigh 6673 and 6673 *bis*), with collations for all the other manuscript variants, over fifty-four pages. The remarkable and even illustrated pilgrimage to Ermenonville recorded by Brizard and Anarcharsis Cloots in 1783 (Leigh 7843) receives similar treatment and annotation, and at sixty-three pages may be the longest document in the whole *Correspondance*, and the most complex in the editorial problems it posed. Rousseau, as Leigh often remarks, was the Flaubert of the eighteenth century — the beauty, metre and cadences of his prose refined and tempered out of the torments of their composition. The transcriptions of his letters provided by Leigh remind readers, on the one hand, of how much his whole life was a kind of literary voyage, and of how so many of the most lyrical passages of his prose are to be found in the letters themselves. On the other hand, they offer a unique insight into Rousseau's style of composition, the at once laborious and exhilarating manner in which his reverie was transformed into art. Leigh was Jean-Jacques's stenographer and

recording angel for much the largest surviving archive of his manuscript material. The textual notes and variants stand to the letters themselves as they stand collectively to the *Confessions*. They are the most fundamental source from which Rousseau's autobiography was shaped, in the immediacy of their composition more authentic in many ways than the assembled reflections Rousseau produced later to lend them greater coherence and plausibility. They mark the draft stages of the gestation of his ideas, the instantaneous evocation of his dreams.

Second, and scarcely less important, are the thousands of *notes explicatives* that Leigh appended to the 8,400 letters and 700 annexed documents (the distinction is dropped after Rousseau's death) which comprise this collection. From public records offices in France, Switzerland and elsewhere, and from other national, municipal and military archives, he compiled the biographies of at least 5,000 correspondents or persons mentioned in exchanges and their families — many of them utterly obscure figures who sought Rousseau's advice in domestic matters, or who turned to him for political guidance, or who merely wrote to him in the not always vain hope that a meeting, even his signature, might one day lend credence to the fabrications of a friendship around which their own literary fortunes could be made. Rousseau was lord to many flies, and practically everyone who scampered after him, or who sought the crumbs from his table, or who even had occasion to fear those crumbs, is identified in this work: the mysterious republican comtesse de Wartensleben (Leigh 5426), writing on behalf of the wayward son of a friend, who inspires in Rousseau's reply (Leigh 5450) one of the finest pages of eighteenth-century French prose; or the whole family of Nicolas-Eloy Thévenin (Leigh 6438), who falsely accused Rousseau of failing to pay a debt; or the entire clan of the surgeon Laubel (Leigh 6305 and app. 659), who conducted the autopsy on the concierge of the château de Trye, whom Rousseau, in one of his darkest hours, imagined that he was suspected of having poisoned. By way of the notes, almost everyone who passed through his life emerges from the shadows of oblivion. Leigh, as sensitive in his fashion as was Rousseau to the enthusiasms of friendship and the anxieties of betrayal, comes in his commentaries to rekindle the suspicions which Jean-Jacques harboured, and at the same time, by documenting the remarks of the persons who inspired them, takes a dispassionate stance of a kind that was never open to Rousseau himself. In an appendix relating all the possible motives and circumstances which surrounded Voltaire's cryptic and artful offer of refuge to Rousseau when he fell

foul of the authorities in France, Leigh concludes, on Rousseau's behalf, 'Ce n'est pas là une de ces pressantes invitations qui incitent à faire ses valises sur le champ' (Leigh app. 271). Through these immensely voluminous notes, all the diversity of Rousseau's life and times comes to be illuminated, not only through his own eyes, as in the *Confessions*, but through the eyes of his contemporaries as well. Especially for the later volumes, where the notes are often unconnected with the texts above them, it is Leigh's magisterial commentaries rather than the original documents which most excite attention.

Third, just as the earlier volumes reconstruct Rousseau's world, so do the later tomes form an indispensable archive for the assessment of Rousseauism at the end of the *ancien régime*. Correspondences are not generally pursued beyond the grave, but the complexities surrounding Rousseau's literary remains and the affairs of the trustees of his estate in their negotiations for a complete edition of his writings enticed Leigh to extend the collection to embrace the death of Thérèse Levasseur in 1801 and the advent of the age of Napoleon (Leigh 8382–4, 8386). The last nine volumes, every one of them undertaken after Leigh's retirement from his chair of French at Cambridge, are in many respects the most important of all, reflecting not only the apotheosis of Rousseau's reputation around his shrine at Ermenonville, but also the appreciation of a new generation of romantic poets and philosophers whose critiques of eighteenth-century cosmopolitanism and commercial society were often leavened by his invectives. They cover all the authorised and known pirate editions of his works — several uncovered or identified by Leigh himself — as well as the ambitions and negotiations of their publishers in the crucial decade between Rousseau's death and the outbreak of the French Revolution, upon which so much scholarship about his putative influence has previously foundered for want of this testimony. And they deal with the celebrations of his memory in the popular press and with the festivals in his honour in both Paris and Geneva in the course of the French Revolution, whose political debates on the exercise of popular sovereignty, and on the accountability of the people's representatives to the nation as a whole, were so much shaped by his writings that he came to be regarded both as the Revolution's great legislator and as its false prophet, when liberal critics of the Jacobin dictatorship identified its excesses as sparked by confusions in his philosophy. These volumes form an extraordinary repository and chronicle in their own right, the touchstone for all future research on Rousseau's revolutionary

influence — in fact, henceforth the *point de départ*, from a bibliographical perspective, of some of the most central questions to do with the connection between the French Revolution and the Enlightenment.

By temperament and disposition, Leigh was uniquely suited to his task, on which he initially embarked out of frustration at the unreliability of previous scholarship rather than any ambition to devote his life to the study of manuscripts, and whose ultimate breadth he had hardly begun to contemplate even after he had been engaged in it for twenty years. This is apparent from Alison Fairlie's announcement, made on Leigh's authority, in the biographical sketch appended to the 1980 collection of essays in his honour, *Reappraisals of Rousseau*, to the effect that the work was then on the verge of completion in thirty-nine volumes, plus two for its index. The intrinsic significance of the subject is of course plain enough and in no need of justification. Rousseau, in brief, was an outstanding writer, an extraordinarily influential thinker and a fascinating personality — indeed 'a colossus of European cultural history' — as Leigh remarks in both the 1965 preface to volume I of the *Correspondance complète* and his Moses Tyson Memorial Lecture on Rousseau, published in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* in 1984. Nor was he ever modest about his own achievement, often adopting a tone of benign sarcasm to remind friends who had too casually expressed mere gratitude for an honourable mention in one or more of his notes that his citation had in fact granted them immortality. But to the undertaking which was to become his life's work he brought to bear a personality, background and other interests which were to grant him specially privileged access to Rousseau's own mind: a difficult and in large measure motherless childhood, a profound love of music and a deeply poetic imagination susceptible to every nuance of language, a delight in companionship whose required candour he frequently believed had been betrayed by others, a sense of moral outrage at political bigotry and injustice in a world pervasively marked by the abuse of power, and an awareness of himself as essentially an outsider even in those settings most central to his life, including Trinity College, Cambridge, and the French and Swiss nexus of Rousseau and Enlightenment scholarship.

He was born in London, the second son of Alexander and Jane Leigh, on 6 January 1915, his father the manager of a small tailoring business in Poplar which did not flourish, particularly after the tragically sudden death of Leigh's mother in 1924. Already stirred in childhood by a love of literature — both prose and poetry — he won an

open scholarship to Raine's School for Boys from which, in 1933, again by way of an open scholarship, he was to enter Queen Mary College, London, where he read Modern Languages. There, three years later, he obtained the best First Class honours degree awarded in his subject. His interests at this stage also included the classics of English and German literature, but his taste for French fiction, theatre and philosophy was broader still, and he chose to cultivate it further at the University of Paris where, in receipt of a number of research awards, he attended the lectures of Paul Hazard and Daniel Mornet at the Sorbonne and of Paul Valéry at the Collège de France. In 1938, having produced a memoir on Amédée Pichot which was to be published the following year in the *Revue de littérature comparée*, he obtained both a certificate from the Institut de phonétique and a *Diplôme des études universitaires*. Although a foreboding cloud of war had by then descended upon Paris, Leigh was to remain as long as he could in the city whose academic and cultural attractions he relished, and it was while taking piano lessons there that he met his future wife, the pianist Edith Kern, whom he married in 1945. A gangling six feet three inches tall but still weighing under ten stone at the outbreak of the Second World War, he was judged to be physically less than ideal for front-line infantry duties, and in the Royal Army Service Corps to which he came to be attached for most of the war's duration he was given other, more cerebral, responsibilities instead, eventually serving as a Major with Allied Strategic Planning. He nevertheless trained to manœuvre a tank, and it may have been the measure of his success at that operation which persuaded him thereafter to sit only in the passenger seat of any motor vehicle. Just after the war he was briefly stationed in Germany, in Westphalia and then the Ruhr, occasionally interrogating civilians as to the extent of local sympathy for Nazi policies, and finding the lack of fervour he met in individuals' disclaimers of allegiance to the fallen regime a sign of their insincerity.

In 1946, soon after his son John was born, he was offered his first academic appointment, in French, at the University of Edinburgh, a post he retained for six years. His teaching and research interests then covered several themes and authors from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, and they included translations from contemporary French prose, in collaboration with Alan Steele. But, while in this period he also worked closely on the novels of Stendhal, he was already beginning to concentrate upon eighteenth-century French thought, and on Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau in particular, assembling material

for a work dealing with Rousseau's influence on the England and Scotland of his day, of which a few fragments were to figure in a 1986 essay, 'Rousseau and the Scottish Enlightenment', published in *Contributions to political economy*. The major treatments of the diffusion of Rousseau's ideas in England produced by Henri Roddier in 1950 and then Jacques Voisine in 1956 rather pre-empted his own initiative in that field, however, and he was also beginning to take a very dim view of the archival scholarship upon which such a study would have to depend, above all of the standard edition of Rousseau's *Correspondance générale*, completed only a few decades earlier, to great international acclaim, and still, until 1953, without a proper index. There were, moreover, other attractions for him in Edinburgh, including the learned company and hospitality of both his distinguished colleague, Georges Poulet, and William Beattie, then Keeper of Printed Books and later Librarian of the National Library of Scotland. Having had to dispose of a set of the great *Encyclopédie* because of lack of space before his move to Scotland, he began once more to assemble a library of eighteenth-century antiquarian books which would form the kernel of the collection he enlarged in Cambridge. His years in Edinburgh formed an agreeable launch of his academic career, and he might well have remained there much longer, but for the opportunity which arose in 1952 to move to a University Lectureship in French at Cambridge, together with a Fellowship and College Lectureship at Trinity which had been vacant on the election of Lewis Harmer to a Professorship the previous year. Since he was not a Cambridge graduate, nor yet the established author of numerous publications, he did not expect to win the appointment in Cambridge and thought little of the long silence which followed his interview, except that he ought, out of courtesy, to have been notified of his failure. He was therefore much surprised by Harmer's telephone call to Edinburgh, in the late summer of 1952, only weeks before the beginning of the academic year, about his forthcoming duties in Cambridge. Having received no formal letter of appointment, he could hardly have accepted it, but that, too, had passed undetected, the University of Edinburgh, nevertheless, permitting his resignation at short notice so as to facilitate his move to Cambridge in the autumn of 1952.

His chief responsibility in the Modern and Medieval Languages Faculty there was to provide thirty-two lectures a year, which were progressively refined into two principal series, that he alternated, on Rousseau and Diderot, on the one hand, and the eighteenth-century

French novel, on the other. Always a vigorous public speaker at academic conferences, Leigh was also an engaging and informative lecturer to an audience of undergraduates, manifestly in command of his subject but wearing his scholarship lightly, emulating the elegance of Hazard rather than the pedantry of Mornet, whose effects upon the attention of listeners he had in each case witnessed in Paris. Both by his impassioned style of delivery and by his manner of concluding every lecture in a state of suspense which could not be resolved except by his students' attendance of the next, he knew how to hold their attention as well; few will have detected any sign of the great effort which such delivery cost him, or of the sleepless nights he often spent in anticipation of that effort, compounded by his alarm that a good part of his next day's research time had thus been lost. Some of the qualities which made him a skilful lecturer were thought mannered and self-indulgent by a handful of colleagues in the Modern Languages Faculty, particularly if they had crossed with him in public debate. He knew how to sustain a line of argument, and his humour was often at its astringent best when he was driving a point home at his colleagues' expense. But he also had close friends over many years in the Faculty, including Odette de Mourgues and most particularly Alison Fairlie, whose assistance in the preparation of the *Correspondance complète* received his profuse acknowledgement. As his reputation grew, so his standing in the Faculty rose. In 1969 he was appointed Reader in French and four years later Professor *ad hominem*.

But it was around Trinity College above all that his academic and much of his social life in Cambridge came to turn. It has been said of his Oxford friend and fellow *dix-huitièmiste*, Robert Shackleton, that he boxed the compass of Radcliffe Square, in the course of a career which took him from Oriel to Brasenose College, then to the Bodleian Library and finally All Souls. Leigh's circumnavigation of Cambridge was of still smaller radius, confined to a single college, and then only the peripheries of its Great Court, which he perambulated by way of a teaching room in the King's Hostel, followed by a set of rooms adjacent to the Great Gate once occupied by Newton, and finally back to the King's Hostel, in a set on two floors, overlooking the Fellows' bowling green, as grand as any college suite in Oxford or Cambridge apart from a master's lodge. For twenty years Leigh lived out of college with his family, in a house on Porson Road which had been largely designed to his own specifications; but with grown children, following the ordeals of Edith's death in 1972, he moved back to college, sold the

house, and in 1979 relocated again to the refurbished rooms in the King's Hostel, which amply accommodated his by now massive library as well as his assistant, and which were to be both his home and his office until his own death. When asked whether his move across Great Court had suited him, he sometimes complained that he was now too far away from the shops, but his daily routine and manner of work made such comforts as Trinity afforded vital to him, and over many years he lunched or dined in Hall — often both — relishing the High Table persiflage, perhaps followed by a game of bowls beneath his own windows, as a distracting interlude from which he could promptly return to the concentrated regimen of annotation, collation or transcription. Though he frequently complained about the direction, and still more often the lack of direction, of college policy, his manner of life at Trinity was congenial to his research, and his turning down of the Maréchal Foch Chair of French Literature at Oxford, when it was offered to him in 1972, is best explained by his reluctance to leave a college in which his labours had so plainly thrived. In January 1985, Kit Wright, who had been a Visiting Fellow Commoner at Trinity some years earlier, penned a poem to celebrate Leigh's seventieth birthday. It includes these lines:

Professor Leigh! Professor Leigh!
 A genius in entirety!
 I trumpet down your days

 Something loud and something long,
 A Boreastic blast of song
 Unmitigated praise!

 Seventy summers. God bless you.
 Your wisdom's done what it should do.
 It speaks in Pentecostal

 Tongues: and still the truth remains
 That everywhere man is in chains
 Save in perhaps King's Hostel.

The eminence of its distinguished Fellows over the centuries, the grandeur and sophistication of its architecture, the treasures of its library and the splendours of its wine cellar all afforded a perfect setting for the illustrious career of a scholar who, unlike some other Fellows, had not enjoyed the privileges of a Trinity background. In granting him a Title B Fellowship in 1969 (in effect, a Senior Research Fellowship) so that he might be released from his college teaching

duties; in helping to fund his assistant over a number of years; and in meeting some of the expenses of publishing the *Correspondance complète* when he fell foul of the wrath and envy of Theodore Besterman at the Voltaire Foundation, Trinity's Master and Fellows showed their support for his scholarly endeavours in the crises of mounting costs and pressure of time that threatened them. But it was the character of the college itself even more than specific benefactions he received from it which made Trinity so amenable to the conduct of his research there. In most respects larger than life, it seemed made to measure for him. He enjoyed describing the statues personifying *Divinity*, *Law*, *Mathematics* and *Physic* which grace the roof of the Wren Library as *Faith*, *Hope*, *Charity* and *Geography*. He found music recitals in the palatial Master's Lodge especially congenial, above all in the mid-1970s, when R. A. Butler was Master, and his wife, Mollie, Lady Butler, sought his advice about programmes and guests. At High Table, his exchanges with Jack Gallagher, Anil Seal and Tony Weir were spiced with mirth. Founder of the Third Trinity Book Club and long the presiding spirit at its annual dinners, Leigh, in his physical and verbal presence in college, often seemed closer to Johnson than Rousseau, and, indeed, he was for many years a convivial member of the Johnson Club. His was the Trinity face that launched a thousand quips, occasionally at the expense of colleagues at High Table who had merely sought to make conversation around subjects close to his heart. When once asked by Weir if he had heard of a minor prelate who might have had dealings with Rousseau's Genevan friends in 1765, Leigh, after pointedly asking for the person in question to be identified again, replied, for all to hear, 'I regret to inform you that in 1765 there was no one in Geneva by that name'. Sometimes he found more venom than wit secreted in college banter, and especially after the death of its Vice-Master, Gallagher, in 1980, he came increasingly to mistrust the motives of certain colleagues whose verbal stratagems seemed designed above all to wound him. As Prælector and Father of the College, who had been responsible for presenting the Prince of Wales for his degree, he supposed he was due more generosity of spirit than abuse from other wags. But since he took such pleasure from catching colleagues off guard, he might have displayed greater equanimity towards their rejoinders. In his capacity to detect sinister motives behind loose talk, he showed how a comprehensive penetration of Rousseau's mind could leave him in possession of some of its trappings.

Splendid as it was in so many ways for his research and style of

life, Trinity suffered in his eyes from a tragically conspicuous flaw, which he seldom felt inclined to conceal from his colleagues — that is, the general indolence and real mediocrity of its current Fellowship in the arts and humanities. While he applauded the science park initiatives of Dr John Bradfield, the Senior Bursar, he lamented what he took to be the absence, at much the wealthiest college in either Cambridge or Oxford, of an indigenous research culture such as had long been established at King's. As Gibbon had remarked of one of his tutors at Magdalen College, Oxford, Leigh supposed that too many of his colleagues at Trinity remembered the salaries they were destined to receive but forgot the duties they were required to perform. Both as a member of the College Council and outside it, he fought long, and for the most part unsuccessful, battles to transform the infrastructure of research funding at Trinity. His expressions of disdain for the intellectual calibre or fluency of some of his colleagues could be amusing, as when, at a college meeting, to which he had arrived late, he apologised for having missed what he took to be the more persuasive half of the previous speaker's testimony. But they did not endear him to the College Fellowship as a whole, and he was to prove perhaps somewhat tactless when he put himself forward as a candidate for the Vice-Mastership in both 1980 and 1984. He lost each election by a substantial margin, after canvassing his colleagues in a manner of winsome absurdity. 'Will you vote for me?', he would ask Fellows, affectionately drawing them aside, so that they might speak more freely, his pen poised to inscribe the answer in a little black notebook which recorded the credits and debits of each victim's last judgement. 'No!', would come the prompt reply from the unintimidated, followed slowly by Leigh's weary shrug, raised eyebrow and twinkle of compassion for such thoughtless error. 'I shall put you down as undecided', he would counter, in the glorious triumph over experience not so much of hope as of self-mockery.

While engaged in research towards his ultimately aborted study of Rousseau's influence on eighteenth-century English and Scottish thought, Leigh had already detected, in Edinburgh, a substantial number of errors in the edition of the *Correspondance générale de Rousseau* prepared from the notes of Théophile Dufour by Pierre-Paul Plan between 1924 and 1934. As his list of mistakes in that edition grew, he at first planned to produce a supplementary volume of corrections which would accompany it, but he soon concluded that the whole of this work, described on its covers and title-page as collated from

the original manuscripts, was 'one of the most extraordinary hoaxes ever perpetrated on the world of learning'.¹ The person officially given full credit for it — Dufour — had died several months before the first volume was prepared in his name, and at the time of his death he had not been engaged in a fresh edition of Rousseau's correspondence, nor had he ever contemplated taking charge of, or contributing to, such a venture. In so far as he had had the slightest wish to see his desultory studies of Rousseau's letters published, he merely hoped to produce a catalogue of the mistranscriptions of those letters in all the editions of the works of Rousseau that had appeared since 1782. Even allowing that Dufour might have got round to preparing such a catalogue if he had survived into his eighties, there is little reason to suppose that any publisher of his day would have been specially proud to produce a mere list of misprints and typographical errors, but Dufour — before his retirement the Keeper of Manuscripts and Librarian of the Bibliothèque de Genève — had personally aspired to nothing more. His papers were transformed into an edition of Rousseau's correspondence by Plan, for no other reason than that Dufour's daughter, Hélène Pittard-Dufour, was determined to pre-empt the efforts of the Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Geneva, orchestrated by its Secretary, Alexis François, to complete just such a project without paying what she deemed to be sufficient tribute to the monumental labours of her father. Dufour never inspected the manuscripts of the letters which Rousseau received, and neither had Plan; in his research, Leigh was particularly frustrated to find the *Correspondance générale* recapitulating all the errors of previous editors with respect to those papers, passing off their liberties, which the new edition was purportedly designed to correct, as if they were authentic transcriptions. Nor had Dufour really collated the letters which Rousseau drafted himself, except to correct all the printed versions, and most especially those which figured in the early and mid-nineteenth-century editions of Rousseau's *Oeuvres complètes* that he knew best. Yet in Dufour's name Plan had compiled a work of his own manufacture, a confection that was peppered with misattributions of dates and persons, with replies which predated any request, with letters sent from places Rousseau

¹ 'Rousseau's correspondence: editorial problems', in *Editing Correspondence* (papers given at the fourteenth annual conference on editorial problems), University of Toronto, 3–4 November 1978, ed. J. A. Dainard (New York, 1979), pp. 45–6.

had not yet visited, or which he had left several years before his letter was apparently posted.

The archives connected with such a central figure of European intellectual history deserved better treatment, and in Leigh they were to draw the attention of one of the greatest scholars of our time. Yet proper tribute to his life's work was perhaps slower to come than if the Dufour-Plan edition, still in print when the *Correspondance complète* began to appear, had never been undertaken at all. For his labours, Leigh received honorary doctorates from Neuchâtel, Geneva and Edinburgh, and in 1988 was due to obtain the same recognition from Oxford. In 1976 he was made a Commander of the British Empire and in 1978 received the *médaille d'argent* of the city of Paris. In 1979 he was awarded the *Légion d'honneur* and had he survived another year would have been promoted to the rank of *officier*. But in Geneva, Paris and elsewhere in francophone Europe could be found a number of scholars who were slow to appreciate the merits of an Englishman's edition of one of the masters of the French language. A work whose necessity stemmed from the deficiencies of another did not immediately receive the rapturous acclaim of persons and institutions that had lavished praise and prizes upon its now discredited precursor.

Leigh's unique command of his subject could only have been conveyed in the form he required, however, by his success in obtaining such licence as had never been accorded to an edition of correspondence before, permitting notes of essay length often longer than the texts to which they were affixed; sometimes it appears that the main function of the original documents he assembled, when they were not letters by Rousseau himself, was to set the stage for their editor's notes. It is difficult to imagine any other publisher in the world apart from the Voltaire Foundation under Theodore Besterman producing the *Correspondance complète de Rousseau* in the form which it took. Perhaps without sufficiently appreciating his good fortune, Leigh was to find in Besterman a man of exceptionally rare gifts in the world of publishing, to whom Enlightenment studies in general over the past thirty or forty years owe much of their efflorescence: an entrepreneur with a true love of scholarship. As the first and largely self-appointed Director of the Musée Voltaire in Geneva, he had devoted many years to Voltaire studies and to the assemblage of an important collection of printed and manuscript sources pertaining to Voltaire's life and thought. Having modelled much of his own character in the image of Voltaire, and having found Voltaire's bed at Les Délices especially

well-suited to him, Besterman loathed Rousseau, in Voltaire's fashion, as a man whose vanity had only prompted him to seek a saintly apotheosis through putting a torch to himself. Besterman's initial encounter with Leigh, moreover, did not bode well for the future collaboration of Jean-Jacques's editor and his publisher. In the *Modern Language Review* of 1954, Leigh had commented in some detail on the first three volumes of Besterman's new edition of Voltaire's *Correspondence*, and in terms which were characteristically both forceful and erudite he had judged Besterman's efforts less than satisfactory on account of their embracing so many mistranscriptions, dubious readings, improbable chronologies and other blunders. Voltaire's editor and amanuensis, who had just launched what he was to call 'the biggest project of its kind ever published or even attempted', found himself portrayed by Leigh as 'gossipy, importunate, otiose, and unsystematic' (*MLR*, XLIX, 240, 241n, 242 and 244).

At first outraged by such cavilling criticism from an upstart reviewer, Besterman attempted to have Leigh's name struck off the list of persons to whom subsequent volumes of Voltaire's *Correspondence* would be sent, but as he came to take better stock of Leigh's exceptional gifts as a scholar, he swallowed his pride and soon appointed Leigh, first, to his work's advisory committee, and then, in 1974, to the committee formed to superintend the publication of Besterman's new edition of *The Complete Works of Voltaire*. In 1977, the year following Besterman's death and a few years after his hasty evacuation to Oxfordshire just one step ahead of Interpol, Leigh was to become a Director of the Voltaire Foundation, and over the next decade, for much of that time with Shackleton, he was to be one of its centrally guiding spirits. In the autumn of 1956, Besterman had invited him to publish a new edition of Rousseau's correspondence with the Voltaire Foundation, then still based at the Musée Voltaire in Geneva, and although there was to be no contract until many years later, after several volumes had already been published, the required impetus to embark in earnest on a project he had only vaguely contemplated before was thereby granted to Leigh. For the next thirty-one years he worked with indefatigable dedication on this project, submitting the first volume to press in the autumn of 1964, thereby launching one of his life's more enduring crises in the very act of bringing his research to its first fruition.

The collaboration of Leigh and Besterman in the *Correspondance de Rousseau* was to be the source of at least as much pain as pleasure

for the work's editor and publisher alike, the intermittent flashes of cordiality which occasionally tempered their exchanges only giving slight pause from outbursts of mutual reproach and remonstrance. When scheduled to meet, as Besterman remarked in the opening line of a letter he sent Leigh on 14 November 1960, it would be 'pistols for two and coffee for one!' Besterman could be a meticulous publisher, and it was his eye which at the last minute detected the error in volume XXI, whose first letter would otherwise have borne the same number as the last letter of volume XX. In Leigh's own best interest, furthermore, so as to avert what he termed 'all sorts of genevoiseries' that would have been occasioned by the appropriation of a great man's works, he suppressed the dedication Leigh had made to his wife, and he occasionally supplied photocopies of important documents, auctioneers' particulars or other material, which Leigh gratefully accepted and, with equal frequency, returned in kind, for Voltaire's *Correspondence*. But although he was as bedazzled by Leigh's scholarship as were other eighteenth-century specialists, Besterman had two reasons of his own — fear and envy — for greeting with only scant enthusiasm a work of outstanding quality which he had in effect himself commissioned. Leigh's remarkable annotation, and his practice of making substantial alterations in proof, were so costly that Besterman soon became alarmed at the prospect of having to provide an incalculable and indefinite subsidy to publish a work which he had originally hoped would produce an income for him; the initial reluctance of a sufficient number of subscribers to queue for the privilege of repaying his investment also annoyed him. Second, he was vexed that Leigh's scholarship so plainly upstaged and outshone his own endeavours on behalf of *le roi soleil* of the eighteenth century. Nowhere was this more conspicuous than in connection with Rousseau's exchange of letters with Voltaire himself, for which attentive readers would henceforth turn to Leigh's edition, with all those damnably authoritative notes that slurred his hero's good name, rather than to his own, thereby making the work of which he was the conspicuously animating editor obsolete in the light of another work of which he was merely the behind the scenes publisher.

These matters were to prove burdensome to Besterman, who was thus to find in his ungrateful protégé a threat to both his livelihood and his reputation. 'You get more like J. J. R. every day', he remarked to Leigh on 1 May 1973, nineteen years after their first exchange, as if it were at last plain that the vitriol and arsenic which Voltaire had

detected in Rousseau's veins had managed to contaminate his scribe. At almost every turn throughout the whole period of their relationship, embracing the publication of both the Voltaire and the Rousseau correspondence, the two men rekindled the greatest quarrel of eighteenth-century French literature — between the braggart and mountebank, addicted to luxury, whom Rousseau had condemned for debasing the upright morals of his Genevan compatriots, and the insufferable lunatic whose self-righteous unworldliness Voltaire decried as a betrayal of the practical ideals of his own cosmopolitan republic of letters.

Besterman's anxiety about the mounting costs of publication prompted him, in the summer of 1965, to insist that Leigh rein in his extravagance in future and, for the present, repay the excess over budget which his last-minute changes had cost. The whole project was nearly brought in this way to stillborn grief, but it was saved by the Trinity College Council, to which Leigh had turned in despair, its generosity commanding his deep gratitude, as expressed in a letter to Besterman of 12 June 1965: 'God bless Henry VIII and the Senior Bursar'. Besterman's envy, on the other hand, could hardly be articulated with ease to Leigh himself, but it must have been profoundly disturbing for the ghost of Voltaire to be haunted by Rousseau's shadow, materialised in fine print and upon excellent paper, in an incarnation he had made possible himself. How was the Godfather of Enlightenment studies to regain the upper hand? There was perhaps one way. In 1968, he launched a fresh publication of Voltaire's correspondence, this time as part of a new edition of his *Complete Works*, bearing the rubric *definitive*, to the exasperation of librarians and book collectors everywhere, who had only just paid their last instalment on the first set. No doubt there were sound academic, and perhaps even some compelling financial, reasons for embarking on a new edition so quickly on the heels of its precursor. Helpful corrections of Besterman's mistakes had been supplied from several quarters in addition to the hundreds offered by Leigh, and, in the meanwhile, a great many new Voltaire documents had been discovered or at last located, not least by virtue of the publication of Besterman's original edition. But to the extent that the editorial revisions of the definitive edition also point to the deficiencies of the first, Leigh's *Correspondance complète de Rousseau*, interpolated between the two sets of Voltaire, may help to explain why Besterman himself came to judge his initial effort an inadequate false start. Among the inadvertent and unanticipated conse-

quences of Leigh's truly definitive scholarship, it could thus appear that he had been instrumental in driving Besterman to edit Voltaire a second time.

Apart from dealing with Besterman, Leigh had of course to negotiate with archivists, librarians, book collectors and literary executors of every possible persuasion, including individuals who were reluctant to permit their treasures to go into print or even to be properly identified. His papers in preparation for the published text form a voluminous collection in their own right, as does the assortment of microfilms and photocopies which enabled Leigh to complete much of his work in Cambridge. Yet a large proportion could not be done from his home or college at all, and for many years he spent his summers and all the time he had available between teaching and administrative duties at the Bibliothèque de Neuchâtel, the Bibliothèque de Genève, the Bürgerbibliothek of Bern, the Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire de Lausanne, the Bibliothèque Mazarine in Paris, the Archives du Ministère de la Guerre at Vincennes and dozens of other libraries, museums and personal archives, in which it was necessary for him to trace leads, confirm his transcriptions or inspect additional papers first-hand. To find his way through such collections, as his acknowledgements make plain, he came to depend upon a network of dedicated scholars, bibliophiles and keepers of manuscripts, whose command of local, diplomatic or military history was crucial to his endeavours. With some of these scholars — eminent, formidable or entertaining in their own right — he was to form lasting ties of friendship. After some initial hesitancy, the redoubtable Claire Rosset, long-term guardian of the Rousseau archive in Neuchâtel, whose considerable age and intimate knowledge of the papers often made her seem the last surviving witness of their composition, was to prove an endlessly patient and invaluable guide. Jacques Rychner, the Neuchâtel Library's Director, and Charles Wirz, at once Secretary of the Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Director, after Besterman's departure, of the Institut et Musée Voltaire, both in Geneva, were as hospitable as any scholars Leigh had ever known. In Geneva especially, where he seemed able to retrace Rousseau's footsteps just by wistful inhalation, he relished his frequent chances to meet other Rousseau scholars, including Jean Starobinski and Bronislaw Baczko. Thanks to Christopher Frayling's skills as a chauffeur, he found it possible, over a number of years between 1969 and 1978, to inspect the Continental archives he needed to visit, in a more flamboyant style and agreeable

company than had been possible when he had travelled alone on trains before.

These journeys, and his manner of work in Cambridge, were not ideally suited to convivial family life. Even after their second child, Martha, was born in Cambridge in 1954, Leigh had encouraged his wife to continue her career as a pianist, and this she managed to do, intermittently, with recitals and broadcasts of sonatas, preludes or études by Debussy, Chopin, Thomas Arne and others, whose recordings Leigh would later play back to a small circle of friends in his King's Hostel rooms. But Edith had willingly made many sacrifices to enable him to pursue his own career, and her untimely death from cancer following kidney failure was a devastating blow from which Leigh's resolution, to proceed with the *Correspondance complète de Rousseau* as best he could, offered scant escape. His move back to college from Porson Road, fraught as that proved in some respects, nevertheless afforded salutary distractions. So did the company of his children, with whom he began to take longer holidays abroad, especially to Egypt and the Orient. With Marian Hobson, a former pupil who had assumed his responsibilities for the teaching of eighteenth-century subjects in both the college and the Faculty of Modern Languages, he could enjoy, not only the exchanges of friendship, but also conversation with another Fellow of Trinity in his own field. With Robert Wokler, for whom he had negotiated a Fellow Commonership in 1978–9, and among whose responsibilities in that period would be the carriage across Great Court of several thousand valuable books, he could discuss Rousseauist themes of mutual interest. In the King's Hostel, he would regale guests at superbly presented private dinners, and sometimes alarm them by the intensity of his squabbles with his son when they played bridge. It was just as he was about to embark on a winter's holiday in Thailand with John that he was struck by a massive heart attack. He had suffered a mild one several years earlier. A diabetic in adulthood, he had come to fear an eventual fate similar to that of Gallagher, who had lost a foot because of poor circulation, brought on by diabetes, although Leigh had been in relatively good health, and certainly in excellent form, in the late autumn of 1987. He had been within sight of the end of his project of almost forty years' labour, though no doubt if he had attended to it himself it would have been expanded into fifty volumes of text rather than forty-nine. He had other plans in hand, not least the bibliography of Rousseau, of which Jo-Ann McEachern had already almost finished the volume devoted

to *Emile*. For that series, whose publication by the Voltaire Foundation he had largely arranged himself, he would have completed the volume on the *Contrat social* first of all, predominantly based upon his own collection of eighteenth-century editions of this text. Having so often shuffled off his mortal coil in verse, until his last breath he was wholly unready to do so in fact. But, sensing that his pulse was weakening and distraught at having to leave his work unfinished even by the smallest fraction, he died, six days after his heart attack, on 22 December 1987.

An outsider drawn to the study of an outcast figure of an earlier age, Leigh perceived the hypocrisy, selfishness and greed of contemporary civilisation in terms that owed much to Rousseau himself, as did his contempt for political systems of both the East and West which gave official sanction to crimes of violence and injustice. Although he never emulated Shackleton (who had stood for Parliament as a Liberal) in seeking a career of his own in public life, he was always deeply vexed by the prevalent corruption of power which passed for the rule of law. By temperament averse to compromise, appeasement and sometimes even moderation, he was perhaps more politically both *engagé* and *enragé* than any other eighteenth-century scholar of his day. He had flirted with communism in his youth and attempted to enlist with the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War. In national elections, he managed to make a political virtue of his lack of a driver's licence by enticing Conservative Party agents in Cambridge to arrange car transport for him to the polling station, where he would cast his vote either for the Labour, or more latterly the Liberal, candidate. Having long witnessed the operation of committees, he imagined he had some knowledge of the ways in which conspiracies were formed, but in his diagnoses of how conspiratorial politics might be swept away and wholesale change effected he could also display a capacity, which he was fond of recognising in others, of planting his feet firmly in the air.

Even his scholarship was striking for its political character, in two main senses. First, it was especially polemical in tone, constructed around arguments which took up issues in adversarial fashion, refuting other authorities, assembling his case from the smallest clues, and then driving his points home with a rapier wit or the gusto and panache of a swashbuckler's flourish. Leigh seldom arrived at the truth without disposing of victims, either in Rousseau's world or his own. His remarkable essay in the *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau* of 1958 on 'Les manuscrits disparus' — one of the most notable bibliographical

essays in Enlightenment studies ever published — meticulously plots the stages of Rousseau's literary imagination, and the course of the dispersal of his papers, as if piecing together the manufacture of a great bomb and the orbit of its explosion out of the distribution of its surviving fragments. His essay on 'Boswell and Rousseau' in the *Modern Language Review* of 1952 forms both a profoundly learned and delightfully disparaging critique of the machinations of a man whose sense of a life of pure imagination drew him less to Rousseau's land of chimeras than towards the strutting exhibitionism of public notoriety. His essay, published in the same journal in the same year, on Elizabeth Fraser's misconceived attribution to Corneille of *La Mort de Solon* is a model of its kind and, together with the essay on 'Boswell and Rousseau', may have swayed the appointments committee in Cambridge in his favour. After noting that Fraser's identification of Corneille's handwriting had been based only upon her own judgement, Leigh remarks that in point of fact 'the handwriting of the manuscript of *Solon* no more resembles Corneille's than does that of *Alidor*, an unknown pastoral play discovered by Miss Fraser some years ago . . . and similarly declared by her to be not only by Corneille, but also in his handwriting'. To explain the absence of any resemblance between the handwriting in these two manuscripts, Miss Fraser, he continues, suggests that, 'at different times of his life, and for different purposes, Corneille utilized different styles of handwriting!' Such embarrassment, he proceeds to explain with great aplomb over the next eighteen pages, is nothing compared to Miss Fraser's treatment of the text.

Second, Leigh retained a lifelong interest in the connection between literature and politics, between the expression of theoretical discourse and its embodiment in political procedures, between Enlightenment ideals and the practical applications imputed to them, between Rousseau and the French Revolution. It was partly on account of his enduring attraction to this subject, which he first articulated in print in a devastating review of Joan McDonald's *Rousseau and the French Revolution* published in *The Historical Journal* in 1969, that he was to continue the *Correspondance complète* through the years of Rousseau's revolutionary impact. In his 1981 Tyson Lecture on 'Rousseau, his publishers and the *Contrat social*', he showed, with a masterful command of his sources, how the various formats of the Duchesne edition of Rousseau's *Oeuvres* dating from the 1760s, the pirate editions of the 1770s and the de luxe editions and their progeny of the 1780s, established a much wider circulation in pre-revolutionary France of the

work which came to be regarded as the revolutionaries' Gospel than had been suggested by Mornet in a highly influential essay assessing the extent of the diffusion of the *Contrat social* by way of tabulating its appearance in a collection of private libraries. Leigh's Sandars Lectures of 1987, published in 1990 as *Unsolved problems in the bibliography of Rousseau*, pursue the same themes in still far greater detail, through the study of printers' catchwords, typefaces, ornaments, settings and other compositorial practices, which could be employed to locate and sometimes identify the pirate presses that had produced Rousseau's *Oeuvres* in general or the *Contrat social* in particular, along lines heralded by Giles Barber and Richard Sayce in the 1960s. No more authoritative study from a bibliographical perspective of Rousseau's influence upon French Revolutionary thought had ever been undertaken before.

Leigh's judicious purchase over the years of eighteenth-century pirate and provincial printings of the *Contrat social* had made possible his use and the photographic illustration of copies from his own library for the Tyson and Sandars Lectures and the *Correspondance complète*. Indeed, the (by no means exhaustive) collection of around thirty-five pre-revolutionary editions of the *Contrat social* which he had formed by the time of his death was the largest in the world. Thanks to a small syndicate of London businessmen whose loan of funds had enabled him to purchase a number of particularly costly items, it also included the so-called 'type A' — that is, embracing the terms *Du contract social* on the title-page rather than half-title — of this most scarce among first editions of Rousseau's major works; Leigh's was an uncut copy in its original publisher's wrappers, even more remarkable for its inclusion of Rousseau's long concluding footnote on Protestant marriages together with the cancel with which his publisher, Marc-Michel Rey, had suppressed it at the last minute, at Rousseau's request, to avert a public outcry such as was to descend on the work anyway. The same syndicate made possible Leigh's acquisition of d'Alembert's copy, including his *marginalia*, of Rousseau's first *Discours*, described by Leigh in *The Library* in 1967, as well as a handful of Rousseau manuscripts which he transcribed and annotated for the *Correspondance complète*. Eventually, when his circumstances permitted, he repaid his creditors, and these items then passed completely into his own collection. But most of his library had been formed over a period of more than forty years from the small change of the modest academic stipend of a man with family commitments. Although he managed to obtain

that rarest of all Montesquieu items — a first edition of the *Lettres persanes*, which Shackleton had long sought in vain — his collection seemed of a different character from that of Shackleton, who had been able to acquire some great seventeenth- and eighteenth-century treasures, in handsome bindings, forming a library as impressive to behold as was that of David Nichol Smith, which had excited his admiration in Oxford. The bindings or provenances of Leigh's collection of books and pamphlets, by contrast, were not among its most compelling attractions. But, in its own way, his library was equally impressive and important, containing several unrecorded editions of Rousseau's works and particularly scarce *pièces fugitives*, mainly by Rousseau's critics, that had been sparked by his *Lettre sur la musique française*, the *Lettre sur les spectacles*, *Emile* and other writings.

At the time of his death the collection included over twenty editions of Rousseau's *Oeuvres* published in the eighteenth century, more than 800 antiquarian items chiefly associated with Rousseau, and nearly 5,000 works in all. Leigh had also been instrumental in the acquisition by the Cambridge University Library of certain texts, not least a set of the luxurious Boubers edition of Rousseau's *Oeuvres complètes*, published in Brussels between 1774 and 1783, which, with the exception of one tome including Rousseau *inédits*, he did not regard as indispensable for his own work. Thanks to the endeavours of Fred Ratcliffe, Shackleton had negotiated the sale of *his* books (excluding the Montesquieu material he bequeathed to the Bodleian) to the John Rylands University Library of Manchester, partly by way of benefaction but on terms which also included his retention of the library for the rest of his lifetime. If Ratcliffe had remained the University of Manchester's Librarian, Leigh's collection would most likely have joined Shackleton's, but when in 1980 he became the Librarian of Cambridge University instead, his move afforded Leigh the chance to keep his collection intact in the city in which it had been mainly assembled — its eighteenth-century core destined to be lodged in a fine room, adjacent to the Library Tower, within sight of Trinity. The Cambridge University Library's benefactors have speedily facilitated a substantial expansion of that collection, so that at least outside Geneva it has already become the largest single archive in the world of eighteenth-century publications by or about Rousseau. This collection is currently being catalogued and should be opened formally within a few years. It is difficult to imagine Leigh entrusting the inauguration of what is principally *his* library to anyone apart from himself. If he could manage a belated

reappearance, he would, as was his fashion so frequently in his addresses to the Third Trinity Book Club dinners, contrive to say something like this: 'It is a truth universally acknowledged that the launch of a good library requires a bad speech. Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, I feel I ought not to let this occasion pass without a brief word of thanks to those who have made it possible.'

ROBERT WOKLER
University of Manchester

Note. For these remarks I have adapted a substantial amount of my 'Preparing the definitive edition of the *Correspondance de Rousseau*', in *Rousseau & the Eighteenth century: Essays in memory of R. A. Leigh*, ed. M. Hobson, J. T. A. Leigh and R. Wokler (Oxford, 1992), whose Part I is comprised of six essays devoted to 'The Work of Ralph Leigh', including a comprehensive bibliography prepared by John Leigh. All references to the *Correspondance complète de Rousseau* are indicated by 'Leigh', followed by a letter number only. There is also a biographical sketch by Alison Fairlie in *Reappraisals of Rousseau: Studies in honour of R. A. Leigh*, ed. S. Harvey, M. Hobson, D. J. Kelley and S. S. B. Taylor (Manchester, 1980). At the Memorial Service conducted at Trinity College, Cambridge, on 30 April 1988, the address was given by the Reverend Harry Williams, CR; it was published in the College Annual Record of 1987–8. For diverse information supplied to me, I am grateful to Alan Bell, Andrew Brown, Peter Cowles, Janet Laming, John Leigh, Martha Leigh, Rose Mendel, Fred Ratcliffe, Robert Robson, Tony Weir and Charles Wirz.