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John C. O'Neal, ed., *The Nature of Rousseau's "Rêveries": Physical, Human, Aesthetic. Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 2008: 03. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2008. v + 281 pp. Tables, illustrations, notes, summaries, bibliography, index. £60/€85/\$125 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-7294-0928-5

Review by Charly Coleman, Washington University in St. Louis.

In January 1762, Jean-Jacques Rousseau addressed a series of letters to Chrétien-Guillaume de Lamoignon de Malesherbes, the Directeur de la Librairie. Not surprisingly, the correspondence turned to Rousseau's own writings, which he described as "inseparable and form[ing] together the same whole."^[1] The essays compiled in *The Nature of Rousseau's "Rêveries,"* edited by John C. O'Neal and authored by leading scholars in the field, accept Jean-Jacques at his word on this point. Taken as a whole, the collection resituates Rousseau's final work within the general problematic that structured his life and thought: the relationship between nature and society. In so doing, the contributors advance our understanding of the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire* in the sense that Rousseau likely intended—that is, as a set of meandering yet purposeful reflections on how social estrangement purifies self-love and leads to existential contentment, how science accentuates sensibility, and how the observation of nature leads to reverie. While some readers might fault the authors for neglecting certain contextual frames—especially those related to religious and economic developments—their articles nonetheless suggest the extent to which Rousseau's writings, for all their idiosyncrasies, functioned as a barometer of social and cultural change in eighteenth-century France.

Rousseau scholars have often analyzed his work as oscillating between conceptual opposites. To cite two prominent examples, Jean Starobinski identified the tensions between Rousseau's longing for "transparency" vis-à-vis his fellows and the "obstruction" of this desire, while Bronisław Baczko emphasized the dialectic of "community" and "solitude" in his political writings.^[2] The volume under review, like the *Rêveries* themselves, departs somewhat from this approach in that nature alone, albeit in its various manifestations, serves as the central category around which the analyses revolve. While Rousseau's final work is the main source, the authors deftly incorporate insights gleaned from his previous writings, especially the *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* (*Second Discourse*). This approach also should recommend the collection to scholars not only in field of French literature, but in history, political philosophy, and other disciplines as well.

The contributions are grouped into four overlapping parts. The first section, on "Nature in Rousseau's *Rêveries*," is devoted primarily to Rousseau's views on, and influence over, the study and representation of nature. Alexandra Cook's essay examines Rousseau's interest in botany, as reflected both in the *Rêveries* and in far lesser-known works he devoted to the subject, including the herbaria that he assembled during his walks. These botanical studies, according to Cook, exemplify Rousseau's disillusionment with instrumental approaches to science, while also serving as a distraction from his tormented past. Dorothy Johnson's piece examines Rousseau's influence on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French landscape painting. While Rousseau's impact is more inferred than demonstrated, Johnson argues that the *Rêveries* encouraged artists such as Pierre-Paul Prud'hon and Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson in their efforts to raise the intellectual profile of the landscape genre by depicting nature as a source of contemplation.

The final essay in this section is by the volume's editor, John O'Neal. Expounding on themes in his previous work on the *Rêveries*, he reads Rousseau's last writings as a method for coping with the destabilizing features of modern life by retreating into nature, without expecting to find a resolution of the doubts that once so acutely seized him.[3] To a certain extent, O'Neal's essay functions both as a summary of the first section and a foreshadowing of the last. Like Cook, he addresses Rousseau's approach to botany as both an active and passive practice, and like Johnson, he describes the *Rêveries* in art historical terms of "figure and landscape" (69). At the same time, his attention to the structure of the text itself points to the contributions by James Swenson and Carole Martin that conclude the volume.

Part two, entitled "Nature and Human Nature in Rousseau's *Rêveries*," traces additional aspects of the topics treated in the first section, with a stress on the anthropological contours of the text. Jean-François Perrin argues that the *Rêveries* depict an experimental method for testing Rousseau's theory of the natural human as elaborated in the *Second Discourse*. The positive elements of this procedure depended on the invention of a "semiotic system" to describe the "automatic mental and physical processes" that Rousseau viewed as a means of recovering desocialized self-love (*amour de soi*) (78). In a similar manner, Jean-Luc Guichet interprets Rousseau's accident during a journey to Ménénilmontant, depicted in the Second Walk, as triggering a unique state that established the conditions for an "effective return" to "pure sensibility," despite Rousseau's previous claims that such a move was impossible (85, 90). As with the founding act of the social contract, it is a moment "liberating alienation," in which the loss of one's powers or prerogatives establishes the conditions for recovering them on a higher plane (91).

Natasha Lee's article also approaches the *Rêveries* as a meditation on the potential of returning to the state of nature by reversing sociability and identifying a new empirical basis for natural selfhood. In moving from the theoretical suppositions of the *Second Discourse* to self-experimentation, Rousseau confronted what Lee terms a "crisis of referentiality" that he ultimately sought to resolve by identifying himself as an "object of nature among others" (104). In contrast to Cook, who emphasizes the pedagogical features of Rousseau's botanizing, Lee sees this practice as part of the broader project of desocialization examined by Perrin and Guichet.

The third section, "Human Nature in the *Rêveries*," highlights additional features of Rousseau's attempts to return the self to a natural state. Several of the essays examine Rousseau's stance toward his past and the outside world. For instance, Jacques Berchtold focuses on two specific details of Rousseau's account of his accident during the Second Walk: the proximity of a theater, and the symbolism of the carriage that nearly crushed him after his fall. The sight of the playhouse, according to Berchtold, suspends Rousseau's immersion in nature and signals his intent to lampoon the wealth represented by the carriage. Fiona Miller's essay addresses Rousseau's observation that those around him have ceased to be humans, but are instead what materialist *philosophes* claimed: mere automata. Rousseau is thus "forced to be free" in a way that sheds light on the famous passage from *Du contrat social* (137). In both texts, the compulsion is rooted in natural freedom (which follows from impulse) rather than in moral or civic freedom (which requires will).

Philip Stewart adopts a broader view of Rousseau's reflections on his relationship with the *philosophes*. Even if, as O'Neal also observes, Rousseau never fully quells his doubts, he nonetheless arrives at a satisfactory assurance that his philosophical system, including his belief in God, can adequately fend off any assault. Stewart aims to show, however, that Rousseau's faith is never as solid as he claimed, since certitude cannot exist without the possibility of incertitude.

Other essays in part three turn to the relationship between the moral and rhetorical features in the *Rêveries*. Lawrence Mall explores the theological implications of Rousseau's attempts to become a whole unto himself. In particular, his claims of being the last person of virtue are read in light of the Book of

Job: God's desire that an innocent man suffer only confirmed his faith that justice awaited him in the next life. With this certainty, Rousseau became his own moral arbiter, who appears in the text as a "lyrical subject" (160). Along similar lines, Sylvie Romanowski argues that the *Rêveries* assign a new role to the narrator as a master of himself and of nature that foreshadows Sade and confirms the eighteenth-century rise of individualism. According to Ourida Mostefai, Rousseau's near-death experience in the Second Walk signifies a reversal of the false conversion that Rousseau experienced at Vincennes at the start of his career as a *philosophe*. He is once again reborn, but in a "state of original innocence" (206). Having confronted his fear of death, Rousseau adopts a resigned air toward his fate and, as Mall also notes, an assurance of his moral innocence.

The essays in this section by John T. Scott and Kevin Inston access Rousseau's attempts to reimagine subjectivity in even greater detail. Scott argues that Rousseau's search for wholeness within himself likewise extends to botanical observation of single plants as wholes apart from nature. Yet this perspective ultimately proves impossible to maintain, because Rousseau is incapable of fully neutralizing the passions of vanity and pride. Whereas Scott, along with Stewart, stresses the inconclusive nature of Rousseau's experiments, Inston regards this feature as crucial for understanding the transformative power of reverie. His essay shows how reverie, like the state of nature in the *Second Discourse*, points to the fundamentally indeterminate character of society and subjectivity, and thus to the possibility of altering them. According to Inston, reverie operates as a means of "self-dispossession" that is in turn a precondition for neutralizing *amour-propre* and narrating a self that "no longer strives for identity" (191, 193).

Like O'Neal's essay in part one, the final essay in part three touches on themes presented in the previous essays while gesturing toward the next section. While Stewart and other contributors highlight Rousseau's relationship with his contemporaries, Zev Trachtenberg is more concerned with his Romantic successors--in particular, with David Thoreau. On the basis of Thoreau's essay "Walking," Trachtenberg argues that both Thoreau and Rousseau conceive of walking as way of maintaining one's sense of self in communion with nature. Thoreau departed from Rousseau's claims of permanent social estrangement, however, in that his walks were intended to enrich his life in society.

The fourth and final section, "The Formal or Aesthetic Nature of Rousseau's *Rêveries*," features essays by James Swenson and Carole Martin. Swenson describes the formal properties of key passages to argue that Rousseau's invention of Romantic lyricism did not depend on the usage of rhythmic patterns, which he describes as neo-classical, but on adopting "a particular way of giving voice to the experience of objects encountered in the course of solitary walks" (226). Of equal interest is Swenson's claim, in contrast to previous scholarship, that for the Rousseau of the *Rêveries*, nature no longer stands for a totalizing whole, but a bare identity between his passing sentiments and the disparate objects he encounters. This experience of objects informs Rousseau's prose, which now makes every observation a source of "lyrical expression" (235).

Carole Martin stresses the similarities between Rousseau's and Gaston Bachelard's notions of reverie, while arguing that the activity of walking poses a sort of counter-action: if reverie signals retreat, the walk leads Rousseau back into society. Martin reads the Ninth Walk, in which Rousseau pays for a group of girls to play a street game, as announcing the emergence of a "liberal individualism" that measures value in terms of monetary exchange (258). Rousseau's introduction of this new standard frees the self from the regard of others, thereby arresting the effects of *amour-propre*. This is a fascinating argument, but one that is difficult to sustain--not least because, on his wife's suggestion, Rousseau ensured that each girl's share of the wafers "became almost equal and the joy more general," and that the encounter convinced him that "true pleasure is not measured by the expense" incurred in acquiring it.[4]

As the preceding summary suggests, the essays collected in this volume range well beyond the *Rêveries*

to engage with the central preoccupation of Rousseau's philosophical career: the moral degeneration of human nature in civil society and the possibility of fixing new relations between the individual subject and other persons as well as objects. Rousseau offered divergent solutions to the problems of estrangement and dependence in his writings. While *Émile* sought to recover human autonomy in preparing a "savage made to live in the city," *Du Contrat social* made a virtue out of the necessity of alienation in its formula for the social compact.[5] The *Rêveries* departed from these approaches, in that they were predicated on a definitive break with traditional forms of sociability. This move, according to David Gauthier's recent study, led to Rousseau's retreat into a commemoration of his love for Mme de Warens, which he claimed (not unlike *Émile* to his tutor) had made him who he was.[6]

The present volume, in contrast, stresses that Rousseau continued to grapple with the alternatives he developed in previous work. In parts two and three, this project entailed an experimental return to the original state of nature and the restoration of some measure of self-mastery. Other essays—those by Miller, Mostefai, and Martin in particular—propose that the *Rêveries* also gestured toward a new way of engaging the world as a singular object among others.

These readings of the *Rêveries* are highly suggestive, and make the collection a valuable resource for scholars and teachers, as was volume on the *Confessions* and the *Rêveries* that O'Neal co-edited for the MLA's Approaches to Teaching World Literature Series.[7] *The Nature of Rousseau's "Rêveries"* is more focused in its thematic emphases than the previous work, which lends it an admirable degree of coherence for an edited compilation. Yet this approach also has its limitations. For instance, despite the central function that reverie plays in the text, there are few attempts to situate this phenomenon within a broader discussion of the dream-state, a significant topic given that Rousseau claimed that his philosophical vocation stemmed from the altered state of consciousness he experienced during the "illumination at Vincennes," but also due to its interest to theologians, physicians, and *philosophes* during the late Enlightenment.

There is also a religious dimension to reverie, which Rousseau himself signaled when he likened the experience to a state of divine quietude in the Fifth Walk. Several contributors allude to this passage, and Inston even describes Rousseau's method as one of "self-dispossession—an expression that echoes the rhetoric of spiritual abandon that was prominent in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century mystic theology. None of the articles, however, offers a sustained account of Rousseau's resigned spirituality in the *Rêveries*, which would appear to draw him closer to his self-professed mentor, Fénelon, who was not only the author of *Télémaque* but also a committed mystic whose teachings were condemned as Quietist heresy in 1699.

Finally, the collection raises intriguing questions about the extent to which Rousseau sought to comment on cultural and socio-economic realities in late eighteenth-century France. Rousseau wrote to Malesherbes that his vision on the way to Vincennes revealed to him "all the contradictions of the social system." [8] In leaving the world, Rousseau showed himself willing, at long last, to leave it as it was. It is telling, then, that he increasingly described himself as a mere object among other natural objects, while reducing his fellow humans to automata that moved under the sway of forces beyond their control. The work of accounting for the languages (religious, philosophical, and otherwise) that Rousseau employed in these statements, and what light they might shed on social relations in an increasingly consumer-oriented economy, remains, like the *Rêveries* themselves, unfinished.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Jacques Berchtold, "Le carosse et le jardinier: nature et dénaturation dans la 'Deuxième promenade'"

Alexandra Cook, "The 'Septième Promenade' of the *Rêveries*: A Peculiar Account of Rousseau's Botany?"

Jean-Luc Guichet, "Nature et origine: l'accident de Ménilmontant"

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Dorothy Johnson, "Rousseau and Landscape Painting in France"

Natasha Lee, "A Dream of Human Nature"

Laurence Mall, "Dieu est juste; il veut que je souffre; et il sait que je suis innocent': le problème du mal dans les *Rêveries* de Rousseau"

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Fiona Miller, "Forced into Freedom: Rousseau's Strange Self-Portrait in the *Rêveries*"

Ourida Mostefai, "De Vincennes à Ménilmontant: promenade et projet autobiographique dans les *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*"

John C. O'Neal, "Nature As Refuge in Rousseau's *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*"

Jean-François Perrin, "Les opérations que font les physiciens': physique de l'homme naturel selon les *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*"

Sylvie Romanowski, "Un étranger pas comme les autres: la voix du maître"

John T. Scott, "Rousseau's quixotic quest in the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*"

Philip Stewart, "Ebranlé mais non convaincu': Rousseau parmi les philosophes"

James Swenson, "The Solitary Walker and the Invention of Lyrical Prose"

Zev Trachtenberg, "The Exile and the Moss-Trooper: Rousseau and Thoreau on Walking in Nature"

NOTES

[1] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettres à Malesherbes*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Bernard Gagnebin and Marcel Raymond, eds., 5 vols., Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1959-1995), 1: 1136.

[2] Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l'obstacle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971) and Bronisław Baczko, *Rousseau: Solitude et communauté*, trans. Claire Brendhel-Lamhout (Paris: Mouton, 1974).

[3] See, for instance, O'Neal, "La métamorphose de la perception du Promeneur solitaire," in *Lectures des "Rêveries,"* ed. Anne F. Garreta (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1998), pp. 59-68.

[4] Rousseau, *Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, 1: 1091-1092.

[5] Rousseau, *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, 4: 483.

[6] David Gauthier, *Rousseau: The Sentiment of Existence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 164-189.

[7] John C. O'Neal and Ourida Mostefai, eds., *Approaches to Teaching Rousseau's "Confessions" and "Reveries of the Solitary Walker,"* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2003).

[8] Rousseau, *Lettres à Malesherbes*, p. 1135.

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