5-2015

Traumatic Familiarity: Fictions and Theories of Community in the Eighteenth Century

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TRAUMATIC FAMILIARITY: FICTIONS AND THEORIES OF COMMUNITY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2015
This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the Dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

TRAUMATIC FAMILIARITY: FICTIONS AND THEORIES OF COMMUNITY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

by

Andrew Dicus

Adviser: Professor Nancy Yousef

This dissertation addresses a crisis of modern collective identity by employing a dialectic of philosophical and literary “realisms.” While both philosophical and novelistic discourses are premised on twin gestures (aspiration for correspondence between representation and reality), they arrive at radically different claims about how rational, self-governing individuals constitute – and are constituted by – “legitimate” social bodies. By foregrounding the internal complexity and empirical immersion of “real” individuals negotiating “realistic” social encounters, eighteenth-century novelists engage in a sustained critique of emerging concepts of “legitimate” community. Penetrating even the most basic foundations of social knowledge, such as the capacity to distinguish between “familiar” and “stranger,” for example, they expose an unsettling porosity that fundamentally undermines critical assumptions of stable, legitimate social organization, such as consent, the “natural” primacy of the family, and “natural sociability.” Thus the novel, as the following chapters argue, a popular literary form derogatorily associated (in direct contrast to works of political philosophy) with women, the young, and the “idle,” facilitates critical engagement with historically privileged discourses about social and political legitimacy.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation has changed dramatically over the years, reflecting the accumulation of too many debts to acknowledge in full; I can only name the few whose most recent and most substantial support is reflected in these pages.

First, I am grateful for the institutional support I have received from the City University of New York, in the form of teaching and research fellowships. This includes the Robert Adams Day Interdisciplinary Dissertation Year Fellowship, various travel grants for conference presentation support, and teaching fellowships. This dissertation simply would not have been written without CUNY’s material support.

I am also grateful for the invaluable guidance, extraordinary patience, and thoughtful insights of my committee members. Carrie Hintz has always been a challenging and encouraging reader; I have learned from her invaluable advice. Her devotion to students, and her commitment to the community of eighteenth-century scholars at the Graduate Center, has been essential to the progress and development of my own intellectual pursuits. Alexander Schlutz has been an eager and thoughtful interlocutor, both enriching and challenging the interdisciplinarity of my research. With an equal measure of generosity and rigor, he has asked me to think about philosophy and literature in ways that often surprised and always inspired. And Nancy Yousef, whose unsparing advocacy and support has dispelled, at times, seemingly endless discouragements, has both validated and challenged my thinking throughout this process. Without her feedback, advice, and insights – and without her own work, which I have found a constant source of inspiration – this dissertation would have been a much different product, and its production a much less rewarding experience. I have truly enjoyed working with such a wonderful committee.
I would also like to thank the participants of the Eighteenth-Century Interdisciplinary Studies group, many of whom responded to portions of this dissertation directly. Al Coppola went out of his way to read work that appears here and elsewhere, and has always been a kind and welcoming advocate. I have benefitted from conversations with Shang-yu Sheng, David Richter, and Heather Zuber as well, with whom I was fortunate to present work about the Enlightenment at the Graduate Center’s Friday Forum. Among my friends and colleagues, I must single out Kristina Huang and Tracy Riley, both of whom have been especially important to me, both personally and professionally. Kristina has always been an eager and thoughtful interlocutor; Tracy has never failed to take me, or my scholarship, seriously, and has truly challenged and improved my thinking in this dissertation from its conception. I have valued their insights and their friendship, both of which helped to shape these pages.

Finally, I want to thank those who, during this long process, kept me afloat: Jessica Graham’s unlimited confidence in this project, as well as her partnership, intelligence, patience, and compassion, have sustained me over the long years of this dissertation’s production and revision. I cannot say enough about what her support and encouragement, supplemented by the kindness of her family, have meant to me. My parents, Gregg and Taryn Dicus, have been tireless advocates. Over a decade ago, along with Emily Robbins, Ken Robbins, and Ruth Dicus, they stood by me when, as a night-shift machine operator at a paint roller manufacturing plant, I was trying to decide whether it would be worth it to enroll at a local community college. Years later, despite setbacks, hardships, and unexpected turns-of-event, their support has never waned, and I could not be more grateful.
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“She had time and opportunity to see the fallacy, alike in authors and in the world, of judging solely by theory.” Frances Burney, *The Wanderer*

In the first two years of the eighteenth century, two political pamphlets appeared in the streets of London that, although written by the same author – the novelist, journalist, and spy Daniel Defoe – addressed some of the organizing problems of legitimacy from two very different perspectives. In the first, *The Succession to the Crown of England, Considered*, Defoe muses about how properly to incentivize a definitive search into the disputed legitimacy of the Duke of Monmouth. In it, he not only speculated that “there can be no harm done in examining into the truth of the thing,” but he proposed more decisively that “If it were but Voted, That whoever could offer any Proof of the Legitimacy of the late Duke of Monmouth, should be heard, and a Committee appointed to inquire into it,” noting that “if nothing appeared, nothing would follow, and there would be an End of it” (29). This argument does more than to accede to a continuity between biological and political legitimacy, as if settling something about the parentage of the Duke amounts to settling something about England’s legitimate governance. His tone in stoking a fraught and obscure schema of political viability is grounded in a signal confidence that there can be a single and objective resolution to the question of the individual’s legitimacy in the first place, as if it lies embedded somewhere in a static and uncontroversial nature, waiting to be discovered and extracted. While such a “truth,” he suggests, might be cryptic and obscure, it exists, and its realization does not conflict with the laws of empirical observation.
While this first pamphlet located political legitimacy in the body of its rulers, his second, *The Original Power of the Collective Body*, a response to the rigidly royalist politician and missionary Sir Humphrey Mackworth, took up the principles of governance familiar to readers of social contract theory. Arguing that “The Good of the People Governed is the…Reason and Original of Governours,” Defoe’s second pamphlet added that “the Governed,” which he called “the first Fountain,” constitutes the “Original and Cause of all Constitutions.” Developing this naturalistic analogy, he continued, “it cannot be suppos’d this Original Fountain should give up all its Waters, but that it reserves a Power of supplying the Streams: Nor has the Streams any power to turn back upon the Fountain, and invert its own Original. All such Motions are Excentrick and Unnatural” (11 – 12).

The aquatic analogy of Defoe’s second pamphlet reverts to a similar confidence in the objective conditions that characterized his first. The legitimacy of the social body, like that of the biological body, follows from a specific and empirically knowable source, doing so, moreover, according to “motions” that are both “natural” and naturally conspicuous. However, the confidence in *The Original Power*’s fountain metaphor is derived from terms and conditions that, unlike those of the Duke’s obscure parentage, are in a sense already self evident. They do not require the institutional scrutiny and verification of public committees. Defoe’s implicit claims about the intrinsic and natural “motions” of legitimate power need no defense because they are obvious to all at first blush. While both pamphlets thus place the principles and conditions of legitimacy in a stable and observable nature, they conceive of access to that nature in different ways.

My interest in these pamphlets, and in reading them together, lies in the rationalist premise to which both definitions of legitimacy appeal. Not only do these passages provide a
moment of tension in a gradual, modernizing transition from emphasis in embodied legitimacy to institutional legitimacy, they also provide insight into the fact that beneath every question about the political conditions of legitimacy lies an epistemological question about how such conditions are determined in the first place. And while there has never been a paucity of intrepid books, tracts, and treatises broaching the former of these two questions, the latter has been symptomatically neglected, as if all that is needed to work it out is to assemble responsible committees and to sponsor appropriate hearings on its behalf. (Indeed, the confidence in Defoe’s formulation obscures the fact that whatever it means to “inquire into” a given proof is not a sufficient resolution but, in fact, precisely the question he needs to resolve.)

This negligence has persisted in part, I argue, because the very necessity of resolving the epistemological question of legitimacy presupposes an inherent simplicity. By necessity, in other words, it presents itself as incredibly easy to resolve. It must do so, in fact, in order to sustain the premises of equality and liberty that validate modern political ideologies. After all, if resolving the epistemological question of legitimacy required specialized experiences or exceptional knowledge, then it loses the very immunity to abuse, exploitation, and manipulation that defines it as legitimacy: consider the frequency with which revolutionary discourses reference truths that are “self evident.”

Despite this necessary presupposition, however, the question harbors a

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1 I allude obviously to the U. S. Declaration, but this kind of expression is easy to find elsewhere. Robespierre, for example, keeps his readers and audience constantly in mind of “the very obviousness of the principles” he develops, strictly limiting his arguments to “obvious principles,” “fact[s] generally recognized,” and “[c]ommon sense.” He argues for example that institutions can mitigate abuses by “means that are as simple as they are infallible; it is claimed they present an insoluble problem, even to genius; I maintain that at least they present no difficulty to common sense and good faith” (49–52); and, elsewhere, “We have been told that genius would be needed to go deeply into this question [whether or not the king could be tried in court]; I maintain that only good faith is required. It is less a question of enlightenment than of avoiding voluntary blindness” (63). The “general will,” which Robespierre embraces, is general precisely because it requires no specialization, qualifying knowledge, or particular experience.
persistent elusiveness that is, ultimately, a damning source of controversy and instability. The
danger of such instability is compounded by the fact that it, in this particular form (that of the 
social body that is only possibly legitimate), leaches from claims about social organization into 
claims about knowledge itself. As the question of the legitimacy of specific social and political 
organizations and practices gives way to questions about the nature and mediation of knowledge, 
skepticism emerges, jeopardizing the central and necessary premises of modern political theory.

Consider what might possibly have counted as “proof” of the Duke of Monmouth’s legitimacy. The readiest answer, the black box, is interesting precisely because it begs every 
question it stands to resolve. It points simultaneously, first, to the urgent need for, and the 
tantalizing possibility of, some stable, objective, empirical evidence of the individual’s status as 
both a determinant and beneficiary of legitimate social organization, without which the parasitic 
specters of personal interest and corruption necessarily arise; second, to the stakes of arriving at a 
medium of such evidence that, being somehow immune to those same parasitic specters, makes 
consent to its terms not only plausible (to whom? under what conditions?) but logically 
necessary (to all, under all conditions); and, third, to the likelihood that any such medium can 
only ever be a fantasy. Available to its discoverers’ careful scrutiny and empirical standards, the 
black box represents the promise of uncontroversial resolution. Circulating at the same time as a 
figment of gossip and political intrigue, it devolves into the self-referencing joke that any such 
promise must necessarily become. The image of the black box (having a suspiciously vague 
provenance, circulating in mysterious obscurity, and turning up with such improbable

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Its power lies in its universality: its obviousness to and construction by all people in all stations, 
purified of parasitic self-interest and ambition.  
2 The black box reputedly contained a marriage certificate between Charles II and Lucy Walter. 
The existence of such a box was, itself, an open question (publicly disputed in fact by Gilbert 
Gerrard, the supposed steward of the black box), used to gain leverage both for and against the 
causes surrounding the Monmouth Rebellion.
suddenness and convenience that even an author who supported Monmouth’s claim to the throne famously called it “mere romance”) becomes a popular and heavily ridiculed symbol of political cynicism and party opportunism. Ultimately, determining the individual’s legitimacy (his or her actual or necessary place within a specific social or political organization) turns out to be feasible less through the logical necessity that Defoe’s first pamphlet requires than through its de-legitimizing negative: accident.

Accordingly, accident has an important role to play in how questions about legitimacy are framed and addressed in the eighteenth century. In fact, I will be arguing that accident’s centrality in literary texts reveals how far these questions extended beyond traditionally “political” and “philosophical” discourses. Ferguson’s allusion to the implausible contingency surrounding the black box’s appearance evokes an idiosyncrasy of genre – namely, a defining convention of literary fiction – that actually has broad significance, I will be arguing, for the development of how political and philosophical conversations are framed. While Ferguson uses the term “mere romance” explicitly to discredit the viability of the black box as a medium of empirical evidence, literary tropes and conventions will play an important role precisely because they call to mind the epistemological and narrative conditions of plausibility, conditions that political theory largely takes for granted (I will return to this presently).

For example, the conveniently implausible and fortuitous disclosure of an individual’s birth or family ties is a trope that features heavily in the “mere romance” of eighteenth-century novels, pointing directly

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3 Robert Ferguson, “A Letter to a Person of Honour, concerning the Black Box” (a pamphlet originally published in London, anonymously, in 1680), 1. Ferguson sees the black box as a “Fable” (1), created to discredit the claim to legitimate marriage by associating it with a cloud of romantic implausibility and intrigue.

4 Indeed, the problematic currents between “self-evidence” and “plausibility,” as conditions of legitimacy (or rational autonomy at all), become conspicuous in the interdisciplinary contact performed here.
to some of the same epistemological and institutional questions at issue in the black box debate. This trope will be central to my analysis in what follows.

Accident is less the object of this dissertation, however, than an entryway into the broader and more fundamental epistemological problems that threaten to undermine modern political theory. These broader problems come into focus upon further examination of Defoe’s pamphlets, this time with an eye more to their differences than to their similarities. After all, given the monumental difficulties of the “black box” question (how is the individual’s legitimacy to be determined?), how does one account for the epistemological confidence, in Defoe’s second formulation, about the “people” that constitutes “the Governed,” the spring from which the legitimacy of any government supposedly issues? How is one to understand his confidence about the nature of this “Fountain,” or the motions according to which it “naturally” flows? Defoe’s formulation of the conditions of constitutional legitimacy takes completely for granted that which his first pamphlet had just put into question, the knowability of the individual. In other words, while his second pamphlet suggests that the legitimacy of governmental power is clearly and conveniently legible in that which is natural and intrinsic to the people, his first regards precisely what is natural and intrinsic to people as locked into an obscurity that, while not impossible to discover, might require decades and committees and institutions to clear away. Moreover, since the subject looking into the legitimacy of this or that specific social body is often herself a constituent-member of that body, the epistemological difficulties she is confronted with are compounded by their necessary inward turn. If I identify as a member of family X, defined in part by my position and functions relative to that family, and I then discover (as characters in eighteenth-century novels frequently do) that family X is actually an aggregate
– reflecting not natural but rather arbitrary or accidental assemblage – then a radical and troubling alienation from self and other ensues.

This alienation is one of several problems, all loosely related to a construct that I will call “collectivity” or “collective identity,” that the following chapters will address. They will argue that representations of collective identification in the eighteenth century were a means to critical engagement with privileged discourses about social and political legitimacy, and that their central place in “realistic” works of prose fiction places the novel (a popular literary form derogatorily associated, in direct contrast to works of political philosophy, with women, the young, and the “idle”) at the center of such debates. By broadening the intellectual context of these philosophical conversations, the concept of social and political legitimacy occupies a space where questions of epistemology (questions that otherwise call to mind the solitary Descartes or Locke, sequestered in dim rooms with chunks of wax or slips of paper) and questions of social organization (that hardly give the solitary individual a second thought) intersect.

After all, collective identification has the effect of animating legitimizing logics in dramatic ways, putting into action the rationales that, otherwise only in theory, distinguish the legitimate from the illegitimate. It concretizes the abstractions that authorize various perspectives on “legitimacy.” Ernesto Laclau has described one iteration of this concretization in his analysis of populism, writing that the inscription of “any democratic demand…within an equivalential claim” (a claim by which a wide variety of particular and local concerns come to be associated with a single whole, the “people”) “undoubtedly gives the demand a corporeality which it would not otherwise have” (88; This corporeality is not just discursive, he later adds, but something that “is also sedimented in practices and institutions” [106]). Moreover, through such corporeality, the archive of empirical data by which “legitimacy” is calculated is altered or amended: it is thus,
after all, that protests and riots motivated by rising food prices in the eighteenth century constitute, in E. P. Thompson’s classic formulation, a “moral economy,” a part of the calculus by which food production, circulation, and pricing can be regulated with disinterested “legitimacy.”

Meanwhile such legitimizing perspectives, whether “patriarchal,” “imperial,” “populist” or otherwise, reify and reproduce themselves in the postures of universalism and logical necessity that they assume. The presumed epistemological simplicity and self-evidence of this or that social body’s claim to legitimacy extends that claim indefinitely. The “people,” returning to Laclau, “aspires to be conceived as the only legitimate totality” (81) namely because the claims they have given voice to ostensibly address contradictions or gaps in the official, legal, and institutional logics of legitimacy – logics that, in turn, already conceive of themselves as sufficient (disinterested, universal). The subject of enlightenment collectivity thus straddles a

5 Laclau describes the people’s claim to totality on similar terms, emphasizing a “just” and “ideal” society, where I emphasize its rational necessity and universalism (though, as his use of “false totality” suggests, his sense of idealism is grounded in the sense of rationalism I am using): “the populus as given – as the ensemble of social relations as they actually are – reveals itself as a false totality, as a partiality which is a source of oppression. On the other hand, the plebs, whose partial demands are inscribed in the horizon of a fully fledged totality – a just society which exists only ideally – can aspire to constitute a truly universal populus which the actually existing situation negates. It is because the two visions of the populus are strictly incommensurable that a certain particularity, the plebs, can identify itself with the populus conceived as an ideal totality” (94). Moreover, Laclau sees the “constitution of popular identities” (94) playing an important role in the emergence of this idealized totality, but he is mostly interested in the ways that popular identity holds in tension the particularity of “democratic demands” and the “wider universality” that allows for the incorporation of those particular demands (indeed, this helps him to account for [mis]attributions of irrationalism, unreason, and vagueness to populist movements). I am after, so to speak, a universality that is wider still: the enlightenment, even Kantian, pretense of “legitimacy” that becomes active only when it recognizes no difference whatsoever between the particular and the universal. When there is a tension as Laclau describes it, it is only because the subject has failed to conceive of things properly, rationally, categorically. This is as much as to say that, while Laclau attempts to define populism – a construct historically interchanged with illegitimacy, often explicitly because it is interchanged with unreason – in a way that gives it a basis in legitimacy, I am attempting to analyze (but not, I should note, to endorse) the prior or foundational notion of legitimacy to which social movements and practices appealed in the eighteenth century, and
wide conceptual gap between the specific claims that his or her identifications concretize and the standards of universalism that ostensibly authorize their concretization in the first place. To this extent, collective identification approximates the “strangely complementary structure” that Nancy Yousef associates with intimacy, in which “[s]kepticism…generates an excessive anxiety about the accuracy and reliability of our apprehension of things” while sympathy “presumes an improbable confidence about our intimacy with other persons” (7). Through collective identification, one understands one’s self as “like,” in some essential and necessary way, those with whom he or she identifies (as, for example, fellow constituents of the “first fountain”), even if the terms of that likeness remain obscure. The individual makes a claim about oneself that presupposes claims – countless claims – about the social body to which he or she belongs, and that extends to the other individuals who also belong to – who are also the “first fountain” of – that body. This presupposition constitutes a big epistemological leap, one that needs further exploration.

Collective identity thus announces and then tries to resolve a double anxiety, one about the status of persons and one about the status as things. Through collective identity, persons emerge as potential objects of the “recognition” that legitimacy requires – recognition that others may, on the other hand, refuse to reciprocate. Meanwhile, the ostensibly objective but nevertheless abstract social or political entity – what one might call the “imagined community” – emerges as a stabilizing universalism that appeals to the person pursuing recognition. The entity which, I think, remains largely in tact. After all, individuals caught in this or that populist sway generally do not describe themselves as “populists” – this is a term that is usually imposed from the outside, sometimes derogatorily. They think of themselves, rather, as holding more “legitimate,” in a prior or foundational sense, concerns and ideas. Consider for example populist movements that posit a “return” to the “principles” of founding documents in the U.S., and that claim a more reasonable and more developed grasp of market logics, governmental principles, even human nature.
provides the person the basis for his or her legitimizing recognition; the person provides the entity a medium through which its legitimizing logic or rationale becomes operative. In other words, the cryptic, thingly “Englishness” of the English becomes legible empirically when one of its constituents comes forward, claims it, embodies it. Like the Duke of Monmouth, or one of his supporters making claims about authenticity and “pretenders” (note that these claims are framed in essentially epistemological terms), he gives substance to the content of Englishness, granting Englishness the empirical medium through which its legitimacy can be (returning to Defoe’s vocabulary) “inquired into” and “proven.” By associating himself with the abstractions that give “Englishness” its potency, he also appropriates its defining legitimacy, understanding himself and his actions by its terms, while at the same time bringing its premises and organizing logics forward into view. At the moment of collective identification, when he is “recognized,” the individual becomes the subject and object of legitimacy.

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6 I am here intentionally conflating multiple notions of “legitimacy,” such as that of one’s birth and that of a given cause or belief. Indeed, in the early eighteenth century both notions of legitimacy begin to converge in revealing ways. Defoe mocks the “true-born Englishman,” for example, attacking xenophobic attitudes that ground claims about one’s superior ability to discern true political interest in prior claims about national provenance, countering the political assertions of William III’s dissidents by reducing the “true-born Englishman” to a “vain ill-natured thing” originating from an “amphibious ill-born mob” (4). (Similarly, claims that one can discern the legitimacy of the Duke of Monmouth’s birth function to signal a corresponding superiority, and a disinterested authenticity, of broader political judgment.) Despite Defoe’s efforts, by the end of the eighteenth century this convergence is only more fully established. In Smollett’s pro-government periodical called “The Briton,” for example (bringing both notions of legitimacy into play, and in fact collapsing one into the other), an editorial argues that the “Briton means, by steering a middle course between” the two poles of the 1790s rights controversy, “to render harmless the poison of either; to inform his countrymen of their real situation, to direct their attention to the excellencies of the constitution under which they live; at the same time to point out its defects with truth and candour, and to recommend to them the wisest and most temperate measured to be pursued in obtaining its amendment” (4). Striking is the presumption that the countrymen need to be informed “of their real situation” or of the “constitution under which they live,” as well as the extent to which the Briton’s status – as The Briton – ratifies these epistemological observations.
From a narrative perspective, the reconciliation of subjective agency and objective validity suggested by collective identification is revealing precisely in its riskiness. Persons who claim that they, their properties, and their actions reflect a particular “legitimacy” open themselves to controversy, ultimately problematizing, like the black box, the very notion of legitimacy they had hoped to stabilize. Rather than giving substance to legitimacy – or (to put it in the social and intersubjective terms suggested by collective identification) rather than making legitimacy familiar to their fellows – they in fact risk becoming strange, objects of chance in a “mere romance.” They risk appropriating too much of the contested provenance and not enough of the “natural” and “intrinsic motions” of validity that make such identifications appealing in the first place. They risk estranging the very obviousness, the self-evidence, of the terms of legitimacy, undermining the legitimizing premises that, through identification, they had sought to substantiate. I am contending not only, therefore, that a full account of legitimacy must also, against implausible odds, account for its own epistemological foundations, but that this contention was central to, if submerged within, broad, popular debates about legitimacy during the eighteenth century.

Questions of epistemology do receive attention in more recent discussions of political theory, although they are often relegated to supporting roles, secondary to the political conditions of legitimacy. John Rawls’s formulation of a “well-ordered society,” for example, in which “everyone accepts and knows that others accept the same principles of justice,” and in which “the basic social institutions generally satisfy and are generally known to satisfy these principles,” seems to place as much pressure on the “principles” (the work’s primary object) as on how they can be known (4). Similarly, Robert Nozik draws his analysis of political legitimacy from a Locke-derived State of Nature that poses as many epistemological as moral challenges:
wronged individuals “will overestimate the amount of harm or damage they have suffered,” for example, and they have an interest in establishing conditions according to which such abuses are not only settled, but according to which “both parties know” they are settled (11).

But even political theories that do recognize the interdependencies of the epistemological and institutional challenges of legitimacy tend to take social and political knowledge for granted, as if knowledge will follow necessarily from the proper conditions of legitimate government once they are established. Jean Starobinski persuasively links Rousseau’s anxiety about mediation to the failures of bourgeois society, for example, but this analysis has lead to overdetermined interpretations of Rousseau’s political optimism, as if the English breakfast scene in Julie might actually represent the transparent, unmediated openness that its protagonist improbably claims. Likewise, Marshall Berman, calling for a “politics of authenticity,” takes for granted not only that the proper political arrangements will bear the fruits of authenticity, but that anything like the “authenticity” of other minds can be recognized and determined at all. In either case, the implicit causal mechanisms that link authenticity or transparency to institutional conditions need further elaboration.

The approach that is best suited for such an elaboration, as I have already begun to argue, is one that is thoroughly interdisciplinary. The epigraph to this introduction comes from Frances Burney’s fourth and last novel, The Wanderer, a narrative set against the backdrop of the French Revolution, and one that is rich with references to political theory, “new systems,” and Burkean conservatism. As the protagonist, fleeing mysterious pursuers and an oppressive past, takes shelter in rural England, she discovers the inadequate abstraction of influential – and, she believes, strictly theoretical – idealizations of country life. Implicitly aimed at Rousseau and his adherents, Burney writes of individuals “born and bred in a capital; who first revel in its
dissipations and vanities, next, sicken of its tumults and disappointments, write or exclaim for ever, how happy is the country peasant’s lot” (700). The Wanderer recognizes that “theoretical” accounts reflect the prepossessions of their authors, and that narrative provides an important supplement to theory, balancing its conclusions by resolving its distance from the lived experiences of individuals – individuals, indeed, including women, laborers, and colonized subjects, who are dispossessed by such theoretical accounts. Authors of theory “reflect not,” she continues, that to substantiate their idealizations of country life “the peasant must be so much more philosophic than the rest of mankind, as to see and feel only his advantages, while he is blind and insensible to his hardships” (700). Theoretical or philosophical discourses, she argues, ultimately reflect and promote the needs of its privileged developers, those who enjoy the material advantages of education and leisure. Moreover, those needs, precisely because they are couched in theoretical discourses, pretend to universality. It is not the peasant (or the woman novelist) that, speaking as if in objective registers, describes political or social legitimacy through universalist claims about country life, but “the writer, who has never tried it, and the man of the world who, however murmuring at his own, would not change with it” (700).

Despite Burney’s misgivings, some of the defining models of modern social and political legitimacy were, above all, interdisciplinary, developed in a context in which stories and abstractions, contrary to the genres and disciplines that would eventually come to distinguish them, were still relatively fluid. (I will be arguing for the theoretical significance of Rousseau as a novelist, for example.) Indeed, central to my argument is that the narrative element of social contract texts needs greater and more serious attention, as do the theoretical investments of fictional and narrative texts. Scholarship on social contract theory generally takes for granted that narratives about civil society emerging from the state of nature are, and are merely, hypothetical.
Any introductory course on the works of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Samuel Pufendorf, or Jean-Jacques Rousseau is likely to begin with the assertion that the imagined histories, despite their prominence in these authors’ respective works, can be quietly set aside. The state of nature is simply instrumental, a fictional construct serving only to set up and expound privileged theoretical descriptions of empirically legitimate social and political organization.

I emphasize, on the contrary, the significance of the fact that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political philosophy, premised precisely on the aspiration for correspondence between representation and “reality,” is co-emergent with that other ostensibly realistic discourse (Burney’s domain), the novel. This dissertation thus advances a dialectic of literary and philosophical “realisms.” While both traditions attempt to situate human life in “realistic” contours, they both advance radically different arguments about how rational, self-governing individuals constitute, and are constituted by, legitimate social and political organization. Questions of social organization and social legitimacy give shape to an important point of contact between literary and philosophical writings of the period, in which the abstract formulations of “legitimate” social organization confront the empirical social experiences featured in novelistic “realism.” My focus on the forms and rational dynamics of community thus situates my work within a recent, broader turn to the intersections of literature and philosophy (Frances Ferguson, Helen Thompson, Nancy Yousef, Jonathan Kramnick, and Karen Bloom Gevirtz, for example), even as it advances investigations of the historical conditions and complexities of social organization in the eighteenth century (including a growing body of scholarship expanding upon and challenging Linda Colley’s monograph on nationalism and eighteenth-century Britain, as well as a vast and rich body of work reevaluating notions of social association and dissociation under British imperialism: Srinivas Aravamudan, Humberto Garcia,
Suvir Kaul, and Roxann Wheeler, among many others). Through the concept of “collective identity,” this dissertation exposes connections between, and explores implications of, both of these critical lines, giving clearer definition to the concept of “legitimacy” and to the problems that arise as it shifts (a “shift” that is never tidy or complete) from a description of individual bodies and their parentage to a description of interconnected social bodies and their governing principles.

“Traumatic familiarity” refers obliquely to the persistence of illegitimacy. That is to say that it refers to the persistence of the inability to determine legitimate from illegitimate social organization – a problem that is especially troubling when one realizes that one is oneself a defining constituent of that organization. A sudden awareness of a mistaken principle of social knowledge or political legitimacy (always conceivable, even likely) indexes, in this case, a related awareness of (an ostensibly much less conceivable) deficiency in self-knowledge. As Raymond Geuss describes it, the “modern subject” is “an autonomous individual who has liberated himself from all merely traditional bonds and has independently assumed responsibility for the organization of his own life.” Geuss acknowledges the temptation in this context “to conceive the optimal organization of life as a form of rational self-legislation.” But the ostensibly “clear and generalizable rules” that organize self-legislation (63), when they extend out (as they necessarily do) into the social and political spaces that the individual shares with others, become matters of debate. When they turn out to be wrong, insufficient, or elusive (as to Defoe’s committees and proofs), they take on the troubling suggestion of an ungovernable and unknowable self. Traumatic familiarity refers to the circuits that bind the confidence and stability
of self-knowledge to the instabilities and abstractions of social knowledge, especially where knowledge and its production through rational autonomy creates and culminates in “legitimacy.”

This dissertation project began with a fascination with the strange insistence eighteenth-century British novelists had with making familiars strange. As chapter three will show at length, readers of eighteenth-century novels were constantly encountering literary characters who, when confronted with sisters, brothers, sexual partners, parents, or friends, collapse momentarily into distraction and terror. Like Robinson Crusoe discovering the human footprint on the beach, these characters are faced with the opportunity to rediscover themselves as specifically determined members of a shared existence, having shared experiences, living in a shared space and off of shared resources. They are faced with the opportunity to identify collectively, to think of themselves as members of a community. They are faced with the suggestion that their prior collective identifications and notions of community had been wrong, somehow misguided or contaminated with manipulation, interest, or error. Like Robinson Crusoe, these characters – despite and indeed often because of the conspicuous familiarity of the encountered other – temporarily reject this opportunity or this suggestion in spectacular, even gothic fashion. They faint and scream; they lose touch, as Crusoe does, with reality; they slip into the margins of madness or death.

What do these moments of traumatic familiarity tell us about community, especially as it was being developed in the eighteenth century, an intellectual context that strives, as I have suggested above, to legitimate community in rationally necessary ways?

Before addressing the question of what this dissertation might aspire to say about community, a brief methodological note will be useful here to establish what it will not attempt to say. It will be obvious already that, while the title of this dissertation is suggestive of a project
that is primarily historical or political in nature, its principle objective is more properly epistemological. In sum, the epistemological problem can be expressed by a deceptively straightforward articulation of what I have been calling “legitimate” community: the reconciliation of the autonomous individual with its necessary immersion in social relationality. With the emergence of modern political thought, and especially in its most durable conceptualizations of legitimacy (including but not limited to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century formulations of the social contract), the individual’s autonomy and relationality are to be considered not only as compatible, but as the essential condition of each other. Accounting for legitimacy thus entails explaining how an individual can and must be at once fully autonomous and fully relational – that is, at once sovereign and subject (to interdependency, obligation, hierarchy, etc). My engagement with community is primarily, thus, an analysis of its development in conceptual and imaginative discourses.

This is not to say that any analysis of community should ever (or could ever) be at all ahistorical or apolitical. Indeed, this project assumes that something of a community’s “legitimacy” is presupposed in the “legitimate” actions of its agents. Thus, it follows that the actions that organize and control social spaces and social relations – such as enclosure, for example – and the conceptual “legitimacy” of the social body that gives such actions context, are mutually implicit. While therefore I do not offer a sustained and explicit critique of practices such as enclosure, I do assume that such a critique must take up, not only the economic and social practices that are disrupted, constructed, or transformed by it, but also the concept of

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7 This project of course proceeds with the awareness, moreover, that such terms are not mutually exclusive. That epistemologies can be political, for example, has been an operating assumption of a great deal of political theory, such as Wendy Brown’s analysis of neoliberalism and the dissemination of a pervasive (economic but also social and political), normative, and ostensibly legitimizing “economic” or “market rationality.” “Neo-Liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” pg 4.
legitimate community that supplies its rationale. Indeed (to follow these implications to a useful if somewhat trite example), the legitimacy of a particular social organization has had the tendency to erase, counter-intuitively, the otherwise conspicuous illegitimacy of certain of its organizing practices: the rhetoric and figure of “exceptionalism” makes this striking tendency legible in twenty-first-century registers. A state that is “exceptional” in its logic, in its rationale and legitimacy, may take, ignore, or excuse the “exceptional” measures it takes in sustaining itself. Rather than contradicting or negating one another, one logic (the logic of extreme measures, as of draconian surveillance and inequitable energy consumption, for example), is absorbed or obviated by another (the logic of social and political legitimacy, whose operative calculus is thus seen magically to negate or excuse the aforementioned measures). Both logics, of course, are historical products, and each has serious political implications. My project aims neither to critique nor to narrate those products and implications, however, but to understand their emergence in modern thought as necessary and interdependent phenomena in the increasingly secular, increasingly global world of the eighteenth century, especially from the perspective of the writers whose theories have proven so durable – writers whose claims about “legitimacy,” that is, have been so convincing for so many. It might be argued that this dissertation is to that extent purblind. These remarks do not constitute a defense of purblind scholarship, but a rejection of the accusation, rather, as itself purblind, as committed to a story as it is being only half-told.

To show all my cards, I value the historicist commitment that has only deepened and enriched scholarly insight into conceptual developments, such as social contract, consent, and natural sociability, which have in turn shaped and informed social practices and political institutions. But I also believe that literary scholarship has more to offer than recent scholarship
might suggest. I find an opportunity, recently expressed by Jonathan Kramnick, to embrace the unique mandate of literary scholarship, and to think about “what grounds eighteenth-century literary studies as an intellectual practice” (“Recent Studies” 683). Specifically, I embrace the opportunity to work out what distinguishes ours from others’ disciplines, and if I agree with Kramnick’s suggestion that “historicism has perhaps run its course,” it is not because I am dismissive of historicist methodology, but because I want to explore the concept of eighteenth-century community through some of the discipline’s “eclectic heterogeneity” (683). One can reflect seriously and responsibly, after all, on the abstract articulation of concepts such as “legitimacy,” “consent,” and “natural law” without neglecting the extent to which such concepts were constructed under, and reflective of, particular historical conditions. The rest of this section, and all of the next, is where I will address most substantially and directly some of the historical questions, contexts, and objections that might arise (though, again, I will be historicizing throughout as well).

It is important to note, first of all, that this dissertation consists primarily of close consideration of philosophical and literary representations produced during, and in reaction to, the historical period we sometimes call the “Enlightenment.”

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8 I have no strong feelings about how “Enlightenment” should be defined (I will capitalize it when it appears as a noun). For my purposes, I will be referring to it in its most generic sense, as it was typically defined in the eighteenth century in all of its various iterations (the “age of reason,” the “empire of light and reason,” etc). And while I see value to emphasizing, as Clifford Siskin and William Warner have done, the historical conditions and technologies, such as technologies of mediation, that made Enlightenment possible, I think, again, the historicist perspective has overemphasized those conditions and technologies at the expense of the conceptual content that historical actors generally meant when they actually talked about Enlightenment. I appreciate the conviction with which Siskin and Warner name their book, proffering a decisive answer to the question Kant addressed, somewhat less decisively, over two centuries ago. But, in addition to noting some of the important objections already made (Dan Edelstein, for example, notes that “the Jesuits had a far more sophisticated system of global correspondence: does this mean they were more enlightened?” adding that many of the
formulations of community in a historical context according to which collective action and responsibility were decreasingly authorized by religion, on the one hand, but not yet legitimized by “nationalism” on the other. In this way, I seek to understand the binding dynamics of individuality and collectivity when there was no apparent, legitimate recourse to such larger organizing narratives as “religion” and the “nation”: to take seriously, in other words, Rousseau’s objection to Grotius in *The Social Contract* that, before examining the establishment of legitimate sovereign forms, “we ought to scrutinize” how “a people” is possible and operative in the first place (59). By doing so, I hope to draw attention to some of the problems and contradictions of political collectivity that have persisted in spite of the inauguration in the nineteenth century of “new” forms of class and national consciousness. Indeed, one of the ways I have conceptualized this project from the outset is as a study of “imagining community.” Accordingly, a fuller account of the inadequacies and contradictions of nationalism can be achieved by considering more closely and carefully the conceptual problems that it sees itself addressing or resolving in earlier, eighteenth-century thought.

Of course, much of the work on collective identity in the eighteenth century already tracks changing attitudes and arguments about national identity, as well as how global political technologies of mediation that existed in the eighteenth-century were not unique to that century, and arguing ultimately that “[t]o locate the singularity of the Enlightenment, we must also consider what was mediated, not just how it was” [11], I want to register what I see as the reductive nature of the argument. I see no reason after all why the book could not have been called *This is Mediation* (a book I would probably have read, and would certainly have profited from), nor do I see how reducing Enlightenment to “a moment in the history of mediation” (1) makes any more sense than reducing, say, industrialization, or perhaps even early capitalism, to “a moment in the history of metallurgy.” After all (to draw upon the basic premises of Siskin’s and Warner’s thesis), industrialization would not have been possible without metallurgy, and material advances in metallurgy in turn facilitate further industrial expansion of the uses and methodologies of metallurgy. But to contend that, therefore, industrialization is “a moment in the history of metallurgy” leaves out or deflates so many of its important social, economic, ideological, and political dimensions to constitute a sufficient account.
organization (such as imperialism) changes to reflect these attitudes and arguments. A great deal of scholarship on eighteenth-century British collectivity, for example, attempts to extend, reassert, or redefine nationalism in order to make the case for or against its status as a nation. Linda Colley writes explicitly about Britain as a national specimen in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (1992), arguing that Great Britain’s Protestantism, trade practices, and animosity with the French cohere England, Wales, and Scotland into one national body. Setting the tone, in many ways, for scholarship about political collectivity in the eighteenth century, Colley provides a very close reading of historical data, rereading standard models of how critics think the English conceptualized themselves. As more evidence has been made available, critics have variously modified, challenged, and reinforced Colley’s history, directly and indirectly. This body of literature is vast, but important recent contributions include Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (1998), Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts (1998), Colin Kidd (1999), and Lisa Cody (2005). But these books are histories, and they draw productive conclusions about collectivity by tracking how maps were made, churches were attended, books were published, babies were weaned, and so forth. In addition to the limitations of historicism mentioned above, the potential teleology of this kind of history – reading the documents and processes of the period as somehow inevitably nationalistic or proto-nationalistic – carries the threat of considering (and sometimes dismissing) evidence that does not fit the model of Andersonian nationalism as aberrations, rather than as valid (or no less valid, rather), alternative expressions of legitimate, imagined community.

There have been a number of studies more explicitly invested in different concepts of collectivity as imagined and represented by eighteenth-century writers and artists, usually with a strong focus on individual philosophers and writers. J.G.A. Pocock’s work has been exemplary
at reconciling conceptual discourses with material historiography. *Barbarism and Religion: Narratives of Civil Government* (2001), for example, examines how Gibbon and some of his contemporaries represented political bodies within the framework of what Pocock calls “the Enlightened Narrative” (I will return to Pocock below). I have also profited from intellectual histories in a similar vein, including especially those of J. B. Schneewind and Charles Taylor. Other broader and multi-author surveys include Pheng Cheah’s *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (2003), an excellent book that examines the development of organicism in metaphors of the state. *Spectral Nationality* approaches more nearly the kind of analysis I attempt here, but it is interested in enlightenment philosophy primarily as it relates to literature of subsequent periods, and it draws upon genre distinctions which, while necessary for its purposes, were still basically fluid for writers and readers in the eighteenth century. A more rigorous interrogation of the concepts of community – as imagined and represented during the eighteenth century in both philosophical and literary texts – is needed in order to provide a fuller understanding of the kinds of collectivity experienced during the period, and for insight into the extent to which early American and French nationalism corrected, appropriated, modified, and rejected these concepts. One approach to this problem, as suggested above, is by parsing a collection of recurring moments during the period – such as that of what I call traumatic familiarity – that throw the contemporary problems of imagining community in the context of enlightenment into relief.

The secular implications of that enlightenment context are important. The sense that community is being conceptualized without recourse to traditional religious or organizing national models leaves one with the impression that community during the eighteenth century is
being thought of on its own terms: community “as such.” The extent to which it makes any sense to speak of a community “as such” (rather than to speak of this or that specific community, or of historically contingent forms of community, like the nation or the family), has of course shifted over time. Aristotle, and his early contentions about the zoon politikon (human beings as political animals, creatures who achieve their promise and their nature when they enter into political structures), has been instrumental in shaping some of the secularizing discourses about community and humanism that eighteenth-century thinkers variously adopted or rejected.

J.G.A. Pocock writes about the spread of civic humanism in the early sixteenth century, for example, as an attempt to reconcile Christian ideas of temporality (which subordinates the finite and thus potentially meaningless business of political events and particularity to divine infinity and an eschatological temporal view that, moreover, ultimately privileges contemplation over action) with Aristotelian notions of virtue: the political means and contexts in which human nature is realized and human promise is achieved. Pocock argues for the significance of civic humanism in providing stability and meaning in the face of fortuna (and, later, in the face of corruption), the unpredictability and instability of secular events, writing that with civic humanism it was possible…for the individual to feel that only as a citizen, as political animal involved in a vivere civile with his fellows, could he fulfill his nature, achieve virtue, and find his world rational; while at the same time it might be that his conceptual means of understanding the particular and controlling the temporal, on which his ability to function as a citizen depended, had not increased to a degree commensurate with the new demands made upon them. (Machiavellian Moment 114)
Pocock’s conception of humanism, fully developed in early-sixteenth-century Florence by Machiavelli and his contemporaries and later revived/revised by revolutionary England and America, provided new vocabularies for what might otherwise be called legitimacy (a key word for Pocock, in fact, throughout his study), since its spread “offered…a means of associating the particular virtues of men composing the political society in such a way that they would not be corrupted by their particularity but would become parts of a common pursuit of universal good,” adding that “it offered powerful incentives to consideration both of what types and categories of men, displaying what characteristic virtues and limitations, made up the political society, and of the means by which it was proposed to associate them in a common pursuit” (115). Pocock writes about republics in particular, as theorized by Machiavelli in the Discorsi, as “a drastic experiment in secularization,” arguing that Machiavelli established “that civic virtue and the vivere civile may…develop entirely in the dimension of contingency, without the intervention of timeless agencies” (including superhuman legislators such as Lycurgus and Moses, to whom I will return in chapter one). Pocock adds that while timelessness or universality remains, for Machiavelli, a fundamental goal of human beings as political animals, “there are circumstances in which citizens move toward this goal through the efforts of their own time-bound selves,” citing as an example Rome, “where the goal was achieved…by the disorderly and chance-governed actions of particular men in the dimension of contingency and fortune” (190).

The secular principle of social organization Machiavelli associates with the achievement of Roman order by “time-bound” and “contingent” citizens is translated by the seventeenth century into a notion of individual rights, developed perhaps most influentially by the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius, whose arguments about rights as “faculties” and “aptitudes” that “attach to a person” pave the way for the enlightenment liberal theories of Hobbes and Locke. In his treatise
On the Law of War and Peace (1625), Grotius marries the rational individual to the concept of legitimate social organization through a rigorous theorization of natural law. While the principles of natural law date at least as far back as the stoics and the subsequent development of *jus gentium* (intended to mitigate the legal confusion and complexity of inter-territorial dealings during Roman expansion by deferring, not to technical or regional written legal codes, but to the presumed and shared rational capacities of any and all “civilized” people to recognize and negotiate the self-evident terms of fair exchange), Grotius modernizes its conceptualization in Christian Europe not only through increased emphasis on the individual and individual rights, but on basing the normative, moral principles of natural law on rational or logical necessity, a standard to which even God may be judged, and of which God cannot change: an objective measure that is truly legitimate. “What we have been saying,” he famously writes, “would have a degree of validity even if we should concede that which cannot be conceded without the utmost wickedness: that there is no God, or that the affairs of men are of no concern to Him” (4).

A similar posture is taken by proponents of Deism, whose primary tenets, in a sense subordinating religious knowledge to rational thought (thus cleansing it of its dangerous corruptions, superstition and popery), are taken even further by John Locke, who insists that religious thought matures not through divine revelation, nor with innate principles, but as the necessary result and the objectively valid produce of empirical investigation. The complex relationship Pocock traces in Machiavelli’s writings, linking the universal to the particular, is

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9 See J. B. Schneewind, especially chapter two, “Natural Law: from Intellectualism to Voluntarism.”

10 On secular thought in Grotius, and how that secularism has played out in subsequent and contemporary theories of international law (internationalism and the “free seas” constitute the most appropriate context for the study of Grotius’s legal theory), see Hilaire McCoubrey, “Natural Law, Religion and the Development of International Law,” and John Haskell, “Hugo Grotius in the Contemporary Memory of International Law.”
stretched to its limits by Locke’s empiricism, where particular, finite, and temporal phenomena alone offer sufficient and necessary passage to legitimate understanding of the universal, infinite, and transcendent nature of God. Consider for example the inadequacy and superficiality of Robinson Crusoe’s many lapses into religious enthusiasm (usually during moments of intense fear, such as during the “terrible Storm” in which a ship he is on, “deep loaden…wallowed in the sea” [54, 55]). These moments serve to highlight the legitimacy of his final turn to Christian theology based, not on fear and dependence, but on rational autonomy and empirical observation. Indeed, it is precisely while looking at a sea “very calm and smooth” that Crusoe begins to wonder “What is this Earth and Sea of which I have seen so much, whence is it produc’d, and what am I,” concluding through rational exercise that “Sure we are all made by some secret Power, who form’d the Earth and the Sea,” reasoning (it “follow’d most naturally,” he insists) that “It is God that has made it all,” and that “He guides and governs them all, and all Things that concern them” (124). The abstraction and contemplative priorities characteristic of medieval philosophy have given way in the popular Lockean tradition to notions of objective truth that are available to the active, empirical mind in its engagement with the contingent and the material. In such a context, social phenomena (once the matter of fortuna: unstable and finite, and thus best ignored or “suffered”) are given new meaning and urgency as well. Social legitimacy, it is

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11 Locke argues for example that “the same truths may be discovered, and conveyed down from revelation, which are discoverable to us by reason, and by those ideas we naturally may have,” adding that “God might, by revelation, discover the truth of any proposition in Euclid; as well as men, by the natural use of their faculties, come to make the discovery themselves. In all things of this kind, there is little need or use of revelation, God having furnished us with natural, and sureer means to arrive at the knowledge of them. For whatsoever truth we come to the clear discovery of, from the knowledge and contemplation of our own ideas, will always be certainer to us, than those which are conveyed to us by traditional revelation.” Chapter XVIII, § 4, pg 609.
suggested, might constitute an objective truth (or a cluster of objective truths) made accessible to
the individual through empirical phenomena: namely, the experience of others in social spaces.

A useful (but, it should be stressed, easy to oversimplify) way in which to characterize
such emergent secularizing tendencies is with the familiar paradigm shift from (mostly) vertical
to (mostly) horizontal descriptions of human relations, in which one’s physical, material, and
moral status begins to say much less about his or her relationship with God than about his or her
interrelations with other people. Yet it is possible of course to accept only a qualified form of
such a schematic shift. Indeed, Pocock writes about the emergence of England, as a product of
civic consciousness, as “a means of conceptualizing, in a complex and particular time-frame, a
public realm, at once secular and godly, in which the individual, at once saint and Englishman, is
to act” (337). The birth of English civic consciousness is directed by an understanding of history
that entails both the religious and the contingent. This was true not only of England as a public
space, but also of English identity in an international context. In her study of racial identification
in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, Roxann Wheeler argues that Christianity and clothing
are not incidental but in fact central to British identification, especially in an international
context: much more than, for example, skin color. But what is meant by “Christianity,” even by
the colonial actors Wheeler describes, is itself now subject to “horizontal” description.

Indeed, one of the best-known examples of what might be called the material reification
of principles of social organization in the eighteenth century, the Gordon Riots of 1780, appears
explicitly religious in nature. The impetus, after all, was the Papists Act of 1778, which rolled
back anti-Catholic Penal Laws instituted in 1698 (effectively barring Catholics from substantial
participation in public life). But as much as the Gordon Riots help us to see how central religion
continued to be in English and British identification, they also help us to understand how
overdetermined Christianity was, pointing as much to religious beliefs and institutions as to secular assumptions and practices. In *The Crowd in History*, George Rudé demonstrates that the Gordon Riots were motivated more by political and class-based concerns than religious ones, citing “social justice” and “settling accounts with the rich” as the rioters’ organizing motive.\(^{12}\) Nicholas Rogers agrees, arguing that if anti-Catholicism was a “necessary cause” of the riots, it was “hardly a sufficient one” (155). (It would almost be stating the obvious to add that Catholicism stood for much more than its theology, and that its associations with the French, the Spanish, and the Irish signify a host of volatile political and territorial hostilities.)

Besides, the turn to what I have called “horizontal” social engagement, as well as its implications for collective identification, constitutes a (if not the) defining interest for eighteenth-century novelists. It is thus that so much depends, for Sterne’s titular narrator of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759), on the winding of a clock: as potent a symbol of temporal and contingent human agency as any. The act of winding a clock accounts for Tristram Shandy’s existence and character, whose narrative is the narrative of complex interpersonal contacts between an uncle, a male wet nurse, his parents, and so many others, and that extends well into a past and into distant places that are not properly his own – that he never experiences first-hand. So complex are the social intersections that account for his “life and opinions” that he cannot decide with any real confidence what must be included or what may be left out. The interest in social interdependency as an explanatory mode of self-narrative and self-

\(^{12}\) “Overtly,” Rudé writes, “the rioters proclaimed their hostility to Roman Catholics without distinction; but, as it turned out, the Catholics whose houses were attacked were not those living in the most densely populated Catholic districts…but in the more fashionable residential areas of the West; and it was not the Catholic craftsmen or wage earners – men similar to themselves – that entangled the rioters’ attention, but gentlemen, manufacturers, merchants, and publicians.” Rudé finds that class-based concerns constitute a common motivator in many of the eighteenth-century “riots” that were only ostensibly motivated by secondary issues, such as, in the case of the Gordon Riots, religion (62).
understanding can be traced back to the self-proclaimed pioneers of the eighteenth-century novel: writers like Aphra Behn, Eliza Haywood, and Daniel Defoe. In other words, theories of community “as such” have always been central to the organizing logic of novelistic realism. As the role of fiction in developing, challenging, and circulating such theories has changed, so have the theories themselves.

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship on community as such has generally focused on a cluster of writers responding, initially, to the immense body of work by the fascinating and prolific writer and theorist, Georges Bataille. Jean-Luc Nancy’s *La Communauté Désouvrée* (1983, reprinted and expanded in 1986) is the first and perhaps best-known attempt to articulate and critique the notion of community animating Bataille’s social and aesthetic criticism, followed shortly by Maurice Blanchot’s brief but dense *La Communauté Inavouable* (also 1983). Nancy places the origins of modern community in the eighteenth century, calling Rousseau “the first thinker of community,” insofar as Rousseau was the first to register a theoretical nostalgia, looking back from the perspective of “a society producing, of necessity, the solitary figure,” to a lost or broken community, “a matter of a lost age in which community was woven of tight, harmonious, and infrangible bonds and in which above all it played back to itself [through] organic communion with its own essence” (9). (Nostalgia is suggestive of narrative time, of course, but Rousseau is not given serious consideration as a narrator.) Such nostalgia, Nancy argues, is fundamentally erroneous, though it is an error that constitutes a defining feature of occidental experience. To avoid this, Nancy abandons the notion of community as a shared – and then lost – *substance* in common, and adopts instead a notion of community as a kind of *medium*, in which subjects, through a dialectic of interiority and exteriority, constitute one
another through mutual and reciprocal “exposure.” Nancy’s sense of community, as one critic explains, “is a matter of exposure to others who are similarly exposed, a sharing of exposure in which the borders of the individual are neither clearly drawn nor completely effaced” since “[i]f the borders were clearly drawn, there would be no exposure, and thus no community; if the borders were completely effaced, there would be a common substance in which all were immersed” (May 33 – 34).

Blanchot takes up Nancy’s critique of community-as-nostalgia, an aspirational longing for a positive, lost substance (what we might call the object of Gemeinschaft), adding that community should not “dissolve its constituent members into a heightened unity which would suppress itself at the same time that it would annul itself as community” (since such a unity, he argues, would only “expose itself to the same objections arising from the simple consideration of the single individual, locked in his immanence”). Nor, he argues, should community be reduced to “the simple putting in common, inside the limits it would propose for itself, of a shared will to be several, albeit to do nothing” (8, 7). For Blanchot, the form of exposure that establishes true community arises in proximity to another’s death, since death elides human “immanence,” the “origin of the sickest totalitarianism” (2).

As the importance of death in Blanchot’s theory of community suggests, it is not recognition that human beings seek from one another, but rather contestation: “[I]n order to exist

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13 Elsewhere, Nancy expands, writing about the relationship between “meaning” and Being, arguing that “Being cannot be anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the with of this singularity plural coexistence” (Being Singular Plural 3), adding that this “between…the is at the heart of a connection” (5).

14 Both May, in describing a “common substance,” and myself, by describing it as a medium, revert to talking about community as a kind of substance, but it is not a substance that is claimed or possessed, or that is somehow added to individuals.
[the being] goes toward the other, which contests and at times negates it, so as to start being only in that privation that makes it conscious…of the impossibility of being itself, of subsisting as its ipse or, if you will, as itself as a separate individual” (6). What can be described either negatively as a negation or positively as an overcoming of individuality occurs, Blanchot argues, when one is present during the other’s death, since “this is the only separation that can open me, in its very impossibility, to the Openness of a community” (9). The “exposure” of proximity to the other’s death, in other words, obviates unresolved problems relating to the interpersonal dynamics of a “community” of individual subjects. Both Nancy and Blanchot, therefore, abandon the prioritization of the autonomous and possessive individual whose emergence marks at once the inauguration of modernity and the impossibility of true community, calling the individual, in fact, “merely the residue of the experience of the dissolution of community” (Nancy 3).

While Nancy and Blanchot read the long history of western collectivity as an unending elegy for lost community, Roberto Esposito turns to the etymology of the word “community” itself. Through an etymological investigation of community’s organizing principles, Esposito recovers the centrality of obligation through transfer or voidance, as in the giving of a gift. Such a notion of obligation does not, as one who shares Nancy’s or Blanchot’s critical perspective might fear, affirm the proprietary basis of modern individuals but, in fact, “expropriates them of their initial property (in part or completely), of the most proper property, namely, their very subjectivity.” Esposito argues moreover that modern political philosophy “unconsciously presuppose[s]” the very possessive individual that community, etymologically, opposes itself to (7).15

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15 I will return to “possessive individualism,” as developed at length by C. B. Macpherson, in chapter 2.
In fact, Esposito associates modernity directly with the etymological opposite of community, *immunity* (immunity, in a word, to the very voidance and obligation that constitutes community). Immunity, he argues, because it implements the individuating and proprietary borders between subjects (ostensibly protecting them, for example, from the Hobbesian violence that characterizes bare living-together – Esposito, like Blanchot, associates community with death), provides a better explanatory model of modernity than secularization, legitimation, and rationalism (12). Esposito thus shares Nancy’s and Blanchot’s rejection of community as a substance that its members have or share, that is added to, possessed by, or that enhances some prior or foundational subject.

Indeed, in his analysis of democracy and rogue states, Jacques Derrida associates this foundational subject with its political forms so intimately that its decline into illegitimacy (state violence, imperial excess and abuse, etc) seems practically inevitable. “[D]o we really need etymology,” he asks, “when simple analysis would show the possibility of power and possession in the mere positioning of the self as oneself [soi-même], in the mere self-positioning of the self as properly oneself?” (12). Nevertheless, like Esposito, he also turns to etymology, investigating the implications of “ipse” and “ipseity,” “the one-self that gives itself its own law, of autofinality, autotely, self-relation as being in view of the self, beginning by the self and with the end of self in view.” He associates the ontological closure of ipseity with its agency, “some ‘I can,’ or at the very least the power that gives itself its own law, its force of law, its self-representation,” which manifests as a counterproductive force in the context of collective identity as “the sovereign and

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16 Through social contract, Esposito argues, community is not established or stabilized, but sacrificed: “It is sacrificed in the sacrifice not only of the enemy but also of every single member of community, since every member finds in his own being the originary figure of the first enemy. Sacrifice responds to this origin, to the fear that the origin provokes: infinitely reactivating it in a circle from which we still have not emerged” (34).
reappropriating gathering of self in the simultaneity of an assemblage or assembly, being together, or ‘living together,’ as we say.” This “I can,” Derrida argues, reifies something very similar to the possessive “immunity” Esposito describes, functioning at the center, in the very engine, of modern democracy.  

Derrida thus returns us to the question of the relationship between the individual and the social or political body—a question that, Nancy had argued, had its roots in the eighteenth century—but he does so in specifically twentieth-century registers. For Derrida, collectivity is a question of force: *ipseity* implies a convergence of might and right expressed, in one iteration at least, by the wolf, who “represents the sovereign force that gives law and gives itself the right to…, who reasons about and declares what is right, who gives reasons for why he is right, and who wins out over the reasons of the lamb.” The juxtaposition of “reason” and violence is of course a standard and undoubtedly important critique of enlightenment thought, as old at least as Max Horkheimer’s and Theodor Adorno’s seminal *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which asserts the

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17 Derrida proceeds to a direct critique of Nancy’s concept of community (which, for Derrida, is still essentially a democratic one). He calls Nancys community a “sharing as spacing” (44) reiterating the emphasis on community as a medium and adding that such a medium produces a dialectic of equality (which “tends to introduce measure and calculation (and thus conditionality)” and freedom (which “is by essence unconditional, indivisible, heterogeneous to calculation and to measure”) [48]. Rather than dealing in subjects, Derrida writes that Nancy’s reformulation of community and its emphasis on “spacing” allows him to deal in “singularities” defined by exposure (a tidy foil to immunity). Exposure enables a dialectic of interior and exterior that arises from (the calculations of measurable) equality and generates (the necessary immeasurability of) freedom. “But,” Derrida writes, “by effacing the difference of singularity through calculation, by no longer counting on it, measure risks putting an end to singularity itself, to its quality or its nonquantifiable intensity.” Thus, he continues, “[t]he whole question of ‘democracy’ might be configured around this transcendental force: how far is democracy to be extended, the people of democracy, and the ‘each ‘one’ of democracy?” (52, 54).

18 Derrida, 70. The wolf as an expression of sovereign power is expressed and expanded in his series of lectures on “the beast and the sovereign,” which takes an interest in the ontological proximity of beasts and sovereigns, both outside or above the law, suspending the law and yet giving the law, “devouring.” Significantly, Robinson Crusoe becomes central to his analysis of sovereignty, law, and autonomy, which I will return to in chapter two.
patriarchal tendency for violent appropriation that defines the possessive individual (he makes the “in-itself” a “for-him,” for example).

It should be noted, however, that *Dialectic* was first produced in the 1940s, and that it suffers, despite the durability of its arguments, from many of the scholarly limitations of its time. Its archive, for example, is incomplete (it would have benefitted from much of the historicist interest in “recovery” that has dominated eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholarship for the past two decades), and as such its argument actually reproduces some of the very problems it ostensibly identifies and critiques. It makes claims about “enlightenment” thought that work only insofar as its operative definition of “enlightenment thinker” ignores the many women, feminist, anti-slavery, leveling, and atheistic writers who were explicitly (sometimes pejoratively) associated with, or who explicitly identified with, the “Enlightenment,” the “age of reason,” the “empire of light and reason,” etc. It makes a claim about “Enlightenment” that excludes, or that denigrates as secondary or derivative, much of the work that is central to its historical and conceptual development: that of James Beattie, Mary Astell, John Laurens, Catharine Trotter Cockburn, Ottobah Cuguano, Granville Sharp, Mary Wollstonecraft, Olaudah Equiano, William Godwin, and many others. All of this is not of course to suggest that critiques of enlightenment reason, arguments that associate rationalism with Christian violence and Eurocentric patriarchy, can be done away with. There are of course potential (and sometimes obvious) linkages, even in enlightenment-era feminist and abolitionist texts, that make these writers complicit in the empirical and imperial forms attributed to writers like Hobbes, Locke, and Hume. But the ideological diversity of writers associated with enlightenment thought attests to its complexity beyond the reductive characterization supplied by Horkheimer and Adorno.
The theorizations of community that come out of the Nancy-Blanchot dialogue are important and useful, and I am sympathetic with the historical and critical exigencies that motivate them. But they describe neither the experiences of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers whose philosophical, political, and literary works give rise to the modern forms of community that have proven so durable, nor (to return to the Burney epigraph with which I began this introduction) of the non-theorist who, when confronted with the question of community, takes recourse to notions like consent or sentiment – notions that preserve the very individuality Nancy’s and Blanchot’s theories reject. Moreover, to reiterate my own prioritization of the epistemological problems with community, I am after something that is in some ways (or, rather, that presents itself as) prior to social organization; something called “legitimacy” that authorizes or ratifies the social or political body. My object is a set of epistemological problems that social organization – liberal or otherwise – already presupposes or takes for granted. The nature of “brotherhood” or “fellow” or “friend” or “countryman” is less a concern in these pages than the vast but generally unspoken body of foreknowledge that such terms encompass. How does one translate an experience of an other into a claim, or complex of claims, about brotherhood or fellowship in the first place? What must one do in order to convert an encounter with an other into a collective identification? And, having done this, how does one know it has been done completely or correctly? While “correctly” can be interchanged with a variety of other terms (“rationally” or “ethically” for example, themselves interchangeable), the agency I am gesturing toward here amounts to a restatement of the question of legitimacy, to a theorization of how the conversion of stranger to countryman can be done “legitimately.”

Indeed, attending more closely to these epistemological questions makes legible the possibility that the possessive individual is overstated. Its autonomy, its freedom, its self-
sufficiency are not reaffirmed but called into question by traumatic familiarity. Legitimacy, when it is approached as an epistemological problem by the rationally autonomous individual, enacts a radical estrangement that is never resolved and that only disappears when the legitimacy of community “as such” disappears into the ostensible, historical legitimacy of this or that national body. I am therefore not arguing to “recover” the subject or the autonomous individual – nor am I agreeing to leave it behind. Rather, I am tracking an unresolved storyline in its development in order to make clearer the stakes, and the specific challenges, of reconciling the individual and the common.

I would finally add that I am not convinced that the lack or loss Nancy’s nostalgia describes is the same privation of community that the eighteenth century actually attempted to address, since the construction of community in enlightenment thought is actually quite novel. It is not (at least, it is not only) a yearning for a recovery of a lost thing, but a (sometimes radical) reconceptualization, a break from, for example, religious or feudal social forms that self-consciously attempts to revise the possibilities for reconciling individual and social bodies. Social contract theory makes the novelty of modern collective identity explicit, pointing, yes, to the deep past, but also emphatically, even flamboyantly, to a past that is fictional, and whose fictionality is conspicuously foregrounded. If Rousseau is notable because he was the first to register a theoretical nostalgia for a lost community, he is also notable for devising a community that was not only, in many ways and for many readers, counterintuitive, but so much so as to be dangerous: dangerous in its rejection of original sin, in its revolutionary impulses, in its very novelty. It is a strange sort of nostalgia that simultaneously longs for a specific past and is surprised by it, is off-put by its novelty. Again, a full understanding of the “legitimacy” presupposed by social contract theory requires that we take seriously its origins in a pronounced
fictionality and a sustained historicity, either one or the other of which is generally ignored or dismissed. It is this ignoring or dismissing that the interdisciplinarity of this project seeks to address.

Before concluding this already too-long introduction with a brief overview of chapters, I want very quickly to consider one conversation from contemporary theory that has been important in shaping my approach to collective identity in the eighteenth century: the problem of “other minds.” It should be noted first of all that, at first glance, other minds did not present a problem to eighteenth-century writers at all, in the same way that legitimacy did not present a problem to eighteenth-century writers at all, in the same way that legitimacy did not present a problem to Defoe in his “first fountain” metaphor. In its rational priorities and (perhaps inevitable) slide toward Kantian ethics and the categorical imperative, eighteenth-century moral and political thought was premised on the confidence that, on all relevant, governing points, the content of individuals operating in good faith and with uncompromised, disinterested rational faculties (a base line, in fact, that might be called common sense, and that culminated in the self-evidence of revolutionary reform described above) could easily be disclosed or discovered. If even God could be approached through empirical investigation and rational exercise, as Locke and Crusoe insisted, then certainly the mind of the other, when it was not corrupted with luxury, selfish desire, madness, or any of the other contaminants of the state of nature, was entirely accessible. Rousseau’s project, after all, was one of clearing away the corrupting influences of Bourgeois society, rediscovering the transparency with which the foundations of legitimate social organization and the general will could not fail to take hold.

And yet obscurities emerge, and not only does the unknowability of other minds persist, it extends inward to the self as attempts at legitimate collective identification posit the alignment
of self and other. The troubling inward turn of the “other minds” problem is thus, in fact, a common feature of literary and philosophical representations. In his formulation of the uncanny, for example (a formulation that draws heavily on many of the themes – familiarity and terror especially – that I associate with collective identification), Freud writes that E. T. A. Hoffman is “the unrivaled master of conjuring up the uncanny” in part because of his ability to narrate the transfer of “mental processes from the one person to the other…so that the one possesses knowledge, feeling and experience in common with the other, identifies himself with another person, so that his self becomes confounded, or the foreign self is substituted for his own,” thus “doubling, dividing and interchanging the self” (9). While identifying with the other is optimistically suggestive of overcoming some of the strangeness of the other, of translating his or her foreignness into familiarity, it also entails the recognition that the other is fundamentally unapproachable, that something of the other’s strangeness is insurmountably strange: in effect, the appropriation of some of its strangeness into the self. And while Hoffman may represent the master of the uncanny in some respects, the persistent dread of the unapproachability of the other – the obscurity in which he or she is irretrievably locked, and the ensuing consequences of that obscurity for the self – features so heavily in fictions of the eighteenth century that an entire subgenre, plots about incest and its (almost always fortuitous) last-minute circumvention, has developed to redefine tragic hamartia by its terms. When Moll Flanders finally calls from obscurity the provenance of her husband, she learns something that has long been true about herself (that she is incestuous) alongside a deeper truth: that she has always been, to at least that extent, a stranger to herself. She learns of her own unknowability, and of the impossibility,

19 He writes about experiencing the uncanny, for example, if one were to encounter the number 62 “several times in a single day,” as on a cabin room and “cloakroom ticket” (10 – 11), adding his own experience of being lost in the equivalent of a red-light district in Italy when, anxiously trying to extract himself, he finds himself encountering the same landmarks again and again.
precisely because of that unknowability, of occupying a stable place within legitimate social arrangements, of sorting her legitimate from illegitimate desires and practices. Something of the other’s familiarity is purchased (and never fully) only at the expense of the familiarity of the self.

Stanley Cavell comes to a similar point about community in his study of Wittgensteinian notions of “criteria” and “grammar,” analyzing the strange extent to which one’s common expressions apparently rely upon standards for judgment that are at once irreducibly public and irreducibly subjective. “Wittgenstein’s appeal to criteria is meant,” he writes, “exactly to call to consciousness the astonishing fact of the astonishing extent to which we do agree in judgment; eliciting criteria goes to show therefore that our judgments are public, that is, shared” (31). And yet, despite these agreements and the almost intuitive obviousness of their criteria, the uncanny question of agency entailed by Wittgenstein’s notion of grammar emerges: “If I am supposed to have been party to the criteria we have established, how can I fail to know what these are; and why do I not recognize the fact that I have been engaged in so extraordinary an enterprise?” (18).

The most important question of modern political theory, indeed, will be the question Cavell formulates here, that of consent. It will also present itself, in keeping with what I have been suggesting above, as the easiest to resolve. What can be complicated about determining the consent of an individual or a group? I think, in fact, that it is an incredibly difficult question to resolve, especially when framed in its epistemological complexity. To even ask the question – to see the question arise inevitably out of the assumptions that minds make about other minds in a social or political context that assumes the inevitability of shared interests or common “criteria” – estranges not only the terms according to which consent is achieved and expressed intersubjectively, but the terms according to which it is arrived at by the autonomous individual in the first place. Narrative fiction, again, make this estrangement clear where political theory
takes it for granted: in what sense, as Toni Bowers asks, does Pamela “consent” to Mr. B? In what her “consent” consists is unclear, but it is immediately apparent that it is vastly more complex and problematic than the straightforward matter of two individuals accepting the mutually beneficial and universally valid terms of legitimacy suggested by writers like Locke or Pufendorf.

For Cavell, the criteria, as well as the taking-for-granted that they are (and how they come to be) shared, constitute what he otherwise calls the ordinary. When we teach children a word, for example, he argues that, “We initiate them, into the relevant forms of life held in language and gathered around the objects and persons of our world” (178), asking them in a sense to assent to, to hold in common, the terms of our world, terms that we take for granted as ordinary. We ask them to share our sense of the *familiarity*, in other words, that situates us and that grounds our senses of self and other. But we also, in asking this, conjure the possibility that they might refuse. Or, more seriously, we confront the fact that, whether they assent or not, the very need for them to do so defamiliarizes the self-evidence of “our world.” “We begin to feel, or ought to,” Cavell writes, “terrified that maybe language (and understanding, and knowledge) rests upon very shaky foundations – a thin net over an abyss” (178).

This is a version of the terror that readers encounter, I argue, when Robinson Crusoe sees the footprint, when Evelina sees her father, when Lady Betty sees her brother. Like the babysitter in the urban legend who is told the unthinkable, that the disturbing phone calls came from within the house – that she and her charge are not, have never been, alone – these characters are confronted with the terrifying obscurity, the irresolvable distance, that dissociates them from any confidence that they know themselves, the terms of their social embeddedness, their functions and realities as social beings. They are confronted with the distance that dissociates them from
what, constituting the very foundation of their subjectivities, they had taken for granted: that families, nations, parties, and every other ostensibly natural or rationally stable social body are anything more than figments, imagined communities that cannot hold. When they are looked at directly, as when they are cracked or fractured by accident (when one realizes by chance, as Evelina’s father does, that the woman that one had taken as one’s natural daughter, that one had raised as one’s own, is actually a stranger), they vanish into nothing, slipping into darkness like Eurydice (a myth on which I have modeled my entire approach to the problem of legitimacy – I will return to it, briefly, in chapter one).

Thinking about other minds foregrounds of course the kinds of work that minds do. It not only situates the individual within his or her relationality to others, but it provides a foothold for discussing the different ways that relationality can be thought and described. While legitimacy requires rational thought above all, community always seems to begin and end with the imagination. This was particularly true in the eighteenth century, when alignment with the logic of community “as such” seemed like a plausible social and political objective. Given that, what are we to make of the eighteenth-century insistence that 1) all communities, even “natural” ones like the family, are imagined; 2) enlightenment thought positions itself in hostile opposition to the imagination; and 3) communities, at least when they are legitimate, satisfy the realist priorities of enlightenment thought? The concept of nationalism, in part because it circumvents the open questions of the legitimacy of community “as such,” makes the tensions I am formulating here conspicuous: nationalism and its legitimacy are products of the Enlightenment; the Enlightenment is hostile to the imagination; a nation is an “imagined community.” This dissertation seeks to account for these tensions and their development in the eighteenth century.

20 I have in mind here Charles Taylor’s assertion that, in modernity, “a self only exists among other selves,” and that any notion of self that is not socially embedded is unthinkable (35).
Chapter one, “Solitude ‘In the Midst of the World’: the Very Strange and Surprising Adventures of *Robinson Crusoe,*” begins with an examination of the surprising duality of Robinson Crusoe. Throughout the eighteenth century (and indeed into the twentieth), Crusoe is a literary trope that comes to stand, in some contexts, for perfect isolation even while, in others, he represents total social dependence and embeddedness. In what looks like a logical contradiction, Crusoe embodies the difficulty of reconciling the independence of rational autonomy with the necessarily social context in which rationalism arises. In order to analyze this peculiar embodiment, I turn to the work of Rousseau, in which Crusoe has a special prominence. By reading the literary trope of Robinson Crusoe through the narrative and theoretical expositions of Rousseau, a problem of modern political theory begins to emerge – a problem, I argue, that is innate to social contract theory, and to which Rousseau responds by complementing theoretical with novelistic discourses. Taking narrative and fictional discourses more seriously than prior political theorists in his tradition, Rousseau brings out internal contradictions undermining the defining sources of legitimacy that underwrite the social contract.

Namely: social contract theory is based on distinguishing the state of nature from that of civilization, which is privileged over the state of nature and which gives form to the enlightenment telos of social and political order. Rousseau invests this defining binary of political theory with great emphasis by associating each state with its own epistemology. In the state of nature, individuals are irreducibly physical, possessed of “purely physical” (and thus limited) relationality. Civilization after the social contract, in sharp contrast, is defined by “moral relationality.” While all prior descriptions of social contract implicitly share some basic form of this epistemological division, Rousseau – by complementing the mostly theoretical discourses of
The Social Contract with narrative, novelistic discourses, not only in Robinson Crusoe but also in his own Emile and Julie – discovers a barrier to the necessary transition from the first (natural) state to the (civilized) other. “Moral relationality” can only be the product of the social contract; the social contract can only be the product of moral relationality. With this, Rousseau discovers a new way to frame the problem of legitimacy that social contract theory seeks to resolve, even while throwing light on a new one that, he shows, social contract theory creates.

Chapter two, “Traumatic Familiarity: The Search for Legitimacy with ‘Some Man,’ the Savage, and Robinson Crusoe,” concerns itself with the narrative and fictional aspects of social contract theory, especially as developed by Hobbes, Locke, and Pufendorf – earlier writers to whom Rousseau is responding when he foregrounds narrative and fictional conventions in his own work. What do we gain, for example, by looking for a “protagonist” in classical social contract theory?

One answer is that the concept of social experience reveals itself to be central to questions of legitimacy. By thinking about social contract as a narrative, we are left with a clear, historical delineation between the legitimate and the illegitimate. Illegitimate social organization occurs in the state of nature (we might, borrowing again some vocabulary from Rousseau, call the random assemblages of people in the state of nature “aggregates”); legitimate social organization (that of “associations”) occurs after the social contract. Social experience is important to this delineation because, as we find when we take these texts up as narratives, it troubles the very distinctions that they ratify, distinctions that substantiate the “legitimacy” that they advance. By foregrounding the narrative features of social contract theory, we see the extent to which it is premised on the idea that any individual in a state of nature who encounters another will necessarily have two mutually explicit reactions: terror of the other (he or she is a source of
threat to self and belongings, which attests to the need for social contract) and comfort in the other (he or she is a source of comfort and security, which reveals the promise of social contract). Social contract requires both of these experiences, experiences that are not only at cross currents with one another, but which would seem presuppose the legitimacy – the moral relationality – that social contract ostensibly creates.

Chapter three, “Learning the Lessons of Evelina’s Familiarity: The Footprint, Traumatic Familiarity, and a Metaphysics of Legitimacy,” provides an extended analysis of what I call traumatic familiarity. Characters encountering familiars in eighteenth-century novels frequently collapse into distraction and terror, punctuating the extent to which social relationality is at once critically important and totally elusive. The fact that so many plots are resolved or complicated by accident or chance revealing that one’s sister is not really her sister, that one’s son is not really his son, or that one’s wife is actually his mother, shows a broad cultural anxiety about the unstable circuits that link the rational individual with the social and political bodies that define him or her. Exploring traumatic familiarity provides access to social constructs, like “father,” and the extent to which these constructs can be embodied with anything like “legitimacy.”

Chapter four, “An Embarrassment of Legitimacies: Collectives and Counter-Collectives in Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa,” moves from the study of the relationship between the individual body and the social body to a study of the individual in the context of multiple social and political “legitimacies.” This chapter looks at individual agency and responsibility in the context of smaller social groups that exist among and against one another, examining how emerging accounts of legitimacy respond to questions of difference and foreignness. Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa is the chapter’s primary frame. In this novel, the protagonist poses a threat to the novel’s primary community, the family, from within it: one of its members, her brother, is
threatened by a body foreign to that community, a body that attracts Clarissa, in part, because of its foreignness. Her desire for Lovelace and her brother's spite both work to destabilize the otherwise highly ordered and structured (read: “legitimate”) family.

Richardson represents Clarissa’s threat as operating like a contagious disease. She is gradually forbidden to speak to her relations, since her father fears Clarissa will be persuasive and will disrupt the logic and affective structure by which the kinship community sustains itself. The order of this community thus sustains and exerts itself precisely by drawing one of its members further and further to its periphery. Though she is part of why the family constitutes a whole, its preservation as a whole requires, paradoxically, her exile from it. Her status as a member of the community is thus complicated, conditioned by her exclusion from it, while the family's status as a community requires her participation in, and identification with, it.

Chapter five, “Clods, Rocks, Rude Masses, and Mighty Wholes: The Political Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft,” concludes the dissertation with a discussion of a more extreme banishment: Mary Wollstonecraft’s simultaneous association with, and dissociation from, the Scandinavians in her Short Residence letters. By basing her political theory on the principles of materialism, Wollstonecraft begins to abandon the objective premise of social legitimacy and to embrace a temporal model, moving away from the legitimate/illegitimate binary of social contract theory and toward a “universal history” narrative of social change. Ostensibly, her political theory enforces claims of continuity between divergent societies and individuals; most criticism supports this view only by understating Wollstonecraft’s apparent contempt for Scandinavians. In practice however, there are two movements of her Short Residence: political theory that insists that all individuals make up one “mighty whole” and personal narrative that reveals the impossible distance between its protagonist and the unenlightened “brutes” that
surround her. While Wollstonecraft (like Rousseau, both a philosopher and a novelist) continues to use social experience and “realism” to confront the shortcomings of social contract, she too falls short of providing an alternative that is fully rational, equal, free – and thus “legitimate.”
It does not seem very controversial to argue that, within nationalism – a sense of community characterized by Benedict Anderson as “a deep, horizontal comradeship,” or a “fraternity” for which “many millions of people” are willing to die – social experience matters deeply (7). At the same time, it is important in Anderson’s classic formulation that the mechanisms of this fraternity guarantee a sense of comradeship across a broad range of individuals whether they have actually met or not (explaining not only the intense affective investment into memorials of Unknown Soldiers, for example, but the deep symbolic significance of such memorials in the culture of modern nationalism more generally). Interpersonal contact in this context presupposes a loaded and highly invested set of experiences – experiences, as we will see, that carry a peculiar epistemological significance. Indeed, post-romantic literary representations sometimes insist that this quality can be sensed, as if objectively available (however obliquely) to either party. Indeed, the mysterious quality of interpersonal familiarity in the context of shared narrative is often a testament to how “real” (if not “stable”) it is. One may not “know” his or her place within a broad, shared narrative, but he can sense it, as if intuitively, nevertheless.

Consider, briefly, *Daniel Deronda*. The titular character suspects from childhood that he is not Sir Hugo’s son and that his own identity, or at least its knowable contours and provenance, elude him. He comes to discover his identity through contact with two others, his mother and Mordecai, but in a way that privileges the affective and visceral intuition of contact over the formality of more traditionally “objective” knowledge. When he finally meets his mother on her deathbed, there is a striking juxtaposition of Deronda’s desire for a climactic filial bond and his
sense of an irreconcilability so pronounced that, to him, “[h]er worn beauty had a strangeness in it as if she were not quite a human mother, but a Melusina, who had ties with some world which is independent of ours” (518). There is a cold formality to their meeting, “something like a greeting between royalties,” and a vague foreignness to her speech and address, all punctuating a reconciliation that, to Deronda, seemed less real than his countless imagined meetings with her.

Her inhuman otherworldliness, we soon learn, emerges from the fact that she has carefully and deliberately severed him from the narratives that, he senses, ought to have organized his life and experiences. She has extracted herself, not only from connection to her son, but from the collective identity to which they both ‘actually’ belong, and thus from the mechanisms of Andersonian fraternity. He learns, most significantly, that he is of Jewish parentage, and the essentially formal self-education that contact with his mother represents radically changes his position in, and attitudes toward, an interpersonal world: he departs from her feeling like “an older man” who had “gone through a tragic experience which must for ever solemnize his life and deepen the significance of the acts by which he bound himself to others” (554). She mediates this knowledge to him, but (ashamed of her own “true” identity and wanting something “better” for her son) she does not share in it with him; it does not organize her own experiences and priorities, so her otherworldliness must remain unresolved: she is, in some important and persistent sense, deeply unfamiliar to her own son.

By sharp contrast, Deronda’s experience of Mordecai is marked by an uncanny and highly compelling sense of connection, which becomes a principle theme in the novel. Deronda encounters Mordecai in a bookshop and is inexplicably impressed by something profound or significant about him. For all the enthusiastic rhetoric surrounding Deronda’s first impression (his figure is “somewhat startling in its unusualness,” we are told), it is easy to forget that
Mordecai is actually rather unremarkable: he is “doing nothing more remarkable than reading the yesterday’s Times,” he has a “typical Jewish face,” and is “familiar and unexciting enough to the inhabitants of this street” (319). Yet within an exchange of only a few lines Mordecai asks Deronda perhaps the novel’s most generative question: “You are perhaps of our race?” Deronda’s ignorant denial is immediately associated with mutual embarrassment and disappointment, which however does not discourage an eventual engagement in friendship and mutual interest. Unlike his mother, Deronda invests himself heavily in shared narratives, not creating but correcting loose ends, first reconciling Mordecai to his estranged sister, and then eventually marrying her. In contrast to the inhuman foreignness evoked by meeting his own mother, Deronda’s encounter with this stranger is steeped in an uncanny proto-recognition of a “race” that (he will soon discover) is his own, a politics that he will share and develop, and even a family that he will join. He senses a connection with Mordecai, and that connection becomes reified; the reification, moreover, enabled by his encounter with his mother, is subordinated, almost as a formality, to the more essential and privileged visceral connection that he had already sensed.

While this is not the place to argue that Daniel Deronda pursues or does not pursue something like a national argument, I am interested in how recognition and social experience work in the novel, written during, and concerned with, the emergence and prominence of historical forms of collective identity, including nationalism. Collective identity is an explicit concern for George Eliot, and understanding how it works in the novel accentuates the

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21 More specifically, critics have been interested in defining the extent to which Daniel Deronda posits something like Jewish identity as either an extension or as a reversal of an either lesser-defined or more “universal” identity or preoccupation, bringing “imagined community” in its historical forms to the fore. See Kwame Anthony Appiah’s “Introduction: Making Conversation,” xi – xxi; Thomas Albrecht, “‘The Balance of Separateness and Communication’: Cosmopolitan Ethics in George Eliot’s Daniel Deronda”; Amanda Anderson, “George Eliot and the Jewish Question”; Michael Ragussis, Figures of Conversion: "The Jewish Question" and English National Identity; among many others.
significance of social experience. Deronda’s privileged contact with Mordecai, despite its ostensible poverty of content, implicates something unknown but very real nevertheless. His encounters with his mother and with Mordecai are distinguished by the entailments of community, whether formally disclosed or undisclosed, through these experiences. It is not just that Deronda’s community with his mother (formally legitimate, if legitimate at all, only to the extent that it is made knowable) remains lacking and unresolved, and that his social experience at this point is therefore unsatisfying. This dissatisfaction, I argue, reveals to Deronda the lacking, unresolved nature of his community with his mother, reveals to him a sense of illegitimacy, and is suggestive of the absence of the kind of fraternity expressed in Andersonian nationalism. If Locke is right that “all princes and rulers of independent governments…are in a state of nature,” it does not seem insignificant that Eliot describes Deronda’s encounter with his mother as “something like a greeting between royalties.” Outside, or in the conscious rejection of, such collective narratives and historical forms as race or nation, interpersonal encounters (and this becomes especially pronounced here, since Deronda’s meeting with his mother is literally intended to reestablish or recover legitimacy) come nevertheless to approximate encounters in a state of nature, a state of illegitimacy.

Ultimately, there is something deeply comforting about the socio-political premises of Daniel Deronda: Mordecai’s mysterious draw speaks to the legitimacy of Deronda’s place in the world, which he has only to uncover from the obscurity of the past. It makes that legitimacy available to him as a prior, ontologically stable entity. I would even use the term “familiar” to characterize Deronda’s experience of Mordecai, even though Mordecai is a stranger, since it describes an experience approaching fraternity (in an Andersonian sense or otherwise) in the novel.
Indeed, as I have just noted, Deronda’s unwitting denial of his Jewish identity to Mordecai is conspicuously associated with shame: “Deronda coloured deeply, not liking the grasp, and then answered with a slight shake of the head, ‘No’” (320). I am reminded of Eve Sedgwick’s description in *Touching Feeling*, of glancing at the downtown Manhattan skyline, looking for “the familiar sight of the pre-September 11 twin towers,” negotiating an expectation of recognition and familiarity, yet feeling, in her disappointment, that “shame was what I would feel” (35). Deronda’s shame is an index to a sensed or expected familiarity, a recognition that does not reciprocate, that becomes strange and that, in becoming strange, reveals how stable the undisclosed basis of recognition had seemed to be.

And there is the emphasis in Deronda’s desperate interjection when his mother reveals his parentage – “Then I *am* a Jew?”22 – an emphasis that marks less a revelation than an affirmation, and reveals a system of collective identities which need not be fully disclosed in order to be sensed as real and legitimate. True, without the formal disclosure of his parentage Deronda would not likely have been able to marry Mirah or to be taken seriously as a proponent of Mordecai’s political principles. It is not my argument that post-romantic, historically-determined collective identification does away with the narrative and rational foundations of legitimacy (they obviously hold an important place – Deronda meets Mordecai and first engages his interest while attempting to purchase a book of Jewish history, after all). But I want to underline the extent to which, even without such disclosure, collectivity is “real” and becomes available, through a kind of social experience I approximate with familiarity, for example, to the subject. Legitimacy as it comes to be constructed in the nineteenth century is not constructed by, dependent upon, or determined by Deronda’s rational acknowledgements or consent. It is there whether he “knows” it or not, hailing him and patiently awaiting his return.
1: “Solitude ‘In the Midst of the World’: the Very Strange and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe”

“People think they come together in the theatre, and it is there that they are isolated” (16 – 17)

Rousseau, *Letter to D’Alembert*

Early in his lengthy, mawkish poem “The Weeping Bard; or Genius in Distress” (1787 – 88), Robert Alves makes what initially appears to be a fairly standard reference to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, exploiting the protagonist’s legacy as a model of the modern solitary individual. Addressing “chief dear Crusoe,” whose story he had read as a child, Alves writes:

> How must thou pine, left all alone,  
> With nought but sea and sky around thee thrown,  
> Pent up in desart-ile forlorn,  
> Th’ eternal murmur of whose angry deep,  
> All waste and wild far off for many a mile,  
> Forbids all intercourse with dear mankind! (60 – 61)

Alves knows his readers will recognize in Crusoe a standard of sentimental, if not romantic, isolation, suggesting by analogy the “weary web of woes” and “sorrow-chequer’d gloom” of the poet’s own youth, which it is the business of his third canto to relate. The following stanza is clearly meant to extend the analogy of Crusoe’s radical isolation, but its opening lines do as much to reverse as to develop this theme:

> Are we not all such exiles here below?  
> Banish’d a while from heaven our native shore! (61)

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While the former stanza is written as an apostrophe, it is qualified by the pensively speculative “how must thou pine,” thus performing even as it portrays the impossibility of “intercourse with dear mankind” embodied by Crusoe on his island. In the latter stanza, however, Alves seems to revoke the status of the reference, shifting from “how must thou” to “are we not all,” not only registering a problem that is fundamentally social – the “world” in its fallen state – but doing so with a level of measured certainty, and in the communal form of the first-person-plural. The trope of Crusoe as it appears in the first stanza should seem fundamentally at odds with the analogy in the second. To be sure, a certain kind of alienation is expressed in both cases, but it is sustained only by ignoring the distinction between alienation of society (as from God) and alienation from society: the very distinction, of course, that the trope of “chief dear Crusoe” enacts in the first place. For Alves, Crusoe is evocative of total social isolation as well as its opposite, a profoundly shared, social experience.

Other references to Crusoe suggest the same, or a very similar, contradictory legacy. While for obvious reasons the vast majority of allusions to Crusoe throughout the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries conjure the human being in social isolation, important exceptions insist on the possibility of Crusoe standing for specific kinds of social embeddedness and negotiation. I am not referring to allusions that simply hold one kind of experience (that of isolation) up against another (sociability), usually in order to privilege the latter as morally or practically superior. Of course, Robinson Crusoe has often been used in this way; James Beattie, for example, argues that Crusoe “fixes in the mind a lively idea of the horrors of solitude, and, consequently, of the sweets of social life, and of the blessings we derive from conversation, and
mutual aid” (311). Rather, the Robinson Crusoe trope holds interest for me precisely when it authorizes expressions and analogies of explicit social engagement and determinacy: not isolation in contrast to sociability but isolation qua sociability. The sociable Crusoe, I will be arguing, is not a sloppy bit of mixed metaphor, but a wholly new and different trope, a symptomatic exposure of a pervasive sense that something has gone wrong in the ways that various theories have linked the concept of legitimate collectivity with the concept of the autonomous individual. Specifically, it opens onto a difficulty in conceiving of the complete moral, political, and economic autonomy of the subject presupposed by modern theories of social and political legitimacy – autonomy so perfect as to be expressed by the solitary figure, the master of self and environment, purged of outside contingencies. The sociable Crusoe therefore dramatizes some version of the central problems that motivate Hannah Arendt’s search for Kant’s “nonwritten political philosophy” (19), a philosophy that, more than any other, would have married “the insight that men are dependent on their fellow men not only because of their having a body and physical needs but precisely for their mental faculties” with the moral and rational autonomy of “the self in its independence of others” (14, 19). To frame this difficulty in Arendt’s terms, the individual’s independence (the rational autonomy that isolation signifies) is the paradoxical condition of the legitimacy of his or her dependence, and this is the condition that the sociable Crusoe expresses.

This difficulty (which, not incidentally, can only be exposed through narrative) is therefore one of assigning ontological priority either to any coherent notion of legitimate social

24 This frequently reproduced quotation comes from his *Dissertations Moral and Critical*, 1783. See also his *Essays on Poetry and Music, as they Affect the Mind*, in which he claims that there is no “tale better contrived for communicating to the reader a lively idea of…the sweets of social life” (205), or *A Father’s instructions*, by Percival Thomas, which argues that *Crusoe* “above all…enables us to perceive, in their full extent, the intellectual, moral, and religious aid we derive from society” (324).
organization or to the liberal subject who is its constituent-member. While political theorists, especially those in the social contract tradition, take some version of this prioritization for granted, narrative treatments (both from within and beyond that tradition) problematize it, developing an autonomous subject that is at once the source and the product of social legitimacy. By describing a socially embedded character as an isolate, the terms of his or her sociability (which might include a wide range of positions, from dependence on others to the oppression of others) are suppressed, revealing the difficulty of reconciling the autonomous individual with her compliment, social legitimacy.

Frances Burney’s *The Wanderer: or, Female Difficulties*, for example, concludes by calling Juliet, the novel’s protagonist, “a being who had been cast upon herself; a female Robinson Crusoe, as unaided and unprotected, though in the midst of the world, as that imaginary hero in his uninhabited island” (873). Indeed, the comparison at first seems almost self-evident, recalling unproblematically the “wanderer’s” castaway, vaguely foreign status. It recalls Juliet’s resourcefulness, of course, but also her sense of unforgiving isolation “in the midst of the world,” a polite (if often petty) society that, until the denouement, she believes will not and perhaps cannot absorb her. And yet it is this same polite society that (indeed, almost to an oppressive extent) engages with her, teases her, converses with her, learns from her, conducts business with her, visits her, employs her, travels with her, dines with her, courts her, puts her on

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25 I will develop this idea further in the following two chapters. It should suffice to note here that the social contract represents an overcoming of the limitations of the state of nature, that its power lies in the fact that it is not arbitrary but a reflection of rational deliberation and intentionality. The rational subject and the social contract cannot thus be said to appear simultaneously and spontaneously, as if sprung from the ground, but through a process that entails human, and “humanizing,” agency. For Kant’s part, the prioritization is expectedly more complex. In his *Critique of Judgment*, for example, he writes that “To be self-sufficient, hence not to need society, yet without being unsociable, i.e., fleeing it, is something that comes close to the sublime, just like any superiority over needs” (157).
stage, and generally draws her into social and economic exchanges despite her frequent misgivings. It is an eminently social novel that, nevertheless, very much seems to be a novel about isolation from society; one scarcely notices how counterintuitive the allusion to Crusoe is, the emblematic conclusion of a novel precisely about “intercourse with dear mankind” (even though limits – always socially imposed – give shape and tension to those negotiations).

This counterintuitive image of the Crusoe, resourceful in solitude “in the midst of the world,” proves surprisingly durable. It returns, for example, in the person of Hank Morgan, the Yankee of Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*. After being knocked unconscious in a brawl, Morgan, a worker in an arms factory, awakens in the deep past, where he is brought to King Arthur’s court. Distressed by the lack of technology and amenities, as well as by the fatuity of his new society, he writes, “I saw that I was just another Robinson Crusoe cast away on an uninhabited island, with no society but some more or less tame animals” (100).

While Morgan is vexed by his perceived isolation from society, he is also “troubled,” in the very next paragraph, by “the immense interest which people took in” him, complaining that “the whole nation wanted a look at” him. Hank Morgan, like Juliet, thus draws upon the total isolation of Robinson Crusoe in order to describe his social embeddedness, while simultaneously suppressing the unsatisfying ties that constitute that embeddedness.

Meanwhile, specific types of social dependence and social intimacy appear to be especially susceptible to approximation with Crusoe. In some contexts, references to Crusoe and his island signal, not isolation from shared experiences, but precisely the extent to which experiences can be held in common. The protagonist of George Sand’s *Nanon*, for example, reconciled with Emilien and his former servant Dumont, settle in the rustic and pastoral Berry, near an abandoned granite quarry. While they largely – but not entirely – dissociate themselves
from anything like polite society, their experience is explicitly social, and their intimacy and friendship contribute much to the pleasure of their idyllic life. Significantly, the nostalgic tone of this scene contrasts sharply with the distress of Nanon’s actual solitude several pages earlier. Nevertheless, she insists, “au milieu de l’anarchie des campagnes et du dépeuplement force, nous étions là un peu comme Robinson dans son île” [we lived in this place in the midst of general anarchy and depopulation much like Robinson Crusoe on his island]. At one point, reinforcing the allusion, they find the footprint of a child on the bank of a river: “nous nous regardâmes, Émilien et moi, et la meme pensée nous vint” [we looked into each other’s faces, and the same thought came to Emilien and myself] (147). So far from a trope of total isolation, Crusoe becomes fundamentally suggestive of the two characters’ social intimacy: “Nous avions lu Robinson ensemble avec délices” [We had read Robinson together with delight], she writes. “Nous nous étions rêvé, nous aussi, une île à nous deux” [We had dreamed of a desert island for ourselves alone] (146 – 147). Sand’s island allusion does not acknowledge that the romance of solitaires (the tradition Nanon celebrates here) is often, if not “civil” in the Habermasian sense, explicitly social, nor does she appear interested in the extent to which her own narrative contributes to the construction of literary conventions of Romantic, social intimacy.

Similarly, though with very different effect, George Eliot alludes to the island trope to describe the intimacy of a social relationship. In Felix Holt, Mr. Lyon falls in love with the grieved, vagrant widow Annette Ledru, whom he takes, with her child, under his care. They eventually marry, and, Eliot writes, “It was clear that Annette,” a mother and a new wife, “regarded her life as…an existence on a remote island where she had been saved from wreck” (85). Her affections for Lyons – but not for her child – soon cool, and in three years she is dead.
In both *Nanon* and *Felix Holt*, it is the social relationship itself, and not the actual solitude that precedes it, that evokes the trope of Robinson Crusoe.

Perhaps even more than that of romantic or sexual intimacy, the context of education appears to have been especially receptive to analogy with the sociable Crusoe. The author and educator Stephanie Felicite Genlis’s *New Method of Instruction for Children from Five to Ten Years Old*, for example, contains a lengthy narrative of a “little society” – four children, their wealthy parents, their tutor, an apprentice, and the patriarch’s “mason’s son…dressed as a savage” – who reenact / reimagine the events of *Robinson Crusoe*, which one of the party “was at that time reading” (128, 123). This imaginative and dramatic exercise, Genlis insists, is a useful, and essentially social, pleasure. A more subtle (but more telling) treatment can be found in Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda*, in which Rachel, whom Clarence renames Virginia, is raised, educated, and then courted in what Clarence insists is a condition of social isolation. He regards her as a “child of nature,” rather than of society, and tests her rustic simplicity by offering her “a pair of diamond earrings and a moss rosebud.” Of course, she rejects the earrings, confirming his fantasy. They are valueless to her, and “consequently as useless…as guineas were to Robinson Crusoe on his desert island” (371 – 372).

In fact, however, her upbringing was tightly controlled, and her “desert island” values are the product of her grandmother’s jealous scrutiny: not “naturally” occurring, but heavily mediated and carefully shaped. To be sure, she does not share *his* social background, and is not to that extent a member of *his* community, unless he makes her so. After all, he knows the value of diamonds (and so does the reader), even if he disdains them, and even if he values Virginia for rejecting them. He has pierced ears himself, though he is pleased that the concept horrifies Virginia’s simplicity. His “testing” her therefore involves a great deal of artifice: the “right”
answers actually only serve to confirm the great distance that he has already imagined between himself (familiar with society) and her (isolated from society). This distance, which he partially discovers and partially constructs, is crucial, as it helps to explain his eagerness to discard Virginia’s Grandmother’s dying wish, “Never, never come after her, when I am dead and gone!” (366). Perhaps, if Crusoe is at all relevant here, the roles must be reversed. He changes her name as Crusoe changes Friday’s, as a gesture of taking possession. Just as, from Crusoe’s point of view, the trace of Friday’s socially-determined past and values-system can be regarded as invalid (unchristian) and insignificant (savage) – and thus dismissed as never legitimately extant in the first place – “Virginia” is represented as a complete social isolate, not because she ever actually was one, but so that she can become more fully and more “legitimately” his.

Edgeworth, Twain, Burney, Alves, and many others contribute to the afterlife of Robinson Crusoe in similarly surprising and counterintuitive ways. He remains an acknowledged shorthand for solitude, isolation, and absolute independence, and yet he comes to function, in that same capacity, as an apparently unproblematic analogue for the socially active and interdependent individual. What is surprising is how true these countervailing allusions ring: most of these Crusoe analogies pass by any first reading rather unproblematically. The authors’ renderings of social engagement are built upon the premise of an apparently self-evident – but, in fact, demonstrably contrived – social isolation. More specifically, these writers draw upon Crusoe in order to characterize moments during which claims of radical social dissociation constitute a form of identification that is nevertheless, fundamentally, socially determined. That is, in such cases, “Robinson Crusoe” is a form of collective identity – but it is one whose duality says as much about the (perhaps inescapably) antilogous structure of legitimate collective
identification itself as about the specific social body in question. There are two interrelated points that can be made about the underlying premises of enlightenment collectivity at this point.

The Crusoian construction of collectivity foregrounds, first of all, the subjective nature of collective identification. To identify with a collective body implies a claim that there is such a thing as a collective body – one that has priorities, values, and other privileged modes of social and material organization that, moreover (taking for granted for a moment the identifier’s interest in legitimacy), align its terms with nature (in the case of families) or right reason (in the case of the state or political party) rather than, say, corrupting ambition, arbitrary fortuna, or purblind self interest. Choosing the rosebud over the diamond ostensibly represents legitimately uncorrupted valuation, so aligning one’s self with an individual – or, more potently, with a political party, family, nation, class, etc. – who rejects the emblematic diamonds self-referentially affirms the uncorrupted valuation of both parties. Collective identification puts into effect the claim, moreover, that such priorities are not only knowable (and legitimate to the extent that they are knowably “correct”), but also objectively distinct from those of other social bodies organized according to contrary values. Such distinctions authorize, in other words, “a widely shared sense of legitimacy” that Charles Taylor associates with “modern social imaginaries,” constructs that organize modern collectivity according to principles of “mutual respect and service” (23, 13). While, in contrast to pre-modern descriptions of social life, modern social imaginaries are not direct reflections of hierarchical, Platonic organization with a basis in objective and cosmic reality, Taylor argues that it “would be a mistake” to “think that our modern notions of moral order lack altogether an ontic component” (10). Legitimate collectivity suggests that ontologically stable and prior modes of mutuality – modes derived from Grotius and Locke according to which respect for “life, liberty,” and “sustenance of self and family” is
advanced – are recognizable, recognized, and appropriated by the individual (or taken for granted by the individual whose tacit consent to social and political arrangements presupposes their recognition and appropriation in some prior moment of contract).

But the claims I associate with the social Crusoe call attention to the role that the identifying individual must play in constructing the social body, and thus to the performative role that he or she plays in determining the otherwise seemingly (and seemingly prior) sovereign, self-referentially objective, or logically closed legitimization of its values. The “ontic component” of a given community thus goes no further than its appropriation or rejection: two actions which, however, already presuppose an “ontic component.” This performativity is apparent in Frances Burney’s *The Wanderer*. Juliet is, in every practical sense, a member of the novel’s community. Moreover, the economic and social interactions that bind her to the novel’s many other characters clearly constitute a kind of broad, if sometimes reluctant, consent. Of course, Juliet does not like her position in the novel’s society, but it is nevertheless a clear and demonstrably social position. Describing her as a complete social isolate effectively undermines any sense that the novel contains an objective community grounded upon consent, sociality, political discourse, sexual courtship, economic activity, shared discourses of taste (all of which describe her interactions with her society), as well as the many other aspects that make the novel’s “world” knowable as a coherent whole.

In some obvious ways, the Wanderer’s suppression of objective community is highly problematic. It allows her to hold consent and dissociation in suspension, for example, selectively and preferentially conferring to her counterparts any sense that they hold anything in common (any sense, that is, that the novel’s various communities are constituted, not by arbitrary preference, but by consensual social activity, shared values, and by financial and political
interdependence). She is “in the midst” of the world, but not of it; she is separable from it, even though she, as an active constituent engaged in its economic and social doings, constitutes it. The countervailing implications of Juliet’s associations and dissociations are especially pronounced in her attitudes about class. Her insistence on respecting laborers, for example, is undermined by the distance she constantly places between herself and the novel’s rustic caricatures (or, at best, in the begrudging acceptance that her economic dependence bears some similarity to theirs), as well as by the unlikely association she desperately tries to secure between herself and the wealthy, entitled Aurora. 

At the same time, and precisely because the gesture is an undermining one, it allows for the possibility of social and political change. It is in this sense that the novel’s society opens itself up to potential reform, which helps to make sense of Burney’s association, in the novel’s vaguely optimistic conclusion, of the female Robinson Crusoe with “female difficulties,” the novel’s subtitle. By challenging the “ontic component” of the social or political world – the “real” foundations that she refuses to reify by refusing to identify in will with the social body to which she already belongs in practice – Juliet makes it available to revision.

The second and more general problem with collective identification as a product of enlightenment thought is the stubborn possibility that the “world,” the “nation,” and even the family, is therefore always and irreconcilably other, and that the reciprocal legitimizing relationship between the individual body (as legitimate member or possible member) and the social or political body (as a real, legitimate entity) is weak. Solitude “in the midst of the world,”

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26 “In fact,” it will be objected, “Juliet has much more in common with Aurora.” But the “in fact” of this objection is precisely what I want to challenge. What constitutes belonging to Aurora’s community “in fact?” According to what criteria is her connection to Aurora more substantial than her connection to those whose financial instability and dependence she shares, those with whom she interacts more frequently, those with whom the novel’s other wealthy characters constantly associate her?
a construction whose contradictions are rarely conspicuous, reveals a categorical instability in the status of those social relations and interdependencies it seeks to reinforce through association or to erase through dissociation. In the examples above, imagining isolation is imagining community, and it is worth looking at the kinds of critical intervention such an imagining might constitute. What does the trope of the social isolate and its persistence tell us about the premises of sociality and collectivity operative during the Enlightenment? About the premises that enlightenment collectivity strives to suppress or reject? I will attempt to address these questions by turning to the Crusoian moment in one of its most extended treatments.

Although in problematic ways, Belinda and Nanon explicitly recall this text as one that, perhaps more than any other, articulates the odd duality of Robinson Crusoe. Clarence discovers Virginia, after all, upon abandoning pre-revolutionary France, disgusted by “the Parisian belles,” “full of vanity, affectation, and artifice.” He has read Rousseau, and, in imitation of Emile, he scours the countryside for a “Sophia,” eager to embark upon “the romantic project of educating a wife for himself” (362). Indeed, the social isolate receives its best-known, most rigorous, and perhaps clearest articulation in Rousseau’s Emile, where Crusoe is the model upon which Emile ostensibly explores his “island” as a merely physical being, but by which his social intimacy with, and dependence upon, his preceptor is suppressed.

THE AUTHORITY OF SOLITUDE: EMILE

Claims of social isolation play a key role in Emile. Indeed, isolation is the very condition of Emile’s privileged education, entailing an existence that is, initially, “purely physical,” rather than moral and social. Rousseau insists that, in the first and foundational stages of his education, Emile “gets his lessons from nature and not from men,” and that he “instructs himself so much the better because he sees nowhere the intention to instruct him.” Emile learns not through
lectures, precepts, or reading, but by experiencing the necessary and direct consequences of his actions, suffering if he breaks his windows, for example, not from reprimands or slaps, but from the cold of night: “[P]unishment as punishment must never be inflicted on children,” he writes, “but it should always happen to them as a natural consequence of their bad action” (101).

By learning through natural rather than social consequences, Emile judges and “reasons in everything immediately related to him” (119). To illustrate this immediacy and the values it imparts, Rousseau provides the example of a philosopher, who, “relegated to a desert island with instruments and books, sure of spending the rest of his days there…will hardly trouble himself any longer about the systems of the world,” and “will perhaps not open a single book in his life.” Rather, he will occupy himself with becoming acquainted with “the last nook and cranny of his island,” limiting himself – as Emile should, from the earliest and most formative points in his education – to “the kinds of knowledge” for which he has “natural taste” and to which “instinct leads us to seek.” The philosopher thus comes to distinguish “between the inclinations which come from nature and those which come from opinion” (167). The student, responding exclusively to “natural” and immediate concerns, and isolated from “opinion” and recognizable intentionality, forges a relationship to his environment that is merely physical, and not (yet) moral. Emile is “still almost only a physical being,” Rousseau writes, and he has “only natural and purely physical knowledge,” entailing “the essential relations of man to things but nothing of the moral relations of man to man” (187, 207). This merely physical existence is the necessary foundation of the transparent, virtuous, and moral life of the fully developed, social adult citizen.

Thus, Robinson Crusoe is the one book that “to my taste, provides the most felicitous treatise on natural education.” Rousseau famously writes that Robinson Crusoe
will alone compose [Emile’s] whole library, and it will always hold a distinguished place there. It will be the text for which all our discussions on the natural sciences will serve only as a commentary. It will serve as a test of the condition of our judgment during our progress; and so long as our taste is not spoiled, its reading will always please us. (184)

Crusoe holds significance for the tutor precisely because, although he is “alone, deprived of the assistance of his kind and the instruments of all the arts,” he is self-sufficient, providing for all of his basic needs by his own labor, always with reference to the voice of nature alone, and never, in any meaningful way, to the voice of opinion. (This reading of Crusoe is of course its own kind of fantasy, since Crusoe’s survival marshals various resources made available by the ship and Crusoe’s past. Suvir Kaul notes, for example, that Crusoe’s life “by no means recapitulates a pre-technological existence,” adding that “his survival within, and then his mastery over, nature derive from his experience and knowledge as an English participant in trans-Atlantic trade and plantation” [71]). “This is how we realize the desert island which served me at first as a comparison,” writes Rousseau.

This state, I agree, is not that of social man; very likely it is not going to be that of Emile. But it is on the basis of this very state that he ought to appraise all the others. The surest means of raising oneself above prejudices and ordering one’s judgments about the true relations of things is to put oneself in the place of an isolated man… (184 – 185)

This claim powerfully articulates Emile’s central premise, suggesting not only that “the true relations of things” can only manifest themselves in the natural course of interacting immediately with the world in social isolation, but also that they will, perhaps necessarily, falter in obscurity.
The unique promise of Emile’s education rests in an epistemology uncontaminated by any social mediation. At its purely physical stage, he “does not yet have a sufficient sense of his relations with his species to be able to judge of others by himself”; thus “the true relations of things” – or any legitimate judgment about them – bears no trace of socially determined, or even socially aware, relations and judgments. He “knows no human being other than himself alone, and he is even far from knowing himself” (187). He embodies the principle that one must initially judge of the relations of things with no moral concept of self and others.

And yet, as critics are quick to note, Emile’s experiences are explicitly social. Frederick Neuhouser writes for example that, “at least in a broad sense,” Emile’s education is social in that “it depends on an enduring, substantive relationship between two individuals” (160, although I find nothing particularly “broad” about this use of the term “social”). Crusoe is a trope that organizes, after all, “our discussions,” “our judgment,” and “our progress.” Like Nanon and Emilien, Rousseau and Emile read Crusoe as an intimate form of social pleasure. Indeed, the course of Emile’s early education, for all of its emphasis on purely physical epistemology, is characterized as a social project, that of exploring a shared island: Emile muses that “All those people so proud of their talents in Paris would not know how to do anything on our island” (188), adding that he is ready for moral instruction when “we have visited the whole island” (192, all emphasis added).

Indeed, Rousseau immediately follows the image of the philosopher “relegated to a desert island with instruments and books” with another that, like that of Robert Alves, conflates total

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27 The claim also suggests that it is possible to “put oneself in the place of an isolated man” in the first place, and that it is useful to put oneself into a state that is “very likely not going to” come to literal fruition – a peculiar reversion to the unlikely that, indeed, seems rather contrary to the natural immediacy privileged by Emile’s early education (the clearest indication yet that the privileged, “purely physical” state is being endorsed from outside of that state).
isolation with total human community: “[t]he island of humankind,” he tellingly insists, “is the earth” (167). (What, in the context of such a conflation, can putting “oneself in the place of an isolated man” mean? In what sense does isolation maintain its defining content?) While Emile’s education puts him into an explicitly social relationship, the narrator insists that he “has only natural and purely physical knowledge,” that he “is alone in human society,” and that “he counts on himself alone.” Moreover, he privileges this isolated status as conferring upon his pupil, “more than [upon] anyone else…the right to count on himself, for…he has no errors, or only those that are inevitable for us. He has no vices, or only those against which no man can guarantee himself” (207, 208). Beginning Emile’s next, moral phase of education, the preceptor perplexingly insists that “my Emile has until now looked only at himself” (235). To account for the claims by which Emile’s education is privileged, to understand its promise (and thus, in large part, the promise of Rousseau’s contribution to Western political and moral philosophy), one must account for its reversion to the trope of Crusoe “in the midst of the world.”

THE AUTHOR OF SOLITUDE: THE TUTOR

At least two options for reconciling Emile’s sociality and isolation present themselves. The first is that there is no contradiction, and that Emile’s isolation constitutes, in fact, isolation. Arguments from the social contract tradition do allow, to some extent, for the framing of social engagement in such a way that Emile’s solitude might be taken at face value. The second is that isolation, as Emile’s tutor understands it, approximates the kind of autonomy suggested by the “general will.” This second suggestion is at least in keeping with the sort of moral and rational agency developed by Kant, whose categorical imperative, entailing total self-sufficiency and total universalism, derives in part from the general will. This section will examine both of these
options, explaining further why each falls short of a satisfying account of Emile’s Crusoian duality.

While the rationale that motivates it is highly problematic, a logic for accepting the “solitude” of Emile, first of all, is conceivable. The tradition of social contract theory offers grounds for taking Emile’s isolation at face value by defining community in ways that exclude children. Hobbes, for example, precludes children from any meaningful engagement in the commonwealth because they, along with “Fooles, and Mad-men…have no use of Reason” and thus “can be no Authors…of any action,” including the making of covenants, “done by them” (113). Similarly, Locke equates “lunatics and idiots” with children “never set free from the government of their parents,” arguing that these individuals are excluded from law, “for nobody can be under a law which is not promulgated to him; and this law being promulgated or made known by reason only, he that is not come to the use of his reason cannot be said to be under this law” (125, 123). Community is conceived in each case such that children cannot participate; perhaps Rousseau’s insistence on social isolation in Emile is in keeping with this conception. After all, the tutor is certainly a “moral” being, even while Emile continues to be “merely physical.” In what sense is a relationship, companionship, or community between a moral being and a merely physical being possible? What is the status of the “merely physical” individual and his “moral” counterpart on their shared island?

This reading seems plausible, and it corroborates Rousseau’s further insistence, in his critique of Locke’s treatise on education, that children cannot be reasoned with.\(^{28}\) But while it credibly sustains Emile’s status as a purely physical being, it negates his tutor’s as a social and

\(^{28}\) Rousseau critiques Locke’s “great maxim” of reasoning with children as a backwards attempt “to make the product the instrument,” since “[i]f children understood reason, they would not need to be raised” (Emile: 89) – a gesture that draws lines clearly akin to those upon which Hobbes’s arguments depend.
moral one – a status defined, again, by knowledge of “the moral relations of man to man,” which the tutor’s function clearly presupposes. Taking seriously the novel’s “island” isolation would entail the unlikely concession that the tutor realizes his promise as a moral being (since his function as a teacher is the manifestation of his moral relationality, his own iteration of the telos towards which Emile himself is being led) in a context, one of only things (human and nonhuman), in which moral relationality and epistemology are impossible.

If the tutor and his pupil are isolated, it is precisely because Emile’s existence is purely physical. Such a relationship, however, especially insofar as it represents the choice and deliberation of the tutor, would seem to privilege natural over civil liberty. This would have a certain but limited appeal for Rousseau (and he is sometimes accused of precisely such privileging). It would remove some of the daunting improbabilities that his moral relationality functions to resolve, for example, including any possibility of *amour-propre*. The tutor becomes immune to opinion and interpersonal judgment even as he embodies “the moral relations of man to man,” thus maintaining his integrity (and, it follows, his authority as a teacher, as a moral being) by reducing Emile to a means to that end. Clarence, of Belinda, seeks a similar kind of relationship, striving to become a beneficiary of association with his innocent and “natural” Rachel/Virginia despite his diamonds, pierced ears, and worldliness. By associating with the totally isolated innocent (or by becoming an object of desire for an individual whose desires are purely natural), he attempts to negate his own worldly values and influences. Because that isolation and innocence are constructed, she is made a means to that end; and yet, if Rachel/Virginia is, like Emile, “purely physical” – and not a moral counterpart, an object of reciprocity or moral respect – this means-to-end process does not pose a moral problem or contradiction to Clarence, so his moral authority remains uncompromised.
In other words, by maintaining a shared existence with a purely physical being, the tutor in this reading discovers some continuity between the possibilities of reciprocity (the social condition of moral life) and perfect isolation, or rational autonomy (the moral condition of social life). While promising, this continuity empties the defining content of moral relationality, a compromise made legible in the conspicuously contrived nature of isolation in the text. After all, if the premise of isolation reconciles reciprocity and autonomy, it does so by creating another continuity between natural and civil freedom (the former conditioning Emile’s existence, the latter conditioning the tutor’s, even though it is in each case a shared existence). This unintended consequence would be fatal to Rousseau’s broader political project, one that clearly distinguishes natural freedom from civil liberty, emphatically privileging the latter. Taking the text’s claims about isolation at face value, then, does not resolve the tensions it creates.

The second possibility for resolving the contradictions of Emile’s isolation is to associate his education with the general will (The Social Contract will receive fuller treatment below). Most interpretations of Rousseau treat the general will as an elaboration of moral and practical autonomy, and specifically as a reformulation of natural law. While equating the general will and natural law directly would be a mistake (given Rousseau’s radical reformulations of nature itself, for example, such as the emphatic distinctions he makes between natural liberty and civil liberty, or between instinct and reason), there is a great extent to which the general will functions, like natural law, exactly because it is not bound to the contingency of historical particulars. Individuals in a legitimate association interact and engage in social life and

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30 “What makes the free will distinctively human, according to Rousseau, is man’s ability to employ his will to resist instinct” (James Miller 169, emphasis his).
commerce without subordinating one will, or some wills, to any others. Any individual within the community has equal access to, and participation in, the general will, and no special status or specialized knowledge is required. Moreover, private interests, when they conflict with the general will, are suppressed (in theory, they do not even occur); the general will thus stifles the cultivation of *amour-propre* and ensures that, when an individual acts, he or she promotes the general interest while remaining wholly free. One obeys only one’s own will, a perfect sense of autonomy that is preserved in the social association because, at the moment of contract, the total alienation (of self and of rights) is perfectly reciprocal.

Similarly, Emile’s isolation can be understood as the premise according to which he does not obey the will or the precepts (there are none) of his tutor. Instead, he at first regards only “things,” the course of natural necessity. The problem with this claim is that “natural necessity,” as a privileged site for the necessary development of autonomy, is in fact carefully organized and arranged in the text. It is neither natural nor necessary. What Emile takes to be the course of nature is in fact the product of his tutor’s mediation and manipulation. Readers are left wondering if “isolation” in *Emile*, and by extension the autonomy that political legitimacy requires in Rousseau’s broader philosophical project, is after all a misrecognized dependence – or, worse, as I will suggest below, the means by which dependence is in fact created and suppressed.

Indeed, critics have generally acknowledged the manipulative dynamic in Emile’s and his tutor’s relationship, but the ways in which this dynamic is bound to the book’s organizing premises about solitude have remained underdeveloped. Moreover, responsibility for the failures of *Emile*, when they are acknowledged at all, is persistently assigned to Emile, to Paris, or even to human nature, finally and necessarily unhappy outside the classical fatherland, but almost
never directly to the tutor, his ideals, or his project. If his methods are off-putting, his principles are sound. As Stephen Ellenburg puts it, by being exposed to and formed by the tutor’s manipulations, Emile is merely “required by circumstances to become a sincerely virtuous citizen” (287). Joseph R. Reisert generally concurs, arguing in fact that the preceptor’s deception and manipulation during the early parts of Emile’s education are not only benign but consistent with friendship. “Although Jean-Jacques surely manipulates his young charge,” Reisert writes, “it is clear that he does so only for Emile’s benefit,” adding that the nature of friendship “proves vital to the success of the educational project being undertaken” (104, 81). Reisert thus takes the “success” of the tutor’s project, despite and even because of its problematic methods, for granted. Other readings, like those of Marshall Berman and Josué V. Harari, stress the success of the tutor’s ends (rather than the manipulation that constitutes his means), foregrounding the restorative nature of the education, according to which the tutor knows and is able to enforce the natural order that is normally subverted as early as when the infant’s cries move from expressing needs to expressing demands.

31 There are notable exceptions, however, including conservative and libertarian interpretations of Rousseau. See David Gauthier for example: “Emile acknowledges that he is not the true natural man,” Gauthier writes, “raised to a condition of self-sufficiency, but the permanent dependent of the tutor” (44), adding, “[f]or Rousseau, it is the very project of individual liberation through control that proves fundamentally flawed,” arguing that the transfer of “enslaving dependence” to “an allegedly liberating power” constitutes a defining pattern “in cults, in psychoanalysis, and in communism” (50). This reading only works, however, if one grants, first, that a transference of dependence is the product – rather than a byproduct, for example, or evidence of failure – of the preceptor’s methods; and, second, that there is no significant qualitative difference between the authority of opinion and the authority of virtue (which the preceptor, Wolmar, and the Great Legislator at least attempt to embody) and nature (whose interests they attempt to represent).
32 “But putting the child back in his place is not an easy operation; it requires an elaborate subterfuge, an artifice that is at the very heart of Rousseauian pedagogy: a system that artificially creates the necessary and sufficient conditions to produce the child – and later the man – who will remain in place through all displacements.” (Harari 108 – 109).
But emphasizing friendship and benign restoration obscures a more basic problem with the text. Even if friendship can support manipulation, for example, it does not follow that manipulation can support the “benefit” or “success” of the tutor’s moral project. Granting that the ends justify the means – the position to which many of these readings can be reduced – neglects the specificity of the tutor’s manipulation and deception. It is not that the tutor manipulates Emile that is significant, but rather what his manipulation produces: not friendship, benefit, or success (these come later, if they come at all, when Emile shifts from a “purely physical” to a “moral” epistemology), but an illusion of autonomy. In effect, these readings rationalize the exigency, without examining the full implications, of Emile’s “solitude.”

Generally, therefore, the tutor’s task is excused or even admired as a positive iteration of Rousseau’s broader investigation of authority and freedom. Judith N. Shklar argues that the tutor, along with the Great Legislator of The Social Contract and Wolmar of Julie, represents the almost superhuman figure of absolute, paternal authority that Rousseau ambivalently seeks: his “authority is indeed immense,” Shklar argues, “but so are the evils he must forestall” (149). Emile is “trained,” she acknowledges, “to say the least,” even to the brink of oppression, and yet ultimately the promise of his education is achieved: Emile’s happiness depends upon neither the opinion of others nor the impossible “isolation of natural man” (58). Having stoically reconciled his inclinations and emotional content with external necessity through the program established and endorsed by the tutor, he experiences the condition of natural, presocial humanity, “an absence of mental pain and a feeling of perfect independence” (60).

While this second way of reading Emile’s solitude thus has the advantage of reinforcing the continuity of Rousseau’s mid-career texts (aligning the tutor, the Lawgiver, and Wolmar), it also therefore reproduces some of the unresolved problems that have dogged those texts –
especially those regarding the status, nature, and origins of authority in *The Social Contract*. And as helpful as aligning these texts can be, doing so ignores the simple fact that they offer varying degrees of conceptual and narrative treatments. To collapse the tutor into the position of the Lawgiver is to ignore his narrative status as a literary character. But that status is not a secondary or incidental quality of the text. Indeed, I argue that an analysis of his status as a literary character, immersed in the narrative textures of novelistic realism, is precisely what is needed if one is to understand *Emile*’s place within Rousseau’s political philosophy. The pseudo-omniscience of the tutor (and of *Julie*’s Wolmar) does bear some obvious resemblance to that of the Great Legislator in *The Social Contract*, but his authority, being figured as a product of narrative realism and empirically plausible cause and effect, lends itself to a different order of analysis. After all, unlike the Legislator who has “no affinity with our nature,” Rousseau insists that the tutor “will not be an angel,” and he reminds us that, “before daring to undertake the formation of a man, one must have made oneself a man” (*il faut s’être fait home soi-même*).

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33 For Shklar, this authority is best embodied by Wolmar (she associates the preceptor with St. Preux after he has been reformed, though she includes him with the other “images of authority”) who is not only “like God,” but “better than God” (151). Similarly, Harari equates the preceptor’s interventions to providence in *Robinson Crusoe*, “except that…the master pedagogue Rousseau wishes to go even further by taking onto himself the power and omniscience of God, and thus supplant the divinity in its providential role” (123), and David Gauthier writes that the preceptor is “one of Rousseau’s redemptive artificers” who “seem to possess, the power to lift their fellows from their fallen condition” and who “are not human insofar as their power and their existence is not explained within the framework of Rousseau’s history of humankind” (31 – 32).

34 Many scholars have all but dismissed, not only the text’s novelistic and narrative status, but even any practical implications and applications of the text, as if it were every bit as abstract as *The Social Contract*. Stephen Ellenburg, for one, argues that “the society of *Emile* is a miniature republic of lawgiver and citizen,” although he also describes the Lawgiver in more practical registers than most (275). In any case, to accept the implausible status of the tutor as that of the Lawgiver is to read his character as Emile does, as if of a different order, which, as we have seen, constitutes a coerced misreading.

35 *Social Contract*: 84.
36 *Emile*: 94 – 95.
Reading *Emile* as a narrative of two individuals, rather than or in addition to a theoretical articulation of the development of the virtuous will obeying only the commands of natural necessity, opens onto the questions that have, in fact, motivated this chapter. Who is the tutor? Why do we get Emile’s story instead of his? What is the nature of his authority, and what are its broader implications? Raising these questions, making the narrative features of the text conspicuous, provides crucial insight into the claims of isolation that organize Emile’s formation.

**NIGHT GAMES, PROPERTY, AND AUTONOMY: SOURCES OF LEGITIMACY**

The first thing one is likely to notice upon reading the text as a novel is that the tutor’s narrative is conspicuously absent. That his backstory is suppressed has both narrative and conceptual implications, drawing attention to the conditions of legitimacy and its emergence in social and empirical contexts, and providing leverage for the analysis of Rousseau’s broader philosophical project. Moreover, in those moments when readers are provided scraps of the tutor’s backstory, the terms, basis, development, and emergence of his authority become available for closer scrutiny.

At one point, for example, the narrator recommends “[m]any night games,” advice that “is more important than it seems” (134). Fear of the dark, he writes, “has a natural cause” grounded in the “stronger” voice of instinct. Further, he associates fear of the dark with isolation, and in describing it he puts feverish, almost paranoid stress on the first-person singular. In the dark, he writes, “I no longer see anything…I may very well know that I am secure in the place I am; I never know it as well as if I actually saw it. I am therefore always subject to a fear that I do not have in daylight. True, I know that a foreign body can hardly act on mine” etc. Representing the limitations of instinct and of the isolation of a merely physical existence, this fear must be overcome, and doing so entails a turn to a more social and rational disposition. “Everything that ought to reassure me exists only in my reason,” he writes, adding that helping children overcome
this fear requires that “one brings together many good-humored children in the evening, that at first they be sent out not separately but several together, [and] that no chance be taken with a single child all alone” (136 – 137). To illustrate the importance and effect of “night games,” the narrator provides a personal example, juxtaposing the image of his young self venturing alone into the dark to retrieve a Bible with the calm “company” in a lighted house nearby.

In brief, Rousseau is “in the country boarding with a minister named M. Lambercier,” Mademoiselle Lambercier, his cousin, and some others, when M. Lambercier, “bored with [Rousseau’s] boasting” and deciding “to put [his] courage to the test” (136), sends the young narrator to retrieve a Bible from the pulpit of a darkened temple. He writes: “In perceiving the profound darkness which reigned in this vast place, I was seized by a terror which made my hair stand on end. I moved back; I went out; I took flight, trembling all over.” He tries again, bringing a dog this time, but again falls “into a state of inexpressible consternation,” leaving in terror. Having failed twice, he approaches the house where, he writes: “I made out M. Lambercier’s voice bursting with laughter. I immediately supposed it to be directed at me; and embarrassed at seeing myself exposed, I hesitated to open the door.” He hears the party suggest that “M. Lambercier…come and look for me escorted by my intrepid cousin, to whom afterward they would without fail have given all the honor resulting from the expedition.” On hearing this, Rousseau instantly recovers, flies to the temple, recovers the Bible, and bursts with his prize into the room, beaming “with joy at having been ahead of the help intended for me.” While the narrator acknowledges that this story is not “a model to follow and as an example of the gaiety” appropriate for night games, he also insists, “I give it as proof that nothing is more reassuring to someone frightened of shadows in the night than to hear company, assembled in a neighboring room, laughing and chatting calmly” (136).
Clearly, this episode does not constitute the “proof” the narrator claims it does. The young Rousseau obviously does not find reassurance in his company, nor is he reacting to the comforting pleasure of calm laughter and chatting. Rather, like St. Preux unable or unwilling to expose himself to the shame of excusing himself from the brothel, young Rousseau is motivated explicitly by fear of derision. Worse, this moment of shame and indulgence is treated as a moment of strength, and the biting social pressure of mockery and triumph over another’s weakness is presented as the gentle, affirming comfort of pleasurable company. A weakness, according to which the narrator is motivated by others’ opinions of him (a moment of inflamed amour-propre), plays the part of self-mastery and independence, which is exactly the kind of error Emile’s education is meant to preclude.

The tutor obviously misreads his own anecdote; whether he does so willfully is unclear. Either way, the misreading invites doubt, not only about the great extent to which Rousseau intervenes in the “natural” course of his ward’s development, but also about the quality and nature of those interventions. If, as critics suggest, the preceptor approximates the superhuman wisdom of “one of Rousseau’s redemptive artificers” (Gauthier 31), then misreading his own anecdote undermines that wisdom and its possibility – an undermining that is heightened, I argue, by the phantom solitude that effectively conceals the preceptor’s agency and, therefore, his responsibility. But if the fleeting presence of the tutor’s narrative gives readers insight into the troubling nature of his authority, its absence is even more revealing.

The centrality of property in social contract theory and the modern individualism that it supports (see, for example, C. B. Macpherson’s seminal work on possessive individualism, to which I return in chapter two) culminates in what many critics believe to be Emile’s most

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important lesson. Judith N. Shklar states that Emile’s lesson on property gives him a “sense of obligation, of right and duty, of justice in sum,” writing that for Rousseau, as for Locke, “there could be no liberty and no true security of obligations without the sacred rights of property” (49). Without the concept of property or its attending sense of true justice – independent of the hazards of *amour-propre* and the defiling confinements of opinion – Emile will fail to meet the stated goal of his education, of being useful both to himself and to others, and thus the very possibility of such a subject fades. It is therefore no less essential that Emile acquire a sense of property than that he acquire it, as it were, “naturally,” in solitude, in a manner directly opposed to that of a traditional, bourgeois education.

Indeed, Emile’s lesson on property follows neatly from the conceptual priorities and exigencies that the text, and its place within the social contract tradition, works to address. The status of property and the transfer of its principles through education hold up to the basic conditions of property: Emile is uniquely positioned by his supposed solitude to grasp the interdependent principles that one has property in one’s person (conferring the sense of liberal justice that he must learn) and that it comes about through labor – an essential feature of property that Locke’s bourgeois education neglects. But that conceptual neatness does not hold up to a consideration of the narrative frame through which his education is presented. From a narrative perspective, after all, there are only a limited number of ways that one can come to know these basic and essential principles of property. I will look at three in the remainder of this section, examining how each contradicts either the philosophical or the narrative mandates of the text.

The first option for learning about the principles of property, which accords with Rousseau’s emphasis on natural consequences, entails their discovery by chance. Importantly, from his own perspective, this is precisely how Emile learns them. He happens to plant his beans in a plot
already in use by another, Robert the gardener. The possibility that his chosen garden location is already in use does not occur to him until his beans are destroyed. As he is initially offended, his sense of justice is aroused, and through confronting Robert and learning the truth, his indignation is revised and appropriately re-applied, inaugurating his respect for Robert’s property and labor, and, by extension, for property in general.

Of course, however, Emile cannot be said to have discovered the principles of property by chance. Education, after all, is labor-intensive, highly organized, and, most of all, predictable. The narrator must know that Emile’s experiment with the beans, under specific, known conditions, will result in specific kinds of internal and interpersonal conflict, which can then be productively redirected toward a new and essential concept of property. Chance here would be counterproductive. Rather than a natural, “merely physical” being stumbling by chance upon these conflicts in the course of exploring its island, Emile’s education requires an organized intervention directed toward a specific goal, which, of course, is precisely what this section dramatizes. Emile is clearly meant to understand himself as having discovered these principles by chance in that “merely physical” sense, and Rousseau clearly privileges exactly the narrative under which Emile (mistakenly) operates, but there is no place for chance in Emile’s education.

The second possible way to learn about property is by coming to realize its principles despite a destructive, bourgeois education. This alternative assumes that the errors imparted by socially privileged forms of education can be overcome: an assumption buried in the position Rousseau takes relative to his readers. His reader, after all, as the narrator likely imagines her, is herself a product of a bourgeois education. If she were the product of a natural, chance-based education, she would not need Emile to explain its principles or how they can be acquired. Since she evidently does need Emile, whether for self-application or as a pedagogical guide, then she is
apparently capable of learning from it, assuming a position from which legitimately to dispense and apply the “natural” principles of property. Otherwise, the book is of no use, and of course Rousseau puts a high priority on the usefulness of his works.\textsuperscript{38}

At this point, the significance of the tutor’s suppressed narrative begins to emerge. Either of these two alternatives might represent the tutor’s own education about property. If the tutor learned about the principles of property as a merely physical being stumbling upon them by chance, then his praxis, arranging and organizing a similar but conspicuously false “chance” encounter for Emile, is dangerously corrupt – I will return to this claim below. Alternatively, we can assume that the tutor, like his reader, must have disabused himself of the concept of property as it was mediated by a bourgeois education. If so, then he constitutes strong evidence that, perhaps, such an education is not so bad, and that it can somehow (but how?) be mitigated and its errors removed. There is also a third alternative, which is that the tutor was educated by a tutor like himself, and that he came to discover the principles of property through a process very much like Emile’s. This third alternative raises the highly problematic possibility of an ostensibly “natural” concept endlessly mediated from person to person, certainly a problematic possibility given that mediation is precisely what so much of his philosophy functions to resolve.\textsuperscript{39} If the tutor was tutored then he, it seems, like Emile, must have acquired his knowledge of this essential concept from a position of error, projecting a framework of “natural” and physical discovery onto a process that was heavily mediated and organized. And even if that error is

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See Joseph R. Reisert (13).
\item On the crucial problem of mediation for Rousseau, see Jean Starobinsky. Much of his book is devoted to this topic, but see especially chapter 6 (122 – 179), in which: The problem of interpreting signs is worth pausing over. If communication is truly immediate, there is no need to interpret signs; and \textit{interpretation} is an \textit{interposition}, an act of mediation. The ideal of immediacy demands that the \textit{meaning} of the sign be identical in the object and in my perception” (155). In Emile’s education, I argue, and possibly in that of the preceptor, the meaning and the object (property) are demonstrably distinct.
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ultimately benign, then the privileged mode of imparting the correct principles of property – the privileged mode, that is, of instantiating moral relationality – is locked in a closed circuit of implausibly isolated wards tutored into instructing implausibly isolated wards, etc.

In any case, whatever the tutor’s means of discovering the true principles of property, his narrative must ultimately be much more valuable than Emile’s. Taking the second alternative, for example, if the tutor was at some point capable of disabusing himself of the errors of a concept as mediated by a polite education in such a way that he gains access to the concept as supplied by an authentically “natural” and socially isolated education, readers would certainly find the tutor’s narrative far more valuable and useful than Emile’s. After all, it is precisely such a process that we, his readers, must undergo ourselves if we are to make good use of Emile – and certainly not that of the book’s titular character. It is the tutor’s narrative, and not his ward’s (who has everything neatly laid out for him; who naively, mistakenly, stumbles upon them as if by chance, and who projects natural necessity onto carefully organized and manipulated phenomena), that would contain the promise of Emile’s knowledge and natural status, but without binding this promise to the hopelessly improbable social arrangement the text narrates. In short, the experiences that legitimize and motivate the narrator’s authority are more relevant to readers than Emile’s, but they are never given narrative substance.

There is an even bigger problem, however, than the relative usefulness of one or another character’s narrative. The text is written such that it both invites and frustrates speculation about the tutor’s backstory. But I do not think Rousseau’s silence about this backstory is a careless oversight, reckless evasion, or winking sleight of hand. Rather, it is possible that the suppressed narrative of the tutor is a deliberate manifestation of a more basic failure, symptomatic of social contract theory in general, to formulate the conditions of legitimate
authority. In this reading, the power of Rousseau’s contribution to the social contract tradition – his conceptual interventions regarding the origins and exercise of moral and rational autonomy, for example – derives at least in part from his investment in narrative realism. Because Emile is the focal point of attention, the nature of the tutor’s agency and interventions recedes. If one focuses on Emile as an object of natural necessity, the conceptual urgencies of justice through property and property through labor are ratified. But if one focuses on the narrative elements of the lesson, as a drama of two characters in social negotiation, then a major problem with social contract theory begins to take shape.

In fact, there is a fourth alternative for teaching the principles of property, which is the worst possible education for inaugurating the transparency and natural knowledge so prized by Rousseau. The principles of property can be taught by knowingly and explicitly gutting them of their defining value and content – indeed, this is precisely what these pages actually dramatize. The tutor knows that Emile must learn what property is, and that Emile must fundamentally respect the property of others as, in Locke’s formulation, an extension of their person. A violation of property is thus profoundly unjust, and learning this, and respecting it, is vital to the kind of subject Emile must become.\textsuperscript{40} He also knows, however, that Emile’s bean plot constitutes exactly such a violation. Without telling him about property abstractly, or allowing him to read about it, the tutor knows that Emile must experience it – discover it – firsthand, naturally. That

\textsuperscript{40} Reisert is right to recognize “the Rousseauian man of virtue” as one who “steadfastly respects the rights of others, even at great cost to himself,” though in asserting that such a man is presented in \textit{Emile} he understates the contradictions explored in these pages. Discussing the inauguration of contracts and moral relationships, for example, Reisert insists that “[w]hen Emile is still a boy, Robert…promises to respect Emile’s rights over a small piece of land in exchange for Emile’s promise to respect Robert’s rights over his land. With that act, each recognizes the other as a valid source of claims against himself.” If Robert is indeed a “valid source” of such claims, however, then what makes this lesson – which requires a violation of those very claims – possible in the first place? Is the status of those “claims” itself compromised, or only Robert as a source of them? Either way, the system falls apart (8, 54).
is, Emile must violate the property of another. While he does so innocently and unknowingly, of course, his tutor, who facilitates and arranges this violation, must do so knowingly. And while Emile’s relationship with the tutor is unsettling, the tutor’s relationship with Robert the gardener is irredeemable. “I encourage” Emile’s desire to garden, he writes. “I share his taste. I work with him, not for his pleasure, but for mine” (emphasis added). The tutor becomes “his helper,” increasing Emile’s joy “by saying to him: ‘This belongs to you,’” and then by “explaining to him this term ‘belong.’” This possession, he insists (making a startlingly revealing comparison), “is more sacred and more respectable than that taken of South America when Núñez Balboa in the name of the King of Spain planted his standard on the shore of the South Sea” (98).

Not only does the tutor put Emile into a position of an unconscious aggressor – thus becoming, himself, a conscious one – but, in this system, he must do so. Without relying on chance or precepts, the principles of property do sustain their conceptual integrity: “In this model of the way of inculcating the primary notions in children one sees how the idea of property naturally goes back to the right of the first occupant by labor,” he writes. But teaching property rights without chance or precepts also requires their violation, the negation of property. That “right…by labor” cannot subsist, cannot condition the idea of property, and must be uprooted

41 It has also been suggested that Robert the gardener, like the magician, is the preceptor’s accomplice. See for example Timothy O’Hagan, pg 67. This reading is credible, and potentially supported by the preceptor’s insistence that “[y]ou will not be the child’s master if you are not the master of all that surrounds him” (95), as well as by key moments in the (very similar) early education of the children in Julie, in which, for example, Julie’s eldest son acquires a taste for reading by growing weary of depending on servants who are, by careful arrangement, too busy to read, or to finish reading, amusing stories from the Bible (see pages 476 – 477). If this is so, however, it is never explicitly disclosed (Rousseau adds a note to a subsequent edition admitting that the magician is an accomplice, leaving room to suppose that Robert is as well), nor does it solve any of our problems. After all, if Robert is indeed an accomplice, then what these pages dramatize is not a violation of his property rights at all, but the deliberate use of his property rights by consent, and Emile has learned nothing – or, perhaps worse, he believes himself to have learned something from events that, in fact, directly contradict his experiences.
from the outset in order to be taught at all. At best, Emile’s education negates itself. He learns of the existence of something that, in being learned, either reveals itself as illusory, or that must be destroyed. It is a right that, when looked at, sinks back like Eurydice into nothing. If one is to take the rights of property seriously, and natural education alone provides “the true relation of things,” then property can and must never be taught. Or, at worst, the right of property, and the sense of justice it unfolds, is illusory, subject to the arbitrary interests of those most qualified to teach it: but then they teach nothing and, in their capacity as teachers, become nothing.

MORAL RELATIONALITY AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

According to Rousseau, social contract requires a gesture of absolute sociality. This in itself is not surprising. But this gesture is conditioned, as Emile helps to show, by a pretense of absolute solitude – a pretense that, perhaps paradoxically, does not negate but in fact legitimizes that absolute sociality, substantiating social contract. In fact it is precisely in its negation, in emptying it of sociality, that social contract is legitimized at all. “Finally,” he writes in The Social Contract, “since each man gives himself to all, he gives himself to no one” (61). Although the goal here is community – ‘legitimate’ forms of social organization and regulation – one finds at its foundation, not merely an independent subordinating himself to nobody, but a sort of isolate, relating himself (insofar as giving of one’s self and receiving of others’ is the constitutive form of relating to others in this moment of contract) to nobody. In a word, in examining Rousseau’s account of absolute and primary community, of the grounds for the legitimization of all community, we find ourselves confronted with solitude in the midst of the world: not, he insists, a problem to be solved, but the solution to a problem. By looking to Rousseau’s more explicit political philosophy, and especially at the social contractor and the Lawgiver, we can see that the pretense of isolation within his conceptualization of collective identification is no less central – but no less stable – than that which becomes conspicuous in the narrative of Emile.
In other words, as I am arguing that *Emile* uses narrative to make problems with social contract conspicuous, it is worth rereading for those parallels, and for the manifestations of those problems, in *The Social Contract*. Parallels between the two texts are easy to find, after all. Stephen Ellenburg calls *Emile* “the *Social Contract* writ small,” arguing that “Rousseau’s education…duplicates on a more manageable, temporally more extended scale the foundation of a true republic by a lawgiver in the *Social Contract*” (271). Each text, in its way, is organized around a claim about engaging with “no one.” While this claim usefully sustains constituents of community in their rational autonomy, it also begs several important questions relating to the epistemology of legitimate association. What, for example, does the individual at the decisive moment of social contract know? How does he understand the relationship between the “all” and the “no one”? Does the contractor, like Emile, engage in a social relationship (relating to all) only while – or even because – he believes himself, or imagines himself, to be a sort of isolate, giving “himself to no one?”

The difficulty of these epistemological questions is compounded by the recollection that the contractor has none of the moral and relational capacities that they would seem to presuppose. Just like Emile entering adolescence, the individual entering into social contract, Rousseau writes, exchanges his “physical and independent existence” with a “moral and communal existence” (85). After all, the chapter on social contract (Book I, Chapter 6) clearly sets out to describe, not all contracts, but an original social contract through which “the primitive condition” of “a state of nature” is exchanged for civil association (59). Such a primitive man must clearly lack the resources – reason, moral relationality – to anticipate any extent to which the act of “unconditional” and “total alienation…of himself” to all can sustain autonomous self-mastery (60). It seems impossible that he would engage in a social exchange that consists of
giving of himself entirely, without rational access to the mechanisms by which this engagement will preserve his liberty – unless all that he knows, or thinks that he knows (like Emile), is that he gives himself to no one.

The role of the Lawgiver provides the easiest and most obvious way around the question of what the social contractor knows, but not, of course, without generating new questions. The purely instinctual epistemology of natural man is crucial to why “the Lawgiver can…employ neither force nor argument” and “must have recourse to an authority of another order, one which can compel without violence and persuade without convincing” (87). During social contract, “[e]ach one of us puts into the community his person and all his powers under the supreme direction of the general will.” While Rousseau writes of a will that “studies…the common interest,” and that can distinguish duty, it is a will that is shaped less by principles than by a vague sense of necessity or chance, reflecting not axioms but the foundations of character and custom fashioned by the Lawgiver (72). The question of legitimacy and social contract becomes a question of narrative. Does the Lawgiver’s “sublime reasoning” impart the ideas of community and sociality (i.e., moral relationality), or does it only arrange for the first act of social contract, from which those ideas are derived? Which is primary and which derivative? In other words, does the contract produce the moral individual, or does the moral individual produce the contract? In fact, both answers must be true.

Again, Emile does not develop the idea of the principles of property and then act according to those principles: the principles must be derived from praxis. If the Lawgiver and the

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42 For a discussion on the will in Rousseau and the extent to which it is either determined by, or productive of the means of, knowledge, see James Miller, 167 – 172. Will, Miller argues, “is an intrinsically enigmatic phenomenon” which “first appears before the mind as an inescapable feeling, not a clear idea” – a “sentiment” which “seems self-evident” (167 – 168). At the same time, Miller points to the Savoyard Vicar, who conflates the “causes” that determine both the will and judgment as one and the same (170).
preceptor play analogous roles in these developmental narratives, then the contractor can only derive the principles of social contract from its practice, and not the other way around. Otherwise, he does not enter into the contract as a merely physical being responding to strict natural necessity, which is to say that he does not obey only his own will. Without recognizing this impasse, it is difficult to appreciate the nature of Rousseau’s contribution to social contract theory. It is usually taken for granted, for example, that the individual at the moment of social contract understands the principles and the objective of total surrender and total liberty, and that he is even motivated by this knowledge. But this cannot be.

John B. Noone, Jr, for example, argues that “legitimate alienation presupposes an already-existent general will” (22), and that, since some common and agreed-upon standards must precede the social contract, “some degree of socialization precedes the contract” (75). Thus, “the contract does not so much create a people as it certifies its antecedent existence and gives it a new dimension, a legitimate political existence” (76 – 77). Noone thus attempts to solve the problem of the social contract by reducing it to “a purely formal procedure” that follows an anterior, already-established general will, practically distinct from the particular will. Moreover, this reading posits the particular will as an obstacle to the realization of the general will, making the moment of social contract itself all but impossible without prior deliberation. In other words, the social contract in Noone’s reading presupposes the kind of moral relationality that can only be produced by the social contract.

To demonstrate the differences between particular and general wills, Noone gives the example of bachelors within a community considering a proposal to raise taxes in order to subsidize education to the level necessary, according to the general will, for the common good. If these bachelors “consult only their particular will,” he argues, “they will find no reason to burden
themselves” (73). Subordinating their particular will to the general will can only happen by first constructing, and thus understanding, the general will. And yet, in his argument, the social contract itself consists of just such an act of subordination—an act that presupposes the kind of moral relationality that, according to Rousseau, is not awakened except by the social contract.

If one applies the assumptions Noone makes about the bachelors’ general and particular wills to the epistemological question I identified above (can knowledge of the principles of sociality precede social contract?), it would seem that sociality is somehow primary, social contract is derivative, and that individuals enter the social contract from a position of, and in order to secure, a pre-understood gesture of autonomous sociality. But Noone’s argument that “contract does not so much create a people” does not address the very objection to Grotius (Book 1, Chapter 5) that motivates Rousseau’s discussion of social contract in the first place:

Therefore, according to Grotius a people is a people even before the gift to the king is made. The gift itself is a civil act; it presupposes public deliberation. Hence, before considering the act by which a people submits to a king, we ought to scrutinize the act by which people become a people, for that act, being necessarily antecedent to the other, is the real foundation of society. (59, emphasis Rousseau’s)

Like Grotius, Noone “presupposes public deliberation,” failing to show how a community entering into a social contract is not already “a people.” And by reducing social contract to a “purely formal procedure,” he presents pictures of the general and particular wills that make any moment of “an original covenant” overwhelmingly improbable, simply begging the question.

One need not accept that, without deliberation prior to the social contract, “the general will becomes some sort of mystical entity, free floating and unanchored in anything that resembles human volition” (Noone 76). Again, Kantian moral theory and the categorical
imperative adapts Rousseau’s general will – with important qualifications\textsuperscript{43} – to address this kind of objection directly, suggesting, for example, that it is likely, even necessary, that even the bachelors will find “reason to burden themselves” with additional taxes in order to improve education sufficient to the common good. If part of the problem of understanding the social contract is confronting a moment during which man’s presocial nature (or merely physical nature, to use Rousseau’s vocabulary) is exchanged for a social (or moral) nature, Noone’s suggestion is simply to posit something like presocial sociality. But perhaps a better answer rests in the contrary movements of collective identification, the extent to which isolation extends itself, or can be imagined to extend itself, into key social moments, preserving an imagined sense of asociality at a moment of practically objective socialization.

There are important differences, however, in how each text treats these contrary movements. For Emile, solitude is the position under which he operates and according to which the imprint of the tutor’s agency and authority is concealed: it is the constitutive error that organizes his early development. For the individual in contract, on the contrary, it is the only position according to which \textit{his own} agency and authority is recovered. It is the only justification for this exchange, properly understood (even if it is a post hoc justification). And yet, it still does not follow that, because the pretense of isolation seems to benefit the contractor by facilitating the establishment of his moral autonomy, it is not also an error. In \textit{Emile}, solitude functions to conceal social asymmetry; in \textit{The Social Contract}, it unfolds perfect social symmetry to view. In either case, it is imagined.

\textsuperscript{43} Small communities are a hallmark of Rousseau’s ideal society and, as James Miller reminds us, “[t]here are as many general wills as there are genuine communities,” and “the general will is no innate endowment of every individual as a member of species” being “neither universal nor inborn,” revealing the very unKantian scope of Rousseau’s general will (62).
It is not enough to account for these differences by suggesting that Emile and The Social Contract simply provide different forms of collective identification, developed to address categorically different needs. Rather, I argue that these differences point to a failure to identify collectively at all. These two works provide representations of interactions that are clearly and crucially intersubjective, but that – just as crucially – suppress everything that substantially distinguishes intersubjectivity from isolation. They suppress any recognition of the content and of the effects of relationality, even though relationality is, not only present, but is absolutely constitutive. In other words, ‘student’ and ‘social contractor’ are irreducibly collective identities, possible only in relation to others, and yet their very fulfillment of those identities requires – indeed, consists of – the suppression of exactly that relationality.

The isolation of Emile and the social contractor is a distant echo of a prior one that is fundamentally linked to the very possibility of imagining (legitimate) community in the first place, since imagining community (as an association, not an aggregate, which is not truly a community) is precisely the work, originally, of the Lawgiver: an individual who is so radically isolated, “entirely complete and solitary,” that he shares neither our passions nor our nature, and “whose happiness was independent of ours” (84).

The implications of the Lawgiver’s status, and the change in human nature of which he is the author, are unsettling: legitimate forms of social formation (like nations, for example) cannot be derived from prior social formations (like families), but must be the product of an isolate who cannot, by definition, share in its promise or responsibility. Moreover, the very mechanisms by which communal reciprocity, discourse, progress, exchange, trust, and intimacy become

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44 That Emile’s knowledge is mutually constructed, that his island is “shared,” or that the contractor, in a state of purely physical, instinctual, pre-rational existence, alienates himself and all of his rights entirely to all.
operative are foreign to and imposed upon the bodies that appropriate them – the bodies, indeed, that come to understand and recognize themselves (entirely, both as “a people” and as constituent-members) precisely and exclusively with reference to them. The narrative that privileges the radically isolate as the kernel of community does not belong to Rousseau alone; it can be found in other conceptualizations of post-classical, communal self-rule. Machiavelli points to a similar paradox in chapter nine of *The Discourses*, for example, writing about the establishment of a form of government that, ideally, contains some element of republican self-rule:

> it rarely or never happens that a republic or kingdom is well organized from the beginning, or completely reformed, with no respect for its ancient institutions, unless it is done by one man alone; moreover, it is necessary that one man provide the means and be the only one from whose mind any such organization originates…(200, emphasis added).

While Machiavelli’s founder differs from Rousseau’s in at least two crucial points (Machiavelli’s position proceeds from his assumption that humans are naturally inclined to evil, and his solitary founder is clearly an authority figure), both figures embody the impossibility of a community legitimized, or established, through its own autonomous deliberations and actions – even as both writers insist that community sustain itself autonomously (through the general will, for example).

The problem is that both theorists emphatically privilege community as the only context in which true freedom and human morality is possible.\(^{45}\) And yet the mechanisms and

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\(^{45}\) This position finds its clearest expression in *The Social Contract*, where Rousseau argues that, despite the “advantages” of the state of nature, “in civil society [man’s]…faculties are so exercised and developed, his mind so enlarged, his sentiments so ennobled, and his whole spirit so elevated that…he should constantly bless the happy hour that lifted him for ever from the state of nature and from a stupid, limited animal made a creature of intelligence and a man” (64 – 65). Steven G. Affeldt demonstrates the centrality of this “happy hour” to Rousseau’s political philosophy, and emphasizes his influence on subsequent philosophers, writing that “social forms
Foundations of community are so entirely contrary to the nature of collectivity as to require a perfect isolate to dream them up in the first place. Its origins and foundations, thus, do not emerge from (and thus they cannot be said to reflect) the privileged context of community and its priorities of moral freedom. They are not the products of moral freedom (of a morally free individual or constituent or group), but of an exception, for whom, it follows, such privileged forms of moral freedom are forever and necessarily foreign. Despite the important distinctions between the Lawgiver’s role and the citizens’ role, the legitimization (establishment) of community, the sustaining (regulation) of community, and the experience of community all come down to imagining community. And yet, in all these imaginings (indeed, not despite but because of these imaginings), an irreconcilable conceptual distance between the individual and the social body only reasserts itself. In effect, comparing the Lawgiver to Emile and the social contractor, we are left with, on the one hand, a radical isolate who imagines community, and, on the other, community-constituents who imagine isolation.

I turn finally to Julie: or the New Heloise, which of all of Rousseau’s works embraces most fully the narrative and novelistic enterprises. Julie lays out explicitly some of the problems of both imagined community and imagined isolation, and it develops claims, articulated in Emile, about simultaneous intervention and independence. Perhaps the most concrete representation of these contrary claims can be found in Julie’s garden. Others have pointed out the similarities between Emile’s education and Julie’s garden, both of which require concealing the actor’s

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and institutions, broadly conceived, are understood as central to and as having a certain priority in the constitution of the subject as a moral and political being. It is through socialization into specific social forms and participation in specific social institutions that the individual transcends the particularity of his or her natural being and comes to be, and to understand himself or herself as, a moral political being” (300). My point here is to emphasize that the Lawgiver does not share in this “happy hour” or the psychological reorganization it performs.
agency under the illusion of natural necessity. Josué V. Harari further ties this theme to the
preceptor’s use of Robinson Crusoe, writing that “[l]ike desert and island gardening, pedagogy
reaches perfection when the tutor manages to erase his own traces,” arguing ultimately that
Robinson Crusoe shows “the role and place of Providence in Defoe [that] coincides exactly with
that of the tutor as master of knowledge in Rousseau’s pedagogical theater” (121, 123).

Providence is useful here because it is suggestive of the contrary movements of
intervention and isolation that legitimize Emile’s education. In the opening paragraphs of Emile,
Rousseau argues that “[p]lants are shaped by cultivation, and men by education,” urging the
“tender and foresighted mother” to keep “the nascent shrub away from the highway and securing
it from the impact of human opinions! Cultivate and water the young plant before it dies. Its
fruits will one day be your delights. Form an enclosure around your child’s soul at an early date”
(Emile 37 – 38). The complete passivity of the shrub (an asymmetry so complete in this
metaphor that the child and the mother are of a different nature) deserves some attention here, as
well as the investment of the mother, or cultivator, who foresees delighting in the “fruits” of the
education. “Cultivation” in this sense is a useful key word for tracking the problems of
Rousseau’s conceptualization of autonomy in community, problems dramatized in both Emile
and Julie: or the New Heloise. St Preux finds himself in Julie’s “Elysium,” a garden that is
highly constructed, but such as to erase any trace of human intervention. The effect is an illusion
of perfect solitude. “I thought I was looking at the wildest, most solitary place in nature,” St
Preux writes, “and it seemed to me I was the first mortal who ever had set foot in this
wilderness.” Finding “the ends of the earth” in this deserted garden, Julie disabuses St Preux:
“Many people find them here as you do” (Julie 387). This specific and complete sense of total
isolation is very much a shared experience: “many people” find themselves “the first mortal” in
this strange place which, stranger still, is precisely the goal. “This place is enchanting, it is true, but rustic and wild,” St Preux wonders. “I see no human labor here. You closed the gate; water came along I know not how; nature alone did the rest and you yourself could never have managed to do as well.” Julie replies, echoing the words of the tutor in *Emile*, “It is true…that nature did it all, but under my direction, and there is nothing here that I have not designed” (388).

Evoking *Crusoe* more explicitly, St Preux expresses confusion that a place so different from what it was could have become what it is only through cultivation and upkeep; yet nowhere do I see the slightest trace of cultivation. Everything is verdant, fresh, vigorous, and the gardener’s hand is not to be seen: nothing belies the idea of a desert Island which came to my mind as I entered, and I see no human footprints.

Wolmar attributes this to “trickery,” of which he is sometimes a “witness” and sometimes an “accomplice”: “we have taken great care to erase” the footprints, he says (393). But this benign trickery by which privileged forms (the “verdant, fresh, vigorous” scene, evocative, again, of the robust citizen-student) are achieved is soon revealed to be something rather darker: Nature “seems to want to veil from men’s eyes her true attractions,” Julie says, “she flees much frequented places; it is on the tops of mountains, deep in the forests, on desert Islands that she deploys her most stirring charms.” Those of us “who love her and cannot go so far to find her,” she insists, “are reduced to doing her violence, forcing her in a way to come and live with them, and all this cannot be done without a modicum of illusion” (394). The trickery, which clearly rhymes with that of Emile’s tutor, constitutes a violence both to nature and to the agent, who
after all has been “reduced” to his or her constitutive form of agency in this exchange. The price of the privileged illusion of rustic isolation is high, and the value of its produce remains unclear.

The garden represents an extension of the kind of agency Wolmar exercises over St Preux and his household, shaping him into a proper companion for his wife and, more importantly, a fit tutor for his children. The community sustained at Clarens, like the garden, is highly constructed, the product of extreme but unseen intervention. St Preux’s experience of this community, consequently, is disconnected from his actual position within it. Just as he feels himself “the first mortal,” but is in reality one of “many people” in the garden, in Clarens he regards his gradual subjection and subordination to the interests of Wolmar as a return to virtue – the realization of a moral sense, in other words, that is ostensibly operative prior to and independent of circumstances (i.e., objective) and, certainly, social subordination. After Wolmar returns from leaving the nervous St Preux and his beloved Julie alone, St Preux declares that Wolmar is now his “friend”: “I no longer hesitate to give him such a dear name and one whose full value you have made me appreciate so well,” he writes to Milord Edward, continuing that “[i]t is the least title I owe to anyone who is helping to restore me to virtue…I am beginning to see myself here without misgivings, and live here as if at home; and if I do not adopt entirely the authority of a master, I take even more pleasure in regarding myself as the child of the house” (432). Likewise, after St Preux successfully prevents Milord Edward’s disadvantageous marriage (all according to Wolmar’s design, of course), Edward insists to Wolmar that St Preux “was more attached to virtue than to his former inclinations. I can therefore bring him back to you in complete confidence; yes, Wolmar, he is worthy of raising men, and moreover, of living in your house” (537).
Julie herself relishes the legitimate community that she now perceives at Clarens, doubting that the pleasure “to love each other, to feel it, to congratulate oneself for it, to spend our days together in fraternal intimacy and in the peace of innocence, to be occupied with each other, think about each other without remorse, speak of each other without blushing,” could be truly possible otherwise, granting at the same time the debt she and St Preux owe to Wolmar, whose “kindnesses…impose on us no new duties, [but rather] merely make dearer to us those we already held so sacred…He has done enough for us and for himself if he has restored us to ourselves” (546). This claim about self-restoration only reinforces the implication of autonomous moral agency suggested by the “duties” they “already held so sacred,” thus acknowledging a debt to Wolmar while, at the same time, erasing his “footprint” from the full expression and realization of their developed selves. She re-presents cultivation by a separate (and at least potentially interested) agent as self-development according to natural necessity. He has played a role, Julie acknowledges, but the virtues that have been cultivated follow from, and are fully consistent with, our own natures and priorities alone.

And yet Wolmar’s footprint is there, and hard to ignore. While it is easy to see that Wolmar plays a strong role in facilitating the privileged “fraternal intimacy” of Julie and St Preux, it must also be recalled that much of what St Preux admires in Clarens is the domestic economy in general and, in particular, the control Wolmar exercises over his servants and laborers. St Preux clearly considers himself, at least at times, a legitimate participant in the society of Clarens, even as something of an equal. Much has been said about the English breakfast, for example, during which “we were all three [Julie, Wolmar, and St Preux] caught

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46 See, for example, Jean Starobinsky, 152 – 153: “The description of the morning presents the ideal of the expansive moment. The soul expands by means of signs rather than words, hence its range is greater and its influence more pure.”
up in the same emotion,” indicative for many as an ideal expression of perfect, unmediated community (457). This scene suggests a kind of equal participation that is in keeping with the belief that Wolmar merely brings St Preux to himself, or to the realization of only those virtues consistent with natural necessity. And yet – though he does not see it – given Wolmar’s role and work as cultivator, as well as St Preux’s status within the household, St Preux belongs as much (if not more) to the community of the servants and farm laborers as to that of Julie and Wolmar. While none of these minor characters is fully developed, or seen to engage in anything like unmediated emotional communication with St Preux, they are, just like him (the “child of the house”), best to understand themselves as filial subordinates: “Am I wrong, Milord, to compare masters so cherished to fathers, and their domestics to their children? You see that that is what they consider themselves” (368). Also like St Preux, the domestics must be shaped and controlled in a potentially volatile sexual economy:

To forestall a dangerous intimacy between the two sexes, they are not constrained here by explicit laws which they would be tempted to break secretly; but without any apparent intention, customs are instituted that are more powerful even than authority. They are not forbidden to see each other, but it happens by design that they have neither the opportunity nor the will to do so. This is achieved by assigning to them entirely different occupations, habits, tastes, pleasures. (370)

Clearly the methods by which Wolmar controls the domestics differs from those by which he controls St Preux, but in each case the labors – and the interests – of the cultivator are not difficult to see.
Indeed, Wolmar himself writes that St Preux “is fiery, but weak and easy to tame,”
writing to Madame d’Orbe that the society he encourages between Julie and St Preux rests on
less romantic foundations than St Preux estimates:

In the place of his mistress I force him to see always the spouse of an honorable man and
the mother of my children: I overlay one tableau with another, and cover the past with the
present. One leads a skittish Steed up to the object that frightens it, so he will no longer
be frightened. This is the way one must treat those young people whose imagination yet
burns when their hearts have already grown cold, and makes them see monsters in the
distance which disappear as they are approached. (419)

While the servants cannot (or are made not to wish to) fraternize with the opposite sex, St Preux
is encouraged to speak with absolute transparency with Julie, both alone with her and in front of
Wolmar. The effect, however, differs little in substance: although unmediated communication is
ostensibly privileged, St Preux comes to see in Julie a “spouse” and a “mother of [Wolmar’s]
children”; or, in other words, Julie’s position relative to her husband. Relating to Julie comes to
relating with Wolmar, understanding more fully his interests and priorities in a highly ordered
and tightly controlled domestic economy. Tellingly, moreover, Wolmar understands his role in
the cultivation of St Preux as that of merely correcting the errors and excesses of the
imagination. The end of this cultivation in his view is, at least ostensibly, to restore exactly the
kind of rational autonomy that Julie and St Preux associate with mere self-restoration and the
return to previously held virtues; yet “restoration,” “return,” and “correction” are gestures at
odds not only with the “force” Wolmar applies but to the exchange of tableaux, a metaphor
which only seems to acknowledge that the imagination is still essential to St Preux’s place
within, and experience of, community. Wolmar does not so much cool St Preux’s imagination as
cultivate it, which requires, however, that he lead St Preux to believe it has been extinguished or tamed.

Although St Preux’s position in this society is highly problematic, it is important to note that he is identifying collectively. So of what does that identification consist? As we have seen, the terms and conditions of the social body with which he identifies are emphatically out of sync with his imagined position within them – this disconnect is even what makes the identification conceivable and sustainable in the first place. Nevertheless, it is the fullest realization of collective identification provided in the novel, and perhaps in all of Rousseau’s major works, as commentary on the English breakfast suggests. St Preux’s position in Clarens contrasts sharply with his position in Paris, which he recognizes (imagines) as an explicit solitude in the midst of the world: “I enter with a secret horror into this vast desert of the world,” he writes to Julie. “This chaos presents me with nothing but horrible solitude, wherein reigns a dull silence. My beleaguered soul seeks for expansion, and everywhere finds itself hemmed in. I am never less alone than when I am alone, said an Ancient, I on the other hand am alone only in the crowd, where I can be neither with you nor with the others” (190). And yet, as we have seen, being “with” Julie is (eventually) not that simple, and while St Preux fails to see that Wolmar “overlay[s] one tableau with another” in his relationship with Julie, he does see that, in Paris, “being in a gathering is about like standing before a moving tableau, where the detached Spectator is the only creature moving under his own power,” since “the men to whom you are speaking are not the ones with whom you converse; their sentiments do not emanate from the heart, their perceptions are not in their minds, their words do not represent their thoughts, all you see of them is their shape” (193).
St Preux employs a kind of critical agency in Paris that acknowledges the subjective nature of identifying (or refusing to identify) collectively. Imagining community becomes an entirely subjective performance. Indeed, not only does he insist that he is isolated in the crowds of Paris, but when he finds himself alone in Paris he insists that he is in good company:

I find…that lovers have a thousand ways to allay the sentiment of absence… Sometimes they even see each other more often than when they used to see each other every day; for as soon as one of the two is alone, instantly they are both together… I keep to myself; I am surrounded by traces of you, and could not possibly rest my eyes on the objects around me without seeing you everywhere. (194)

While, as I have been arguing in this chapter, insisting on solitude while in Paris allows St Preux to isolate himself from – and thus critique – the values which organize and distinguish Parisian society (although, unlike the characters from the examples in the beginning of this chapter, St Preux does this intentionally at this point), this isolation also ultimately gets him into trouble. A stranger to the social codes of fashionable Parisian society, he finds himself naively drawn by Swiss soldiers (who ‘mock’ St Preux for failing to assimilate by “retaining in Paris the simplicity of ancient Helvetic manners”) into a brothel (241). Julie knows his principle failing in this adventure. Lacking the intimacy and openness with the soldiers that he ostensibly shares with Julie, he does indeed allow himself to be duped into drunkenness and infidelity – however, and much worse, he has let his fear of shame and mockery subordinate his fear of moral transgression. “Speak more frankly with her who can read what is in your heart,” she writes, evoking a degree of openness and true community that he rejected with the soldiers but that, ironically, might also have saved him, “it was shame that held you back. You feared they would mock you on your way out; a moment’s jeers frightened you, and you preferred exposing
yourself to remorse rather than to derision.” That is, his imagined isolation from the participants in Parisian society has insulated him from the social codes that may have made the brothel recognizable (and repulsive) to him in the first place, but it has not guaranteed his detachment from the affective investments of *amour-propre* that may have motivated him to leave or to protest openly.

In both cases – his refusal to identify with Parisian society and his identification with Clarens – his position consists of a failed struggle to reconcile what he does or does not know of social structures with his imagined place within those structures. His place in (rather, outside) Parisian society seems to allow him to critique its follies, but it also, at the same time, prevents him from recognizing how fully immersed he is within those follies, or from engaging directly with that critique in any practical, productive way. Because he is isolated from Parisian mores, he is able to dissociate himself from its moral shortcomings, but, for the same reason, he does not always recognize its snares – he cannot reject them or change them, such that the dissociation ultimately amounts to nothing, and he participates in those follies (the very moral shortcomings he has dissociated himself from) in spite of himself. In Clarens, his imagined community seems much more idyllic. Perhaps in some ways it is. This chapter is not the place to argue that Paris is more than, less than, or equal to Clarens in any qualitative sense. The content of community in Clarens is privileged, and that is clearly the point, but the mechanisms by which community is imagined and legitimized in each case differ little. It is a subjective performance by which power relations are suppressed and interests and priorities are potentially appropriated asymmetrically, which seems contrary to so much of what Rousseau’s political philosophy seeks to accomplish.

**CONCLUSION**

It is important to remember that although one does not *see* the footprint or *feel* that one is being taught, it is not a problem for Rousseau that they are there unseen, unfelt. There can be no
doubt that the imagination plays a strong role in true community for Rousseau, or that it is directly linked to the sense of independence and autonomy under which the true citizen operates. There can also be no doubt that, contrary to this perceived independence and autonomy, the imagination is being acted upon by another. This is clear in the examples considered above, and can be traced back to the origins of society even in Rousseau’s most practical political writings. Moses, for example, among the three great lawgivers considered in Considerations on the Government of Poland, “gave [his people] morals and practices…overburdened it with distinctive rites, ceremonies; he constrained it in a thousand ways in order to keep it ceaselessly in suspense,” etc. (172). His practical writings on Poland and Corsica, like Emile, are full of precepts about how you must make your people feel X, see Y, or believe N. Moral freedom in the fatherland consists in imagining one’s self free, but also in the assumption that, in so doing, one actually is free. In principle, absolute reciprocity and equality assure us of this (“[t]he fundamental law of your foundation ought to be equality. Everything ought to be related to it, even authority itself which is established only to defend it. All ought to be equal by right of birth” [130]), but insofar as the proper object and practical labor of the association’s members is to sustain the autonomy of Robinson Crusoe (to sense that one obeys only one’s own will), the extent to which one imagines, and to which one’s imagination is acted upon, are lost. But is this necessarily the case? After all, Rousseau provides no hint that the preceptor and Wolmar, for example, operate under the same errors. We simply do not know, and the suppression of their narratives keeps us from knowing: indeed, it helps to ensure that the important work of imagining community proceeds unfalteringly.

Above, I have suggested that imagining Emile as a sort of isolate draws attention away from some potentially damning implications of his relationship with his preceptor, and therefore
with a representation of a nearly ideal Rousseauian community. Specifically, I have been
interested in speculating about the preceptor’s suppressed narrative. Doing this, as I have started
to do in these pages, follows directly from rejecting the solitude he attributes to his ward, and it
provides the opportunity to appreciate more fully some otherwise lost implications of the
narrative’s structural asymmetry. By foregrounding the narrator, his past – which must to some
extent authorize his role in *Emile* – becomes more conspicuous, or more conspicuously absent,
leaving one with important questions about the emergence and conditions of legitimacy. Does
the tutor represent the promise of Emile’s education, for example? Presumably, yes. He has all
the knowledge he wishes to impart to Emile. He knows it better and (unless he is a product of a
similar education) knows it more authentically. Yet we cannot know if Emile or his tutor more
fully realizes the promise of this knowledge, or if it is even possible to realize it, since we know
nothing of how the preceptor came about it: nothing about a narrative, as I suggest above, likely
to be far more useful than that of *Emile*. And yet it is Emile’s story; he is given as the product of
a cultivation, an experiment: the making of a man useful to both himself and to society. So what
is the essential difference between Emile and his preceptor that makes this knowledge liberating
to the pupil but unusable to the teacher?

Perhaps it is presumptuous to assume that the preceptor knows what Emile must know,
has the same relationship to the world that Emile must have, but has these in some more
authentic way. Perhaps he is, rather, just like his readers, the bourgeoisie creeping through a
world in which “fatherland” and “citizens” no longer exist, but who was somehow capable of
making Emile fundamentally unlike both himself and his readers. If so, where does this agency
come from? One assumes that the tutor knows what Emile must do and be and, further, that he
therefore must do and be it himself. Otherwise, he chooses not to do or to be that which he insists
Emile must, which raises troubling doubts either about the tutor himself or about the natural status and knowledge he clearly otherwise privileges. Like the lawgiver, he appears all potential energy, spontaneously and mysteriously – mystically – appearing in order only to disappear into his pupil and his now irreversibly problematic book. Unlike the lawgiver, however, as we have seen, he shares Emile’s nature, so his status and his provenance are accomplices in the suppression of his cultivation of Emile.

I wonder: can Emile read Emile? Rousseau famously cautions against letting his student read, of course, especially in his youth. Yet to his readers, Emile ostensibly serves the same purpose as Robinson Crusoe, a story about self-sufficiency and following only the dictates of natural necessity. It seems that there is some implicit, essential difference between Emile and his reader that, above all, makes his narrative useful to us but dangerous to him, and that makes Robinson Crusoe sufficient for him but not for us (I imagine Emile being a one-page pamphlet: “go read Robinson Crusoe”). Emile believes himself to be discovering knowledge (such as the nature and principles of property) naturally and as a “natural man,” but we of course do not. Emile is demonstrably wrong, and yet his education is privileged over ours as readers. As his lesson on property shows, Emile, the product of a privileged education, cannot see what we (at least in his narrative) can: he cannot distinguish the knowledge of natural necessity from socially-mediated and -conditioned knowledge. And if Emile cannot, can anybody? Perhaps we don’t get the preceptor’s story precisely because it is impossible, with the best of educations in the most ideal circumstances, to make this most basic and crucial distinction: the very distinction according to which Emile’s education (and his subsequent status) is privileged in the first place. That is, the preceptor’s narrative must be suppressed because he cannot account for how he came
to learn what is most important – what Emile himself fails to learn: how autonomy so perfect as to be analogous with isolation can in fact be consistent with a socially organized world.
2: Traumatic Familiarity: “Some Man,” the Savage, and the Main Character of Legitimacy

For writers before Rousseau, the startling nature of social contract is rather easy to unfold by considering the peculiar narrative position of the individual just before the moment of contract. She exists in a state of nature, wandering through the wilderness and sustaining herself on its produce, perhaps she has a few apples or skins with her, when she happens upon a cluster (an “aggregate,” approaching Rousseau’s terminology) of others. Social contract theory is organized around two possible ways of imagining this cluster of individuals, each of which is deeply rooted in the phenomena of social experience.

In the first, she is afraid: these others constitute a threat to the protagonist and her meager possessions. Her fear is a necessary feature of narratives of social contract, arising for two reasons. First, the individual in the state of nature is relatively weak. A common narrative trope in the eighteenth century, the premise of innate human weakness finds one of its best known expressions in the Yahoos of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*: humans, unique among animals, are “utterly uncapable of doing much Mischief,” Gulliver’s master Houyhnhnm declares, naively believing that Yahoo wars must be rather bloodless affairs, “For your Mouths lying flat with your Faces, you can hardly bite each other to any Purpose, unless by Consent” – or, in other words, by contract (214). Swift echoes contract theorist Samuel Pufendorf, for whom the weakness of human beings is crucially important. Men, “unlike the beasts,” he writes, “are not formidable for teeth or hooves or horns,” and, “man now seems to be in a worse condition than the beasts in that scarcely any other animal is attended from birth with such weakness.” Describing “the internal structure of states,” he writes more coolly that “man’s power is of limited extent” (135), which poses a problem in the context of natural right – the second reason
the cluster of individuals constitutes a threat – according to which, Hobbes notes, “every man has a Right to every thing; even to one anothers body” (91).

This fear is important specifically because it supplies the need for social contract. It provides the incentive, at a level of experience consistent with purely physical, pre-social, and wholly natural existence, to enter into social obligations. Since, speaking practically, all individuals are subject to equal limitations in the state of nature, “there can be no security to any man” where natural right authorizes brutality as a matter of sustenance (Hobbes 91). Even Locke, who works to bridge the gap between natural law and natural right (ostensibly mitigating some of the notorious hostility of Hobbes’s state of nature),\(^{47}\) insists that, without any appeal to law, “I may kill [a thief] when he sets on me to rob me but of my horse or coat” (108).\(^ {48}\) In all cases, because the individual lacks sufficient defensive strength, and because natural law alone (even Pufendorf’s most generous interpretation of it) does not preclude the possibility of violence, we can imagine that, upon experiencing other individuals, our protagonist is distressed and afraid. For the natural isolate, as well as for all the other individuals who make up this aggregate, this encounter must be a moment of profound anxiety: confronted with other people,

\(^{47}\) As many critics point out, the difference between Hobbes and Locke in this respect is much less pronounced than he claims it is; nevertheless, Locke attempts to reconfigure the relationship between right and law. See Kirstie M. McClure, for example, who shows the “complementarity” between the two, at least in principle. See also Brian Tierney’s *The Idea of Natural Rights, Natural Law, and Church Law 1150 – 1625*, which has also been important in pointing to continuity between natural rights and natural law.

\(^{48}\) This specific claim does not fully disappear, even with Rousseau. Although Rousseau makes himself an exception by associating natural individuals with such strength that bears and lions leave them alone (unless provoked with desperate hunger), it is clear that equality among people makes this strength practically useless in interpersonal encounters. In this sense, Rousseau’s position differs from Pufendorf’s less than one might expect – Pufendorf argues, after all, that “the physical strength of adult men is nearly equal to the extent that even a relatively weak man can kill a stronger man by taking him by surprise or by use of cunning and skill in arms,” such that one’s “superiority does not give him license to inflict injuries on others” (61), and such that physical strength is not much of a reliable advantage.
the individual and her possessions are not secure, and it is precisely this fact, and its attendant anxiety, that makes social contract necessary in the first place.

By sharp contrast, the other way to imagine this cluster of individuals is as a locus of personal security. We can see this by revisiting Pufendorf’s claim in its context: “In the first place it is clear that the individual finds in other men a more useful and effective defense against the evils that human depravity threatens to inflict on him than in fortifications, weapons or dumb animals; and since a man’s power is of limited extent, it was necessary for him to combine with other men to achieve that end” (135). Social contract can be characterized, in part, by this paradoxical position: the individual in a state of nature finds it “necessary” to “combine with other men” in order to secure herself from the “depravity” of other men. The gathering of natural men and women with which we began presents to our natural isolate two, it would seem, mutually exclusive ideas: the threat of human contact, violence, and violation on the one hand (“No animal is fiercer than man, none more savage and prone to more vices disruptive of the peace of society” [Pufendorf 133]); useful security against exactly such threats on the other. To these conflicting ideas correspond two mutually exclusive social experiences – the crowd evokes distress; the same crowd, under the same conditions, evokes the comfort of security. This affective impasse should seem especially troubling since both of these reactions, by most accounts, are necessary preconditions for the inauguration and effectiveness of social contract. The former reveals to the individual why social contract is necessary, the latter attests to its realization. Any complete understanding of social contract must make reference to these two ways of imagining others. But how can both of these conflicting representations emerge, with equal narrative force and conceptual necessity, under the same conditions? How are we to
understand the relationship between the one and the other, or the relationship between each and legitimate social organization?

THE MAIN CHARACTER OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Much has been made about the narrative framework of social contract theory – it is something that transpires or is purchased in historical time, something that separates a supposed “state of nature” from civilized society in chronological terms, rather than something that is innate or naturally given. Hobbes writes about the conditions that give rise to the social contract, for example, in explicitly temporal terms, writing that “during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as if of every man, against every man,” adding that “WARRE, consisteth not in Battell onely, or in the act of fighting; but in the tract of time, wherein the Will to contend by Battell is sufficiently known” (88). The empirical and temporal immersion of the individual gives rise to “the known disposition” to war that motivates the contract (88 – 89), as well as to the conditions under which that disposition is neutralized through contract. “Whensoever a man Transferreth his Right, or Renounceth it,” he writes, referring to the unconditional right to self preservation, “it is either in consideration of some Right reciprocally transferred to himselfe; or for some other good he hopeth for thereby” (93). Such a “mutuall transferring of Right,” performed by individuals reacting to and consciously shaping events in historical time, “is that which men call CONTRACT” (94).

As I argued above, Samuel Pufendorf’s theory of social contract presupposes individuals with similar historical and empirical investments. This presupposition is embedded, moreover, within a broader and more conventionally historical narrative, since the “union of wills and forces” by which “a multitude of men [is] brought to life as a corporate body” is premised on a
further, narrative distinction. (This union entails “two agreements” – the original contract to “become fellow citizens” followed by a second on the “form of government to be introduced” – as well as a “decree,” by which “the man or men are appointed on whom the government of the infant state is conferred” [136 – 137].) The will to consent that gives rise to civil society is of a different order than the prior and natural one, which, by the time civil society emerges, has already formed family households. “We cannot,” Pufendorf writes, “infer directly from man’s sociality that his nature tends precisely to civil society” (132), since natural sociality is ontologically different from – and chronologically anterior to – civil society.

The narrative registers of Locke’s social contract theory are even more conspicuous. Not unlike Pufendorf, Locke argues that the “first society was between man and wife, which gave beginning to that between parents and children; to which, in time, that between master and servant came to be added.” The gradual formation of increasingly complex social bodies is distinctly historical, and yet, Locke adds, such bodies “came short of political society” (133). While the family resembles “a little commonwealth,” it remains “very far from it” (136), since not only are conjugal and political authorities distinct, but conjugal authority does nothing to address the weakness, instability, and vulnerability that I associated above with the state of nature. Political society is produced by a contract that responds to the liabilities of property and personal security in the state of nature. The contract is an event, a fixed action in a historical narrative: “there only is political society, where every one of the members hath quitted this natural power, resigned it up into the hands of the community in all cases that exclude him not from appealing for protection to the law established by it” (136 – 137). To the extent that the contract is an expression, not of arbitrary contingency but of legitimate, deliberate, self-governing rationalism, it consciously addresses itself both to its troubled prehistory and to its
aspirational future. Locke, like Hobbes and Pufendorf, develops a narrative of social contract that necessarily presupposes a historically prior state of nature.

Nevertheless, modern critics and contract theorists alike insist that any serious analysis of social contract must ignore or dismiss, as merely hypothetical, this very narrative premise.\(^49\) Hobbes, for example, famously grants that it is impossible to know what the state of nature was like, or if it ever existed at all (89). Pufendorf takes a similar position, approaching more closely an outright rejection, writing that “it is obvious that the whole human race was never at once and the same time in the natural state” (116), and Locke skirts the issue, or at least its historical status, arguing only that contemporary leaders of nations exist in such a state relative to one another today (106). Readers are thus left grasping for some insight into the nature of society

\(^{49}\) Almost all literature about the social contract insists at some point that these “histories” are theoretical, hypothetical, mythical, and so forth. Critics of Hobbes have argued for example that the state of nature is “not historical but analytical,” and that “[i]t is really a picture of man as he is perhaps never, certainly seldom, found…analogous to the scientific description of a body as continuing in a state or rest or of uniform motion in a straight line unless influenced by outside forces,” adding that “[a]ctually there is no such body” (Lamprecht 23, 24); another, lingering on Hobbes’s analogy in De Cive, notes the “prototype of a materialist physiology so indifferent to sex that Hobbes populates his hypothetical state of nature with mushrooms” (Thompson 74). Jean Starobinski writes that the state of nature in Rousseau is “a theoretical hypothesis that takes on almost concrete reality thanks to a style capable of making imaginary things seem real,” a convincing effect of the philosopher’s strategy of “making up an objective history of an Age of Transparency” that he himself, Starobinski argues, wanted to accept objectively (294, 15). Similarly, Judith Shklar writes that “The life-history of our species, in Rousseau’s view, begins not with any known, but with a hypothetical man, the man of pure sensation, a being shorn of every attribute that might conceivably be social in its origin” (36). Frederick Neuhouser straddles the ambiguity by calling Rousseau’s state of nature “‘true’ (but fictitious)” (36). There are recent and important exceptions to this rule, however, especially as claims about the state of nature relate to pre-colonial societies and international relations. See for example the work of J. G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner (174 – 177), whose analysis of the state of nature is informed by Hobbes’s and Locke’s association of the state of nature with America – an association, of course (it must be noted), that is not any less mythical and instrumental than any association of the state of nature with the deep, European past. For a more sustained analysis of the state of nature in pre-colonial contexts, see Charles W. Mills (whom I will return to briefly), who writes that “the literal state of nature is reserved for nonwhites; for whites the state of nature is hypothetical.” (66).
couched in a narrative of the origins of society, the latter of which, we are told, must in the end be put aside.

The problem, I argue, is at least twofold: first, these texts create a tension of competing truth values in both narrative and theoretical accounts. Second, following directly from this, they create a tension in the representations of individual bodies and social bodies. Hobbes, Pufendorf, and Locke ultimately make the case for social contract – its need and its power for legitimizing social bodies – with reference to the individual, the centerpiece after all for the liberal social theory that social contract evolves to accommodate. In part (and Rousseau’s centralization of this fact was crucial to his transformation of the concept) this is because social contract must be justified for the individual; and when the contract is realized, its power and effectiveness must play out in ways that are empirically recognizable to the individual. In other words, there must be some relationship between the legitimacy of the social contract and the individual’s experiences – and since social contract transforms the terms and conditions of social organization (from an “aggregate” to an “association,” to use Rousseau’s terms), the possibility for and the legitimate realization of social contract should make themselves legible in social experience.

For the most part, people are represented in contract theories in the third-person plural, as “men” in general, or as a kind of archetype, such as the father in Locke’s Second Treatise whose “command over his children is but temporary, and reaches not their life or property” (127). This father stands more properly as a relational position, emblematic of categorical functions more akin to a legal category than an individual strictly speaking. But since justification in the context of early enlightenment thought presupposes a rationally autonomous individual – and,
emphatically, not a type – a particularized individual is strongly implied as well, both as the intended reader of the pages of political philosophy and as a kind of literary character within them, a figure that occasionally (if rarely) actually appears in order to make the otherwise abstract implications and justifications of social contract theory more explicit. It is thus that Locke, in one of his best-known passages, slips into narrative, offering an account of a single individual for whom the conditions of legitimate social organization become available through his experience of another. First offering a strictly theoretical account of illegitimate social contact (“force, or a declared design of force, upon the person of another, where there is no common superior on earth to appeal to for relief, is the state of war: and it is the want of such an appeal gives a man the right of war even against an aggressor, though he be in society, and a fellow subject”), he follows with a narrative account of the social experience that makes these terms available to the singular, rational subject of empirical experience (“Thus a thief, whom I cannot harm, but by appeal to the law, for having stolen all that I am worth, I may kill, when he sets on me to rob me but of my horse or coat” [108]). Social contract is conceptualized around the representational and epistemological demands of both individuals and types, or (borrowing form literary parlance) what we might think of as round and flat characters.

50 For Helen Thompson, it is precisely this feature that defines the modernity of the contract theorists’ political thought. Thompson locates Locke’s rejection of Filmer’s patriarchy in individuals consenting to authority only to the extent to which they find, after reflection, that doing so is reasonable and desirable. I should also note that, as I do here, Thompson draws upon novelistic representations in order to identify contradictions in social contract theories (namely the arbitrary subjection of women that does not seem authorized by the ultimately inclusive, internalized, and mechanized conceptualization of the contractarian subject), but her argument overstates the particular individualism of Hobbes’s and Locke’s texts, arguing that “neither Hobbes nor Locke represents his model citizen as the disembodied, universalizing, necessarily masculine figure who serves as the individual’s contemporary referent” available in “contemporary critical visions of a public sphere populated, sometimes with surprising literalness, by abstractions” (5). My argument begins with the claim that, in fact, both individuals and abstractions appear in these texts.
Ideally, as a major premise of contract theory insists, these two movements and types of demands – the round and the flat; the particular and the categorical – are easily reconciled, and could in fact be considered interchangeably, since the particularized individual becomes a legitimate citizen precisely when he or she achieves or maintains, through the exercise of reason, the status of the abstract, rights-determined subject. 51 In practice, however, as feminist critics of social contract have pointed out, the particular and categorical demands of contract theory are not always so neatly reconciled. 52 Indeed, I argue that when the single individual, the rounded character, becomes an object of representation in such theories, a number of otherwise submerged tensions between collective organization and individual autonomy become conspicuous. What happens, for example, when a father, more roundly and particularly considered, believes himself to have a degree or quality of command over his children that his type does not authorize? Does legitimacy reside in the “objective” relational category from which his command ostensibly proceeds, or from his particularity, as a rational, affective subject, which ostensibly grants him the agency to recognize, interpret, doubt, or even ignore such “flat,” categorical commands? On which does consent depend, and to which does it appeal, both in relation to other “flat” categories of social identity and to his particular sons and daughters?

The particularized individual in the theories of Hobbes, Pufendorf, and Locke is closely related to – and its emergence is nearly contemporaneous with – another major round, particular individual around which narratives are organized: the protagonist of novelistic realism. Recent

51 Contract theory reaches maturity in the moral philosophy of Kant, after all, whose “categorical imperative” describes the promise of the individual in terms universal.
52 For some critics, the abstract archetype of the free subject necessarily excludes women, complicating the supposed universalism of freedom that contract theory (and the definition of full humanness its promulgation and realization relies upon) requires. See especially Carole Pateman, The Sexual Contract, and, for an analysis of later texts, Joan Wallach Scott on the “abstract individual” (6 – 7).
critics have turned more earnestly not just to the historical coincidence of seventeenth- and
eighteenth-century philosophical and literary representation but also to the circuits that link them
in practice. Karen Bloom Gevirtz writes, for example, that early novelists, while “not
philosophers,” “were very interested in the philosophical questions swirling around them” (4),
echoing recent statements about the philosophical engagement of literary writers by critics like
Helen Thompson, Jonathan Kramnick, E. Derek Taylor, and others. In addition to the extent to
which, as these critics argue, novelists from at least as early as Aphra Behn and Mary Davys
developed characters immersed in the epistemological and political conditions of Hobbesian or
Lockean individualism, they also frequently referenced social and political concepts from
philosophy explicitly. Edward Kimber’s trans-Atlantic History of the Life and Adventures of Mr.
Anderson (1754), for example, contains a scene in which the concept of individual liberty and
obligation is explained to the protagonist, Tom Anderson (a child abducted and sold into
indentured servitude), culminating in “Tom explaining a passage in Locke to his mistress, with
her arm gentry reclined upon his shoulder” (68). In Millenium Hall ([sic] 1762), Sarah Scott
censures the fashionable world outside her utopian community, arguing that “It might more
properly be compared to that state of war, which Hobbes supposes the first condition of
mankind” (61). For their part, novelists often saw themselves as participants in conversations
about society and the individual, and saw by extension the importance of foregrounding narrative
representations of individuals negotiating legitimizing conditions of social and political
organization.

Indeed, by the time Frances Burney writes her last novel, The Wanderer (1814), the
significance of narrative contributions to abstract, philosophical formulations is fully developed.
Her protagonist criticizes philosophers “born and bred in a capital; who first revel in its
dissipations and vanities, next, sicken of its tumults and disappointments, write or exclaim for ever, how happy is the country peasant’s lot” (700). The Wanderer recognizes that “theoretical” accounts reflect the prepossessions of their authors, and that narrative provides an important supplement to theory, balancing its conclusions by resolving its distance from the lived experiences of individuals – individuals, indeed, including women, laborers, and colonized subjects, who are dispossessed by such theoretical accounts. Authors of theory “reflect not,” she continues, that to promote their idealizations of country life “the peasant must be so much more philosophic than the rest of mankind, as to see and feel only his advantages, while he is blind and insensible to his hardships.” Theoretical or philosophical discourses, she argues, ultimately reflect and promote the needs of its privileged developers, those who enjoy the material advantages of education and leisure. Their concepts are thus of little use (or, at least, are of less use than those of fictional narrative) to real people.

While, despite such examples, novelists’ contributions to political philosophy have been largely ignored, it is precisely the intersection of empirical plausibility (realism) and character “roundness” that substantiates both literary characters and social contractors. Ironically, Burney seems to address her critique to the one political philosopher in the social contract tradition who, as I argued in the first chapter, truly embraced the power of narrative representation. While I will conclude below with a gesture toward the implications for Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s revolutionary approach to social contract theory, and while I wish to focus the present chapter on his predecessors (in whose work narrative and theoretical formulations of individual and social bodies exposes a problem that, I argue, is symptomatic of modern expressions of legitimacy), it is worth recalling that Rousseau’s state of nature is more developed, in historical and narrative terms, than any that came before, and that the middle, prescriptive period of his career in the
1760s produced two novels whose importance would be hard to overstate: *Emile* and *Julie: ou la nouvelle Héloïse*. The power of Rousseau’s reimagining of the social contract proceeds at least in part from his insistence on allowing its protagonist the depth of roundness and plausibility that fictional narrative affords – even as that “depth,” as Susan Buck-Morss and Charles W. Mills point out, problematically reduces roundness to a patriarchal, Eurocentric universal.

Approximating philosophical and literary protagonists reveals how potentially disparate the interests of – as well as the entailments of legitimacy for – the individual and the social body are. By definition, the protagonist is a figure who finds himself or herself in negotiation with less-delineated others, a single social surface (or multiple social surfaces) of “flat” characterization, the mere potential for intersubjectivity enclosed in a narrative structure similar to what Alex Woloch details in *The One vs. the Many*. This is made explicit, for example, in *Joseph Andrews* by Henry Fielding (a self-avowed pioneer of the novel genre), a novel which is structured according to its narrator by contact between a small handful of round, foregrounded characters and, “not Men, but Manners; not an Individual, but a Species,” such as the “Lawyer” that is not particular but a figure embodying “these 4000 Years” of archetypal representation (148). Likewise, when a protagonist appears in social contract theory, its authors stir up the specter of the individual’s affective and rational postures against, not within, the “objectively” present social body – his (and he is always male) anxiety about controlling the nature and conditions of his contact with that surface as an external and perhaps even suspect object, in addition to *and sometimes rather than* the conditions according to which he recognizes himself as a constituent of it.

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53 The best work on gender in the social contract is still Carole Pateman’s classic *The Sexual Contract*. 
After all, Woloch argues not only that novels contain flat characters and round characters, but that protagonists, competing with other characters for narrative space and readers’ attention, facilitate and engender the flattening of other characters. Joseph Andrews is not only a round character in contradistinction to the archetypical lawyer, but by virtue of the lawyer’s flattening: his particularity is purchased at the expense of the minor characters that serve as his backdrop – minor characters that, being strictly categorical, embodying their functions in the same way that Locke’s “father” figure embodies his, facilitate his emergence from and transcendence of the very flatness that confines them. Framed in this way, we see an epistemological conflict at the heart of social contract theory, at least in its persistent narrative claims. The demands and experiences of the autonomous, rational individual are not only separate from, but potentially opposed to those of the social body that, through the contract, entails them. Appealing to the interests and experiences of the protagonist not only subordinates but also potentially distorts the interests and experiences of the social body. By assuming, however, that these two movements are interchangeable, contract theorists oversimplify and even ignore the relationship (and conflicts) between the individual and the social body, a relationship that remains under-theorized. A better understanding of social and political organization must acknowledge that representations of individual and social bodies presuppose different features, operate in different epistemological frameworks, and occupy, therefore, fundamentally different positions relative to legitimacy. For my present purposes, this means that, even before addressing the problem of reconciling liberty and social organization – through, for example, Rousseau’s “general will” – we must see if it is possible for the individual to recognize liberty and its violations in the first place (and, as I have been arguing, this must be recognized in social experience). In other words, it must first be established that legitimacy can be experienced at all (as empirical phenomena, by
a rational body within a social body) before any political forms can be said to be legitimate. What is needed is a metaphysics of legitimacy, and it is by looking more closely at— and not by ignoring—the narrative premises of contract theory that a fuller articulation of this need and its implications can be achieved.

**NARRATIVE FRAMES FOR SOCIAL CONTRACT**

By dismissing the narrative aspects of social contract theory, critics privilege one claim (the historical account of social contract is hypothetical) over another (social contract is a historical product). Moreover, the priority of the first claim is typically justified primarily or even exclusively by reference to the latter: a move that, while not exactly arbitrary, needs a more rigorous defense. To be clear, I am not arguing that narratives of social contract are intended to be read as straight history, or that these two claims hold equal rhetorical or truth value. But our understanding of social contract ought not to leave the historical premise out entirely. After all, these theorists include and even foreground historical narrative in their accounts. Recall Rousseau’s objection to Grotius, for example, in which he famously argued for the need to discover the means by which a people become “a people” in the first place (14). The persistence of historical narrative, even as it was obsessively qualified by its developers, was clearly thought to be more useful than distracting or confusing.

Nevertheless, a more explicitly historical or narrative account of social contract is not easily determined, as the conflictedness of the simultaneously comforted and terrified individual in the state of nature shows. It is tempting to consider a narrative of social contract in its simplest terms as, say, the problem of getting from point A (imagining others as a source of violence and violation) to point B (imagining them as a source of comfort and security). Indeed, most critical dismissals of the narrative aspects of contract assume just such terms, or something very like
them. But of course this framing only begs the question: while it acknowledges the explicit historical framework that is both part of and contrary to early modern contract theories, it neglects the important fact that, as we have seen above, imagining others as a potential source of security is a necessary precondition for entertaining social contract in the first place. The individual, even in her natural isolation, “finds” this security “in other men,” or (in a formulation closer to Locke’s) in the common law and authority established by the consent that one expects to find in “the hands of the community” (137). In other words, this simple A-to-B framing does not make clear why, for these writers, social contract is still necessary once the natural individual finds herself capable of imagining others as a source of security – or, to put it another way, why contract is not in such cases already realized, since the anxiety of interpersonal contact has already been neutralized. Any contract narrative must account for the operative assumption, generally taken for granted by contract theorists before Rousseau, that social contract is not required for, nor does it consist in, merely imagining others as a source of security. It is possible for the individual in the state of nature to imagine others as representing the depravity of human nature and, at the same time, security from that depravity, and this does not present a contradiction. More importantly, this possibility does not undermine the force of social contract, even though (as the dramatization above suggests) social contract seems to be authorized in large part by that very distinction.

As I have been arguing, attempting to narrate social contract in a way that accounts for social experience (and these two ways of imagining others, fear and comfort, A and B) is crucial, but doing so threatens not to resolve but to problematize the relationship between legitimacy and the individual in the course of anticipating, negotiating, and realizing the social contract. To resolve this problem, it appears that whatever the relationship between A and B is, it must be
found in our protagonist, the isolate, as she relates to, or imagines, herself in an interpersonal context. The orthodox answer to the problem of an isolate (pre-contract) recognizing both depravity and security in others is that the change effected by contract is interior, and not—at least not primarily—interpersonal. For Hobbes, for example, social contract consists of surrendering one’s own natural right to all things and means: “To lay downe a mans Right to any thing, is to devest himselfe of the Liberty, of hindering another of the benefit of his own Right to the same.” In its first moments, social contract consists of the “diminution of impediments” to others’ enjoyment of their “Right originall,” following only from the recognition, by the individual, that she is herself such an impediment (92). In other words, “diminution” and self-divestment come to the same, primarily self-referential, thing. Thus, while the individual in a state of nature has no concept of justice or injustice, being “none of the Faculties neither of the Body, nor Mind” (Hobbes 90), these “Faculties” arise introspectively and retrospectively: “when a man hath in either manner abandoned, or granted away his Right; then is he said to be OBLIGED, or BOUND, not to hinder those, to whom such Right is granted…it is his DUTY, not to make voyd that voluntary act of his own: and that such hindrance is INJUSTICE” (92 – 93).

Locke’s formulation is more succinct (though no less complex): the individual “divests himself of his natural liberty, and puts on the bonds of civil society” (142). The individual in a state of nature does not move from imagining depravity to imagining security in others at all, but, recognizing both of these possibilities, moves from a position of isolation conditioned by natural right to one (variously described as free and subjected) conditioned by the surrender of that right. But this answer is not satisfying either, and precisely because of the conflict between the theoretical and the narrative articulations of its construction. Understanding the social contract as a catalyst principally for interior transformation of this sort would require representing (would
require, specifically, narrating) its solution and power in a radically different way than they
generally do. Social contract currently conceives of the isolate perceiving an aggregate of
individuals as a locus of personal security against the depravity of others, not as perceiving them
as an insulation from, or force against, her own depravity. After all, if Locke has protagonists, as
we have seen, they are possessors – of produce, of a horse or a coat, or of land which, mixed
with their labor, is removed from what is common and must be secured against others’ depravity.
Depravity is almost always embodied, when it is embodied at all, by minor “characters,” flat,
general, and emphatically other: the generalized potential for threat rather than embodied and
rounded individuals whose perceived depravity can be narrated, and thus plausibly accounted
for. The suggestion of the horse-thief in Locke’s account falls far short of Daniel Defoe’s
protagonists, Moll Flanders or Roxana, or of Frances Burney’s Macartney, or of hundreds of
other apparently depraved characters of novelistic realism who for whatever specific reasons and
under whatever specific conditions – often in fact hunger or desperation – find themselves
seriously contemplating robbery, theft, prostitution, etc. Even Hobbes, whose theory of social
contract is organized entirely around a claim that human nature is relentlessly depraved, urges
his readers to consider, not their own thievish desires, but the vulnerabilities of rightful
possession and understandable paranoia:

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54 Frances Burney’s titular protagonist, Evelina, becomes unpopular with her peers precisely for
refusing to dismiss the mysterious and brooding Macartney, an “unfortunate North Briton” who
contemplates turning to robbery, as a mere type (the poor Northern lodger, undeserving of any
substantial attention), literally bringing him from the background of the small front room, asking
him to speak, insisting upon his right to vote, gathering his backstory, and circulating to her ward
his account of the desperate conditions under which he found himself contemplating robbery.
Defoe’s novels, Moll Flanders and Roxana, tell the stories of two women who, abandoned and
forced to rely upon their own resources in a world they find generally hostile, turn to
lawlessness, theft, prostitution, and even, it is suggested in Roxana, murder.
It may seem strange to some man, that has not well weighed these things; that Nature should thus dissociate, and render men apt to invade, and destroy one another…Let him therefore consider with himselfe, when taking a journey, he armes himselfe, and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep, he locks his dores; when even in his house he locks his chests…what opinion he has of his fellow subjects, when he rides armed, of his fellow Citizens, when he locks his dores; and of his children, and servants, when he locks his chests. (89)

Hobbes’s “some man” is not the depraved thief that one might reasonably expect from an account such as his, and especially since “some man” appears precisely where the text seems to promise a demonstration of the naturally destructive inclinations of every man. His protagonist’s experience (and habitual negotiation) of a shared, political space reveals something about human nature, Hobbes suggests, and yet the protagonist himself stands contrary to that pattern, not only by not destroying, but by actively avoiding, others. Hobbes offers “some man’s” social experiences (his feelings about others as revealed in the course of negotiating shared spaces) as clear and valid proof about human nature, yet he is silent on what the protagonist’s own benign, if paranoid, existence reveals. Moreover, the protagonist’s social attitudes make a claim that is ostensibly familiar (we are meant to recognize them in ourselves), but that therefore, being at least to that extent universally valid, would seem to negate itself: if everybody is a protagonist, organized by our paranoia about the depravity of others, there are no others left to substantiate that paranoia. “Some man” is an exception dressed up to demonstrate the rule.

RECONCILING CONCEPTUAL AND NARRATIVE CLAIMS

Some of the problems I am discussing here, such as the seemingly residual, state-of-nature anxiety of an otherwise civilized “some man,” have been taken up before. C. B. Macpherson’s
analysis of property and the possessor, for example, has become a major and enduring account of
the sources of liberalism in early modern political thought. Significantly, however, his argument
so completely disregards the narrative premises of contract theory that he effectively ignores its
operative distinction between “presocial” and “social.” In his now standard reading, Hobbes’s
state of nature presupposes some degree of civilization since, he argues, there is no logical
transition from the purely mechanical nature of human motivations to the depravity of human
nature without the introduction of some elements of civilization: “some man,” he writes, as well
as the ostensibly civilized tendencies that appear in Hobbes’s state of nature, are both suggestive
of a “state of nature [that] is a logical abstraction drawn from the behavior of men in civilized
society.” He argues that “the assumption that the power of every man is opposed to the power of
every other man,” so crucial to Hobbes’s state of nature, “appears to be a social, not a
physiological, postulate,” and that “the opposition of individual’s power is…not contained in
the…propositions about man as a self-moving mechanism seeking to maintain or enhance his
motion” (40, 36). Macpherson’s claim is based ultimately on the premise that Hobbes “moves
from the neutral definition of power to the desire of every man for ever more power over other
men” (35), but there is no reason to believe that, for an individual in a state of nature (for whom,
as I have shown above, justice and its distinctions do not exist), such a move has occurred at all.
To her, each power is equally “neutral,” since all means, including the lives of others, are equally
at her disposal, and carry no such moral imperative.

It is also important to note, for our purposes especially, that Macpherson’s claim does not
account for a long tradition of readers who give no indication that Hobbes does anything less
than position his state of nature (conceptually, if not historically) opposite even rudimentary
forms of civilization. Most authors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries write about
Hobbes’s state of nature as exactly that, and while others may approximate unsatisfactory forms of civilization with Hobbes’s state of nature (such as Sarah Scott’s previously noted comparison of polite society with the “state of war”), this kind of hyperbole does not strictly collapse but in fact reinforces the absolute distinction between each state (it is “the first condition,” after all). Charles W. Mills reminds us, moreover, that Hobbes may have drawn his picture of the state of nature from explorers’ representations of the Americas, for whom literal subhumanness in the Natives was generally taken for granted. Macpherson’s argument, while a compelling and useful contribution to the history of liberalism in most respects, neglects the sense in which the state of nature was largely understood, as well as the contradiction that “some man’s” experience exposes. He still does not account, in other words, for why, in his useful and otherwise compelling account of possessive individualism, “some man” is at once an exception to the rule and a valid index to that rule. He is silent on the role and significance of the protagonist’s social experience.

There may also be grounds for objecting that the social experiences of Hobbes’s protagonist do not necessarily contradict the theory it is meant to expound, despite the fact, as I have argued, that his fear of the depravity of (generalized) others occupies the place where his fear of his own (particularized) depravity ought to reside. After all, in Hobbes’s account fear is one of human nature’s constitutive affects, and it cannot be (nor should it be) fully subdued, since it is the basis from which anxiety about other savages can become transformed into productive awe for the sovereign: “For by this Authoritie, given him by every particular man in the Common-Wealth, he hath the use of so much Power and Strength conferred on him, that by terror therof, he is enabled to [con]forme the wills of them all, to Peace at home, and mutuall ayd against their enemies abroad” (120 – 121, emphasis added). Even so, it must be asked whether
“some man’s” anxiety is mistaken: it apparently reveals that the depravity of human nature is still accessible through his experiences in organized, social spaces. His anxiety says something true about human nature by indexing its depravity, but it also explicitly excludes him from that nature, distinguishing him from the thieves, robbers, and rogues that are apparently the norm. Another way of thinking about this problem is to notice the similarities between Hobbes’s protagonist and the natural isolate I began with. In both accounts – an account of the state of nature and an account that seventeenth-century readers are meant to identify with – an individual encounters a group of others (or their potential) in a shared space and then has social experiences associated with competing claims about the nature and status of social contact, as well as his or her role within it: depravity, fellowship; anxiety, security. Each protagonist has social experiences that characterize both the state of nature and civil society. For “some man,” what is the depravity of human nature, or its trace, doing in the shared space of commonwealth – a space whose civilizing force can be detected in “some man’s” own total lack of depravity? Since some allowance must be made for the deficiency and imperfection of “some man’s” social and political context, the far more difficult question relates to our pre-social isolate: in what sense does the comfort of social organization make itself recognizable to her? It seems in either case that social experience, from a narrative perspective presupposing a protagonist (which necessitates and which must determine the success of contract for that protagonist), is not a reliable indicator about whether contract is legitimate or not. Narratives of the individual, and their emphasis on social experiences in particular, are necessary: in principle, they provide the incentive for social contract for the savage and justify it for “some man.” In practice, however, they point to a glaring problem that comes from collapsing the many into the one.

THE TRAUMA OF FAMILIARITY IN *ROBINSON CRUSOE*
In *Daniel Deronda*, the protagonist’s peculiar and inexplicable draw to Mordecai, a Jewish visionary and advocate for Jewish nationalism, is an index to the affective, pre-cognitive, non-rational magnetism of community (legible for example in Benedict Anderson’s notion of fraternity) that comes to dominate collective forms by the nineteenth century. When he encounters Mordecai, after all, he knows nothing of his own Jewish ancestry, and thus has no conscious or rational grounds to substantiate the irresistible draw that he feels. Deronda is able to overcome the empirical impasse of “some man,” since his experience of Mordecai is an experience of legitimacy (of his own ‘real’ place in the Jewish community), some form of which discloses itself in the face-to-face encounter that, although its participants are ostensibly strangers, approximates familiarity. For this reason, the familiarity is comforting, reassuring readers that the community is a real thing, empirically knowable (it has, to return to Charles Taylor’s argument, a prior, “ontic” component), and that it entails its constituents *whether they know themselves to be such or not*. The community, of which the constituent is knowingly or unknowingly a part, is intact, and on some level this can be sensed. At the same time, any interventions, manipulations, or withholdings (by Deronda’s mother, for example, who lies to the protagonist about his ancestry – interventions that are intended to sever the constituent from his or her community by disturbing the rationally traceable discursive lines from self to community) cannot undermine the community as it “actually” exists. Its “actual” existence is not therefore a discursive or rational construct, following from contract or consent, for example, but even anterior to constituent individuals conscious of some known and organized relation to one another. Eliot distinguishes the discursive community from the community as it ‘actually’ and ‘legitimately’ exists. The precariousness of enlightenment legitimacy (the subjective aspect that “Crusoe in the midst of the world” reifies) has been largely mitigated.
In enlightenment discourses, where the distinction Eliot makes is not available, social experiences like familiarity play a very different role in the determination of legitimacy. Indeed, familiarity itself, a concept with comforting and restorative suggestions, comes rather to signal the troubled relationship (and, in fact, to trouble the relationship) between community and constituent. In popular usage, even leaving aside the extraordinary magnetism of Deronda’s experience, familiarity is generally taken to be a stabilizing force. Etymologically, it suggests intimacy (sometimes, indeed, an excess of intimacy), evoking the family (the familiar, the familia, the household). It also suggests a depth of knowledge, since (except in cases of “vague familiarity”) to become “familiar” with something or someone is to know it or him thoroughly. In the case of the family, where both usages come to bear, the experience of one’s familiars stabilizes his or her understanding of the community (of whom it consists, how it is organized and regulated, how it is sustained, how it has continued to be – and how it will continue to be – one more or less recognizably cohesive thing over generational time) even as it stabilizes one’s understanding of self. Familiarity is thus significant first for its epistemological role in social life and then, therefore, for the groundwork it lays for social legitimacy which, I have argued, must not only be known but known through social experience. It gives the individual more stable epistemological access to his identity – to his sense of self as an individual functioning within, and regarded with reference to, a relational body – as well as to the social body within which that relationality is constructed, understood, and consented to.

But one frequently encounters a different kind of familiarity in eighteenth-century novels. Indeed, familiarity in eighteenth-century fiction is frequently destructive, associated not with stability or comfort but with terror and error, drawn upon to punctuate moments of encounter that culminate in a counterintuitive shock so dramatic and extreme that it approaches trauma. I will
look at a number of such moments in detail in the next chapter, but I would like first to establish the implications, for philosophical projects concerned with the legitimacy of social and political organization, of reframing familiarity in this way. By looking at the relationship between episodes of traumatic familiarity and the problems with legitimacy that philosophical texts leave unresolved (by downplaying elements of narrative and character, for example), the extent to which legitimacy is an epistemological question begins to emerge. How is legitimacy determined in enlightenment thought, where a “sense” of connection, as in Deronda, is largely suppressed? What is the function of social experience in that determination? What other resources are available to constituents of a community where its historical legitimacy is submerged in broader questions of conceptual legitimacy, where it is contained in some obscure but rationally available “ontic” component? In other words, what, in the field of the fully developed, wholly particular protagonist, is the relationship between social experiences and social legitimacy?

To begin to answer this question I return to Robinson Crusoe. Robinson Crusoe is an obvious first choice for my purposes: he provides insight into how legitimacy might present itself to a fleshed-out version of the very individual presupposed by social contract theories. He is rational, of course, committed to the enlightenment priorities of self-making, material appropriation, and “improvement”; but he is also, as Mills and Pateman remind us, white, male, Christian, European, and capitalist, embodying the landowning protestant many contract theorists took for granted as the default liberal subject. Moreover, critics have recently noted how Defoe’s formation of protagonists challenges more conventional and general representations, as I

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55 Crusoe’s reproductivity, however, is neglected by Defoe (though often foregrounded by critics), so his relation to the sexual contract is complicated. DeeAnn DeLuna reads Crusoe as the “commercial paragon” of “early modern commerce’s highest roles,” in part because he represents the “male sexual neuters who suffer no distractions of fornication or the marriage bed” (70).
am arguing that literary protagonists do in the context of political philosophy, in a variety of other discursive contexts. Lisa Zunshine, for example, writes that *Moll Flanders* “had to foster the readers’ emotional involvement with its title heroine, which meant giving the practice of abandonment of bastard children by their mothers a human face and psychological motivation,” an aspect largely missing in infanticide-prevention campaigns of the period (41), and Sharon Alker relates the trauma of the footprint scene in particular to an argument about how Defoe’s innovative use of the protagonist in *Memoirs of a Cavalier* makes the “psychological experiences” of a particularized soldier available, challenging the conventions of a genre that typically put “the focus...on the battle as a whole, not on the actions of a single soldier” (68, 49).

Defoe recognized that one could learn something new from the actions and content of a single, fully-developed person, and that this content was not neatly enclosed within or presupposed by any general representations of the type or the “whole” – even when that “whole” would appear to be precisely what authorizes and organizes the individual’s identity in the first place. To this extent, one might think of Defoe’s protagonist and his negotiations with the terms of legitimacy as an early contribution (one of many, as I will show in the next chapter) to narrative developments associated, for Michael McKeon, with a growing tension between “individual life” and “overarching pattern.”

56 In the context of this growing tension, Crusoe the isolate standardizes a canon of empirical and affective experiences that will become tropic for the centrality of social experience in the determination of social legitimacy. However, I am pointing here to something more than Crusoe “in the midst of the world,” the ways in which authors use a pretense of isolation in order to control and suppress social dependence and to support the illusion of autonomy. Rather, I will be suggesting that Robinson Crusoe’s terrible

encounter of the footprint on the beach establishes a category of experience (one that I will call traumatic familiarity) that makes conspicuous the limitations in the ways in which the empirical, autonomous individual has been related to social and political legitimacy. This limitation is damning, and, as I hope to show in the remainder of this section, traumatic familiarity operates less as a comment upon the exorbitant challenge of determining legitimacy through social experience than a critique of any such concept of legitimacy in the first place.

Although iconic for its portrayal of an individual negotiating the sober distress of chronic isolation, one of the most acutely distressing experiences in the novel is actually social in nature. After over a decade alone on his island, Crusoe discovers a single footprint, confronting the possibility for the first time that he is not alone. Although very well known, I quote the passage in full in order to spell out its investments in characteristics of social experience:

It happen’d one Day, about Noon going towards my Boat, I was exceedingly surpriz’d with the Print of a Man’s naked Foot on the Shore, which was very plain to be seen in the Sand: I stood like one Thunderstruck, or as if I had seen an Apparition; I listen’d, I look’d round me, I could hear nothing, nor see any Thing; I went up to a rising Ground to look farther; I went up the Shore and down the Shore, but it was all one, I could see no other Impression but that one, I went to it again to see if there were any more, and to observe it if might not be my Fancy; but there was no Room for that, for there was exactly the very Print of a Foot, Toes, Heel, and every Part of a Foot; how it came thither, I knew not, nor could in the least imagine. But after innumerable fluttering Thoughts, like a Man perfectly confus’d and out of my self, I came Home to my Fortification, not feeling, as we say, the Ground I went on, but terrify’d to the last Degree, looking behind me at every two or three steps, mistaking every Bush and Tree, and fancying every Stump at a
Distance to be a Man; nor is it possible to describe how many various Shapes affrighted Imagination represented Things to me in, how many wild Ideas were found every Moment in my Fancy, and what strange unaccountable Whimsies came into my Thoughts by the Way.

Crusoe continues, writing that he “fled into” his “Castle” “like one pursued,” insisting that “never frightened Hare fled to Cover, or Fox to Earth, with more Terror of Mind that [he] to this Retreat,” so terrified ultimately that he must convince himself in calmer moments that the print was not that of the Devil.

The predominant theme in Crusoe’s encounter is terror. It is important to remember, first of all, that Crusoe is not associated exclusively with an individual in the state of nature, and that his terror of the footprint is not therefore the Hobbesian terror of the natural other. Neither solitude nor existing in a natural environment is strictly interchangeable with the state of nature, and Crusoe is nothing if not worldly. Indeed, he occasionally presents himself as something of a natural isolate, looking “upon the World as a Thing remote, which [he] had nothing to do with, no Expectation from, and indeed no Desires about,” even approximating Locke’s isolate: “There were no Rivals. I had no Competitor, none to dispute Sovereignty or Command with me” (93 – 94). Moreover, his sovereignty resonates with Derrida’s claims about the radical isolation of both beasts and sovereigns, further emphasizing the conceptual implications of Crusoe’s actual solitude. But he can never surrender the moral and epistemological relational framework of sociality, according to which (he has already admitted) claims about complete acceptance of and desire for social isolation are hypocritical. He puts a great deal of faith in mediation, for

57 “How canst thou be such a Hypocrite, (said I, even audibly) to pretend to be thankful for a Condition, which however thou may’st endeavor to be contented with, thou would’st rather pray heartily to be deliver’d from” (83).
example (writing in his journal and taking money, which he knows to be useless, from the ship’s wreckage), and he feels accountable to others, calculating his moral and technological failures with reference not only to God but to his father and to his distant fellows (merchants, potters, bakers, shipbuilders). So attributing his trauma on seeing the footprint to the anxiety of the natural isolate encountering an other would be a mistake. Crusoe’s trauma should be understood within a framework consistent with the worldly socialite that he is.

At the same time, it is obvious that his experience inaugurates nothing like what we might call community or collective identity. That his space is now, or always was, a shared space obviously does not automatically mean that its occupants recognize fellowship in one another, or anything like contractual organization in their contact. Nor is the opportunity to take seriously his newfound social existence, the possibility of community on the island or of his own status as a social being, given any consideration. Legitimacy, in other words, becomes a sort of broken hammer, a wholly open question, conspicuously obscure, but whose mechanisms cannot be taken for granted.

Obviously, nothing of Andersonian fraternity or the romantic familiarity of Mordecai is recognizable in the footprint scene; and yet it is important to note that familiarity, in a most basic sense, is at the heart of Defoe’s concern in this important scene. Despite common misreadings, he is not, when he first encounters the footprint, struck with the danger of potential cannibals or competitors for the island’s natural resources. His terror has nothing explicit and immediately to do with personal safety, but it is associated rather with his laboring to process precisely the very familiarity of the footprint, “exactly the very Print of a Foot, Toes, Heel, and every Part of a Foot.” Kant realizes the centrality of familiarity in this footprint scene when, reimagining it in *The Critique of Judgment*, he replaces the footprint with “a geometrical figure”:
If someone were to perceive a geometrical figure, for instance a regular hexagon, drawn in the sand in an apparently uninhabited land, his reflection, working with a concept of it, would become aware of the unity of the principle of its generation by a means of reason, even if only obscurely, and thus, in accordance with this, would not be able to judge as a ground of the possibility of such a shape in the sand, the nearby sea, the wind, the footprints of any known animal, or any other non-rational cause, because the contingency of coinciding with such a concept, which is possible only in reason, would seem to him so infinitely great that it would be just as good as if there were no natural law of nature, consequently no cause in nature acting merely mechanically, and as if the concept of such an object could be regarded as a concept that can be given only by reason and only by reason compared with the object, thus as if only reason can contain the causality for such an effect, consequently that this object must be thoroughly regarded as an end, but not a natural end, i.e., as a product of art (vestigium hominis video). (242)

In other words, as Kant reimagines him, Crusoe observes in the sand a “trace of a human being,” a bearer of will and reason, with whom he shares his nature, his resources, his fate. In re-tracing, after some time has passed (even though it was “plain to be seen” the first time), “the very Print of a Foot, Toes, Heel, and every Part of a Foot,” Crusoe marks a moment less of revelation and surprise than of emphatic affirmation (recall Deronda’s emphasis: “then I am a Jew”).

It is precisely this familiarity that, rather than offering consolation, so “distracts” (in eighteenth-century parlance, suggesting a lapse of self possession, even temporary insanity) and terrifies him. His terror, moreover, is double: it points outside into the world and back into the subject who failed to recognize and process that world fully and correctly. Crusoe’s struggle to appropriate this mark of familiarity into a sign of comfort and stability (as, say, that of a possible
companion, or of his own foot) brings him directly into contact, not only with the fact that his space is now, and perhaps always was, a shared space, but with his own failure to sense this all-important truth in the first place. There is something disturbing, haunting, about realizing that he is not now, and perhaps never was, alone, as the print – staring back at him like an “Apparition” – insists, and his framework for understanding his place in his little world is radically upended (or is shown, perhaps, to have been radically wrong all along – he cannot be sure about this either). In other words, in sharp contrast to Deronda, he is confronted with the fact that he did not ever “sense,” nor even does he “sense” now, his true place in the world, or anything of the ontic component of its social status (whether or not it is a social space, whether his entitlement to its resources is legitimate, vulnerable to contest, etc). Familiarity here provides no comfort, not only because it shows that what he knew of the world was wrong – although already, for one as meticulously committed to cataloguing, understanding, and mastering the world as Crusoe, this would be a deeply unsettling realization – nor because it shows that he was mistaken about what he knew of himself as an inhabitant (and assumed sovereign) of that world – though this too is deeply troubling and life altering. Rather, in addition to these, in the footprint he is made to confront the failure of his own resources – his privileged enlightenment priorities of rationalism and improvement, his ethic of material expansion and self-mastery, his empirical methodologies – to generate and stabilize even the most basic and foundational knowledge about himself and his surroundings. He has lost not only the content of his knowledge about his self and the world, but his means of approaching, constructing, and distinguishing such content moving forward. His encounter with the footprint, revealing all of this to him, is not profound or comforting; it is devastating.
Readers are made witness in this remarkable scene to a dramatization of the interdependence of self-knowledge and social knowledge. It narrates Crusoe’s disturbing struggle to account, with all of his resources (his understanding, labor, and resolve, for example), for his place in the world, for his ability to provide such an account in the first place, and thus for his sense of self as an autonomous subject. Crusoe’s struggle to reconcile the footprint’s suggestive “new” truths with his failed epistemological certainty involves, first, renegotiating the roles of the imagination and empirical knowledge. At first he is “Thunderstruck,” but, a goodish subject of enlightenment empiricism, he attempts to conquer this initial shock by retreating to the certainty of sense perception and experiential knowledge. This fails him: “I listn’d, I look’d round me, I could hear nothing, nor see any Thing; I went up to a rising Ground to look farther,” etc. As the passage progresses, his inability to rely on his senses increases, and to this failure corresponds a violent crisis of identity: he runs to his castle “not feeling…the Ground I went on,” and he describes himself, meanwhile, as one “perfectly confus’d and out of my Self,” unable even to remember how he entered his cave (remarkably, frighteningly, unsure if he is passing for the first time or for the thousandth time – or indeed at all – from a shared to a private space). At the same time, his imagination attempts to claim greater and greater sovereignty. He first wonders, or hopes, that the print “might not be my Fancy,” and when he flees he does so “mistaking every Bush and Tree, and fancying every Stump” to be human, fretting over his “affrighted Imagination,” the “wild Ideas” in his “Fancy,” and the “strange unaccountable Whimsies” that pursue him home.

Distracted, “out of [his] self,” Crusoe can no more account for himself at this point than for the footprint. Although this lapse seems fleeting, and Crusoe seems to recover something of his self-mastery, it is a recovery that is only possible because the footprint is made a fixed source
of instability that, remarkably, he extends to the human community of his readers and beyond. “Life of Man” is a “strange Chequer-Work of Providence,” he writes, our “Affections hurry’d about” by “secret differing Springs.” “To Day,” he continues, introducing his experience of the footprint with statements from, about, and authorized by the first-person plural, “we love what to Morrow we hate; to Day we seek what to Morrow we shun; do Day we desire what to Morrow we fear.” Such truths about the human community become evident because in that capacity they resolve the epistemological impasse that so terrified him. Although his only known, recognizable and expressed affliction was his banishment “from human Society,” he “should now tremble at the very Apprehensions of seeing a Man, and was ready to sink into the Ground at but the Shadow or silent Appearance of a Man’s having set his Foot in the Island.”

This passage traces a crisis of reflexive self-knowledge that, in its more stable manifestations, Charles Taylor associates with Locke’s “punctual self.” Crusoe observes his own unraveling as a separate object, as an index to the impossibility of knowing one’s stable identity (at least as far as identity relates to or refers to others, which is entirely the case here), and thus as a means to regarding a human problem, the “Life of Man.” A moment of individual instability is resolved by becoming a stabilizing element, a truth about the human community (which, ostensibly, one shares, and from which, therefore, one’s own stability can be recovered). But such a radical revision, from instability to stability, from self to other, marks a fleeting breach of – even as it then helps to secure – Crusoe’s organizing enlightenment commitments. In order to sense something about the world at large, he suggests, and about the inhabitants with which he must share it, he must first abandon the premise that empirical content, taken and internalized from the outside world and then processed by the autonomous subject, can sufficiently determine

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58 Crusoe, 113 – 114.
the terms according to which the world, its inhabitants, and its shared nature constitute
legitimacy. Legitimacy is not resolved by, but problematized by, the particular and autonomous
individual. As with the isolate from the first pages of this chapter, our attention is drawn from the
footprint to the protagonist, who must renegotiate a self and its frameworks. The problem of
determining legitimacy in the state of nature is extended universally, to all civilized subjects.

FOOTPRINTS AND FACES

I would like to conclude this discussion of Crusoe’s terror by considering the specific
kinds of questions about legitimacy that the footprint scene in Robinson Crusoe poses. One sees
in Crusoe’s trauma more than a reflexive, epistemological crisis about one’s ability (or lack of
ability) to account for oneself and one’s place in the world, though this crisis is obviously
important to me. The footprint does more than to point to Crusoe’s inability to “sense” his place
in the world – given the novel’s devotion to the popular priorities of enlightenment rationalism
and hostility to suspicion, such a “sense” would not have occurred in any serious way. Any
reading that reduces Crusoe’s trauma to such a crisis threatens to undermine itself, potentially
both anachronistic and teleological (in the sense that is evaluates an enlightenment drama of
legitimacy through a lens of either nationalism or romantic and post-romantic understandings of
community).

Rather, I argue that the footprint is also significant because it puts Crusoe into a posture
of sociality, and that, in an important sense, his experience is a social experience. Indeed, I want
to suggest not only that Crusoe’s experience of the footprint is a social experience, but that, from
an important perspective, that is what social experience is. The footprint insists that Crusoe is not
alone, that he is in the presence of another (or the possibility of another, a distinction on which
we will elaborate below); it makes the demands upon Crusoe that sociality makes, beginning
with the most critical demand that he surrender the unchecked sovereignty discussed above, pushing him from one end of Derrida’s polarity, sovereign, all the way to the other, beast (hunted fox, rabbit). It insists, in the surrender of his sovereignty, that he attend to it, that he recognize it in both major and mutually implicit senses of the word: that he concede its presence, that is, surveying it carefully, at least twice, reluctantly but emphatically acknowledging its humanness. It forces him into an experience that is organized around a “new” shared reality, where such possibilities (and responsibilities) as reciprocity and hierarchy are conceivable or even necessary, but remain entirely underdetermined.⁵⁹

Crusoe’s problems, central to any formulation reconciling individual particularity and social organization (the problems, in my reading, that motivate Defoe and his implicit critique of his philosophical forerunners) persist well beyond the eighteenth century. To a certain extent, for example, my interpretation of the footprint is similar to a current theory of sociality first sketched out by Emmanuel Levinas, a sketch that rhymes with Crusoe’s experience as I interpret it.

⁵⁹ Recent scholarship has attempted to reevaluate the relationship between persons and things in the eighteenth century, looking at so-called “it narratives,” for example, arguing for a less-than-stable binary between person and thing and suggesting that understanding how persons were conceptualized depends increasingly upon understanding how things were described; the footprint is sometimes evoked in this context. Lynn Festa argues that “[i]n Robinson Crusoe, subject and object are…mutually constituting, both in the material sense that persons and things make one another, and in the formal literary sense that Crusoe, like his readers, must struggle to work the heterogeneous elements of the novelistic world into a meaningful unity, making things – shoes, skins, or even footprints – fit the person, or making the person fit the thing” (446). In the case of the footprint, I make a much clearer distinction, at least such that a shoe or a pot is obviously much more clearly a “thing” to Crusoe, an object of knowledge and potential manipulation, than the footprint. While compelling, especially with respect to shoes and skins (her other examples), Festa’s argument does not adequately account for Crusoe’s excessive reaction to the footprint, suggesting at least that the footprint is not a “misfit” in the same sense that a misshapen clay pot (and thus not exactly a pot), or an animal skin, might be. I am suggesting here only that we take seriously that, initially, at the moment of trauma, it is precisely its humanness that terrifies him – a humanness that is not immediately, explicitly, or obviously (as most scholars believe, pointing to its nakedness for example) associated with cannibalism, with a threat to his material accumulation, etc.: rather, humanness qua humanness.
Levinas’s attempts to characterize the primary drives (often described as ethical drives, though usually with some qualification) that emerge in the experience of another – the absence and anonymity implied by a footprint would not seem to apply, at least not directly, especially since Levinas writes about the other as an embodied subject whose face, whose proximity, expresses. However, while the difference between another’s face, for example, and the mere trace of an absent other seems to suggest no meaningful equivalency, it may be worth noting some of their shared features, beginning with Levinas’s principle assertion that the experience of the other “summons me, demands me, claims me” (145). Levinas is sketching what he calls “a ‘phenomenology’ of sociality, taking as [his] point of departure the face of the other,” which he equates with “a voice that commands: an order addressed to me” (169). This is a useful formulation, since its emphasis is on interruption and relationality, but a relationality that is (in a sense familiar to Crusoe, who experiences the trace of an other but nothing of the shape or conditions of this newly conspicuous relationality) prior to practical organization: “the subservience of obedience precedes the hearing of the order” and appeals to the subject’s “nonintentional consciousness” (151, 141). It is not passive, it hails the subject, but it does not organize or determine his or her actions. Nevertheless, following from this, it is also true of both accounts that, in the presence of this command (the face for Levinas, the print for Crusoe), there is a subsequent “laying aside by the self of its sovereignty of self,” and a kind of subordination or obeisance (147).

Put another way, Levinas, like Defoe, is interested in questions of social experience, especially as it relates to the broader problem of individuality within and against sociality. While he describes his project as an intervention against Heidegger and Husserl, I am particularly interested here in his claims against the ways in which romantic and post-romantic philosophy
subordinates the individual to the totality, already emerging in the first decades of the nineteenth century (as, for example, in the “spirit” of Hegel’s historiography). He argues, for example, that “it is impossible to form an idea of the human totality, for men have an inner life closed to him who does, however, grasp the comprehensive movements of human groups,” positing, counter to post-enlightenment, eschatological theories of metaphysics and history, that “[t]he real must not only be determined in its historical objectivity, but also from interior intentions, from the secrecy that interrupts the continuity of historical time,” arguing further that “[o]nly on the basis of this secrecy is the pluralism of society possible” (Totality and Infinity 57 – 58). In addition to this secrecy, through which Levinas deflates any notion of the real that comprehends the individual only in his or her figuring into the totality (that is, as he will put it, only in his or her figuring into the “survivors’” account of “history”), Levinas argues that the nudity of the other’s face itself already constitutes a particularity that cannot be absorbed fully into generality. Things are particular only when “they are not entirely absorbed in their form; they then stand out in themselves, breaking through, rending their forms, are not resolved into the relations that link them up to the totality.” Nudity, when perceived in the face, when it becomes particular, reveals “the surplus of its being over its finality” (reveals, that is, the inadequacy of form, of the generalizable, to absorb it in this instance), and the nudity of the face becomes singular, analogous to “industrial cities” which, while “adapted to a goal of production…exist also for themselves” (Totality and Infinity 74) in all of their Dickensian waste, smoke, and grief.

For my purposes, it is important to note that Levinas’s argument suggests that reconciliation between the goal-inflected adaptations implied by a teleological totality and the particularity of waste and smoke is not realized in history, as key shifts in some nineteenth-
century philosophy (on the one hand) and nationalism (on the other) might suggest; and that, indeed, what appears to be such a reconciliation is in fact a kind of violence:

Totalization is accomplished only in history – in the history of historiographers, that is, among the survivors. It rests on the affirmation and the conviction that the chronological order of the history of the historians outlines the plot of being in itself, analogous to nature. The time of universal history remains as the ontological ground in which particular existences are lost, are computed, and in which at least their essences are recapitulated. Birth and death as punctual moments, and the interval that separates them, are lodged in this universal time of the historian, who is a survivor. (Totality and Infinity 55)

Rather, he argues, the particular and the general can only be reconciled through social experience – and, specifically, through the ways in which social experience encroaches upon one’s freedom. Production, for Levinas, is the business of freedom: like the mechanistic savage of Hobbes, and not unlike Crusoe, the free individual “finds in the world a site and a home…a medium” that “affords means” (Totality and Infinity 37). “Everything is here” he writes, “everything belongs to me; everything is caught up in advance with the primordial occupying of a site” (Totality and Infinity 37 – 38). Ethics in this argument (as for Hobbes) requires first that the individual call that freedom into question (85). This questioning occurs as an “awakening” that “comes from the Other”: “The welcoming of the Other is ipso facto the consciousness of my own injustice – the shame that freedom feels for itself” (86). Such is the summons of the face of the other – and such are the conditions of the subject’s obeisance.

Of course, however, one can also already distinguish the subordination of Levinas’s phenomenology from Crusoe’s fear in at least two ways, first by considering the extent to which
Levinas describes an event that approximates the state of nature, since the self he describes is absolutely primary. While the other becomes available in a way that, in both texts, may be regarded as an interruption, for Levinas this interruption appeals not “to the abstraction of some anonymous law, some juridical entity” or any other derivative, artificial institution of social organization (144). Rather, its realm is “the depths of natural perseverance,” an experience that “rises a responsibility for the other to whom I have therefore been dedicated before every vow,” a “vow” that is “prior to deliberation” and thus pre-contractarian (149, 170). It is an experience that still holds intact the sense of otherness, uniqueness, and difference that derivative culture and artificial political institutions, with their gesture toward a lost Platonic unity, work to cover over. Secondly, we can compare how both experiences become recognizable as fear, since Levinas organizes his ethical content around “[a] fear that comes to me from the face of the other person” (130). That it is a face that the speaker encounters is what gives some shape or content to this fear, what gives it its ethical direction, arousing for Levinas the possibility of usurpation or death that, in his reading, Pascal has in mind when he describes his “place in the sun.” Thus, while I argue that Crusoe experiences the other (as it manifests itself on the island) as a command or demand (it is its humanness that strikes him, remember, and that he repeatedly confirms), the fear he experiences does not correspond and is not suggestive of substantial concern for the other. It is shapeless, unlocatable, reflexive but underdetermined.

The other becomes conspicuous and present in its violation of Crusoe’s sovereignty and solitude, yet it is not disclosed in any of its specificity. He must reply, but he has no indication about what replying or reciprocating might entail or require. His is not the experience of the other outside the mediation of jurisdiction. His is a social experience without the mediation of another. All the same, the footprint has and gives no history: it is all secrecy. Its anonymity and its
singularity together ensure that no deduction or narrative is possible about where its author came
from, what he or she was doing, or where he or she went. Crusoe finds himself in a posture of
sociality, but the specific narrative according to which this posture is demanded and
substantiated (according to which it must be determined, now that Crusoe is a social subject) has
been suppressed: the question of legitimacy, then, must be purely conceptual, and can make no
reference to any narrative or historical account that might reveal anything about the conditions
by which this beach came to be, and must exist as, a shared space.

In attempting to imagine the possibility of something like conceptual – rather than
historical – legitimacy, Defoe puts his protagonist into contact with the impossible, a
contradiction in terms, a social experience that is, or approaches, the a priori. What would social
experience look like if conceptual legitimacy were one’s object? Is any such legitimacy possible
at all? How can you have conceptual legitimacy when the “concept” in question seems
inalienable from practical experiences, narrative, historical situation, encounter? Defoe seems to
suggest that, if we could isolate social experience from the content of sociality (from the
subjective baggage that organizes social contact and that might include custom, tradition,
politeness, mores – the popular objects of enlightenment in its negative manifestations), this is
what it would look like. But if this is so, should there not be some trace of this trauma in more
practical social negotiation as well? It would appear at least that conceptual legitimacy and
historical narrative must not contradict one another, must be able to be reconciled in the course
of collective identification. Otherwise, conceptual legitimacy, as Defoe attempts to imagine it,
amounts to very little, much less than a state of nature that may or may not have existed at all.
There must be a relationship between conceptual legitimacy and the narrative conditions that
otherwise appear to obviate it for its actors. As I will show in the following chapter, these very
concerns help to explain some of Robinson Crusoe’s odd textual afterlife, and help novelists in the enlightenment tradition to put relentless pressure on given claims about social experience and social legitimacy.

In pursuing the role of social experience in collective identification, I have come up against two very different and difficult problems: first, the narrative impulses of social contract theory insist upon, but then problematize, the centrality of social experience in the conceptualization, negotiation, and realization of legitimacy through social contract. I have found the protagonist of social contract theory underdetermined, hovering in a dead and often contradictory space between category and individual, existing among flat others, constituting a flat other himself, making both categorical and particular demands (one or the other, as needed) that render the pre-social protagonist and the social protagonist inconsistent with one another (and, as often, with itself). This reveals a rift in the enlightenment insistence – central to social contract theory – for the particular, autonomous individual, fully wrought and liberal: a rift in a defining enlightenment insistence, in other words, for empirical continuity in the subject as it approaches, negotiates, and evaluates the discursive and experiential conditions – such as those of social contract – in which it operates. Novelists as early as Daniel Defoe (the first, some still argue) provide an alternative protagonist – one that meets the needs of full-fleshed particularity and empirical continuity – who puts renewed pressure on the conditions of social experience, and who thus allows for a renewed investigation into the role of social experience in determining legitimacy.

But here I have encountered a different problem. While the conceptual premises of social contract theory must confront the need for determining the narrative (if not historical) conditions of legitimacy, the narrative premises of realistic fiction must confront the difficulty of
determining and supporting (another major premise of social contract theory) something like conceptual legitimacy. Defoe’s critique of contractarian empiricism does not constitute a satisfying alternative, namely because his protagonist finds nothing in his experience of the other from which legitimacy can be derived, or upon which it can be based: nothing of the comfort of familiarity, for example, that might situate him, give him (or his possessions) social meaning. In one moment, a moment of terror, collectivity becomes necessary, but collective identity impossible.

It will be objected that later novelists, immersed in a readership of ever-more sophisticated generic evolution and sophistication, are better poised to reconcile these two problems; or that, at any rate, later novels (even those still wedded to the enlightenment priorities that define and limit Robinson Crusoe) invested in social individuals negotiating more explicitly social relations (family relations, for example, among which the terms of collectivity and legitimacy would seem to be more easily determined) are better able to isolate the relationship between social experience and legitimacy we have sought here. However, as we shall see in what follows, the surprising feature of such novels is the persistence of the footprint, legible even in the most ostensibly straightforward questions of collective identification. On the contrary, the problem of legitimacy that haunts Crusoe’s island, and the strangeness of familiarity that terrifies its protagonist, is not resolved in novelistic representations featuring intra-class, intra-national, or intra-familial encounters, but repeated and insisted upon.
3: Learning the Lesson of Evelina’s Familiarity: Skepticism and The Footprint

THE RECURRING FOOTPRINT

The climax of Mary Davys’s brief novel of courtship and intrigue, *The Reform’d Coquet* (1724), culminates in an odd encounter between one Lady Betty and her brother, Lord Alanthus, who first appears to her in disguise. When Alanthus removes his false beard and becomes familiar to his sister, Davys interjects to register the strangeness, not of a brother unmasking himself from the guise of an elderly man, but of his sister’s reaction: she slips into distraction, shocked at the sudden appearance of “her brother’s Form; but so far from running to him with the kind Caresses of a Sister, that she shriek’d out, and fell in a swoon” (83). The hyperbolic “so far from” is revealing. It suggests that narratives of family reconciliation are conventionalized, embedded with a normative script of affective and performative customs that function to reaffirm filial bonds; it situates *The Reform’d Coquet* within the narrative tradition from which such a script emerges; and yet it signals how substantially this drama deviates from those conventions. The concluding episode of Davys’s novel hinges upon a sister whose status as such, marked by a reaction that is “so far from” sisterly, is at once confirmed and problematized. Conventionally, the appearance of her brother ought to fortify the relationship that determines and binds these actors – instead, it entirely estranges. For a moment, though she is among company that includes a brother and a friend, “she thought herself in some enchanted Castle, and all about her Fiends and Goblins” (83).

Far from incidental, I argue that the instability of Lady Betty’s experience is central to understanding the conflict that organizes Mary Davys’s novel, a tale concerned explicitly with the nature and conditions of legitimacy. While the question of what distinguishes legitimate from
illegitimate social organization has ostensibly been settled at this point – the marriage plot has already been resolved, after all, and the protagonist is no longer vulnerable to the base appetites and deception of her rakish courters – Lady Betty’s unsisterly horror reanimates the specter of illegitimate social relation in a new form. Foregrounding the content of her social experience, this scene proceeds in roughly three stages. First, she thinks herself among a polite aggregate of strangers, one that includes an elderly man. That she is mistaken about this most basic fact already troubles the empirical premises according to which she understands the social group and her position relative to it – it does not occur to her, for example, that she is a sister to anybody in the room, a fact with fascinating and potentially disturbing implications. Second, after her brother’s revelation (upon which the presumably true relations of the individuals to one another are fully disclosed), she becomes distracted, momentarily believing herself among “Fiends and Goblins.” Finally, necessarily, the scene’s tensions are resolved as Betty is “brought…to herself” by “The whole Company quickly surround[ing] her.” Davys attributes Lady Betty’s recovery primarily to her brother who, strikingly, must first convince Betty: “believe your self in the arms of your unfeigned Brother, and among your real Friends” (emphasis added). Betty only then “began to hear and believe all,” not only recovering her relational identity with respect to her brother but also recovering and then reinforcing her relational identity with respect to the others in the room: “when she had perfectly recover’d her surprize, she turn’d to Amoranda, and said…how well I’m pleas’d with that Alliance I forsee will be betwixt us, my future Behaviour shall shew” (83).

Surely the last of these three successive social experiences is taken for granted as the objectively “real,” or objectively “correct” experience, both by readers and Lady Betty alike, despite the fact that nothing explicit qualitatively distinguishes her “belief” that Alanthus is her
brother from her “belief” that he was an old man or a Goblin. While the novel seemingly follows many of its contemporaries in resolving tensions about sexual and social legitimation through the closure of the marriage plot, its final scene contains three imagined communities (or, in Lady Betty’s – *dubious*, as has just been proven – estimation, two imagined and one real) that problematize such conventional closure: an aggregate of people including an old man, a group of goblins, and an association of people including a friend and a brother. How is it that one of these comes to be privileged over the others?

Answering this question requires a closer investigation of the odd *fear* Lady Betty experiences when she first recognizes her brother. While at first this moment may seem extraordinary, a similar terror of familiarity punctuates a surprising number of eighteenth-century novels. Although expressed degrees of horror, distraction, and extenuating circumstances vary widely, the abundance of traumatic familiarity features in literary representations of social and political negotiation beginning with some of the earliest and best-known novels of the century. A comprehensive catalogue of such texts is beyond the scope of the present project, but a cursory survey of a handful of these moments (arranged more or less arbitrarily) will be useful before exploring their implications more fully.

Consider for example Defoe’s Roxana and her maid Amy, driven to distraction when they recognize the protagonist’s unwanted and abandoned daughter Suzan – a distraction that echoes the nearly fatal trauma his protagonist in *Moll Flanders* shares with her mother and brother-husband upon recognizing one another in their true relationships. While *Roxana* is published the same year as *The Reformed Coquet*, and both texts shortly after *Robinson Crusoe* and the footprint scene, the pattern of experience persists into the novel’s maturity. See for example Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, published in 1794, in which the protagonist,
Emily, wanders pensively in her garden thinking about her beloved Valancourt and, suddenly seeing him, becomes briefly distracted: “her eyes fixed on the place, whence he had vanished, and her frame trembling so excessively, that she could scarcely support herself, remained, for some moments…scarcely conscious of existence” (586). This moment is repeated when she next sees him, “start[ing] from her chair, tremble[ing], and, sinking into it again, bec[oming] insensible to all around her. A scream from [her former servant] Theresa now told, that she knew Valancourt” as well (624, the scream as an index to familiarity is not an uncommon feature in such moments). One can also find terror in familiarity in Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801), ranging from encounters of mild fear (“Why do you tremble, Helena! Is there any thing so very terrible in the looks of your mother?” [170]), to more moderate shock (Virginia, on seeing her father, experiences a “violent effervescence of…sensibility,” followed by a “stupid and insensible” appearance [412]), and, in the denouement, a moment loosely recalling *Moll Flanders*, of near-fatal terror (the same Virginia, encountering a second portrait of her idyllic hero, captain Sunderland, “turned her eyes upon the picture – uttered a piercing shriek, and fell senseless to the floor,” even, temporarily, losing her pulse [464]).

Some of these moments are generically linked. Traumatic familiarity seems to play an important role in the almost oppressively repeated incest and near-incest plots in novels throughout the long eighteenth century, for example. In this context, one can discern a relatively consistent critique of the fundamental instability of society, especially with respect to the imperative to reconcile the objectively knowable contours of a collective unit and one’s ability to locate and regulate oneself within and according to those contours. Traumatic familiarity in incest plots often indicates the extent to which taking-for-granted frequently attends – or, as frequently, constitutes – belonging to a particular social or family unit. One suggestion is clearly
that an individual must – but cannot – justify the collective and its legitimacy, not by taking it for granted, but by constantly determining and verifying the interrelations that form the community and situate the individual. Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* can be read in this tradition, enclosing the repeated, climactic shocks of the nearly incestuous marriage revelation (Fanny understandably “changed Colour” and “fainted away, Joseph turned pale” [255]) within, on the one hand, claims about obvious social knowledge that prove untenable (Mr. Andrews rather reasonably but incorrectly insists that he knows that “he had never lost a Daughter by Gypsies, nor ever had any other Children than Joseph and Pamela” [263]) and, on the other, a social context already obsessed with distinguishing knowable collective bodies from one another. Recall the ungenerous parson, for example, who regards “his poor Parishioners…as not of the same Species with himself” (135), a sentiment later repeated by Lady Booby, assuring her maid Slipslop that “Thou art a low Creature, of the Andrews breed, a Reptile of a lower Order, a Weed that grows in the common Garden of Creation.” This prompts Slipslop’s defensive observation, “your Ladyship talks of Servants as if they were not born of the Christian Specious” (233) that, missing the mark by a few vowels, nearly confirms the argument that, in its caricature form, it seeks to refute: communion between these “species” is forced, conspicuously unnatural. (*Joseph Andrews* is a novel, by the way, in which the protagonist encounters his father, hears his history, and does not recognize him [nor is he recognized by him] or sense anything like familiarity. Recognition comes much later, and is confirmed when Andrews’s true father regards Andrews’s birthmark – an object like Odysseus’s scar that is both a part of his son and that can be read alone as a sign – “with Wildness in his Looks” [265].)

In *Tom Jones* we find two moments of traumatic familiarity. The first occurs in the Man of the Hill’s narrative. (It is worth digressing to note that, in the Man of the Hill, Fielding likely
had Crusoe explicitly in mind: first, he represents the social-isolate Crusoe discussed in the first chapter, telling Jones that in London “you have the advantage of solitude without its disadvantage; since you may be alone and in company at the same time” [376]. Additionally, in his actual isolation from society [neglecting, of course, the woman he lives with!], he has adopted a very Crusoian ensemble, “cloathed with the skin of an ass, made something into the form of a coat” and “boots on his legs, and a cap on his head, both composed of the skin of some other animals” [364]. Joking references to outlandish or peculiar dress as evocative of Crusoe are common throughout the eighteenth century.) In his history, while nursing a wounded victim of robbery, he “began to recollect the features of [his] father,” and continues: “I did not lose my being, as my father for a while did, my senses where, however, so overpowered with affright and surprize, that I am a stranger to what passed during some minutes” (383). The second, another instance of screaming recognition, occurs when, after a long absence, Sophia finally encounters Jones at Lady Bellaston’s in London. She first sees him in the mirror and, turning around, “perceived the reality of the vision: upon which she gave a violent scream, and scarce preserved herself from fainting” (618).

It is my contention that these moments, of the terror of the other, of the trauma of familiarity, all reflect, revisit, revise, and reimagine Robinson Crusoe’s encounter with the footprint, and that they all take up similar questions about the nature of community. Crusoe is confronted with the extent to which his existence on the island has always been a social existence, and with his own unthinkable inability to recognize this basic fact. Returning to Kant’s description of the geometrical figure in the sand, Crusoe is struck by the “trace of a human being” – in other words, he is confronted with the fact that his isolation has been a mistakenly imagined state, and with the opportunity to think of himself anew, as a social being on a shared
space, living among shared resources. A community of other human beings, rational ends, does not so much become available to him at this moment as it announces that it had been there all along. He is laboring (and, in brief distraction, failing) to reconcile the increasingly privileged program of empirical rationalism that signifies his practice of autonomous subjectivity with its utter failure to disclose the terms that determine his place in the world – terms, in particular,

60 I expect some will take issue with my casting Robinson Crusoe – a white, male, capitalist Protestant, mired in the standard imperial ambitions of Defoe’s age and place – as the centerpiece of the experience of legitimacy in enlightenment thought. My point, of course, is not that political or social legitimacy in actual fact (whatever that means) primarily proceeds from, or is ultimately realized within, such a figure, but that, by embodying the experience of social and political legitimacy in such a way that subsequent writers continually rehearse, these writers are identifying an important limitation in conceptualizing legitimacy and its experience in social space. Indeed, one advantage that novelists have over seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theorists of the social contract is the heterogeneous nature of their voices, representing different classes, gender identities, races, and regions. Moreover, subsequent novelizations of traumatic familiarity reveal that Crusoe is limited not only because he is white, male, protestant, capitalist (which of course would not always have presented itself as a limitation to eighteenth-century readers), but also because the exceptionalism he ostensibly embodies is not sufficient to resolve or overcome the empirical problems attending the experience of legitimacy. Crusoe’s epistemological privilege is clear: one can track for example how obligation in the novel arises in different ways. For the Spaniards, obligation to Crusoe comes from promises and contracts; for Friday, it comes from mutual but totally asymmetrical bonds of affection. Religious duty unfurls for Crusoe (as, Locke insists, and as I discussed in the introduction, it must) in the due course of rationalizing his existence and his place in the world. The same ideology that privileges Crusoe as a rational isolate identifying legitimate religion – as opposed to the excess of enthusiasm he experiences while ships are sinking or earthquakes strike – puts him for the same reasons in an ideal position from which to deduce political legitimacy, since in both cases it ostensibly proceeds from the autonomous figure of Cartesian insularity. Crusoe represents the enlightenment ideal, and we see through him, through his negotiation with legitimacy, one small but important failure of that ideal. At the same time, many critics like Susan Buck-Morss, Suvir Kaul, Carole Pateman, Charles W. Mills, and many others acknowledge that the western tradition of enlightenment thought and novelistic prose in the eighteenth century comes from and tends to reinforce an ideology that is largely ethnically absolutist or essentialist, racially exploitative, heteronormative, capitalist, and anti-feminist. To argue that Defoe establishes an enduring pattern of experience in Robinson Crusoe’s footprint encounter is clearly not meant as an endorsement of such (to state, I hope, the obvious), but is rather an observation wholly consistent with long-known claims about an ideology that has since been, and must still be, rigorously critiqued. I do not say that Defoe invented this experience, attitude, or orientation; and even in saying that he articulated an early version of such that clearly resonated for subsequent writers, I obviously do not endorse it. On the contrary, I spell it out more fully, locating it in such
that these novelists associate with questions of collectivity and legitimacy (conspicuous, as we have seen, in novels with incest plots). But these scenes offer much more than a negatively constructed meditation on the difficulties of determining legitimacy. Rather, the recurring terror of the footprint becomes a means for novelists to confront the elusive role that social experience in particular plays in such questions, seeming to demand a more stable empirical curriculum of political legitimacy, or what we might call a metaphysics of legitimacy, that can be codified, stabilized, and cited as a more or less one-to-one correspondence with objective reality (incorporating, as it were, social or political legitimacy – suspended in the embarrassing and precarious ambivalence between myth and history in the pages of social contract theory – into the rubric of novelistic realism).

In my discussion of the protagonist’s transition from a state of nature, the role of social experience became problematic in part because it showed itself to be both necessary and severely underspecified. The authors of the above scenes draw upon the footprint in order to interrogate the stability of familiarity – or, more precisely, the role of social experience in the epistemological pursuit of legitimacy – ultimately troubling the liberal, enlightenment premises of contract requiring empirical continuity in the social individual (continuity, to use my previous example, in an individual that is first motivated to join into social contract and that must then verify and evaluate its effectiveness after having done so). Moreover, by upsetting the stabilizing role of familiarity, and then in seemingly reintroducing social legitimacy despite having undermined the authority of social experience to determine its terms, these novelists challenge basic assumptions about a social legitimacy grounded in enlightenment practices, even while privileging those very practices. The Crusoian exercise of empirical rationalism is an obviously problematic figure as Crusoe in order to link him and a troubling ideology more fully and more clearly.
simultaneously undermined and upheld as a means to creating and determining social and political legitimacy. How can this be?

It is not my contention that novelists like Burney, Davys, Edgeworth, Inchbald, Fielding, Defoe, and Radcliffe provide answers to such questions, but that, in dramatizing scenes of dubious or precarious legitimacy, they call into question the conventional premises according to which the autonomous individual and the social body are thought to constitute one another, especially in philosophical and political (that is, non-narrative) discourses. They dramatize the limited extent to which the privileged agency that authorizes consent can disengage from its grounding in empirical experience. To frame this narrative problem in terms of the social contract, these novelists wonder if the agent’s consent to social contract – which ostensibly sustains its legitimacy – can subordinate his or her inability to recognize its workings empirically. This is significant because it is precisely such recognition that rational consent presupposes in the first place. The community, despite the agency that gives it its legitimacy (such as consent to, and grounded in, its “ontic” component), is, without a clearer understanding of the role of social experience, imagined: a conclusion that does not accord with the Enlightenment’s hostility to the imagined, or with the rational mandate of legitimacy.

This last and difficult set of questions about the function of social experience in creating, recognizing, and sustaining social legitimacy, as well as the extent to which it is both undermined and reaffirmed in those pursuits, provides an opportunity to pause and address more explicitly the social experience upon which my reading is built, and in particular my calling it “traumatic.” For some, this terminology will seem glibly anachronistic, and to be frank this is partly (but only partly) so. By the eighteenth century, the word *trauma* was used principally in medical discourses, usually to signify any kind of open wound. *Traumatic,* meanwhile, could
also have meant ameliorative, corrective: something that soothes and heals such a “trauma.” The contrariety suggested by these two terms neatly captures the contrariety of collective identification I am describing here: the contrary movements of the social body and the individual that have been my principle business (constituting one another, doing so by distinguishing each from the other, etc). To think about familiarity as a “trauma,” then, is to evoke the cohesive social body that familiarity is intended to evoke, as an objectively recognizable entity, one single concrete body among others (as in a family among the other families of a neighborhood, or a nation among other nations), even while insisting that such recognition constitutes a break or a rupture to that body. “Traumatic” at once reifies the social body as a cohesive, recognizable object while registering that such reification (entailing the autonomous, liberal individual who must then extract herself from the social body in order to regard it as an object, as other) requires acknowledging a rupture precisely to that cohesion.

But frankly I am also happy to allow the anachronistic sense of the word to contaminate my argument. I invite the absence of the contemporary, popular and clinical meanings of “traumatic” to become conspicuous, namely because I want the general absence of the corresponding experience (terror, to put it in simple terms, that inaugurates long-term, psychological distress) to be equally conspicuous. William James famously described the shock of certain terrifying events as “‘psychic traumata,’ thorns in the spirit, so to speak” – psychological “reminiscences” that cannot be easily shaken, and that endure and intrude into the normal course of one’s daily life (qtd. in Richardson 336). James’s meaning does not appear until well into the nineteenth century, and so its use in the context of this chapter usefully points to an enduring sense of psychological disruption and terror in these moments of familiarity that probably should, but for the most part does not, appear. Why isn’t Defoe “traumatized,” in the
current sense of the word, by a specter that is so violently intrusive? Why aren’t Lady Betty, Virginia, Emily, or Moll Flanders, all of whom are so aggressively struck with shock as to become entirely distracted (shocked nearly to death) afflicted with “thorns” in their spirit? Or, to pose the question more productively, why are these characters able to overcome, so quickly and so fully, the unresolved problems that the shock of familiarity imposes upon them? Since it would seem that answering this question might provide some insight into the role of legitimacy in these passages, I will return to it below, but I want to return to the novelists first, and to read more closely two examples of traumatic familiarity that I find especially edifying.

THE LESSON OF FAMILIARITY: ELIZABETH INCHBALD’S A SIMPLE STORY AND FRANCES BURNEY’S EVELINA

The first of the two scenes I want to consider in occurs in Elizabeth Inchbald’s strange novel, A Simple Story (1791). Inchbald is particularly illuminating for any analysis of the protagonist and social experience, given the peculiarities of her characterization. Many critics, for example, find the roundness of her characters unconvincing. Jo Alyson Parker writes that “Matilda [the protagonist of the second half of A Simple Story] is less a character in her own right than an index of features of contemporary fictional heroines” (262), and Dianne Osland argues that “no character in this novel is able to demonstrate the clarity of motivation that contributes so much to the comprehensibility and coherence of character in the realist novel” (89). Nevertheless, Osland couches her discussion of characters’ motives (conscious and unconscious) within broader questions of characters’ legibility and illegibility, explicitly raising questions of empiricism and social experience that bring an awareness of Inchbald’s stagecraft to bear. By the time Inchbald writes A Simple Story, her successful career as a dramatist has given her an interest in characters whose inner lives are vitally inscribed on their expressive, gestural
bodies, raising the possibility of interiorities that are either subordinated to (and thus murky and elusive) or coextensive with (and thus entirely visible to others) whatever meets the reader’s, the audience’s, or the other characters’ eyes. As Nora Nachumi puts it, addressing a related set of concerns about interiority and exteriority, “In her plays, novels, and criticism, Inchbald repeatedly demonstrates that bodies express emotions more authentically and more persuasively than words alone,” insisting that “a widely recognized system of theatrical gesture manifests itself in her criticism and fiction” (318).

Thus, Inchbald’s characters are often, like any successful protagonist, fully particular and individual, but that particularity is theatrical: legible to an extent that easily facilitates social experience. But what do those social experiences in their theatrical (and thus largely external) legibility cumulatively signify? Do readers see in them a more “authentic” individuality and, by extension, a more authentic social relationality? Or a flatness that belies the character’s individuality, and that by extension poses an obstacle to accessing the terms of his or her social relationality? Moreover, to the extent that one’s individuality and relationality are mutually implied (as in “brother of X,” or “citizen of Y,” entailing in each case a rich but specific catalog of privileges and responsibilities), can either one be determined where the other is not given, given authentically, and given in such a way that its “authenticity” can be empirically determined? The theatrical particularity of Inchabld’s characters thus foregrounds the epistemological conditions under which “legitimacy” is produced and sustained.

Framing “legitimacy” as a dynamic of narrative and character development makes conceptual difficulties conspicuous for both the subject and the object of social experience. Any constituent for whom the legitimacy of a social body is an open question must gather from social experiences the terms according to which legitimacy can be determined; he must also express,
however, as legibly as possible (see chapter one on Rousseau and the significance of transparency), contributing to the social experiences of others so that they will know whether he is an elderly man, for example, or a goblin, or their brother. That the transparency of Inchbald’s characters translates into flatness, especially in *A Simple Story*, might thus reflect *either* a murky or inadequate interiority of character *or* the remoteness of a community of legible and transparent constituents. The problem of Inchbald’s characterization can be reframed: are her novels problematic because we read her characters as flat, or because, relying upon social experience as an index to legitimacy, their roundness is premised on the relative legibility and transparency of the other? Are they flat, or does their roundness consist precisely in the pursuit of flattening others? One scene in particular lays bare the novel’s interest in consolidating legitimacy, social experience, and characterization, and it does so in ways that, symptomatically, resist neat differentiation between flat and round character.

Long after Miss Milner has died, her daughter, Matilda, is allowed to reside in the house of her father, Lord Elmwood, provided that she never appear before him, never impose upon him the memory of his beloved but unfaithful Miss Milner. Indeed, she must erase herself, not exist to him at all. Volume III ends with a dramatic encounter between Matilda and her father (in fact, as for Crusoe, it is initially a disembodied footstep that she encounters) on “the great staircase” – Matilda hears “a footstep walking slowly up,” and she sees him:

She felt something like affright before she saw him – but her reason told her she had nothing to fear, as he was far away. – But now the appearance of a stranger whom she had never before seen; an air of authority in his looks as well as in the sound of his steps; a resemblance to the portrait she had seen of him; a start of astonishment which he gave on beholding her; but above all – her fears confirmed her it was him. – She gave a scream
of terror – put out her trembling hands to catch the balustrades on the stairs for support – missed them – and fell motionless into her father’s arms. (273 – 274 emphasis Inchbald’s)

Again, the predominant theme in this encounter is terror, and again reflecting on this terror brings our attention back to the problems of collective identification. Elmwood Castle is paradoxical, a space of relational self-contradiction: it is above all a shared, a filial space, rigorously regulated by the directives of a father and the obedience of a daughter; yet it is sustained as such only by the complete suppression of every trace or implication of its being a shared, filial space.  

The odd nature of Elmwood Castle’s society has been cited frequently, often with an eye towards Inchbald’s allegedly artificial or awkward plotting. More direct critiques of the estate’s social space tend to do more justice to Inchbald’s political objectives, evaluating, as Jo Alyson Parker writes, the possibilities for “female power” in ‘unnatural’ spaces of excessive mediation: “The Elmwood household functions as a perverse version of the family unit, for it relies upon substitutes to maintain an intercourse among the various members…the convoluted lines of communication reinforcing our sense of the unnatural.” For Parker, however, what is unnatural are the “constraints” Elmwood imposes upon himself, as obstacles to the free expression and realization of his suppressed fatherly fondness (263 – a reading, it is worth noting, which contemporary readers largely shared: see for example Barbauld’s preface to A Simple Story in The British Novels, quoted in Dianne Osland, 91, note 29). Parker thus takes for granted the normative script of filial negotiation privileged by conventional eighteenth-century domestic fiction (why is the use of “substitutes” necessarily “perverse” and “unnatural?”), but in doing so she does not account for, first, how such a narrative comes to be privileged in the first place; or, second, how Elmwood simultaneously feeds (by registering their “natural” gravity) and rejects (by refusing to act upon his fondness) such conventions. By reading the space as a self-contradiction, however, rather than merely problematic or poorly contrived, I emphasize the conditions according to which legitimacy itself is founded and determined by agents in enlightenment thought (Kant’s practical philosophy, for example, posits that an action is ethical, and can become law [universally, objectively valid] only insofar as it does not contradict itself in its extension from self-directed to universal). The difference in our readings is between one in which a social context’s normative conventions naturally arise, as if objectively valid (but may be ignored by unnatural agents), and one in which the emergence of such conventions is already highly fraught. Conventional domestic fiction naturalizes the patriarchal command, after all, as much as if not more than fatherly fondness, so the point for me is less how “unnatural” this space is than how difficult it becomes to determine such ostensibly simple things as what qualifies as “natural” in the first place.
that he never see or hear any trace of his daughter’s existence, Matilda’s perfect and complete consummation of daughterhood (a set of responsibilities and privileges bound to this specific relational identity) corresponds directly to the perfect and complete suppression of daughterhood (the very constituency or relationality that imposes these responsibilities in the first place); and the command that organizes Elmwood’s patriarchal fatherhood resolves itself in dismantling the very relationality from which that command proceeds. In chapter two, I used Locke’s example of the father to question the extent to which social contract reconciles the demands of the type and the individual; for Locke, such a reconciliation appears necessary. Inchbald complicates social contract’s mandate for reconciling the particular and the type by putting duty and command in a context of explicitly contradictory relationality. Her narrative provides a context in which the type and the particular simultaneously authorize and cancel one another. Performing their relational identities, each character severs any empirical trace of his or her operative relationality (I will examine a similar example of contradictory relationality in Clarissa in the following chapter).

The society of Elmwood Castle is bracketed by two narratives that help to explain its contradictions. The first half of the novel relates Elmwood’s (called Dorriforth before inheriting his title) relationship with his ward, Miss Milner, who resents his Catholic severity but who gradually comes to love him. Eventually they marry, but while Elmwood attends to business in the West Indies, she lapses into frivolity and sexual license, finally exiling herself in guilt from the Castle on his return. Livid, he banishes innocent Matilda as well. The narrator cites this banishment as central to a defining shift in Elmwood’s character: “the pious, the good, the tender Dorriforth, is become a hard-hearted tyrant” (tyranny, of course, being the most recognizable form of illegitimacy in early modern and enlightenment political theory, alongside the state of
nature). Now an “example of implacable rigour and injustice” (194 – 195), the new-minted tyrant’s first business is revenge, and he determines to duel with Milner’s lover, Frederick, who “was called upon to answer for his conduct, and was left upon the spot where they met, so maimed, and defaced with scars, as never again to endanger the honour of a husband” (198). Ostensibly, a kind of justice is secured here. The social body’s stability is secured, specifically since a threat to other imagined husbands is neutralized (“the honour of a husband” is a speculative phrase that functions primarily to reaffirm the value of a categorical abstraction). Moreover, like “father,” it is a categorical abstraction that Elmwood both does and does not embody, since “the honour of a husband” is a notion that refers directly to him (to his wife’s betrayal and the abuse of his honor that motivates this duel) while also excluding him (since, first of all, he has already surrendered any claim to a share in his wife’s and daughter’s lives and, second, the “danger” from which he protects honor cannot apply to his, already abused). Thus Elmwood, confusing the individual with the category, confuses revenge with justice.\footnote{Contract theorists often associate revenge with the state of nature and justice with legitimate civil society. Locke’s description of natural right and the state of war, for example, closely approximates Elmwood’s motives: “every man, in the state of nature, has a power to kill a murderer, both to deter others from doing the like injury…and also to secure men from the attempts of a criminal” (chpt 2, § 11). This power is only removed when the appeal to a common judge becomes possible – and law, common to all citizens, stripped of the arbitrary imperatives that feed revenge, legitimizes the judge.}

The tyranny that defines him in the duel thus more or less corresponds to the contradictory nature of his fatherhood: it is an abstraction, a flat characterization that he exploits, mining it for its authority, but he also extracts himself from its ‘natural’ affective and categorical imperatives. The approximation of tyrannical justice with half-borne fatherhood becomes clearer when considering the narrative that resolves these contradictions. At the novel’s conclusion, after Elmwood makes good on his dictate that Matilda must be banished from the house if she ever
appear before him, she is abducted by the rakish Lord Margrave who exploits her “unprotected” state in exile. Informed of the abduction, Elmwood quickly sets out to rescue her and, encountering her in Margrave’s apartment, immediately recovers his fatherly tenderness: “That moment her father entered – and with the unrestrained fondness of a parent, folded her in his arms” (328). Grammatically, this scene and the duel both evoke the individual and the categorical, but in this reconciliation, rather than departing from “the honour of a husband,” Elmwood fully embodies “the…fondness of a parent.” This final encounter, so strikingly different in tone from their meeting on the stairs, signals the complete reformation of our tyrant, which is then immediately confirmed when Margrave asks “if you have any demands on me,” to which Elmwood (who is perhaps still embracing Matilda) replies: “Would you make me an executioner? The law shall be your only antagonist” (329). He now fully embodies both of the categorical abstractions from which he had departed, satisfying their respective terms of fondness and justice.

The return to legitimacy – signaled by the effacement of arbitrary judicial tyranny and the embodiment of normative, relational fatherhood – seems to correspond with the reconciliation of the particular and the type (or perhaps, at least for Elmwood himself, a subordination of the particular to the type). The invocation of law makes this reconciliation especially legible, particularly given its contrast with Elmwood’s prior duel. But how does one account for this legitimacy? What if anything differentiates confusing the particular and the type, as Elmwood the tyrant does, from reconciling the particular and the type, as Elmwood the father does? Returning to the vocabulary of The Reform’d Coquet from the opening of this chapter, does the difference between these two subjectivities lie simply in Elmwood’s “beliefs?” If so, what conditions those beliefs? In what sense does an individual’s belief about legitimacy become a part of the “ontic”
component upon which legitimacy is calculated by others? How do these characters make
legitimacy legible in the social body for others to see and to recognize? Inchbald makes none of
this clear.

After all, interpreting Matilda’s rescue as the resolution of “unnatural” family
relationality, previously associated with tyranny and illegitimacy, only subordinates her own
experience to his, potentially reinforcing the arbitrary paternalism that has already given
troubling shape to their social contact. What does she experience of this new-found legitimacy?
When she sees her father rush into Margrave’s apartment, she is not much less conflicted than
when she meets him on the stairs: “Her extreme, her excess of joy…was still, in part, repressed
by his awful presence – The apprehensions to which she had been accustomed, kept her timid
and doubtful – she feared to speak, or clasp him in return for his embrace” (328). Even the next
day, when the immediate threat of assault is gone, and the narrator has shifted to a tone of
relative calm and resolution, Matilda’s experience of the filial bond with her father is qualified
with subordination, fear, and constraint: “When Matilda was ready to join her father in the next
room, she felt a tremor seize her, that made it almost impossible to appear before him…and she
knew not how to dare to speak, or look on him with that freedom her affection warranted.” Now,
“embarrassment at meeting on terms of easy intercourse” with one whom, we are told, she used
to fear, makes it difficult for her to adjust her behavior and affections to their newly legitimate
(“warranted”) relationship – and it makes, in particular, “freedom” difficult (330).63

63 For discussions of freedom in the novel, see especially Terry Castle, Masquerade and
Civilization (290 – 330) and Patricia Meyer Spacks, Desire and Truth. See also Barbara Judson,
“The Psychology of Satan,” which compellingly reads in A Simple Story – depicting “in vivid
detail the process by which the psyche enslaves itself, a form of bondage [Inchbald] portrays as
the inability to love (602) – a reimagining of the problems of freedom engaged in Paradise Lost.
Notwithstanding Matilda’s embarrassment, her apparent fear of her father remains conspicuous. That her fears at this later meeting are wrong, that they signal a misjudgment of social knowledge, is significant. In her father, like the public for Some Man, she senses the specter of a tyrant; her own reluctance to approach him signifies a lack of freedom in which her daughterly affections and behavior are still suspended. Her fear as a signal of misjudgment is especially significant given that, in their meeting on the stairs, it is precisely her fears that mediate social knowledge to her. For all the empirical evidence and rational deduction catalogued on the staircase – his likeness to the portrait, his air of authority – it is “her fears [that] confirmed her it was him.” Social knowledge, the contours of the objective social body that he and she constitute, comes to Matilda through eminently subjective, affective channels. Since the social knowledge her fear imparts is correct, the staircase scene seems to problematize the relationship between subjective and objective, especially with respect to the “ontic component” of collective identification. But that this scene is associated, moreover, with a state of tyranny and illegitimacy – and that her fears will later misjudge the social body in a state of legitimate filial sociality – does not stabilize but rather undermines entirely any empirical program according to which different individuals can freely and rationally consent. Like Lady Betty in The Reform’d Coquet, Matilda must now, in the state of legitimacy, come to “believe” – despite her fears and tremors – that her father is not a tyrant, goblin, stranger, etc. But how? What is the nature of this belief and how does it come to be privileged? What is the relationship between the agency of “belief” and legitimacy, such as the agency of rational “consent?”

The second, final example of traumatic familiarity I would like to explore helps to articulate precisely the relationship between belief and legitimacy, including consent. It comes from a well-known passage in Frances Burney’s Evelina, following the protagonist’s appeal for
recognition by her father, John Belmont, for the first time. As her father has refused to acknowledge her as his offspring, her expressed objective in this meeting is precisely to establish her legitimacy. For his part, Belmont mockingly insists to Evelina’s advocate, Mrs. Selwyn, that he “just had the satisfaction of breakfasting with” his daughter, taking for granted (as any perfectly reasonable individual would!) that he knows the members of which his family consists – dismissing as absurd, that is, any suggestion that his faculties, his frameworks, his empirical understanding of his position in a shared space (and therefore of that shared space itself), might not sufficiently present to him the most basic facts that situate him and stabilize his social identity (“father,” for example, of person X). It is with no trace of doubt, but with sheer – even triumphant – confidence that he knows who he is and who his family members are, that he does not object to meeting Evelina, and he allows her to be brought to him. Evelina narrates the encounter, which I reproduce in full:

Then, taking my trembling hand, [Selwyn] led me forward. I would have withdrawn it, and retreated, but as he advanced instantly towards me, I found myself already before him.

What a moment for your Evelina! – an involuntary scream escaped me, and covering my face with my hands, I sunk on the floor.

He had, however, seen me first; for in a voice scarce articulate, he exclaimed, “My God! Does Caroline Evelyn⁶⁴ still live!”

Mrs. Selwyn said something, but I could not listen to her; and, in a few minutes, he added, “Lift up thy head, -- if my sight has not blasted thee, -- lift up thy head, thou image of my long-lost Caroline!”

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⁶⁴ Like Elmwood, Belmont sees the protagonist’s long-dead mother.
Affected beyond measure, I half arose, and embraced his knees, while yet on my own.

“Yes, yes,” cried he, looking earnestly in my face, “I see, I see thou art her child! she lives – she breathes – she is present to my view; --Oh God, that she indeed lived! – Go, child, go” added he, wildly starting and pushing me from him, “take her away, Madam, -- I cannot bear to look at her!” And then, breaking hastily from me, he rushed out of the room.

John Belmont then, “with a violence almost frantic…ran up stairs.” This filial revelation (that is only a revelation for one of the characters) constitutes the novel’s climax, and it ends with this image of the retreat of a violently distracted father, a figure that bears a striking resemblance to Robinson Crusoe, fleeing into his “Castle,” it bears repeating, “like one pursued”: “never frightened Hare fled to Cover, or Fox to Earth, with more Terror of Mind than [Crusoe] to this Retreat.” Evelina and her father both experience this trauma: the “involuntary scream” and the sinking to floor are no less suggestive of Crusoe “out of himself” than the scarce articulate ramblings and frantic agitation of her father. In a passage that is both impossibly distant from and highly evocative of the footprint scene, we see once again the frenzied recourse to sense perception (and the attending failure of sense perception: “I could not listen to her”), the demand to look and to be looked at, and the collapsing of certainty through familiarity (he recognizes her to be his daughter) with the uncertainty of the imagination: he recognizes her dead mother, a footprint (which Crusoe calls an “Apparition”) that both familiarizes and estranges, stabilizes and destabilizes.

This moment, like many of the others from this chapter, challenges two basic claims about social and political legitimacy, one of which has long since lost its legs, but the other of which still circulates. In the first, political legitimacy is derived from filial legitimacy, since the
history of the state begins for many political theorists with a history of the family.\textsuperscript{65} The affective, reproductive, rational, and self-/other-interested bonds that constitute the family in its earliest historical stages are extended outward to nonfamily members as the population increases, as more sophisticated networks of interest are drawn, and as more complex apparatus of stability are required. The organization and legitimization of the family unit follows from the natural, patriarchal and reproductive impulses of sex and child rearing, and any subsequent consolidation of family units into increasingly large, organized social units follows more or less seamlessly. Bolingbroke, for example, writes that “we are led” by “instinct,” “information,” “habit, and finally by reason” to “civil through natural society, and are fitted to be members of one, by having been members of the other” (45), arguing that “it cannot be doubted…that the first societies of men were those of families formed by nature and governed by natural law, nor that kingdoms and states were the second” (51). For Bolingbroke, people are – and have always been – naturally social, since they have always been members of families, the primary state of human life, and thus this primary sociality remains intact as an objectively available truth through social and political collectivity. Similarly, Sir Thomas Craig writes “that the first Societies of men began in Families, after that in the Union of more Families together, Nature alone being their guide” (Book I, pg 14), and economic writer Thomas Mortimer argues that “The first societies, and those which compose all others, are family societies. These are natural, and the better they are regulated the more easily and the more surely will political societies, whose component parts they are, be put and maintained under good regulations” (175). Elements of this argument survive with Pufendorf, who writes that “[m]arriage may be called the first example of social life and at the same time the seed-bed of the human race” (120), adding that “heads of households

\textsuperscript{65} See Locke’s and Pufendorf’s arguments, for example, outlined in the previous chapter.
before they entered into states had exercised in their homes a sort of princely authority” (126), ultimately insisting, however, that “we must…investigate why men have not been content with those first small associations [families, including their slaves], but have constituted large associations which go by the name of states,” since “this is the basis from which we must derive the justification of the duties which go with men’s civil state” (132).

Of course, the primarily filial picture of social organization does not resolve the problem of political or social legitimacy, since it merely takes the legitimacy of the family unit – and the means by which the individual is able to determine such legitimacy – for granted. Political or social legitimacy, these theories suggest, being derived from a natural form, is an objectively real thing. And being a real thing (grounded, no less, in familiarity), it can be determined, recognized, and empirically verified (the claims that validate family trees, for example). But writers, and particularly novelists such as Frances Burney, Henry Fielding, and Mary Davys, undermine precisely these two assumptions. John Belmont, insisting that he had “breakfasted with” his daughter previously, embodies the possibility – so frequently embodied in eighteenth-century fiction – that one might be mistaken about whom one thinks is one’s daughter, father, or spouse. What one thinks of as one’s natural family unit may in fact be an aggregate of stowaways and bastards; those whom one recognizes as fathers and sisters may be the fathers and sisters of friends or total strangers. Conversely, a total stranger, even one whom one has closely scrutinized, may turn out to be one’s brother, mother, father, longtime sexual partner, etc. Filial legitimacy is no more secure, natural, or objective than social or political legitimacy, so determining legitimacy by arguing that the former is primary and the latter derivative simply begs the question.
But it is the novelists’ objection to the second claim about legitimacy that is more interesting, since it is a claim that is still widely favored. Legitimacy, this claim goes, is derived from consent. For Locke (who in rejecting Filmer argues precisely against the central premises of the filial model of legitimacy), “when any number of men have, by the consent of every individual, made a community, they have thereby made that community one body, with the power to act as one body” (142). Indeed, that there can be no legitimacy without consent seems fairly obvious. On its face, it is hard to argue with this claim. But, Burney and other novelists seem to suggest, even if it is true that where there is legitimacy there must be consent, it does not follow that where there is consent there must be legitimacy.

Fictional treatments of traumatic familiarity feature several distinctly problematic aspects of consent. First, “consent” does not signal as clear and stable an expression in the eighteenth century as one might hope. Indeed, novelistic fiction played a role in broader attempts both to stabilize and to problematize various meanings and manifestations of consent. Toni Bowers argues that seduction stories, for example, engaged with an attempt to establish a stable basis for recognizing and expressing consent and resistance, arguing not only that “seduction tales…could be used as ‘cover stories’ for otherwise dangerous or incendiary ideas,” and that “the central preoccupation of seduction stories during the eighteenth century was less seduction per se than the effort to define the relative agencies of persons in relations of power and subordination,” but that, in this context, “courtship, seduction, and rape tended to overlap, like the consent, complicity, and resistance that supposedly distinguished them.” That Evelina was signally interested in the slippery nuance and uncertainty of consent is made clear by the abundance of ambivalent, sometimes uneasy qualifications of consent that continually recur in its pages (“I
was obliged to consent,” “I was obliged to submit” [36], “I have been almost compelled to consent” [135], “Miss Branghton was obliged to yield” [159], etc).

The second problem of consent featured by passages of trauma, following closely from the first, is that even in its more (ostensibly) straightforward occurrences, it provides no more direct or authentic access to the “ontic component” of community than do “natural” presumptions of family ties. Locke, contributing to a shift already present in Pufendorf, puts the legitimacy of consent in explicit opposition to presumptions of filial legitimacy, writing that “the society betwixt” family members and their slaves “is far different from a politic society” (135). Jonathan Kramnick has spelled out specifically what consent entails for Locke, highlighting in particular the marginality of expressed consent and the corresponding centrality of tacit consent. Locke, he writes, “builds his model of political legitimacy on [a] notion of unspoken and implied consent.” Kramnick points to some of the implications of this theory in Locke’s *Second Treatise*: “By participating in a money economy, we consent to the capacity of money to express value; and, once we consent to the value of money, we also consent to a society of unequal wealth and power” (173). None of this is conscious, which enables Locke to solve the perennially difficult question of individuals’ consent, even where it is never expressed, to governments that they are born into. By extension, the legitimacy of such arrangements of material value and their corresponding inequalities proceeds directly from (and *exclusively* from) tacit consent, which is constantly performed in the living of daily life. Unlike the money itself (which is always at least ostensibly a deferral of, or reference to, objective, quantifiable, material wealth), the actions that signal consent do not refer to objective conditions of legitimacy but, rather, *constitute* these conditions. “I act as if I consent,” Kramnick writes, “and that is sufficient” (175).
It is immediately clear how novelists problematize Locke’s (otherwise compelling and necessary) theory of tacit consent. For what better demonstrates both the performance of such tacit consent, a la Locke, and its total failure to generate or index legitimacy, than a gentleman breakfasting with (whom he thinks is) his daughter? Moreover, what, in Locke’s theory of consent, authorizes Lady Betty to “believe” that the man before her is her brother, and not (conclusions that also proceed from her “beliefs”) a goblin or an elderly man? What authorizes her to distinguish the former belief from the latter two? Consent, the novelists suggest, is at best merely an index, pointing (but never very clearly) to prior conditions of legitimacy external to the closed system of pedestrian, intersubjective exchanges among familiars in a shared space. Rather than constituting legitimacy, or enabling legitimacy, it can only indicate one’s “beliefs” about legitimacy, and these beliefs may be entirely wrong.

*Evelina* makes all of this clear, providing along the way about as good a counterexample to *Daniel Deronda* as any, exposing how central Deronda’s sense of attachment really is. John Belmont’s “objective” notion of family – that most basic and “natural” form of social organization – collapses before him, as does the authority of any “consent” he has ever provided. Indeed, moreover, the now undermined “ontic” component of his community is the same with which he purchased, understood, and performed his own identity. Mere statements of

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66 Critics who ignore this fact tend to misjudge Belmont’s character, and sometimes to overstate his cruelty (evidenced less by his treatment of Evelina than of her late mother), in a way that highlights the basic stakes of our arguments here. Virginia H. Cope, for example, rightly foregrounds the economic implications of Evelina’s illegitimacy, drawing upon the role affect plays in economic negotiations in Locke’s *Second Treatise* to argue that, “in the second meeting, Evelina demands that Sir John Belmont participate in the affective economy” that will lead, according to natural and then civil law, to the security of her inheritance. But this claim does not register, first, the intensity of Belmont’s affective reaction to Evelina or, second, the possibility that he has long been a participant in precisely such an economy, albeit with his (mistakenly) presumed, rather than his actual daughter. The affective economy, thus, does not provide the stability that Locke, Evelina, and perhaps Cope suggests that it does, partially because it presumes a continuity between naturally and civically objective legitimacy (74).
bare fact – I had breakfast with my daughter today – turn on their speaker such that he becomes entirely alienated not only from the “objective” relational claims they carry (“my daughter” is a claim that implicitly asserts one’s ability to recognize and distinguish one collective body as an object “really” and knowably separate from others) but from himself: first, from the “I” that understands itself in reference to those relational claims and, second, from the authority (no less “objective”) from which claims about one’s self and the world are possible in the first place. In other words, John Belmont, straddling the epistemological statuses of both the individual and the type, taking for granted that they are the same, watches them both collapse beneath him: he is alienated from himself once as a person determined by an objectively knowable relational type among others and again as the kind of rational, autonomous agent who is therefore and to that extent capable of distinguishing and understanding the world as constructed of such objectively knowable, determining features.

How is legitimacy to be recovered in such a context? The contemporary meaning of “trauma” can be brought more directly to bear here. For Belmont, Evelina’s familiarity is at once the source of trauma that destabilizes his identity and, if more obscurely, the tantalizing suggestion that some elusive foundation for “actual” legitimation (and thus stability) exists, somewhere. After all (and this I find endlessly strange), he is satisfied! Even knowing that he is capable of mistaking the most basic and fundamental principles of his social life and identity does not, as one might expect, lead him to doubt that he might not encounter, at some point in the future, a young woman more familiar than Evelina – more probably, we might say, his “actual” daughter. John Belmont does not learn the lesson of Evelina’s familiarity. It reveals to him that his place within his supposed family – and the family itself – was false (that even the most objective, “natural,” and ostensibly basic categories of an organized world are open to
unperceived manipulation and error), but it also reinforces the fiction that his true place and true family can be recovered and recognized as really existent. But in what sense? His access to those truths – as an autonomous agent, as a known and acknowledged head of family – has already been (I would argue irreversibly) disturbed. For him, her familiarity seems to point in the direction of an objectively real existence, of “real” social organization and collective identity, even as it severs his access to any such reality by showing him how tenuous – how imaginary in the sense enlightenment thought typically resists – its foundations must ultimately be. And, like Belmont, most readers are satisfied that the question of legitimacy has been resolved. Villars’s account seems satisfactory, and (as in *A Simple Story*) Evelina’s and her father’s fears seem to “confirm” this account. But why?

Burney’s climactic encounter brings to mind another canonical struggle to stabilize one’s identity in the face of uncertain and uneasy experiences, to which we turn now by way of conclusion. In a key moment of the first book of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume writes that “In every judgment, which we can form concerning probability, as well as concerning knowledge, we ought always to correct the first judgment, deriv’d from the nature of the object, by another judgment, deriv’d from the nature of the understanding.” Following Hume’s logic, Belmont ought upon seeing his *probable* daughter to have reflected more explicitly not only on his changing relational identity, but on the faculties by which he – thus far inaccurately – creates, understands, and performs them. “As demonstration,” Hume continues, “is subject to the control of probability, so is probability liable to a new correction by a reflex act of the mind, wherein the nature of our understanding, and our reasoning from the first probability becomes our objects.” The problem, Hume concludes, is that when doubt occurs it becomes reflexive, such that doubt of one’s doubt necessarily arises, challenging the initial judgment and eventually the very
capacity to judge: “Having found in every probability, beside the original uncertainty inherent in the subject, a new uncertainty deriv’d from the weakness of that faculty, which judges, and having adjusted these two together, we are oblig’d by our reason to add a new doubt deriv’d from the possibility of error in the estimation we make of the truth and fidelity of our faculties.” Certainty, anything like the objective, becomes impossible here, to such an extent that, he concludes, “When I reflect on the natural fallibility of my judgment, I have less confidence in my opinions, than when I only consider those objects concerning which I reason; and when I proceed still farther, to turn the scrutiny against every successive estimation I make of my faculties, all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence” (1.4.1.5-6).

Hume helps us to see the stakes of social experience in Evelina and its version of traumatic familiarity; Evelina, meanwhile, provides a glimpse of an alternative to conceptual (Cartesian, Platonic) legitimacy as sought by Crusoe and Some Man. But while this alternative makes explicit the dangers of, as I put it above, learning the lesson of Evelina’s familiarity, it does not do so by offering a more stable or objective foundation for collective identity, legitimacy, or social experience.

AGAINST A METAPHYSICS OF LEGITIMACY

When one reaches the conclusion of the first book of Hume’s Treatise of Human Nature, she finds herself on familiar territory, confronting once again the “forlorn solitude” of an interlocutor “not being able to mingle and unite in society.” Hume explains that, like Robinson Crusoe (a reference that Hume does not make explicitly), he “has been expell’d from all human commerce, and left utterly abandon’d and disconsolate.” But Hume extends this solitude much

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further. In contrast to Robinson Crusoe tracing the familiarity of a human footprint – confirming precisely its humanness, at least twice, in terror – Hume traces, in himself, something deeply inhuman, unfamiliar: “some strange uncouth monster” who “wou’d run into the crowd for shelter and warmth; but cannot prevail with myself to mix with [to impose, we might say] such deformity” (1.4.7.2). It is not simply that such “deformity” would impose discomfort or distress onto others; nor is solitude, as he writes later, “the greatest punishment we can suffer” (2.2.5.15) merely because it makes one miserable. Rather, Hume’s monstrous solitude is an indication that he has left the “natural” commerce explicitly constitutive of human contact. He makes this clear early, by conflating the psychological and physiological effects of sociability. In the entertainment of others, he writes,

> the mind…awakes, as it were, from a dream: The blood flows with a new tide: the heart is elevated: And the whole man acquires a vigour, which he cannot command in his solitary and calm moments. Hence company is naturally so rejoicing, as presenting the liveliest of all objects, viz. a rational and thinking being like ourselves, who communicates to us all the actions of his mind; makes us privy to his inmost sentiments and affections; and lets us see, in the very instant of their production, all the emotions, which are caus’d by an object. (2.2.4.4, emphasis added)

His narrative at this point obviously does not correspond to those that posit a transition from the state of nature, yet we see how, for Hume, humanness (even in its most mechanistic, Hobbesian formulations) is roughly interchangeable with sociability, such that solitude and unsociability – monstrosity – confine one to a status of essential illegitimacy. Engagement with others, intimate exchange, follows from and constitutes human nature. By evoking monstrosity, Hume argues

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68 For Hume’s narrative corresponding to these, see 3.2.2.
that he is able to recognize a set of conditions under which delegitimization (of claims about collective identification that that are true and necessary, and that include oneself) necessarily follows.

There two aspects of Hume’s isolation that I wish to emphasize here; the first relating to the extent to which Hume represents the individual’s existence in the world as essentially subjective, and the second to the extent of the world’s essential objectivity. In the first, Hume’s critique of metaphysics leaves him in a position of advancing a strictly empiricist picture of epistemology/morality that puts heavy stress on the single, fully-wrought individual with (and with only, in an important sense) a richly elaborated inner life of affects and sense-perceptions. Even in reflecting upon the most distant concepts, “the utmost limits of the universe,” he argues, “we never really advance a step beyond ourselves” (1.2.6.8). In such a work, it seems, the very archetypal character presupposed by the rationalist contract theorists is technically impossible; Hume’s arguments about social organization can go no further than what can belong to any particular, experiencing individual, i.e., the protagonist. Taken simply, such a position – in which all knowledge and belief (and the complex ideas of which they consist) can be traced to primary ideas of sense perceptions – threatens to reduce the protagonist to the subjective idealism of George Berkeley. Hume’s resolution to this problem, as we shall see, is to further advance the authority of such subjective, internal content. In other words, it is by advancing, and not retreating from, subjective interiority that Hume rejects Berkeley’s radical skepticism and reconciles the experiencing subject with collectivity: not a type (like “father”), but a “general view.”

The second noteworthy aspect of Hume’s isolation is the extent to which his monstrosity at the end of book one corresponds with a rejection of something like natural law, a concept
typically understood, by definition, as one that is universally valid, and to that extent prior to individual experience and therefore objective. “There is a general course of nature in human actions,” he writes, including sociability, “as well as in the operations of the sun and the climate” (2.3.1.10). This “general course of nature” entirely qualifies commonly understood notions of liberty to such an extent that we can make no distinction between natural necessity as it determines the material and the moral world (see 2.3.1. 15 – 17). That is, gravity and sociability are necessary to an equal degree according to their respective sciences. The sort of monstrosity he proposes, therefore, formally resembles those aspects of natural law theory, especially pronounced in Locke, for whom self-preservation and the preservation of “the rest of mankind” are dependent – not conflicting – dictates of natural law. And since our recognition of natural law (for Locke) is what distinguishes us from the animals, to reject natural law is to “trespass against the whole species,” to estrange one’s self from the human community, to

69 Though I will turn shortly to Hume’s notion of “objectivity,” it seems worth noting here, in the context of claims that collapse physical and psychological necessity, that Hume argues that he does not “ascribe to matter, that intelligible quality, which is supposed to lie in matter” but rather ascribes “to matter, that intelligible quality, call it necessity or not, which…must allow or belong to the will.” He changes, “therefore, nothing in the receiv’d systems, with regard to the will, but only with regard to material objects” (2.3.2.4). We will have more to say below about how Hume understands the material world and its relationship to the subject.
70 For a thoughtful and thorough discussion of determinism in Hume, see Peter Millican, “Hume’s Determinism.”
71 Locke, Second Treatise, (102: Chpt 2, P 6).
72 Locke, (103: chpt 2, p 8). Kirstie M. McClure locates this logic explicitly within the framework by which Locke attempts to establish conceptual – as opposed to historical – legitimacy (“order was preeminently conceived in moralistic rather than sociological or historical terms” [5]), arguing that natural law was “defined by [God’s] purposes and expressive of his will, but the uniqueness of the human place within this architecture required that the rules prescribed to human agents differ in kind from all the rest,” such that rejecting this law constitutes a rejection of that privileged human place (37). It is this argument, according to Charles W. Mills, by which supposedly liberal theories of social contract are able to exclude nonwhites as “subpersons,” “biologically destined never to penetrate the normative rights ceiling established for them below white persons” (17). Mills is drawing roughly upon Carole Pateman, who shows that a similar logic is at work in suspending women’s rights to enter certain (public)
Hume breaks with Locke, however, by dissociating natural law (which is not quite a law in the same sense anymore, and for precisely this reason) exclusively with reason: in fact, unchecked reason for Hume leads us to uneasy, and thus unnatural, conclusions. Moreover, while judgment as Locke understands it is representative and can therefore be mistaken, affect has no representative content and can thus never be wrong (unless its exercise follows a mistaken judgment of fact). Affect is thus not only more important for Hume than for Locke; rather, he argues, “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them” (2.3.3.4; Hume argues that what Locke and others contracts, even as their necessary consent to the (private) marriage contract qualifies this logic (see especially chapter 3, “Contract, the Individual and Slavery,” 39 – 76).

73 Locke writes that “The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law…” etc. chpt 2, p 6.

74 In this capacity he plays an important role in developing theories of moral sentiment and economic sociability that reach maturity in the work of his friend, Adam Smith, according to whom, in one of his best-known formulations, one contributes to social well-being unconsciously by furthering one’s self-interests, linking the social and the personal in ways not immediately recognizable to the reasoning mind (Hume treats this principle most explicitly in 3.2.2). Indeed, Pack J. Spencer and Eric Schliesser argue recently that Smith is more “Humean” than Hume, especially regarding the centrality of the passion of resentment in Smith’s account of justice. 75 This well-known and absolute statement has not gone unchallenged, however. For a recent discussion of reason directing the passions in Hume see Nathan Brett and Katharina Paxman, “Reason in Hume’s Passions.” Brett and Paxman undermine their otherwise compelling argument by putting too much stress on Hume’s claim that a passion disappears once we realize that its fulfillment is impossible. While this example may appear to show affect following reason, it seems just as likely that the passion occurred only as a result of a reasoning that was...
typically attribute to cool reason, especially whatever is apparently self-evident, is actually the product of calm passions: see 2.3.4.8). This reprioritization, of course, changes the experiencing subject’s relationship with objective reality, and thus, for our purposes, his or her relationship with those premises that authorize claims of real legitimacy.

At the heart of Hume’s social and moral philosophy is his “metaphysics” (his system of empiricism, actually, which in rejecting claims about things-in-themselves is ultimately unmetaphysical), which are validated ultimately by his meticulously tracing the most basic assumptions people associate with complex experiences back to a need to stabilize a subjectivity that otherwise finds itself in constant anxiety, fear, or even what we might call “trauma.”

We create a “fiction of a continu’d existence” (1.4.2.36), for example, that we assign to objects (or to the objects that, in a related fiction, correspond externally to those of our sense perceptions) even when we look away from them because to do otherwise would be to exist in a state, not of irrationalism, but of anxiety. If I appear to be using some of these terms interchangeably, I follow Hume on the direct passions, as related to the determination of desire and the will, where he writes that “Terror, consternation, astonishment, anxiety, and other passions of that kind, are nothing but different species and degrees of fear” 2.3.10.31).
external objects, or from the combat of internal principles… Now there being here an opposition betwixt the notion of the identity of resembling perceptions, and the interruption of their appearance, the mind must be uneasy in that situation, and will naturally seek relief from that uneasiness. (1.4.2.37)

In some ways, the image of Hume’s imagined interlocutor and the image of Crusoe thunderstruck on the beach collate neatly: each offers a figure hovering in anxiety over a truly unaccountable mark, a footprint entirely suggestive but entirely silent, a gesture – but a frustratingly static one – toward nothing at all and toward something ostensibly external, real, utterly basic. Moreover, Hume grounds his point about uneasiness and the fictions of external objectivity in narrative, describing in a famous passage how, while seated “in [his] chamber with [his] face to the fire,” an individual (“I,” a protagonist) hears the “sudden noise of a door turning upon its hinges” and turns to see his porter enter. The continued, independent existence of the door and the porter (and everything else) is a vulgar conclusion, Hume argues, “directly contrary to those, which are confirm’d by philosophy” (1.4.2.13 – 14). It is only imagined, he concludes, and imagined specifically in order to avoid, not unreason, but the kind of anxiety or displeasure that, for him, ultimately motivates all human thought and action: “In order to free ourselves from this difficulty, we disguise, as much as possible, the interruption, or rather remove it entirely, by supposing that these interrupted perceptions are connected by a real existence, of which we are sensible” (1.4.2.24). Thus, as we saw above, attributing identity to such continued existences becomes necessary because “uneasiness arises from the opposition of” constant identity and “resembling impressions,” and the mind “must look for relief” (1.4.2.37).

Indeed, there is a proliferation of uneasiness throughout Hume’s philosophy, accounting for the crucial importance of the role of custom, for example, in mitigating the distress of the
epistemological crises that his interlocutor must negotiate. Our ideas of even the most basic relationships among objects (cause and effect) is imagined, but appears objectively valid only because we are accustomed to seeing one thing follow from another. Custom reinforces and eventually naturalizes such relationships (“custom operates before we have time for reflection” [1.3.8.13]), terminating (recall lady Betty and her brother) in belief. If his readers still have any doubt about the role of affect in such knowledge, Hume concludes “that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures” (1.4.1.8); it “is something felt by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of judgment from the fictions of the imagination” (1.3.7.7), and it is, moreover, the “vivacity” or intensity of such feeling alone that constitutes belief, distinguishing it from other mental impressions. Reasonable conclusions such as total skepticism, while rationally sound (while recognizable, we could say, in the due course of reason), are problematic because they are strange, distressing – and that distress is more than something symptomatic of, say, error in judgment. It follows from his view of human nature:

Where the mind reaches not its objects with easiness and facility, the same principles have not the same effect as in a more natural conception of the ideas; nor does the imagination feel a sensation, which holds any proportion with that which arises from its common judgments and opinions. The attention is on the stretch: The posture of the mind is uneasy; and the spirits being diverted from their natural course, are not govern’d in their movements by the same laws, at last not to the same degree, as when they flow in their usual channel. (1.4.1.10)

Were John Belmont to learn the lesson of Evelina’s familiarity, as explained above, such would be the posture, from Hume’s perspective, of his mind. Like skepticism, Belmont’s doubt, if left unrepressed, would constitute a kind of parasitism (we see how appropriate an analogy
drawn from nature is), seeking “shelter under [the] protection” of reason’s sovereignty in order to die, bringing reason along with it: “it gradually diminishes the force of that governing power, and its own at the same time; till at last they both vanish away into nothing” (1.4.1.12). It is thus not reason but nature that Belmont obeys; the mind’s “uneasy” and thus unnatural “posture” is conclusive in determining the proper object of reality. Belmont’s acceptance of his daughter, his compliance to the natural postures of sentiment/belief, signals a qualified rejection of reason which sits, like Crusoe on his island, “in possession of the throne, prescribing laws, and imposing maxims, with an absolute sway and authority” (1.4.2.12). It signals a rejection of a kind of autonomy77 that for Hume is monstrous, strictly reasonable and thus unsociable. It signals the abandonment of a notion of legitimacy that proceeds from and encloses the individual presupposed by the social contract theories discussed above.

But serious problems remain. What, after all, does such “compliance” mean? What does it look like in practice? What I am tracking here is how Hume advances a notion of collectivity that we might recognize as “objective.” By looking at Hume’s monstrosity, we see that part of the problem he relates is that following one’s reason to its unsettling conclusions (I had almost written “natural conclusions”) does not estrange any particular notion of collectivity, does not destabilize any of its characteristics or mechanisms (the conditions under which it makes itself known, by which it sustains itself, according to which individuals do or do not count as proper constituents), but rather estranges the self, disturbs the self’s stability. One becomes illegitimate with respect to a stable collective body, not the other way around. Hume does this not only by aligning the objectivity of the human community with nature, but by then putting nature, in an

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77 On this he is explicit: “We have command over our mind to a certain degree, but beyond that lose all empire over it: And ‘tis evidently impossible to fix any pricess bounds to our authority, where we consult not experience. In short, the actions of the mind are, in this respect, the same with those of matter.” (1.3.14.12)
important sense, out of reach. “Most fortunately it happens,” he writes, and I emphasize his use of fortune, “that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation,” etc. (1.4.7.9). Nature does not make the contours and conditions of this objectivity available (as “objectivity” itself, to the enlightenment rationalists, implies) but insists upon them silently, asking us to take them for granted just as John Belmont does – and just as he had always done.

This is significant because, while the question Hume asks seems to be self-directed (whether he will make of himself a familiar, legitimate constituent or an uncouth monster, rather than whether collectivity contains and might reveal the conditions of its legitimacy or not), his answer lies in a “nature” that is other and external – within a system, moreover, that begins by insisting on the impossibility of truly accessing anything that is other and external.78 Nevertheless, like John Belmont, he departs from a position of trauma and arrives at one of satisfaction: “Here then I find myself absolutely and necessarily determin’d to live,” he writes, relieved to find that nature has intervened, has exercised its agency upon his passive, stranded, monstrous self, “and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life” (1.4.7.10). He is satisfied to know that he has found himself – and that he has done so according to nature, even though nature does not make itself or the terms of its intervention conspicuous. He feels it; that is

78 Accordingly, it may seem strange that while he insists that “my intention never was to penetrate into the nature of bodies, or explain the secret causes of their operations [since] such an enterprize is beyond the reach of human understanding” (1.2.5.26), he continually takes for granted what his presumed reader thinks and believes, even at least once in her own voice: “what! the efficacy of causes lie in the determination of the mind!” (1.3.14.26). Similar observations have been made before; this attitude, in fact, seems to have been symptomatic of British empiricism, as John W. Yolton suggests: “Hume accepted Locke’s skepticism concerning man’s inability to know the ‘true, internal constitution of things,’ but both men contrived to make firm claims about the workings of the human mind” (62).
sufficient. But what does it mean to “act like other people?” Why is this necessary? Why these people and not others?

Clearly, we can better understand the implications of this problem in Hume through a critique of his relatively idiosyncratic use of the word “nature.” Since extensive critiques of this sort are available, it should suffice here to point to a handful of key passages that relate directly to my object. Hume himself argues that “the definition of the word, nature” is “ambiguous and equivocal,” suggesting first that if anything is “natural” in the imprecise sense of ordinary (in opposition to what is “rare and unusual”), the moral sentiments are, since “there never was any nation of the world, nor any single person in any nation, who was utterly depriv’d of them…These sentiments are so rooted in our constitution and temper, that without entirely confounding the human mind by disease or madness, ‘tis impossible to extirpate and destroy them” (3.1.2.8). More significantly, however, as we have already seen, Hume proceeds to complicate the natural-artificial binary that was so operative for Hobbes and so central to theories of social contract. He argues that “the designs, and projects, and views of men are principles as necessary in their operation as heat and cold, moist and dry: But taking them to be free and entirely our own, ’tis usual for us to set them in opposition to the other principles of nature” (3.1.2.9). Of the “laws of nature,” which we have mentioned above, Hume argues that there are three (“of the stability of possession, of its transference by consent, and of the performance of promises” [3.2.6.1]), yet he writes that “men invented the three fundamental laws of nature, when they observ’d the necessity of society to their mutual subsistence, and found, that ’twas impossible to maintain any correspondence together, without some restraint on their natural appetites” (3.2.8.5). The two seemingly mutually exclusive uses of “nature” and “natural” in the previous sentence are revealing: “nature” as it appears in “natural appetites” can be
directly opposed to and subordinated by “nature” as it appears in the laws of nature, which moreover, while invented, are necessary according to human nature/sociability (in addition to the moral sentiments “so rooted in our constitution,” Hume also writes that the “very first state and situation” of humans “may justly be esteem’d social” [3.2.2.14]). Ultimately, the laws of nature depend in part upon such artificial virtues as justice, which, in turn, depend upon self-interest (a “natural appetite”) and morality. These latter create together the proper conditions under which we can associate our instinctual pleasure with artificial – but necessary – institutions.79

It is easy to see the link here between Hume and those that, following him, strive to valorize (not natural but normative) notions of national pride and civil institutions by associating them with time immemorial, such as Edmund Burke and Adam Smith. By naturalizing civil institutions and the mechanisms of collectivity – associating them with time out of mind and thus collapsing consent with traditionalism – the question of legitimacy needs no, and can have no, obvious or direct resolution. The implications are troubling, since it allows Hume to attribute to nature such “moral” qualities as “an esteem for any person” with “power and riches” and “a contempt” for one with “poverty and meanness” (2.2.5.1). In their clearest expression, these implications are most unsettling: “The skin, pores, muscles, and nerves of a day-labourer are different from those of a man of quality: So are his sentiments, actions, and manners. The different stations of life influence the whole fabric, external and internal; and these different stations arise necessarily, because uniformly, from the necessary and uniform principles of human nature.” From this description, the necessity in human affairs, which Hume associates with nature, is laid out in full: “Men cannot live without society, and cannot be associated without government. Government makes a distinction of property, and establishes the different

79 see 3.2.7.11
ranks of men. This produces industry, traffic, manufactures, law-suits, war, leaves, alliances, voyages, travels, cities, fleets, ports, and all those other actions and objects, which cause such diversity, and at the same time maintain such uniformity in human life” (2.3.1.9).80

What, returning to my earlier question, does “compliance” with such “natural” postures of the mind mean? Hume’s theory seems to allow for an extended sense of subjectivity that does not, on its face, disqualify something like objectivity. The two movements of imagining community appear possible to reconcile. He appears, in other words, to offer a solution to the problems that traumatic familiarity in novels makes so explicit. Belmont can recover his sense of self, his sense of family, and the comfortable extent to which these two are mutually constitutive. But it is clear that what Hume presumes to be necessary is only so within a social or political framework whose legitimacy is either deferred or entirely taken for granted. Under Hume, legitimacy is evoked by social experiences that comply with moral sentiments, but no account that explains that evocation or compliance is possible. Evelina is Belmont’s daughter because he feels that it is so; Matilda “knows” her father because her fears confirm it; Alanthus is Lady Betty’s brother because he insists that she believe it. Hume offers nothing to substantially differentiate these feelings from those that facilitate our consent to collective identifications based upon misjudgment and mistakes – or from those that, for that matter, “confirm” our superiority or inferiority relative to others. A certain stability is purchased in either case, but only by begging the question of its legitimacy.

80 Hume’s particular reasoning, which supports such troubling conclusions about class distinctions, also plays a role in his most notorious comment about race, found in the footnote to his essay “Of National Characters,” in which he takes for granted – which is to say that he “believes” – “negroes to be naturally inferior to whites,” such that rumors about “one negro” reputed “as a man of parts and learning…likely…is admired for slender accomplishments, like a parrot who speaks a few words plainly” (360).
4: An Embarrassment of Legitimacies: Collectives and Counter-Collectives in Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa

In her first published work, *Poems and Fancies* (1653), Margaret Cavendish reveals some of the skepticism that will feature centrally in her critique of empirical scientific research, including much of that being conducted by members of the Royal Society. But whereas David Hume will eventually submit paralyzing skepticism as the dead end of rationalism, Cavendish’s early poems appear much more ambivalent, seeming to take a kind of pleasure in the uncertainty of experience that, in the context of her later writings (particularly her criticism of Robert Hooke’s *Micrographia*), appears somewhat uncharacteristic.\(^\text{81}\) While poems like “OF MANY WORLDS IN THIS WORLD” implicitly challenge the scientific usefulness and stability of empirical knowledge, they also clearly relish the possibilities that lie beyond the limits of sense experience. “So in this World,” she writes in “OF MANY WORLDS,” “may many Worlds more be,” continuing:

Thinner, and lesse, and lesse still by degree;

Although they are not subject to our Sense,

A World may be no bigger then two-pence.

\(^{81}\) Cavendish’s philosophical positions have been notoriously difficult to pin down. While there is little disagreement about her rationalism, anti-empiricism, and the relationship between her epistemology and her royalist commitments, critics have disagreed about the coherence (in both senses) of her philosophy, the terms (and sometimes the rigor) of her critique, the relationship between her aesthetic and scientific productions, the relationship between her epistemology and feminism, etc. This should be noted in any claim about the extent to which any elements of her philosophy are “characteristic” or “uncharacteristic.” Eric Lewis provides a useful overview of critical attitudes and assumptions about Cavendish in “The Legacy of Margaret Cavendish.” A comprehensive overview of Cavendish’s philosophy is beyond the scope of this project, but I do want to point to both the epistemological frustrations and the largely ignored imaginative pleasures Cavendish draws out of the limits of empiricism – at least in this, her first publication.
**Nature** is curious, and such worke may make,

That our dull Sense can never finde, but scape.

She shifts at this point from speculating about nature as a purely imaginative exercise to accounting for these speculations in scientific terms, turning to the theory (that she briefly endorsed but will shortly hereafter abandon)\(^8^2\) of atomism:

If foure *Atomes* a *World* can make, then see,

What severall *Worlds* might in an *Eare-ring* bee.

For *Millions* of these *Atomes* may bee in

The *Head* of one *small*, little, *single Pin*.

And if thus *small*, then *Ladies* well may weare

A *World* of *Worlds*, as *Pendents* in each *Eare*.

These “worlds” are peculiar for any number of reasons, not the least of which is the extent to which they are at once radically unfamiliar and yet embedded into the structures (in this case earrings) of the wholly familiar. In “A WORLD IN AN EARE-RING,” she expands this paradoxical juxtaposition by populating her strange, four-atom worlds, not with the alien bear-men and fly-men of her *New Blazing World*, but with entirely familiar “*Mountains* vast,” “*Meadowes*,” “*Pastures fresh*, and *greene*,” “*Night*, and *Day*, and *Heat*, and *Cold*,” where “*Life*, and *Death*, and *Young*, and *Old*, still grow.” There, she writes, “*Cityes* bee, and stately *Houses* built…There *Churches* bee, and *Priests* to teach therein.” Completely familiar, these worlds are in a sense already known, even as they are unknown and unknowable. These worlds have “*Winter* cold,” she writes, “Yet never on the *Ladies Eare* [does this cold] take hold.” Birds “sweetly sing” in these worlds, and yet “we heare them not in an *Eare-ring*.” The proximity of

\(^{82}\) See Lewis, 353.
these strange worlds to the everyday is no less striking than their impossible, fantastical distance from it.

What appears to intrigue Cavendish most is not simply the possibility that her world – “this world,” a comprehensive arrangement of social and material phenomena that might be disclosed to those who know how to seek it – is not the only world (despite the universality implied by the term), but that other worlds might pass unknown directly through our field of experience. Indeed, they might feature regularly in our most intimate and quotidian experiences while yet remaining wholly unseen, unfelt, unheard. In the poem’s arresting central image – “Ladies” whose earrings harbor and conceal other worlds: ladies who intriguingly (because mistakenly) take for granted the exhaustive familiarity of such ordinary objects – what passes for comprehensive familiarity with the world reveals, paradoxically, only an underlying myopia, and knowledge of the objective world terminates in ignorance and the mere imagining (but “mere” in a sense that intrigues at least as much as it frustrates) about the world(s). In other words, the “object-domain” that constitutes the world, and the methods that disclose it, are playfully disassembled – much as the “object-domain” that constitutes the family is upset by Evelina’s relative familiarity. Like the footprint of Crusoe’s island, the worlds in these earrings (even their bare possibility) complicate the claims that one is able to make, even in the most everyday and “familiar” context, about the nature of his or her existence: whether it is shared or not; when it is and is not social; the relationship between the autonomous subject and the disclosure(s) of the other, etc. The imagination, and perhaps eventually its logical extension, belief (as se saw in Evelina), must – but, at the same time, cannot – mitigate the epistemological privation that characterizes enlightenment community. How, in this case, given its epistemological similarities
to *Evelina* and *Robinson Crusoe*, do the Ladies in Cavendish’s poems elude the trauma of familiarity?

The ethical questions begged by the Ladies’ myopia do not occur in the poems, and in fact, as we have seen, in “OF MANY WORLDS” the speculations seem to culminate in the speaker’s delight in the ladies’ possibly possessing whole worlds in their cosmetic objects, as in its concluding couplet:

> And if thus small, then Ladies well may weare

> A World of Worlds as Pendants in each Eare.

(Swift will ironize but will not stretch this idea too far when writing in *Gulliver’s Travels* that “this whole Globe of Earth must be at least three Times gone round, before on of our better female *Yahoos* could get her Breakfast, or a Cup to put it in” [219]). “A WORLD IN AN EARENING,” extending this couplet’s image, is indeed somewhat more suggestive, as it describes not only “Governours” and “Kings” contained in these common objects, but also “Islands…where Spices grow,” bustling “Markets,” “Christall Rocks,” and “Golden Mines.” In imagining her relationship to these other worlds, Cavendish assumes an imperial posture of possession, and it is possession that absorbs the terror of the (un)familiar, that takes the place (and obviates the function) of empirical knowledge. Of course, the possession that ensues is of a rather different *kind* than that of the liberal contract theorists, since possession in her poems is wholly divorced from the possessor’s labor and rationale. Wholly oblivious about the worlds within worlds, there is no direct sense in which her relationship to the worlds she possesses is authorized by rationalism (a necessary feature of material exchange in markets, or, in contract theory, by calculated manipulation and exploitation of natural resources). It therefore makes no pretense to accountability, for example, in natural law, and the autonomy of the subject might thus appear
somewhat compromised. And yet, to state the obvious, Cavendish’s is not a subject in the liberal sense developed by Locke and Rousseau. Indeed, her royalist principles hold her Ladies precisely to the standard of legitimacy that the liberal subject of Locke and Rousseau would ostensibly reject, in which hierarchy supersedes rational foundations in accounting for possession. Nevertheless, her poems help to identify an important problem with collectivity that its enlightenment premises would struggle to resolve: a rationally based notion of legitimacy must be accessible to, and achievable by, a large and diverse body (or a potential body) of people who can then act (who can possess, fight, buy, sell, sue, enclose, organize, petition – in short, who can then do all the things that their ostensibly recognizable and defensible “legitimacy” sanctions), deferring to such a notion of legitimacy as the rationale for those actions. Indeed, such a notion seems, in principle, so normative as to be essentially singular, even as the worlds to which it applies – and the worlds that claim to be organized by it – are multiplying.

In other words, among the problems of identifying collectively in an enlightenment context is the increasingly urgent one of doing so in a world that is more, more visibly, and more radically plural. The eighteenth century sees an unprecedented rise, after all, in popular accounts of global and transnational cultures. Travel writing, by some accounts “the most widespread and popular literary genre” of the eighteenth century (Smethurst 5), was being produced and consumed by an increasing and impressively diverse group of individuals pursuing an equally

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83 The concept of natural law, and its relationship to *jus gentium*, emerged in response to a confusing and formidable plurality of differing local and idiosyncratic rules and procedures, mostly custom-based, that frustrated imperial commercial activity in early Rome. See J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy* (17). Mary Astell invokes a similar notion of legitimacy in *Some Reflections on Marriage*, arguing that formal royal and paternal authority is *legitimized* when it is rationally based, and, moreover, that it is undermined when it is not, since inferiors, even in subjection, feel themselves superior to husbands whose authority requires or is based upon mere ignorance or force. The implication is that the terms of legitimacy are available to all parties (and agreeable to all parties, if not in interest then in principle) who must appeal to it, and this is what I refer to as the singular, normative aspects of legitimacy.
diverse range of objectives. Global travel features almost as heavily in some of the most popular literary productions of the century, including those of Behn, Defoe, Swift, and Lennox. English readers were confronted in these works not only with other cultures, but with the sense that their own culture, hitherto submerged in the obscurities of habitus, was novel, strange, and even potentially oppressive from the perspectives of others. Through representations that alienated British readers from their cultural practices and assumptions (such as Gulliver’s earnest appraisal of military strength and technology in Brobdingnag and Houyhnhnmland, which parrots British patriotism but gives voice to the brutality that such patriotism otherwise functions to suppress), the self-evidence (or the taking-for-granted, to return to the vocabulary I have been using in the previous chapters) of the legitimacy of those practices and assumptions comes into question. As such, ideas of foreignness figured more centrally and more concretely in the associations and dissociations people used to stabilize and revise their concepts of legitimacy and social organization, resulting in what Benjamin Colbert called a “home-foreign binary, increasingly evoked in the name of nationalist party politics” in which “perceiving oneself and one’s place in the nation involves reading the nation itself as a ‘foreign’ subject” (Colbert 70).

By the time Cavendish writes her Poems and Fancies, the English world and the Atlantic world are already fully entangled, and national identities and the economic and cultural practices that sustained them were inescapably shaped by the interdependencies and conflicts that

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84 See Elizabeth A. Bohls’s introduction to Travel Writing 1700 – 1830, an Anthology.
85 Roxann Wheeler writes about the “tendency” in European commentary on Africa and Africans “to acknowledge what we now call cultural relativity in the eighteenth century – or at least an ethnocentric form of it,” adding that these texts often noted that “English customs seemed as outlandish to Africans as some African manners did to the British who traded with them. Britons who came in contact with others frequently had the experience of seeing themselves through others’ eyes – as unhygienic, bizarre, as gendered differently, especially in regard to the clothes that they wore. Many Britons who experienced or who read about other people understood the artificiality of their own preferences” (97).
emerged. Britain and the British global presence were to be defined, as Linda Colley has argued, as much by positive claims of self-identification (Protestantism, for example) as by negative claims contrasting British and foreign identities (especially French and Spanish Catholicism, but also Spanish colonial practices and priorities). As J. H. Elliott puts it, following the misgovernment and decline of Spanish imperialism in the late seventeenth century, “Britain’s empire was…to be a maritime and commercial empire,” and as such, “[c]ommercial enterprise, Protestantism and liberty were now to be enshrined as the mutually reinforcing constituents of a national ethos” (221). That ethos and its “constituents” had wide-ranging consequences, both conceptual and material, providing new “contact zones” in which popular British collective identification (through both association and dissociation, in the context of various and competing religious, economic, and political interests) could play out. And these resulting contact zones raised the stakes of defining the terms and the nature of (the legitimacy of) one’s collective British, inter-European, and trans-Atlantic identities, even as they proportionately troubled the methods available for doing so.

North America, for example, with its seemingly endless natural resources, new trading opportunities, and native inhabitants (potential counterparts in a wide variety commercial and military engagements), provided a backdrop for an overabundance of often contradictory claims and activities that were thought to dramatize or stabilize British character and interests. Here, enduring interest in British dissociation from the Native Americans in some contexts comes up against the many important treaties and economic and military alliances they made with them in

86 I use the familiar definition, formulated by Mary Louise Pratt in “Arts of the Contact Zone”: “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (34). Pratt contrasts the frenetic business of “contact zones” with the “utopian quality” inherent in “speech communities” that are evocative of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” (37).
others – treaties and alliances that imply reciprocity, trust, and thus a measure of association. It is
clear for example that the subhuman savages that populate works such as George Walker’s 1799
anti-Jacobin novel, *The Vagabond*, endorses a shortsighted savage-civilized binary that clearly
functions to define British character (in the Burkean sense, as a definitive, ancient, self-
generating, and intergenerational product that is distinctively British), yet its ensuing definition is
at odds with the well-known history of British-American relations and interdependencies that,
just as clearly, function to define British character. Both of these discourses, in other words, of
association and dissociation, make claims about British identity and about its legitimacy as it
manifests through contact with the other, and yet, since the operative claims that they produce
vary so widely, the attending gestures of self-identification are dangerously unstable. (This
instability has not always been obvious, even in retrospect. As Paul Gilroy and others have
shown, even the most intuitively “obvious” [especially to current-day readers] Atlantic and racial
identities were porous, suggesting that even the most stable British identities had to admit to a
degree of porosity as well.

The implications of imperial trade and the specifics of emergent nationalism in the
eighteenth century are of course important and incredibly rich topics. My objective in these

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87 Alden T. Vaughan chronicles some of the many Americans who went to England on usually
very well known trips, noting that most of them “went voluntarily, conducted serious business
abroad, survived the exposure to deadly viruses, and, safely home, influenced their own people
and often the course of Indian-European relations in their region of North, Central, or South
America, thereby contributing from the western side of the ocean to an increasingly
international/multicultural Atlantic World” (xiv). Most of these individuals were, and were
treated as, emissaries. By contrast, in one of the more gruesome scenes of Walker’s novel, the
protagonists encounter “an Indian severely beating two women with a cane.” Begged for an
explanation, he answers “Because I choose it,” relating not only that the women are his wives
(who are beaten because they could not find plovers for his dinner) but that one is also his
daughter. He insists that he follows natural law, signaling the impossibility British-American
transaction that is not ordered by some measure of coercion (Walker 208 – 209).

88 Shifting rhetoric about and attitudes toward “Nabobs” and Creoles also illustrate this porosity,
each of which has grown into its own body of scholarship in the past decade.
pages has not been to write the histories of these intersections (a vast and constantly growing body of scholarship is devoted to these and related subjects), but to track the manifestations of their respective conceptual pressures in discourses about collectivity and legitimacy. One of these manifestations, as I have suggested, is the plurality of worlds Cavendish imagines folded into the hidden dimensions of her earrings. Her royalist epistemology makes the question of legitimacy in the contact between her “Ladies” and the plurality of worlds unnecessary. But from the perspective of the Lockean or Rousseauian liberal subject, the Ladies’ possession of their worlds is suggestive of the impulses of arbitrary rule that should appear antithetical to the liberties of enlightened self-governance emerging in the parliamentary prerogatives of the 1689 Declaration of Rights, and soon to be sought in revolutionary France and America. Yet, as Susan Buck-Morss, David Brion Davis, and others have shown, many of the most troubling effects of her royalism survive the enlightenment retooling of legitimacy. The same enlightenment discourses that hold liberty up as the essential humanizing basis of autonomy (and by extension reason, consent, and legitimacy) help to produce and sustain social, economic, and political infrastructures that either ignore or actively promote coercion, arbitrary social hierarchy, and enslavement: a contradiction that is well documented in the context of American revolution and independence. As Alan Gilbert has shown, “the words ‘independence’ or ‘sovereignty’ took on a resonance among southern Patriots not of ‘no taxation without representation,’ but of the preservation of bondage from the threat of emancipation,” adding that “[t]he prospect of an emancipation promised by the colonial British administration was actually one of the factors that drove white slave-owning colonists toward rebellion and independence” (6, since “the specter of abolition seemed to be among the many impositions on the colonies, North and South alike, that the movement for freedom and independence sought to redress” [5]). Gilbert analyzes the
rhetoric of Patriots, including the “founding fathers,” in response to the Dunmore Proclamation and the Somersett verdict, arguing that, “Patriot protests about British denials of law and liberty were thus fundamentally compromised by persistent, despotic Patriot violence toward blacks” (12). Clearly, at least in practice, the struggle for a more rational basis of legitimate social organization bears something more than a trace of its royalist predecessor. But that struggle nevertheless helps to make conspicuous the claims and counter-claims that ostensibly authorize rationally legitimate collectivities, as well as the terms of “legitimate” membership within them. The pursuit of a more rational, liberal account of collective identification in an increasingly plural world tells us much – even, and perhaps especially, in its failures – not only about sociality in general but about what it means to belong in one specific community at the exclusion of others, especially when such “belonging” ostensibly presupposes a rejection of the arbitrary. 

I turn now to a text that, while ostensibly distant from Atlantic and colonial concerns, dramatizes similar negotiations for community that those concerns entail. Important for its place within narratives about the history or “rise” of the novel, Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa is also significant for the incredibly rich psychological depth in which moral and social negotiation is couched. While Robinson Crusoe embodies a somatic embrace of even the most abusive (in its commercial and imperial posturing) assumptions of the thinking, producing, and laboring enlightenment subject, Clarissa (whose body suffers the impairments of sexual abuse, forced seclusion, and patriarchal subjection) ostensibly foregrounds the ever rational but uncompromisingly egalitarian mind as the prime resource for the autonomous determination and assumption of legitimacy. What kinds of social relations can such a mind produce, reject, endorse, or qualify? With what forms of legitimacy is such a mind complicit?
CLARISSA, THE ONE GREAT FAMILY, AND ANTINOMIES OF COMMUNITY

The following section will develop some of the implications of a connection I laid out in the previous chapters: that between the conceptualizations of family and state legitimacies. I have already tried to show that reducing state legitimacy to a prior foundation of family legitimacy begs the question, since it takes for granted that the family unit is a knowable entity, stable in the disclosure of its interrelations at any given moment. As many eighteenth-century novelists insist, such assumptions overstate the epistemological autonomy of the individual in any social context (even the most “familiar”), even while they continue to insist on such empirical autonomy as the locus from which legitimacy must proceed. In what follows, I will look at how the Harlowe family negotiates its own claims about legitimacy, and how such claims manifest in the practical, evolving interrelations of its constituents (I will then move on to the implications of the novel’s multiple and competing legitimacies). Since the opening conflict of the novel reveals a young woman who poses a threat to the stability of the family, I am particularly interested in how the family maintains a sense of stable community, even while trying to neutralize the actions and desires of one of its members, Clarissa. How, in a word, does “family” (the novel’s operative relationality) at once authorize Clarissa as a moral and rational agent, and erase, negate, or suspend her agency as such? How can these two movements, each of which is central to how relationality is realized, performed, and recognized in the novel, be reconciled?

First-time readers of Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa are almost invariably impressed with the exhausting and relentless oppression of its protagonist. By her family, Clarissa is mocked, maligned, shunned, suspected, and belittled; by her rakish pursuer, she is manipulated, exploited, abducted, imprisoned, and raped. The novel is uniquely taxing, demanding in its sheer length and weight, and draining in the almost obscene glut of abuse to which its young heroine is subject.
But the persistence and proliferation of cruelty in *Clarissa* has had the effect of blunting some of the density of its moral world. Many readers are apt to conflate Clarissa’s family and her libertine abductor, for example, as foils to the protagonist (herself staunchly, selflessly, almost implausibly virtuous), functioning similarly as registers of illegitimate authority against which the superior moral content of Clarissa comes into focus.89

But there are differences between the tyranny of her family and the brutality of Lovelace that get lost in this reading. Indeed, as these pages will argue, Clarissa’s virtue is substantiated as much by the contrast between herself and her persecutors as by her refusal to see any moral continuity between her family and Lovelace at all, a refusal that her dying regret, the “fatal error which threw her out of [her family’s] protection,” registers (1371). I will approach *Clarissa* by, at least initially, setting aside the compelling moral judgments that already presuppose the conditions of legitimate and illegitimate practice, and by instead taking seriously the family’s

89 Peggy Thompson writes about Clarissa’s family as “torment[ing]” her, for example, with the awful choice of either marrying Solmes or being disobedient, adding quickly that Lovelace “exacerbates the pain of her ostracism” before moving on to an extended analysis and historicization of Clarissa’s suffering (255). Alex Eric Hernandez follows, while qualifying, the conclusion of other critics who “have pointed out, that Richardson likely drew on Hobbesian thought for his representations of the Harlowes and Lovelace,” reading “violence in the household” and the abuse of Lovelace as similar registers of the excesses of absolute and tyrannical sovereignty. “Even before the rape,” Hernandez writes, linking the rape to the dispossession of daughters in the context of early capitalism (as analyzed by Ruth Perry), “Clarissa is figured as the one to whom violence is directed with relative impunity.” Alex Eric Hernandez (619, 618). Similarly, Terry Eagleton writes that *Clarissa* is the story is of a young, virtuous woman “made to suffer under a violently oppressive family” and who is then abducted and Raped by a “notorious sexual predator” (63 – 64); Eagleton proceeds to review “what critics have made of this narrative” (a narrative about Clarissa’s suffering in two different contexts) by focusing largely on interpretations of Clarissa’s rape, as if all of her experiences in these quite different contexts of persecution can be adequately represented indifferently by a this single and worst violation and abuse. Indeed, Eagleton’s own argument, ostensibly tracking Clarissa’s negotiation with a choice between “bourgeois patriarchy and libertine aristocracy” (76), remains closely invested throughout (as his title suggests) in the details of Clarissa’s rape and death, leaving her conflicts with her father, uncles, brother, and mother to speak largely for themselves, and taking for granted that Clarissa’s death constitutes a single and wholesale “indictment of Lovelace and the Harlowes” (77).
measures, however misguided, at face value: as sincere, legitimizing impulses. This chapter is thus motivated by questions that standard readings of *Clarissa*, which collapse the protagonist’s family and rapist into one comprehensive amalgam of abusive practice, tend to ignore. What would it mean to read Clarissa’s treatment by her family as a licit exercise, as an instance of legitimacy (anticipating, perhaps, Rousseau’s claim that an unwilling constituent of an association can and must be “forced to be free” [64])? What would it mean to see the strategic mobilization and confinement of Clarissa by her parents, siblings, aunts, and uncles as an attempt by something like a general will to restore or to sustain its legitimacy?

Looking more closely at Clarissa’s family as a social body concerned not merely with indulging its vanity and ambition but rather with preserving its legitimacy exposes connections between family and state that animate a number of political and philosophical discourses. Indeed, its narrative is typical of the early novel’s intense interest in putting characters’ individuality in tension with their social embeddedness, an interest that develops, not only in response to political modernity and liberalism, but alongside important changes to how family

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90 These claims do not amount to an argument that Clarissa’s family engages in “legitimate” practices, or that their treatment of the protagonist is in any sense acceptable; I am aware of the “truly reactionary nature of much deconstructionist ‘radicalism,’” as Terry Eagleton puts it, that has led to readings that either validate Lovelace (for example) or vilify Clarissa (67). Rather, I am advancing a critique of (a certain kind of) legitimacy itself – how it is constructed, how it wins consent or confronts dissent, and especially how it sustains itself during those (theoretically impossible) moments when its precarious nature becomes conspicuous – in the mid-eighteenth century.

91 Robert Filmer develops one such theory, a theory that is often discussed in the context of Richardson’s novels. E. Derek Taylor, for example, writes that the composition of *Clarissa*, a process which was always guided by the certainty that Clarissa would die in the end, explains how “a moralistic prude could create the most brilliantly iconoclastic, unrepentantly Faustian villain of his age; how a rigidly Filmerian father could offer a devastating challenge to Filmer’s patriarchal assumption in is portrayal of Clarissa’s battle with her family” (3).
ties were thought. Critics have seen these changes as both causes and effects of egalitarian social organization and “affective individualism,” emphasizing a gradual disengagement from patrilineal models of family ties and an increased emphasis on individual agency – or, as Ruth Perry puts it: “a movement from an axis of kinship based on consanguineal ties or blood lineage to an axis based on conjugal and affinal ties of the married couple,” in which “the biologically given family into which one was born was gradually becoming secondary to the chosen family constructed by marriage” (2).

This gradual shift in emphasis from patrilineal to conjugal arrangement makes the family an appropriate site for conflicting claims about legitimate modes of obligation, authority, and consent to play out. Accordingly, a wide range of models of social and political legitimacy are projected onto the family, such as the conservative mainstay that social and political legitimacy is derived from the “natural,” primary legitimacy of the family. Robert Filmer makes essentially this case, adapted later by Bolingbroke when he claims that “we are led” by “instinct,” “information,” “habit, and finally by reason” to “civil through natural society, and are fitted to be members of one, by having been members of the other” (see chapter three). Hume had made a similar claim, of course, arguing that society is possible only when its advantages are known, adding that while individuals “in their wild uncultivated state” could never “attain this knowledge,” they are gradually made “sensible” of them through the “custom and habit” attending first reproductive, and then filial, ties (3.2.2, 312). As John P. Zomchick puts it, “[i]t is in the family that the person in the state of nature first comes to realize the value of association”

92 In addition to the works cited here, see also Keith Wrightson (1998) and Michael Anderson (1980).
93 On egalitarianism and affective individualism, see Randolph Trumbauch (1978) and Lawrence Stone (1977). Indeed, Terry Eagleton writes that “For Richardson, ideology is thicker than blood: his ‘family’ is one constructed by literary practice, not genetically given,” constituting a “public sphere” within which his writings are constructed. (The Rape of Clarissa, 13).
(13). But such theories, as I argued in chapter three, ultimately beg the question. The proliferation of characters in eighteenth-century novels (Moll Flanders, Joseph Andrews, and Evelina’s father, to name just a few) who wrongly take for granted the stability and knowability of their families and their places within them helps to puncture this Filmerian logic.

Meanwhile, the family is also being used to index political legitimacy in ways that either attenuate or reframe its “natural” primacy. From Milton’s well-known advocacy for divorce, including his translations of Martin Bucer, marriage could be considered (even if it rarely was in his time) “a civil thing,” such that “men…may rightly contract, inviolably keep, and not without extreme necessity dissolve marriage” according to principles “to be aquitted, aided, and compelled by laws and judicature of the commonwealth” (240). John Witte identifies a parallel emphasis in the writings of Locke, who argues “that marriages, like commonwealths, must be formed, maintained, and dissolved in accordance with the contract negotiated by a man and woman, who,” Witte adds, are “by nature are free and equal” (269). While Locke, like Hume, indeed argues that “the first society was between man and wife,” and that it extended over time to include children and servants, the family nevertheless “came short of political society” (133); family organization is directed rather by the liberty and rationalism that are, as Witte observes, innate to the individual men and women who constitute it. Rousseau goes further: individuals in the state of nature, obeying “purely physical” or instinctual inclination, cannot form families, but meet randomly and fleetingly to satisfy sexual appetites. Domestic organization is a (and perhaps the, as Julie strongly suggests) product of “moral relationality,” such that the legitimacy of political and family arrangements comes to one and the same thing, neither being a derivative of the other.
By tracing its origins back to “instinct” and the “wild uncultivated state,” writers like Hume and Bolingbroke construct narratives of social legitimacy that elide some of the thorny epistemological problems that dogged their contemporaries. They need not provide an account (such as Rousseau’s) of how a “purely physical” state of nature becomes a “general will” of “moral relationality,” for example, or of how a society premised on consent can be made up of individuals who have never openly consented. And yet, as Ruth Perry’s formulation of shifting family ties makes clear, eighteenth-century families carried “democratizing implications,” and they “could be conceived of as constructed, even earned, rather than simply given at birth” (33).

Moreover, Naomi Tadmor reminds us that the term “family” referred to groups of dependents, including servants, guests, and blood relations, living together in a household under the “protection” and authority of a paternal “head of family,” so that the notion of “family relations” extended to a wide variety of interpersonal relations that were actually “contractual” (as well as “instrumental,” “occupational,” and “sentimental”) (27 – 30). In other words, the reciprocal and consensual obligations to which the more rational, Lockean concept of legitimacy point already exist in “family” units. Thus, as the eighteenth-century family was being deployed as an appropriate analogue for both Humean and Lockean political models, these respective political models became filters through which to inscribe the eighteenth-century family with competing norms.

Clarissa’s role within her family seems at first to support the Filmerian assumptions that conceive of the family as sustained by its ontological or natural givenness. Her father, brother, and uncles often speak about the duties of a daughter, after all, as if such duties are inscribed alongside the mandate for self-preservation in natural law. Her judgments about the legitimacy of that role, however (especially as they invoke the subversive possibility of alternative and less
oppressive roles), as well as the extraordinary energy her family expends in defending and rationalizing their position, speak to the extent to which any social group is ultimately sustained by free and rational consent. That is, Clarissa becomes subversive to the family not simply because she deviates from its givenness in nature, but because she foregrounds its status as a discursive construct – one social body among many, each in contest with the moral and ontological priority of the others. Richardson dramatizes Lockean modes of consent by placing Clarissa in the position of evaluating the relative merit of several competing “legitimacies.”

The novel opens by putting the implications of the protagonist’s roundness into question. Anna Howe’s first letter expresses concern “for the disturbances that have happened in [Clarissa’s] family,” noting that Clarissa has become “the subject of the public talk”: “it is impossible but that whatever relates to a young lady, whose distinguished merits have made her the public care, should engage everybody’s attention” (39). Clarissa, both a daughter and a “young lady” representing “distinguished merits,” is at once deeply particular (the embodiment, indeed, of novelistic realism’s promise of fully wrought particularity, roundness of character, internal depth),94 and wholly abstract, a “type” in the spirit of Henry Fielding’s lawyer. “You see,” Anna Howe writes to her, “what you draw upon yourself by excelling all your sex. Every individual of it who knows you, or has heard of you, seems to think you answerable to her for your conduct on points so very delicate and concerning. Every eye…is upon you with the expectation of an example” (40).95 Clarissa’s status as a paragon of the dutiful daughter becomes

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94 In her introduction to the novel form, Patricia Meyer Spacks associates Clarissa with other “novels of consciousness,” participating in a turn to “focusing more intensely on internal than on external event,” according to which “the consciousness possessed and experienced by an individual or individuals operating in relation to it became central to the novelistic action” (92).

95 See Henry Fielding on literary character: “I describe not Men, but Manners; not an Individual, but a Species. Perhaps it will be answered, Are not all the Characters then taken from Life? To which I answer in the Affirmative; nay, I believe I might aver, that I have writ little more than I
a problem for the text to resolve, since it does not strictly reinforce but in fact entirely conflicts
with her status as an actual daughter. Indeed, her conduct, to the very extent that it represents a
filial ideal, constitutes a threat to the unity and stability of her own particular family. The natural
or ontological priority of Clarissa’s family, emerging as only one of many constituencies to
which she is accountable, comes into question. Its claims to legitimacy – claims that manifest
chiefly in a normative rhetoric of “duty” that demands reification in practice of what seems, from
its perspective, necessarily right, proper, and virtuous – are not so absolute or self-evident that
they are immune from contestation. What seems necessarily right, proper, and virtuous from her
family’s perspective, in other words, might be so only from that perspective.

If this is so, then her family’s “legitimacy” is idiosyncratic. Worse, it is potentially
arbitrary, extending a limited rationale that might demand practices and values that are not only
at odds with, or even destructive of, other communities in the novel (other families, for example,
or marriage markets, or commercial London), but contrary to a broader, more comprehensive,
and more universally stable rationale. Her family’s claims to legitimacy, in other words, not
satisfying something like Kantian maxims of categorical imperative, are potentially
unsustainable, contradictory, and thus self-defeating.

Clarissa, the object of competing claims of duty (narrowly filial and broadly social),
explicitly frames her moral obligations in terms of contrary legitimizing premises. Moreover, she
describes the context of the novel’s central conflict to Anna Howe in a way that makes
conspicuous the conceptual and material stakes of a plurality of legitimacies. Having very

have seen. The Lawyer is not only alive, but hath been so these 4000 years, and I hope G—will
indulge his Life as many yet to come” (148). Christine Roulston identifies this aspect of
Clarissa’s character as central to the “authentic” subjectivity advanced by sentimental fiction,
arguing that Clarissa, along with Pamela and Rousseau’s Julie, “all become examples of virtue
for both the intra- and extra-textual reader; they fulfill a role that parallels that of the ideal
woman of the conduct manual, becoming exemplary models of domestic virtue” (xvii).
recently learned that her family (apprehensive of Clarissa’s suspected desire for Lovelace, a rival to her brother and the subject of her sister’s secret jealousy) has proposed an alternative match with the wealthy but loathsome Solmes, she is acquainted with the terms of a proposal that she cannot, as a matter of legitimate principle, accept.\(^{96}\) Disgusted, she writes,

\begin{quote}
I hate him more than before. One great estate is already obtained at the expense of the relations to it, though distant relations, my brother’s I mean, by his godmother; and this has given the hope, however chimerical that hope, of procuring others, and that my own at least may revert to the family. And yet, in my opinion, the world is but one great family; originally it was so; what then is this narrow selfishness that reigns in us, but relationship remembered against relationship forgot? (62)
\end{quote}

These terms, the “reign” of a “narrow selfishness,” invoke the possible breach of rationalism and freedom that is the foundation of enlightenment legitimacy. What Robinson Crusoe dramatizes on his island, and what Kant will later express through his “motto” of the Enlightenment (<i>sapere aude!</i>), is a principle that premises legitimate moral and political action and organization on independent, rational thought, and especially on independent, rational thought that supersedes the more narrow interests of crude material accumulation (which enlightenment autonomy mitigates through rational principles of property) and affective indulgence (such as vengeance, which is suppressed by an appeal to just, impartial law). “Relationship,” or social organization, should

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\(^{96}\) On this she is clear, if not always decisive. Writing to her uncle at one point, for example, she insists that “it is not obstinacy I am governed by: it is aversion; an aversion I cannot overcome: for, if I have but endeavored to reason with myself (out of regard to the duty I owe to my papa’s will), my heart has recoiled, and I have been averse to myself for offering but to argue with myself, in behalf of a man who, in the light he appears to me, has no one merit” (153). This sentence is strange, since it insists both that she is unable to weigh the arguments for and against Solmes from rational perspectives <i>and</i> that he has no “merit,” which is a conclusion drawn from weighing the calculable arguments for and against him: arguments that she then proceeds carefully to explain and rationalize.
reflect universal – yet independently acquired – rational principles, a premise that suggests that something like objective legitimacy, a metaphysics of legitimacy, exists and can be empirically determined. By contrast, the more narrow “reign” indicated by Clarissa is premised on selective recognition of “relationship,” in which one’s social entanglements, dependencies, and obligations are not only partial, but emergent products of a compromised will and an undermined self-governance. To employ the catchphrases of the Enlightenment, community in *Clarissa* (its appraisal here, at least) is, at best, a muddled “aggregate” of interested corruption. At worst, it is a tyranny of base appetites, petty ambitions, and passionate indulgences.

To be clear, Clarissa’s family does not think of itself in these terms. It rests on what it believes to be a solid foundation of its own self-evident legitimacy, and it expects its constituents to recognize that legitimacy, to consent to it (indeed, how can they do otherwise, precisely since it is, upon disinterested reflection, self-evident?), and to act accordingly. The narrative creates ambiguity regarding the status of that foundation, however. Clarissa’s moral authority, the measure of legitimate practice in the novel, derives as much from the extent to which she participates in this self-evident legitimacy as in the extent to which she rejects it. When she is granted permission to visit Mrs. Howe, she writes to Anna that, despite (*not until*) some recent “solemnity” occasioned by Lovelace’s persistence, “never was there a family more united in its different branches than ours. Our uncles consider us as their own children, and declare that it is for our sakes they live single. So they are advised with upon every article relating to, or that may affect, us” (56).

This “unity,” and its recognition by Clarissa, is crucial. If some disagreement causes its breach, for example, then the operative principles of its legitimacy have been punctured. What had seemed a legitimate unit held together by what is, by reason, necessarily proper and virtuous,
might be shown to have been an arbitrary assemblage, an aggregate (to return to Rousseau’s vocabulary) of dupes held together by the whims and passions of a single, persuasive, and coercive individual – namely, Clarissa’s brother James. After all, if Clarissa is right about Solmes, about Lovelace, or (more subversively) about her brother, she has effectively called the bluff, not so much destroying the unprecedented unity she boasts of as revealing it to have been illusory all along. Such a revelation would thus undermine her own insistence upon the unprecedented unity of her family. While her judgments about the unity of her family and about its narrow reign are in direct conflict – that is, while these judgments negate one another – they both equally substantiate Clarissa’s moral and epistemological priority. Determining legitimacy thus entails a descent into contradiction, the kind of Humean skepticism I discussed in the previous chapter, in which doubt is produced, attended subsequently by doubt of one’s doubt, and so on, until the certainty of rational autonomy is undermined entirely.

Clarissa’s defiance thus presents a crisis of legitimacy at a foundational, conceptual level. It is not just her innocence or virtue that is at stake (although both of these are clearly implicated), but the basic epistemological premises that secure social stability and legitimize interconnection. The consequences of her defiance will be the dissolution of the family’s organizing logic as well as the relationality that that logic supplies. As her mother insists, “the honour, as well as the benefit, of the family is concerned” in Clarissa’s inclinations for Lovelace and against Solmes. “Be ingenuous,” she urges. “You used to be so, even against yourself. Who at the long run must submit – all of us to you; or you to all of us? – If you intend to yield at last if you find you cannot conquer, yield now and with a grace – for yield you must, or be none of our child” (107). The language of necessity in this passage (she “must” yield, “must” submit) reinforces the sense that the family’s logic, embodied in the implicit consent of the collective “all
of us,” is rationally inevitable. If Clarissa would surrender the disingenuous attachment to narrow interest, she would recognize and embrace this inevitability; if not, she departs from the family, shedding her relational identity (since such an identity is constituted by the embrace of its formative logic – she will “be none of our child”) – just as, in Locke, the individual who rejects natural law trespasses against the species, shedding his or her human nature. Clarissa’s goodness, filial piety, and preference by her relations (her grandfather, uncles, aunts, and mother especially) are not enough to secure her place as a recognized member of the family, not enough to constitute her ‘daughterhood.’ In her obstinacy, her mother insists, her uncles “will give [her] up…if [her] papa does, and absolutely renounce” her (107, 108).

In part, _Clarissa_ thus participates in the broader demand for more modern, comprehensive, and rational logics of legitimacy, especially ones that abandon aristocratic models of intuitive or naturalized value for more leveling models of value, empirically calculable and quantifiable. Raymond Williams reads _Clarissa_ as a site for negotiating precisely such shifts in value. Taking stock of the gradual transition from post-feudal to agrarian capitalist landownership, _Clarissa_, Williams argues, registers a range of complex reactions to social relations ostensibly constructed in the service of tradition and obligation giving way to colder, modernizing principles of calculated improvement. The novels of Fielding and Richardson express a need for the “consolidated morality” of “a more maturely calculating society,” he writes, according to which a more open critique of the cynically calculating landed aristocracy is possible and in which “calculation, and cost, are given a wider scheme of reference.” In such a wider scheme, “[l]ove, honour, physical pleasure,” and “loyalty…have to be brought into the reckoning with incomes and acres” (63).

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97 See Locke’s _Second Treatise_, chapter 2, § 8.
The openly cynical scramble for land and for heiresses, which had been the predominant
tone of an earlier period, was succeeded, in the more settled process of the first half of the
eighteenth century, by just this wider, longer-sighted building of position. Humanity,
family interest, personal need, must now, if at all possible, be included in any rational and
improving settlement. If it was not possible, the main current of advantage took its way,
leaving its human casualties” (64).

Clarissa, Williams argues, is just such a casualty. He reads Clarissa’s marriage negotiations
within and against these two calculating modes, arguing that “Clarissa Harlowe’s proposed
marriage to Solmes is part of her family’s calculation in concentrating their estates and
increasing their rank,” and that “it is from this that she recoils to the destructive and cynical
world of the established landowning aristocrat, Lovelace” (61). Clarissa represents the antithesis
of “consolidated morality,” and with its emphasis on the preservation of virginity that cannot be
bargained but can only be taken with its protagonist’s life, it is “an important sign of that
separation of virtue from any practically available world…Though it engages with the current
acquisitiveness and ambition of the landowning families, it is in the end not a criticism of the
period or structure of society, but of what can be abstracted as ‘the world’” (65).

But the need to incorporate material calculation into a “wider scheme of reference”
suggests that the terms of such a scheme (claims about virtue and morality, for example) are
calculable at all. Indeed, such a “widening” of calculability is apparent in the very concept of
“legitimacy,” especially as it evolves from a description of biological bodies and their parentage
to one of social bodies and their governing principles (since the latter presumes that broad and
rational consent to such principles is possible and necessary). Rousseau’s formulation that one
who departs from the general will can and must be “forced” to be “free” reveals a similar
widening of moral and political calculation, as it presupposes an improbable confidence in
people’s ability to arrive at a stable, broadly viable notion of freedom, as well as the means to
secure it (The Social Contract, 64). But it also reveals the extent to which the “general” will and
any attendant “scheme of reference” originates in and reinforces liberal individualism. In
aligning one’s self with self-evident (according to rational, disinterested reflection), governing
principles of virtue, material acquisition, and morality, one obeys only one’s own will, rather
than, to use Clarissa’s words, any “narrow selfishness that reigns in us” or in others.

Thus while Rousseau insists that, through contracting into the general will, “in place of
the individual person of each contracting party, this act of association creates an artificial and
corporate body” that is characterized by its “unity” (61), and while Clarissa and her mother
continually insist upon the inevitable and unprecedented “unity” of the Harlowe family, their
individuality as the necessary basis for that unity never disappears into (and thus never ceases to
pose problems for) the “artificial and corporate body.” After all, the narrative is largely
mediated to us through Clarissa’s singular voice, whose unyielding desire for and compelling
claims about the greater good are incredibly compelling largely because, as many critics have
suggested, they reflect and are influenced by liberal models of Lockean empiricism and
individualism. “Locke’s empirically inclined philosophy,” as E. Derek Taylor puts it, “provides
Richardson a ground on which to build realistic characters formed in the crucible of experience”

98 The tensions between family and individuality, and the role that Clarissa’s superior virtue
plays in the production of those tensions, are given spatial representation as well, both in how the
house is regulated (to which I return below) and in the position of the dairy house. Karen
Lipsedge “argues that Richardson employs the dairy house’s removed location and the reason for
its construction to emphasize Clarissa’s independence, self-sufficiency, and command of space”
(30). It represents Clarissa’s late grandfather’s faith in her as the candidate best suited to carry
forward the family’s moral and material business – most representative of the Harlowe name, in
a sense – but it also positions that regulation at a remove from the family’s main estate.

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(35), and those experiences serve always to foreground the individual over the corporate. Even writing to Lovelace, she (often convincingly) insists, is an act of self-sacrifice meant to preserve the peace, security, and dignity of her family, even though doing so explicitly rejects the will that ostensibly constitutes that family. In other words, the novel invites us, by providing persistent and substantial contact with Clarissa’s superior “wider scheme of reference,” to doubt the premises according to which the family’s renowned “unity” is preserved and reproduced – an invitation that is in tension with its insistence on premising her superior “wider scheme of reference” precisely on her concern for, her efforts to preserve, and her celebration of, that “unity.” Clarissa’s collective identity culminates in a powerful and telling contradiction.

In letter 17 Clarissa recognizes that her complaints are not against her brother alone – that her brother’s “fine scheme will walk alone without needing his leading-strings” – and that “it is become my father’s will that I oppose, not my brother’s grasping views” (96). As Clarissa’s exasperated mother advocates for Solmes (advocates, in her words, for Clarissa’s return to duty “at a time an on an occasion that the highest instance of duty is expected from” her [96]), she aligns herself with “the family view” and its promotion (97). Richardson encourages readers to

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99 Taylor provides a useful overview of critical claims about the influence of Locke on novelists, and on Richardson in particular. Taylor complicates critical consensus about this influence, however, suggesting that, rather than “unthinkingly” tripping over Lockean ideas, Richardson might “have been aware that Locke provided unstable grounding for his ambitious second novel,” and that Richardson “offers a critical examination of Locke’s philosophical, political, religious, and epistemological positions” (38). See especially chapter one.

100 Expressing this tension, Clarissa, presented with what passes for evidence of Lovelace’s sordid character, argues that “great care should be taken by fathers and mothers, when they would have their daughters of their minds in these particulars, not to say things that shall necessitate the child, in honour and generosity, to take part with the man her friends are averse to. But, waiving all this, as I have offered to renounce him forever, I see not why he should be mentioned to me” (322), at once attributing the legitimacy – the moral and rational ‘necessity’ – of her autonomous actions to her aligning herself with her parents’ will (renouncing Lovelace) and to her rejecting that will (since, as it departs from the dictums of “honour and generosity,” it “necessitates” her contempt for it).
take Clarissa’s objections to such a view seriously by signaling some ambivalence on the part of her mother, further undermining its stability. While Mrs. Harlowe reifies the “family view” by constantly reproducing the “all of us” rhetoric of association by thoughtful consent, she also weakens it by drawing suspicion to her own commitments to it (or, more precisely, to the extent to which her use of the inclusive “all of us” rhetoric reflects only obedience to her own will). “It would be wicked,” Clarissa writes to Howe, “to suppose my mamma capable of art – But she is put upon it; and obliged to take methods her heart is naturally above stooping to.” In this same letter, Clarissa insists that her own arguments might persuade her mother, “could she have been permitted to judge for herself” (97). Indeed, she later writes, the arguments that constitute the “family view” against Clarissa were “obtruded upon my mamma” (110); her mother struggles “to hide under an anger she was compelled to assume” (111); her brother and sister are “engaging my mamma, contrary to her own judgment, against me” (168); she complains about “[h]ow willingly would my dear mamma show kindness to me, where she permitted” (187); and Howe readily embraces this claim, writing that “your mamma has been thus drawn in against her judgment” (212); etc. Clarissa subversively registers her mother’s departure from the supposedly necessary unity of the family view, and she promotes that departure by supplying her own, contrary, and ultimately more persuasive “scheme of reference.” Clarissa’s paradoxical collective identity begins to come into view: she is victim of family unity; she is a valid (because compelling) challenger of that family unity; and yet, since her virtue and character (which make her voice compelling to readers, to her peers, and to her mother) are derived from it, she enlists that family unity to be the very basis of the validity of her challenge.

Richardson thus attaches a sense of emergency and growing family anxiety to any social interaction between Clarissa and her mother, indicating Clarissa’s threat to the stability of the
conceptual, intersubjective construct signified by the Harlowe name (a construct whose professed legitimacy authorizes certain actions, and that gives meaning to its constituents’ engagements with the novel’s other worlds). The family, in order to preserve itself as an unprecedented unity, begins to fracture. Clarissa’s mother is compelled to satisfy the obligations attending motherhood precisely by suspending any activities associated with motherhood; the same goes for Clarissa, whose daughterhood must be realized not despite but through isolation from her parents. This is especially peculiar given that “mother” and “daughter” are relational identities; social interaction is their necessary precondition. More than this: the “family view,” the “unity” that is constituted by self-evident and rationally necessary relationality, supplies the logic according to which relationality between some of its members must be suspended. The family view becomes associated with a set of consensual, relational claims supported and sustained by a suspension of consensual relationality. Relationality, then, in the context of the Harlowes, takes on a logical contradiction; legitimacy, like Eurydice in the Orpheus myth, slips away precisely when and where its verification is sought.

INFECTIONOUS RATIONALISM

Mrs. Harlowe’s suspected ambivalence reveals how precarious the social construct, the “family view,” actually is. But ultimately it is Clarissa’s virtue – her “more mature” calculation that both derives from and persuasively contradicts the “family view” – that makes the family’s illegitimacy (to which Mrs. Harlowe’s ambivalence nervously points) credible. Clarissa’s function as the novel’s protagonist, as well as the novel’s commitment to realistic representation, conspire to put relationality in the novel at odds with itself: Clarissa is a daughter to the extent that she embodies the rationally necessary piety within and respect for the “family view”; she is
an individual to the extent that she (independently and dispassionately) recognizes when the
family view’s claims to respect and notions of piety are invalid. The problem is not just that
these two movements in the novel are in conflict, but that filial and social “legitimacy,” in the
context of realistic fiction and enlightenment thought, premises the principles of the former on
the autonomy of the latter. A formal problem in the novel addresses itself to a conceptual
problem in philosophical configurations (especially those based on discursive contract and
rational consent) of legitimacy.

In *Imagining the Penitentiary*, John Bender describes novelistic realism as “a
constructive force” that, alongside new models and theories of the penitentiary, saturate the
subject’s actions with specific forms of narrative meaning and individualism, such that her place
within social structures becomes more visible and more broadly significant (5). Drawing upon
Foucault’s genealogical analysis of discipline, Bender advances novelistic realism as a
technology that provides and reinforces organizing principles of social order and stability.
Bender’s argument makes a couple of points that are relevant to social order and stability in
*Clarissa*: first, that “within the novelistic container as within the physical regime of the
penitentiary, the self is perceived through and by its narrative construction” (45); second, that
“‘total’ authority represented through physically enforced mental solitude – through a narratively
ordered, sequential control of the particulars of daily life – will make citizens of criminals” (77).
In other words, Bender argues that realistic narrative – and the order it supplies – *legitimizes*
individuals in the course of their daily lives:

…novelistic conventions of transparency, completeness, and representational
reliability…subsume an assent to regularized authority. This assent finds its cultural
counterpart in the societal consent whereby, according to Weber, our reliance on the
consistency, orderliness, and rationality of bureaucratic institutions – our acceptance of them as transparent and ethically neutral – validates the power of the state and indeed enables us to conceive its existence. (73)

To a certain extent, the “consent” at which Bender finally arrives is not entirely distinct from the “consent” upon which the general will of Rousseauian association is premised. After all, the fact that all bodies surveil, even as they are surveilled, is crucial to the transformation of discipline Bender describes, lending them an air of autonomy. They obey only their own wills in the sense that they directly produce and reinforce the power relations that then regulate them. However, the irreducible individuality of the bodies in Bender’s formulation is just as crucial: no general will is possible because nothing can be fully or ultimately subsumed to a perfect generality.

In a similar way, Foucault describes the technologies of discipline, the “control and transformation of behaviour,” as “accompanied – both as a condition and as a consequence – by the development of a knowledge of the individuals.” In this way, “[t]he prison [as, for Bender, the novel] functions…as an apparatus of knowledge” (125, 126). And yet this knowledge is partial since, as in the Panopticon, “the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so” (201). Discipline can only function when the individual does not know when he or she is being observed; it is a system that is empirical but anti-rational, at least if one equates rationalism with independence. For Foucault, the role of discipline and the kind of “consent” it supplies makes conspicuous something of the dubious nature of “consent”; the claustrophobic “legitimacy” of discipline is imposed onto, not produced by, the rational mind.

Significantly, both Bender and Foucault turn to accounts of the plague to explain how paradigms of discipline function on broad, social scales. For Foucault, “[t]he plague-stricken
town, traversed throughout with hierarchy, surveillance, observation, writing; the town immobilized by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinct way over all individual bodies – this is the utopia of the perfectly governed city” (198). For Bender, the new technologies of individuation and surveillance that give the Panopticon its structural force are powerfully dramatized in Daniel Defoe’s *Journal of the Plague Year* (1772): “In the old system,” he writes, “one could talk of infected houses; H.F. [the novel’s narrator] would deal in infected persons” (79). In the realistic, first-person account of the *Journal*, Bender argues, “we witness the private self being constituted narratively through isolated reflection on its relation to circumstance; individual personality appears as the internal restatement of external authority, as a principle of order in face of chaos, comprehension in face of the arbitrary, representation in face of endless disordered perception, a principle of life as opposed to death, reformation as opposed to execution” (77).

A very similar constitution of “the private self” is unfolded in *Clarissa*, especially as its protagonist, giving expression to a compelling counter-logic that persistently destabilizes the family’s unity, is shut away like a contagious bearer of infection. Indeed, Clarissa’s isolation from her family members is compounded when the contagious nature of her logic begins to manifest in family dissolution: Mrs. Harlowe, showing some modest flexibility, “was only treated as a too fond mother, who, from motives of a blameable indulgence, would encourage a child to stand in opposition to a father’s will: she was charged…with dividing the family into two parts” and was subsequently “told that she must be convinced of the fitness as well as advantage to the whole…of carrying the contract with Mr Solmes, on which so many contracts depended, into execution” (109). But to preserve itself from being “divided,” to preserve itself as a “whole,” the family, in fact, divides itself. It prohibits Clarissa from encountering, and thus
contaminating, her mother (as well, eventually, as her other relations and friends, gradually and one person at a time), except as prescribed and supervised by her father, brother, and (eventually) sister’s servant. And yet the sickness spreads. The family grows more unstable, and, correspondingly, more resolved to preserve its stability. Clarissa’s maid, Hannah, acts as mediator, conveying Clarissa’s unsolicited letters and pleas to her parents: she succumbs too. “Late as it is,” Clarissa writes, “they are all shut together. Not a door opens; not a soul stirs. Hannah, as she moves up and down, is shunned as a person infected” (116). Soon, Hannah is banished, turned out of service; shortly thereafter Clarissa is cut off from her parents entirely, and the cynically characterized “utopia” of perfect government, described by Foucault, prevails. James Harlowe writes to his sister

expressly to forbid you to come into their presence, or into the garden when they are there: nor when they are not there, but with Betty Barnes [their sister’s provocative maid] to attend you, except by particular licence or command…In short, [you] are strictly to confine yourself to your chamber, except now and then in Betty Barnes’s sight…you take a morning and evening turn in the garden: and then you are to go directly, and without stopping at any apartment in the way, up and down the back stairs, that the sight of so perverse a young creature may not add to the pain you have given everybody. (121)

And Anna Howe, if more playfully, invokes the rhetoric of infection to explain Clarissa’s condition, as well as the threat that she poses to her family’s regulation and preservation. Suggesting that Clarissa indeed loves Lovelace (and acknowledging that, especially considering Solmes’s character and morals, such a love might be justifiable), Howe writes that Clarissa has become sick, as with a cold:
When a person gets a cold, he or she puzzles and studies how it began; how he – she got it: and when that is accounted for, down he – she sits contented and lets it have its course, or takes a sweat or the like, to get rid of it, if it be very troublesome—So, my dear, before the malady you wot of, yet wot not of, grows so importunate as that you must be obliged to sweat it out, let me advise you to mind how it comes on.

Significantly, Howe continues to argue that the “indiscreet violence” of the Harlowes has contributed, as much as the “insinuating address” of Lovelace, to Clarissa’s amorous “malady” (173). It is a communicable disease, passed moreover from family to daughter and from daughter to family in the very course of fulfilling and enforcing family prerogatives and relational functions.

Thus, as the crisis unfolds and as Clarissa persists in defying Solmes’s proposals, relational figures, acting with the authority and in the interests of preserving relationality, suspend relationality. Are their identities in this case, to the great extent that their identities are essentially relational (a “father’s will,” a “mamma,” a “sisterly” or “brotherly” sibling), preserved? Negated? The precedent for this paradox can be found, again, in Defoe’s *A Journal of the Plague Year*, where, H. F. writes,

> Fathers and Mothers have gone about as if they had been well, and have believ’d themselves to be so, till they have insensibly infected, and been the Destruction of their whole Families: Which they would have been far from doing, if they had the least Apprehensions of their being unsound and dangerous themselves. A Family, whose Story I have heard, was thus infected by the Father, and the Distemper began to appear upon some of them, even before he found it upon himself; but searching more narrowly, it
appear’d he had been infected some Time, and as soon as he found that his Family had
been poison’d by himself, he went distracted…and in a few Days died.¹⁰¹

Such a man “had been a walking Destroyer,” killing his beloved relations “even perhaps in his
tender Kissing and Embracings of his own Children” (159). In the course of being a father,
performing the functions and duties organized and authorized by his family identity, he becomes
a “Destroyer,” eliminating the figures relative to whom his identity as father exists in the first
place. Clarissa’s isolation parallels that of family members who, shut off from one another,
cannot destroy one another. But what does a “family” of isolates signify? What is a collective
identity, like “daughter” or “Harlowe,” outside any of the interactivity or negotiation that
constitutes collectivity? Indeed, what does it mean when isolation becomes the very condition of
sustaining collective identity?

The Harlowes premise the legitimacy of their actions on principle, and they frame those
principles in contrast with those of other communities. Their legitimacy, they suggest, if not self-
evident to Clarissa, should become evident when compared to the claims to legitimacy supplied
by the novel’s other worlds. What conceptual demands does her family actually make on her?
For one, she is taught to be suspicious of social legitimacy outside her family, but she is never
provided with the basis with which to substantiate this suspicion. By negotiating the claims of
both her family and Lovelace, she is presented with two contrary sets of duties, two
“associations” apart from the “one great family,” two competing claims to legitimacy. How is
she to decide?

It is not just that this novel contains two separate communities, each claiming the
individual’s recognition in different ways. There is a deeper problem at stake, one relating to

¹⁰¹ Daniel Defoe, A Journal of the Plague Year (1722). Ed. Paula R. Backscheider (New York:
W. W. Norton & Co., 1992), 158.
social epistemology and legitimacy. The novel’s two communities become knowable (both as social bodies and as distinct from one another) through an arrangement of claims and counter-claims that, on the one hand, both presuppose legitimacy and, on the other, necessarily put those claims into conflict with one another. Without any certain empirical recourse to legitimizing conditions, such as those ostensibly presupposed by the natural givennes of “family” or the rationally necessary consent of “association,” it becomes at once necessary and impossible for Clarissa to determine the conditions under which one community is to be (and has already been, by others) privileged over the other. It does not always appear to her how her naturally necessary obedience to her father is in conflict with her carefully reasoned rejections of both Lovelace and Solmes; meanwhile her consent, appearing variously conditioned or qualified, is not recognized as an extension of obedience to paternalism. In brief, Clarissa senses that these two communities are in conflict with one another, and yet, unable to recognize the conditions according to which each legitimizes itself, she feels special obligations to each. To her family, she owes her obedience and subscription to its traditions and hierarchical structure (which it enforces with increasing violence); to aristocratic England, she owes the discursive, rational engagement according to which it can engage, absorb, and mobilize her (all of which it also does, eventually, through violence).

POLITICAL STRUCTURES AND COUNTER-STRUCTURES IN CLARISSA

It might be argued that I overstate the premises of legitimacy in the case of Clarissa, and that her father, brother, and uncles, far from grounding the organization and practices of their family on anything like a rationale for legitimacy, merely selfishly indulge their vanity by pursuing their social and material ambitions. Certainly Anna Howe takes this to be the case, and she
occasionally mediates a few scraps of gossip from her friends and mother for corroboration. Moreover, it might be said (and generally is, I think) that the “duties” demanded, and the norms endorsed, by the Harlowes merely reproduce the very conventions of blind patriarchy, custom, and tradition that discourses of rational legitimacy work to neutralize. Clarissa’s uncle Antony especially appears to promote such a view, writing at one early point “that children should not dispute their parents’ authority,” continuing that “[w]hen your grandfather left his estate to you, though his three sons, and a grandson, and your elder sister were in being, we all acquiesced: and why? Because it was our father’s doing. Do you imitate that example: if you will not, those who set it you have the reason to hold you inexcusable” (157). Perhaps “legitimacy” in the enlightenment sense that I outline above, in fact, precisely misses the point of Clarissa. Perhaps, like Cavendish’s “Ladies” and the “worlds” in their earrings, the hierarchal structure of family patriarchy sufficiently accounts for its pursuits and possessions, and that to look for any further legitimizing rationale is to project onto it a business of “disenchantment” that it resists or neglects – indeed, such a position would help to account for Mrs. Harlowe’s reluctant “consent.”

But this objection only begs the question: it takes a bad rationale – or an insufficient rationale, or a backwards one, or an outdated one, etc. – for no rationale. It ignores that, for the first third of the book, the patriarchal prerogative is being asserted and meticulously (if sometimes speciously, a qualification that is possible but by no means necessary) defended. Clarissa is asked to obey her father’s will, but she is asked to do so by recognizing and acknowledging the validity of its substance – a substance that, moreover, explicitly echoes elements from contemporary political discourse. Even Antony’s letter cited in the previous paragraph supplies his commitment to paternal prerogatives with what passes for rational

102 See Morris Golden, for example, especially 586 – 587.
justification, defending the family’s authority to involve itself in the selection of Clarissa’s husband on the basis of the estate which is all of theirs, and in which they all have an interest (155), arguing moreover to Clarissa that she knows “very well that we have nothing but your good at heart; consistently, indeed, with the good and honour of all of us. What must we think of any one of it, who would not promote the good of the whole? and who would set one part of it against another? – which God forbid, say I! – You see I am for the good of all.” He then concludes by insisting that “I think I have all the argument on my side,” and that “I am sure, this, by fair argument, is unanswerable” (158, emphasis added). The claim to possessing the “unanswerable” argument even becomes something of a trope, repeated by Clarissa’s siblings and parents.

The objection that “legitimacy” is a red herring also denies Clarissa’s struggle, which makes up the bulk of the novel, to understand and to persuade, and it deflates the lesson that is ostensibly learned at the novel’s conclusion. Indeed, as E. Derek Taylor argues, “[k]eeping this fact of composition in mind [that Richardson knew how the novel was going to end throughout its construction] helps to explain…how a rigidly Filmerian father could offer a devastating challenge to Filmer’s patriarchal assumptions in his portrayal of Clarissa’s battle with her family” (3), highlighting the role that discourses of politics and legitimacy play in the novel’s composition. Morris Golden foregrounds precisely that role, reading Clarissa as a rich record of Richardson’s time, juxtaposing its conflicts with contemporary, documented cases of spousal abuse, dramatic deaths, family intrigues, and politics. Golden’s reading helps to account for the novel’s hints of developing Jacobite intrigue leading into the rebellion of 1745, and of George II and a royal family “plotted against, threatened continuously, and directly attacked by a representative of an older legitimacy while the novel was in progress,” within which “were
known divisions between the father and the eldest son, partly because of a dead grandfather’s will…the elder son’s ambitions,” etc. (589).\textsuperscript{103}

Others have attempted to complement Golden’s reading of the topical political content of Richardson’s novel by developing the conceptual and theoretical frameworks through which it was thought to operate. Rachel K. Carnell, for example, argues that \textit{Clarissa} and the public debates it inspired (sometimes with Richardson’s encouragement) provide a glimpse into “the complex relationship between humanizing morality and political analysis that characterized the eighteenth-century literary public sphere,” emphasizing not only the novel’s moral preoccupations but its “highly politicized discourse” (271), and granting it some of the power of rational discourse described by Jürgen Habermas’s \textit{Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere}. And Lauren Hinton puts Clarissa’s confidence in moral autonomy through natural law up against seventeenth- and eighteenth-century natural law discourses that subordinate women to men as property. But this reading takes for granted some of what it attempts to critique. On the one hand, Hinton argues that “[i]t is as a member of the land-owning bourgeoisie that Clarissa asserts her radical autonomy as a form of moral propriety” (296), and that “Clarissa strives for this radical-rational autonomy which would later be described as a Kantian ideal” (299), citing “Clarissa's belief in right reason and an internal, universal moral law” (295, a belief that, Hinton shows, Richardson himself acknowledged). On the other hand, Hinton writes that “Clarissa challenges and yet attempts to exist in harmony with the ‘natural’ patriarchal laws that undergird

\textsuperscript{103} John Cardwell adds that Clarissa’s conflict “is related to the seventeenth-century constitutional confrontation between king and people, which led to the overthrow of Charles I, the dictatorship of Oliver Cromwell, and the exiled Stuarts’ attempts to recover the throne,” writing that “Richardson’s reaction to the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 is reflected in the association of the Harlowes with the Hanoverian Succession, Clarissa with the British political nation, and Lovelace with the Young Pretender striving to impose absolutist rule,” some of which I will take up in what follows (154).
her bourgeois family as ‘natural’ extension of the state” (297), and that those patriarchal laws manifest as “the use of graphic spatial enclosures that increasingly inhibit and encroach upon Clarissa’s physical liberty,” signalling “a morally decadent and unnatural universe” (298). The result, for Clarissa, is a “subjectivity [that] is bound up in the sadomasochistic contradictions between autonomy and dependency” (300).

And yet, even as Hinton uses the term “unnatural” to describe the novel’s patriarchal, Filmerian prerogatives, she maintains that Clarissa’s “sadomasochism” proceeds from “the ironies of natural law, which allows her to assert radical autonomy and social dependency at once” (301). In other words, by explaining Clarissa’s fidelity to moral freedom and autonomy, authorized by natural law, and by then projecting onto natural law the patriarchal, often antithetical premises it was sometimes deployed to support or defend, Hinton pathologizes Clarissa, nearly blaming her for naïve fidelity to what appears an innately contradictory system, rather than blaming her family for making that system appear contradictory through faulty or narrowly ambitious rationale. After all, Mary Astell – on whose work, Jocelyn Harris argues, “Richardson modeled Clarissa’s character, education, and philosophical beliefs” – challenges the arbitrary, oppressive, patriarchal practices (specifically in the institution of marriage) in a way that directly deflates the very “ironies” of natural law identified by Hinton (Harris 445). For Astell, it is the narrow love of power that goes against the moral autonomy of natural law, and not the “Kantian ideal” it eventually becomes, that comes to associate oppressive family practices with natural law. (Mary Wollstonecraft will later advance elements of Astell’s argument, identifying social structures and institutions that, to use a later term, “naturalize” inequalities and qualitative social assumptions.)
The novel’s engagement with political structure is most apparent in the rhetoric through which its various “worlds” are distinguished. Clarissa flirts with the possibility that Lovelace represents not only a more attractive but a more legitimate authority than that of her parents early in her close confinement, wondering, in a letter to Howe, if Lovelace would “confine me prisoner to my chamber? Will he deny me the visits of my dearest friend, and forbid me to correspond with her? …Will he set a servant over me, with licence to insult me? Will he, as he has not a sister, permit his cousins Montague, or would either of those ladies accept of a position to insult and tyrannize over me? – It cannot be. Why then, think I often, do you tempt me, oh my cruel friends, to try the difference?” (183). The difference, as one between legitimacy and tyranny, is reiterated and expanded later in this same letter: “I like him better than I ever thought I should like him,” she writes, “[a]nd, I believe, it is possible for the persecution I labour under to induce me to like him still more; especially while I can recollect to his advantage our last interview, and as every day produces stronger instances of tyranny, I will call it, on the other side.” Lovelace is compelling out of principle, not a tempter, or a source of dangerous, blind seduction. She warms to him because she finds him to be, upon reflection, a better authority than her parents – and than Solmes. Her inclinations in other words remain legitimate, since although she likes him “better” than she expected she could, she insists that her love is no tyrant, “no such mighty monarch, no such unconquerable power, as I have heard it represented” (185).

Clarissa’s parents, meanwhile, position themselves as legitimate authorities in terms that would be familiar to English readers, graciously extending to Clarissa “an act of oblivion” (189), suggesting that her confinement points, not to their arbitrary and excessive force, but to her own trespasses against their rightful prerogative. (Much later, Lovelace will extend, betraying his own abuse of authority, a remarkably similar gesture, writing to Clarissa that “I am but too sensible...
that this kind of treatment may appear to you with the face of an arbitrary and illegal imposition.” He also blames Clarissa, begging that she “forgive this act of compulsion on the score of the necessity you your dear self have laid me under to be guilty of it; and to permit the solemnity of next Thursday to include an act of oblivion of all past offences” [953].) In letter forty-one, the “undutiful” Clarissa is fully banished from seeing her father: consequences, Mrs. Harlowe insists, of her daughter’s disobedience. Mrs. Harlowe then defends her refusal “[t]o love a rebel, as well as if she were dutiful” (191). Solmes, too, accounts for his authority in terms that would be familiar (and troubling) to most English readers: “fear and terror rather than…complaisance and love” characterize a husband’s authority, he insists, claiming that “it should be his care to perpetuate the occasion for that fear, if he could not think that he had the love. And, for his part, he was of opinion that if LOVE and FEAR must be separated in matrimony, the man who made himself feared fared the best” (238). Where the Harlowes represent a precarious state of England (the fickleness, mobishness, and partisan plotting suggested by Dryden’s “Absalom and Achitaphel”) following the English revolution, Solmes explicitly invokes Machiavelli (the Machiavelli associated with The Prince, which resonates very differently than his Discourses on Livy), a trope then as now for brutal and ambitious tyranny.

Despite such familiarly troubling and unstable registers, an alternative frame for analyzing the Harlowe family as (faulty) practitioners – rather than negligent abusers – of rational legitimacy can be found, not in the narrow calculation Raymond Williams associates with “an openly cynical scramble for land,” but in the shifting attitudes about the role calculation must play in the regulation of cultural practices and social institutions. Albert O. Hirschman describes this shift in The Passions and the Interests, explaining how “commercial, banking, and similar money-making pursuits become honorable at some point in the modern age after having
stood condemned or despised as greed, love of lucre, and avarice for centuries past” (9). Closely following the methodological turn that inaugurated revisionist historiography of the French Revolution in the 1950s and 60s, Hirschman shows that assumptions about greed and luxury, such as those that animate Williams’s argument, are sometimes misplaced: that an analysis such as Williams’s projects onto (some of the characters in) *Clarissa* a frame of economic theory that does not necessarily apply. Indeed, through such commercial and entrepreneurial frames, the logic of aristocratic “paternalism” might have been reconciled, in some instances, to the effects of a more egalitarian notion of reciprocal community bonds: Amanda Berry writes about eighteenth-century voluntary hospitals, for example, which not only accepted such working poor patients as had been sponsored by subscribers (whose “written recommendation” was meant to confirm “that the sick person was a ‘suitable object’” of care, properly embodying the community’s broader values and priorities [127]), but also as had been supplied with the patronage of “commercial firms,” at once protecting their material labor interests and reinforcing a “theory of paternalism [that] centres around the concept that property has its duties as well as its rights” (134, 135). There is a perspective (and it becomes a dominant perspective) from which the “scramble” Williams describes is not a lapse of moral calculation at all, but in fact the business of a rationally necessary organizational paradigm, in which the calculation of durable interests subordinates the often dubious, misleading, and in any case fleeting passions, purchasing greater social, political, and indeed moral stability. In fact, Charles Taylor traces the development of this paradigm alongside that of the novel, which as a literary form “further entrenched the egalitarian affirmation of ordinary life” in precisely the ways Hirschman describes (*Sources of the self*, 286).
Of course, I am not arguing that the Harlowe family are not greedy: I take for granted that they are, and that the institutions of marriage and inheritable property as represented by the Harlowes’ arguments are – from any perspective informed by postcolonial theory, Marxian and critical theory, queer and critical race theory, and centuries of feminist theory – antithetical to the principles of liberty and right that any current readers (even those endorsing the most conservative liberalisms) can accept. I am challenging the claim that their greed necessarily negates their claims (however misguided or misogynistic their effects) to legitimate social organization. There is no reason not to take Antony at his word, in other words, that he ingenuously seeks the family’s greater good, and that he genuinely sees Clarissa’s interests and the family’s interests as one and the same: that, to use Rousseau’s language, he and his family are forcing her to be free. Taking Antony at his word deflates a false dichotomy of legitimacy-illegitimacy – it shifts emphasis away from characterizing the oppressive overtones of her family’s proposal and toward the operative definition of “freedom” that ostensibly defines its telos, as well as the techniques (such as keeping her in confinement) that are thus understood, unironically, as “liberating.”

If achieving the promise of “unity” through legitimate negotiation implies rational and moral freedom (obeying one’s own will by observing “duties” that one understands to be rationally necessary from a disinterested perspective), then the

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104 John P. Zomchick represents the central conflict of Clarissa in a way that, as I am arguing in this section, reproduces some of the assumptions it attempts to critique, arguing that “Although Clarissa’s ‘heart’ is no less an ideological sign than the men’s heads, it is a sign of resistance rather than a means of oppression. If her heart represents a natural threat to the bourgeoisie’s rise to power, then that heart must be put in harness by having it internalize the rational calculation of the new juridical world,” adding that “the confinement that the family subjects her to is meant to break the heart of its wild liberty and condition the woman to accept the harness that the laws put into the hands of the husband” (75). Zomchick’s use of the term “harness” takes it as given that the “heart” is freer than the “head,” and that rationalism and calculation are innately restricting, and that sentiment is innately free and authentic, despite the course of enlightenment thought (especially as it reaches its maturity in Rousseau and Kant) that arrives at precisely the opposite formulation.
questions of oppression and patriarchy in *Clarissa* must be reframed as a question of legitimacy – of, in fact, multiple legitimacies – and how it is constructed, circulated, and examined. And determining its construction, circulation, and examination, of course, brings our attention back to the epistemological problems, central to this dissertation, of social experience. To return to our previous question: in the context of competing claims to legitimacy, each of which warns her to be skeptical of (other) claims to legitimacy, how is she to decide?

(It should also be pointed out that, in representing the novel’s central conflict – as many critics do – as a that between Clarissa’s legitimacy and the family’s and Lovelace’s illegitimacy, readers not only ignore the family’s notions of legitimacy and liberation that are couched in patriarchal social structures, but they also take for granted or overstate the “legitimacy” in the liberal sense Clarissa represents, as if it is not also oppressive. Thus, not only does the claim [as one critic puts it] that “[t]he Harlowes subordinate everything to their material interests, ruthlessly ignoring individual rights and needs” characterize the oppressive illegitimacy of the Harlowe family in a way that obviates serious study of the concepts of “rights” and liberties their ideology ostensibly advances [Zomchick 61], but it also overstates the ideological innocence of the heroine’s motives in a way that, similarly, takes for granted [obviates the study of] the legitimacy of its assumptions and implications. Readers are sympathetic to Clarissa’s rationale [and on the whole, given the simple choice, I am as well], but sympathizing with Clarissa as a simple foil to her family threatens to romanticize a dominant national ideology – Clarissa speaks more than once of her rights as an “English subject” – that, otherwise, is troubling and problematic, just as sympathizing with Locke’s notions of liberty and rationalism as a simple foil to Cavendish’s royalism threatens to downplay the role Lockean rhetoric played, as the first section of this chapter suggests, in coercive political and imperial structures.)
This problem (how is she to decide?) is complicated by the fact that social knowledge, and specifically knowledge of social legitimacy through its organization and practices, is enclosed by self-knowledge. Knowing legitimacy begins with what Jacques Derrida has called *ipseity*, the apparent precondition to democracy, the knowing of one’s self, and “of the one-self that gives itself its own law.”  

105 *Ipseity* is in some ways a perfect “unity,” complicating the autonomous subject’s status and durability in the context of the “unity” of the family (in what ways can a perfect unity be thought of as a part of a greater unity? Can it be its own end as well as an essential part of a greater social teleology? The following chapter will take up these and related questions in detail). Translating the closed circle of the self-governing individual into the social circle of democratic legitimacy poses obvious problems. But the reverse is also true, as I have been arguing. Translating (often elusive) social phenomena into the perfect autonomy and self-knowledge of *ipseity* is also at issue, since *ipseity*, one’s “island,” may in fact always already be shared; since self-knowledge, as it is relational, is premised on social knowledge. Christine Roulston describes the “challenge” of *Clarissa* as one of testing “whether the subject can remain authentic when stripped of all her frames of reference…whether the subject can overcome conditions of radical defamiliarization and remain internally and ethically coherent” (26). This formulation makes only half the case, since, as I have argued in the previous section, Clarissa’s ‘internal and ethical coherence’ is precisely defined by, indicative of, and sustained by a kind of radical *familiarization*, by total embeddedness in “frames of reference.” Her desperate yearning to observe her filial duty defines and confirms her virtue; her rejection of the validity of that duty’s entailments validates and authenticates her virtue. Her legitimacy is a kind of quantum

105 From *Rogues*: see a discussion of this passage and the text it comes from in the introduction.
duality: virtue that is constituted simultaneously by both of these (apparently mutually exclusive) properties.

What are the legitimacies with which she is presented? The family’s, the rake’s, the Machiavel’s. Each constitutes its own sociality, organized by its own code that demands something different from her (different forms of attachment, different obligations, different notions of duty and virtue), that hails her in different ways, and that seeks to define her in a way that, reciprocally, validates its distinct, idiosyncratic code. Legitimacy, of the individual body and the social body, is reciprocal. Such is the context and the condition of the subject negotiating a plurality of “worlds,” of the subject discovering that the relational nature of her ipseity – which she had taken for granted as complete, as the self-sufficiency of the solitary Crusoe – has been challenged and must now be rethought or reimagined. But to which “world” will she (her disinterested rationalism, specifically: her ipseity) confer legitimacy? And which world will validate (to her, to others, to other worlds) her ipseity as legitimate?106 Analyzing a similar set of problems, Ronald Dworkin writes about “associative obligations,” essential but largely interpretive “special responsibilities social practice attaches to membership in some biological or social group,” which he distinguishes sharply from “the kinds of personal obligations we incur through discrete promises and other deliberate acts” (196). The complexity of “membership” is expressed, for Dworkin, by the two movements of associative obligations: they are “interpretive,” suggesting that they are subject to the constituent’s rational, calculating mind (she must determine for herself what obligations and duties logically follow from the sustaining of a

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106 Describing the increasing emphasis on conjugal kinship identifications (which are chosen, and which thus punctuate the individuality of its adherents and the discursive basis of social legitimacy), Ruth Perry writes that “[i]n many areas of life, the state replaced family functioning and appeared to insert itself in matters once handled by kin,” writing specifically about the state drawing upon families’ incomes and male heirs to support colonial wars, “exchanging nationalism for family loyalty” and creating “a substitute family in the militarized state” (35).
particular social group, such as, in the case of Clarissa, its particular interpretations of inheritance and the transfer of property), and yet they are largely latent: “Even associations we consider mainly consensual, like friendship, are not formed in one act of deliberate contractual commitment, the way one joins a club, but instead develop through a series of choices and events that are never seen, one by one, as carrying a commitment of that kind” (197).

Samuel Scheffler expands upon Dworkin’s analysis, drawing particular attention to the moral imperatives that come to be attached to, or that emerge from, various and competing associations (48). Scheffler explains “associative duties” in a way that might be taken to substantiate the Harlowe family’s perspective: “If…we attach great importance to our own membership in a group of a certain kind, then not only are we apt to see ourselves as having duties to the other members of the group, we may also be inclined to suppose that membership in a group of this kind always gives rise to such duties, and we may disapprove of group members who fail to acknowledge their duties as we see them” (51). As thus described, associative duties imply a greater share of advantages and privileges among members than between non-members, such that “I may sometimes be required to help my brother even if his need is less urgent than [a] stranger’s” (52). The Harlowe family’s disapproval of Clarissa indicates the twofold nature of their disappointment: she has failed to “acknowledge” the “duties” that are inherent to her family membership (thus sustaining its claims to legitimacy), and she threatens to withhold from them a material advantage that duty and family membership require.

But the principle of associative duty is complicated by a range of epistemological difficulties. First, it assumes that one can determine whom one is associated with in the first place, with a degree of certainty: in Mary Davys, as we have seen, “stranger” and “brother” are completely unstable, and a single individual can occupy both identities simultaneously, or
oscillate between them. Similarly, Eliza Haywood’s Fantomina can monogamously engage the same sex partner continuously while each time taking on a new identity and assuming a whole new range of associative duties (she is particularly adept at assuming the postures, and demanding the addresses, appropriate to women, not just with different names and personalities, but in very different socio-economic classes), such that her partner believes himself a faithless (and widely desired) rake. And Clarissa compulsively redefines the nature of her relationships with others, addressing and describing the same individuals variously as friends, relations, usurpers, allies, antagonists, etc.

The second epistemological difficulty is the fact (that Scheffler does acknowledge) that, once association is more fully disclosed, “the duties of the participants are often difficult to delineate with precision” (53). But the principle of legitimacy should obviate this difficulty. Indeed, explaining what he calls “the voluntarist objection” to the principle of associative duties, Scheffler writes about those for whom “mere membership in a group or participation in a relationship cannot by itself give rise to any duties at all,” adding that “we have such responsibilities, according to this objection, only in so far as we have voluntarily incurred them” (54). The crux of this objection is that associative duties are not properly duties at all, at least if one accepts the Kantian definition of duty. As I have been suggesting, Kantian duty entails acting voluntarily upon what one determines to be necessary according to universal law – and, moreover, that only such actions are truly free. This is more or less the correspondence of “duty” and “liberation” that Astell associates with proper obedience to king, father, and husband, and that Rousseau associates with the general will: two formulations of “legitimacy” that I have been referencing loosely throughout my analysis of Clarissa. From the perspective of such
formulations, there would be no meaningful distinction between any given associative duty and the voluntarist’s autonomy. In fact, each would be the necessary condition of the other.

Ultimately, Clarissa would not share Scheffler’s “doubts about the possibility of what might be called wholesale monistic assimilation: that is, about the possibility of assimilating the full range of perceived associative duties to any other single type of duty” (54). Her utopian gesture to the “one great family” indicates her faith in a more Kantian notion of association. Her position in the family – a daughter stripped of daughterhood; an infected, unconscious, “walking destroyer” – dramatizes the implications of Kantian association in a pluralistic world. According to Kant’s moral theory, one “was obligated only to act in accord with his own will, which, however, in accordance with its natural end, is a universally legislative will” (50). In associating with only one’s self, in preserving one’s autonomy and ipseity (as it is constructed in accordance with what above I have been calling the self-evident), one associates with nobody in particular. And in associating with nobody in particular, one associates with all subjects – at least with all rational subjects. In this case, a daughter may indeed – in fact must – perform, or at least conceive of, her daughterhood and its defining, associative duties in isolation. In a sense, her true identity, even insofar as it is relational (and especially insofar as it is “legitimate”), depends upon this isolation. In this way she may regard herself as the legitimate Kantian subject, “universally legislative in regard to all laws to which [she] may be subject, because precisely this suitableness of [her] maxims for the universal legislation designates [her] as an end in” herself (56). The epistemological questions that complicate Scheffler’s description of associative duty do not arise for Kant, given that “just as the fact that this dignity (prerogative) before all mere beings of nature brings with it to have to take its maxims always from its own point of view but also at the same time from that of every other rational being as a universally legislative being (which is why
they are also called ‘persons’)" (Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals 56). The proper perspective for considering moral action is supplied by the framework through which maxims are developed, and cannot be seen as attached to one group (or the promotion of its interests) or another. But is this how Clarissa is taught by her family to frame her skepticism of Lovelace’s legitimacy, or by Lovelace to frame the skepticism of her family’s? Is this the ‘proper perspective’ from which she enacts her own resistance, both to her family and, later, to Lovelace? In fact, we see in Clarissa that the epistemological problems remain. How does one know when one group’s interests are being promoted? How does one know when the promotion of one group’s interests is in conflict with, consistent with, or even necessary to, the universal good? How is Clarissa to know whether her imprisonment by her family really is, in some way obscured by her own “narrow view,” the proper mitigation of her unconscious destructive properties, her “infection?” How doe she know that, imprisoned by her family, forced to sustain her daughterhood by suspending its relationality, she is not forced to be free, especially since she is, almost literally, forced into identifying with others in isolation, by identifying with none of them in particular?

A Kantian answer to these questions would mean invoking the kingdom of ends: an organizing moral assumption according to which nobody may be treated solely as a means; each individual is an end. But there is an interpretive quality to such an answer. Respect to other individuals, after all, is owing to the fact that they too are universally legislative creatures (the most significant sense in which they are not only ends, but also means). One accepts the other’s maxims (so far as one believes that they are consistent with the kingdom of ends) as universal law. What then is one to make of the increasing plurality of communities? Is this plurality consistent with a universal law? Is it possible to have one’s own family, and rigorously to
observe the dictates of filial duty to that family, and also to believe in “the one great family?” Can, moreover, filial duty to one’s particular family, and the promotion of its interests (so long as such promotion does not reduce non-family individuals to mere means) constitute the observance of the categorical imperative, as Clarissa seems to think? If so, Clarissa’s question about which community to join (and thus to legitimize) remains, at least in principle, unresolved.

CONCLUSION

Like the other novels this dissertation examines, Clarissa insists upon a more thorough account of social experience, and of the kinds of knowledge (specifically of the nature and conditions of legitimacy) such experience unfolds. While social experience is necessary to the determination of the legitimacy of social organization, it is also the most stubborn obstacle to such determination. Legitimacy – whether through consent or deferral to nature – presupposes that others’ actions and motives can be made legible, and legibly linked to broader (and indeed universal) social priorities. And yet the very concept and mechanisms of community, subordinating the individual as a liberal, rational agent, resists any such legibility. The very anxiety inaugurated by the search for and examination of legitimacy attests to the subordination of the individual constituent, for it speaks to the extent to which his or her own sense of supplying and constituting the group’s organizing logic is suspended at such moments (after all, if I am anxious about my community’s legitimacy, even if I am confident that I have never reduced others to mere means, I have ceased to premise its legitimacy upon my actions). While determining the legitimacy of a particular family makes of that family an object of study – and of the constituent a passive observer – the legitimizing agency of that constituent disappears. Whether necessarily or by convenience, action in the novels I have been exploring seems only to
be possible when the legitimacy that authorizes and organizes it is taken for granted. In a world of multiple and competing communities, one either seeks legitimacy (like Clarissa, confined in her room and shut off from her relations) or one acts (like Belmont breakfasting with his “daughter”), but one cannot do both simultaneously.

And yet the relationship between action and rationalism in a context of multiple and evolving worlds will soon come to define legitimacy in eighteenth-century thought. In part because of the emphasis novelists placed on the individual – and in particular on the role of the rational individual in the construction and recognition of social organization in an empirical world – the conditions under which legitimacy can be conceived of as something that is both known and done are reevaluated in critical and practical thought. The novelistic intervention in political and philosophical discourses about legitimacy points to a failure to reframe the individual as a subject and object of legitimacy. It reveals an individual for whom fantasizing about unknown “worlds within worlds” (an unconscious beneficiary of the riches and resources that are the products of unknown, generally unknowable, and distinctly foreign social organization) undermines the deliberate labor and rational mind that otherwise constitutes autonomy and confers legitimacy. It points to the extent to which the collective body does not mitigate but reifies the potential excesses and abuses of the imagination – to the instability of relationality as much as to the constructs for which stable relationality is essential (as in the construction, recognition, and circulation of the “self-evident” in social organization, for example). And it complicates the notion of liberty, a notion that in many ways defines legitimate relationality but that, in turn, is overdetermined by the claims multiple “worlds” place upon or project onto it. If this complication is the defining impasse that gives rise to the nation state in
the nineteenth century, it is because it eventually puts a much heavier stress on the individual as a locus for collective action.

In the next chapter, I will look more closely at the concept of action and labor in a collective frame, juxtaposing this frame with the concept of progress or perfectibility usually associated with the Scottish Enlightenment or Whig historiography. I conclude with two images suggestive of the transition I have identified here. In many ways, discourses of modern legitimacy begin with a description of parts and wholes, a nice alignment of social and organic bodies. Thomas Hobbes writes that “by Art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE (in latine CIVITAS) which is but an Artificial Man; though of greater stature and strength than the Naturall, for whose protection and defence it was intended; and in which, the Soveraignty is an Artificial Soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body… [and for whom] the Pacts and Covenants, by which the parts of this Body Politique were first made, set together, and united, resemble that Fiat, or the Let us make Man, pronounced by God in the Creation” (Leviathan 9 – 10). Hobbes created an image of the political body that is the product of “art,” but that also subordinates the individual’s agency, since through a kind of ‘consensual’ deferral (see chapter two) he or she becomes the “author” of the sovereign’s actions. By comparison, Mary Wollstonecraft describes the evolution of social and political dynamics leading into the French Revolution with an image that clearly rhymes with, and as clearly rejects, that of Hobbes’s artificial man: she describes the “atrocious debaucheries” of “the reign of Louis XV,” a “vile despotism, under the lash of which twenty-five millions of people groaned; till, unable to endure the increasing weight of oppression, they rose like a vast elephant, terrible in his anger, treading down with blind fury friends as well as foes” (An Historical and Moral View, 301).
Of interest, for me, is the contrast not just between Hobbes and Wollstonecraft (and the shift in how legitimacy is described and derived), but between the individuals in France and Clarissa, who negotiates with her family, Solmes, and Richardson, rational to a fault, to the awful end. Of interest is the sense that Clarissa enacts, perhaps as much as is possible, the island sensibility of the autonomous Crusoe, utilizing herself and her environs in isolation as resources in the construction of legitimacy where, to her mind, it is wholly lacking. And of interest is her failure to accomplish this essential end. By contrast, the “blind fury,” the “terrible” and explicitly animalistic “anger” of the French translates, from Wollstonecraft’s perspective, to greater legitimacy – or at least to a faltering step toward greater legitimacy, and in a way that ostensibly reconciles multiple “worlds” into a universalizing historiography, one in which French actions, English principles, Indian imagery, etc., are absorbed into a single and defining moment of universally significant political progress.

In what way does Wollstonecraft’s terrible elephant embody legitimacy or its potential more effectively than Hobbes’s artificial man? How do late eighteenth-century thinkers, transitioning to romantic conceptualizations of ethical and political organization, respond to the challenge novelists pose to rational, contractarian notions of social legitimacy? The final chapter develops this set of questions in the same way that the first chapter raised them: by turning to an author that was known for both philosophical and novelistic representation. While this dissertation opened with a novelist/philosopher’s attempt to describe perfect isolation and rational autonomy, it concludes in what follows with a later novelist/philosopher’s attempt to formulate a more satisfying description of the relationship between individual and social bodies: namely, Mary Wollstonecraft’s materialist descriptions of parts and wholes, operating in a perfectible natural order organized by moral empirical laws.
5: Clods, Rocks, Rude Masses, and Mighty Wholes: the Political Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft

THE MIGHTY WHOLE: COMMUNITY AND MATERIALISM

The strange dualism of collective identification, as well as a shift in its priority at the end of the eighteenth century, is given striking expression in Wollstonecraft’s first letter in A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark (1796):

What are these imperious sympathies? How frequently has melancholy and even misanthropy taken possession of me, when the world has disgusted me, and friends have proved unkind. I have then considered myself as a particle broken off from the grand mass of mankind; -- I was alone, till some involuntary sympathetic emotion, like the attraction of adhesion, make me feel that I was still a part of a mighty whole, from which I could not sever myself – not, perhaps, for the reflection has been carried very far, by snapping the thread of an existence which loses its charms in proportion as the cruel experience of life stops or poisons the current of the heart. (69 – 70)

Wollstonecraft’s collective identification – just like her misanthropy, its counterforce – is involuntary, reinforcing the sense of objectivity, so secure as to be couched in the language of scientific disinterest, attending the social object, the “mighty whole.” The collective exists, not just because of her, a rational subject constructing and interpreting the claims that ostensibly authorize and legitimize it, but even in spite of her. So far from a discursive object – the product of rational negotiation, like a contract – collective identification in this passage tugs like gravity at the involuntary preconscious, not only independent of but apparently antecedent to rational autonomy. What qualities or requirements does such a formulation presuppose regarding its
constituents? How is this “mighty whole” qualified or undermined by the “failed promise of historical progress and the limits of human adaptability” apparent in the text’s broader historical assumptions, apparent in an often ungenerous ethnographic narrative of Scandinavia that Scott Juengel has called “a journey into the heart of whiteness?”

In the opening pages of this same letter, after all, Wollstonecraft notes the “scarcely human” appearance of “two old men,” and the lack of curiosity and imagination in the “men who remain so near the brute creation, as only to exert themselves to find the food necessary to sustain human life” (64, 65). It would appear, from these descriptions at least, that the pull she feels toward the “grand mass of mankind” does not presuppose a pull toward these individuals, whose relative sub-humanness becomes an emphatic expression of their distance from her. In juxtaposing the brutish Scandinavians with her own psychological and physiological depth (her ‘exertions,’ as her Short Residence and its exigency insist, and as the “particle” passage takes for granted, presumably transcend those “only…necessary to sustain human life”) while also highlighting the pre-rational magnetism of sympathy, Wollstonecraft seems to sustain a state of nature fantasy, in which ‘progress’ from brutishness to civility is necessary, even as she

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107 Scott Juengel, “Countenancing History” (900). For Juengel, Wollstonecraft endorses Samuel Smith’s monogenetic theory (according to which all races of people descend from a common species, and differ only as a result of geographic and climatic differences – for some this is a degenerative interpretation of human history, but for others it suggests the possibility of differences from one group to another being erased) and understands sympathy in particular as evidence of this claim.

108 Daniel O’Neill locates Wollstonecraft’s use of this narrative within and against historiographies of progress associated with the Scottish Enlightenment: “Like the Scots, [Wollstonecraft] agreed that there was slow improvement in the human species’ condition, which took the form of progressive ‘refinement’ over a series of stages, analogous to the individual’s maturation process. Unlike them, however, Wollstonecraft did not believe that this improvement derived from the refinement of instinctive impulses. Rather, it came from bringing reason to bear on a given field of human endeavor and benefiting from its incremental accretion over vast stretches of time.” We will return to my take on reason and instinct in Wollstonecraft in what follows (121).
diminishes the rational mechanisms by which the state of nature is ostensibly transcended. In employing (though not unproblematically) what one critic has called a “fusion of sentimental and Romantic discourses [that] is in turn fused with a discourse of reason embodying Enlightenment humanism and its progressive values” (Özdemir 321), Wollstonecraft complicates the agency entailed by collective identification standardized by enlightenment constructs like contract theory. But in what ways, why, and how?

There are of course different ways to interpret Wollstonecraft’s broken particle, including, for Saba Bahar, as an island. In describing herself as a particle separate from mankind, Wollstonecraft “has become…an island,” responding “to an entire rhetorical and philosophical convention which figures man as a sovereign self, an island entirely on its own. Such is the case, for instance, of Rousseau” and Emile (162). At the same time, Bahar argues that Wollstonecraft posits an alternative to Rousseau’s island, an “image of the island that is not really one” (163), because Wollstonecraft after all

is not an island-lover. Unlike the desert island where man, cut off from all sides, is left to rediscover and reorganise the world again in relation to himself and his centrality, the heath – barren and isolated though it may be – ensures a passage between worlds. It imposes a contract, a pact, a union between parts. Wollstonecraft moreover realises that this ‘independence’ must be at the expense of something; she must contract, and reduce her wants and not allow herself the endless territorial and imperial expansion that her male counterparts promote…The connection with the main mass of mankind does indeed involve a loss, but without this loss survival would be impossible. (163)

For Bahar, Wollstonecraft is confronting “[t]he tensions between the social and solitary self,” evoking a corresponding “conflict between the positive and negative consequences of the
individual’s excessive desires and feelings to the detriment of the more basic wants of an other” (160). In diminishing any sense in which individuals, herself included, might be taken as mere objects of passive, romantic sympathy, and in constructing a sense in which the individual must be accountable to the claims of others in a shared, imagined community, Wollstonecraft embodies the conflicted dualism of Crusoe in the midst of the world. Of course however, as we have seen, Emile is also an “island that is not really one,” and the island trope can be used to authorize or sanction a number of highly problematic identifications, suppressing social dynamics under the purview of autonomy, moral social agency, etc. We shall see the extent to which this description applies to Wollstonecraft as well.

But in the mean time there is another, I think more obvious way to understand this passage, accounting more nearly for Wollstonecraft’s idiosyncratic approach to social and political problems. Virginia Sapiro, calling her “a moral Newtonian” (57), notes that “Wollstonecraft often used metaphors from physics” (62), recalling not only that moral and scientific research often went hand-in-hand in the eighteenth century, but that Wollstonecraft’s self-education and intellectual engagements were steeped in this tradition. In her review to David Williams’s Lectures on Education (1789), Wollstonecraft writes that, in the “present age…of experimental philosophy,” “the most ingenious conjectures have melted before mechanical discoveries and mathematical conclusions…It is not necessary,” she continues, to descant on the sublime pursuit, to which physical enquiries naturally lend the contemplative mind, when it is not rendered so purblind by microscopic observations, as to overlook a grand cause in minute effects. The utility of collecting a number of facts, and prying into the properties of matter, cannot be contested. To see the harmony which

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109 Sapiro writes, for example, that “Wollstonecraft’s friend Joseph Preistley provided a model of the moral philosopher/physical scientist” (58).
subsists in the revolution of the heavenly bodies simply stated, and silently to mark how light and darkness, subsiding as we proceed, enables us to view the fair form of things, calms the mind by cultivating latent seeds of order and taste. We trace in this manner, the footsteps of the Creator… (*The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft* 141)

From this perspective, Wollstonecraft draws upon notions of particle and force to construct a metaphor from physics to indicate how both rational autonomy and sociability fit into a universe, characterized by providential order and harmony, that is discernible through empirical investigation. Wollstonecraft’s religious principles proceed, Sapiro writes, not from her fear of God’s power or will but from respect of God’s “divine wisdom” (47), implying that the universe is not ordered arbitrarily but according to laws accessible to the rational mind.¹¹ Yet sociability, as such a law, occupies a peculiar position: Wollstonecraft is somehow the author and the object of this force. She produces it, feeling it in all of its intimacy and subsequently discerning its gravity and calculating its claims autonomously in a designed, universal harmony; and yet it is “imperious,” a force of “attraction” that is external to her, that drags her along in spite of herself – even, she anxiously suggests, up to, against, or perhaps beyond the point of identification with the “scarcely human.” What, then, is the nature of this force, from an objective, empirical perspective? And what kinds of agency are possible in its sway?

The relationship between sociability and physical laws is suggestive: recall for example that Defoe had used physical systems and empirically calculable forces to characterize the nature

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¹¹ Sapiro, 44 – 52. The “laws of the universe are discernible by human beings in the regularities and harmonies of the universe,” Sapiro writes, and “[a]ny act toward fulfilling God’s will, including the ability to discern it, is good” (45). To a certain extent, Eileen Hunt Botting challenges this claim, arguing that Sapiro’s comprehensive, “bird’s-eye” vindication of Wollstonecraft’s political theory neglects the extent to which Wollstonecraft’s religious views changed over time. Botting regards “Wollstonecraft as a traditional Trinitarian Anglican in her early writings, a rationalist Socinian Christian Dissenter in her middle writings, and a Romantic deist, skeptic, and possible atheist in her late writings” (134).
and origins of legitimacy. Even though the natural/social relationship seems rarely to have been so explicitly spelled out, the nature of eighteenth-century “science,” as we have just seen, was such that moral and physical investigations were often mutually instructive. Hobbes, as we saw in chapter two, begins his explanation of social and political organization with a description of a purely physical and highly mechanized human being. Locke’s empirical philosophy drew heavily upon the work of Robert Boyle, an important early scholar of corpuscular theory, according to which all matter – and all perceived effects of matter – result from microscopic, indivisible bodies called corpuscles, the structures (or “textures”) that they form, and their “primary qualities” (their size, shape, and states of motion and rest). Complex matter is composed of simple corpuscles, according to Boyle, much as any canon of complex literary works is entirely composed of the same twenty-six letters; likewise, perceived effects of matter such as color and heat are produced from corpuscles in much the same way that the powers and mechanisms of a clock proceed from all of its components working together in certain arrangements. Thus, like Hobbes and his mechanistic individuals, Locke’s political theory must ultimately be consistent with the physical laws of corpuscular theory. Even Kant’s earliest philosophical work, his second dissertation (some of the claims of which sound remarkably similar to Sapiro’s interpretation of Wollstonecraft), posits “a systematic pattern of mutual relations,” characteristic of “a new system” which he called “the system of the universal connection of substances,” and which reflected the determination and harmony of providence (views, however, not entirely consistent with those of the mature Kant).

111 For more on Boyle’s influence on Locke, see Peter Alexander, *Ideas, Qualities, and Corpuscles*. On Boyle’s “primary qualities, see 77 – 78.

For our present purposes, the role of materialism and its relationship to empirical investigation (on the one hand) and moral autonomy (on the other) should be sought in the mechanisms of collective identification. Wollstonecraft herself seems to have been a materialist, after all (we will return to this below), so reading her work as a narrative of social identity – and a prescription for social change – requires accounting for the properties of material systems, empirical knowledge of material systems, and the exercise of free will within them: a project of great and popular interest throughout the eighteenth century.

In one extensive and widely known public debate at the beginning of the eighteenth century (1706 – 1708), for example, Samuel Clarke and Anthony Collins lay out some of the most important and durable arguments about dualist and materialist explanations of the nature and origins of consciousness. Clarke, a Newtonian and an ally to Robert Boyle, began the debate by positing the immortality of the soul while responding to Henry Dodwell’s *Epistolary Discourse Proving...that the Soul is a Principle Naturally Mortal* (a 1706 treatise on conditional immortality). In the course of his refutation, Clarke argues that some qualities, and namely consciousness, can only be a property or a “power” of an indivisible unit, and that since matter is divisible, the soul is immaterial. The indivisibility of consciousness is what constitutes it (and its bearer) as an individual, a conclusion that follows directly from the work of Descartes, who wrote in his *Meditations*, “When I reflect on the mind… I certainly cannot distinguish any parts in myself; instead I understand myself to be a completely unified and integral thing.” Although

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113 Many of the terms of this debate have remained relevant for contemporary scholars. See for example *Explaining Consciousness – The ‘Hard Problem,’* Ed. Jonathan Shear. For a recent discussion of the “hard problem” of consciousness in an eighteenth-century perspective, see Jonathan Kramnick, 2010.
114 William L. Uzgalis calls Clarke’s logic demonstrating the indivisibility of consciousness through the immateriality of the soul “the Individual Being Condition” in his introduction to *The Correspondence of Samuel Clarke and Anthony Collins* (24).
for Descartes (and for Clarke) the body is divisible, if one loses a limb “I know that nothing is thereby taken away from the mind. Nor can the faculties of willing, sensing, understanding, etc., be said to be parts of the mind, because it is one and the same mind that wills, senses and understands” (67). Collins disagrees, seeing no reason that a material soul cannot be immortal, or that consciousness, with a nudge from God, cannot be an emergent property of material organization.

While their central concerns may seem peripheral to our present object, it is worth pausing to consider the arguments that Clarke and Collins put forward to address the relationship between part and whole, since this is the language Wollstonecraft uses to characterize the tensions and “sympathies” between the solitary individual and the “grand mass of mankind.” Indeed, Clarke’s first argument to Dodwell considers, precisely, ‘broken-off’ particles. Quoting at length, Clarke argues that matter being a divisible substance, consisting always of separable – nay of actually separate and distinct parts – it is plain [that, disregarding some form of panpsychism] no system of it in any possible composition or division can be an individual conscious being.

Despite this impression, in fact Wollstonecraft would likely have been aware of this debate and its implications for social and moral philosophy. Her contemporaries Richard Price and Joseph Priestley (whose influence in Wollstonecraft’s self-education is well known) conducted a debate in published correspondence (1778), drawing heavily upon and sometimes directly citing Clarke and Collins. Priestley writes in the introduction that Price “supposes that the powers of perception and thought reside in an immaterial substance, but that the exercise of these powers is made to depend on the organization of the body; whereas I suppose these powers to reside in the organized body itself, and therefore must be suspended till the time when the organization shall be restored” (xvi). Priestley associates the immateriality of the soul with other “oriental” philosophies and “popish,” superstitious beliefs, representing the grossest excesses of imagination, such as purgatory, “atonement for the sins of men,” and “the worship of Christ and of dead men” (xvii). These beliefs parallel, in Robert Boyle’s corpuscular theory, the subscription to “occult” practices and principles by some alchemists: phenomena that cannot be explained (Alexander, 17 – 18). I look more closely in this chapter at Clarke and Collins than Price and Priestley because the terms of the debate were established clearly in the former, while the latter helps to establish that Wollstonecraft would have been exposed to these terms.
For, suppose three or three hundred particles of matter at a mile, or any given distance, one from another. Is it possible that all those separate parts should in that state be one individual conscious being? Suppose then, all these particles brought together into one system, so as to touch one another. Will they thereby, or by any motion or composition whatsoever, become any whit less truly distinct beings than they were at the greatest distance? How then can their being disposed in any possible system, make them one individual conscious being? (47)

Collins, taking Clarke to mean that “it is only required that a thing be an individual being in order to its being a proper subject of a power of thinking” (47), notes that these dispersed particles technically qualify, suggesting further that, following Clarke’s logic, God has the power to combine particles “in one system…incapable of any division or separation by natural causes, and consequently…capable of thinking” (48). “If several particles of matter can be so united as to touch one another, or closely to adhere,” he asks, “wherein does the distinctness or individuality of the several particles consist?” Indeed, he argues, it is “lost” (48), subsumed by the resulting mass, which itself now makes up a newly constituted individual (or, more precisely, which thus dispenses with the condition of individuality – conceived as indivisibility – altogether). A brain composed of unconscious corpuscles can therefore give rise to consciousness, he argues, not unlike a rose, which “consists of several particles, which separately and singly want a power to produce that agreeable sensation we experience in them when united” (49).

Collins’s question – wherein does the individual consist? – becomes one of several frequently referenced themes in the ensuing correspondence. Collins quickly suggests a social analogy, arguing that powers or qualities can exist in groups of bodies that are more than the sum
of their parts, and that “a particular power” can exist “to which several particular powers contribute,” supposing for example “a power arising from matter without belonging to the parts of which the whole consists,” such as (perhaps evoking Boyle’s famous analogy) “a whole [that] is not the same with a piece of a clock,” or “as every man is a particular man, though various powers are necessary to constitute him of the species” (71). Collins will develop this claim a bit further much later in the correspondence. Discussing an apparently minor point about the conventions of language, he writes, “what do we mean by a kind or sort, but several particulars having a conformity to an abstract idea? So that if our abstract idea of roundness agrees to the figure of any number of beings, we do as necessarily call them all round, and reckon their figures a sort of figures, as we do a negro of the sort or species of man, though the term species or sort may not perhaps be made use of in one case as it is in the other” (221).

His shift from describing the human species as an example of “a particular power” to that of “an abstract idea” is an interesting one, and might seem to imply a shift from the objective conditions of species to a set of subjective practices, presupposing things like interpretation, judgment, and consent. Also of interest is his comparison of “roundness” and “man,” since particle theories generally differentiate the kinds of “species” that each of these figures constitutes. Peter Alexander writes that, for Locke, unlike our ideas of substances, “our ideas of [geometrical figures] contain their whole essences because, Locke holds, they can be completely determined by definitions” (265); circle or triangle thus designates the “real essence” of its referent, whereas man or gold designates only a “nominal essence.” Nominal essences are nevertheless important, Alexander writes, since “real essences are subject to change, a consequence of their depending on inner constitutions of individuals” (269), thus rendering nominal essences more durable. Locke “holds that when I am considered as an individual none
of my present characteristics is essential: I might be a different shape or colour, lack rationality or sense, or any combination of these,” and the “idea that any of these is essential to me occurs only when I am classified as, and called, a member of the species man” (269). Alexander then foregrounds the subjective primacy of nominal essences: “A species or kind cannot change unless we change it. If we do not, the collection of individuals included in the kind may change because a change in an individual may be sufficient to exclude it from that kind” (270). Collins’s passing reference to the aspect of race thus helps to reveal the stakes of thinking about nominal and real species: an aspect that gained a great deal of urgency and significance especially toward the end of the eighteenth century as, in France, America, and the West Indies, ostensibly rational but always contested questions of self-governance, human nature, and colonialism begin to coalesce.\footnote{See, for example, the ever-changing status of mixed-race “mulattos” in revolutionary rhetoric leading up to the Haitian Revolution in the wake of the French Revolution. C. L. R. James, The Black Jacobins, especially 62 – 84.}

Wolstonecraft’s broken particle metaphor, drawing explicitly upon rhetoric from the natural sciences, signals an interest in the status of sociability and collective identification as forces, playing a role in constructs that appear deliberate and constructed in one moment and objective and involuntary in the next. Wherein does the individual consist? What are its “particular powers?” Do they include both “involuntary” sympathies with others as well as conscious dissociations from the “scarcely human?” And what about the counterforces, misanthropy and melancholy, which, having “taken possession of” her, appear no less involuntary, external, objective? (And, given this, why the notes of self-accusation?) If Wolstonecraft is a particle that is, to use Clarke’s language, a mile distant, mired in “melancholy” and “misanthropy,” what is the status of the “mighty whole?” What are its
particular powers? How does she negotiate the facts from the acts of identifying collectively, the imperious forces from the autonomous judgments and interpretations; and in the course of these negotiations, how and where does she deploy – and contest – abstract ideas, confronting, dispensing, recognizing, and authorizing presumptions of “nominal” and “real” essences? And what do these deployments say about the “force” that sympathy, on the one hand, or the presumed objectivity of the “mass” (or its implied “harmony” of the “heavenly bodies”) on the other, constitutes?

Responding to Wollstonecraft’s well-known dread about the “Malthusian prophesies of an over-cultivated and over-peopled world” (from letter eleven), Saba Bahar asks a version of Collins’s question – wherein does the individual consist? – which has been an enduring question, in one form or another, for a critics of A Short Residence. Specifically, Bahar wonders about “the ambiguous identity of the hero of the story. For…we have to ask whom Wollstonecraft is talking about: man the species (when she speaks of the state of man and the unfortunate creatures) or man the individual (when she recounts how the singular hero of the tale will fend for himself when faced with universal famine)” (155). By seeking the narrative’s “hero” in either the individual or the species, Bahar is asking upon which, in the face of lack and crisis, resolution depends. They are not – and their “particular powers” are not – mutually inclusive, even when confronted with the same crisis in the same terms. Similarly, Thomas H. Ford argues that, for Wollstonecraft, the limitations of women’s political agency are directly related to “cunning,” which “hinders transformation…by individualizing political agency.” It is “a power drawn from the specificity of an individual situation and always remains tethered to that personal pole,” such that it “prevents the formation of a female generality, and the cunning woman negates collective belonging” (197). Indeed in her biography of Mary Wollstonecraft, Janet Todd writes that, even
from her earliest days reading about vagrancy and food riots in Beverley, “Mary did not care for violence or mass action: she had a strong sense of the individual” (13). And Moira Ferguson reads in Wollstonecraft’s work a dramatization of unaligned collective and individualistic tensions, arguing that “Wollstonecraft subscribes to a concept of overall group identity” that “is undercut, however, when she probes particulars because her sense of a personally wrought self-determination causes her to find women culpable of their vanity, their acceptance of an inferior education, their emphasis on feeling,” ultimately locating “herself outside what she deems self-demeaning behavior” (31). Although Wollstonecraft “accords all women, including herself, a group identity, a political position from which they can start organizing and agitating,” the “sense of group solidarity dissolves” (16) and she “separates herself from [white middle-class women] as a mentor-censor” (17). Wollstonecraft imagines herself in community with white middle-class women – and, if more distantly, with Atlantic slaves – but she finds these communities unsatisfying and unsustainable. She finds their basic characteristics and entailments to be a contradiction to her and her own nature. How does this qualify the “involuntary…attraction of adhesion” her physics metaphor suggests? The rest of this chapter will seek to answer some of these questions, paying particular attention to the “subjective” and

117 Daniel I. O’Neill also registers how Wollstonecraft represented herself relative to contemporary women, positing a reaction to formulations of gender roles emerging from the Scottish Enlightenment according to which “the relationship between the advent of commercial society and the place of women was paradoxical,” since “they believed that the rich web of social relationships created by commercial society tamed, transformed, and refined the savage (male) moral personality into one identified by softer, more polished, more polite manners” (92). Women mitigated against the sovereignty of cold rationalism that threatened to undermine moral sentiments, on which capitalism depended, by posing as “catalysts and managers of sensibility within the private sphere,” a necessarily passive and submissive “bulwark against the erosion of community and a powerful check on aggressive and self-interested male behavior in commercial society” (94).
“objective” (or “imagined” and “reasoned”) movements of collective identification at a moment of transition from enlightenment to romantic thought.

Now, lest it be thought that my own reading of Short Residence is “rendered…purblind by microscopic observations” and “minute effects,” let us step back from the particle passage to look at how collective identification is constructed more comprehensively by the text as a whole.

2. HETEROGENEOUS MASSES: BURKE AND WOLLSTONECRAFT

The objective premises of community presupposed by the particle metaphor are underscored by Wollstonecraft’s insistence elsewhere upon the countervailing subjective movements of collective identification. Where, in one case, “involuntary” forces of “attraction” and “adhesion” regulate and cohere the community, in the other, debates and documents do; and while the first results in a “grand mass,” the other, embodied most explicitly by the constitution (and thus bearing the literal mark of a given point in human progress), emphatically does not. The contrast with the “mighty whole” is striking: in Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790), for example, she writes that “[t]he imperfection of all modern governments must…in a great measure have arisen from this simple circumstance, that the constitution, if such a heterogeneous mass deserve that name, was settled in the dark days of ignorance, when the minds of men were shackled by the grossest prejudices and most immoral superstition” (11, emphasis added). Likewise, in An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution (1794), she writes that “[w]hen society was first regulated, the laws could not be adjusted to take in the future conduct of it’s members, because the faculties of man are unfolded and perfected by the improvements made by society: consequently the regulations established as circumstances required were very imperfect.” Rejecting veneration for the past as a proper model for social regulation, she asks: “What then is to hinder man, at each epoch of civilization, from making a
stand, and new modeling the materials, that have been hastily thrown into a rude mass, which time alone has consolidated and rendered venerable?” (293, emphasis added). The image of the “rude” and “heterogeneous mass” is revealing for its associations both with artificiality and with the deep past. Reverence for the constitution, from this perspective, entails a fatal allegiance to an explicitly unnatural, almost Frankensteinian composition of disjointed parts from a dead past.

Peculiarly, while involuntary sympathy works upon the passive subject to resolve social disorder or disjointedness in Wollstonecraft’s first model of sociability (since, again, external forces of attraction and adhesion work upon the subject, even in spite of herself), a very similar posture promotes social disorder and disjointedness in the context of her second model of sociability. In A Vindication of the Rights of Men, Wollstonecraft accuses Edmund Burke of hypocrisy when he berates Richard Price for ignoring his natural reverence for royalty, even though, she argues, Burke himself had already ignored precisely such reverence in the interests of self-promotion. When, in the wake of George III’s declared insanity in 1788, the Prince of Wales offered to promote Burke to the post of Paymaster-General, Burke worked hard, first, to resist a Regency Bill limiting the Prince’s powers and, second, to discredit the king and dismiss any possibility of his recovery. Wollstonecraft quotes Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), citing his view of nature that, being “wisdom without reflection, and above it” (25),

118 entices subjects automatically – involuntarily – to respect the awe of sovereignty. Where, she asks him about 1788, “was the infallibility of that extolled instinct which rises above reason? was it warped by vanity, or hurled from its throne by self-interest? To your own heart answer these questions in the sober hours of reflection – and, after reviewing this gust of passion, learn

118 Cf. Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France, 119. He refers in the original to “an inheritable crown; an inheritable peerage; and an house of commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties, from a long line of ancestors” transferred to us “from Magna Charta to the Declaration of Right.”
to respect the sovereignty of reason” (26). Wollstonecraft quickly moves to an analysis of Burke’s own chivalric prose, which cunningly exploits, in her view, “romantic” and superficially fashionable readers. Citing his “sentimental jargon,” she writes that

[a] kind of mysterious instinct is supposed to reside in the soul, that instantaneously discerns truth, without the tedious labour of ratiocination. This instinct, for I know not what other name to give it, has been termed common sense, and more frequently sensibility; and, by a kind of indefensible right, it has been supposed for rights of this kind are not easily proved, to reign paramount over the other faculties of the mind, and to be an authority from which there is no appeal. (29)

Using language remarkably similar to the “attraction of adhesion” in her particle metaphor, Wollstonecraft then calls this “authority from which there is no appeal” a “subtle magnetic fluid, that runs round the whole circle of society, [which] is not subject to any known rule…It dips, we know not why, granting it to be an infallible instinct, and, though supposed always to point to truth, its pole star, the point is always shifting, and seldom stands due north” (29 – 30).

Several parallels between Burke and Wollstonecraft should be noted. Each makes a claim about nature and its function in social and political organization. Each posits the passivity of the subject, which is required for the “attraction of adhesion” in one case, and the “authority without appeal” in the other, to function properly. And yet, against this passivity, each relies upon rigorous discursive practices since, for Wollstonecraft, “ratiocination” and rationalism remain fundamentally important and, for Burke, a kind of calculus is ultimately essential: “There ought to be a system of manners in every nation,” he writes, “which a well-formed mind would be disposed to relish. To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely” (172). While several aspects of Burke’s claim deserve closer scrutiny than our present purposes will allow (the
relationship between, and the agency behind, the “well-formed” mind and the “lovely” country, to begin with), it is worth noting the normative, prescriptive premise that Burke attributes to both subjects (those who relish beauty and make countries beautiful) and objects (beautiful countries and systems of manners) of political organization.

Wollstonecraft targets this passage in her critique of Burke, and her reaction to this specific claim reveals the materialist commitments of her own position. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, she writes of “the good natured man” that “[t]he amiable weakness of his mind is a strong argument against its immateriality, and seems to prove that beauty relaxes the solids of the soul as well as the body” (46, emphasis hers). It should be noted that she addresses this text in its opening pages (as Burke addresses his *Reflections* to “a Gentleman in Paris”) to Edmund Burke, distinguishing his “private” and “public” characters and, explicitly deploying corpuscular terminology, calling “the very texture of [his] mind…amiable” (5). Following her logic, the “beauty” that Burke associates with the loveliness of a country – to which his mind of course is “well-formed” to be “disposed to relish” – has weakened the “solids” of his soul and body, and

119 I should note that, though I use the word “commitments,” these views reveal some potential flux over time. By the time Wollstonecraft writes her *Short Residence*, for example, evidence of both materialism and dualism can be found. In letter eight, she writes that “I cannot bear to think of being no more – of losing myself – though existence is often but a painful consciousness of misery; nay, it appears to me impossible that I should cease to exist, or that this active, restless spirit, equally alive to joy and sorrow, should only be organized dust – ready to fly abroad the moment the spring snaps, or the spark goes out, which kept it together. Surely something resides in this heart that is not perishable – and life is more than a dream” (112). While this passage is suggestively dualistic, it is not necessarily so – Collins’s main point, after all, is that materialism does not preclude immortality. The commitments I refer to appear much more conspicuously in her *Vindications*, as we shall see presently, despite claims to the contrary by other critics. Eileen Hunt Botting, for example, writes that Wollstonecraft in her “middle” works (encompassing her *Vindications*) “believed in human free agency and that the soul was an immortal, spiritual substance distinct from the mortal body.” Botting argues that Wollstonecraft is influenced here by Price and Priestley. Price and Priestley, meanwhile, drew heavily upon Clarke and Collins, and Collins argued, again, that immortality does not presuppose a “spiritual substance.” We will return to the Price / Priestley debate later (160).
that the anti-rationalism of his politics and rhetoric proceeds from, reflects, and then reproduces that weakness. In reference to his dealings with the regency crisis of 1788, she writes, “what but the odious maxims of Machiavelian policy could have led you to have searched in the very dregs of misery for forcible arguments to support your party? …where human weakness appears in its most awful form to calculate the chances against the King’s recovery” (27). Wollstonecraft, in other words, has drawn up a causal, materialist narrative: beauty begets weakness (a claim featured heavily in her Vindication of the rights of Woman), weakness begets corruption (specifically, a corrupt calculus that then organizes social arrangements and practices), corruption privileges beauty, etc.

There are three basic components of political theory that I am tracing, both in Wollstonecraft’s positive political theory and in her critique of Burke’s: involuntary association with others, deliberate, rational dissociation from others (two movements which define and complicate community in her political theory), and the forms of agency presupposed by political and social organization in the context of these two movements. These movements coalesce around commercial activity, as well as Wollstonecraft’s critique of commerce.

3. COMMERCE AND BRUTISHNESS

In the Scandinavian letters, Wollstonecraft counts commerce among the unnatural counterforces to sympathy, approximating commerce and illegitimacy so nearly that she associates it explicitly with the state of nature. This becomes clear especially toward the end of the text, when she orients her impatience with Hamburg toward its commercial nature: “Mushroom fortunes have started up during the war,” she writes, completing her allusion to the famous passage in Hobbes by writing that “the men, indeed, seem of the species of the fungus; and the insolent vulgarity which a sudden influx of wealth usually produces in common minds, is
here very conspicuous” (191). In comparing men in the state of nature with mushrooms in De Cive, Hobbes means to explain the origins of “the right of dominion” where the rational capacities of the human mind are fully developed, laying the groundwork for various types of social organization and political hierarchy (205). Social legitimacy necessarily presupposes, from the perspective of contract liberalism he helps to develop, such a fully rational individual.120 By comparing commercial Hamburger with the Hobbesian mushroom-men, Wollstonecraft attributes their illegitimacy and decline to a free choice, rather than to the determinism of natural forces, such as sympathy, magnetism, or gravity. Yet, at the same time, the ensuing interruption to natural progress, although a product of free and autonomous will, irremediably damages the rational capacities that constitute that will. Jealously “apprehensive of their sharing the golden harvest of commerce” with “their Danish neighbors,” she insists that Hamburg is “governed in a manner which…narrow[s] the minds of the rich,” such that “the character of the man is lost in the Hamburger” (190). In acting and governing upon the apprehensions of a free and potentially rational mind, the Hamburger suppress and destroy their humanizing capacities as free and potentially rational minds. Their actions create a commercial culture and infrastructure, and that culture and infrastructure consequently hold them back, since “Situation seems to be the mould in which men’s characters are formed” (191). Being very explicit about the Hamburger’s state-of-nature, fungal illegitimacy, she writes that “greedy enjoyment of pleasure without sentiment,” the result of such commerce, “embrutes them” (191).121

120 We have already explored this concept at length, with particular interest in how Rousseau’s social contract theory paradoxically insists upon a contract that both presupposes and produces the rational, social individual. Hobbes’s mushroom-individual is the precursor to Rousseau’s moral (as opposed to purely physical, presocial) individual. See chapter one. 121 This is a late eighteenth-century iteration of the logic found in Locke, discussed in chapter two, wherein individuals who reject natural law (which is reason, and which encourages sociability) quit human nature and “trespass against the species.”
It seems important for Wollstonecraft to establish a causal narrative with respect to the damaging effects of commerce for both philosophical and personal reasons: or, rather, the causal narrative of social and political devolution has a poignant personal relevance for her, which she chooses to dramatize alongside her political commentary.122 This is a text, after all, that has an interest in linking the individual with the mass, so it stands to reason that the forces of commercial corruption must play out in both national and personal dramas. Accordingly, Wollstonecraft ends her twenty-second letter with a paragraph of famously personal admonition. Weary from travel, frustrated with trying to find accommodations, and disappointed with them when she does, she writes that

I scarcely know any thing that produces more disagreeable sensations, I mean to speak of the passing cares, the recollection of which afterwards enlivens our enjoyments, than those excited by little disasters of this kind. After a long journey, with our eyes directed to some particular spot, to arrive and find nothing as it should be, is vexatious, and sinks the agitated spirits. But I, who received the cruelest of disappointments, last spring, in returning to my home, term such as these emphatically passing cares. Know you of what materials some hearts are made? I play the child, and weep at the recollection – for the grief is still fresh that stunned as well as wounded me – yet never did drops of anguish

122 The personal, and some (beginning arguably with Godwin in his controversial biography) argue sentimental, moments in the Short Residence have led many critics to exclude it from serious consideration among Wollstonecraft’s political theory. This is a strange posture to take, given the work’s direct and practical engagements with history, economics, and politics, all of which ostensibly entangle the personal. On this nevertheless durable critical oversight, see Anthony Pollock, “Aesthetic Economies of Immasculation,” in which he suggests that “the Letters expand the connections articulated in Wollstonecraft’s earlier works between aesthetics, gender construction, and sociability by placing that constellation of issues in the global economic context of mercantile capitalism,” arguing that “Wollstonecraft analyzes the dangers of taking stereotypically masculine characteristics like calculation and instrumental rationality as the basis for social and economic organization” (195).
like these bedew the cheeks of infantine innocence – and why should they mine, that
never were stained by a blush of guilt? Innocent and credulous as a child, why have I not
the same happy thoughtlessness? (189)

The “cruelst of disappointments” is a reference of course to Imlay, to whom Wollstonecraft
addresses these letters, on whose behalf Wollstonecraft (with their daughter) takes this “long
journey,” and who had betrayed Wollstonecraft, requesting her return to London in 1795 even
though he was living with another woman at the time. This passage, especially given the
increasing despondency and increasingly personal tone of the letters overall, is clearly meant to
evoke Imlay’s sympathy. He is meant to regard the responsibilities he has to others in a shared
world, that his acts and feelings are meant to reconcile him to the “mighty whole” in which, by
nature, he belongs. The family, as Eileen Hunt Botting has shown, is an important part of that
whole and its nature. For all of Wollstonecraft’s disagreements with Burke and Rousseau,
Botting argues that “each highlights the crucial role of the family in cultivating the affectivity
necessary for human moral development and the formation of human social and civic identities”
(203). In appealing to his sympathy, Wollstonecraft attempts to reengage the affectivity on which
his proper functioning as a father, and thus as a human being in an ever-progressing world,
depends.

Yet, as she knows, she is likely to fail. Like the mushroom-men of Hamburg, Imlay has
shed his responsibilities willfully, calculating his personal commercial gains and consequently
‘embruting’ himself. Her admonition continues into letter twenty-three: “you will say that I am
growing bitter, perhaps, personal. Ah! shall I whisper to you – that you – yourself, are strangely
altered, since you have entered deeply into commerce – more than you are aware of – never
allowing yourself to reflect, and keeping your mind, or rather your passions in a continual state
of agitation – Nature has given you talents, which lie dormant, or are wasted in ignoble pursuits – You will rouse yourself, and shake off the vile dust that obscures you, or my understanding, as well as my heart, deceives me, egregiously – only tell me when? But to go farther a-field” (191).

Imlay’s ‘strange alteration’ (we can say that the “character of the man is lost” in him) is a cyclical devolution, the result of his commercial entanglements which have so corrupted his empirical and rational capacities that his distance from nature, though conspicuous to Wollstonecraft, is “more than [he] is aware.” Nature provides him with talents that he chooses through his free will to neglect. He ‘never allows himself’ to use them, so they “lie dormant,” thus not only altering him but ensuring that he can no longer recognize nature, its magnetism, or how far he has departed from it. He ‘embrutes’ himself and, being now “brutish,” has lost the humanizing advantages of rationalism that legitimacy and social contract both presuppose and require.

As such, Wollstonecraft’s contempt for these ‘brutes’ is not only excusable but necessary. Brutishness in this case is not merely an unwelcome yet inevitable state for the undeveloped, natural individual to transcend, but a deliberate, calculated subordination of human nature and common good to the interests of personal wealth. In an earlier letter, she insists that she is not “too severe on commerce; but from the manner it is at present carried on, little can be advanced in favour of a pursuit that wears out the most sacred principles of humanity and rectitude.” Speculation, she writes, is “a species of gambling, I might have said fraud,” carried out in the interests of protecting, promoting, and expanding personal property (143), which she holds accountable for the decline and corruption of the developed west. The results are devastating, and Wollstonecraft concludes her critique of commerce with a new – and newly mechanized – analogy for human morality: “Men are strange machines; and their whole system of morality is
in general held together by one grand principle, which loses its force the moment they allow themselves to break with impunity over the bounds which secured their self-respect.” A rejection of self-respect, crucial to the sympathetic, social individual of Wollstonecraft’s social theory (as her feminist disgust with the infantile concerns of her peers makes especially clear), becomes a centrifugal force that corrupts more immediate, and then more distant, and then universally human feelings and relations. Sociability and relationality fall away, and as the individual sinks into the empty business of self-enrichment, so the society, of which she is a constituent, crumples into a meaningless aggregation of broken particles. “A man who ceases to love humanity, and then individuals, as he advances in the chase after wealth; as one clashes with his interest, the other with his pleasures: to do business, as it is termed, every thing must give way; nay, is sacrificed; and all the endearing charities of citizen, husband, father, brother, become empty names” (191).

But this all helps to explain only some of the apparent contempt Wollstonecraft expresses in the Scandinavian letters for the ‘brutish’ people she encounters. To the extent at least that it is true, her critique of the Hamburger and Imlay appears consistent with her comprehensive moral and political theories, and her dissociation from them – strong enough indeed to counter the sympathies of “attraction and adhesion” – is of course inevitable. But commerce, in the speculative gambling sense that exists for the sole purpose of expanding personal property, is not the only form of “development” or “progress” that Wollstonecraft encounters – and builds civilized/brutish binaries around – in the text. After all, the “scarcely human” individuals “so near the brute creation” that Wollstonecraft encounters in her first Swedish letter are far from the ostentatious “ghosts of greatness” (191) she perceives in Hamburg. While practitioners of commerce are brutes by choice, Wollstonecraft also (and more frequently) registers the presence
of “brutes” and “brutishness” in the more familiar sense of the term, found in social contract theory. The “scarcely human” people from her first letter, failing to emerge and observe the arrival of the author “where strangers, especially women, so seldom appeared,” embody both an uncultivated status and the challenge of transcending that status, as they “have little or no imagination to call forth the curiosity necessary to fructify the faint glimmerings of mind which entitles them to rank as lords of the creation. – Had they either, they could not contentedly remain rooted in the clods they so indolently cultivate” (65). They are not brutes by choice; they have not surrendered – because they have not yet acquired or refined – their humanizing, rational capacities. Their ‘indolence’ and their “clods” attest to and explain their brutishness, conjuring not only the immense distance between the civilized (Wollstonecraft) and the uncivilized (the Swedes), but also the immense difficulty of making progress. What after all can motivate the “indolently” content to claim their curiosity, their imagination, and finally their entitled rank within the grand mass?

The question of cultivation is crucial. The Swedes occupy the first five letters of Wollstonecraft’s Residence, and much of what she concludes about them, beginning with her observation about their “clods,” is drawn from her considerations of cultivation. (“Clod,” by the way, if a brief digression will be permitted, is a useful image. Johnson’s dictionary defines it as a “lump of earth or clay,” and the OED shows that it was widely used in and before Wollstonecraft’s time to designate, not only “a blockhead,” aptly suggesting stupidity [in fact, “clodpate” and “clodhead” were used as insults for stupid people in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, appearing for example in Johnson’s dictionary’s entry for “numskulled” (267)], but also “a lump of earth or clay adhering together.” I note two points of interest: First, the word “clod” thus features regularly in descriptions, not of uncultivated nature, but of plowed
and cultivated fields. The OED cites Conrad Heresbach’s *Four Bookes of Husbandry* (1577), stating that “The Feelde is saide to be…broken vp when it is first plowed lying in great Cloddes,” and Dryden’s translation of *The Works of Virgil: Containing his Pastorals, Georgics, and Æneis* (1697), wherein “The Peasant…pounds with Rakes The crumbling Clods.” Second, the “lump…adhering together” provides an image that contrasts sharply with the “mighty whole,” being a much more haphazard and fortuitous arrangement of particles, not adhering to any discernable principles of harmony or order.) Wollstonecraft sees evidence in the Swedes of human progress and perfectibility, but mostly only insofar as they provide a contrast to other, more developed cultures. Noting the absence of curiosity and imagination in the Swedes, and then “recollecting the extreme fondness which the Parisians ever testify for novelty,” for example, she is assured that “their very curiosity appeared to me a proof of the progress they had made in refinement” (65).

In letter two Wollstonecraft fleshes out the implications of Swedish uncultivation by observing that social life in Gothenburg centers not on conversations about “literature” or “public amusements,” but on “the table,” “the bottle,” and “scandal,” since “politics” is “seldom…a subject of continual discussion in a country town in any part of the world. The politics of the place,” she continues, “being on a smaller scale, suits better with the size of their faculties; for, generally speaking, the sphere of observation determines the extent of the mind” (72). Such dinners, as well as the Swedes’ too frequent recourse to alcohol and tobacco, seem to confirm for Wollstonecraft that small towns and small minds produce and restrain one another: “Without the aid of the imagination all the pleasures of the senses must sink into grossness,” she argues, “unless continual novelty serve as a substitute for the imagination, which [is] impossible” (72 – 73). Remarkably, the clearest evidence Wollstonecraft offers of Swedish uncultivation is
their hospitality. Without sustained interest in scientific and aesthetic pursuits, she argues, a society cannot have reflection, and she “never met with much imagination amongst people who had not acquired a habit of reflection” (73). Swedish hospitality, lacking any reference to reflection and imagination, only reveals the hollowness of their uncultivated nature: “The Swedes pique themselves on their politeness; but far from being the polish of a cultivated mind, it consists merely of tiresome forms and ceremonies” (73). Such hospitality is not an indication, as some travelers mistakenly believe, of “proof of goodness of heart,” but “is rather a criterion by which you may form a tolerable estimate of the indolence or vacancy of a head” (73). Later, in her nineteenth letter, she will return to this theme, arguing that “when visiting distant climes, a momentary social sympathy should not be allowed to influence the conclusions of the understanding; for hospitality too frequently leads travellers…to make a false estimate of the virtues of a nation; which, I am now convinced, bear an exact proportion to their scientific improvements” (173). Indeed, Wollstonecraft associates the Swedish brand of hospitality with a state of perpetual illegitimacy, since it is an abuse to freedom, the first and most important principle of legitimate social and political organization: “their over-acted civility is a continual restraint on all your actions” (73).

Clearly, Wollstonecraft develops a notion of Swedish hospitality that securely dissociates herself from them. It may seem that hospitality generates interest in the stranger and her comfort and wellbeing, drawing the subject directly into recognizing and engaging with the other, her needs, her condition, etc. Indeed, from this perspective, it is difficult to discern any substantial difference between what Wollstonecraft calls hospitality and the kinds of natural forces, such as sympathy, that also (ostensibly!) function to generate interest in the stranger. But Wollstonecraft argues that hospitality, on the contrary, completely estranges; that, indeed, in the context of
hospitality even the “momentary social sympathy” of the traveller must be suppressed. It seems that Swedish hospitality is a form of engagement with the other that ultimately only nurtures mediation, referencing not the other or her needs at all, but the “forms and ceremonies” that are meant to organize interpersonal contact from a distant (and probably distantly past) perspective. To that extent, she appears to be taking up those elements of Rousseau’s arguments that identify the corrupting influence of mediation for the bourgeois, analyzed by Jean Starobinski. Because, as Rousseau argues, mediation is not merely symptomatic but a problem in its own right, notoriously difficult to overcome, any resolution to the problems Wollstonecraft associates with hospitality (and that reinforces her dissociation from the Swedes) will be slow and arduous, and must foreground cultivation. There are two (not always totally distinct) forms of cultivation that appear in her Short Residence: cultivation of minds and cultivation of land.

4. CULTIVATION AND “ROCKS…PILED ON ROCKS”

It should be clear already, from the terms by which Wollstonecraft dissociates herself from the Swedes, that cultivated and uncultivated minds are distinguished foremost by the presence and activity of the imagination. Recall her comments on reflection, politics, and the imagination at the Swedish table, for example, or her wonder at the poverty of curiosity and imagination that contrasts the Swedes with the French. Even in Norwegians (of whom Wollstonecraft’s representations are generally more sympathetic), there is a marked contrast in the cultivation – and thus imagination – of minds: “As their minds were totally uncultivated,” she writes, narrating “a sort of conversation of gestures” she has with women during a dinner, “I did not lose much, perhaps gained, by not being able to understand them; for fancy probably filled up, more to their advantage, the void in the picture” (114). She describes her relationship with these women as one of asymmetrical interest: while they “excited [her] sympathy,” they merely
took “pleasure” in “look[ing] at” her, since she “appeared so good-natured.” In this exchange, we see a contrast between Wollstonecraft, enjoying the use of sympathy (humanizing her, as again it reinforces her membership in the “mighty whole”) and profiting from an imagination that, she believes, overestimates her conversers, and the women, who superficially and childishly relish her appearance. (These women, it is worth noting, suffer some of the brutishness of the Swedes, but have evidently progressed at least somewhat further. They are “a mixture of indolence and vivacity” [113], she writes, and while she observes that this dinner “was conducted with great hospitality,” their entertainment includes “several songs,” including “translations of some patriotic French ones” [114]. The Norwegians, she believes, “are arriving at the epoch which precedes the introduction of the arts and sciences” [103]).

It is likewise in Norway that Wollstonecraft comes to recognize the valuable link between the cultivation of minds and land. “As the farmers cut away the wood, they clear the ground,” she writes, arguing that the “gradual reduction, of their forests, will probably meliorate their climate; and their manners will naturally improve in the same ratio as industry requires ingenuity” (121). Wollstonecraft sees in Norway a graphic depiction of the familiar enlightenment narratives of improvement and cultivation – a narrative that sees land (and often people) as a natural resource to be transformed, through contact with the rational mind, from its

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123 It does not necessarily thereby humanize her interlocutors. Wollstonecraft does not present sympathy as a force that binds or connects separate people or their interests. Rather, she represents it as a force that is deeply subjective: the spontaneous and involuntary feeling of sympathy humanizes, not the rationally calculable interrelatedness that it then implies. It is important to remember that the sympathy she describes in the broken particle passage occurs in isolation, reconciling not individuals to other individuals, but a single individual to a mighty whole. Thus, while Wollstonecraft’s sympathy at dinner might seem to imply a mutually humanizing force between her and her companions, this conclusion does not follow the logic or dynamic of sympathy as Wollstonecraft represents it. (This does not mean that, in my view, Wollstonecraft’s one-sided sympathy with these women necessarily dehumanizes her interlocutors, however. We will return to the lopsided dynamics of Wollstonecraft’s collective identification / dissociation below.)
savage state into ordered, fecund land. The cultivated land, in turn, acts upon the mind, first by forcing it to confront the challenges of mass agriculture and, second, by freeing it to think about supposedly higher order problems, lending minds and lands a symbiotic, mutually profitable relationship to one another. Moreover, the relationship unfolds in a causal, material narrative of perfectibility. “The world requires,” she writes, “the hand of man to perfect it; and as this task naturally unfolds the faculties he exercises, it is physically impossible that he should have remained in Rousseau’s golden age of stupidity” (121 – 122). By indicating the physical impossibility of perpetual savagery in an agricultural context, Wollstonecraft signals the empirical (as opposed to what Boyle might call occult) conditions of the course of human perfectibility within the mighty whole of providential harmony. One can compare Wollstonecraft’s arguments here to alternative arguments about progress and perfectibility that celebrate the “occult,” or mystical, nature of human progress and history, advanced for example in Anna Letitia Barbauld’s poem “Eighteen Hundred and Eleven” (1812):

There walks a Spirit o’er the peopled earth,

Secret his progress is, unknown his birth;

Moody and viewless as the changing wind,

No force arrests his foot, no chains can bind;

Where’er he turns, the human brute awakes,

And, roused to better life, his sordid hut forsakes:

He thinks, he reasons, glows with purer fires,

Feels finer wants, and burns with new desires:

Obedient Nature follows where he leads… (215 – 223)
The spirit of progress in Barbauld’s alternative history is extrinsic and unknowable. It is not produced by but rather spontaneously acts upon individuals and societies. While her narrative agrees that “Obedient Nature” is cultivated and determined by human beings, the consciousness and rationality that make this cultivation possible are imposed by a force external to both humans and the empirical forces of nature. Barbauld’s account leaves little room for the kind of agency and self-determination that Wollstonecraft, by associating the cultivation of lands directly with the cultivation of minds in material, causal narratives, insists upon, subordinating possibilities for radical social change to forces beyond human agency and empirical epistemology.

Given her claims about the empirical bases of perfectibility and social change, it is important to note that while her *Short Residence* occasionally registers images of cultured, productive lands perfected by “the hand of man,” she concentrates much more on wild, uncultivated lands. With emphasis on the untamed wildness of northern landscapes, she advances a theme increasingly familiar in late eighteenth-century and romantic thought about the subordinate role of the far north in the context of human history. In his 1830 lectures on human history, for example, Hegel writes about the importance of climate, arguing that “all development involves a reflection of the spirit within itself in opposition to nature,” and that “where nature is too powerful, [human] liberation becomes more difficult” (154). The promises of enlightenment freedom and perfectibility can only be achieved in temperate, maritime climates, since “[t]he frost which grips the inhabitants of Lappland and the fiery heat of Africa are forces too powerful a nature for man to resist, or for the spirit to achieve free movement and to reach that degree of richness which is the precondition and source of a fully developed mastery of reality.” Echoing Wollstonecraft’s insistence that the Swedes only “exert themselves to find the food necessary to sustain life,” Hegel argues that in the far north, “dire necessity can
never be escaped or overcome; man is continually forced to direct his attention to nature” (155). Likewise, in Rousseau’s Essay on the Origin of Languages (published posthumously), the north is associated with inhibited progress in very similar terms, since, he argues, “where the earth yields nothing except through toil, and where life seems to come more from the arms than the heart, where men are ceaselessly busy providing for their subsistence, they hardly think of pleasanter ties.” In such a place, he writes, “[e]verything is limited by physical motives.” The liberty that makes legitimacy possible in enlightenment political theory is physically obviated by the dominance of nature and natural needs in the far north.

For Wollstonecraft, since she visits during unexpectedly bright and refreshing summer months, the clearest expression of the “too powerful” force of the wilderness, and the sharpest contrast with tamed and productive fields, is not the far North’s ice and snow but its abundance of rocks. Rocks in the summer embody the stagnation and hostilities of the harsh winters of the place as, in a passage that notes the clouds and eagles “high amongst the rocks,” she observes that “[t]he current of life seemed congealed at the source: all were not frozen; for it was summer, you remember; but every thing appeared so dull, that I waited to see ice, in order to reconcile me to the absence of gaiety” (88). The rocks of Wollstonecraft’s Scandinavia graphically display Hegel’s observation about nature encumbering “free movement” in cold, northern climates. The seemingly unqualified oppressiveness of this exposed and supposedly miserable climate is unambiguously displayed in letter eleven, with a gothic analogy evoking the primitive miseries and poverty of pre-revolutionary France. Exploring the coast of Norway, she writes that “It

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124 A version of these arguments prove very durable, featuring heavily for example in Hannah Arendt’s arguments about the distinctions between labor, which she associates with life-sustaining bodily processes and thus slavery (“To labor meant to be enslaved by necessity” [83]) and work, which destroys nature and its dominance (139) while reifying the subject and its content, objectifying it in the world.

would be difficult to form an idea of the place, if you have never seen one of these rocky coasts,” continuing that “we saw about two hundred houses crowded together, under a very high rock – still higher appearing above. Talk not of bastilles! To be born here, was to be bastilled by nature – shut out from all that opens the understanding, or enlarges the heart” (131). The gothic misery and claustrophobia of the rocks intensifies as she goes for a walk, “mounting near two hundred steps made round a rock,” where “[t]he ocean, and these tremendous bulwarks, enclosed me on every side. I felt confinement, and wished for wings” (131). Feeling “her breath oppressed,” she begins to reflect on the lives of the townspeople below, “shudder[ing] at the thought of receiving existence, and remaining here, in the solitude of ignorance” where “the character of the inhabitants is as uncultivated…as their abode” (131). In a land where only “traffic” is available, she writes not only that “[n]othing genial…appears around this place, or within its circle of rocks,” but that nothing is here “to humanise these beings,” who spend all their time shut up (she describes her own stay in this town as a “confinement” spent tediously “looking at tiles, overhung by rocks” [132]) with tobacco and brandy, spoiling their “breath, teeth, clothes, and furniture” (131 – 132).

When she makes her return from Norway (about which, again, she is on the whole more sympathetic) to Sweden, she again finds herself stuck “amongst the rocks,” too slowly advancing along a calm sea. The captain, having no compass, assures her that he can steer their course “with the rocks,” but as “he was half a fool,” she anxiously fears that they “were straying amidst a labyrinth of rocks, without a clue.” Indeed, she writes, “we turned round one rock only to see another, equally destitute of the tokens we were in search of to tell us where we were” (154 – 155). With this half-fool, and through these rocks, she is reintroduced to the “insensibility in the very movements of” the Swedes – the “sluggish peasants” who conduct and house her with
“their share of cunning” (155) – at times exasperated with “the stupid obstinacy of some of these half alive beings” (156). In the far north, characterized with a stifling and oppressive imagery of “Rocks…piled on rocks” (67), the world is isolated from cultivation and perfectibility, and its constrained inhabitants are deprived of opportunities to enrich and expand their imaginations.

But, at the same time, it is hard to ignore that the most inspired and imaginative prose of the text is very often, precisely, Wollstonecraft’s meditations upon and reactions to all these rocks. During the unequalled “beauty of the northern summer’s evening and night,” for example, she “contemplated all nature at rest; the rocks even grown darker in their appearance, looked as if they partook of the general repose, and reclined more heavily on their foundation” (69). And while oppressed with the empty hospitality of the Swedish table, she imagines slipping away to gather in the scenery and majesty of the rocks: “let me, my kind strangers, escape sometimes into your fir groves, wander on the margin of your beautiful lakes, or climb your rocks to view still others in endless perspective; which, piled by more than giant’s hand, scale the heavens to intercept its rays, or to receive the parting tinge of lingering day – day that, scarcely softened into twilight, allows the freshening breeze to wake, and the moon to burst forth in all her glory to glide with solemn elegance through the azure expanse” (74 – 75). In these moments, some of the most rewarding passages for readers of her Short Residence, Wollstonecraft slips into poetry, drawing (like Wordsworth’s troubled speaker fumbling numbly through the woods until he encounters the leech collector) suddenly more heavily on metaphorical and figurative language: “The rocks,” she writes, “which tossed their fantastic heads so high were often covered with pines and firs, varied in the most picturesque manner” (89). Indeed, in a later and very telling moment, while riding beneath a midnight, Nordic moon, she writes in a particularly rich passage that “it is not the queen of night alone [the moon] who reigns here in all her splendor, though the
sun, loitering just below the horizon, decks her with a golden tinge from his car, illuminating the cliffs that hide him; the heavens also, of a clear softened blue, throw her forward, and the evening star appears a lesser moon to the naked eye. The huge shadows of the rocks, fringed with firs, concentrating the views, without darkening them, exciting that tender melancholy which, sublimating the imagination, exalts, rather than depresses the mind” (94).

It might seem that Wollstonecraft approaches the rocks with ambivalence, regarding them at times as oppressive forces against the cultivation and perfectibility of the natural and narrow mind, and at other times as sources of inspiration, expanding, exercising, and even improving the mind. But in the next paragraph, Wollstonecraft clarifies this ambiguity by drawing up a distinction between herself and her companions, and specifically by distinguishing how each experiences and relates to this scenery of the moon and the rocks. For her companions, their relationship to this beguiling midnight is emphatically somatic, and calls to mind the basic, utilitarian needs of the laboring body: “My companions fell asleep: -- fortunately they did not snore…” (94). For Wollstonecraft, she transcends the bodily demands that preoccupy her companions, and registers the satisfaction and perhaps surprised relief that their organic, corporal concerns – specifically their snores – do not harassingly interfere with her higher-order, more imaginative reflections on the moon and midnight rocks: “…and I contemplated,” the sentence continues, “fearless of idle questions, a night such as I had never before seen or felt to charm the senses, and calm the heart…A vague pleasurable sentiment absorbed me, as I opened my bosom to the embraces of nature; and my soul rose to its author, with the chirping of the solitary birds, which began to feel, rather than see, advancing day.” Indeed, in stark contrast to her dozing companions, Wollstonecraft experiences “a kind of expectation that made me almost afraid to breathe, lest I should break the charm. I saw the sun – and sighed” (94).
A troubling dynamic begins to emerge. For the Scandinavians, the profusion of rocks is a constant and oppressive monument to the wild, untamed and untamable nature that, surrounding them like a “bastille,” impedes the expansion and improvement of their minds, keeping them from transcending a state of “half alive,” “scarcely human” brutishness. At the same time, it facilitates Wollstonecraft’s own progress and perfectibility. By using the rocks as a recurring trope to develop a narrative that reconciles poetry and ethnographic history, Wollstonecraft embodies the very catalysts of progress that, in her observations about hospitality, the Scandinavians lack: “the cultivation of the arts and sciences” (73). How can these same rocks improve her mind (the subject of aesthetic and scientific production), and explain the unimprovability of theirs (the dissociated, disinterested objects of such production)? How is this not a contradiction? (The potential contradiction can be put in several different ways: one, the same empirical phenomena, rocks for example, can expand one mind and inhibit another; two, the same empirical phenomena makes the cultivation of one mind possible and makes the cultivation of another impossible; etc.) Does it not problematize Wollstonecraft’s claims about sympathy and the mighty whole?

Indeed, it gets worse. For Wollstonecraft insists throughout her career that all individuals are equal (and should thus respond to the same phenomena under the same conditions in essentially similar – and thus essentially humanizing – ways), but she acknowledges that material conditions from region to region and from class to class can compromise the appearances of equality. This results in people regarding and treating one another differently.126 Nobody, she writes, is “stupid by nature,” and national characters hastily drawn up by travelers “do not discriminate the natural [in which she includes climate] from the acquired difference” (92). In

126 Many critics use the following passage from letter five to understate or excuse Wollstonecraft’s apparent contempt for the Scandinavians.
fact, such indiscriminate ‘national characters’ and presumptions of natural inequality have been used to justify the most abhorrent of human practices, “because they did not consider that slaves, having no object to stimulate industry, have not their faculties sharpened by the only thing that can exercise them, self-interest. Others have been brought forward as brutes, having no aptitude for the arts and sciences, only because the progress of improvement had not reached that stage which produces them” (92 – 93). But it is not only that the uncultivated nature of Scandinavian landscapes inspires Wollstonecraft while paradoxically explaining Scandinavian brutishness. As Scandinavian cultivation (including industry, which ought to ‘sharpen’ their “faculties” and eventually humanize them, drawing them away from the empty gestures of hospitality and into the sympathies of the grand mass) tames and transforms nature, it compromises the wildness of the landscape. It thus compromises a source of inspiration and perfectibility that Wollstonecraft, as a writer and historian, comes to depend upon: in fact, surprisingly, she regularly resents Scandinavian cultivation and industry.

In an early, visceral example, she approaches “a little village called Kvistram,” where she “was particularly impressed by the beauty of the situation,” yet she notes that “[a]s we drew near, the loveliest banks of wild flowers variegated the prospect, and promised to exhale odours to add to the sweetness of the air, the purity of which you could almost see, alas! not smell, for the putrifying herrings, which they use as manure, after the oil has been extracted, spread over the patches of the earth, claimed by cultivation, destroyed every other” (86 – 87). Surveying Sweden, Wollstonecraft begins to enter into historical and scientific meditations, believing that “Sweden appeared to me the country in the world most proper to form the botanist and natural historian,” since “every object seemed to remind me of the creation of things, of the first efforts of sportive nature.” She even begins to think explicitly of the role of sociability in the
perfectibility of human nature, but, she regrets, “[t]his train of reflections might have led me further, in every sense of the word; but I could not escape from the detestable evaporation of the herrings, which poisoned all my pleasure” (87). The offensive “herring effluvia” (90) marks only one form of industry that, paralyzing the progress of her own mind and imagination, Wollstonecraft regrets in the *Residence*. Later, approaching Christiana (now Oslo), Wollstonecraft does indeed notice some cultivated fields, but they “graced a scene which still retained so much of its native wildness, that the art which appeared, seemed so necessary, it was scarcely perceived.” Cultivation is okay here, because it is not apparent. No so of its mines, for “as we drove down the mountain, [the view] was almost spoilt by the depredations committed on the rocks to make alum. I did not know the process. – I only saw that the rocks looked red after they had been burnt; and regretted that the operation should leave a quantity of rubbish, to introduce an image of human industry in the shape of destruction” (142). These rocks, bearing the literal trace of human industry, do not reveal a moment of civilizing transition and the progress of sharpened faculties, but a regrettable kind of devolution, from rocks to rubbish. Later, taking in the scenery after leaving Christiana, she appreciates some agricultural cultivation, but punctuates these observations by noting that “[t]he appearance of the river [Glomma?] above and below the falls is very picturesque, the ruggedness of the scenery disappearing as the torrent subsides into a peaceful stream. But I did not like to see a number of saw-mills crowded together close to the cataracts; they destroyed the harmony of the prospect” (153). Later, visiting Trollhättan, she writes that “I own that the first view of the cascade disappointed me: and the sight of the works, as they advanced, though a grand proof of human industry, was not calculated to warm the fancy,” adding that “[a]midst the awful roaring of the impetuous torrents, the noise of human instruments, and the bustle of workmen, even the
blowing up of the rocks, when grand masses trembled in the darkened air – only resembled the insignificant sport of children” (159 – 160). By associating ‘grand proofs’ of Scandinavian industry with halted scientific and historical observations, interruptions to aesthetic production, and useless child’s play, Wollstonecraft associates the means of Scandinavian cultivation with devolution and counter-progression, even as she continues to regret their brutish clods and empty hospitality as evidence of their failure to progress.

We can see, in the context of Wollstonecraft’s double vision of Scandinavian cultivation, how appropriate the image of her moonlight passage really is. Her corporeal processes are suspended as her mind expands through space and time, touching on history, mythology, poetry, and even the substance of providential harmony. Nature and “its author” absorb her as day slowly, regrettably approaches. She is “afraid to breathe,” while her companions, in sharp contrast, only breathe, their snores present even in their absence: the very possibility of their snoring suggests itself to her, which like “idle questions” would certainly inhibit her reflections and spoil her transcendent experience. It is only when day arrives and the enchanting experience of the night ends that her own bodily processes resume: although “afraid to breathe” so as not to “break the charm” of the night, she writes, “I saw the sun – and sighed.” And while the passage clearly and emphatically privileges the transcendent charms of Wollstonecraft’s psychological and spiritual experiences, it is with the return to corporeal concerns that error is corrected, and that actual, practical, measurable progress is resumed: “One of my companions,” the next sentence relates, “now awake, perceiving that the postilion had mistaken the road, began to swear at him, and roused the other two, who reluctantly shook off sleep” (94). It does not escape the reader’s notice that, had her companions been awake, they would not likely have become lost
nor does Wollstonecraft’s tone of annoyance at the swearing reluctance with which they correct their course.

With this scene in mind, we can reevaluate Wollstonecraft’s claim that “[t]he world requires, I see, the hand of man to perfect it,” and that “[i]t is very fortunate that men are, a long time, but just above the brute creation…because it is the patient labour of men, who are only seeking for a subsistence, which produces whatever embellishes existence, affording leisure for the cultivation of the arts and sciences, that lift man so far above his first state” (121 – 122). The humanizing promise of the improvability of the world, apparent both in Wollstonecraft’s transcendent experience of the almost sacred night and in the natural forces of sympathy that draw her into the harmony of the mighty whole, requires brutish people and their laboring bodies, who are thus – if temporarily – excluded from (or, better, subordinated within) that promise and that whole. To be sure, they are a part of the slow process and harmony of perfectibility, but they are not conscious contributors to, calculators of, or enjoyers of that harmony. They are not beneficiaries of the aesthetic and empirical effects of that harmony and its phenomena. Their physical needs alone put into motion the machinery and the gravitation that will only much later put them (or others, in the present) into touch with God and with each other in truly legitimate, rationally sound, sympathetically mortared social arrangements – consistent with and in harmony with the empirical principles wherein the association, the social individual, consists. [pg 355 of vindic texts]

Meanwhile, the experiences of the transcendent mind are at odds with the experiences of the laboring body. This does not mean however that Wollstonecraft rejects or expels the laboring body, as a mere animal for example, from the harmonizing logic of human community – her relationship with them creates and suspends both collective identification that extends from her
to her companions and dissociation that alienates her from them. A transcendent mind meditating on the moon is of a different order than that of the dozing riders – only such a transcendent mind can recognize the broader necessity of their “patient labour” (whose rational and empirical meaning is otherwise lost in the immediacy of mere instinctual and physical satisfaction of bodily needs) in the first place. Thus, a conflict. On the one hand, subordinates ought to be treated as equals. “We must love our servants,” she writes, observing that providing servants with “a different kind of food from their masters…appears to me a remnant of barbarism,” adding that “I do not know a more agreeable sight than to see servants part of a family.” Since “attendants [have] human feelings, as well as forms,” treating them as equals creates a symbiotic, and mutually (if not symmetrically) humanizing relationship with them (76 – 77). Remember, after all, that Wollstonecraft rejected polygenetic explanations of racial differences, and thus refused to regard racial and cultural differences as naturally essential differences. On the other hand, she acknowledges that although it is “delightful to love our fellow-creatures…I begin to think that I should not like to live continually in the country, with people whose minds have such a narrow range,” since her “heart would frequently be interested; but [her] mind would languish for more companionable society” (84), adding later that “I am…half convinced, that I could not live very comfortably exiled from the countries where mankind are so much further advanced in knowledge, imperfect as it is, and unsatisfactory to the thinking mind.” Her thoughts, she adds, “fly from this wilderness to the polished circles of the world,” though the “vices and follies” (122) of that world are also disappointing.

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127 Gravity, implied again by the “attraction of adhesion,” is a useful metaphor here. The gravitational pull between two objects is mutual but not symmetrical, unless the mass of the two objects is equal.

128 See Scott Juengel for more about Wollstonecraft and monogenesis.
In effect, Wollstonecraft’s representation of the Scandinavians reflects a perspective heavily informed by a broader understanding of, and pursuit of, universal human history. She says as much, arguing first (as we have seen) that travellers “whose works have served as materials for the compilers of universal histories” generally provide “a national character, which is rarely just” (92), stating much later that “I do not pretend to sketch a national character; but merely to note the present state of morals and manners, as I trace the progress of the world’s improvement,” adding however that “my principle object has been to take such a dispassionate view of men as will lead me to form a just idea of the nature of man” (172). In fact, Wollstonecraft contradicts the former of these two assertions, insisting that, “I am persuaded that I have formed a very just opinion of the character of the Norwegians, without being able to hold converse with them” (113). (What, after all, constitutes a “just” national character? Are not “acquired” differences, as much as “natural” differences [whatever those might be in the “mighty whole” that constitutes humankind], significant in its execution? Would a just “national character” not consist substantially of “acquired” differences?) More importantly, however, Wollstonecraft situates herself, if not in the ranks of natural historians, then at least among empirical observers whose data contributes to natural histories.

In other words, Wollstonecraft’s claims and contradictions pertaining to community with (and dissociation from) other people must be understood in a context that, at least ostensibly, foregrounds temporality. Her references to “universal histories” and “dispassionate” ethnography reframe questions of social organization and political legitimacy as questions about objects that are not only material but also temporal. The earlier troubled binary between the legitimate “some man” and the illegitimate “savage” is complicated as temporality becomes an increasingly important ingredient in questions of legitimacy and collectivity in romantic and post-romantic
political thought: Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is an especially legible example of this shift. *Short Residence* helps us to register some of the difficulties and contradictions inherent in universal human history projects, and to get insight into how this project emerges as an alternative to liberal theories of contractarian legitimacy. By the end of the eighteenth century, enlightenment discourses about the objective conditions of legitimate social and political arrangements largely transition to discourses of universal (and then national) human history, just as, at the end of the seventeenth century, the discourse of embodied legitimacy (of princes, kings, and sons) shifted into a discourse about institutional legitimacy. While shifting from discourses of embodied to institutional legitimacy foregrounded the consent of the governed, the shift from discourses of the objective to those of the temporal conditions of institutional legitimacy foregrounds the possibility – and inevitability – of social and institutional change. The savage is no longer merely the counterpoint of some man: he is also in some small (but measurable) degree enfranchised, at least ostensibly, helping to put the forces of social change and perfectibility into motion. The narrative of social and political legitimacy is not one of the savage disappearing into the legitimate citizen, switching from a purely physical nature to a moral nature, at which point one half of the binary erases the other, but one of progress that assigns rationally calculable necessity and legitimacy to each. And so women, slaves, Inuit, servants, Swedes, etc, being all parts of the mighty whole, collectively constitute the legitimacy of human community. We can put it like this: some political philosophy, including Wollstonecraft’s, begins by the end of the eighteenth century to take up more seriously the challenge that novelists had posed, incorporating narrative and protagonists (apparent again in the slow progress of *Geist*) more substantially into its formulations of social legitimacy – but it has also unwittingly taken up some of the novelists’ fatal flaws.
A fine line is drawn here. The necessity of brutes, “the patient labour of men, who are only seeking for a subsistence, which produces whatever embellishes existence, affording leisure for the cultivation of the arts and sciences, that lift man so far above his first state,” does not seem to distinguish substantially enough between the need for brutes of the deep past (our own ancestors) and brutes of today (the other), even as it clearly distinguishes the “patient” laborer from the leisured aesthete. Wollstonecraft’s experience of the Nordic moon, to return to our previous example, certainly “embellishes” her “existence,” seeming to “lift [her] so far above [her] first state,” and this experience would not be possible, as we have seen, without the brutishness of her companions. Less trivially, even though Wollstonecraft consistently derides the exploitation of other people by repeatedly and explicitly deploying abolitionist rhetoric, there is nothing in her narrative of progress (since human history’s progress, always containing both civilized and savage people that determine one another as such, is not strictly linear) that excludes the possibility of further exploitation. Wollstonecraft’s ostensible enfranchisement of the Scandinavian brutes (acknowledging their human form and feelings), juxtaposed with her dissociation from them (which both justifies and suppresses her level of dependence upon them and their labor), goes a long way toward dramatizing how far her political philosophy has fallen short of resolving what Susan Buck-Morss has called the “double vision” of enlightenment thought, which stresses private property and liberty as essential preconditions to humanization even as it suppresses the dependence of such institutions on slavery, or dehumanization. “British liberty meant the protection of private property,” Buck-Morss writes, “and slaves were private property” (28), adding that even Rousseau, a father of romantic thought and the French Revolution, “declared all men equal and saw private property as the source of inequality, but he
never put two and two together to discuss French slavery for economic profit as central to arguments of both equality and property” (33).

A critique of Wollstonecraft’s political theory thus requires what Edward Said calls a “contrapuntal reading,” reflecting the pursuit of “an understanding of what is involved when an author shows, for instance, that a colonial sugar plantation is seen as important to the process of maintaining a particular style of life in England.”¹²⁹ To be fair, the “particular style of life” Wollstonecraft upholds does indeed entail the leisure necessary for the cultivation of arts and sciences while also therefore presupposing the necessity of (past and present) brutes – but it also explicitly forbids slavery and diminishes the importance of private property overall. She is not Adam Smith, after all, and her “attraction of adhesion” is no invisible hand. Understanding how such a “style of life” is possible, or if it is possible at all, requires a closer examination of the relationship between legitimacy and temporality.

5. REPRODUCTION, TEMPORALITY, AND LEGITIMACY

And yet only the most cursory of explorations of this vastly complex topic, the relationship between temporality and legitimacy, will be possible here. Therefore, my objective in this final section will not be to resolve the open questions of Wollstonecraft’s historiography as it is complicated and reinforced by her Short Residence, but to lay out more clearly the nature and the implications of those questions. Insofar as her theory of legitimacy constitutes an alternative to rational theories of legitimacy that presuppose transcending an impossible-to-transcend savage/some man binary (by bringing the savage and some man into the same mighty

¹²⁹ Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism, 66. A similar sort of the erasure of or suppression of the laboring body in order to emphasize and even facilitate narratives of progress is also present in the logic of enclosure: “Historians have noted that the great age of parliamentary enclosure, between 1760 and 1820, is a testimony…to the rage for improvement.” E. P. Thompson, Customs in Common, 110.
whole), how has she found temporality a useful mechanism? How does this temporally conditioned legitimacy complicate her materialist premise of the all-inclusive, rationally objective and necessary legitimacy of a mighty whole? Indeed, just how temporal is her temporality?

We ought to note first of all that while there is something vaguely eschatological about legitimacy as history and the perfectibility of human nature, the content and development of historical experience is not erased by its realization. The notion of the “process” makes this clear, evident not only in the turn to dialectic (Hegel famously argues that “The True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development”)\textsuperscript{130} but in the residual premise of objectivity that directs historical processes: Hannah Arendt notes the “quality of permanence in the model or image” that organizes work, arguing that, as in the making of material objects, “one eternal idea presid[es] over a multitude of perishable things” – an idea that is derived from Platonic thought (142 – 143). Framed in this way, legitimacy is less the product of time than the process of its own constructing: it is the making objective, or external, or real, the always already presupposed objectivity, externality, and reality of proper social organization. Indeed, some critics have detected something of this logic in Wollstonecraft, and especially in her feminist writings, very often found in criticism focused upon the concept of motherhood in her work.

Tilottama Rajan for example compares Wollstonecraft’s and Hegel’s conceptions of historical reproduction and generation, noting that Hegel’s philosophy of nature posits reproduction as “a bio-psychic economy that joins the body, culture, and the aesthetic to the destiny of the species,” involving “a constant self-destruction and renewal of the body and the

\textsuperscript{130} G. W. F. Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, 11.
species through the sacrifice of parts to the whole” (218). Through reproduction, “[t]he individual assimilates what is other (including the negative in experience), and ‘re-produces’ itself anew: across time the species takes in what is different, yet continues the same” (212). In a “sacrificial logic [that] extends obviously enough to the social body,” Hegel argues that “[w]ithin the body, the animal assimilates foreign matter as food, but also assimilates and reproduces itself. For the body consists of members, each of which ‘draws on the others for its own needs,’” even while maintaining mutual hostility (218). Reproduction in this sense is “the underlying semiosis of a history that has as its goal society, not community” (218 – Rajan draws upon Jean-Luc Nancy’s distinctions between these words, according to which community sustains a sense of the individual and its “singularities” [214] whereas society, a la the Scottish Enlightenment, subsumes her into the whole. Regarding the question of “whether reproduction respects singularity,” Rajan argues that “[t]hough gender focuses this problem with particular intensity on the bodies of women, the Jacobin novel generalizes it across the social body” [221]). Rajan, seeing in Wollstonecraft’s work as well as in that of other radical novelists of her time a “prevalence…of miscarriages, (symbolic) infanticides, and other forms of withdrawal from domestic economy” (212), posits Wollstonecraft’s The Wrongs of Woman (1798) and its inherent

131 Hegel’s description here draws upon distinctions between animal and plant reproduction, plants posing a radical (but lower-order) alternative since they do not require a gender binary and, more importantly, since their reproduction does not sustain narratives of linear, generational-historical time that thus puts alterity and sameness in dialectic relation to one another – they reproduce “laterally” (212). Interestingly, the association between Wollstonecraft and plant sexuality – as a means of registering her discrediting of domestic, generational reproductivity – is not new. See Greta L. Lafleur on Richard Polwhele’s popular diatribe against “Jacobin gender politics” called The Unsex’d Females (1800), for example, which is a response both to A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and to Erasmus Darwin’s Loves of the Plants (1789), “an epic poem based on Linnaean taxonomy that described the sex lives of plants in pornographic detail. To Polwhele,” Lafleur writes, “Wollstonecraft’s radical feminist politics and Darwin’s lavishly copulating flora both reflected the same social ill: the violation of “NATURE’S law” (7) of feminine modesty” (93).
Jacobin sympathies as part of a “de-jection of the semiosis of reproduction” (223). By rejecting reproduction in her novels, she privileges community and its possibilities for social change over the limiting paradigm of enlightenment civil society.\(^{132}\)

At the same time, Thomas H. Ford writes about the conflicting meanings of motherhood in feminist discourses, and about the extent to which Wollstonecraft as “foremother” of English-speaking feminism validates her place as a pioneer in its ranks even as it leaves her vulnerable to criticism that paints her as a bourgeois agent of “feminist misogyny.” Reading the same Jacobin novel, *The Wrongs of Woman*, Ford argues that the main character’s “use of language, writing or speaking as a mother, effectively precludes her from becoming a feminist agent,” and that “[p]aradoxically, her efforts to educate her daughter to a feminist future entrap Maria herself in a repetition of her own past repression” (192). This ‘paradox’ of feminist anti-feminism represents a near material embodiment of Hegel’s schema of reproduction, in which the different and the same are appropriated and sustained by the same agency. And yet, Ford argues, the effect of this paradoxical practice is still open to radical social change, since “through invoking [a] nonfamilial audience, Maria’s critique of partiality [the partiality of western enlightenment civilization that excludes women from participating] is liberated for a different collective political subject” (195). This is possible, Ford writes, because, again, of a rejection of biological reproduction. Specifically, Ford argues that Wollstonecraft casts her readers not as mothers but as midwives, a practical occupation that offers “ways of gaining independence from immediate familial male

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\(^{132}\) At least one critic has argued that this logic applies to Wollstonecraft’s reviews as well: “much of the figurative language in Wollstonecraft’s work for the *Analytical Review* suggests a repudiation of mothering, as it too often results in the reproduction of conventional femininity,” suggesting, however, that “when Wollstonecraft begins *Maria* in 1795, motherhood is reconsidered, maternal metaphor is refigured to suggest greater creativity, and ridicule gives way to ‘melancholy reflections’ that acknowledges the sustenance sentimental literature provides to women with limited freedoms” (Tegan 359).
power” and which does so by introducing “the possibility of a new order [that] is not the mother who gives birth, but the woman who assists” (197). According to Ford, “[r]eading…can be understood as a kind of midwifery” since “[a] shift in textual apprehension makes different ways of acting possible” (198) and because “[b]oth reading and midwifery bring forth new forms of life, new ways of living and new conceptions of the lived” (199). Since, in motherhood, “social reproduction is tied to sexual reproduction” and “offers comparatively limited potential for social transformation” (199), casting her readers in the role as midwives entails “reading history as the narrative of a collective subject” (200). Ford thus posits “the principle of composition in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman [as] largely one of aggregation,” enacting the binding logic of the grand mass (202). But midwifery purchases the possibility for less “limited” social progress, by disengaging from biological reproduction and thus allowing for collective agency and greater perfectibility through social progress, only by losing something else. For what is left behind in exchanging the mother’s body for the midwife’s? The answer, of course, is labor.

The midwife’s relationship to generation and reproduction is one that foregrounds, not somatic processes only, but the narrative of arts and sciences that situate the body and its processes as objects of knowledge and control (which then, in turn, become tropes for the control over nature suggested by enlightenment thought – this is the point Sterne satirizes with his famous man-midwife in Tristram Shandy, Dr. Slop). This is precisely what is entailed by its being a discipline. Through the midwife, the construction of her discipline, and the priority it places upon the narrative of arts and sciences (which makes the reproducing body its object), the process of reproduction, sexual and then social, is alienated from the reproducing body. It is

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133 On the importance of midwifery in the eighteenth century for both enlightenment thought and British nationalism, see Lisa Forman Cody, Birthing the Nation.
made objective by its codification within the scientific discipline in the same way that, as Hegel argues, the processes and materials from the past are made objective by historiography, and then given to its consumers as a present: “When we study the past and occupy ourselves with a remote world, a present opens up before the mind, a present created out of the mind’s own activity and bestowed upon it as a reward for its exertions. The events are various, but their general significance, their inner quality and coherence, are one. This circumstance cancels out the past and raises the event into the present” (Lectures on World History 20). The laboring body (the mother, the bridge-builder, the miner) is the agent of reproduction – not through its own labors (which smack of brutishness), but only insofar as it is recognized as such by the enlightenment discipline (midwifery, historiography, poetic ethnography) that takes it up as its object, therefore situating it within the narrative of the progress of the grand mass. But what kind of subject results? What kind of object? What is their relation to one another? To ask this question in a different way (a way that returns us to the epistemological problems underlying social experience), what might familiarity between these two parties look like?

When identifying collectively with the Scandinavians, Wollstonecraft conceives of the other as a familiar – as a complement to the humanizing forces of sympathy. The other is a subject with which she is embedded in a mighty whole of social organization, with whom she shares mutual responsibilities and benefits from the produce of self-determined agency, especially as regards cultivation. This is one kind of history, a history of familiarity that points to nature and the force it applies to human community, linking the nature of the individual to that of the grand mass. But she also makes of the other an object of knowledge, another kind of history. She dissociates from them, enacts a split, a break, a trauma: but it is a dissociation she can account for. They become the means to the realization of her own self-determined agency, the
fodder for her own enlightenment Bildung. They are like the rocks of the far north, uncultivated and uncultivatable, recognizable as human and quasi-human forms (“their fantastic heads so high were often covered with pines and firs”) only to the creative, creating, higher-order imagination, giving that imagination its content and substance. By relating to them as objects of knowledge, and thus as a disinterested observer among artifacts of nature that are hers to name and to describe, she potentially enacts the troubling dynamics of enlightenment power relations identified in its most basic critique, as for example in Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno’s classic study: “Myth becomes enlightenment and nature mere objectivity. Human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted. Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings.”

But she also overcomes the trauma of familiarity. The condition of their humanity, of their familiarity, does not accost her but rather proceeds from her recognition. The footprint is an object from nature, a brutishness that is not shared but that is other, an alterity from the deep past that is made present by recognition and (ostensibly historical) narrative.

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134 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, 6. For an important counterpoint to this position, especially relevant to thinking about Wollstonecraft’s position within enlightenment history, see Barbara Taylor’s brief essay, “Enlightenment and the Uses of Woman,” which begins with an analysis of Adorno’s “strikingly misogynistic” correspondence with Erich Fromm in 1937. Here, Adorno reproduces one of the most basic Enlightenment myths (about women and luxury) by “suggesting an investigation into the ‘feminine character,’” which, he argues, represents “‘infantile’ ‘bedazzlement’ by consumerism, the corruption of…personalities by ‘economic fetishism’, [which] had made them into instruments of capitalist hegemony” (79). Taylor sees the logic of Horkheimer and Adorno (the singularity, and thus the singularly patriarchal hegemonic authority, of Enlightenment rationalism), and much of the feminist criticism of Enlightenment that draws upon it, as reacting to a “caricature, that cannot survive even a cursory glance at the noisily argumentative world of Enlightenment, with its multiple renditions of reason and truth purveyed by lively minds of diverse sorts, from Encyclopedists and philosophical theologians to bluestockings and Grub Street hacks of both sexes,” ignoring, along the way, “the high visibility of women in enlightened thought, as over the course of the eighteenth century longstanding assumptions about women’s place became the focus of widespread discussion and debate” (80).
Drawing on the critique of the novelists (which, being a novelist herself, is her critique as well), the deep past becomes available and present in Wollstonecraft’s *Short Residence* through the Scandinavians, as characters in her narrative, precisely as Hegel indicates. But the resulting history is ineffective. The temporality that is not temporal (the brutish past that is right before her) fails both to distinguish Wollstonecraft from and to cohere her with the Scandinavians. The conditions of both their alterity and of their familiarity are unconvincing. Indeed, Ann Rigney, writing about the “hybridity” of fictional and historical writing (beginning with an analysis of Sir Walter Scott’s historical novels and their reception), argues that “a particular variant of the sublime is produced by… the perceived resistance offered by the past to our attempts to represent it with whatever information, concepts, and discursive models we have at our disposal,” using the term “romantic historicism” to designate (among other things) “a radical awareness of the alterity of the past and the historicity of experience [which] picked up on the Enlightenment interest in culture and eighteenth-century antiquarianism and fed into emergent nationalism with its ‘identity politics’ and interest in folk culture” (8). Sublime indeed, because the sublime always points to limitations in the subject which nevertheless humanize and valorize her.

Sublime indeed: a perceived resistance to aesthetic appropriation, to appropriation into scientific categories and “just national characters.” A perceived resistance that, like rocks piled on rocks, troubles the progress of the historian-passenger but that, being sublime, still manages to speak to the complexity and richness of the historian’s imagination, which through them touches history, mythology, God. With temporality that is not temporal, and the ensuing construction of brutishness that is thus familiarized, the legitimacy indexed by historical progress in Wollstonecraft’s *Short Residence* still points, and still problematically, to Crusoe in the midst of the world.
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