***Monstrously Natural***

 ***Rousseau and I***

1.

As I am reading the uncouth,

 Fantastical Rousseau in bed

One night, into my dreamy head

There walks a shy and awkward youth

Whose manners are distinctly odd.

 An Englishman named Mr Dudding, *An incident related in the*

 He of his native tongue knows nudding, Confessions *in connection*

And I will not expose the fraud. *with a tryst with an older woman.*

Imposture is the strange imposthume

 Of his soul’s turmoil, almost reeking

 Of an ambivalent self-seeking

That puts on the Armenian costume,

A tragic yet romantic life-

 Long tale of self-love unrequited,

 *Amour de soi* corrupted, blighted

And by controversy and strife

Perverted into *amour-propre*

 And persecution mania,

 A much-disputed *Contract*, a

Once-famous, now-forgotten opera,

And those notorious *Confessions*,

 Penned by a man who, though a beast

 In some ways, was ‘unique, at least’;

Who authored, with uncanny prescience,

The attitude, the sentimentality,

 Pretensions, fears, and aspirations

 Of the succeeding generations

And birthed the modern personality.

2.

Though Athens taught you what you knew,

 You pledged allegiance to grim Sparta,

 And made dramatic arts a martyr

To virtues hardly found in you.

You wrote against the theatre

 That gave you money and a name—

 But money’s false, and so is fame,

And Art and Science are a slur

On the primordial dignity *L’Hermitage.*

 Of Man, so free, so full of pity

 Till, penned in a corrupting city

By Tubal-Cain & Company

He takes on envy in proportion

 As his dependency increases

 Until he altogether ceases

To settle for his natural portion

But wears a mask, and grubs for wealth

 And fame and power at the expense

 Of others, and sells innocence

For knowledge, and for beauty, health.

3.

You ruined a maid’s life once, when

 You blamed your theft on her, to save

 Yourself. Confess this sin (though grave)

And you are self-absolved again!

And as for the five children you

 Abandoned to the mercies of

 A foundling hospital: what love

Of self this showed, what strange *vertu,*

Sentencing them, almost, to die,

 Or an impoverished life to live.

 It was your duty at least to give

Them help—and did you even try?

*But you abandoned yours, as well,*

 *It was not just, that what you threw*

 *Away should be returned to you,*

*What in your irresponsible*

*Self-indulgence you forfeited:*

 *Your wife, your name, your family,*

 *Position in society,*

*Your very self, like your fame, dead!*

*You’re one of them,* that *I can tell!*

 *You have been looking through my letters,*

 *Haven’t you, spying on your betters?*

*Begone, thou monster. Go to Hell!*

4. *Frankenstein’s Monster*

Ah, Mary Shelley, though they thrive,

 The Puritans and Radicals,

 It’s you who feel the root, the pulse.

*I am alive! I am alive!*

So cries the Monster named Rousseau,

 The Natural Man; might Frankenstein

 Be faulted for his flawed design?

Into the night we watch him go

Pursued by his conspiracies,

 And could the world but know his heart,

 No murderer he: a man apart,

Who has his faults; let judge of these

Who dares! He is, at least, unique.

 At heart he is a sentimental man

 And much inclined to be a gentle man—

Of *gentlemen* let us not speak!

[Percy Shelley:]

*Life triumphed o’er him, left him twisted*

 *In road-side shadows of her progress,*

 *As she, the meretrix, the Ogress,*

*Sped in the van whereto she listed.*

[Mary Shelley:]

*A monstrous type of Abraham*

 *Who sacrificed his progeny*

 *On the altar of a vanity*

*Whose only dogma is* I AM.

5.

Patron saint of the Jacobins

 (Robespierre your spiritual son)

 They raised you to the Pantheon.

The Terror in your heart begins.

It spreads and builds its clean machines,

 And schemes on paper with red ink

 Revise the way we live and think

And edit vice with guillotines.

Robespierre, grim and grandiose, is

 Bent upon forcing us to be

 Free, pruning vices from the Tree

Till virtue swells into psychosis

And Liberty becomes tyrannical.

 With the cult of sincerity

 And Spartan Virtue you set free

Once more the Demons Puritanical.

To banish every atheist

 And execute the insincere

 Embodies liberty’s worst fear,

Wraps life in Terror’s crimson mist.

And your praise of the ‘species-being’

 Above the individual

 Poisons the mind of Karl Marx, all

The fury of the masses freeing.

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The animus-filled anima

 Can never find enlightenment.

 Let stand this shrift and testament:

*Jean-Jacques, Monsieur Rousseau*, *c’est moi.*

