Retrospective diagnosis
Jean-Jacques Rousseau

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Overview

• Biography
• A Genius
• Acute intermittent porphyria
• Rousseau’s symptoms
• Influences on his work:
  – Initiator of Romanticism
  – Pioneer of cultural changes
  – Bet on humanity

Biography

• Birth: June 1712, 28th
• Death: July 1778, 2\textsuperscript{nd} heart attack
• Life of independence and instability
• Genevan philosopher, writer, and composer
• Composer: contributions to music as a theorist

A Genius

• Enlightenment philosopher:
  – Rejection of autocratic regimes
  – Reflection on the functioning of democratic society
  – Debate on education, morals, theology

• Writer:
  – Epistolary novel
  – Pre-Romantic painting the feeling of love and nature
  – Modern autobiography

Major influence in political philosophy and literature
Acute intermittent porphyria

- Inherited disorders of enzymes in the heme synthetic pathway
- Overproduction and accumulation of the of porphyrins
- Symptoms:
  - Abdominal pain and vomiting
  - Acute neuropathy, muscle weakness and seizures
  - Mental disturbances: hallucinations, depression, anxiety, paranoia
  - Cardiac arrhythmias and tachycardia

http://themedicalbiochemistrypage.org/vp.html
Rousseau’s symptoms

• Congenital disease: mother and brother affected
• Heart attack → death
• Abdominal disorders and sphincter dysfunction
• Neurological symptoms:
  – Sensory impairment: hallucinations
  – Motor impairment
  – Seizure
• Psychological disorders:
  – Mood changes
  – Structured neurosis: anxiety, mythomania, exhibitionism, sadomasochism, paranoia
  – Aggressiveness
Influences on his work -
Initiator of Romanticism

• Beginning of the novel of introspection:
  – Transforms the experience of illness into words
  – Detailed description of symptoms

• Pre romanticism:
  – Source of inspiration: his delusions
  – Tendency to exaggeration and distortion
  – Dramatization of his suffering

→ *Exhibitionism and masochism sublimated by writing*
→ *Literature sublimated by his feelings*
Influences on his work - Pioneer of cultural changes

• Aggressive character: provocation, denunciation, judgment
• Attacks at all levels of society: King, doctors, wealthy people → French Revolution
• Critique of society:
  – Draft constitution citizen-centered
  – Political freedom based on the
  – social contract
  → Advent of the Republic
• Reflection on a strict and egalitarian
• Education
• Debates on morals and theology

http://www.histoire-france.net/epoque/revolution-francaise.html
Influences on his work-
Bet on humanity

• Sadomasochism:
  – Pejorative conception of disease: harshness against the weakest
  – Defence of the poor: design of an ideal health

• Neurosis:
  – Certainty of his superiority
  – Desire to enlighten and save mankind

• Emotional frustration: family virtues, sanctity of love
Take home message

• Immense work: poems, operas, novels, theater plays, letters, speech
• Prepared the Modern Changes in the domains of ideas and expression of feelings
• Initiator of Romanticism
• Porphyria: deep imprint on his work
  $\rightarrow$ Combination of his genius and his madness
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