

Rousseau Rousseau
and et la
Criticism Critique

edited by
sous la direction de

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PREFACE

The Eighteenth Century launched the great age of Enlightenment critique--an age of rationalist skepticism about the dogmatic certainties of orthodox religion, a critique of revelation in the name of a new, scientific Enlightenment reason. But that critique could not be complete until reason critiqued itself, as it did most notably perhaps--albeit very differently--in the figures of Kant and Rousseau. Rousseau's *First Discourse* launched indeed what might be called the first great counter-critique of Enlightenment reason, a counter-critique that at once subscribed to Enlightenment skepticism and overturned it. For Rousseau's skepticism attacked the new god of Enlightenment reason itself as a degradation or corruption of nature and a naturally sympathetic or sentient human nature, radically redefining both in a way that nonetheless completed the Enlightenment project: the apotheosis of reason's critique was its own collapse.

The central dynamic or dialectic of critique and counter-critique which one finds in Rousseau has since come to dominate modernity. We live in a thoroughly skeptical age, caught it appears in the kind of ceaseless self-questioning and self-consciousness which Rousseau himself came to embody, no longer able even to affirm his faith in nature and human nature as something prior to any "social constructionism." Yet one can argue that Rousseau's famous distinctions between the state of nature and the state of civil society, between *amour de soi* and *amour propre*, made him in fact the very father of such constructionism. Hence Rousseau's profound ambiguity for feminist critiques of patriarchy: is Rousseau the great patriarchal tyrant *par excellence* for his attempts to ground sexual difference in a state of nature? or the great liberator from patriarchal tyranny for his demonstration that gender roles as we know them are socially constructed?

Since Rousseau's time, the kinds of paradoxes to which his thought gives rise have stimulated widely divergent and apparently contradictory responses, critiques of his critiques of Enlightenment reason and morality which sometimes attack and sometimes defend a Rousseau who becomes ever more elusive and wily in his apparent self-contradictions. The papers we have collected here range across a wide spectrum of Rousseau's critiques of religion, literature, morality, and gender relations, charting Rousseau's "dialogues" with his "critics" from the Ancients through the Eighteenth Century to Nietzsche and contemporary feminists. They also chart Rousseau's dialogue with his own severest--and most lenient?--critic: himself.

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We also warmly thank Jim MacAdam, one of the original founders of the Association and host of its inaugural conference at Trent University in 1978, for the splendid conference he arranged and hosted with characteristic gusto and sly wit on the even of his retirement from Trent in May 1993. I want to thank personally as well Aubrey Rosenberg, retiring president of the Association, for the moving tribute to Maurice Cranston which heads this volume; and Guy Lafrance, for generously taking on the job of editing the French-language papers and overseeing the final stages of publication with unfailing helpfulness, courtesy, and kindness.

Lorraine Clark

IN MEMORIAM MAURICE CRANSTON (1920-1993)

There have been many wonderful testimonials, in national newspapers, magazines, and learned journals, to the remarkable life of Maurice Cranston who died of a heart attack in November 1993. When he spoke at our Association meeting in Montreal, in May 1989, he was in his usual fine form, witty, urbane, and in absolute command of the Rousseau canon. Similarly, when he was invited to be the keynote speaker at our conference at Trent University, in May 1993, where he delivered a lecture on Rousseau and Romanticism, there was no hint of anything amiss. All those who knew him were shocked, therefore, by the news of his sudden death. This is not the place to rehearse in detail all the aspects of a remarkably varied career in England, Europe, and America, that saw Maurice Cranston in such diverse roles as journalist, professor, administrator, freelance writer of fiction as well as fact (a distinction he firmly adhered to in opposition to fashionable literary theories), translator, biographer, peripatetic philosopher and a host of others. These activities and his numerous publications that brought him international fame have been documented in the obituaries referred to above.

What interests our Association particularly are his writings on Rousseau that began early in his academic career and culminated in his magisterial biography of Rousseau of which, at the time of his death, he had completed two of the three proposed volumes. But we are indebted to him not simply for his writings but also for the enormous encouragement he gave to our fledgling Society, especially to scholars embarking on a career.

Despite his great reputation, Maurice Cranston was essentially a modest man. Indeed, when he was invited to our colloquia he always gave the impression that the honour was his. And this, I think, is the hallmark of that vanishing breed of gentlemen/scholars who take their work seriously but not themselves, whose intellectual integrity is beyond reproach, who would rather perish than publish for the sake of doing so, and whose presence alone ennobles the company they keep. As a tribute to Maurice Cranston, it is fitting to say of him what Hamlet said of his father: "He was a man, take him for all in all, /I shall not look upon his like again." Nor shall we.

Aubrey Rosenberg