

LAVDATIO DOMINI

GEORGE SEBASTIAN ROUSSEAU

Educated at Amherst College, from which he received his B.A., and Princeton University, which granted him both his M.A. and his Ph.D. degrees, Professor George Sebastian Rousseau is a celebrity in the Anglo-American and international academe. Literature and other disciplines, interdisciplinarity, that is, this is what ranks highest in his research interests and areas. While this is in tune with developments in our field in the last few decades, the distinctive personal note couched in the formulation needs underlining. Professor Rousseau's name is tirelessly associated with literature and science, most specifically literature and medicine. This combination has procured him notoriety amongst scholars in the humanities. Another strong component of Professor Rousseau's intellectual and academic stature gravitates round the gender agenda, with Gender Studies and the History of Sexuality as central in his research, teaching and writing, and the biography of neglected figures as an added sign of distinction. In his hierarchy this trans-disciplinary view makes room for more traditional ways of referring to the humanities a few rungs down. Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Studies, with, in his own words, special emphasis on Pope, Swift, Smollett, Sterne 'and their world', and the Romantics feature just above Literary Theory and Literary Criticism, to be wound up in an engagé agenda. Indeed, to do justice to his own identity, his other area of interest, the Jews in the Mediterranean world: 1492 to the present and the migration of Jewry throughout Europe, from Europe to the Americas, completes a career which, for lack of a less eroded term, I would still call postmodern. Do a search on the Google "george rousseau oxford" site or look up titles under his name in any of the great and grand libraries of the world and the engagé quality of his works will immediately strike you as only too apparent.

George Rousseau is one of those names that produce an unfailing intimidating effect. There is the cultural halo of the surname, of course, and he does not seem to dislike joking with it. But once you open a book signed 'Rousseau' and get immersed in stupendous cultural and intellectual history matters - a special treat this Rousseau can offer at any time - then you realize that the erudite mind shares its charm with the elegant style of a *bon homme*. Get to know him in person, the effect is doubly powerful. A meridional face behind ebony-black rimmed glasses, whose round lenses enhance the inquisitive look they preface, or pre-face, will send friendly signals on the spot. After a short while, you realize a certain apprehensive proclivity, and when you get to e-mail

him, he will amaze you with the least expected questions and queries, from Biblical themes to details about stray dogs in post-communist Bucharest streets. Endowed with a sense of meticulous curiosity, George Rousseau can write long epistles, electronic as they may be these days, just to make sure he will be safe where he is going next. For this incredibly nice person has a matchless charm of placing his tiny figure in the interstices of an at times little friendly world. When you have read his books and shared his company as colleagues, attended conferences and travelled with him, hosted him at your table or been hosted at his, visited his flawlessly kempt garden behind his stupendous house in the heart of England just above the Berkshire Downs, and stayed in constant touch as postmodern message writers do, you then realize you have made friends with a very special person. I am the recipient of such special feelings and here I am today, in the pleasant, yet difficult position of introducing a celebrity, as if he was merely a friend, or as if he needed being introduced.

George Rousseau is a great friend in our world's noetic sphere. His name treads into your intellectual and academic edifice before you are lucky enough to meet him in flesh and blood. Fluent in French, Spanish and Ladino, he brings in the trail of a cultural identity of past times. But if you investigate data on *Who's Who in America* or *Who's Who in the United Kingdom* - George Rousseau has brought to Oxford the supplementary distinction of the crème de la crème across the Atlantic - or do a search on *Who's Who International Directory* or the *Dictionary of International Biography*, you will form the impression of a distant ivy league professor. The feeling is confirmed by his list of publications including twenty five volumes authored, co-authored, edited or co-edited, and more than two hundred and sixty articles and reviews in scholarly journals and magazines. It is also dispelled by the professor's jovial attitude when you listen to his gentle voice.

Of the former category of his work, your attention will be arrested by such titles as the now celebrated trilogy on eighteenth-century culture which is his joint work with the much regretted Roy Porter: *The Ferment of Knowledge: Studies in the Historiography of Science* (1980), *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment* (1987), and *Exoticism in the Enlightenment* (1990); preceding them chronologically and of a markedly erudite traditional nature are studies on English poetic satire, monograph or celebratory studies, or case and legacy studies centering on eighteenth-century British classics. A notable change in his approach occurs in the 1990's to still characterize his critical perspective: the same crucial times in the growth of the modern mind are fathomed with instruments sensitive to more complex phenomena. Such are *The Languages of Psyche: Mind and Body in Enlightenment Thought* (1990), *Enlightenment Crossings: Pre- and Post-Modern Discourses - Anthropological* (1991), or *Enlightenment Borders: Pre- and Post-Modern Discourses - Medical, Scientific* (1991). And in step the medical vocabulary and vision, the anthropological and culturalist views with *Medicine and the Muses* (1993), *Gout: The Patrician Malady* (1998), *Framing and Imagining Disease in Cultural History* (2003), *Nervous Acts: Essays on Literature, Culture and Sensibility* (2004), and *Children and Sexuality: The Greeks to the Great War* (2007).

The latter category, his articles to the day, is research hosted by the most distinguished periodicals and journals printed in the English-speaking world, among which The

Review of English Studies, Philological Quarterly, Eighteenth-Century Studies, Diacritics, Journal of the History of Sexuality, Modern Philology, Genre, Essays in Criticism, The Classical Journal, Journal of the History of Ideas, Harvard Library Bulletin, Medical History, Partisan Review, History of Science, Journal of the American Medical Association, Bulletin of the History of Medicine, Gay & Lesbian Quarterly, The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation.

Professor Rousseau's lifelong academic career has been crowned by fellowships and appointments in the United States and the United Kingdom, of which, selectively, here are the most impressive ones: Fellow in English Literature, Princeton University (1965-1966), Fellow of The Royal Society of Medicine, London (1967), Fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies (1970), three consecutive grants by the American Philosophical Society (1967-1970), Professor of English and Comparative Literature, UCLA (1973), Fellow of The Royal Society of Arts, Great Britain (1973), Honorary Fellow of Wolfson College, Cambridge University (1974-1975), Professor of Eighteenth-Century Studies, UCLA (1975), Overseas Fellow, Cambridge University (1979), Clark Library Professor, University of California (1985-1986), Senior Fellow of The National Endowment for the Humanities, USA (1986-1987), Emeritus Professor, UCLA (1994), Appointed Regius Professor of English, King's College, Aberdeen (1994-1998), Visiting Professorial Fellow of New College and Merton College, Oxford (1999). International institutions have benefited from his presence: he was a member of the Board of the International Archives of the History of Ideas, Paris and Leiden from 1974 to 1992, Senior Fulbright Research Scholar, Sir Thomas Browne Institute, The Netherlands (1983), and Fulbright Professor at the University of Lausanne (1994). Since 2003 Professor George Sebastian Rousseau has been Co-Director of The Centre for the History of Childhood, History Faculty, University of Oxford.

This list is accompanied by a no less overwhelming set of teaching positions: Instructor at the Department of English, Harvard University (1966-1968), Assistant Professor (1968), then Professor of English and Eighteenth-Century Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (1973-1993), Emeritus Professor of the Humanities, De Montfort University (2002). He has held a number of titles from frontline universities, in the last one and a half decades: Regius Professor of English, King's College, Aberdeen since 1994, Research Professor of the Humanities, De Montfort University since 1999, Professor of The Faculty of History, Oxford University since 2003, Senior Research Associate, Oxford Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine, Oxford University since the beginning of 2007.

No small number of basic titles bearing his signature feature as musts in our critical references, from undergraduate and graduate to MA or Ph.D. level, for the professor is a well of intellectual fervour and cultural enthusiasm. Like cultural historians, George Rousseau has covered a wide range of topics deriving from, and converging on, issues of communal identity, from cultural institutions to varieties of perception, or images forming in the collective conscious and unconscious. Like intellectual historians, he is sensitive to the percolation of ideas from high to popular culture, from the centre to the periphery, from the metropolis to the colonies, to which he adds a subtle anthropological turn. Alert to cultural embeddedness, he moves with ease from the

humanities to the sciences and back, finding in the one camp substance for the other and legitimizing the one's status by wisely inquiring into the whys and whereofs of the other. We will be the wiser ourselves tomorrow, for having become his colleagues here at the University of Bucharest, as part of a family of the minds and the hearts of those stirred by the curiosity of knowledge. For no better motto can be attached to the *doctor honoris causa* title conferred upon a specialist in the Enlightenment than '*Aude sapere*'.

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Bucharest
24 May 2007