Robert Burns and Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Sensitive Hearts, Big Mouths

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Robert Burns was a voracious reader: according to his grandson, his library contained, among other authors, "Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Goldsmith, Tasso, Voltaire, Molière, Boileau, Rousseau, and the Immortal Shakespeare" (Crawford 2009, 404). John Robotham adds Confucius, Euclid, Cervantes, and Goethe to the list (in McGuirk 1998, 281-297). Indeed, the poet who, for a long time, was considered as a "Heaven-taught ploughman" was as well aware of the tradition as of his contemporaries. He could also read French, and his brother Gilbert recalls his brother's education with their preceptor Murdoch with admiration: "in a little while, … he [Burns] had acquired such a knowledge of the language, as to read any French author in prose. This was considered a prodigy" (McIntyre 20). This chapter sets out to show that one main influence over Burns's worldview is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas. A musician, a lover of nature and a figurehead of the age of sensibility, an opponent of absolute monarchy, and as such an outspoken personality (what Michel Foucault would call a "parresiast" [2001, 2009]), prone to self-dramatizing, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was a philosopher in whom Burns found much to identify with and to draw upon so as to build his own poetic persona. Robert Burns certainly read some of Rousseau's works, but no one seems able today to ascertain what specific books he knew. And what does reading mean? Pierre Bayard (2007) has warned his readers about the complexities of reading: what with books one has read but forgotten, books one has bought but has not read, or not read

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entirely, or misunderstood, it is rather difficult to assess, on the basis of books found on a shelf, the amount of influence books have had on a person. Therefore, when considering a poet like Burns in the wake of a thinker like Rousseau, it is possible to agree with Marilyn Butler when she says: "In fact a thinker becomes 'influential', that is, read, admired and echoed, because he has ideas common with others, rather than because he initiates them" (Butler 23). Robert Burns shares with Jean-Jacques Rousseau the sensibility of the age, an interest in the inner life of feelings. The expression of such feelings leads to the study of music, to a study of the self, and to a conception of nature not only as a model of authenticity, but also as something to preserve. Being sincere implies being sincere with others: the paradox of the sentimental era is that sensitive hearts, like Rousseau and Burns, may turn into big mouths, especially when it comes to the denunciation of luxury, politics and critics.

The Effusions of the Heart

Rousseau was famous in England from the 1760s onwards. After *Émile* and *Du contrat social* (1762) had been banned, Rousseau was almost constantly on the move, and at the invitation of David Hume, he spent the better part of two years (1766-1767) in England. Best known in Great Britain were probably his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755) and *Du contrat social*—or rather, the *ideas* contained in these books were well-known, as they were vulgarised in book clubs and newspapers, and as they offered a radical criticism of the political system and society of the time. Indeed, as Eric Hobsbawm writes, Rousseau's "intellectual influence was pervasive and strong, especially in Germany and among the Romantics, but it was not that of a system but of an attitude and a passion" (300). With the publication of the translation of his *Confessions* in two parts (1782 and 1789), Rousseau became both "a venerated figure among the British radicals" and "essential to the cult of sensibility in Britain throughout the 1780s" (McCalman 684).

Marilyn Butler notes that "after the middle of the century, and aided by the example of Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) and *Émile* (1762), a strongly subjective fictional kind [of sentimental fiction] had emerged

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which regularly put the feelings of the heart above parental authority, law and inherited morality" (157). In truth, even in his early essays like the *Discours sur les origines et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, Rousseau had laid great emphasis on the heart as a means to reach a form of sincerity. McGuirk (1985) has convincingly traced many sources of Burns's sentimentality, but surprisingly she does not refer to Rousseau even once. Burns takes pride in underlining his place in the sentimental tradition opened up by Rousseau, and prolonged by Henry Mackenzie's 1771 *Man of Feeling*—"a book I prize next to the Bible," Burns confesses (Ross Roy I: 17). Echoing Rousseau, he expresses his belief that "Man is naturally a kind, benevolent animal" (Ross Roy I: 290). In the preface to *Poems*, he confesses his desire to sing "the sentiments and manners he felt and saw in himself and his rustic compeers," while the motto affixed to the volume is a brief manifesto to the sentimental age:

> The simple Bard, unbroke by rules of art,
> He pours the wild effusions of the heart;
> And if inspir'd 'tis Nature's pow'rs inspire;
> Her's all the melting thrill, and her's the kindling fire.

The idea of rusticity and simplicity is at the core of the connexion between Rousseau and Burns. As per an idea repeatedly advocated by Rousseau, simplicity is tantamount to authenticity. Genuine feelings are for instance extolled by Burns in the first "Epistle to John Lapraik" ("My Muse … may touch the heart," 198-199) and more at length in "The Cotter's Saturday Night." The poem starts on an epigraph by Thomas Gray stating: "Let not Ambition mock their useful toil, / Their homely joys, and destiny obscure; / Nor Grandeur hear, with a disdainful smile, / The short and simple annals of the Poor." The poet tunes his voice to the subject with: "To you I sing, in simple Scottish lays" (7). The evening in the cottage consists in a homely meal: "the supper crowns their simple board" (91). Lines 176-177, in the voice of the poet, condemn wealth in Rousseauist fashion: "And O! may Heaven their simple lives prevent / From luxury's contagion, weak and vile!" In the conclusion of the poem, Burns praises the mores of the Scottish peasants and disparages the aristocracy:

> From scenes like these, old Scotia's grandeur springs,
> That makes her lov'd at home, rever'd abroad:

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> Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,
> 'An honest man's the noblest work of God;'
> And certes, in fair virtue's heavenly road,
> The cottage leaves the palace far behind;
> What is a lordling's pomp? a cumbrous load,
> Disguising oft the wretch of human kind,
> Studied in arts of hell, in wickedness refin'd! (163-171)

As for homely scenes, like that described in "The Cotter's Saturday Night," Rousseau encourages authors to choose simple topics: "Ne serait-il pas à désirer que nos sublimes auteurs daignassent descendre un peu de leur continuelle élévation et nous attendrir quelquefois pour la simple humanité souffrante, de peur que, n'ayant de la pitié que pour des héros malheureux, nous n'en ayons jamais pour personne" (Rousseau 1967, 89). The simplicity of the cotter's Saturday night is accompanied by songs: "They chant their artless notes in simple guise, / They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim" (109-110). Indeed, beginning no later than the controversy between Rameau and Rousseau throughout the 1750s, music is considered by Rousseau's followers as the best channel to convey sincerity.

Belinda Cannone, when describing Rousseau's *Le Devin du Village* (first performed in 1752), points out that the true boldness of the opera lies in its simplicity: "Simplicité de la musique, mais aussi des sentiments exprimés qui sont conformes au vœu de Rousseau" (110). Simplicity is what Rousseau advocates in *Lettre sur la musique française* (1753), where he praises his own opera, and in *Lettre sur les spectacles* (1758). Donald Low notes that, according to Rousseau, "the primary function of music is to carry sentiments, the agents of feeling, to the listener's heart" (1974, 128). In the *Lettre à d'Alembert*, Rousseau condemns extravagant shows: "c'est l'oubli des goûts simples et naturels, qui rendent si nécessaire un amusement étranger" (Rousseau 1967, 66).

Likewise, according to Crawford (1979, 185), Burns was "the masterly exponent in practice of an aesthetic of music and words which had been developing in Britain from Dryden onwards, and which fitted in with current European trends, particularly with some of Rousseau's speculations about music." In opposition to Rameau, Rousseau favours melody over harmony ("cette ridicule emphase de science harmonique"

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[Rousseau 1993, 162; see also Low 1975, 128-134]). In the tradition of the Scottish culture, Burns holds dear folk-songs and traditional music, where melodies, played by pipes or strings, can be heard in the thirty-odd collections of Scottish airs and songs published in the course of the century, culminating with James Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* (1787-1800) and George Thomson's *Select Collection* (1793-1818), both of which Burns contributed to. Such a focus on simplicity associated with melody is also central to Burns's conception of music:

> There is a certain irregularity in the old Scotch Songs, a redundancy of syllables with respect to that exactness of accent & measure that the English Poetry requires, but which glides in, most melodiously with the respective tunes to which they are set. … There is a degree of wild irregularity in many of the compositions & Fragments which are daily sung to them by my compeers, the common people—a certain happy arrangement of old Scotch syllables, & yet, very frequently, nothing, not even *like* rhyme, or sameness of jingle at the ends of the lines. This has made me sometimes imagine that perhaps it might be possible for a Scotch Poet, with a nice, judicious ear, to set compositions to many of our most favourite airs, particularly that class of them mentioned above, independent of rhyme altogether" (in Low 1985, xxv)

Rousseau (1993) insists on vocal phrases and melody as the prime elements of music, and his opinion is that they do not exist *per se* in French music, whereas they shine in the Italian one. Rousseau constantly disparages harmony and counterpoint. For his part, Burns supports this view, as he explains in a letter: "You know that my pretensions to musical taste, are merely a few of Nature's instincts, untaught and untutored by Art.—For this reason, many musical compositions, particularly where much of the merit lies in Counterpoint, however they may transport and ravish the ears of you, Connoisseurs, affect my simple lug [ear] no otherwise than merely as melodious Din" (Ross Roy II: 235).

This is why for Rousseau melodrama is the most relevant form to express the human voice accompanied by music (as opposed to the French mode in which the voice is paradoxically turned into the accompaniment of the original accompaniments, namely instruments). Melody stems from national character: "c'est de la mélodie seulement qu'il faut tirer le caractère particulier d'une musique nationale" (Rousseau 1993, 143). Moreover, he defines melodrama as an alternation of spoken and sung

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parts (see Culler 1975). Burns subtitles "Love and Liberty" (written in 1785) a cantata (from the Italian "sung"), and, in the course of the poem, recitative moments ("recitativo") alternate with songs. He therefore sets his poem in the wake of Rousseau's insistence on melody, and it can be interpreted in this light as a "Scots drama," to take up the title of a song in Alan Ramsay's *Tea-Table Miscellany* (1724-7), or as a Scottish form of melodrama. According to a critic, the characters are the "Noble Savages of the eighteenth century saved from the usual concomitant sentimentalism by Scots realism and abounding energy" (Noble & Hogg 592). The myth of the noble savage that Rousseau describes in *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* had a tremendous impact throughout the following decades. As Robert Crawford notes, "During and after the European Enlightenment era of Rousseau, noble savages were all the rage" (Crawford 2007, 18). Ironically, as McGuirk (70-73) has shown, when Burns went to Edinburgh after the success of the 1786 Kilmarnock edition, he was invited in the salons of the Scottish capital, only to be considered as a northern embodiment of the Noble Savage, a moment he disliked intensely. On the contrary, one can say that Burns's own embodiment of the Noble Savage as a paragon of human virtues is rather the Honest Man, as he is described in the "Second Epistle to J. Lapraik" (stanzas 11, 12, 15), and in "Is There for Honest Poverty."

Against life's misfortunes, Burns is prone, like Rousseau, to stage his life in his writings, poems and letters alike. This self-dramatization very often verges on self-victimisation. The plea for himself is barely hidden under the mask of a third person-poet, be it mockingly in "On a Scotch Bard, Gone to the West Indies" or in a bittersweet tone in the "Elegy on the Death of Robert Ruisseaux." In this poem, the title plays on the word "burns," which is the Scottish equivalent for the French "ruisseaux" ("rills"), a word sounding very much like Rousseau. The mock-elegy is composed in Standard Habbie stanzas, and, under the persona, Burns describes a poet on his death-bed, who takes pride in his "kintra [country] work," and in his ability to keep poverty, hunger, fear and care at arm's length "wi' a rhyme or song." Burns may also be downright miserable, as in "A Lament," or in this self-pitying portrait of a poet's life in "To Robert Graham of Fintry, Esq.":

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> Vampyre-booksellers drain him to the heart,
> And scorpion-critics cureless venom dart
> ……
> The hapless Poet flounces on through life,
> Till, fled each hope that once his bosom fired,
> And fled each Muse that glorious once inspir'd,
> Low-sunk in squalid, unprotected age,
> Dead even resentment for his injur'd page,
> He heeds no more the ruthless critics' rage. (35-36, 46-51)

He does the same in his letters. To quote but one instance, after the success of the Kilmarnock edition of his poems, he laments about

> the uncertainty of getting soon into business; the consequences of my follies, which may perhaps make it impracticable for me to stay at home; and, besides, I have for some time been pining under secret wretchedness, from causes which you pretty well know—the pang of disappointment, the sting of pride, with some wandering stabs of remorse, which never fail to settle on my vitals like vultures, when attention is not called away by the calls of society, or the vagaries of the muse. Even in the hour of social mirth, my gaiety is the madness of an intoxicated criminal under the hands of the executioner (Ross Roy I: 58)

Nature's Powers Inspire

Yet Robert Burns's highly ambivalent personality could be very rational, and even encyclopaedic, when it came to his knowledge of the flora of his time. John Young (1996) has listed all the names of plants and animals and evocations of seasons and weather conditions in the work of Burns[1]. His acute awareness of nature may of course be due to his life in the country, but the period he was living in is also a turning point in the ecological history of mankind. Indeed, historians claim that the end of the eighteenth-century is the beginning of the anthropocene—a termed coined by Eugene F. Stoermer to designate an informal geological era characterised by the systematic influence of human action upon the earth and its ecosystems, most specifically on the environment—an allusion to the twofold process of industrial revolution and rural migration.

1. John Young (1996) counts 91 references to mammals (18 different species), 366 to birds (42 species), and to many other species such as fish, insects…

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Jean-Jacques Rousseau's writings on the necessity to get back or, at least, closer to nature had a great influence on sentimentalist minds in the second half of the eighteenth century. This is perhaps most specifically the case of *Les rêveries du promeneur solitaire*. This keen interest in nature may originate in the radical transformation of the landscape that occured over the eighteenth century. Before the development of enclosures, flocks were free to roam over the heath, marshes, forests and commons. Gradually, their ways were restricted to certain roads and lanes; consequently, peasants had to dedicate part of their lands to plots where flocks were allowed to graze. "The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie" evokes the limitation of freedom that this phenomenon entails. The dying ewe asks for her and her kind to "wander at [their] will" (22). It is no coincidence that by 1750, when the enclosure phenomenon was prevalent, in Great Britain but also in France, Rousseau's *Discours* should encapsulate what is at stake in a short myth:

> Le premier qui, ayant enclos un terrain, s'avisa de dire: Ceci est à moi, et trouva des gens assez simples pour le croire, fut le vrai fondateur de la société civile. Que de crimes, de guerres, de meurtres, que de misères et d'horreurs n'eût point épargnés au genre humain celui qui, arrachant les pieux ou comblant le fossé, eût crié à ses semblables: Gardez-vous d'écouter cet imposteur; vous êtes perdus, si vous oubliez que les fruits sont à tous, et que la terre n'est à personne. (1971, 222)

Mailie the ewe asks for more freedom to roam among vaster pastures, in conditions that are poles apart from those of intensive farming. As flocks increase, forest protection and deforestation, the development of uncultivable areas (heath, the draining of marshes) and the demographic question reduce the regional transhumance and modify the relation between mankind and the animal world by and large.

> Les arbres, les arbrisseaux, les plantes sont la parure et le vêtement de la terre. Rien n'est si triste que l'aspect d'une campagne nue et pelée qui n'étale aux yeux que des pierres, du limon et des sables. Mais vivifiée par la nature et revêtue de sa robe de noces au milieu du cours des eaux et du chant des oiseaux, la terre offre à l'homme dans l'harmonie des trois règnes un spectacle plein de vie, d'intérêt et de charmes, le seul spectacle au monde dont ses yeux et son cœur ne se lassent jamais. (Rousseau 1983, 108)

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"The harmony of the three realms" often procures a feeling of "jouissance" to Rousseau, and what is "jouir," if not a portmanteau-word for "ouir le je," listening to the I, as a way of listening to the muses? Burns also likes to reveal the pleasure he has when he walks along the riverside, as in "To William Simson" ("O NATURE! a' thy shews an' forms / To feeling, pensive hearts hae charms!" 79-80), or through the prosopopoeia of "The Humble Petition of *Bruar Water* to the noble Duke of Athole." "To a Mouse" is Burns's poetical manifesto for a reassessment of the links between mankind and nature. The persona has no difficulty in assuming the perspective of the mouse. By doing so, Burns decentres the usual human point of view towards nature, and suggests a deep awareness of a common bond between all living beings, in a world where man is only one species among the others. In the second stanza, the persona deplores the breaking of the bond:

> I'm truly sorry man's dominion,
> Has broken nature's social union,
> An' justifies that ill opinion,
> Which makes thee startle
> At me, thy poor, earth-born companion,
> An' fellow-mortal! (7-12)

The critique of anthropocentrism ("man's dominion") originates in a passage of the book of Genesis when the relationship between human beings and animals is defined by God: "let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1. 26-28). Contrary to the Creator's will, Burns's position consists in advocating a "social union" between human beings and "natural" beings. In other words, Burns extends Rousseau's ideas, expounded notably in Rousseau's famous *Du contrat social*, to the whole sphere of flora and fauna.

In fact, this is why Robert Burns, in true sentimentalist fashion, denounces hunting, which entails diffidence between mankind and the animal kingdom. An instance of this growing distrust between animals and human beings is given in "On Scaring some Water-Fowl":

> Why, ye tenants of the lake,

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> For me your wat'ry haunt forsake?
> Tell me, fellow-creatures, why
> At my presence thus you fly?
> Why disturb your social joys,
> Parent, filial, kindred ties?—
> Common friend to you and me,
> Nature's gifts to all are free (1-8)

Hunters kill for their sport. In a letter introducing his poem, "On Seeing a Wounded Hare Limp by Me, Which a Fellow had just Shot at," Burns exposes his hurt feelings:

> You will guess my indignation at the inhuman fellow who could shoot a hare at this season, when all of them have young ones, & it gave me no little gloomy satisfaction to see the poor injured creature escape him.—Indeed there is something in that business of destroying, for our sport, individuals in the animal creation that do not injure us materially, which I could never reconcile to my ideas of Virtue & eternal Right (Ross Roy I: 404-5, see also I: 397).[2]

The incipit to the poem clearly sets the outraged tone of the poet's voice:

> Inhuman man! curse on thy barb'rous art,
> And blasted be thy murder-aiming eye!
> May never pity soothe thee with a sigh,
> Nor never pleasure glad thy cruel heart! (1-4)

The heart, which is usually associated with human feelings of love (as the epitome of all humane passions in a man), and which is the organ that allows blood to flow, is, in the hunter, denatured, as it is the spring from which originates his decision to shed the blood of another animal. Burns underlines the sadistic impulse in all hunters who indulge in the dubious pleasure of killing other living beings. In another letter some time after the event, Burns states his opinion more clearly:

> I have always had an abhorrence at this way of assassinating God's creatures without first allowing them those means of defence with which he has variously endowed them; but at this season when the object of our treacherous murder is most probably a Parent, perhaps the mother, and of consequence to leave two helpless nurslings to perish with hunger amid the pitiless wilds,

2. Burns would have rejoiced at Rousseau's description of how the latter managed a settlement of rabbits on a small island (Rousseau 1983, 84).

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> such an action is not only a sin against the letter of the law, but likewise a deep crime against the morality of the heart.—We are all equally creatures of some Great Creator (Ross Roy I: 417-418).

In his denunciation of hunting, Burns espouses Rousseau's views in *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, when he describes the good savage's desires being limited to his physical needs (1971, 195). The poet is disheartened and frightened as he vituperates against "man's savage, ruthless deeds!" (65). He also shares the Rousseauist (and sentimental) view of mercy as a cardinal virtue.[3] The pun "Inhuman man" therefore suggests that, by killing animals, hunters set themselves apart from everything that is humane in humanity; they have become barbarians ("barb'rous"), beyond the pale of civilisation. On the contrary, with such expressions as "fellow mortal," "fellow-creatures," Burns underlines the kinship that binds mankind to nature. In advocating the complementariness of the natural elements, and their overall symbiosis, Burns provides an apology of sorts on behalf of all mankind. Furthermore, he echoes Rousseau's support of a social contract, widening it to the whole natural universe. In other terms, taking Rousseau's idea to its logical end, Burns suggests what Michel Serres (1992) would call a "contrat naturel," an ecological pact among all natural beings.

Plain Truth to Speak

The brotherhood with flora and fauna is only one consequence of sentimentalism. Being sincere with one's feelings also implies being frank with others, so as to share what one holds to be the truth. His whole life, Rousseau was confronted with the most hostile reactions, in public and in private, to his works and to his ideas. Rousseau's books were repeatedly burnt on public places (such as *Du contrat social*, in Paris and in Geneva), and he was also burnt in effigy more than once. But throughout is life, Rousseau remained adamant: he insisted on being outspoken for the

3. For Rousseau (1971), mercy ("pitié") is a natural principle defined as "une répugnance naturelle à voir souffrir ou périr tout être sensible" (162): "avec toute leur morale les hommes n'eussent jamais été que des monstres, si la nature ne leur eût donné la pitié à l'appui de la raison"; it is like a law in the state of nature (213-4).

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sake of truth: "Justice et Vérité, voilà les premiers devoirs de l'homme" (Rousseau, 1967, 43), and he put pen to paper to justify, and defend, his writings. He would rather sacrifice his person than his ideas, he said: "ce n'est point J.-J. Rousseau que je veux défendre[.] Mais quant au système que j'ai soutenu, je le défendrai de toute ma force aussi longtemps que je demeurerai convaincu qu'il est celui de la vérité et de la vertu" (Rousseau, 1964, 129). Rousseau asserted his independence: "je ne me soucie de plaire ni aux beaux esprits ni aux gens à la mode" (27) and his "zèle pour la vérité" (127). Casting a retrospective glance on his life, Rousseau acknowledged his propensity for speaking the truth: "Mais ce qui me rend plus inexcusable est la devise que j'avais choisie. Cette devise m'obligeait plus que tout autre homme à une profession plus étroite de la vérité[.] Il fallait avoir le courage et la force d'être vrai toujours et en toute occasion" (1983, 77). The *Lettre sur la musique française* is clearly a pamphlet ("le chant français n'est qu'un aboiement continuel," 184), whose main butt is Rameau as the representative of the French way in the opera, and in it Rousseau makes it clear that he is going to speak with his usual frankness (135).

Sentimentalism breeds therefore an unforeseen paradox: being sincere also means being sincere with others, sometimes at the cost of friendship or support. In one of his last lectures at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault studied this outspoken attitude, and, to find a word to designate it, he found the Greek term of *parrêsia*. Parrêsia, from the cynics onwards, consists in: "la franchise, la liberté, l'ouverture, qui font qu'on dit ce qu'on a à dire, comme on a envie de le dire, quand on a envie de le dire et dans la forme où l'on croit qu'il est nécessaire de le dire" (Foucault 2001, 356). The parresiast is: "le diseur courageux d'une vérité où il risque lui-même et sa relation avec l'autre" (2009, 15).

To return to Robert Burns, his poetry and letters are often provocative. Witness for instance the grand finale of "Love and Liberty":

> A fig for those by law protected!
> Liberty's a glorious feast!
> Courts for cowards were erected,
> Churches built to please the priest. (297-300)

Robert Burns's provocative attitude—in the private as well as in the public sphere, in the personal as well as in the poetic field—originates in

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a deeply-rooted feature of his character that he shares with Jean-Jacques Rousseau: to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, regardless (as much as possible) of consequences. Burns delights in unpalatable truths, embarrassing truths, challenging truths that are to be told for the sake of uncovering new grounds for thoughts. "Plain truth to speak" ("Epistle to John Lapraik," 70), or his own motto—"my motto is—I DARE!" (Ross Roy I: 185)—might sum up his boldness in speech. To his friend Mrs Dunlop, who gently asks him to reform his provocative behaviour, he writes back:

> Your criticisms, Madam, I understand very well, and could have wished to have pleased you better. —You are right in your guesses that I am not very amenable to counsel.—Poets, much my superiors, have so flattered those who possessed the adventitious qualities of wealth and power, that I am determined to flatter no created being, either in prose or verse, so help me God.—I set as little by kings, lords, clergy, critics, &c as all these respectable Gentry do by my Bardship. (Ross Roy I: 108).

The targets Burns loves to hate allow one to draw a map of Burns's arch-enemies. The Scottish bard, like the French philosopher, mainly vents his poetical spleen in political matters. Rousseau consistently criticises wealth: "le luxe [est] diamétralement opposé aux bonnes moeurs" (Rousseau 1964, 43); or, succinctly, in a letter to the king of Poland: "La première source du mal est l'inégalité; de l'inégalité sont venues les richesses. … Des richesses sont nés le luxe et l'oisiveté" (87). His is a radical assertion: "S'il n'y a avait point de luxe, il n'y aurait point de pauvres," "Le luxe nourrit cent pauvres dans nos villes, et en fait périr cent mille dans nos campagnes" (103); "le luxe [est] le pire de tous les maux [qui], pour nourrir des foules de valets et de misérables qu'il a faits, accable et ruine le laboureur et le citoyen" (Rousseau 1971, 187). Burns would certainly have agreed. Rousseau denounces luxury as odious to humanity (Rousseau 1964, 103), and he is consumed with rage when he faces the fact: "qu'il y eût des hommes assez abominables pour oser avoir du superflu pendant que d'autres hommes meurent de faim" (104). Burns follows suit; in "Epistle to Davie," he highlights the social inequalities of his time:

> It's hardly in a body's pow'r
> To keep, at times, frae° being sour, °from
> To see how things are shar'd;

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How best o' chiels° are whiles° in want, °people, often
While coofs° on countless thousands rant° (15-19) °fools, make merry

In "Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson" (91-6), he insists on that fact that socially speaking, all that glitters is not gold, but, more often than not, "tinsel," the real value being the humanity within a man or a woman. This idea might well be an echo of Rousseau, as the latter asserts:

> la vertu ne marche guère en si grande pompe. La richesse de la parure peut annoncer un homme opulent, et son élégance un homme de goût; l'homme sain et robuste se reconnaît à d'autres marques: c'est sous l'habit rustique d'un laboureur, et non sous la dorure d'un courtisan, qu'on trouvera la force et la vigueur du corps. La parure n'est pas moins étrangère à la vertu qui est la force et la vigueur de l'âme. L'homme de bien est un athlète qui se plaît à combattre nu: il méprise tous ces vils ornements qui gêneraient l'usage de ses forces (Rousseau 1964, 32).

Burns, in "The Cotter's Saturday Night," waxes lyrical about the honest simplicity of Scottish peasants ("From scenes like these, old Scotia's grandeur springs," 163; "And O! may Heaven their simple lives prevent / From luxury's contagion, weak and vile!," 176-7) as opposed to the carefree financial waste of the aristocrats. In the course of the poem, Burns praises the honesty of the humble Scottish abode ("guileless," 3 and 7), honesty being associated with "honour" (1). The Scottish home, as described in this poem, radiates with a virtue which would have warmed the cockles of Rousseau's heart, had the latter been able to witness the scene.

Burns's constant attacks against religion ("Holy Willie's Prayer"), the bourgeoisie and aristocracy intended to cause a stir in a time of revolution. Between the first (1786) and the third (1793) edition of the poems, the French revolution had started, and with it more than two decades of wars, on land and at sea, throughout the continent. Henry Dundas, the Home Secretary for the Pitt cabinet between 1791 and 1794, and War Secretary after 1794, organised a network of spies throughout the British Isles so as to wage a war against radicals at home. Many a Burns's poem takes Pitt's cabinet, cabinet members and policy, as its targets. In 1793, Great Britain declared war on France. In 1794, the Habeas Corpus was suspended. In an article published on January 1st, 1795 in the *Morning*

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Chronicle, Burns denounced what little freedom of speech was left to political opponents: "At this moment you and I are subject to be seized and confined without having a right to demand a trial; for when a Minister can send his *marechausée* [sic] into your house, and take you in silence to a dungeon, what security can you have against a transport into a distant region?" (Scott and Hogg 517). Burns was indeed an active member of the Republic of letters, which allowed ideas to be spread and debated throughout the continent. As a man of letters, Burns also had to engage in a defence of his own work against critics, who embodied another aspect of the poet's pet hates.

It is certainly not of one of his least contradictions that Rousseau the intellectual wrote books upon books against intellectuals, and, meditating in one of them, he went so far as to assert: "l'homme qui médite est un animal dépravé" (Rousseau 1971, 180). As a philosopher in the process of writing philosophy, he even warned against all philosophers: "Qu'est-ce que la philosophie? Que contiennent les écrits des philosophes les plus connus? Quelles sont les leçons de ces amis de la sagesse? À les entendre, ne les prendrait-on pas pour une troupe de charlatans criant, chacun de son côté sur une place publique; Venez à moi, c'est moi seul qui ne trompe point?" (Rousseau 1964, 51). Burns walks the same tight rope. As a poet, he criticises the critics. In "Epistle to a Young Friend," he advises said young friend to "Conceal yoursel' as weel's ye can / Frae critical dissection" (37-38). Burns even quivers with rage against "Critics! … / Those cut-throat bandits in the paths of fame" in "To Robert Graham of Fintry, Esq." (37-38), and in the first "Epistle to J. Lapraik," he calls them "fools" (63) and "A set o' dull, conceited Hashes [dunderheads]" (67).

Stemming from the so-called "age of sensibility," Rousseau's and Burns's perspectives privilege the dramatization of the self and its expression through music and the recourse to autobiographical exposure, sometimes bordering on self-victimisation. In both the philosopher's and the poet's works, nature is conceived as a tuneful echo-chamber of feelings. Robert Burns enriches the Rousseauist tradition by an even more radical, and ecological, twist when he suggests that the social contract be extended to all living beings. To be coherent with one's feelings implies a certain boldness of address to the world, even to one's friends. Rousseau

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and Burns have targets in common: undue wealth, the powers that be, and their literary adversaries. Thus creation, for Rousseau as well as for Burns, represents a way of opening up new realms of feelings and reflections.

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