

Heather Sakaki

Professor XYZ

[REDACTED]

15 March 2021

From Reasoner to Romantic: A Rebirth of Passions

“One must use a great deal of art to prevent social man from being totally artificial”

(Rousseau 317)

Rousseau had hoped that his natural, yet carefully guided education would not only help prepare young Emile for a smoother transition into puberty but that it would also lay a foundation for which romantic love could be cultivated. However, since this desire for romance was neither rooted in human nature nor grew naturally in society, Rousseau had to develop a method of pollination for this new species of love to flourish. Once this new seed of love was sowed, nurtured with poetry and literature, and deeply watered with fresh emotion, came the dawning of a new “hybrid” era in Europe, commonly, referred to as “the romantic era”, which lasted well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was a season that celebrated emotional intensity, the beauty of nature and the psychological depths of the individual, inspired by the vigour of Rousseau’s new variety of philosophy, presented in *Emile, or on Education*, which generated a widespread desire in Europeans to thrive romantically. Rousseau believes that when romantic love is absent from political societies, self-seeking love is sure to dominate the atmosphere, which will become a breeding ground for hostility and prejudice. This essay explores the successive nature of these passions and how a natural education paired with artistic expression can prime the body for romantic love.

Before this time-period, the majority of citizens in Europe were still largely entrenched

in their practical lifestyles and common modes of subsistence and survival, born from upbringings and educations designed to abet, only, their most basic human needs of fulfillment. Needs like food, sleep, and sex, which could be easily satisfied in the state of nature, illustrated by Rousseau in his *Second Discourse* seven years earlier. A state where primal sex drive was the dominating force and all reproductive strategies were detached from emotion and romantic connectivity of any kind. However, once Rousseau discovered the heights and intensity of this passion firsthand, he realized that the long endured, style of childhood education in Europe was perhaps, denying some citizens the opportunity to experience romantic love directly and sought to rectify this situation with a more natural approach to education.

For Rousseau, there was something very essential about a nurturing education within this context and believed that environmental variables predominantly shaped the individual as opposed to genetic, or other hereditary factors. In general, *Emile, or on Education* was a theoretical rehearsal of how one could assist in the preservation of human goodness in a manner that would also connect, or rather, *reconnect* humans with their natural world. Rousseau thought that Emile's preparatory yet natural education would encourage a healthy development of the senses. A foundation that would not only foster a sense of security great enough to allow for the later surrendering of these senses during puberty but would also build in his student the capacity to fall in love and then experience the spiritual quality of sex with his loved one, when his more primal instincts and energies took over.

In *Emile, or on Education*, Rousseau seeks to explain how this "rebirth" of passions develops within the individual (Emile) taking his readers through the consecutive stages of child development and the specific rearing strategies required (by the tutor) to support a healthy and natural "birth" of these passions. However, in the original state of nature that Rousseau outlined

in his *Second Discourse*, “romance” did not exist and so it is important for us to understand how and when in history this desire was born and the significance of this passion in the context of “modern” times.

By first gaining an understanding of the state of nature, it allows us to visualize the “natural order” of humankind, which Rousseau describes as the “slow sequence of events” which takes us from “one era to the next” (135). He believes that knowledge of this sequence is essential to understanding how this transformation from primal sex drive to romantic love occurred and why it is important “at this last stage, in the state of nature” (Rousseau 135). He reflects that in our most original and primitive state, self-preservation was the only concern for early humans, which, of course, included the need to reproduce, since this act would help to ensure the survival of our species. In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau describes this instinct as a “blind impulse, lacking all heartfelt sentiment, [and was] a purely animal act” (135) and that once these needs were satisfied, “the two sexes no longer recognized each other” (135).

However, as speciation progressed, the characteristics of our species did too, as more and more distinctive traits began to distinguish our species from those of others. Rousseau thought that one of the most significant turning points in “prehistory” occurred in unison with the discovery of iron and believed that manipulations of this natural resource slowly transformed into the art of metallurgy. This artform prompted the development of societies because it was the metal tools born from this artform that were first used for the cultivation of land, which then, inspired the art of agriculture. For Rousseau, it was the combination of these two artforms which brought political order and inequality to the world because humans began to realize the ways in which these metal tools could be used to increase food production, which led to a need for division of land, hence, the introduction of “property”, which created an interdependency for

survival (141). Once this land was distinguished as “property”, law became necessary because this interdependency now required a certain level of morality, which demanded a greater need for civility among our species.

Once laws were established to maintain this new level of civil order, “civilizations” began to grow parallel to language development and soon, differences among humans began to matter as certain “talents” started to prove themselves to be more useful than others. As populations increased, these differences only grew more and more consequential as the hunt for resources and mating opportunities became more competitive. However, even in these “developing” societies, romantic love was still absent, and it was this absence which likely motivated Rousseau’s *Emile, or on Education*, in the hopes that this style of education would help future political societies achieve a more *fully* “developed” state, by his standards. In Rousseau’s opinion, this would require some external guidance though, since this passion was one that remained *unnatural* in human development.

From ages 0-15, “Emile has only natural and purely physical knowledge” (207) states Rousseau, which has confirmed a steadiness in his pupil that will provide a supportive basis for any new imagery that charges his mind during puberty. In only seeking the nature of things in relation to himself during his first fifteen years without being exposed to opinions, history, metaphysics or laws of morality, Rousseau’s student “considers himself without regard to others and finds it good that others do not think of him” (208). These educational omissions have prevented *amour-propre* from developing in Emile up until this point, as he has been purposely prevented from learning subjects which would provoke one to make comparisons between themselves and others. Instead, his mind has been allowed a long gestation, still untouched with a free heart and soul to energize it.

At this point in his education (approx. age 15), Emile is now ready to begin learning about the motions of the human heart, which his tutor believes, is best done by reading into the lives of individuals *before* groups, since “the genius of assembled [peoples] is quite different from a [person’s] character in private” (Rousseau 240). In this matter, the more detailed the biography the better, in Rousseau’s opinion, since the partialities of the individual must be well understood before one becomes able to “foresee their effects when combined in the body of the people” (240). This skill will also become very helpful in the role of parenting when that parent finds themselves able to empower their child with guidance that will appeal to the many rather than the few. By studying the motions of the individual through written memoirs and poetry, Rousseau’s pupil will gain an understanding of the human life, form, and flaws from a distance, thus, allowing him to first find beauty in these flaws because he will be free to form his *own* opinions about the individuals without hearing other judgements that could potentially influence/alter the flow of his own. This *secondhand* knowledge will condition Emile to be more sensitive to the lives, emotions and passions of others because he will absorb the details of these recorded childhoods, struggles, joys, pains, romances, and livelihoods with pure and simple understanding rather than with judgement which can only truly manifest through *firsthand* experiences.

In this condition, Emile is now ready to understand the social order, which will suddenly bring awareness to “natural and civil, inequality” (Rousseau 234) that was not there before. However, since his imagination has been preserved up until now, any violent new images conjured by the mind while absorbing lessons in history, will be met with an operative and tolerant brain that will courageously absorb the details of these dangerous events without “enlarging” the calamity of them (Rousseau 208). Rousseau calls this phase “the moral order”,

which is the final step before all the passions begin to arise and the inevitable transformation from self-love to *amour-propre* occurs (235). However, even this phase must be buffered by the tutor, who will present Emile with history that has not been “molded according to [author] interests” and instead choose authors who strictly “report the facts without judging them” (Rousseau 239). This will allow his student the opportunity to make judgements for himself, provided the author has fairly presented the reader with all the determining facts and conditions relating to the historical events. For Rousseau, there is one ancient in particular who meets these standards and says that “Thucydides is to my taste the true model of historians...he puts all he recounts before the reader’s eyes. Far from putting himself between the events and the readers, he hides himself. The reader no longer believes he reads; he believes he sees” (239). These history lessons will prepare his mind and body for the inequality he will begin to observe and take to heart once he starts comparing himself to others in society during puberty and the competitive mating strategies that will seek to overpower his movements during this time and those of his “competitors”.

Finally, the moment has arrived for the passions. Emile is now *fully* ready for these new urges and desires because he has been protected from developing *amour-propre* until now and is above all, a lover of peace, happiness and sharing that happiness with others (Rousseau 251). And since he has gained a thorough understanding of the “true principles of the just, the true models of the beautiful, [and] all the moral relations of beings” he is now entering puberty with a healthy and natural attitude about passions even *before* the actual experience of them because his tutor has taught “their illusions and their effects” (Rousseau 235) in a manner that has left Emile well-prepared for the arrival of them. However, Rousseau warns that during this “rebirth” (puberty), it is essential that if/when the pupil has questions about their/her/his new desires, that

it is important not to “combat [these] desires with dryness” (235) as this type of response could suppress one’s imagination which needs room to soar during this stage in human development. This will allow the pupil’s changing body the freedom that it needs to experience a *natural* rise in sex hormones during this time which will support his immune system and growth processes if this is considered from the onset of puberty. The best response is to assure him that all his new sexual feelings, desires, and urges are quite simply beautiful because passions and sensual pleasure bring “supreme happiness” to life, and by speaking to him about pleasures in this manner, he will feel able to surrender to his senses and the feelings inside him. Moreover, by speaking to him tenderly about romantic love (regardless of whether the tutor, has experienced it themselves or not) they will be allowing their pupil to develop a “thirst for sweet sentiment” which will cause them to “sense how much charm the union of two hearts adds to the attraction of the senses” (Rousseau 327). At this point, the pupil is now ready (and even *wants*) to fall in love.

However, according to Rousseau, it is absolutely essential that sexual desires have a chance to be *naturally* born as opposed to being “provided for in advance” (as would be the case for someone who is repeatedly sought out by others for sex before they/she/he has fallen in love with those individuals) (228). He warns, that “in seeking him out before he loves them, they will unhinge him rather than make a lover out of him” (Rousseau 228). Presumably, Rousseau, himself, must have fallen in love at some point during his life, otherwise, he would, not have been able to make this distinction between the position of “lover” and “loved” in the context of romantic and/or intimate experiences, one would assume. When, he states that “he will have successes but he will have neither transports nor passions for enjoying them” (Rousseau 228), one can only assume that he is speaking from personal experience and that he must have felt

intensely pleasurable emotion for someone who stirred these desires in him, which then, transformed his entire perspective about romance thereafter. And although, he does admit that, in matters of love, many things are “an illusion”, he does believe that “the sentiments for the truly beautiful” are real, and that it is these sentiments “with which love animates us and which it makes us love” (Rousseau 391), hence the importance of the sentiments chosen by the tutor when discussing matters of love and what constitutes true beauty as Emile will then be free to “inherit” these romantic sentiments himself.

There is also some evidence in book V to suggest that Rousseau, himself, experienced romantic love firsthand (or simply, falling in love) when he discusses the “warm[ing]” of the soul when it is “delivered to those sublime transports which constitute the delirium of lovers and the charm of their passions” (391). Depending on the nature of his experience, his use of the word “transports” in this quote may be referring to the transmutation of his sexual energy if he had been forced to channel it into spiritual energy. If this were the case, he would have likely been experiencing a higher state of consciousness during this period of abstinence, which would have inspired him to find alternative forms of sexual expression. Moreover, the rushes of energy experienced during this period would have likely even been heightened with every new sensation he embraced in this successive state of sexual awareness, steadily increasing the power of this force over time...one would assume. Furthermore, if he was successful in achieving a full “transformation” during this process, he would have likely even experienced a full regeneration of the soul, symbolizing the creational properties of this energy, or rather, this *awakened* energy. Finally, once his sexual energy had been channelled, it could then also be harnessed for other creative purposes, such as writing a 500-page discourse on education for example. And although there are no direct quotes from *Emile, or on Education* which confirm that the channeling of this



energy took place within him, I personally believe, that the evidence of this experience lies, more generally, in the finished work itself and the levels of creative motivation that would have been necessary for producing such a discourse.

Although it is a bit far-fetched to believe that Rousseau's natural education for Emile could be achieved within the margins of a public education, his guidance does, at least, provide "tutors" (parents, caregivers, educators) with some helpful tips that can be used to support one's child in the early developmental stages of life and any other home time in which such guidance could/would be beneficial to their "pupil". Furthermore, his natural education allows the student to stay firmly connected to nature and its elements in a manner that will not allow them to become easily disconnected from it because they will have made a very strong soul connection with nature, therefore, will allow themselves to be guided by nature too. This guidance will nurture their development because nature will be directing their/her/his movements rather than the individual directing nature. In freely surrendering to their senses, they will be able to maintain a beautiful and healthy soul/body connection that will also help prime their body for romantic connections and love once their instinctive sexual desires are triggered during puberty.

Judging by book IV of *Emile, or on Education*, Rousseau seemed to possess a fairly thorough understanding of the power of sexual energy which means that he likely experienced the affects of the higher form of this energy for himself, in my opinion. Arguably, he knew how to harness this power and how to channel and direct it. He knew that it could be used for greater purposes if he practiced various forms of self-denial and discipline during this elevated state of consciousness and the boundless levels of creativity that could thrive under these conditions. In other words, he even knew how to maximize the potential of this sexual energy in its transcended, spiritual form. Furthermore, he knew how to cultivate political spaces

that would breed more of this energy, with “the romantic era” being a classic reflection of this understanding. It was an era high on the sexual energy that Rousseau inspired, born from his direct experiences with this creational power and the creativity it stimulated in him. Creativity that inspired countless reflections, which inspired various forms of philosophical and artistic expression, which attracted a curious audience, which roused new heights of passion, which then spanned across Europe. A revolution that eventually allowed this passion to dominate and artistic expression to climax, originally driven and guided by one of the most primal human instincts.

Works Cited

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Emile, or On Education*. Trans. Allan Bloom. United States, Basic Books, 1979.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Fundamental Political Writings*, ed. Matthew Maguire and David Williams. Translated by Ian Johnston. Peterborough, Broadview Press, 2018.