

## *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,  
He of his native tongue knows nudding,  
And I will not expose the fraud.

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.



*An incident related in the  
Confessions in connection  
with a tryst with an older woman.*

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



*L'Hermitage.*

On the primordial dignity  
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.*

