



The Solitary Self: Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Exile and Adversity

By Maurice Cranston

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A monumental achievement, Maurice Cranston's trilogy provides the definitive account of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's turbulent life. Now available in paperback, this final volume completes a masterful biography of one of the most important philosophers of all time. *The Solitary Self* traces the last tempestuous years of Rousseau's life.

"*The Solitary Self* is a fitting coda to a magisterial work. Cranston . . . is a compelling stylist who narrates Rousseau's tribulations with a mixture of compassion and dry humor."—Thomas Pavel, *Wall Street Journal*

"Cranston not only recreates for his readers a rounded view of Rousseau himself, he sets it firmly in the social and political context of Europe's *ancien regime*. . . . An engrossing work of history."—John Gray, *New Statesman*

"Cranston's painstaking archival research and lucid style yield the most detailed and thoroughly documented biography of Rousseau written in English. His epilogue masterfully sums up Rousseau's importance as political philosopher and initiator of romantic sensibilities."—*Choice*

"Anyone curious about the paradoxes of a most paradoxical man will not go wrong by starting with this invaluable biography."—James Miller, *Washington Post Book World*

"As absorbing as a picaresque novel."—Naomi Bliven, *New Yorker*

"A monument of scholarship. . . . This amazing biography, like Boswell's account of Johnson, recreates the daily life of Rousseau: what he did, who he saw, what he said, what he wrote. . . . We may be quite confident that we hold in our hands the authoritative account of this life. The definitive Rousseau."—Isaac Kramnick, *New Republic*

Maurice Cranston (1920-1993), a distinguished scholar and recipient of the

James Tait Black Memorial Prize for his biography of John Locke, was professor of political science at the London School of Economics. His numerous books include *The Romantic Movement* and *Philosophers and Pamphleteers*, and translations of Rousseau's *The Social Contract* and *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*.

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Editorial Review

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Professor Cranston died in 1993, after completing the first seven chapters of this third volume in his biography of Rousseau. The eighth chapter was composed from his notes, a prepared lecture, and other sources. This final volume in Cranston's definitive trilogy chronicles Rousseau's last turbulent years as an outcast in England and Neuchatel, after the burning of *x83 mile* and the order for his arrest. The unsettled misery and solitude of an innocent, truthful man drove Rousseau to introspection and the composition of his greatest literary work: *Confessions*. Considered by some to be the first true autobiography ever written, *Confessions* allowed Rousseau to unburden his conscience while sharing his experiences with the world. This is a scholarly yet ingratiating portrayal of a man whose last years found him battling sciatica and Voltaire, enjoying botany and Boswell. Cranston's authoritative work has given us an invaluable account of the paradoxical life of an emotionally devoted yet tactlessly demanding man. *Patricia Hassler*

From Kirkus Reviews

Cranston concludes his three-volume biography of Rousseau (Jean Jacques: The Early Life and Work, 1983; The Noble Savage, 1991) with a dispassionate chronicle of the philosopher's bitter last years--a period of exile, persecution, and paranoia. Cranston died just before finishing the biography; his colleague Sanford Lakoff (Univ. of Calif.) has added a final chapter using Cranston's notes and the text of a lecture, adding a useful epilogue distilled from Cranston's previous books on Rousseau's thought. Cranston ended The Noble Savage with Rousseau's transformation from "literary celebrity to cult figure" after the publication of The Social Contract, and Julie, ou la Nouvelle Heloise. Infamy closely followed fame: When friends tried to have his novel Emile published in Paris, it was condemned, publicly burned, and a warrant was issued for his arrest. He was forced into uncertain wanderings, which Cranston conscientiously tracks. Staying above Rousseau's emotional perspective, Cranston traces his increasingly heated dealings with his publisher and his feuds with the group of Paris philosophes dominated by Voltaire. Rousseau was thrown out of the Swiss canton of Neuchâtel, where he had found asylum, after Letters from the Mountains, a work highly critical of the Swiss, was published. He traveled to Bern, had a romantic interlude on the isle of Saint-Pierre, then had to flee again. He accepted David Hume's offer of asylum in England. Cranston gives an admirably impartial account of the stormy relationship of this philosophical odd couple, though he gives scant attention to the composition of the Confessions, which occurred roughly simultaneously. He is, however, always meticulously objective in tracing Rousseau's frantic actions and complex, contradictory character. A sober, concise chaser to the intoxicating Confessions (though more a starting point than the last word on that work) and a muted, though moving, conclusion to a remarkable work of scholarship and sympathy. (16 illustrations, not seen) -- Copyright ©1996, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

From the Back Cover

In this third and final volume of his masterly biography, Maurice Cranston traces the last tempestuous years of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's life. From his brilliant authorship of the Confessions, the Dialogues, and the Reveries to his controversial religious views, from his notorious public quarrel with David Hume in England to his clandestine return to France, from his unsettled wanderings to his death in 1778 - these and other critical events in Rousseau's most embattled years are detailed in this sympathetic yet balanced portrait. In 1762, with the condemnation of Emile and The Social Contract harried by both church and state, Rousseau fled Paris, seeking refuge in Neuchatel and England. Deemed a social outcast and beset by feelings of persecution and abuse, not wholly unwarranted, the philosopher turned in despair to the production of autobiographical works intended to reveal his essential innocence and integrity. Through this bitter

introspection, Rousseau transformed his solitude into some of the most enduring literature of his time.

Users Review

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