



Reveries of the Solitary Walker

By Jean Rousseau



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Rousseau's last great work, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* is part reminiscence, part meditation, as the philosopher tries to come to terms with his isolation and to find happiness in solitude and nature. The *Reveries* are an important complement to Rousseau's other philosophical and autobiographical works and address many of the same issues, making it a useful introduction for anyone interested in reading Rousseau for the first time. Russell Goulbourne offers a fresh new translation that marries accuracy with readability. In addition, his Introduction discusses the nature of the work and places it in its historical, literary, and intellectual contexts. It considers the *Reveries* alongside Rousseau's other autobiographical work, notably the *Confessions*, and the form and style of the text in the context of the history of lyrical prose narratives, the rise of Romanticism, and works about walking. Finally, the book features detailed explanatory notes that enable readers to appreciate to the full Rousseau's ideas, ranging from biographical details to literary allusions, philosophical contexts, and the routes around Paris where Rousseau walked.



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Reveries of the Solitary Walker By Jean Rousseau Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #2623875 in Books
- Brand: Brand: HarperCollins (paper)
- Published on: 1982-03
- Number of items: 1
- Binding: Paperback

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Editorial Review

Language Notes

Text: English, French (translation)

About the Author

Jean Jacques Rousseau was a Swiss philosopher and political theorist who lived much of his life in France. Many reference books describe him as French, but he generally added "Citizen of Geneva" whenever he signed his name. He presented his theory of education in *Emile* (1762), a novel, the first book to link the educational process to a scientific understanding of children; Rousseau is thus regarded as the precursor, if not the founder, of child psychology. "The greatest good is not authority, but liberty," he wrote, and in *The Social Contract* (1762) Rousseau moved from a study of the individual to an analysis of the relationship of the individual to the state: "The art of politics consists of making each citizen extremely dependent upon the polis in order to free him from dependence upon other citizens." This doctrine of sovereignty, the absolute supremacy of the state over its members, has led many to accuse Rousseau of opening the doors to despotism, collectivism, and totalitarianism. Others say that this is the opposite of Rousseau's intent, that the surrender of rights is only apparent, and that in the end individuals retain the rights that they appear to have given up. In effect, these Rousseau supporters say, the social contract is designed to secure or to restore to individuals in the state of civilization the equivalent of the rights they enjoyed in the state of nature. Rousseau was a passionate man who lived in passionate times, and he still stirs passion in those who write about him today.

Users Review

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