



The Reveries of the Solitary Walker, Botanical Writings, and Letter to Franquières (Collected Writings of Rousseau)

By Jean-Jacques Rousseau

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“I am now alone on earth, no longer having any brother, neighbor, friend, or society other than myself” proclaimed Rousseau in *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. *Reveries*, along with *Botanical Writings* and *Letter to Franquières*, were all written at the end of his life, a period when Rousseau renounced his occupation as author and ceased publishing his works. Presenting himself as an unwilling societal outcast, he nonetheless crafted each with a sharp eye on his readership. Whether addressing himself, a mother hoping to interest her child in botany, or a confused young nobleman, his dialogue reflects the needs of his interlocutor and of future readers.

Although very different in style, these three works concern overlapping subjects. Their unity comes from the relation of the other writings to the *Reveries*, which consists of ten meditative “walks” during which Rousseau considers his life and thought. The third and fourth walks discuss truth, morality, and religious belief, which are the themes of the *Letter to Franquières*; while the seventh is a lengthy discussion of botany as a model for contemplative activity. The overarching themes of the volume—the relations among philosophic or scientific contemplation, religion, and morality—provide Rousseau’s most intimate and final reflections on the difficulties involved in understanding nature.

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Review

“We botanists should be indebted to historian Alexandra Cook, not only for her offering such a complete rendition of Rousseau’s botanical writings . . . but also for the translations themselves, her marvelously detailed annotations and editing of the botanical writings, and her coauthored introduction . . . volume 8 on Rousseau’s botanical writings is immensely important to the history of botany and should not be overlooked by biology or botany libraries.” (TAXON)

“This will be a useful source for anyone who needs to know something about ‘Rousseau’s botany’ and the letters themselves are beautifully fresh and lively, despite the formalities of style.” (The Society for the History of Natural History)

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