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"According to my bond": Intimacy and Attachment in Early Modernity

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“According to My Bond”:
Intimacy and Attachment in Early Modernity

By
Andrea Lauren Gadberry

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Comparative Literature
in the
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of the
University of California, Berkeley

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Professor Victoria Kahn, Chair
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“According to My Bond”: Intimacy and Attachment in Early Modernity
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Abstract

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This dissertation studies the history of intimacy from late humanism through the Enlightenment by examining how the abstract concept of attachment becomes both a primary preoccupation and a crucial stumbling block in imagining subjectivity throughout the period. Examining a series of authors (Shakespeare, Descartes, Milton, and Rousseau) who ask what it would mean to be essentially without social ties, this project reveals the early modern period’s ongoing conflict between a primary solitude associated with autonomy, isolation, and detachment and a primary sociality that assumes a natural order of attachments, bonds, and interdependence. This dissertation challenges the conventional story of the birth of “interiority” or “the invention of the human” with Shakespeare (or even Montaigne) by revealing a resistance to a conception of attachment that assumes inwardness; instead, it uncovers a more gradual historical shift in models of primary attachment from external to internal bonds, from attachments understood to occur outside the subject to those forged by an immanent or internal principle of relationship.

Chapter one argues that Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice and King Lear reveal a commitment to exteriority rather than the interiority so often attributed to Shakespeare as it attempts to conceal the fragility of social bonds and the ease with which they – and social life – can be destroyed. Chapter two examines Descartes’ Meditations and locates in the defensive strategies of the meditator an attempt to evade the threats of attachment through a negotiation with poetics that leaves dependency precariously outside the self. Chapter three finds in Milton’s Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained a turn to an immanent sociality in the figure of the Son; in Milton’s monism, a principle of relation inheres in all matter, suggesting that even total isolation is attended by this principle of relation. Chapter four studies Rousseau’s Émile and shows how the autonomy and even the solitude of the subject is secured by placing a relational principle around the subject’s soul. Finally, a speculative coda turns to Kant to consider the legacy of solitude and autonomy in the Enlightenment’s most famous moral philosopher.
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INTRODUCTION

“Every Man Alone”: The Eclipse of Attachment

‘Tis all in peeces, all cohaerence gone;
All just supply, and all Relation:
Prince, Subject, Father, Sonne, are things forgot,
For every man alone thinks he hath got
To be a Phoenix…

Years after John Donne wrote his “First Anniversary” in 1611, he and his fellow wits incurred Samuel Johnson’s wrath for a body of work Johnson dismissed for only “say[ing] what they hoped had never been said before.” But what Donne may have lacked in sincerity, he made up for with the acuity of his cultural critique: Something had shattered, and all Relation was in flux. Donne’s verse imagines a Humpty Dumpty of relation, “all in peeces” and, worse, lacking the etymological glue necessary for reassembly – with all “coherence” gone, the possibility of “sticking together,” co-haerere, abandoned. Whatever Relation stood for, it failed to provide cohesion enough. This dissertation will suggest that the concerns voiced in this moment of Donne’s elegy are not particular to him but are an ongoing preoccupation of his moment. What Donne thinks “are things forgot” are remembered consistently in the vexed relationship to relationship that appears in works of the period, works which, I will show, engage the theme of relation and attachment – and, curiously enough, often do so in pursuit not of relation but, rather, of an autonomy that depends upon the attempt to forget Relation.

The individual that emerges at the end of the eighteenth century is often thought of as autonomous, secular, and atomic. But independent it is not. The story of individuation that my account traces exposes the difficulties and the compromises involved in declaring the self autonomous. Implicit in my argument is the assumption that the process of becoming individual, or of seeming to, is inseparable from our bonds and attachments. Following the work of Gilbert Simondon, I investigate individuation before the individual, a project made possible in large part

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3 See Gilbert Simondon, L’individualization psychique et collective : à la lumière des notions de forme, information, potentiel et métastabilité (Paris: Aubier, 1989). describes the common approaches to this problem as follows: “Il existe deux voies selon lesquelles la réalité de l’être comme individu peut être abordée : une voie substantialiste, considérant l’être comme consistant en son unité, donné à lui-même, fondé sur lui-même, engendré, résistant à ce qui n’est pas lui-même ; une voie hylémorphique, considérant l’individu comme engendré par la rencontre d’une forme et d’une matière. Le monisme centré sur lui-même de la pensée substantialiste s’oppose à la bipolarité du schème hylémorphique. Mais il y a quelque chose de commun en ces deux manières d’aborder la réalité de l’individu : toutes deux supposent qu’il existe un principe de l’individuation antérieur à l’individuation elle-même, susceptible de l’expliquer.” The problem with this approach is that it limits what is “interesting” to the individual alone: “Cette manière de poser le problème de l’individuation à partir de la constatation de l’existence d’individus recèle une présupposition qui doit être éclaircie, parce qu’elle entraîne un aspect important des solutions que l’on propose et se glisse dans la recherche du principe d’individuation : c’est l’individu en tant qu’individu constitué qui est la réalité intéressante” (9). In contrast, Simondon asks, as Sean Bowden puts it, if it is possible to think about “individuation without recourse to an already constituted individual” and, further, to make “relation…not
by the fallout of the very common project of the early modern period of imagining individuals in total isolation. In looking at the nebulous stuff of relation that seems to fall in between solitary individuals, I explore the strategies of engagement, the ties and attachments, that might make a self possible in the first place but that also challenge a subject’s independence and freedom. Imagining men who spring from the earth like fungi, as Hobbes’ state of nature in *De Cive* would imagine it, or even as second Adams⁴ (born without mothers), puts in relief the ties, affective and psychic, that must be shed to make solitary selves in the first place. Like Donne, I put Relation before the offices it oversees, but in doing so, what I uncover across a range of works from early modernity to the Enlightenment is a sense of uncertainty about how to handle the very concept of “relation” – about where to put it within or near the self, about what to do with it in light of the vulnerabilities it seems to ensure. Before turning to the primary authors of this project (Shakespeare, Descartes, Milton, Rousseau) I want to show, first, how these figures participate in a much wider conversation underway throughout the early modern period and, second, how the terms of my own project are defined in large part by a scholarship that bears witness to the problem of relation and its continued irresolution.

I.

The early modern period is often said to have paved the way for the “invention of autonomy,”⁵ the heralded offspring of the long period between the “invention of the human”⁶ and the Enlightenment. But autonomy as we know it could not be invented without the eclipse of attachment. Even when explained as simply an effect of history – as feudal fallout,⁷ as a lingering blood tie,⁸ or as prelude or part of contract, for instance⁹ – the early modern period’s an accident with respect to a substance but rather a prior and constitutive condition of substance” (136-37). See Sean Bowden, “Gilles Deleuze, a Reader of Gilbert Simondon” in *Gilbert Simondon: Being and Technology*, ed. Arne De Boever et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012). Of course, my project can only think “without recourse to an already constituted individual” to a limited degree, but it does rely on making “relation...a constitutive condition.” For more on the figure of the “second Adam,” especially in relation to the birth of experimental science, see Joanna Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).


⁵ I borrow this language from Jerome Schneewind’s magisterial *The Invention of Autonomy*. There, Schneewind traces the origins of autonomy understood à la Kant as a morality rooted in self-governance. Schneewind traces developing notions of morality from Luther and Calvin to Kant, from evolving conceptions of natural law to negotiations with religious authority. As Schneewind thinks about the potential collapse of authority that might come with being self-ruled, he also imagines figures who argue for autonomy in light of the persistence of forms of authority, divine and otherwise, “because we do not live in a fatherless world” (403). My account of attachment and autonomy might be understood as taking on the question of autonomy and what I think might be understood as the problem of not living in a childless or motherless world. Jerome Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy: A History of Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.)


⁸ Daniel Juan Gil discusses the “vestiges of the traditional, aristocratic social framework” (6) in his helpful *Before Intimacy: Asocial Sexuality in Early Modern England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
“bond” is insistently perplexing: how a discourse overwhelmingly concerned with attachment becomes one of atomic individuals instead might make us ask just where all these bonds went—or how (and why) they were so successfully vanquished. However stark the question of relation was in the period, it seems largely to have evaded critical scrutiny and even interest in the centuries that followed, with perhaps the notable exception of contract theory where relationship is codified in formal agreements. But just what defined the “bond” is simple neither in the critical tradition in which it is actually discussed nor in the texts of the period where negotiating the bond propels drama, philosophy, epic poetry, and the novel—to name only the genres of the texts primarily under discussion in this project. The problem with the commonplaces we have about autonomy and its supposed appearance in the early modern period is that the self-rule that the term’s etymology proclaims (autos-self, nomos-law) leaves out the attempt to sever or manage attachments that isolates that self to begin with. The shock of arriving at autonomy is not in our supposed graduation to a free exercise of reason associated with the Enlightenment; it is in autonomy’s detritus: vulnerability, attachment, a way of talking about the space between increasingly atomic individuals.

This dissertation, then, reexamines the rise of the autonomous individual and finds a new, more complex narrative than the “invention of autonomy” in the story of attachment and relationship that occurs around it. In the period leading up to the Enlightenment, autonomy is purchased in a bargain that relocates the bond from outside the subject to within it, that depicts a brutal atomism at odds with what is a still-prevailing narrative of progress in the biography of the Individual. What the texts I study reveal is a consistent ambivalence about attachment—about sustaining it and losing it. I argue that the problem with attachment is so unsettling that one of its solutions gradually swallows it whole: the introjected and incorporated bond makes attachment an internal principle and one easily occluded in the biographies of autonomous, self-fashioned individuals. This means that the “invention of the human” so often yoked to the deeply psychological writings of Montaigne or Shakespeare actually makes a person with an interior that had yet to acquire the trademark of modern attachment; that is, the “psychological” characters that appear in the period of late humanism, I will show, have external ties rather than the internalized relations that so often drive moderns to the chaise longue of Freudian analysis. But

9 On early modern political theory, see especially, J.G.A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975). The distinguished tradition of secondary literature on social contract seems to tell only part of the story of relation in the period, as the succeeding chapters try to convey. In moving from a bond thought of in explicit terms to a more implicit kind of attachment, I show a preoccupation with attachment that occurs largely outside of the complex network of promises, exchange, and contract. In other words, I hope to show that the early modern subject is even more “bound” than we thought—and often in moments of perceived liberty or in isolation.

10 This codification, of course, was no simple affair itself, and, as Victoria Kahn argues, early modern writers “drew on the existing narratives of covenant and contract in Scripture and classical literature. They did not simply accept these narratives at face value, but instead used them as the raw material of their own accounts of obligation” (19). See Victoria Kahn, Wayward Contracts: The Crisis of Political Obligation in England, 1640-1674 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).


12 Greenblatt’s sense that “psychoanalysis is the historical outcome of certain characteristic Renaissance strategies” (131) seems to me to be at least partially right, given what I see as its disavowal of essential
this also suggests that the strategy of our intellectual ancestors has largely succeeded: we have made Relation into a “thing forgot.”

As early modern writers struggled with the problem of relation and attachment, they were much more likely to talk about it than modern critics who focus so exclusively on the individual as to miss both the drama occurring between individuals as well as individuation itself. In the nascent market economy of the early modern period, the bond provided a form of trust to secure increasingly distant economic transactions. The agony of the relationship between Shylock and Antonio begins with a “bond” so ordinary that it was a simple fact of economic life. Far from being limited to its practical manifestations, attachment also appeared in more mystical guises. The philosopher and heretic Giordano Bruno made it the main object of inquiry in his De vinculis in genere (1591) or On Bonding in General: “The explanation of bonds is, for the most part, hidden, even from the wise, for what use is it to appeal to analogies, similarities, family traits and other such meaningless words….” In Bruno’s hands, bonds are part of a strictly material world—“There is nothing outside of matter or without matter,” he explains. But that they have to do with matter in no way diminishes the mysterious realm from which they emerge: “Taken universally, bonding agents are God, demons, souls, animals, nature, chance, luck, and finally fate.” For his less mystical contemporaries, looking at bonds could subvert the “meaningless words” that grouped like objects and persons, that yoked parties together without recognizing that the bonding agent was the work of “chance” known as custom. In Montaigne’s “De l’affection des peres aux enfans,” the tie binding father to son comes with no guaranteed affection; instead, Montaigne’s startling observation points to the possibility of a far greater affinity that could create an attachment apart from the kind custom alone produced, namely, the kind made by the soul: “ce que nous engendrons par l’ame, les enfantemens de nostre esprit.”

Attachment and bonding were growing up in a world in which the language of social life was changing, of course, and Donne’s sense that “Relation” had shattered extends easily to a linguistic landscape inflected by (and doubtless inflecting) a society undergoing massive structural changes, from the development of a market economy to the modern reinvention of republicanism. By the end of the seventeenth century, the word “sociality” would emerge in the English lexicon and serve as a general term for thinking about the various arrangements within society, but at the beginning of the century, the language of social attachment was in flux.


14 Bruno, 173.

15 Ibid., 145.


17 Norbert Elias’ observation that “[t]he more or less sudden emergence of words within languages nearly always points to changes in the lives of people themselves, particularly when the new concepts are destined to become as central and long-lived” is especially resonant here as the proliferation of new cognates and alternative definitions around terms related to bonding, relationship, and association develop throughout the century alongside a shifting sense of what attachment itself might mean. See Norbert Elias, The Civilizing Process (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 43.
“Bond,” which had once signified a relatively limited set of legal transactions, would begin to be used with greater flexibility and increasingly figurative heft: binding would come to characterize the nature of both contracts and relationships, would be deployed for formal and legalistic transactions as well as the more nebulous stuff of interpersonal exchange. It would slowly transform itself from a term describing fiscal and fiduciary constraint, that is, to the word that would, in modern times, come to characterize the social practice of instilling a feeling of togetherness known as “bonding.” And the language of “relation,” in turn, would for the first fifty or so years of the century surpass its limited definition as the mere act of relating or narrating and become a capacious and various term encompassing “relatedness” or a special connection between two persons.\(^\text{18}\)

It might make sense that the language of and negotiations over relationship would be eclipsed because the long period this dissertation traces has been known so well for giving us not a new theory of relationship but a new creature altogether: the autonomous individual I’ve already mentioned above. For at the same moment that this new vocabulary of relationship appeared, so, too, did a language of individuation and the individual – not to mention one of loneliness.\(^\text{19}\) It hardly seems to be a coincidence that the “human” would be said to be invented at the moment that the individual was, too. Following Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “conceptual personae,”\(^\text{20}\) this project finds that the problem of attachment is most richly theorized in works in which the object is, to borrow Donne’s formula, a creature with “all Relation” gone.

Distinguishing the “conceptual persona” from both novelistic characters and social types, Deleuze and Guattari find a figure, such as the skeptical figure behind the cogito, allied foremost with a conceptual or philosophical purpose. For Deleuze, “[i]t is possible that the conceptual persona only rarely or allusively appears for himself. Nevertheless, he is there, and however nameless and subterranean, he must always be reconstituted by the reader.”\(^\text{21}\) Moving across genres, I reconstitute a conceptual persona who evades the seventeenth century’s production of types even as he (and sometimes she) nears quite a few them. Writers of the early modern period were of course intimately familiar with “types,” and one of the most famous misanthropes of literature, Timon, even receives his own entry in La Bruyère’s Caractères (1688). The search for solitude was no secret, then, but it is not the reactionary individual who defines himself in relation to a society he loathes that interests me here – but this other, odder creature: the person who has – or tries to have – no relation at all. Not quite a misanthrope or a monk, this solitary subject tries on the trappings of atomic solitude that will become entirely commonplace in the centuries that follow. But imagining this figure is still an experiment in the period about which I write, an experiment with a type that consistently slips by more familiar typology and allegory.

The “nameless and subterranean” creature who allows us to imagine the absence of ties lurks behind familiar, and sometimes unlikely, faces: she is Cordelia; he is the narrator of Descartes’ Meditations; he is Milton’s Son; he is Rousseau’s Émile. The four primary figures I follow here are potent representatives of a personage of course found elsewhere, as its spectral


\(^{19}\) The OED cites the first usage in 1586. See "loneliness, n.," OED Online, Oxford University Press, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/109969.


\(^{21}\) Deleuze and Guattari, 63.
appearance here in Donne’s elegy might convey. The figures who emerge here across diverse genres point toward a still broader history to be found in the problems of attachment posed by the Hobbesian subject of contract (not to mention the solitary sovereign), by Robinson Crusoe (as Émile’s own required reading indicates), by the Humean skeptic whose severance of relation untethers cause and effect. Such an account might also examine solitude in the early modern period’s proliferation of misanthropes as well as in the period’s outcasts, especially in relationship to gender and the marriage contract, to exploration and the New World, as it might usefully pose the question of how parties excluded from certain kinds of relationship haunt it nonetheless. The figures I examine here, then, allow me to begin to tell part of this broader story as they both complicate a story of an autonomous self that has been taken for granted and uncover the diversity of solutions (and of additional problems) that emerge in the attempt to secure the boundaries of the isolated self.

The story of relation has a vastly longer history, of course. Hundreds of years before Simondon articulates his theory of a pre-individual principle of individuation, medieval scholars struggled with precisely this problem of individuation in the contentious question of what defined the principium individuationis. Duns Scotus, Boethius, and Suárez numbered among the many figures who debated what constituted the individual, whether one could think in terms of “individual” at all, and whether universal and individual notions could even coexist. The question of how the figure of the individual relates to the broader question of individuation and Being itself of course undergirds the thinking within this project. What subtends the effort to understand the individual and her relation to relation is also an understanding of the world at large: the struggle between notions of dualism and monism that stretch across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are also fights about who we are and who we are to each other and our environments. The period that began to see a real division of “natural philosophy” into science and philosophy would very naturally also have to contend with interior divisions. The fuss about individuation would be amply justified for its medieval (and early modern, for that matter) exponents were it only a question of divine substance, but what creates an individual, what distinguishes one individual from another, what distinguishes matter from anything (or everything) else: these questions permeate the stories we tell about how we have become the creatures we are. The abstract problems of parts and wholes, of deciphering likeness and difference, cause and effect, undergird our language and its tropes at every turn. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a discourse about individuality and relation was appearing in striking ways as it reshaped the lexicon even if syntax as such already announced nothing if not a project of relation.

Yet, the total victory of the individual seems already to have been declared without regard for the claims of relation essential to its constitution. C.B. Macpherson’s The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism (1962) looked to political philosophy of the seventeenth century in pursuit of his shrewd diagnosis of the modern individual born from the period: “The individual is, it was thought, free inasmuch as he is the proprietor of his person and capacities. The human essence is freedom from dependence on the wills of others, and freedom is a function of possession. Society becomes a lot of free equal individuals related to each other as proprietors of their own capacities and of what they have acquired by their exercise. Society consists of relations of

22 For a history of individuation from the medieval to the early modern periods, see Jorge J.E. Gracia, ed., Individuation in Scholasticism: The Later Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation, 1150-1650 (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994).
23 See the coda. Also, note the etymology of syn-tax from sun-tassein, to arrange with.
exchange between proprietors. Political society becomes a calculated device for the protection of this property and for the maintenance of an orderly relation of exchange.”

Macpherson’s description shows how inseparable the questions of attachment and autonomy are: freedom depends on eradicating dependence. This is the culmination of the fantasy of the autonomous individual. Removed from the bitterness of the reactionary misanthrope, this conceptual persona looks more like a gentleman-philosopher than an angry, Diogenic hermit, at least at first glance. It might go without saying that this figure represents an unattainable end, but the failures around it seem to suggest that, even if a pure autonomy might be possible, attachment can appear in new ways and can be written out of the story of the self.

Well before Macpherson’s seminal study, of course, Karl Marx had diagnosed this character as the solitary competitor of modern society: “In this society of free competition [i.e., in particular, the society of the eighteenth century, of Smith and Ricardo], the individual appears detached from the natural bonds etc. which in earlier historical periods make him the accessory of a definite and limited human conglomerate.” What Marx overlooks in his cursory glance at the history of the individual and his attachments is the complexity of “natural bonds” in the first place. Just what bonds were “natural” is hardly clear, and the one place where a large body of scholarship does talk about the bond, namely, social contract theory, makes it abundantly clear that the constitution of the bond is immensely complex – and perhaps even better thought of as a force making a new person (the sovereign) rather than as a connection between individuals. In Marx’s history, the eighteenth century reveals bonds noticed for the first time – as a means to an end: “Only in the eighteenth century, in “civil society,” do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity.” For Marx, “social connectedness” links atomic individuals, but what might be true for the mechanisms underlying capital is not the case for concepts of the individual and its ties. Where Marx offers an economic history, I find, instead, a cultural, conceptual, and semantic story that shows how a principle of attachment moves inward. The negotiations that occur in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries point not so much (or not only) to the open history of the “conglomerate” and its parts but to an occluded one.

Part of the problem in diagnosing the problem of attachment as I have defined it here is that it asks us to examine the period that gave us the microscope to look for something we can never see, no matter how powerful our own optics become. Seeing relationship, how an individual emerges out of, alongside, or against it, asks us to look at the invisible ties around the discrete selves we can actually see. However difficult this may be, it isn’t an impossible task. We need not resort to the mystical ties that Giordano Bruno proposes or the sympathies early moderns imagined between plants and objects, for instance, to understand it. By way of introduction, the problem of attachment might be thought of symbolically in the very mechanics of the (very modern) new science and its exponent Isaac Newton. A glance at this titan of the new science conveys a sense of the reach of the problem, and it is symbolic of how casually the

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26 Marx, Grundrisse, 223.
conflict between isolation and relation could resurface in other discourses, of how the problem itself seemed and seems to inhere in matter.

In his *Philosophae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1689), Newton would join his contemporaries in imagining the absence of any ties at all as he defined the “absolute”: “without relation to anything external.” The science that relied on concepts dispensing with relation, though, made room for relative time and relative space—and it also invented a concept of attachment that has endured all subsequent scientific revolutions: gravity. Writing of the force of attraction between two discrete bodies, Newton quickly gained opponents who thought of gravity as purely mystical. His early-eighteenth-century editor Roger Cotes dismissed the controversy out of hand: “Some there are who say that gravity is praeternatural, and call it a perpetual miracle. Therefore they would have it rejected, because praeternatural causes have no place in physics.” If Newton stoked so much controversy, it was at least in part because he had discovered the reason why objects are drawn to each other—and the force that could hold them apart. The same era that could conceive of “mass” or the heft of discrete objects could also imagine the force between them, the force that held them together.

But this revolution was conceptual first and scientific second. If Newton gave a name to one very specific principle of attachment and to a principle of shedding all ties, he was not alone in the effort to grapple with these broad ideas. When it came to the task of creating the autonomous individual, the preferred strategy seems to have been to respect the absolute and to hush the relative. The “perpetual miracle” of gravity, the mystery of our ties, could not compete with the principle of self-generation and regeneration behind the individual: “For every man alone thinks he hath got / To be a phoenix.”

II.

While relationship may have been consistently overlooked in the secondary scholarship, the individual has not been. But roughly thirty years ago, the way we talk about the individual underwent a shift. Understanding the self as itself a product of careful labor, a subject that was made rather than simply born, meant recognizing the diligent work around self-fashioning: “The old alchemical dream was changing base metals into gold. The new alchemical dream [was]: changing one’s personality—remaking, remodeling, elevating, and polishing one’s very self. . . and observing, studying, and doting on it.”

Perhaps the most famous work of Renaissance studies in the past thirty years, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980) set out to explain the modern person born from the early modern period. Following Foucault’s groundbreaking work, of course, it posited the existence of a self with “a self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process” with a “new range of meanings: [self-fashioning] describes the practice of parents and teachers; it is linked to manners or demeanor, particularly that of the elite; it may suggest hypocrisy or deception, an adherence to mere outward ceremony; it suggests representation of one’s nature or intention in speech or actions.” But the source of this section’s first quotation beat Greenblatt

31 Ibid., 3.
to the punch by four years: It was 1976, the publication New York Magazine; Tom Wolfe’s now-famous article was the text that baptized the “me generation.” Its analysis stretched from the court of Louis XIV to the bench press of 1970s gyms to Bergman’s filmography. It found an “alchemy” of the self in the self-fashioning it saw happening all around it. Wolfe created a shorthand that would be passed ignominiously, sometimes with heated debate, to subsequent generations, too. Yet in retrospect, Wolfe’s article reads uncannily like an early, if largely glib, arrival to the then entirely-new new historicism, attempting a kind of thick description inflected with anecdote, examining cultural productions high and low, and heralding a renaissance of self-fashioning before Renaissance Self-Fashioning existed. Wolfe summoned images of a highly self-conscious individualism that turned its gaze simultaneously inward and out, carefully cultivating its appearance but also nervously checking to make sure its intended audience approved and admired. It seems implausible, if also strangely pleasing, to imagine Greenblatt and Wolfe swapping notes as they were writing their works, but both found themselves, at this moment of the late seventies and early eighties, working on similar concepts, arguing about single selves and the pressures wrought upon them and within them and how those selves were not “natural” and artless but meticulously wrought. The Me Generation and the objects of Greenblatt’s inquiry covered some four hundred years, a span that stretched from dulcimer to disco, but the kinds of selves that were revealed – ambitious self-sculptors trying to make it amidst social pressures, sometimes to terrifically vain effect – were the same. And not so different was the technique that exposed them.

But both left out relationship. The coercive power of society played no small part (think of the hustle and bustle of Marx’s conglomerate), but attachments and ties were simply maneuvers this scheming subject deployed. The oddity about the self-fashioned subject is that the creature who appears there looks like a carefully curated Hobbesian fungus, of the kind I described above. In lieu of Bildung, there is a story that erases our earliest vulnerability altogether and that imagines attachments as accidents between the fully formed rather than as the fully formative. That Greenblatt’s narrative about subjectivity has remained the dominant one in Renaissance Studies (and an important influence to literary and historical studies of subjectivity well beyond the early modern period) speaks as much to the book’s obvious importance as it does to the cultural climate ready to receive it and already engaging with its terms, as Greenblatt himself would be the first to admit. Greenblatt’s book works so stunningly, in part, because it shines a mirror not just on Renaissance selves but ourselves, and the collision between Wolfe and Greenblatt is not a gratuitous one. The conversations that Wolfe and Greenblatt began have endured, for in a sense, both works try to make sense of a generation of selves. And, as Greenblatt reminds us: “There are always selves.”

But what I also want to suggest is that alongside this critical and popular devotion to the self there is another critical current, one that takes account of the relational rather than, alongside, or even prior to the individual. If the way we speak still prioritizes the individual, still communicates its faith in the atomic individual, it is not, I think, because it is the only narrative or the one that has definitively won. Within early modern and Enlightenment studies of the past

33 Hobbes, De cive, 8.1.
34 Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, 1.
decade, thinking about relational subjects has become increasingly possible. Greenblatt’s own work is of course keenly sensitive to the social forces forming selves and to the dialectical movements at play within the individual. The kind of self that appears in Foucault or Greenblatt might look like an individual belonging to a more sophisticated “conglomerate” than the one Marx imagines characterizing pre-modern societies in his *Grundrisse*. Foucault’s sense of the urgency of uncovering “new relational modes” may even have minimized the extent to which suppressing so much of relation was central to the narrative of the self and its freedom. In early modern scholarship, Nancy Selleck’s *The Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne and Early Modern Culture* (2008) locates in early modernity a way of conceiving of early modern subjectivity that reveals “a tendency to locate selfhood beyond subjective experience, in the experience of an *other.*” Nancy Yousef’s *Isolated Cases: The Anxieties of Autonomy in Enlightenment Philosophy and Romantic Literature* (2004) treats texts beginning many decades after Selleck’s work but shows how works often thought to celebrate solitary subjects ultimately “repudiate[ ] the possibility of imagining human beings . . . as essentially independent.” While other scholarship has remarked the proliferation of figures in pursuit of solitude in the period, the story of the individual usually is narrated as I’ve indicated above: an individual with a rich psychological interior appears approximately with Shakespeare, and he graduates to full autonomy as early modernity passes to modernity proper.

In this light, I aim to correct a Whiggish narrative about the “progress” of the individual and its interiority. I also want to push against what remains a field-wide tendency to treat relationship as something that happens between self-fashioned individuals (or not to treat it at all) rather than a formative force at work in relational subjects. In doing so, this project joins, if obliquely, the efforts of scholarship that has complicated the question of attachment, usually in studies of desire and sexuality of the period, but it also offers a new way of discussing attachment in a field in which the “bond” is frequently discussed only in the very specific context of scholarship about social contract and political theory. While recent scholarship on early modern and Enlightenment literature and philosophy has given increasingly attention to relationship, this project’s greatest debt is to the methods of understanding subjectivity made available by scholarship inflected by psychoanalysis and post-structuralism that seems to have appeared most forcefully in the 1990s. It is at that moment that I locate the most intense interest in returning to something like relation—an interest that, at least for the moment, seems only to have intensified. Peter Sloterdijk’s 1998-2004 *Spheres* trilogy set out, in part, to put an end to the isolated individual, “to reject loneliness” as its polemical preface put it as it located in modernity not autonomy so much as abandonment: “It is precisely in modernity . . . that the dogma of a primary human loneliness is propagated more triumphantly than ever.” In art criticism, Nicolas Bourriaud coined the term “relational aesthetics” (1996) to describe a changing trend in art

35 See Bersani’s discussion of this in *Is the Rectum a Grave?: and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
38 See, for instance, Janette Dillon, *Shakespeare and the Solitary Man* (London: MacMillan, 1981) and the abundant secondary literature around this topic in *Robinson Crusoe*.
practice that brought in both social contexts and relationship. In *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (1997), Judith Butler exposed, among other things, the workings of Foucaultian subjection within a language that allowed for attachment, that is, within psychic life itself, given that “no subject emerges without a passionate attachment to those on whom he or she is fundamentally dependent.” In psychoanalysis, meanwhile, Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen’s *The Emotional Tie: Psychoanalysis, Mimesis, and Affect* (1991) uncovered the importance of the “bond” or *Bindung* to Freudian thought. Coming after the diverse efforts of works such as these, my project aims to expose the centrality of the early modern period to thinking about “relationality,” about the “passionate attachments” that have been central to forming the self along the historical trajectory during which the modern individual is said to have been invented in the first place. And if recent scholarship has made it possible to think of relation and attachment in new ways, it has also allowed me to shed light on what was already a central preoccupation of early modern and Enlightenment authors.

Of course, other scholars had already been urging a relational turn for a long time: Gilbert Simondon’s *L’individuation psychique et collective*, though still untranslated, continued Simondon’s efforts to build a vocabulary of the pre-individual and enabled a conception of a force of individuation and relation that preceded the individual. Psychoanalytic models of attachment (John Bowlby, for instance) and object-relations (in the Kleinian mother) were radically rethinking what the self looked like and what ties it had within and without. If popular and scholarly culture liked to talk about a post-atomic age of atomic individuals, a rich counter-current had already begun to make it possible to think of a different kind of individuation and to talk about attachments and bonds in earnest. But the twentieth century’s underdog story of individuation, of individuals in relation and relation shaping individuals, that I have sketched rather roughly here, comes with a prehistory to a solitary self that early moderns already knew: they were the ones struggling to tell it. They were writing and thinking about it, trying to deal with the problems of attachment in the marketplace, the home, the court and parliament. The language of relation held the open secrets of attachment, but the language for talking about relationship would be hushed in favor of a new vocabulary with less ambivalence about its ties: autonomy, freedom, individual, identity. The keywords of the Enlightenment could channel the problems of attachment and ties into outbursts of sentimentality and protocols governed by politesse. However successful its strategy, though, Relation had left its mark: no one ever did succeed in becoming Phoenix, however convinced of its necessity.

III.

In readings across the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, the chapters to come show how Shakespeare, Descartes, Milton, and Rousseau reveal a discourse on bonds, attachments, and their dissolution, which demonstrates a more pervasive interest in redefining


43 Think, for instance, of the publication of Nancy Chodorow’s *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), which appears at precisely the same moment as Wolfe’s article. A sharp rejoinder to Wolfe’s self-fashioners of the 1970s, Chodorow’s book remains a useful analysis of attachments central to psychic formation and also of the often unequal distribution of labor in cultivating those attachments.
relationship and which, in turn, contributes a new chapter to the ongoing work of writing the history of intimacy. Against a tendency to treat attachment as the object of power relations or hierarchies alone (i.e., sovereign-subject, father-son, etc.), I trace a literary tradition that asks what constitutes the bond in itself and that negotiates with the lure and challenges of a primary solitude. Through close readings of scenes that reconfigure, reinvent, or discover our essential attachments, I argue that the early modern period witnesses a struggle that culminates in the internalization of attachment; that is, bonds “between” parties become immanent bonds, exposing not only a slower move to “inwardness” than histories of the period usually suggest but also an overlooked conflict to figure out how and where attachments occur. The arrival of the modern individual’s interiority, autonomy, and, indeed, individuality emerges only from its vexed prehistory’s ambivalent negotiations with relationship.

As I have suggested above, one of the primary loci for isolating the problem of relationship is in isolation itself. Across the early modern period, the problem of relationship appeared in literary and philosophical efforts to imagine what it would look like to have no social attachments at all. It happened across genres, and it happened for a range of reasons. In the context of the seventeenth-century Europe, it might make sense that the logic of the Peace of Augsburg would extend to the individual; if the protocol of *cuius regio eius religio* (whose realm, his religion) aimed, if often problematically, to impose uniformity of religion according to geographical rule, the idea of isolating an individual in his own place meant that re-ligio in its etymological sense of tying together or bonding was beyond the scope of the solitary self. Or at least that is perhaps what a thinker like Descartes, isolating himself in his stove-heated room while the Thirty Years’ War raged on, might very reasonably think.

The first chapter, “‘No more nor less’: Shakespeare’s Theatre of the Bond” asks how primary bonds are forged and exposed. The chapter traces in *The Merchant of Venice* and *King Lear* the dangerous stakes of making and unmaking bonds. Beginning with *The Merchant of Venice*, in which the language of the “bond” is passed from character to character, and culminating with a reading of *King Lear* (Cordelia’s famous description of her love the source of the titles of this project and this chapter), I ask what constitutes a bond in Shakespeare and how those bonds are made. I argue that the plays absorb widespread cultural worries into the “daughter function,” in which the unraveling of filial piety unleashes a chaos of unbonding that threatens to (and, in the case of *Lear*, does) show the artificiality of systems of attachment that reach from the interpersonal to state and society. As characters wish for bonds of flesh or bonds made out of surer or more seductive speech, they seem to wish to dispossess the very interiority with which Shakespearean characters have so frequently been characterized.

The second chapter, “‘As if it were only me in the world’: Cartesian Poetics and Solitude in the *Meditations*” turns from the play of multiple bonds in the previous chapter to the eradication of (nearly all) bonds. Here, I examine two literary episodes in the *Meditations*: the famous skeptical encounter with the evil genius in the First Meditation and Descartes’ account of error, an account that functions as theodicy, in the Fourth Meditation. While solitude characterizes the meditator’s pose and the stance of skepticism, his attempt to destroy attachment ultimately stumbles in the Fourth Meditation where the meditator appeals to the rest of creation to justify the ways of God. Revealing how Descartes’ strategy to maintain his solitude depends on the rhetorical tactics of love lyric (in the First Meditation) and in a rejection of elegy (in the Fourth Meditation), I show how a negative poetics sustains Descartes’ careful placement of attachment just at the borders of the self.
The third chapter, “‘Solitude is Best Society’: On Milton’s Immanent Attachments,” turns from outward bonds to inward ones as it investigates immanent bonding in Milton. Focusing on Milton’s representations of the Son in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, I argue that an ambivalent stance toward sociality and perfect solitude in Milton’s poems undergirds the representation of the Son, who embodies relationship while maintaining a posture of singularity and isolation. The primary attachment Milton creates is one of immanent connection and one that extends to creation more generally, legible only as an inflection signaling an unstated relationship to God, rather than as a purposeful bond or part of a spectacle of mutual obligation between parties. In contrast to the relational ideal contained within the Son, Satanic sociability exposes a noxious counterpart of parasitic attachments, exposing the hazards of attachment as well as the value of monism as a moral philosophy of immanent attachment.

The final chapter, “In Secret Society: The Soul of Émile,” shows how Rousseau, the philosopher so famous for his self-imposed exile and solitude, simultaneously rejects and sustains solitude in *Émile*. As in Milton, Rousseau’s *Émile* relies on a principle of relational immanence, but Rousseau shows how relationship is internalized as a structure surrounding the soul of his title character. I study Rousseau’s protective containment strategy, which keeps Émile “unborn” in a primitive rejection of intimacy, on the one hand, but also secures what I call a “dialectical pregnancy” within the text. Rousseau makes a form of attachment that which guarantees his pupil’s isolation, but as he requires both secrecy and forgetting for the success of his program, Rousseau seems to require that his relational compromise be forgotten to ensure its success.

Finally, a brief coda brings this project to its speculative conclusion. In concluding, I look at the figure most often associated with the invention of the autonomous subject, Immanuel Kant, and suggest that some of the relational strategies of earlier figures might productively unsettle Kant’s conclusions.
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CHAPTER ONE

“No more nor less”:
Shakespeare’s Theatre of the Bond

Antony, Cymbeline, Falstaff, Macbeth: Shakespeare’s characters seem to spread the language of the “bond” and the “bound” contagiously, to name only a handful of the dozens of characters who find themselves talking about it. It is impossible not to hear the term passed from tongue to tongue in particular in The Merchant of Venice, from Shylock’s very topical “bond” of flesh to the more figurative bondage in the “so infinitely bound” Bassanio or Portia’s telltale directive to her suitor to be bound “in all sense.” In the Shakespearean universe, what creates intimacy is hardly obvious, and rather than being perfectly clear or overtly contractual, it is often occluded in a language of attachment that stops short of revealing its contents. The fluidity and uncertainty of binding and attachment make the problem of intimacy or isolation one that occurs not just in portrayals of affection but also as a philosophical or epistemological question. Thinking about the bond itself is a task many characters undertake – and it is a treacherous project. It is, after all, Cordelia’s designation of the bond that unleashes Lear’s fury on the grounds of its inadequacy; she loves him, she explains, “According to my bond” – and that, evidently, is not bond enough.

While Lear rages as his youngest daughter tells him she can describe her affection only “according to [her] bond,” much of the secondary criticism has failed to hear what made Lear so angry in this cryptic and catalyzing word, the very term that unravels the worlds of both The Merchant of Venice and King Lear. Works that grapple with the issue of the bond typically overlook the kinship between the plays, looking instead for the ways in which each might allegorize historical problems. While the stakes of the bond are indeed also historical, the extraordinary self-consciousness around the bond exposes a preoccupation with the “bond” that is as much philosophical as historical. In Freud’s famous “The Theme of the Three Caskets,” the two plays are brought together for the sake of such a theoretical inquiry. Freud argues that what the two plays expose together is a reliance on an archetypal “triplet” (three caskets, three daughters) and a grappling with the spectre of death (the caskets and Cordelia’s ominous silence). Freud is right to notice the kinship between the two plays as he examines their archetypal materials, but he locates their most important affinity in Cordelia’s silence and the iconography of death when it seems, rather, to be Cordelia’s words that announce the play’s relationship to The Merchant of Venice. It is not Cordelia’s silence that speaks most loudly in the famed first scene but her speech, for she names the issue that will unleash catastrophe: the “bond.” The language of the bond, ubiquitous in The Merchant of Venice, returns with shattering effect, and Cordelia’s precision “According to my bond no more nor less” recalls the exactitude of Portia’s legal strategy (one pound of flesh, no blood). This notion of the importance of attachment does more than just inhere in or define specific kinds of relationship (the bond of family or, say, the bond of state). It also exists as a

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1 Judy Kronenfeld helpfully surveys a wide range of scholarship discussing Cordelia’s “bond” as code for the problems of Puritanism in early modern England as well as for shifts between feudal and modern bonds. See Judy Kronenfeld, “The Plain Heart according to Her Bond: Sociopolitical readings and Family Relationships” in King Lear and the Naked Truth: Rethinking the Language of Religion and Resistance (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 95-122.

problem in itself: the “bond” itself is at question, not just the relationships it secures. It echoes loudly linguistically and thematically and directs the audience’s attention not to the self-fashioning of subjects but to the ties and tensions between persons.

The technicalities of bonds and contracts have long appeared in studies of Shakespeare’s relationship to the law, oath-taking, and marriage. In the context of The Merchant of Venice, too, critics have addressed the play’s symmetry around bonds and rings. Burckhardt’s “The Gentle Bond” (1962) would stage a critical intervention in formalist accounts of the play, arguing that the apparent “harmony” of the bond was a cover for brute savagery. Yet the emphasis on the bond as an index of history or genre has only infrequently allowed critical notice to examine the conception of the bond or relationship in philosophical or psychic terms – this in spite of works of the period like Giordano Bruno’s A General Account of Bonding (De vinculis in genere) that announce the importance of the issue. As I suggest in my introduction, part of this seems to be a field-wide emphasis on the individual and subject that makes “attachment” as such an afterthought, a nugatory footnote to the history of the self-fashioned subject. Shakespeare’s characters, however, are vehement about the ties they create. They evoke the bond not just in service of establishing order but also out of a desire to see it made tangible. The universe the play creates, too, guides the audience to regard those ties in addition to and apart from the characters themselves. In this chapter, I attempt to decenter a study of subjects that overlooks the intricacy of the bond itself. The fascination with, the thirst to see and hear attachment, suggests that the discourse on bonding does more than service institutions in which attachment is important (contract, family hierarchy, etc.). Scholarly devotion to the technical details of contract misses a complex struggle over intimacy in which the narratives of attachment that contract and like discourses deliver belie broader cultural preoccupations with attachment and isolation. The language of the “bond” in Shakespeare thus exposes the problem of “bonding” as such: what it is, how it happens, where it might be found – and what happens when it fails.

Yet, in The Merchant of Venice and King Lear, the locus of attachment is outside of the famous “inwardness” attributed to Shakespeare’s characters. In this chapter, I argue that the exteriority of attachment reveals that the “inwardness” Shakespeare is said to have cultivated is not yet as comfortably “inward” as critics have believed. There is, instead, a deep ambivalence about the efficacy of leaving attachment either “inside” or unstated, and there is a lurking sense that doing so is entirely inadequate. In this light, I show how the obsession with various forms of intimacy and attachment in these plays betokens a wish for greater exteriority, a will to turn inwardness outward to eliminate the problem of accounting for the arbitrariness of the other’s feelings and motives. But rather than clarifying or distinguishing varieties of bonds, this strategy blurs attachments; the intimacy of marriage, for instance, is yoked to juridical and political maneuverings outside of domestic life. In The Merchant of Venice, I show how a shared desire for the exteriority of bonds results in an urgent (and often dark) comedy to control and substantiate attachments. And turning to King Lear, I argue that the catastrophic exposure and subsequent breaking of bonds begins to reveal a threatening primary unbondedness that makes the alternative to

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flattery that Cordelia pursues a “Nothing” so menacing as to take with it the social world and to reveal the necessity of zealously preserving the fictions of attachment at any price.

I. Manner over Matter

Shylock’s mourning cry when he discovers that Jessica has departed with his coffers in tow – “O my ducats! O my daughter! / Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!” (II.viii.15-16) – reveals more than his grief or shock. Instead, his words portray an inefficacious system of hereditary kinship and elide the world of finance with family. The parallelism of Shylock’s cry (as it is reported by Salanio) makes the loss of ducats a matter of equal weight to Jessica’s flight and implied conversion, but the formula also suggests that relatedness is largely a question of proximity, Jessica’s departure “with a Christian” converting the ducats to “Christian ducats” as well. Shylock’s words have the effect of converting wealth, mere currency, to Christianity even as the possessive adjective “my” asserts his continued claim to his wealth. When Shylock speaks for himself at the beginning of the third act, rather than calling upon daughters and ducats, he relies upon an idiom that roots relatedness in the flesh: “My own flesh and blood to rebel!” (III.i.32) and “I say my daughter is my flesh and blood” (III.i.34).

Yet Jessica has already distanced herself from Shylock’s “flesh,” as she weakens the basis of her attachment to her father: “But, though I am a daughter to his blood, / I am not to his manners” (II.iii.18-19). From Shylock to Jessica, the elements of attachment shift from flesh and blood to blood and “manners.” Where Jessica estranges herself from Shylock by calling for “flesh and blood” to be replaced with “blood” and “manners” Shylock himself cannot possess, Portia will destroy him by demanding flesh but not blood. While both Jessica and Portia seem to recognize some enduring power in the notion of “blood,” the introduction of “manners” and the paradoxical “flesh without blood” unsettles the stability of a notion of relatedness tethered to “bloodlines.” Yet as she asserts “manner” as the prevailing basis of attachment, Jessica has achieved what Shylock cannot: she has removed flesh without removing blood.

All citations from the play are from the Arden edition: William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Drakakis (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2010). All subsequent citations come from this edition and will be cited in the text by act, scene, and line number.

There is an echo of this sentiment in Hamlet’s “A little more than kin and less than kind” (I.ii.65) if we understand “manners” as a kind of behavior. Hamlet’s objections are obviously different, but again they portray the uneasy relationship of blood relations and the question of both likeness and attachment. See William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006). All subsequent citations from *Hamlet* are from this edition.

Of course, the role of daughters as essential to imagining the bond is crucial not only creatively in the world of these dramas but also had historical significance in early modern England. In a patriarchy in which new arrangements of power were secured by marriage, daughters and their dowries allowed for consolidations of power, a limited social mobility through exogamy, and (vitaly) the reproduction of the line. Whatever power may have been located in the male-dominated patriarchy and the male “namesake,” women were essential to the bond. It is likewise impossible to remove these dramas from the shadow of the most powerful daughter and maker (and breaker) of bonds: Elizabeth. The “virgin queen” both embodied the successful transmission of the filial bond and the succession of royal power but also signaled an important break. Her decision not to marry, to break the chain of heredity rule as power would go to James VI/I, is a bond-breaking in its own right and from, no less, the figure who made attachments on a national scale.

In this light, Portia’s judgment of Shylock seems all the more a trap. Jessica is able to break the relationship of the “flesh” because she has the social mobility and wherewithal to transform herself.
In The Merchant of Venice, attachment departs from a material basis of “flesh and blood.” In the law as in family, blood is excluded as the primary substance of the bond, attachment inhering in the bloodless and more important attachments of “manners” instead. The Merchant of Venice imagines other possibilities to a law of blood, whatever the legal realities offstage, that introduce a range of alternatives to relationships of “flesh and blood.” Instead of asserting the power of blood relations, the play supplies, indeed requires, something else. “Manner” will trump the values of blood alone and reveal a widespread doubt about the reliability of inner matter (blood, flesh, the humors in general) as a principle of attachment and as the basis of self-understanding. Showing instead a failure to explain feeling and decision or to justify attachments, the play makes a case for the necessary externalization of bonds in compensation for the apparent arbitrariness and uncertainty within the stuff of “manner.” I show how urgent a preoccupation the question of attachment is in the play – so much so, in fact, that bonding itself becomes a partial solution, if only linguistically and symbolically, to the grave problem of arbitrariness. In doing so, I expose how the “manners” of daughters in the play reveal the extra-material basis of attachment in a figurative magic.

The play opens with what appears to be a textbook case of melancholy, but as Antonio discusses his symptoms, the diagnosis that has greatest success is the one that privileges arbitrariness and opacity of character. Antonio’s complaint, practically steeped in black bile, produces a familiar formula for melancholia:

In sooth I know not why I am so sad.  
It wearies me; you say it wearies you;  
But how I caught it, found it or came by it,  
What stuff ‘tis made of, whereof it is born,  
I am to learn; and such a want-wit sadness makes of me,  
That I have much ado to know myself. (I.i.1-6)

Antonio’s lament shows a failure to recognize his own self-knowledge; while no doubt a “want-wit” when it comes to assessing “why” or “how” he became sad, Antonio actually knows quite a bit about his uncertainty. When Salarino and Salanio propose reasons for Antonio’s sadness, Antonio knows which ones to reject. It is not “sad to think upon his merchandise” (I.i.39), nor is love the source of his problems – a suggestion Antonio dismisses with a curt “Fie, fie” (I.i.46). A long tradition of scholarship has located in Antonio’s melancholy an inexpressible love for Bassanio, one that, of course, Antonio’s own account refuses to acknowledge. In assessing Bassanio, critics position themselves, however, as more astute Salarinos and Salanios, for Antonio will never confirm their guesses, however justified they may be. While Antonio’s riddle certainly invites the audience’s speculations about the mysteries Antonio contains, the revelation of his self-knowledge and interior life is secondary to the “stuff” outside the self. Rather, what Antonio produces is a melancholy made of “stuff” and “born” – a material sadness that simply needs to finish in Belmont.

Shylock has no such luxury, and his attachments, save for his connection to Jessica, have been based on exchange. It is important to distinguish the ways in which Shylock is excluded from the society of Venice, for it would be inaccurate to say that there is no attachment. Rather, his exclusion is a constitutive one, and it seems no coincidence that following his conversion, the world of Venice dissolves on the stage and has to finish in Belmont.

be located. Indeed, to adapt Hamlet’s language, Antonio’s melancholy seems to make outward show rather than to surpass it internally. Like the copious lists that will comprise Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, melancholy exists as much “outside” as within. If this is a kind of lonely state Antonio describes, it certainly seems to crowd the outside world.

Alongside these assertions of exteriority is Antonio’s tacit acceptance of Salanio’s last guess as to the cause of Antonio’s woes: “Then let us say you are sad / Because you are not merry” (I.i.47-48). Salanio repeats the formula “Then let us say you are sad” in inverted form to make it a truism: “[let us] say you are merry / because you are not sad” (I.i.49-50). It is a formula that gives up on looking for cause, that asserts that a person is one way just because he is not another. Salanio plays the clown here, expressing his wish to stay “till I had made you [that is, Antonio] merry” (I.i.60) and to put a stop to Antonio’s rejection of every proposed explanation of his unhappiness. But Salanio’s joke (you’re sad because you’re not happy) is more central to the world of the play than the jesting pose of its speaker can convey. When Salanio and Salarino have left, Antonio accounts for his mood to Gratiano in terms that modify Salanio’s formula: “I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano, / A stage, where every man must play a part, / And mine a sad one” (I.i.77-78). This famous formulation of the *theatrum mundi* is typically understood to reveal the way in which the “world” itself is like theatre (and certainly Antonio’s comments are a reminder of the currency of that perspective). Yet Antonio’s self-ascribed role also offers what is simply a more sophisticated version of Salanio’s account: Antonio plays a “sad” part because he has not been assigned a happy one. In Antonio’s account, his sadness still has no reason, all that he confirms is that his feelings are causeless. He is just sad, and he can say so now that Salanio has literally given him his lines: “Let us say you are sad” and “say you are not merry.”

The centrality of arbitrariness to Antonio’s melancholy could of course be understood as a strategy of disavowal or a failure on the part of his interlocutors to see the complexity of the man behind the melancholy. But the absence of a reason for feeling is part of a story about attachment and the bond where the principle of relationship depends on a matrix of arbitrary feeling, characterological opacity, and the externalization of the bond. In fact, it is Shylock who, acts later, will invoke the very logic that Salanio had used to explain Antonio’s melancholy for the sake of his own demand for flesh over money. Indeed, in his insistence on his “bond” (and in the form he wants it, that is, flesh), Shylock offers no justification at all. While Salanio had considered Antonio “sad / Because you are not merry,” Shylock refuses to explain himself to his interlocutors on the basis of his “humour”: “You’ll ask me why I rather choose to have / A weight of carrion flesh than to receive / Three thousand ducats. I’ll not answer that! / But say it is my humour.” (IV.i.39-42). Shylock rejects responding to those who wonder “why I rather choose” and leaves them to consider his “humour” at most. (This resort to “humor,” too, unsettlingly looks ahead to Portia’s injunction against removing Antonio’s blood, itself a “humor.”) If there is an internal motivation, Shylock will not share it. And his own words, “But say it is my humour,” blur indicative and imperative as the subject of “say it is my humour” is unstated, leaving it unclear whether it is Shylock or his addressee who attributes Shylock’s motivation to humor. But while Salanio’s speculation light that the cause of Antonio’s melancholy, Shylock makes overt an alarming arbitrariness that states what Salanio’s sporting comments leave unstated: “[t]here is no firm reason to be rendered . . . / So can I give no reason, nor I will not” (IV.i.52, IV.i.58). That there is no firm reason for what one feels or what one does

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11 Angus Fletcher coins the term “etceterative” to describe the odd listing effect of Burton’s catalog, and it might likewise be applied to the generative nature of Antonio’s melancholy. See Angus Fletcher, *Colors of the Mind: Conjectures on Thinking in Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 55.
exposes the dangerous arbitrariness undergirding Shylock’s bond. It might have a kind of logic. It might conform to reason. It might have been agreed to and even secured by law, but, regardless, there “is no firm reason to be rendered.” Whatever the legal trappings and their formalities, whatever is in or involved in a “bond” is somehow less clear than the technicalities of contract or oath would suggest, and this inheres in Shylock’s refusal to answer the incensed Bassanio. In spite of the way in which Shylock marshals logic, he has entered into a play with a shortage of reasons.

In light of the paucity of reason and the spate of demands without cause (think, for instance, even of the opacity of Portia as the jurist in asking for the ring; Bassanio finds himself responding to another inexplicable desire), affirming the bond that tethers people together becomes more urgent than ever. Rather than simply “saying” things are so because of humor, a regime of visible attachments and scenes of attachment-making must be installed. In other words, given the instability of feeling, the world of the play shows characters who want their attachments to acquire the surety of the world of things, whose interactions often reflect an opacity of character rather than a desire for or belief in depth and, with it, an emphasis on attachments outside of the apparently unknowable or invisible contents of the self. The ritual Bassanio undergoes to win Portia’s hand shows just what it is to forge an attachment: it is a confrontation with the total risk of making a bond, which apparently entails hazarding all. The letter Bassanio finds within the casket praises him for overlooking outward qualities, even as its own ritual has participated in nothing if not theatrical outwardness: “You that choose not by the view / Chance as fair and choose as true. / Since this fortune falls to you, / Be content and seek no new” (III.ii.131-134). Bassanio anticipates the lesson of the letter when he begins to remark that “So may the outward shows be least themselves, / The world is still deceived with ornament” (III.ii.73-74), but his choice is still based on an appearance, even if it is a “paleness [that] moves me more than eloquence” (III.ii.106). Bassanio pooh-poohs the world of appearances but nonetheless participates in the project of “outward show,” still chooses “by the view.” His selection of the lead casket seems not only to acknowledge that things appear to be other than what they are, but it is also an index of the uncertain connection between choice and its consequences. The lead casket with its warning, “Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath” (II.vii.16), rightly foregrounds the role of “hazard” in the matter of attachment. Bassanio and Portia experience the ritual as, it seems, a burden that interferes in their love. But the ritual simply externalizes the “hazard” subtending all ties, all attachments in the play.

Rather than trusting or assuming interiority, these characters couple a sense of the arbitrariness of feeling with the cultivation of symbols of attachment that mark the externality of those ties. As Portia gives Bassanio the ring that secures their bond, it seems that the spectacle of caskets and promises are insufficient. The ring appears to grant a union based on chance or fortune the cast of intentionality, but the ring itself is invested with an arbitrariness that contains the menace of contingency: “[W]hen you part from, lose or give away [the ring], / Let it presage the ruin of your love, / And be my vantage to exclaim on you” (III.ii.172-174). Like Antonio’s inexplicable sadness, Bassanio’s outcome is conceived of as what happens if an accident befalls a ring, or, in the words of Portia’s dead father, “Since this fortune falls to you” (III.ii.133). The injunction to “Be content” with the reward of the lead casket, here issued from the grave, will later be reclaimed by the converted Shylock whose professed “contentment” likewise marks the end of an effort, albeit a failed one, to secure his bond.\(^\text{12}\)

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This system of concrete symbols of attachment, then, externalizes attachments and does so in response to the desire of characters to move their attachments outward, to compensate for the arbitrariness and uncertainty of feeling. This is particularly evident in the scene of Shylock’s trial in which both Antonio and Shylock are looking for a fleshly bond that incarnates attachment, whether in the spirit of martyrdom or of revenge. Indeed, as the scene begins, Shylock’s characteristic repetitions summon the “bond”: “I’ll have my bond. Speak not against my bond; / I have sworn an oath that I will have my bond” (III.iii.4-5), “I’ll have my bond. I will not hear thee [Antonio] speak. / I’ll have my bond, and therefore speak no more.” (III.iii.12-13). Shylock’s repetitions render the “bond” itself strange, multiplying it without clarifying what the bond means – to Shylock or as such. His “I have sworn an oath that I will have my bond” folds the law in on itself as the legally binding “oath” mandates yet another bond. Shylock has sworn a bond to have a bond, then, but the efficacy of bonding (or swearing an oath, for that matter) seems less sure. As Shylock repeats the term, just what the bond is becomes less clear. So, too, however, does the relationship between the bond and speech. Shylock suggests that the “oath” determines that he “will have [his] bond,” but he quickly reveals that speech “against [his] bond” also poses a threat. The bond, then, seems both to follow from speech and to eliminate the need for it, as Shylock’s account of his decision conveys: because Shylock “will have [his] bond…therefore speak no more.” Antonio and Salanio realize it is futile to argue, Salanio deeming Shylock “impenetrable” and Antonio deciding it preferable to “Let him alone.” But what the language of Antonio and Shylock hints at is an alternative to the connective “bond”: isolation. Salanio and Antonio both imagine Shylock “alone” – “impenetrable,” “kept with men,” rather than living intertwined among them. If this language loosens the bond with Shylock, preferring to imagine him as a “stranger” with “commodity…/ With us in Venice” (III.iii.37-28), the language of exchange that might keep Shylock a “stranger” to the other characters actually formalizes another kind of role – as “creditor,” as “impenetrable.” The bond that Antonio and Salanio dare not mention is also crucial to them; it is that which ties Shylock, by oath, to Venice, its law, and to Antonio.

The theatre of contract, law, and enchanted symbols, from caskets to rings, provides not reason but security, a concrete crutch in the effort to establish the basis of attachment. Even Antonio cannot resist the gravity of this system and in his way shares Shylock’s desire to have and see the bond: “Pray God Bassanio come / To see me pay his debt, and then I care not” (III.iii.35-36). Rather than wishing for Antonio to rescue him (or to be spared certain injury or death), rather than imagining a duke who could “deny the course of law” and exercise his prerogative for clemency, a gloomy Antonio protests not enough – only interjecting twice. In a way, he seems to agree with Shylock that there is no use in arguing. In the scene of Portia-cum-jurist’s deliberation, the arbitrary feeling preceding the bond is also what follows it; what is subsequent to the bond, Portia explains, must also be arbitrariness. Addressing Antonio, Portia asks, “Do you confess the bond?” (IV.i.177). When Antonio replies in the affirmative, Portia


14 In this sense, Antonio’s insistence on refraining from arguing with Shylock or with the law simply replicates Shylock’s position that “mercy” should not be discussed (“Tell not me of mercy” (III.iii.1)). Shylock and Antonio share a wish for “no speaking” (III.iii.17) and a preference for spectacle: Shylock wants to see the bond of flesh exacted, and Antonio wants to be seen by Bassanio.
gives to Shylock a formula that replicates arbitrariness under the name of grace: “Then must the Jew be merciful.” Mercy, like “the gentle rain from heaven,” comes with no cause, neither “firm reason” nor explanation. “Mercy” cannot be caused (and obviously cannot be mandated either) – at least not in any ordinary way. While some have read in Portia’s requirement that Shylock be merciful a historical contest between justice and mercy or the competition of Jewish legalism and Christian grace, what the command to mercy reveals is the vast domain of the arbitrary surrounding the “bond.” Portia’s demand that Shylock give mercy in return for Antonio’s “confession” of the bond is not enough for a Shylock who wants the “penalty and forfeit of my bond.” The mere avowal of the bond in the form of Antonio’s confession is inadequate, and while Bassanio objects to the proceedings and appeals to the Duke, Shylock wants to see the tangible penalty of the bond exacted in full.

Portia’s manipulative request to “look upon the bond” voices a desire many of the play’s characters share; indeed, it is only what Antonio and Shylock have both been asking for throughout the play’s duration: to see what attachment is and the stuff that constitutes it. At this juncture, three characters have wanted to see the bond: Antonio has wished for Bassanio to witness its forfeit, Shylock has requested to exact it, and Portia has asked to “look upon” it. As Shylock praises Portia’s legal judgments, the audience learns what is at stake for the law: “[T]he intent and purpose of the law / Hath full relation to the penalty / Which here appeareth due upon the bond” (IV.i.243-245). While “full relation” here might suggest that Portia exposes how the law’s purpose is intricately connected to the penalty, what “appears…upon the bond” is an “intent and purpose” that signals the very arbitrariness of the law. The call for mercy, itself a call for arbitrariness in the form of an imitation of grace, is mirrored in the law where a mysterious “full relation” between “intent and purpose of the law” and “penalty” is kept as unknown as ever. This, Portia’s most developed articulation of the law, in fact points to the arbitrariness of the relationship between the law’s cryptic reasons and justifications and the penalties it exacts. Portia can provide no “firm reason” for the law but confirms, at least, where it is: “upon the bond.”

What, however, is the role of “manners,” or what are “manners” when it comes to the bond? In the “manners” of the daughters of The Merchant of Venice appears an ability to manipulate bonds, to skillfully maneuver in the world of attachment-making. In the place of a tradition of dowries and exogamy emerges a compensatory aura around the daughter: she assumes new powers in a community in which daughterhood and the binding capacity it traditionally possesses are insufficient. She is not simply exchanged along with her dowry but actually has a power over a new art of attachment. More than participating allegorically in the crisis of succession, there seems to be something askew with the loyalties of genealogy. The “blood” attachments that seemed so useful are oddly expendable in a universe of the play in which figuring out what one’s “humour” is is as difficult for the onlooker as for the subject. As I have suggested, the desire to see the bond makes promises and contracts inadequate, and one solution lies in the bond’s externalization. The presence of daughters seems inextricably tied to the maintenance and creation of bonds of kinship, but in Jessica and Portia, this daughter function also comes with an enduring kind of transformative magic. The conversion of both Jessica and currency to Christianity suggests that, imaginatively or otherwise, the allegiance of daughters has material effects beyond the daughter herself. As Salanio reports Shylock’s exclamation of “Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!” (II.viii.16), Shylock’s speech

15 See John Drakakis’ helpful comments in the Arden Shakespeare edition, 347.
registers the nearly mystical power with which his daughter's flight is imbued. But if this instance of hypallage endows Jessica's flight with a sacramental power, it is not the only moment in the play where the transfiguration associated with daughters is essential to forging attachments.

In Jessica's flight and in Portia's transformation into jurist and de facto legislator, Shakespeare portrays daughters with the power to change their ways of being embodied and to summon the power of the law. Salanio reports Shylock's reaction to Jessica's flight:

\begin{verbatim}
A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats,
Of double ducats, stolen from me by my daughter!
And jewels, two stones, two rich and precious stones,
Stolen by my daughter! Justice! find the girl;
She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats. (II.viii.18-22)
\end{verbatim}

Shylock's words describe an emasculation by transfer; while his house has been despoiled of its riches, the "two stones" stolen from him amount to a figurative castration. The figure Shylock describes ("the girl / She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats") has stolen Shylock's "properties" in two senses: she has taken the jewels and ducats that belonged to him, but she has also transformed him – leaving him castrated without actually being so – by virtue of the "stones upon her," which acquire an incantatory power through Shylock's urgent repetitions. The odd logic of Shylock's charge doubles every offense, and it is in this dyadic structure that the untethered attachment between Shylock and Jessica appears: their relationship is no longer characterized in a bodily and even sentimental language of "flesh and blood." Jessica morphs into simply "the girl" with his precious metals. Yet we have met such women before in Portia and Nerissa, those women who put "stones upon" themselves through dress – and, in so doing, invent and enforce the law. The material "flesh and blood" bond becomes flimsy in light of attachments nullified and transferred without action or speech.

Jessica's severed ties have a figurative magic that renders ducats and jewels capable of more than mere exchange, that transforms Shylock. But Portia's bonding magic exceeds even that, summoning the impersonal magic of the law. As Portia transforms herself into the young juris doctor, she presides over the attachments of subjects to the law and the arrangements between subjects. And indeed, she will do so again without costume in the final scene of the play in which Antonio is re-bound. In her voluntary submission to her father's casket test, Portia seems at first to exemplify the peaceful and untroubled process of attachment and reattachment through the ritual binding of the daughter. But she goes beyond the call of her filial bond in transforming herself into a representative of the state, and as she presides over the legal "bond" and over new attachments for Antonio, the salvific effect of Portia's Machiavellian legal maneuvers should be understood as part of a broader range of daughterly stratagems. Shylock's confusion of daughters and ducats and Portia's administration of the legal bond suggest that daughters intervene at sites of attachment that have more than "family" at issue. Rather, there is a network of attachment in which flexibility determines one's success at maneuvering around them, and in which a reliance on "humour" alone proves to be inadequate. On the one hand, this means that the ethic of the courtier trumps consistency or an appeal to fixed values. In Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, flexibility and self-transformation were key to success at court, dissembling the key to advancement for so many Machiavels and Iagos. But dissembling comes at a higher price here, for Portia's transformation from heiress to jurist and Jessica's financial and familial breech suggest that a primary bond rooted in blood relations is either
bankrupt or just untrue. Jessica’s own description of her relationship to her father – “of his blood but not his manner” – begins to adumbrate an alternative to bonds of blood. And, it seems, that what being a daughter is is performing a kind of relationship, one that, here, seems to be in flux.

In this light, it is less Castiglione’s model that illuminates what these daughters do than Giordano Bruno’s *De vinculis in genere* (published in 1588, three years after Bruno’s two-year stay in England), which would articulate the task of bonding and the highly specific bonds that formed between parties. It would be a question not simply of social savvy but of links between parties that, like “manner,” consisted not of the traditional matter of blood and flesh but of a more mysterious and less stable *vincula* or bond: “The explanation of bonds is, for the most part, hidden, even from the wise, for what use is it to appeal to analogies, similarities, family traits and other such meaningless words…”16 Like the characters in *The Merchant of Venice*, Bruno seems to suggest that, however many kinds of bonds might be observed and evoked, there is no firm reason to be rendered for them. In Bruno’s hands, while bonds are part of a strictly material world – “There is nothing outside of matter or without matter”17 – bonds are nonetheless at a remove from what can be explained: “[t]aken universally, bonding agents are God, demons, souls, animals, nature, chance, luck, and finally fate.”18 These bonding agents, with their varying degrees of mystical properties, in no way lessen the importance of seeing or sensing the bond, and Bruno stresses the centrality of the eyes to a process of bonding that begins with the senses. In Bruno’s world, as in Antonio’s, it is nearly impossible to explain easily how or why a bond comes to be, but while Bruno crafts a systematic account of mystical attachments, in *The Merchant of Venice*, there is no reliable rulebook at all. In fact, the absence of authority, textual or otherwise, is part of what seems to give Portia’s fiats their unusual strength. As she asserts her interpretations of the bond, she becomes an “agent of bonding” herself.

When Portia legislates bonds in costume in Venice and later in her own right in Belmont, she absorbs a power that, earlier in the play, seemed available to the characters over whom she now presides. In spite of the occasional levity in earlier scenes of bonding, the final binding of Shylock and Antonio shows a forced interiority simultaneous with the loss of control over exterior bonds. In other words, Shylock’s savage forced conversion is kind of bond but one that excludes him from a world in which one’s social livelihood depends on being able to make bonds. Shylock’s earlier description of the conversion of his currency (as he lamented his Christian daughter and her “converted” ducats) exposed wrongdoing, but it still showed Shylock able to wield transformative speech (even as what it described, as I have shown above, was also his own transformation). But both Shylock and Antonio will end the play having very little to say. At Portia’s announcement that Antonio’s ships have survived intact, Antonio speaks a language that distances itself from language as such: “I am dumb” (V.i.279). Certainly Antonio’s response reveals that he is “amazed,” but he has also just told Portia that he “dare be bound again” (V.i.251) – words meant to vouch for Bassanio’s loyalty but also a wish that will come true as Antonio becomes Portia’s puppet and finds himself making Bassanio swear his fidelity to the “ring” at her behest. Antonio is “dumb” not just out of relief for his ships’ safety but because he needs Portia to give him his lines. While earlier he could “say” he was merry because he was not

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18 Ibid., 145.
sad, here he cannot say anything. The loquacity of Antonio’s first speech, in which he claimed to have “much ado to know [him]self” (I.i.7), has devolved from appropriating the suggestions he held to be correct (Salanio’s assessment) or asserting the value of self-knowledge, to being part of a “dumb” show he by no means directs.

Antonio’s “dumbness” in being re-bound comes at the high price of his voluntary servitude to Portia and her rules, but the far more sinister end of course lies in Shylock’s professed “contentment.” After his forced conversion, Shylock is, like Antonio, “dumb,” but Shylock is literally so, his considerable verbal artistry reduced to a few bare replies and requests. While Shylock’s claim to contentment has attracted critical controversy, it is at this point hardly disputable that “it is a contentment that borders on discontent,”19 as Julia Lupton mildly puts it. What I would suggest, however, is that the problem is that it is contentment that Shylock experiences – not the “ecstatic” revelation of Christian truth, not the “satisfaction of payment,” but “contentment” in its etymological sense, a “contentment” as in Latin continuere: to contain, to keep – and one might say, even, to bind. The “contented” Shylock shows just what a knot a bind can be, for in his “merciful” punishment, Shylock is forced inward – and out of the play. It is no wonder that he will leave the play with a short set of instructions and a brief excuse (“I am not well”), for what has been forced upon Shylock is a binding that also stuffs him with unwanted contents. The magical bonding power that Portia wields has stopped Shylock from participating in the play of bonds or free self-fashioning. What the audience has witnessed is a form of torture that leaves no marks: we have seen Shylock stuffed full of new “contents.” In a play in which power resides in manipulating, shaping, and witnessing external attachments, the primary punishment is this extraordinary surfeit of forced interiority.

The bond will have quite a different fate in King Lear, but in The Merchant of Venice, at least, a certain magic still enchants the bond, however cruel its effects. The ritual of the caskets, linking death and dowries and suggesting that a bond might be created by opening the right box, Portia’s transformation and the miracle of flesh without blood that she requires, and the closing scene of the play around a “ring” that is at once punningly bawdy but also enchanted and binding leave The Merchant of Venice in a world not yet demystified. The music that Jessica and Lorenzo hear in Belmont removes the play, at its end, from the culture of commerce in Venice but also has the effect of imbuing the play with the texture of midsummer, further coloring a realm in which tokens have real power. Even the world of hard exchange and busy dealings in Venice obeys the magic of the law (even at its most cruel), and if there is something inadequate about the new “bond” or some kind of upheaval about primary bonds, there is a “manner” that prevails. In the Merchant of Venice, the insistence on a network of “bonds” and “rings” does not signal a particularly easy or “harmonious” relationship to attachment but, rather, one in which the terms of attachment must be fought for, where the repetition and accumulation of symbols signals part of a widespread effort to grapple with and control the new regime of flesh without blood, the regime of “manner.”

II. Sweeter by Any Other Name

In the early England of King Lear, however, the breakdown in bonds summons not costume changes and the felicities of Belmont but an exposure of an “unbondedness” that threatens to unleash a primal loneliness. As King Lear plans to divide his kingdom in three, his strategy of asking for affirmations of love seeks to ensure the integrity of his kingdom. However

crass, the exchange of land for avowals of love, not unlike political marriages, maintains the enchantment of state. That the lion’s share should go to the daughter whom “shall we say doth love us most” (I.i.50)\(^20\) is evidence less of vanity than of the way in which love and nation go together, the way in which the state requires affirmations of its subjects’ attachments. So when Lear asks his three daughters to quantify their love, what he demands of them is a necessary collusion in early England’s most basic political science:

Since now we will divest us both of rule,  
Interest of territory, cares of state—  
Which of you shall we say doth love us most,  
That we our largest bounty may extend  
Where nature doth with merit challenge. (I.i.48-53)

Lear’s “Since now” places in the scene of distribution an under-examined chain of causation: it is only because Lear is abdicating that these declarations are necessary. (In other words, Cordelia’s silence would be fine were it not so urgent a matter of state, were it not the “now” that merits it most.) The division of state has already begun before the lips of any daughter move, however, for Lear’s unnerving “both” sits at the fulcrum between “us” and the triplicate grouping of “rule, Interest of territory, [and] cares of state.” What the “both” modifies and splits, whether the direct or indirect object of divestment (that is, whether “us” or these features “of state”), is so unclear as to suggest that both the fracture of self and the fracture of territory are equally at stake. At the moment of divestment, the request for a performance of fealty claims a special relationship to the coherence of state and self. And it is a measure designed to soften, somewhat, the “Unburdened crawl toward death” (I.i.40) that Lear’s abdication signifies. The verbal outpouring of affection counters the decrepitude of the fading king with a fecundity that renews Lear’s bondedness to his life and to the life of state. But part of the virility of Lear’s efforts here lies in his assertion of control: his last act as ruler is to uphold the unwritten law that yokes love and land, that secures the bond’s underwriting power. It takes a torrent of declarations for Lear’s transfer to maintain its mystique: after Lear, this deluge. In other words, these affirmations of bonds renew Lear’s bondedness to life itself, and part of its power lies in its control over the kinds of bonds that are permissible.

Lear’s request is also a simpler kind of conquest, though: pitting the sisters against each other, it forecloses claims to sororal ties with its single superlative: “Which of you shall we say doth love us most.” If Lear’s formula for power mixes love and land, it generously satisfies itself with speech, or, put more bluntly, it doesn’t need the “real thing,” for what Lear asks is not who loves him the most but who he can say loves him most.\(^21\) As in The Merchant of Venice, however, there is an uneasy artificiality contained in the verb of speaking, and Lear asks for speech that would engender more speech, a kind of linguistic insurance for state and person. Accordingly, Goneril describes a love that points to an asymptotic overflow of language: “Sir, I do love you more than word can wield the matter” (I.i.55) while Regan suggests Goneril “comes too short” and that she alone will “the most precious square of sense possess” (I.i.72, 74). Both Regan and

\(^{20}\) All citations from the play are from the Arden edition: William Shakespeare, King Lear, ed. R.A. Foakes (London: Arden Shakespeare, 1997). All subsequent citations come from this edition will be cited in the text by act, scene, and line number.

\(^{21}\) Like most criticism of Lear, Tate’s version of King Lear overlooks this intervening “say.” See Nahum Tate, The History of King Lear, ed. James Black (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1975).
Goneril seem to understand that their participation in these vows reflects a “sense” that word can wield matter, that what Lear has asked for is not love but sayings. They also mimic the power of the king’s superlative, and neither refers to attachment by name without qualifying it as “more” or “most.” While an angry Shylock can decide to render no reason for his feelings or for his desire for the bond, Goneril and Regan carefully obscure any language that would bring the legitimacy of bonding or the arbitrariness (or authenticity) of feeling into question. What they have to offer the king is something, as Goneril puts it, “Beyond all manner” of description (I.i.61), but it is precisely this showcase of manners that secures their place in the kingdom, that preserves the order of “thee and thine hereditary ever” (I.i.79).

Even in light of the already destabilizing language of attachment in The Merchant of Venice, Cordelia’s sequence of replies are a stark commentary on the nature of attachment, rendered all the more potent by their simplicity in contrast to the rhetorical fireworks of Goneril and Regan. While she refuses to answer obsequiously in the style of her sisters, Cordelia nonetheless seems to share with Goneril and Regan an astute understanding of the special power of language, even if she is the only one to hear the unsettling “Which of you” that precedes both the sororal contest and Cordelia’s strange split from herself. Cordelia’s canny apprehension inheres in her two asides, in which she worries about what to say – and also about the very Cordelia who will say it: “What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent” (I.i.62). “Love” is the object of the verb “to speak” here, but it is also its own imperative; coupled with “be silent,” it seems as if Cordelia has grasped the weird mechanism of subject formation, reworking Lear’s question, “Which of you shall we say doth love us most,” in a way that shows how “Cordelia” is a social role she must play and oversee. But with its parallel to Lear and Lear’s “shall,” with the force of its bold imperatives (the commands to love and to be silent), Cordelia disenchants Lear’s kingdom well before she makes the leader lose his cool: she shows the audience that anyone, in fact, can talk like a king. In spite of this, Cordelia seems to overlook the ways in which the language of love maintains the bonds of family. Her complaint bypasses any explicit acknowledgment of what it means to speak and to feel, and her initial two replies of “Nothing” (I.i.87, I.i.89) when Lear asks her what she has to say baffles the economy of exchange Lear has set up and that Goneril and Regan have successfully navigated. “[N]othing will come of nothing” (I.i.90), Lear replies, mirroring Cordelia, and, where Goneril and Regan would produce speech, a kind of negative fecundity makes many nothings out of nothing.

When she is prompted to explain herself, Cordelia’s minimalist replies show how the “bond” is, in truth, a protocol – a courtly choreography or even a guarantee, but something quite apart from the universe of the florid allegiances of her sisters. Cordelia places the “bond” outside of a language that would confuse language with spirit or with body: “Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty / According to my bond, no more nor less” (I.i.91-93). Cordelia cannot speak for her heart, nor her heart for itself, beyond conveying the simple truth that she adheres to “those duties…as are right fit” (I.i.96). But more importantly, she posits a “bond” with so settled a value that it simply cannot participate in Lear’s contest for a love measured in superlative language, as “least” or “most”—or even as “more [or] less.” Cordelia’s reply isolates the bond beyond the pale of comparison, even as it ironically produces its own Surfeit of attachment as its “according to” resonates both with the cord or tie of the “bond” she only utters once and with a fragment of Cordelia’s own name. (It is only in this “According to” that Cordelia successfully heaves “heart” – the Latin cor, cordis – into her mouth.) In a remarkable echoing of The Merchant of Venice, Cordelia’s response also suggests that her relationship to Lear hinges upon the manners required of the bond, her “according to” mirroring
Jessica’s ambivalent account of her attachment to Shylock in that moment at which she announces that she is Shylock’s daughter in blood but not manner. The rage Lear experiences in response to Cordelia’s insufficient avowals is a catastrophe most readers of Shakespeare now know well: he disowns Cordelia and announces that

[he] disclaim[s] all . . . paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee from this for ever. (I.i.117)

Instead, Lear leaves Cordelia with the “truth”: “Well, let it be so. Thy truth then be thy dower” (I.i.109). Lear’s program of exchange, his attempt to pit his daughters against each other in a contest of love and power, fails with Cordelia’s exposure of the bare bond. The truth might be gained, but its cost is catastrophic.

What Cordelia seems not to realize is that the “bond” “according to” which she loves Lear “no more nor less” (I.i.93) is constituted by the fictions and the excess she will not produce. It is Cordelia’s answer, with its judicious restraint, that triggers the creation of a world that demonstrates precisely what it means to have a system of bonds “according to” such a model of restraint. In other words, the chaos that ensues reflects a world without the fictions that surround such attachments. Lear’s response, which severs the ties of “blood” through language, alerts the audience to just what Cordelia has unleashed: the possibility of undoing the fiction of the bond, of having no bond at all or one that seems, at best, nominal. The play’s painful isolations and exiles, I suggest, are more than the oft-observed “exile and separation [that] separate one from another [or] disguise and madness [that] lock away . . . individuals in their private worlds.”22 These severed ties startle us not only because Lear’s kingdom and its order shatter with it, but also because the interpersonal bond dissolves and shows a primary bond, between king and subject and father and daughter, revoked by so simple a thing as naming it. The maintenance of bonds, as Regan, Goneril, and even Edmund know, requires producing more—in concealing or evading the neutrality of the bond’s fixed value, “no more nor less,” even if it means foregoing the truth.

If Cordelia is uncomfortable with elaborating fictions on command, if she will not articulate a “manifold and strong . . . bond” (as Edmund puts it), it is not because she lacks experience in doing so. Indeed, Cordelia’s self-consciousness about a “Cordelia” that already summons with it so many social fictions undermines her claim to being “pitiable” for her inability to constitute a self who could speak like her sisters, even as it exposes the cunning of Regan and Goneril in their recognition that the rhetoric of affection, the verbal production of bonds, is necessary for the state. Yet Cordelia’s “nothing” is a far greater hazard than the sycophancy of her sisters, for Cordelia exposes the way that bonds are forged and demonstrates that the fantasy of innate filial loyalty is inadequate when left unstated or without ornament. While Cordelia’s honesty seems convincing enough, it is inadequate to maintain the bond. As the characters of The Merchant of Venice understand, maintaining attachments requires excess and, at times, even pageantry. Foregoing the elaboration of “manners” is not enough. Cordelia’s objection to the procedure of exchange, whether understood as excessive pride or heroic stubbornness, takes the form of a refusal of a requisite ornamentation. Her statement that she loves Lear only “according to [her] bond” articulates a respect for the letter more than the “spirit” of custom,

and the failure of her honesty exposes the necessity of zeal for the maintenance of order and the *status quo*.

The fiction-making Lear requires around the “bond” and the distribution of land and power shapes the play’s imagining of an ancient England, but Cordelia’s conundrum – forced to speak before sovereign power and pledge a kind of loyalty she cannot – comes from the tragedy but also characterizes a common political quandary of the early modern period. Though the culture of oath-taking and allegiance would only intensify leading up to the English Civil War, “[t]he oaths contained in Henry VIII’s 1534 Act of Succession and the 1559 Elizabethan Oath of Supremacy set the style.” 23 In the “last three decades of the sixteenth century…”, “[p]enalties for recusancy were stiffened; efforts at detection and prosecution were intensified.” 24 Indeed, Jonsen and Toulmin argue that “truth-telling was the most prominent [moral issue] that everyone with Catholic sympathies must have faced almost daily.” 25 From the culture of dissimulation, members of the court already knew how to conceal, how to finesse the truth, but the “crisis of conscience” extended the realm of “court” beyond the confines of aristocratic life. But what these oaths also did was to confirm commitments to community. While on the one hand, the broken bonds of *King Lear* occur between family members and the culture of the court, the question of bonds was no less pressing in real life, and the stake of promises made in a culture of oath-taking would only raise the stakes of Cordelia’s lackluster performance.

Though her sisters understand the scene of politics to require pageantry, Cordelia treats Lear’s program of political exchange in minimalist terms. A nearly legalistic division of affections, Cordelia’s description of the “bond” is exact and even somewhat chilly: “Haply, when I shall wed, / That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry / Half my love with him, half my care and duty” (I.i.100-102). Cordelia is no renegade here; she will follow the rules of attachment to the letter, and though her allusions to the weight of her “heart” signals her emotive depth, she appears here to be more calculating, in a literal sense, at least, than either of her sisters. The logic of her affections adheres to a rigorous mathematics: *half* of her love and *half* her “care and duty” will be “carried” by whomever she weds. The echo of “care” in “carried” only accentuates the way in which the “bond” is part of a bare procedure of exchange; even “care” will appear as an effect of utility. As she characterizes her eventual marriage as something that occurs “haply,” Cordelia exposes how what rules affection is not sentimentiality or passion but *chance*. What Cordelia has uttered that must not be voiced is this: attachments can occur “haply,” and feeling can be ruled by unfeeling calculation. Lear already knows this, of course, for his own demand for avowals of love merges political calculation with love. But Cordelia has voiced something that should not be named. And as she bids farewell to her sisters, Cordelia threatens to expose the “bond” yet again and to shatter sisterhood with it: “I know you what you are, / And like a sister am most loath to call / Your faults as they are named” (I.i.271-273). “Like” a sister, Cordelia hints that her attachment to Goneril and Regan also occurs “according to” a basic, and fragile, bond. She likewise seems to understand the power she might possess in speaking the truth and naming things “as they are named.” Her plain-spokenness is a dangerous disenchantment: it formulates the “bond” as the stuff of mundane obligation, quite separate from the richness of emotion and interiority; she shows how very little indeed there is to show.

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25 Ibid.
Cordelia’s frankness does not yield a new language of plainness or an unornamented respect for obligation. Indeed, Lear’s invocation of Hecate as he disowns Cordelia breaks the “bond” but only in protecting the magic of language that Cordelia wants to disavow. Lear proves wrong Cordelia’s quiet contention that bonds can remain unspoken or, at least, can be spoken without elaboration. As he disowns her with performative utterances mystified further by the stuff of witchcraft, he not only severs their tie but also restores (or at least tries to restore!) the power of language to create and destroy bonds. Thus Cordelia’s error in not avowing her love and not conforming to the rules of court elicits from Lear something quite different than a simple affirmation of the values of the court and of the behaviors of its aristocracy. What Lear resorts to is not a fiat that rewards the behavior of Goneril and Regan or a defense of his demand for a declaration of love but, rather, an invocation of the occult. Cordelia’s sense that her attachments exist simply “according to my bond” so unsettles Lear that he seeks a remedy in witchcraft:

Thy truth then be thy dower,
For by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
By all the operations of the orbs
From whom we do exist and cease to be,
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee from this for ever. (I.i.109-117)

Lear adopts Cordelia’s tongue here, throwing “care” back in her face as a thing “disclaimed.” But Lear not only severs the tie between Cordelia and himself, he also restores (or at least tries to restore!) the power of language to create and destroy bonds. As he summons “the mysteries of Hecate” and an astrological order, those “operations of the orbs,” Lear’s incantation summons both the powers of kingship and an interpersonal magic that renders Cordelia a “stranger.” Yoking kingship to the decipherment of the occult – to that which ties together dark matter and its mystical effects – is in fact the bravado of the bond, an exertion of a kind of **kingly** witchcraft under the aegis of sovereign power.

Lear’s invocation of Hecate summons a mystified politics (one with particular resonance in the England of a King James who authored *Daemonologie*26) and Cordelia appealed to the timeless forces of nature, but these are also evocations of a more primal prehistory where words and magic coincide. As he calls upon celestial powers, Lear imagines bonds made and severed by magic, speech transformed into the cosmic coordination of persons and things. In *Macbeth*, calling upon magic for the sake of political power works: real witches really appear. In *The Merchant of Venice*, a kind of lesser magic exists in the stuff of the law and in a network of symbols and promises that, however mutable, bind all of the characters in the end. In this model of England, that is, in *King Lear*, magic has stopped working, and Lear’s pleas to the planets ring hollow. While once sorcery could connect a would-be king to his fate (spectacular or otherwise), here Hecate never shows up, and Lear’s “breaking” of blood ties and “propinquity” in the language of magic only reinforces what Cordelia has already shown: namely, how there is no

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supernatural magic to the tie at all. Moments later, Lear reaches toward Greco-Roman magics, summoning Apollo (I.i.161) and Jupiter (I.i.179) in vain. The classical polis and its gods have no ears for Lear’s lament. The rule that Cordelia has broken has not just torn a kingdom asunder; it has also broken an order in which bonds and attachments can be conjured through incantation, can be affirmed through the fervency of magics, for all to see.

In this England, Hecate will not respond when summoned, and nature will not heed its children’s pleas. But the play doles out a response of its own and one that outdoes Lear’s banishment of his daughter from his realm: namely, its own exile of Cordelia from the play. While it is by now something of a familiar claim to locate “magic” in the functioning of the play itself, the play seems to have ears where Nature and the gods do not. It seems to have granted forcibly Cordelia’s call for silence and to have marked Lear’s oath to “Hold thee from this for ever” (I.i.117), where the cryptic deixis of being “H[el]d from this/this” resides in fact the mechanism by which Cordelia is removed from the play. What Cordelia forfeits in offering “nothing” other than the bare bond are the identity categories made out of the bond, but it also seems as if she somehow threatens the play (and its fictions), too. In a play in which exile is so common – so many characters sent to the moors or pushed out of the play of power – Cordelia experiences an exile so extreme that she is written out of the play, not just out of England, for close to its entirety. But Cordelia’s exile is not only a narrative consequence of social and political commotion and the workings of stagecraft; it is also borne out of her own power to expose rather than merely decorate the bond.

Between Acts I and IV, Cordelia disappears entirely from the play, speaking in the play’s very first scene not to utter another word until Act IV, scene iv: it is as if the play will not readmit her until she, too, tries to restore language’s magic. Whatever Cordelia “feels” is not attachment enough; that is, as in _The Merchant of Venice_ where so many wanted to see the bond, attachment is held to be something outside – something that must be raised through incantation or affirmed through ceremonies of fervent commitment. While on the one hand she seems to obey her own commandment to “Be silent” (I.i.62), when she does reappear, she re-pledges herself to ornamental commitments, calling upon the natural world as she describes her father:

> Crowned with rank fumiter and furrow-weeds,  
> With burdocks, hemlocks, nettles, cuckoo-flowers,  
> Darnel and all the idle weeds that grow  
> In our sustaining corn. (IV.iv.3-6)

In contrast to her earlier “Nothing” is Cordelia’s newfound harvest. What she does here is the kind of copious performance she refuses to do in the presence of the king. Her description of the king’s vegetal ornaments is a catalogue of his accoutrements, a detailed account of the stuff that makes the king, practically a witch’s brew of herbs from the native soil of “our sustaining corn.” What her herbal effusion leads her to is a restoration of a belief in a kind of magic that her disenchanted account of her love had deferred. Whereas before the bare “bond” (perhaps, the _cord_) of attachment was enough, now the natural world that produces a “sustaining corn” must be addressed in increasingly mystical terms. Addressing not “Cordelia” but the earth itself, Cordelia then summons the power of Nature:

> All blest secrets  
> All you unpublished virtues of the earth,
Spring with my tears. Be aidant and remediate
In the good man's distress. (IV.iv.15-18)

It is too late for Cordelia. Even if the binding effects of natural “magic” could work, Cordelia seems only belatedly to arrive at what she refuses to give in the play’s opening: a natural loquacity in which “unpublished virtues” are made manifest. For it was precisely unpublished virtues that shattered the kingdom: the public bond, avowed in speech, is that which sustains kingdoms. It is only now, with her invocation of natural magic, that Cordelia is permitted reentry into the world of the play. Cordelia’s “unnatural” performance of daughterhood at the start of the play is here supplanted by a renewed commitment in language to the power of nature. But it is a failed effort and not just because both she and the king face imminent death. It is also a failure because Cordelia cannot retract her “nothing.” The ruse here is too obvious: the restoration of a “natural” order is just a pile of plants on the king’s head.

The play, like Lear, banishes Cordelia, and the terms of her reentry to the play are curiously yoked to her efforts to restore the kind of speech that she has already rendered obsolete. Cordelia meets her match not in her raging father, not in the machinations of her wicked sisters, but in the power of theatre. Indeed, she is only admitted to the play when her language reaches toward natural magic and when she stops saying “nothing” and reaffirms the language of vows. In their famous reconciliation scene, Cordelia avows, at last, that she is indeed Lear’s child. In doing so, she seems to restore a necessary dependency, and even to exaggerate it in agreeing that she is a “child” (rather than, say, an adult). More is at stake than articulating the terms of Cordelia’s relationship to Lear. Lear’s scene of recognition performs this transfer, a metamorphosis that moves Cordelia from “lady” to “child”: “For, as I a man, I think this lady / To be my child Cordelia” (IV.vii.68-69). While on the one hand a poignant scene of reunion and mutual recognition, the reconciliation between Lear and Cordelia also requires the acceptance of an infantilization upon which Lear stakes his virility (“as I am a man”). As Cordelia repeats the formula according to which she affirms she is Lear’s child – “And so I am, I am” (IV.vii.70) – she twice over accepts an identity category that is a function of bondedness. But it is also something she has to repeat twice, as if simply saying it once is not enough. Cordelia has agreed to the part Lear has assigned her, but she has agreed far too late. The role Cordelia is given here might reasonably remind us of other distributions of parts in Shakespeare, but in contrast to the joyful assignation of roles in Midsummer or the tortured theatricality of Hamlet, Cordelia is a reluctant player.

While the play can tolerate vast ambiguities – can indeed show Cordelia’s model of state “according to [her] bond” – it ultimately destroys her, pushing her out of the play until she mends her speech and then ultimately eliminating her for being, still, too great a threat. The play does this for two reasons, I suggest. First, it attaches to Cordelia a strange causation: her exposure of the unadorned “bond” produces a violent society in which neither bonds nor much of anything else works. Second, though the play considers Cordelia’s model and presents it for our consideration, the shape of the drama affirms the value of language and ornament both for the science of state and for the theatre itself. Cordelia’s model of state, one in which acknowledging the “bond” alone would be enough might seem monstrous to Lear, but for audiences shortly after Shakespeare’s time, there was indeed a model of the polis in which the order of society rested in an indelible bond that needed no special ornamentation: namely, contract. A few decades after Lear, Hobbes wrote of “the BONDS by which men are bound and obliged, bonds that have their strength, not from their own nature (for nothing is more easily
broken than a man’s word) but from fear of some evil consequence upon the rupture.”

Cordelia, with the “cord” or “bond” in her name, seems not to fear loss because she affirms the bond; where Goneril and Regan scramble to secure their inheritances, Cordelia trusts in the bond alone.

But Cordelia’s modern politics signal not progress but regression; when Cordelia points out what is effectively a contract that binds her to father and husband, that undergirds the state, the early England of King Lear is thrown into chaos. Cordelia’s articulation of the bond might be said to produce social disorder, to create “evil consequence” even if she herself has not assumed any “rupture” to the bond. In another light, the Cordelia who has made a Hobbesian observation about what ties subjects together and to power, succeeds not in banishing a feared state of nature -- but has instead invited chaos in. Indeed, life after Cordelia’s utterance is nothing if not “solitary, nasty, brutish, and short.” The horrible irony of Cordelia avowing bondedness is that it makes way for a more treacherous solitude. It produces an England of every man against every man, cheap alliances dismantled as quickly as they are forged, a chaos on par with that unleashed with the help of magic in Macbeth when Duncan’s horses “Turn’d wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out / Contending ‘gainst obedience, as they would make / War with mankind” (II.iv.16-18). But here it is not horses or the environment that rebels; it is a chaos created only by those “of woman born.” In making this inversion, in having the declaration of the “bond” unleash chaos, the play punishes the Cordelia who would dare to speak this new truth on its stage.

In the Hobbesian inversion where Cordelia’s “bond” precedes the fury of political disarray, the play rejects the Cordelia who, like Freud’s “Death Goddess,” seems to be more cipher than person. Her conscience is hard to “catch,” even if we think we know what it is. The cryptic attachment that Cordelia seems to embody, might be “truthful” enough, but what we can know for sure is that neither Lear nor the play wants truth: they want language and ornament. Hobbes might agree with Cordelia, “[s]eeing then that truth consisteth in right ordering of names in our affirmations.” Cordelia certainly names the bond correctly, remembering what it stands for and not elaborating anything more than the exact bond. It is Goneril and Regan in contrast who try to weave attachments out of florid speech, who operate against the Hobbesian edict for truth: “a man that seeketh precise truth had need to remember what every name he uses stands for, and to place it accordingly, or else he will find himself entangled in words; as a bird in lime twigs, the more he struggles the more belimed.” While the Cordelia who loves “according to her bond” shows the simple truth “accordingly,” as Hobbes would have it, in naming the bond alone, it is decorous language that produces dramatic poesy and that lets politics proceed, not without conflict, but at least without derailing altogether.

It is fitting that Lear’s fantasy for himself and Cordelia would show such a bird “belimed,” if in this version with two birds and in a more orderly trap – in the cage Lear imagines for himself and Cordelia:

No, no, no, no. Come let’s away to prison
We two alone will sing like birds i’the cage.
When thou dost ask me blessing I’ll kneel down

29 Hobbes, Leviathan, 19.
30 Ibid.
And ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too –
Who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out….

(V.iii.8-15)

In Lear’s fantasy, the vibrant exchange that Cordelia’s initial clipped replies precluded is replaced with a surplus of speech. The successful exchange of blessing for forgiveness is succeeded by a surfeit of language: prayer and song, tales and gossip. Lear’s “No, no, no, no” – in reply to Cordelia – echoes her “nothing” from earlier in the play, but it also turns negation into population, with his “No, no, no, no” followed shortly by the teeming polis he imagines being summoned to parlay in the prison-court in a quartet of four “Who’s: “Who loses and who wins, who’s in, who’s out.” Where Cordelia’s “bond” seemed to depersonalize and obviate specificity of character, Lear seems here to reserve spots for its restoration, this time in the guise of a political who’s who that adds to the “Talk” that fills the space, that delightedly blurs the precision of “what every name stands for…” à la Hobbes with the stuff of mirth and tales old and new.

Cordelia has no time to reply, sent to her death before she can affirm (or dissolve) Lear’s language trap. But beyond the intensity and poignancy of Lear’s reaction to Cordelia’s death is an indication of Cordelia’s importance, and her threat, to the state. Lear first understands that Cordelia is dead, “gone for ever” (V.iii.257); he recognizes the permanency of death, and his knowledge includes “know[ing] when one is dead and when one lives” (V.iii.258). This knowledge seems only uneasily to extend to Cordelia, for Lear’s certainty soon wavers under the weight of his grief. “Lend me a looking-glass” (V.iii.259), he says, calling for a mirror to see if Cordelia’s “breath will mist” (V.iii.260) and prove she lives. Lear’s call for the mirror might rightly arouse some suspicion for readers of Shakespeare in the wake of Hamlet’s call for a mirror to show Gertrude “the inmost parts of you” (III.iv.21), tethering the mirror to pained and forced revelation, but the mirror is also the special tool of the theatre, if we believe Hamlet’s description that he gives to the player, where the function of theatre is to hold “the mirror up to nature” (III.ii.22). The mirror of theatre will depict and test the dead Cordelia. But Lear’s request for a mirror, not unlike Hamlet’s, also nervously summons a different kind of mirror: the “mirror” for princes. At the moment of Cordelia’s death, the deposed king summons a genre that would teach him anew how to rule. The mirror for princes, the genre that created models for kingship, the genre, in fact, of King James’ own Basilikon Doron (1599), appears here as an ironic and obsolete technology. Lear might have been helped by calling on such a book much earlier, of course, but Cordelia has already seemed to suggest that such advice manuals are part of a quaint past – a past that also includes the niceties of performing the flourishes of obeisance. The future is heading elsewhere, toward a different kind of political science, and the methods of the past do not seem to work. For the bond to keep working, it will need a different kind of power.

Yet the other technology that Lear summons comes out of the natural world, bringing with it not the techniques of old kingship but a more humble material, apart from the artifice of human creation. Lear’s second test calls for a prop whose appearance has been notoriously difficult to account for in the play: the feather.31 If “[t]his feather stirs, she lives” (V.iii.263), Lear explains, announcing he will see if Cordelia’s breath will make the feather quiver and prove she

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lives. In this weird tuft, as in the promise of the mirror, inheres some of the magic of theatre, for the feather is an embodiment, if only a fragment, of Lear’s own fantasy. The play that paid no heed to wish or magic has seemed, at last, to hear Lear’s call: the cage he imagined for himself and Cordelia where “We two alone will sing like birds i’the cage” (V.iii.9) has, from Lear’s words, seemed to make a small part of his simile turn concrete. With Cordelia gone, perhaps there is room for some small magic again, it seems to suggest, however ineffectual.

If this is a validation of the power of Lear’s language or the power of theatre, it is hard to gauge, for the king and the play are both nearing their ends, too. In the scenes that follow, order is restored, for the time being, to England. New rulers are proposed, not according to love or vows, but according to necessity. The power of the fiat works well enough to install new rulers in post-LEARean England, and the play appears to have solved the problem of Cordelia and silenced her threat to order for good. But Cordelia’s truth seems to linger – and not just in Edgar’s affirmation that joins both “obedience” and “Speak[ing] what we feel, not what we ought” (V.iii.322-323) as if in recognition of Cordelia’s goodness. Edgar’s closing rhymes and the play’s peaceful conclusion resist a return to Cordelia’s unsettling “bond,” but its echo remains. If Cordelia haunts us in spite of this closure, in spite of her death, it may be because the “bond” she has exposed remains bare: the bird has flown out of its lime twigs, leaving only a feather behind.

In both King Lear and The Merchant of Venice, unbound characters pose a challenge to the workings of the play, and neither play seems to be able to tolerate exposure of the bare bond. Indeed, these plays exact the cruelest punishments for those who are near the unadorned bond, who call it such, and who glimpse unbondedness. To those who refuse to play the games of magic and transformation around it (or who only comply too late), death is dealt. But rather than seeing in this merely a formula of tragedy or the punishment of outsiders or the exiled, we should return to Freud who rightly guides the reader of these two plays to look for the archetypal here. Yet it is not a death drive we should locate, however, but the danger of the unbound. The great “harmony” of The Merchant of Venice is that the belief in the bond is upheld zealously by the whole community – a circus of rings and bonds and repetitions lets no one out of the embrace of the society – even as all its maneuverings reveal just how much it is at risk. The threat of death, this drive to thanatos, that Freud sees in the tripartite formulae in The Merchant of Venice and King Lear might be revised as a cautionary tale with death as its penalty: touching the bond or seeing the bond for what it is is a move so dangerous that it must be contained. The character who does so must be either “contented” (that is, contained or re-bound, as in the case of Shylock) or killed (Cordelia), lest the lonely subjects bound, no more nor less, expose the attachments so fragilely holding society together. If Cordelia’s strategy looks forward to a future political science of the “bond,” it also makes a good case for choosing to exile oneself completely from the pageant of the bond. In this light, Cordelia’s minimalism might also anticipate the epistemology that would throw off all attachments, adhere to “custom” where necessary, but ultimately base its truth on

32 Here I agree with G.K. Hunter’s recognition of the way in which the “mechanism” of the play seems to have something of a will of its own. In his account, however, characters who express strong self-definition are punished for the assertion of their self-knowledge: “The play seems to be intent on hunting down the man who thinks he knows what he believes or even who he is.” See G.K. Hunter, introduction, 35. Methodologically, a useful point of reference is also Barthes’ Sur Racine for its sense of the theatre’s punishing mechanisms, psychic and literary, which Barthes locates in Racine’s Phèdre. See Roland Barthes, Sur Racine (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968).
eliminating the pageant of attachment altogether, namely, that of Descartes, the story of which I treat in the following chapter.
CHAPTER TWO

“As if it were only me in the world”:
Cartesian Poetics and Solitude in the Meditations

“Descartes…decline[s] to place his inquiry within a social context. He does his thinking in private, and no one appears in his Meditations but himself.” – Harry Frankfurt, Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen: The Defense of Reason in Descartes’s Meditations

Early in his seminal work on Descartes’ Meditations, Harry Frankfurt declares the meditation the perfect form for philosophical thought, for there, a philosopher can find solitude. Reflecting on philosophical dialogue and Plato’s reflection in the Theaetetus that “thinking [is] a conversation conducted by the soul with itself,” Frankfurt contends that “[i]f thinking is indeed internal discourse…[a] much more appropriate vehicle is the meditation, in which an author represents the autonomous give and take of his own systematic reflections.” Frankfurt portrays the meditation, then, as a form of isolation: the thinker alone with his thoughts. Frankfurt’s claim has widespread critical support, with a majority critics affirming the solitude of the Cartesian self in the Meditations and elsewhere, but this chapter suggests that Frankfurt’s initial assumption, at least, is wrong. Descartes is never so alone as he seems to believe. The Meditations reveals not an easy “autonomous give and take” but, rather, a struggle with isolation that summons spectral characters to populate its solitude and articulate an ambivalent stance about attachment.

The centrality of solitude and the problem of attachment and detachment are foregrounded in the opening moments of the Meditations itself, even if the question of attachment might appear to retreat later in the text. Before turning to closer examinations of the First and Fourth Meditations, I want to consider how the text encodes problems of attachment in the framing materials of the Meditations. In the Meditations’ savvy dedication to the Dean and Doctors of the “Sacred Faculty of Theology” at the Sorbonne, Descartes sets out some guidelines for the Meditations, unfolding what kind of work it is and how it ought to be read. Though the Meditations would end up on the Papal Index some twenty years later, this opening gambit seems at least to have bought Descartes some time: denouncing the arguments of atheists and asserting that God “may be more easily and certainly known than the things of the world,” Descartes claims for his

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2 Take, for instance, Paolo Fabiani who puts it thus: “The experience of solitude…is an effect of the Cartesian subjectivism” in his The Philosophy of the Imagination in Vico and Malebranche, trans. Giorgio Pinton (Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2009), 87. Ernest Gellner, meanwhile, goes so far as to say that, for Western philosophy, the “path to loneliness…began with…Descartes.” Ernest Gellner, Language and Solitude: Wittgenstein, Malinowski, and the Habsburg Dilemma (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 43. For a reading of Descartes’ solitude as a variety of urban pastoral (in the Discourse in particular), see Kevin Dunn, “‘A Great City is a Great Solitude’: Descartes’s Urban Pastoral,” Yale French Studies 80 (1991): 93-107. (Dunn’s article prudently cautions the reader of Descartes that “his dedication to a life of solitude was more figurative than real” (94), as, of course, does Descartes’s own praise of friendship and intimacy in his letters to Elizabeth of Bohemia.)
3 That Descartes cannot exclude others entirely seems also to inhere in the language Frankfurt evokes; the “autonomous give and take” seems an odd expression to describe isolation, for a “give and take” seems to evoke some kind of absent other.
work a requisite piety, and he also extends a canny invitation to his potential readers from the Sorbonne:

[Although I consider the demonstrations of which I here make use, to be equal or even superior to the geometrical certitude and evidence, I am afraid, nevertheless, that they will not be adequately understood by many, as well because they also are somewhat long and involved, as chiefly because they require the mind to be entirely free from prejudice, and able with ease to detach itself from the commerce of the senses.]

In both the original Latin and the contemporary French translation, detachment is a preoccupation that inheres in the verbs of this early disclaimer: Descartes’ wish for detachment appears in the desire to “détacher du commerce des sens,” and in the Latin original as well, where it reads “a sensuum confortio facile subducat”; it withdraws [subducat] easily from the comfort of the senses. This moment might be read as a throwing-down of the dualist gauntlet, demanding of the reader that his own method of reading the text entail an affirmation of the separation of body and mind transposed onto the process of reading, but it is also about the practice of detachment as such—for that is the special thing the reader’s mind must do. Separation and detachment thus not only are predicated on Descartes’ dualism but are also the motions of reading.

After this first notice of the necessity of detachment extended to the learned readers of the Sorbonne comes another version, this time in a subsequent address to some presumably more humble readers:

I would advise none to read this work, unless such as are able and willing to meditate with me in earnest [serio mecum meditari], to detach their minds from

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5 *Quamvis eas quibus hic utor, certitudine et evidentia Geometricas aequare, vel etiam superare, existimem, veror tamen ne a multis saitis percipi non possint, tum quia etiam longiusculae sunt, et aliae ab aliis pendent, tum praecepsne quia requirunt mentem a praejudiciis plane liberam, et quae se ipsum a sensuum confortio facile subducat.*

*Encore que j’estime que celles dont je me sers ici, égalent, voire mesme surpassent en certitude et evidence les demonstrations de Geometrie, j’aprehende neantmoins qu’elles ne puissent pas estre assez suffissamment entendues de plusieurs, tant parce qu’elles sont aussi un peu longues, et dependantes les unes des autres, que principalement parce qu’elles demandent un esprit entierement libre de tous préjugez et qui se puisse aysément détacher du commerce des sens.*
commerce with the senses, and likewise to deliver themselves from all prejudice; and individuals of this character are, I well know, remarkably rare.\(^6\)

Descartes makes his instructions clear. Knowing how to read the Meditations requires knowing how to detach (to “abducere”—to lead away, detach, or remove the mind from the senses), but as Descartes extends this wary invitation, he also seems to retract it: only those who know how to detach can join the community of readers of the Meditations. Or, to put it another way, only those who know how to detach can be awarded a readerly attachment. The material reality of the book is itself at odds with the detachment from the “commerce of the senses” required of members of the Sorbonne and the unknown “reader” alike. Just what “meditating with [Descartes] in earnest” – “serio mecum meditari” – would mean, given that it entails a break from “all prejudice,” makes Descartes’ disclaimer all the more alarming: it may well be the case that there is none who can read this book.

But this problem of reading is followed by another – one that troubles the problem of detachment even more than the strange Cartesian invitation to “meditate with.” Moments later, the positive quality of detachment (and this is, after all, the skill most intimately associated with intellectual acumen and the skeptical posture) will be transformed into a threat to the very integrity of the text:

> But with regard to those who, without caring to comprehend the order and connection of the reasonings [rationum mearum seriem et nexum comprehendere non curantes], shall study only detached clauses [singulas clausulas] for the purpose of small but noisy criticism, as is the custom with many, I may say that such persons will not profit greatly by the reading of this treatise.\(^7\)

What Descartes wishes his reader to do to himself (that is, detach) is the opposite of what he wishes the reader to do to the text: detachment or withdrawal is to be feared here. The principle of detaching clauses (those “singulas clausulas” that threaten a holistic meaning) puts detachment as such in a more foreboding light. The integrity of the material person, dismantled by a dualism that would separate him into body and spirit or mind, is recuperated in a unity here that insists on the integrity of the text, on reading not shaped by removing phrases from a precise scaffolding of logic but for “the connection of reasonings” (“rationum…nexum” – where “nexum” summons its own sense of attachment, coming from necto to bind). What is forbidden is “detach[ing]"

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\(^6\) Etiam nullis author sum ut haec legant, nisi tantum iis qui serio mecum meditari, mentemque a sensibus, simulque ab omnibus praejudiciae, abducere poterunt ac volent, quales non nisi admodum paucos reperiri satis scio.

\(^7\) Quantum autem ad illos, qui, rationum mearum seriem et nexum comprehendere non curantes, se singulas tantum clausulas, ut multis in more est, argutari studebunt, non magnum et huius scripti lectione fructum sunt percepturi. Mais pour ceux qui, sans se soucier beaucoup de l’ordre et de liaison de mes raisons, s’amuseront à épiloguer sur chacune des parties, comme font plusieurs, ceux-là, dis-je, ne feront pas grand profit de la lecture de ce traité.
clauses,” even as withdrawing and detaching are the vital movements of reading proper. What the human cannot achieve amidst the conflict between the mind and the senses and their dangerous commerce, it appears the text can.

In the prefatory material, the language of detachment is a safeguard against misinterpretation: Descartes urges his reader not to draw conclusions by “detach[ing] clauses for the purpose of small but noisy criticism,” but “Descartes’ own strategy is better described as an experiment with proximity and interpretation, one that is often overlooked because of the success of the philosophical stance of solitude. Yet these negotiations with part and whole reemerge later in the Meditations along with the double bind of the prefatory material. In that formula, it is necessary to be detached in order to understand and successfully apply the Cartesian method, but understanding is precluded entirely if the principle of detachment trumps an understanding of the entirety of the work. This problem reappears in relation to the Objections, too, where the very form of the project comes under fire. In his defense of the work’s structure, Descartes returns to the impossible injunction to understand part and whole simultaneously. The second objections to the Meditations, authored by Mersenne, suggest to Descartes that he dispense with the literary framework of the text, with the project of imagining a meditator ruminating and reaching his philosophical conclusions over six days. What Descartes must justify, Mersenne conveys, is his preference for the meditations and their meanderings over a streamlined, “geometric” form. “It would be worthwhile,” Mersenne’s objections read, “if you set out the entire argument in geometrical fashion starting from a number of definitions, postulates and axioms. You are highly experienced in employing this method, and it would enable you to fill the mind of each reader so that he could see everything as it were at a single glance, and be permeated with awareness of the divine power.” Mersenne makes it possible to imagine a view of the universe that sees everything at one time, a view that collapses the temporal sequence of the Meditations and its plodding movement from one idea to the next. But Descartes scorns Mersenne’s ambition: the meditations must be read in order, and “the items which are put forward first must be known entirely without the aid of what comes later.” And they must also be read “so that if the reader is willing to follow…and give sufficient attention to all points, he will make the thing his own and understand it just as perfectly as if he had discovered it for himself.” A failure to do so can arise from missing “even…the smallest point,” Descartes warns.

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8 One could also reasonably frame this strategy in gentler terms as “close reading.” While Descartes’s strategy to control his readership might feel like it contains some especially modern strategies, early modern examples of this are not hard to find. (Take, for instance, Rabelais’ prefaces or his model of charitable reading “in the best sense” in his Tiers Livre.)

9 Descartes, ed. Cottingham et al., Philosophical Writings, 92. That the Meditations appears with the Objections, too, also breaks the appearance of solitude, coupling the main text with rigorous intellectual exchange. As Rorty explains, “It is not an isolated meditator’s reflective analytic and foundational architectonic but the published correspondence of a group of debaters animated by mutual respect. In truth, then, the Meditations in its final printed form moves us from a world of prefaces addressed to doctors of divinity to a world defined as a community of philosophers and scholars” (19). Amélie Rorty, “The Structure of Descartes’ Meditations,” Essays on Descartes’ Meditations, ed. Amélie Rorty (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 1-20.

10 Descartes, ed. Cottingham et al., 151. For more on this “analytic” form and its relationship to earlier forms of meditation, see Rorty. For a thorough discussion of Descartes’ Meditations in relationship to Loyola’s Spiritual Exercises, refer to Zeno Vendler, “Descartes’ Exercises” Canadian Journal of Philosophy 19.2 (1989): 193-224. Descartes’ biographers also discuss the philosopher’s years of Jesuit schooling at La
his interlocutor. Nonetheless, Mersenne’s fantasy of “be[ing] permeated with awareness” is actually very similar to the effect achieved by the all-encompassing evil genius who threatens to engulf the meditator, albeit with false appearances. Descartes’ response, wishing the reader to “make the thing his own…for himself” is, in turn, consistent with a strategy meant to disable and disarm the power of the other – whether another reader or, within the Meditations, the spectral others that the meditator encounters. Though this tactic fosters a fierce independence, of reading and of thought, it is a strategy that also leaves behind stunning, if critically neglected, remainders of its losses and compromises.

In spite of these nervous treatments of textual attachment and detachment in the prefatory materials, the importance of solitude to the Cartesian project is infrequently tempered by any acknowledgment of its complexity, its uncertainty, and its significance for the status of others to the Cartesian pose. In the Discourse, solitude is that which Descartes’ riper years win him and which gives philosophy a reprieve from the hubbub of the outside world. In his youth, Descartes explains there, he thought he needed to travel the world and acquire cosmopolitan experience, but in his pursuit of truth and his new method, he realized otherwise: he didn’t need to travel the world; he needed to expel it. The framing architecture of that first phase of the Cartesian project is the isolated poêle, the stove-heated room that seems to replicate the warmth and comfort of the womb, and it is there that Descartes develops his method with the interference of the world at bay. Away from the distractions and the illusions of every day life, Descartes eliminates, at least in theory, the deceptive elements of sensory experience – and more than an echo of this resides in the opening words of the Meditations. For Descartes, this means hollowing out a space in which the experiences outside the doors of the poêle, from the wars ravaging the continent to the distractions of the everyday, can no longer hinder the thinker from his pursuit of the truth or jeopardize the material support for his reflections. What this seems to require is solitude, or, put another way, this isolation is the precondition of the skeptical challenge: in order to figure out the truth of experience, no one else can be involved. The


12 As he argues that Descartes’s apparent retreat into abstraction was not a marker of either political ignorance or indifference, Stephen Toulmin remarks that the Thirty Years’ War accompanied nearly all of Descartes’s adult life: “When the Thirty Years’ War broke out in 1618, Descartes was in his early twenties; when it at last ended in 1648, he had two years to live; his whole mature life was spent under its shadow.” See his Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 61-62.

13 To glance briefly at the Sixth Meditation, where the problem of “other minds” appears, the involvement of others is so limited that it is an open question whether other people have experiences at all. Asking what other people have in them (if other people are real, if other people feel as one does), scholarship on the problem of “other minds” extends the systematic doubt of the skeptic to his experience of others – and his guesses about their inner lives (including whether they have them at all). The question of “other minds,” however, seems to posit solitary subjects without any attachments between them or, at the very least, with solitude as the primary and default state. For a schematic account of the “other minds” problem from antiquity to present, see Anita Avramides, Other Minds (London: Routledge), 2001. For a
solitude of the setting, then, is matched by the utter solitude of subjectivity for Descartes. If any ties bind here, they do so only very, very loosely – and without any apparent awareness of them. The conceit of the text, that the method might be the object of imitation, makes this solitude fall apart: only the meditator could even try to live as if it were only he in the world. But that this is the place in which truth can, in which it ought to be sought: this alone speaks to the sense that truth and solitude go together, that the threats inhering in attachment (here, at least) require a robust counter-fiction that would assert the certainty of its contamination at the hands of others.  

This chapter isolates two literary episodes in the *Meditations*: first, the very famous encounter with the “malin génie” of the First and Second Meditations; second, the more rarely noted theodicy in the Fourth Meditation that redeems its potentially worrisome god with the help of other people. These episodes portray two different sides of the problem of attachment in Cartesian thought. The evil genius episode conveys the anxieties of engulfment; the rhetorical strategies of the narrative upon which Descartes insisted against Mersenne’s objections nullify the threat of engulfment and banish the problems of desire and need, but only while leaving behind textual remainders that begin to register a kind of loss. The episode in the Fourth Meditation, however, retrieves a kind of loose social attachment in order to solve the problem of error: the meditator’s defense of God entails a summoning of all creation in a moment that flirts with monism. The meditator’s strategy of distancing himself from this necessary attachment in turn lays bare the *Meditations*’ implicit edict forbidding mourning. But while the Cartesian insistence on solitude seems consistent across his works, it actually falters before the problem of theodicy as it is framed in the Fourth Meditation and shows an equivocation more elaborate and involved even than that of his strange invitation (and its retraction) to his readers. In turn, it forces a return to the episode of the evil genius to understand the contours of the wish for a created universe made specifically for the meditator: the evil genius indirectly saves Descartes’ deity and makes Descartes pay for his god’s reprieve with a provisional attachment. In this project’s broader story of the shift to an internalized attachment, the shadow of grief that this casts over the *Meditations* as a whole marks a moment of near-solitude that seems desperate both to maintain the externality of attachments and to deny the exterior altogether. From this wider view, then, the lively discussion of some of the “problem[s] of others,” see Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1979), 329-496.  

14 The mystery of love in the *Passions de l’âme* might be one exception, but, as Frankfurt’s description in the epigraph conveys, Descartes purges other people from view. Secondary criticism seems largely to echo Frankfurt’s sentiment, and even the uneasy drama of the mind/body problem appears to pass as if there were only one mind, one body to worry about. There, Descartes mounts a case for the way that love attaches the lover to the objects of his affection: Love “impels the soul to join itself willingly to objects that appear agreeable to it.” In love, he explains, “we imagine a whole, of which we take ourselves to be only one part, and the thing loved to be another” (Descartes, Vol. 1, ed. Cottingham et al., 356).  


16 Lex Newman describes this relative lack as follows: “In general, our understanding of the Fourth Meditation is embarrassingly inadequate: the theory of judgment there is generally well understood; the matter of its contribution to the (presumably orderly) epistemological project in which it is embedded, and to which Descartes alludes (in the *Synopsis*), is widely regarded as an enigma and routinely receives short shrift.” See Lex Newman, “The Fourth Meditation,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* LIX.3 (1999): 560.
triumph of the solitary cogito seems to rest on a profound textual ambivalence and an eclipsed
inglanguage of loss; this, then, is a muddled victory, and it is one that conjures an implicit poetics, an
engagement with love lyric and elegy, at the edges of its vacillations between solitude and
attachment.

I. What Do Evil Geniuses Want?

Descartes’ now-famous evil genius is usually cast as antagonist in a cautionary tale about
the hazards of illusory perceptions. But his genius and his evil are better understood as telling a
story about bad attachments. The meditator introduces the evil genius as a totalizing agent of
doubt; imagining “all external things” to be made by the evil genius, the meditator will dismiss
the unreliability of the sensory and material world and locate a sanctuary of veracity in thought
alone. Yet the evil genius induces not merely the usual anxieties about distinguishing between
reality and illusion or trusting what our senses perceive, but also a fear of a pernicious proximity,
an engulfment of the self that takes the world and the body with it. In this light, Descartes’ dark
fantasy of the evil genius (and his rejection of it) tells a story of a philosophical subject whose
constitution is as much about defending a principle of solitude as it is about finding the “truth.”
The story of the birth of the famous “thinking thing,” then, comes from a necessity imposed, at
least in part, by the meditator’s efforts to shake off a bad intimacy: the Cartesian subject has its
origins in the extremity of the text’s effort to shatter closeness, for the meditator will do anything
to be alone. He will destroy the world; he will sever himself from his body; and he will come
perilously close to sacrificing the goodness of God to maintain the equipoise of his solitude. In
Descartes’ hands, the genius of the evil genius, then, is in his ability to render himself necessary
to the world and to the person in it: the evil genius is the maker of every detail of creation, down
to the stuff of physical personhood. Slaying the evil genius involves disavowing the desires the
evil genius might fairly elicit—desires for such a handmade world, a personal god, a dependency
on something outside the self. The meditator’s logic seems to suggest that if the meditator wants
the pleasures of the world, he will have to need someone or something. And the menace of these
pleasures, of desire itself, is something the meditator must banish.

When Descartes first introduces the evil genius, what he portrays is a personal god who
unleashes doubt on a broad scale:

I will suppose therefore that not God, who is supremely good and the source of
truth, but rather some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has
employed all his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that the sky, the air,
the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely the delusions
of dreams which he has devised to ensnare my judgment. I shall consider myself
as not having hands or eyes, or flesh, or blood, or senses, but as falsely believing
that I have all these things.  

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17 See, for example, classic accounts of Cartesian doubt and the evil genius in O.K. Bouwsma, “Descartes'
Evil Genius,” Philosophical Essays (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 85-98, and Harry
Frankfurt’s Demons, Dreamers, and Madmen: The Defense of Reason in Descartes’ Meditations.

18 Je supposeray qu’il y a, non point un vray Dieu, qui est la souveraine source de verité, mais un certain
mauvais genie, non moins rusé et trompeur que puissant, qui a employé toute son industrie à me tromper.
Je penseray que le Ciel, l’air, la terre, les couleurs, les figures, les sons et toutes les choses exterieures que
nous voyons, ne sont que des illusions et tromperies, dont il se sert pour surprendre ma credulité. Je
The oddity of the evil genius here is not just in the breadth of the objects he causes to be called into doubt; it lies, rather, in the way in which he is an intensely personal figure of deceit, toiling expressly to ensnare the “credulity” of the meditator alone. The appeal of the evil genius is only partially in his fraud, for the evil genius does not set up a false universe and walk away. In contrast to the “vray Dieu” [optimum Deum] who is markedly distanced from the human,19 (he is a force of truth rather than a personification of it; in the Latin, he is, no less impersonally, the “font of truth” [fontem veritatis]), the evil genius is hard at work, breaking a sweat for the meditator and the meditator alone: “[il] a employé toute son industrie à me tromper [omnem suam industriam in eo posuisse, ut me falleret].” Personally focused on the meditator (“à me tromper,” “ut me falleret”), the evil genius manufactures a false world not for all of its inhabitants but for one. The meditator responds to this personal deceit with a violent dismantling: the snares or traps (insidias) that beguile the meditator lead him to annihilate the elemental and the personal alike, and the list of doubted objects suggests that the meditator imagines the creative strokes of an evil genius who fabricates on scales large and small, as the “sky, air, earth, colors, figures, sounds, and all external things” become suspect along with the meditator’s own body. Yet the ingenuity of the evil genius inheres in a toil that creates the world, its qualities, and the matter for and of a single inhabitant.

In spite of the character’s fame, the portrayal of the evil genius is fleeting and vague, introducing him only to push him rather hastily out of the narrative. While first it is the evil genius who acts (he presides as the grammatical subject over a triplet of nasty predications: he toils, deceives, and ensnares), the meditator makes sure the evil genius is ultimately only a secondary actor. Though the reader learns that the evil genius is a deceiver with formidable strength, the meditator introduces this character only to announce his own virile program of resistance, eclipsing what the evil genius might do behind what the meditator will do. Indeed, the evil genius retreats in sentences that evoke a future tense in which the evil genius becomes irrelevant: “I will think,” “I will consider” the objects of the world to be illusory, the meditator explains, and with that, what the evil genius creates shrinks in significance, the objects of the meditator’s dismissal rather than the menacing agents of a systematic deceit. In his bravado, the meditator seems to present and then level a vision of a treacherous kind of future, one in which the meditator fears that there is an evil genius manufacturing the world in its entirety. Yet with these effortless dismissals, the evil genius seems not so serious a threat. What the evil genius tempts the meditator with is not hard to shove off, for it is the most banal kind of falsehood: a facsimile that looks exactly like the real world. He is not an inventor of monsters or of beguiling deception.

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19 Descartes’s evil genius was not so different from God, though, to avoid being mistaken for a version of God. During the Leiden Affair (1647), Descartes was accused of creating a representation of a deceiver-God. For a discussion of the affair, see Zbigniew Janowski, “Can God Deceive Us?” Cartesian Theodicy: Descartes’ Quest for Certitude (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 49-78. (The adjacent question of whether or not God himself can lie at all, meanwhile, appears in the Second Objections, primarily authored by Mersenne.)
temptations; all that he has to offer is the everyday. However inventive and impressive, his genius yields not the extraordinary other “worlds” of the Renaissance world-making tradition but rather a world steeped in the ordinary and sapped in this narrative even of a verisimilar victory by virtue of the extremely general language that denotes it ("air, sky, color," etc.). This is not to downplay the stakes: the evil genius is a threat to truth, after all, but it is the evil genius who labors here, not the meditator who vanquishes his foe in two verbs that transfigure the world around him and render it fiction.

These verbs (I will think, I will consider) begin to slay the evil genius; before the famed cogito of the Second Meditation, then, there is the putabo and the considerabo that fell the Meditations’ wicked world-maker. “Putabo” governs a system of equivalences that holds the stuff of the world to be the “ludificationes somniorum” or the stuff of dreams, and “considerabo” governs all those physical features and substances that the meditator will deem he “falsely” has. Space for the cogito and the present tense of the thinking thing—philosophical victories that arrive with the Second Meditation—is cleared by a meditator who controls futurity with his mind, and the cogito is marked as a “cognition” that has other, powerful cognitive forebears.

Heidegger put the more famous “cogito” under scrutiny when he asked why one would assume to know what “cogito” meant in the first place, and yet here two equally opaque verbs of cognition and reflection, “putabo” and “considerabo,” help diminish the problem of the evil genius, their definitions unquestioned. While, in practical terms, the enervated evil genius succumbs to a future marked by the steady pulse of the meditator’s will rather than the genius’s artifice, the words that vanquish the evil genius deserve more consideration, for they happen to destroy the world: the meditator’s tactics conceal in the apparent neutrality of their actions ("I will think," “I will consider”) a violence that dismantles the world and the physical self to keep the evil genius out. The putabo governs the destruction of the world, the considerabo that of the person. Nowhere in the secondary literature, that I’m aware of, do Descartes’s critics take into account the specific mercenary work of the putabo and the considerabo. Apart from Judith Butler’s reading of the “dismemberment” of the meditator in the First Meditation, critics have also seemed to ignore the ferocity of the formulae that proceed the more famous “ergo”: putabo therefore I have no world; considerabo therefore I have no body. These verbs of thought dramatize the constitutive nihilism on which the cogito rests. As operations of language, the “putabo” and “considerabo” here turn the landscape around the meditator into metaphor.


21 “We translate cogitare with ‘thinking’ and thus persuade ourselves that it is now clear what Descartes means by cogitare. As if we immediately knew what ‘thinking’ means [was denken heisst].” Martin Heidegger, “The Dominance of the Subject in the Modern Age,” Nietzsche Vol. 4: Nihilism (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 104.


23 While keeping the “truth” separate from the metaphorical (and sensual) apparatus of body and world, Descartes nonetheless gives figuration a vital role, and, in that respect, at least, seems not to eclipse the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy. See, of course, Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” Margins of Philosophy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 207-272.
metaphor in the literal sense of meta-phorein or carrying over). The “considerabo,” meanwhile (as I discuss at length in a moment), undoes the basic functioning of the necessary metonymy that allows parts to cohere into wholes, that associates the parts of the body with the body entire. In this linguistic landscape, verbs of thinking are verbs of distancing. This not only begs the question about the ferocious power a “cogitabo” would yield (Would it be in the cogitabo that some kind of transformative self inheres, born out of the destruction of the world and the body? Does it matter that a cogitabo appears in the second meditation before the might of the cogito claims being for itself?); it also points urgently toward the specificity of the material that is destroyed with the meditator’s “putabo” and “considerabo.”

The discarded material of “ludificationes somniorum” reveal what the meditator needs to exclude. In making the debris of the “putabo” and “cogitabo,” Descartes’ strategy begins with the stuff of the world before it dismantles the body; he systematically depletes the world to make space for philosophical thought and its claim to truth, leveling sky, air, earth, colors, figures, sounds, and all external things (“coelum, aërem, terram, colores, figuras, sonos, cunctaque externa”). All of these objects are to be understood, instead, as the deceptions of dreams, “ludificationes somniorum.” As a counter-measure against the evil genius, the meditator insults the evil genius who has toiled so hard when he makes these elements of the world the production not of the evil genius’ handiwork but of his own mysterious inner workings, his dreams. The meditator puts perception into doubt, then, but his tactic consists moreover of emptying the world outside of him and appearing to discredit it by reducing it to an internal product, consigning it to an unthreatening psychic heap – something rather lost in the French translation that gets rid of the language of sleep altogether, deeming these things only “illusions et tromperies.” The evil genius’ effort might be understood, rather, as an effort to house the self of the meditator, giving him the world in which he lives. In this light, the meditator’s action – a tumbling down of the materials of the world, first one by one (the sky, the air), but then accelerating until everything outside, “cunctaque externa,” is gone – follows a ruthless logic

24 The cogitabo’s appearance in the second meditation coincides with the fleeting reappearance of the evil genius. There, the evil genius is cast in something of a different guise, however. Announcing his final defeat of the evil genius, the meditator suggests that even the evil genius’s impish deceptions are irrelevant when it comes to the problem of being sure of his own existence: “In that case I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me; and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something.”

“Haud dubie igitur ego etiam sum, si me fallit; & fallat quantum potest, nunquam tamen efficiet, ut nihil sim quamdiu me aliquid esse cogitabo.”

“Il n’y a donc point de doute que je suis, s’il me trompe ; et qu’il me trompe tant qu’il voudra, il ne saurait jamais faire que je ne sois rien, tant que je penserai être quelque chose.”

But here, as the meditator affirms that he indeed “exists” even if the evil genius should try to persuade him otherwise, our meditator reverses the program of deceit the evil genius signified in the First Meditation. There, it was quite impossible to imagine the evil genius even trying to convince the meditator that he is nothing, “ut nihil sim.” In the First Meditation, the meditator was in a sense everything was the reason why things were; there wasn’t any doubt that he existed because the evil genius had made the entire world for him. What the meditator locates in this moment of the Second Meditation is not so much the work of the evil genius reappearing but his own: his powers of destruction (to banish the world and the body) cannot banish everything “as long as I think myself to be something.” The “cogitabo” thus makes a funny tautology when coupled with the Meditations’ famous cogito: as long as I think myself to be something, I [can] think, therefore I am.
aimed to untether any dependency on the world outside. The shelter the world gives is not shelter enough. As I discuss in the next section, the (potentially bigger) problem of the distant and mysterious god who sets up an occasionally botched universe is solved preemptively here, but in a strange way: if a creator can be known and is working specifically for me, is making creation in fact tailored to me, as the evil genius does, I must allow there to be no creation at all. Part of the oddity of the world Descartes dismantles is its sheer emptiness to begin with: there is a container (sky, earth, air), and then there is an impressionistic splatter of color, sound, and the nebulous stuff of “figuras.” Just what these shadowy “figuras” (or, for that matter, “all other external things”) might be is left unclear; where the evil genius promises to create a world tailor-made to deceive the meditator, Descartes only fells the most vague universe. The external world seems to be an open vessel in his hands, and the meditator affirms, as so many have noticed, that when it comes to knowing what is true, he cannot trust what is outside of him.

This is so familiar a story that it is easy to read it simply – as a tale about truth and where it is located – and to ignore the strained romance between the evil genius and the object of his obsessive affections. The world Descartes reordered (as air, figure, and so on) for the purpose of rejection is a strategy that saps the world of its menace but also of its appeal, rendering it first bland and then null. It is an iconoclastic gesture that, when it is extended to the self, has disturbing reverberations, for what the meditator dismisses as he finally gets rid of his own body, too, is the very disorder of desire itself, of wanting, of need. The meditator proves that he needs neither world nor body. The threat of the evil genius lies in the way he makes his relationship to the meditator one of necessity and proximity while the distant God and his absolute truth are mercilessly absent from the equation of need and supply. Once the meditator has rejected the created world outside of him, he turns to his own body. He announces how he will extend his skepticism even to his own person (this time with the “considerabo”): “considerabo meipsum tanquam manus non habentem, non oculos, non carnem, non sanguinem, non aliquem sensum, sed haec omnia me habere falsò opinantem.” “I will consider myself as having not hands, not eyes, not flesh, not blood, nor any sense, but I will believe that I hold all of these things falsely.” The meditator’s strategy of imagining away his bodily features, sense, and “all these things” is an extreme measure, but it evokes a still more extreme image of the meditator. The meditator does not enumerate his considerations in this way just for the sake of hyperbole. The unrelenting

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25 While it is a fairly common reading that “the rationalism of René Descartes and the empiricism of Francis Bacon are most often singled out as representing this shift [toward a destructive approach to nature]; by denying mind or spirit to any beings other than humans, Descartes gave philosophical support to Bacon’s project of gaining mastery over nature through scientific experimentation” (9), Descartes only seems to go a step beyond “mastery” toward a control that allows for total destruction here. While many readers of Descartes would fairly see the philosopher’s work as splitting apart nature and reason, body and mind, Descartes’ rejections also expose a great deal of ambivalence, however grave their effects. See Karla Ambruster and Kathleen R. Wallace, eds., Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2001).

26 Descartes’ distrust of the image inheres in his doubt about the reliability of the visual faculty, too, though here, it seems to use that gaze to break apart the body. For more on Descartes and his distrust of vision, see Dalia Judovitz, “Vision, Representation, and Technology in Descartes,” Modernity and the Hegemony, ed. David Michael Levin (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 63-86.

27 The meditator achieves with thought what the necessary material compromises of the Discourse cannot permit; there, for instance, the narrator points out the necessity of adhering to custom in order to live in the world.
march of negations (not hands, not eyes, not flesh, not blood): this bodily undoing, on the contrary, is a retreat that destroys the self as an object of desire.

For the meditator lists parts and features of the body in what amounts to a twisted appropriation of the strategy of love lyric; where lyric poets would have praised parts for the whole and summoned, sometimes with yearning, the objects of their desire, the meditator’s listing of parts amounts to a rigorous negation of desire: who would want a body like this one, he seems to dare the evil genius to try to respond to his technique. Doubting his senses, then, the meditator undoes the usual metonymy of the blazon and of the body in favor of a metonymy through subtraction, disposing of parts for the sake of a remnant part that denies its partiality, that not only stands for the “whole” but becomes its essence: the “ego” that is left behind when the body has been stripped away becomes, its real stuff of the meditator (and something the evil genius can neither touch nor endow with a world). In order to defeat the evil genius, the meditator imagines himself without hands, eyes, flesh, and blood, a fragmentation that dismembers not in order to linger on the beloved by preserving (or controlling) individual parts but to refuse those parts either sensing or being sensed. When he dismantled the world, the meditator got rid of sound and color, but when it comes to getting rid of the body, it’s not abstractions and elements that are lopped but the hands, eyes, flesh, blood. The castaway matter of this Cartesian striptease forms a curious pile of meat, and the body that remains is strange to imagine indeed: an amputated, eyeless skeleton, sucked dry of its blood. This is the technique of the blazon but instead of eliciting or describing erotic desire, it means the defeat of eros as such. One crucial poetic counterpoint, and one with which Descartes would have been familiar, would be Petrarch’s treatment of Laura. As Timothy Hampton writes, “Never glimpsed entire, evoked only through the description of her body parts, Laura is everywhere and nowhere….That fragmentation in turn celebrates the poet’s own power to sing of the love that he creates in song.”

Descartes changes the formula here, for while, as Butler notes, it is certainly the case that “the effort to excise the body fails because the body returns, spectrally, as a figural dimension of the text,” its fragmentation refuses an encounter with alterity or even imagined alterity. What Petrarch might do to Laura, Descartes does to himself. What this effort succeeds in doing is splitting the representation of the meditator to resist the deeply personal, engulfing strategy of the evil genius. The defeat of the evil genius works a kind of conceptual vampirism as it drains the meditator of living material, and it urges the meditator into deep retreat – into the soul and to the remnant and fragmented body (a body in which there must be no “sense,” “non habentem…non aliquem sensum,” “comme n’ayant aucun sens”). And it also deprives the evil genius of authorship; the wicked demigod that would have made the world is undone by what amounts to an aggressive counter-making, a counter-poiesis.

Having set up the evil genius as the meditator’s personal deceiver-god, the meditator makes himself untouchable and unwanted, impervious to any gaze: yet he has used an erotic

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28 In the Second Meditation, such a catalogue of the body appears, too. There, the meditator describes the body as he thinks about how he “used to consider what I was” and thought first about “face, hands, arms and the whole mechanical structure of limbs which can be seen in a corpse” (81). Descartes refers to the anatomy theatre, of course, as he cites the things “which can be seen in a corpse,” but it seems to me hard not to locate in the “corpse” of representation here a method of killing the “thinking thing” he will discover that he “is.”


30 Butler, 14.
strategy to put an end to eros, and he does so to make solitude the prevailing pose of philosophy. He does not declare the whole “body” the object of his skepticism but dismembers the body as he disowns it, a work of mutilation but also a rhetorical strategy of eros and one born in large part in the Petrarchan and post-Petrarchan poetry of the century before Descartes. The meditator works in a much longer tradition of escape and metamorphosis, too, of course: to evade Apollo, Daphne turns into a tree; to help Io escape Hera’s wrath, Zeus transforms her into a cow. Escaping the passionate attachment of the evil genius summons equally desperate measures. The problem is not just that the outside world will be somehow frightening or untrue (both of which are problems!) but that the meditator will have his experience of himself and the world affected by another, that he will depend on another for the world, that another will work so hard for his “credulitas” – his belief, his trust, and, etymologically, his heart. The frame of the Meditations, then, should be understood as a reaction to founding relationships and not just the dramatization of troubling new ones. But the metamorphosis here depends on a dramatic annihilation and leaves a weird, fleshy remainder on the page that a majority of critics turn away from, as if Descartes had heeded Mersenne’s call to compose a “geometric” proof instead. The symbolics of being of another’s “flesh and blood” echoes in the particularity of the substances being called out for exclusion from the meditator’s person and world, and this principle of relatedness is one that induces a philosophical shame that hastens to free itself of relation.

In grappling with the evil genius, the meditator willingly lops limbs and drains humors to avoid attachment; in doing so, he also removes the history of the body and, with it, a problem that appears elsewhere in Descartes’ work: the philosophical disaster of having been a baby. Consistent with Descartes’ comments on the troubling vulnerability of the infant, the meditator hearkens to Descartes’ portrayal of the creature whose universe must necessarily be made by another—an evil genius, a parent, a creator of matter or wayward bodies. In the Principia, Descartes reminds his reader that error begins with birth: “The chief cause of error arises from the preconceived opinions of childhood.” “Right from our infancy,” Descartes explains, “our mind was swamped.” Descartes describes the body of the infant as a writhing prison of the mind, and the experience of infancy consists in a subservience to the body brought about by an awful necessity: “the mind judged everything in terms of its utility to the body in which it was immersed.” The curiosity of Descartes’ infant is that while he is enslaved to his body, the caretakers of that body are entirely absent from view. In the Principia, the baby takes in

31 The anatomizing blazon has its roots in Petrarchanism and in sixteenth-century French poetry beginning with Marot who “initiated the genre, [which] celebrated the female body, and by 1536 it was possible to gather many of them into an anthology entitled Blasons anatomiques du corps feminin” (142). See Isidore Silver and T.V.F. Brogan, “Blason” in Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Alex Preminger, T.V.F. Brogan, et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 141-142. Descartes’ blazoning strategies suggest not only the hazard of a perhaps effeminate and desiring (and desired) body but also the way in which blazoning itself might rupture not just the objects of desire but also subjectivity.

32 The most sustained account of the problem of infancy for Descartes is still found in Henri Gouhier’s La pensée métaphysique de Descartes (Paris: Vrin, 1962). Bordo also describes “the Cartesian project of starting anew through the revocation of one’s actual childhood...as a ‘father of oneself’ fantasy on a highly symbolic, but profound, plane” (108). In relationship to the question of history more generally, Butler notes that the “Meditations...require[s] performing a destruction of one’s own past, of memory. We must then, as readers,...imagine an ‘I’ who is detachable from the history of its beliefs” (7). On the problem of children and childcare for political theory more broadly, see chapter four and the coda.

33 Descartes, ed. Cottingham et al., 186.

34 Ibid.
a view of the world made of shapes and figures, composed of language stunningly similar to that which the meditator imagines as the architecture of evil. Yet the world of the infant of the *Principia* is markedly parentless. It seems too humiliating to mention that the babe is slave not just to his body but also to the will of his caretakers.

Ceding world-shaping powers to others is not a possibility that can be spoken anywhere, it seems, and that world-making power is what the evil genius represents, at least in part, for the meditator. The threat of “immersion” names the grave hazard of the evil genius, for the evil genius acts as a kind of full-immersion body, enslaving the meditator twice over, to the writhing environment around him and to the body that has contact with the evil genius’s creation that—until the final assertion that the body have no “sense”—makes the body touch another. The evil genius episode marks not only a kind of return to the shadow of infancy Descartes writes about in his *Principia*, it also introduces a body-world that has an author. The drama of denouncing perception and lopping limbs works homeopathically, positioning the materials of the meditator’s body against the enveloping body of a world shaped by others. This is a prudent strategy, for a world made by an evil genius can be denounced easily while cursing the inexcusable experience of childhood might put our meditator in the position of having to impugn creation.\(^35\)

The quiet solitude won by executing the evil genius creates a space for a self without a history, for a self without ties past or present. In the *Principia*, growing up brings a reward similar to that of the First Meditation: liberty from the problem of “the mind [being] a total slave to the body.”\(^36\) But in the *Meditations*, Descartes gives a model of personal history that would not just create a rupture between childhood and adulthood but would also forego that history altogether, eventually overcoming the problems of memory or a past in favor of the conceptual present of the “clear and distinct” – a move that levels earlier learning and posits the province of “truth” as primary in the place of a temporal sequence. The curious “putabo” and “considerabo” that guided the slaying of the evil genius tell a broader story: they supplant a past in which such “enslavement” to the body made such an issuance of the will impossible, in which the future was markedly beyond control. In turn, the eradication of the evil genius makes a future where attachment and human history are equally impossible. The encounter with the evil genius marks the meditator as a truly strange creature, outside of the time of human development, fundamentally without attachments, with a privileged power over future thought—outside of the drama of desire and dependency.

Yet once he has dispensed with the evil genius by way of destroying the world, Descartes affirms a kind of stubborn attachment – but it is the attachment of the thinker to his thought: “I shall stubbornly and firmly persist in this meditation” (“manebo obstinate in hac meditatione defixus” “Je demeurai obstinément attaché à cette pensée”). This “defixus,” meaning “stuck, thrust, fastened, or attached,” and rendered “attaché” in the French translation, makes attachment endure, even if it acts here as a systematic displacement of attachment, moving it from the world to thought. While the meditator describes a lazy relapse into the stuff of deception, the stubborn “manebo” wills that attachment not happen outside the self. Attachment is not “inside” or “incarnate” here. It has no body in which to rest, but the meditator’s ambivalence about attachment requires the weaving of new fictions. It seems easy enough to

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\(^{35}\) As a send-up of the creative powers of Renaissance world-making, though, the evil genius has good literary company. The Cartesian fantasy of the falsified world and its fallout had appeared on the Spanish stage only a few years before the publication of Descartes’ *Meditations*. See, of course, Calderon’s *La vida es sueño*.

\(^{36}\) Descartes, ed. Cottingham et al., 186.
banish the evil genius, but his threat is only partially the fabrication of the banal things of the world; the evil genius, with “all of his industry” directed toward the deception of the meditator, exposes not just the threat of this deceptive other but the threat of his proximity to the meditator himself. What the meditator’s reaction conveys is his fear that he will be able to be touched, will experience the senses, which requires the experience of alterity to provide objects to be sensed.\footnote{Jean-Luc Marion argues that “flesh only ever refers back to itself, in the indissoluble unity of the felt and of the feeling. Flesh is referred to itself as it auto-affects itself. In consequence, it eludes all relation…in an absoluteness without compromise, without anything like it or equal to it” (100). At least here, this is not the case for Descartes. If anything, it is thought which “auto-effects itself.” See Marion’s \textit{In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena}, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berrand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002).} For this, after all, is the evil genius’s goal. The evil genius that Descartes creates here is defined by wanting to make all the details of the universe for the meditator, from the broad strokes of the sky to the fine details of the meditator’s own hand. He is not a distant creator working evil from afar but rather operates to falsify every detail of the meditator’s reality. In this light, the evil genius is actually the most efficient provider, not a god of deprivation but of a kind of bad fecundity – a smothering, too close god. In other words, the evil genius creates a dark fantasy of a universe created entirely \textit{for the meditator}, all creation arranged and ordered to thwart the meditator alone. In turn, the threat of the evil genius is a bad proximity that threatens the integrity of the self. The brilliance of the meditator’s strategy is that he has a body that he can detach and sacrifice to the demigod that would dare to employ all of his industry for the purpose of providing for him falsely. The new security of isolated thinking, of the \textit{Meditations} once the evil genius has been evicted, is this: Descartes can exist “as if it were only me in the world.” But this “as if” will be short lived; in spite of himself, he will still need others to justify (his) creation.

II. The Cartesian Compromise: Theodicy and Elegy in the Fourth Meditation

In the interior of the Fourth Meditation, the problem of attachment is made clearer, for there, others appear not just as part of a momentary flash of evil or as a sustained threat of bad intimacy but as indispensable to the essential goodness of God and creation. Where the evil genius prompted the meditator to destroy the very structure of desire and attachment, the Fourth Meditation appears to engage the loss of alterity as itself the object of mourning, yoking the problem of theodicy to an implicit poetics of elegy. In the Cartesian project, vanquishing solitude lies at the center of theodicy and also appears at a moment in which the goodness of creation and literary creation coincide. If it were only the meditator in the world, the meditation explains, there would be no worrying about defending God, but to excuse his God of the problem of creating a universe in which error is possible, other people must return to his vision. Part of what the meditator seems to want to excuse is the apparent problem of admitting the existence of other people at all, a problem that his philosophy presupposes in its rejection of attachment and in its severance from history and childhood.\footnote{See above, note xxxii.} The Fourth Meditation turns the evil genius strategy inside out, calling upon “the world” and “all of creation” in order to justify the goodness of God, and the triumphant destruction through thought in the First Meditation is replaced, in turn, by a poignant (and failed) rejection of mourning.

Compared to the first two meditations, Descartes’ fourth meditation, entitled “On the True and the False,” gets relatively little critical attention. (In his \textit{Cartesian Meditations}, Husserl deemed the last four meditations unnecessary and insisted the first two did all of Descartes’
important philosophical work. This meditation takes on the problem of accounting for the existence of error, however, and acts as Descartes' theodicy. By the Fourth Meditation, the meditator has already established himself as a “thinking thing” and asserted that God would never deceive him because that would convey some sort of imperfection on God’s part – a possibility the meditator necessarily rejects. But the meditator still is left with the problem of error. If God is not a deceiver, and if the meditator is not in the hands of some evil genius, then why is it even possible to make mistakes and to be unable to distinguish the true from the false? The Fourth Meditation shows the limits of Cartesian comprehension: it might be the case that the tactics of God are simply incomprehensible. At the same time, it shows the limits of perception: it might be the case that things appear imperfect in their parts but are not actually so as a whole. This is the shape of the meditation, then: from worrying about error indicting not just God but the world he has created in which error is possible, maybe inevitable, the meditator finds a compromise; if he follows the method of clear and distinct thinking carefully enough, and recognizes his own imperfection, God and creation are off the hook.

But while the noxious proximity of the evil genius early in the Meditations and the meditator’s worry about dependency already suggest that the ease and primacy of the meditator’s detachment is, at the very least, a difficult topic for the meditator, in the Fourth Meditation, a kind of loose attachment is the key to Descartes’ theodicy. Yet this attachment so troubles the principle of solitude and the need for the maintenance of the “clear and distinct” that the meditator abandons it. This technique of resisting attachment and of deferring the problem of an evil God who would allow error rests, however, upon a rejection of elegy. That is, where the project of exiling the evil genius entailed a destructive blazoning that turned a poetic strategy of eros inside out, here the stuff of mourning and its poetics, and of elegy in particular, vex the meditation’s philosophical program. When the meditator ultimately rejects both attachment and the legitimacy of elegy, he exposes a philosophy of autonomy bought by a (self-undermining) prohibition of a kind of poetry—one that might be said to try to earn the accusation said to have been hurled at the philosopher by Boileau, namely that “the philosophy of Descartes had cut poetry’s throat.”

The way in which the meditation works as the perfect solitary form comes with

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39 Arthur Smith describes Husserl’s dismissal of the subsequent meditations bluntly: “Husserl was consistently interested only in the first two of Descartes’s meditations. This is not simply because he thought that most of the arguments in Descartes’s other meditations were invalid and based on unquestioned, mostly Scholastic prejudices (though he did think this), but because he thought the whole attempt to go beyond what Descartes had attained in the first two meditations was misguided in principle. In particular, Husserl thought that the very idea of trying to prove the existence of an ‘external’ world on the basis of the contents of ‘inner’ experience was, as he liked to put it, using the French term, a nonsens” (19). See Arthur David Smith, Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Husserl and the Cartesian Meditations (London: Routledge, 2003).


41 So Jean-Baptiste Rousseau reported: “I have often heard M. Despréaux [Boileau] say that the philosophy of Descartes had cut poetry’s throat [coupé la gorge à la poésie]; and it is certain that what poetry has borrowed from mathematics has desiccated its spirit and accustomed it to a concrete or material precision [une justesse matérielle] that has nothing to do with what might be called the properly metaphysical precision [justesse métaphysique] of poets and orators” (qtd. on Norman 158). See Larry Norman, The Shock of the Ancient: Literature and History in Early Modern France (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 157-58. Norman also describes how Voltaire added his own anti-Cartesian lament, dubbing his era’s “esprit géométrique” no less than a “nouveau frein” (a new brake) on French poetry.
a deafening disclaimer: its solitary thinker cannot help but lament his solitude, even when he says that “not lamenting” is precisely what he will do.\footnote{42}

In the Fourth Meditation, the meditator grapples with the problem of the true and the false and luxuriates in imagining, in one version of the text, at least, an alternative to an erring self, and this alternative is a creature who exists in isolation. If only fleetingly, he allows himself to imagine a remedy to such error in expunging all of creation, except for himself:

Had God made me this way, then I can easily understand that, considered as a totality [as if there were only myself in the world], I would have been more perfect than I am now.

\textit{Et facile intelligo me, quatenus rationem habeo totius caussdam, perfectiorem futurum fuisse quam nunc sum, si talis a Deo factus esset.}

Et je remarque bien qu’en tant que je me considère tout seul, comme s’il n’y avait que moy au monde, j’aurais esté beaucoup plus parfait que je ne suis, si Dieu m’aurait créé tel que je ne faillisse jamais.

While slaying the evil demon required shutting down the world and the body to avoid enmeshment with the evil genius, here the rhetorical strategy is rather different. The French text, asserting that the meditator would have been more perfect had he been made “comme s’il n’y avait que moy au monde,” keeps the world intact as well as, presumably, the meditator's body. What is cast out, however, is every other person. In contrast to the hewing of world and body in the First Meditation, here the meditator’s satisfaction depends on a self understood to have integrity in an entirety (totius), and in the emended French translation,\footnote{43} on a remarkable purging

\textit{(Interestingly, Wallace Stevens later hurls the same accusation at Freud: “Boileau’s remark that Descartes had cut poetry’s throat is a remark that could have been made . . . of no one more aptly than Freud, who, as it happens, was familiar with it and repeats it in his \textit{Future of an Illusion.”} See Wallace Stevens, “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words” in \textit{The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and Imagination} (New York: Random House, 1951), 1-36, 14.)

\textit{If anything, the meditator cuts his own throat as my comments above on the strategy of the blazon convey.}

\textit{This moment invites speculation about the stakes of the meditator’s solitude for Descartes and for his translators: is it the case that Descartes, who oversaw the French translation of his text, put this in for clarity’s sake, or is it the case that Descartes’s translators wanted a purer version of Cartesian solitude? The addition of the clause goes oddly unquestioned by some of the most distinguished critics, a problem that owes as much to the entrenched vision of the solitary thinker (see Frankfurt’s easy story of isolation above!) as it does to the problem of a Latin original and a highly authoritative contemporary translation. Jean-Luc Marion, still one of the most interesting recent critics of Descartes, is not troubled at all by the addition, explaining it simply as an edition to the text, which “la traduction française glose intelligemment” (207). But following the principle of the “lectio difficilior” of textual criticism, that is the “more difficult” reading of an earlier manuscript that would be corrected by the subsequent scribe, or in this case, translator, this easy dismissal seems to arrive too soon: the desire to be alone in the world is consistent with the solitude of the earlier meditations, but it is not the more difficult reading, and it does not solve the problem of theodicy. There is no question that the text elicits the fantasy of autonomy, but the text is more unwieldy when it comes to dealing with its attachments. See Jean-Luc Marion, \textit{Questions cartésiennes: méthode et métaphysique} (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991).}
of all other people. The problem of error seems somehow inextricable from having others present. If there were not other people, perfection (or, at any rate, greater perfection) would somehow be guaranteed by isolation. In the meditator’s “as if there were only me in the world,” the Adamic wish for a help meet is lost to a new fantasy of primal history that sees perfection in original isolation. In the meditator’s hands, all of history collapses before an “as if” that would annihilate the world of its contents: what took God six days to make takes Descartes four meditations to undo with a swift “as if.” But what I argue, however, is that the fantasy of living “as if there were only me in the world” – regardless of whose fantasy it actually is – has already broken down in the Meditations by the time the meditator is said to voice this wish, nested in its “as if.” (And it is also an “as if” that seems to work a little too well: the way in which the meditator isolates himself in the earlier meditation sheds fragments of the world, of the body, piece by piece, and here the brief “only me in the world” achieves a more definitive effect with suspicious rapidity.) This idea of the truth inhering only in the atomic self in Descartes overlooks the epistemological and ethical contributions of the rest of creation. As is now clear, this tension lurks elsewhere in Descartes’ work, but it is central to the challenge of theodicy in the Fourth Meditation in particular. The pursuit of the clear and distinct might also be, then, a wish for the clear, distinct, and unique, a wish to evade attachment and dependency, but it is ultimately at odds with Descartes’ articulation of a God made good thanks to alterity.

The meditator will have to look outside of himself (and the greater perfection he “alone” would bring) to justify a God who makes a universe in which the meditator sometimes struggles to distinguish true from false. The handicap of possible error distances the meditator from the “as if” of solitude and forces him to adopt a fuller view of creation. He must become habituated to bafflement before God and creation: “It occurs to me first of all that it is no cause for surprise if I do not understand the reasons for some of God’s actions; and there is no call to doubt his existence if I happen to find that there are other instances where I do not grasp why or how certain things were made by him….I also know without more ado that he is capable of countless things whose causes are beyond my knowledge.” This humbling moment depicts the meditator reopening the carefully evacuated subjectivity he has made to admit “other instances” and “certain” (other) “things” even as he attempts to contain his “surprise.” The number of “other things” will increase from a few mere instances, too. Slowly assembling the materials of his theodicy, the meditator cites a still more humbling “infinity of things in his [that is, God’s] power” and, by extension, not in the meditator’s own. And yet the meditator downplays what the stakes are here: experience rendered incomprehensible at best and, at worst, a bankrupt God. Reframed here as a question of mere “surprise,” the problem of divine deception (or, even, divine evil) does more than simply force the meditator to reveal the way in which the meditation wants to safeguard itself against contingency and surprise: it also pushes the meditator into a surprising sociality – one that the meditator frames as an afterthought:

It also occurs to me that whenever we are inquiring whether the works of God are perfect, we ought to look at the whole universe, not just at one created thing on its own.

Occurrit etiam non unam aliquam creaturam separatim, sed omnem rerum universitatem esse spectandam, quoties an opera Dei perfecta sint inquirimus…

44 Descartes, ed. Cottingham et al., 100.
De plus il me tombe encore en l’esprit, qu’on ne doit pas considérer une seule creature separement, lorsqu’on recherche si les souvrages de Dieu sont parfaits, mais généralement toutes les creatures ensemble.

For a moment, the meditator invites all creatures back onto the ark. In an incredibly understated moment of inspiration, it “occurs” (occurririt) to the meditator (as if almost ex nihilo) that the whole universe of things (“omnem rerum universitatem” or all creatures, “toutes les creatures”) must be seen (spectandam). With the possibility of divine evil looming large, the meditator wishes not to be alone in the universe, not to dismiss everything as the “ludificationes somniorum.” The faculty of sight, so clearly tethered in the First Meditation to every variety of deceit is, for a moment, redeemed, inhering in the force of the gerundive “spectandam” – and for no less of a cause than to defend the goodness of God. So as not to be “surprised” by the inexplicability of the divine, the meditator confronts that inexplicability by letting all creation rush in: a kind of sublime totality – all creation or the whole universe of things (“omnem rerum universitatem” in the Latin) – subdues surprise at one’s own incapacities.

When faced with the possibility of a wicked God, the meditator looks for solidarity rather than solitude, then, but the crowd Descartes appears to have let in is one he almost immediately effaces. The fullness of “all creatures,” a scintillating glimpse of a vital connection between created things—one in contrast to the principle of detachment espoused earlier in the text and across his work—evaporates. The moment that some have called Descartes’ most monistic is quickly abandoned. What follows Descartes’ suggestion is not an elaboration of this collective exculpation of God or a panorama of just what all those other created things (creaturae) would look like, but instead a return to the individual. Descartes reroutes the language of plenitude to focus on the will – an internal force that needs clarity and distinction to operate correctly—but that does not need the rest of creation. But the attempted erasure of this plenitude occurs not just in reasserting the priority of the will. It also dissolves in a chorus of negations that trumpet the willing subject’s power to refuse to criticize the creator. This chorus replaces the suggestion of a voluminous, teeming world outside – just on the edges of the meditator’s experience – with the volume of the meditator’s own voice. The meditation ends with the meditator declaring that he really has no reason to complain about his many faults – about not being smarter, not having a perfectly controllable will, not getting to have his occasional mistakes corrected by God, and about not having his place in the world be as “the most perfect.” Read in succession, the complaint is voluminous and unrelenting: “And I have no cause for complaint on the grounds that the power of understanding or the natural light which God gave me is no greater than it is”; “Nor do I have any cause for complaint on the grounds that God gave me a will which extends more widely than my intellect…”; “Finally, I must not complain that the forming of those acts

45 “Neque enim habeo causam ullam conquerendi, quod Deus mihi non maiorem vim intelligendi, sive non maius lumen natural dederit quam dedit…” “Car je n’ay certes aucun sujet de me plaindre, de ce que Dieu ne m’a pas donné une intelligence plus capable, ou une lumiere naturelle plus grande que celle que je tiens de luy…”
46 “Non habeo etiam causam conquerendi, quod voluntatem dederit latius patentem quam intellectum…” “Je n’ay pas aussi sujet de me plaindre, de ce qu’il m’a donné une volonté plus étendue que l’entendement…”
of will or judgments in which I go wrong happens with God’s concurrence…”;⁴⁷ “And I have no right to complain that the role God wished me to undertake in the world is not the principal one or the most perfect of all.”⁴⁸ To take just the first charge, “And I have no cause for complaint on the grounds that the power of understanding or the natural light which God gave me is no greater than it is,” the meditator evacuates the complaint of its substance: there is nothing to complain about, he concludes, but the meditator has actually leveled quite a charge. Indeed, the meditator laments his insufficient “power of understanding” and “natural light” – both serious claims even if the meditator sets aside his right to complain about them. At the limit of this explanation is of course the problem of the incomprehensible ways of God: God made the meditator this way for reasons beyond the meditator’s understanding, and that is something the meditator must accept.

The meditator threatens to uncover a complaint that he cannot make, but what he describes in this opening of four non-complaints is tethered inextricably to createdness – why things are the way they are (that is, why they are made to be so imperfect). But what the meditator comes close to maligning here is creation itself: the problem with the gift here (this thing that is donné or that has been given, dederit) is that it appears not to be returnable. The absence of perfect “natural light” shows the stakes of the deferred complaint: blasphemy against creation, grievances for irredeemable lack. It is a commonplace that the structure of the meditations follows the structure of biblical creation: God creates for six days; the meditator has six meditations. On the first day, God makes light (his lux fiat), but on the fourth day, God makes those lesser lights, the ones he plants in the sky or firmament that do the more humble work of separating or distinguishing day from night. This lesser lighting (“luminare minus” in the Vulgate) is here rerouted as part of the problem that cannot be a problem here: the meditator’s less than perfect light (“non maius lumen”⁴⁹) cannot be the subject of the complaint of the Fourth Meditation; like the lesser lighting of the fourth day, the light of the fourth meditation’s meditator, too, was created by God and must not be the object of the meditator’s attack.

⁴⁷ “Nec denique etiam queri debo, quod Deus mecum concurrat ad eliciendos illos actus voluntatis, sive illa judicia, in quibus fallor…” “Et enfin je ne dois pas aussi me plaindre, de ce que Dieu concourt avec moy pour former les actes de cette volonté, c’est à dire les jugements lesquels je me trompe…”

⁴⁸ “Et nullum habeo jus conquerendi quod eam me Deus in mundo personam sustinere voluerit, quae non est omnium praeicipua et maxime perfecta.” “Et je n’ay aucun droit de me plaindre, si Dieu, m’ayant mis au monde, n’a pas voulu me mettre au rang des choses les plus nobles et les plus parfaites.”


⁵⁰ Readers of the Principia might also remember the infant’s difficulty orienting himself with respect to light; there, Descartes’s baby cannot distinguish between the light and the stars. Lodged in this insufficient light seems to linger a broader resentment over this infantile vulnerability. The problems of “light” also implicate poetry, however, because “[f]or the Descartes of the Regulae, Discourse, and Meditations, the truth of the poetic imagination has remained just that: transitory brilliance which reason cannot place in a coherent system to serve as a guide for life. His admiration for the poet’s imagination is that of the thinker who has not yet developed rules to discipline the imagination into a source for reason to draw on in seeking and finding scientific truth….It is the mature Descartes’ conviction that only the steady flame of scientific, not the evanescent spark of poetic, truth allows for the possibility of human progress. Poetry, says a forty-year-old Descartes, ‘has quite ravishing delicacy and sweetness,’ but is to be placed among the subjects which ‘it is good to have examined…in order to know their true value and guard against being deceived by them’ (AT 6:5-6; CSM 1:113). Indeed, the sparks of poetic truth ‘shine more brightly’ than the
Confronted with the world around him as the only apparent justification of God’s permission of error, Descartes has to devise a strategy to deal with the quandary the world and his populist solution have given him: either he has to deal with a strange monist turn inhering in the answer to his theodicy as he summons all created things – a problem for the individualistic and dualist philosophy he has worked so hard to make – or he has to come up with some other strategy. And he does precisely that within the refrain above, for what follows the idea of a tenuous attachment to other things is a chorus out of the meditator’s own voice that pushes others (or the suggestion of others) out – and that obviates the need for the rest of the world. The substance of each of these complaints sidesteps leveling an actual charge, but the repetition very nearly drowns that fact out: I will not complain, I will not complain, I will not complain, I will not complain, he repeats. In this sequence of refusals (“I have no subject for complaint,” in the French, and in the Latin, “I have no cause” – climaxing in a language of right: droit or ius conquerendi), the meditator protests too much. His is a sidelong complaint, and his praeteritio or paralipsis is a feeble disguise. In at least one version of the text, the meditator has already invoked the “as if” that promised a more perfect world only at the cost of erasing all of its other inhabitants. Each turn absolves Descartes’ God, and in contrast to the sometimes feeble will that overrides Descartes’ imperfect intelligence, here that will rejects what it might justifiably want to do: namely, to hurl an accusation at a baffling God.

But what complaining would consist of is less clear. The stuff of Descartes’ deferred complaint is, I suggest, a problem of poetics, and one with a peculiar relationship to the question of attachment. It is also a problem that emerges out of the fabric of the text, a text that simultaneously severs ties and urges a holistic version of the universe – and one that recommends and restricts detachment itself as the strategy for proper reading. The meditator’s language of discontentment also implicates the meditation in a broader preoccupation with attachment.

Indeed, the meditator’s repeated use of the term “complaint,” seems to reintroduce, however quietly, the problem of just what might be shared or just what might attach all things (just what this “nexum” or “bond” might be). The French “plaindre” from plangere to strike or beat the breast, evokes the early modern “plainte” or “complainte,” a complaint or lament in the glow of imaginative scientific possibility.” See Peter A. Schouls, Descartes and the Possibility of Science (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 94.

In contrast, Jean-Luc Marion says that there is no textual basis for deeming others to be of any importance at all to Descartes’s argument: “Pourtant, voudra-t-on objecter...si la Meditatio I élimine autrui, ne s’agit-il pas d’une négation provisoire, préparant une restauration ultérieure d’autrui...? Telle serait l’hypothèse la plus élégante et la plus satisfaisante ; son seul défaut tient pourtant à l’absence de tout texte qui la confirme. La Meditatio IV, bien qu’elle établisse une doctrine de l’erreur en invoquant la finitude de mon entendement, n’entreprend pas, même en esquisse, une définition intersubjective de la vérité : la mention de l’omnis universitas rerum…n’anticipe en rien sur une constitution intersubjective du monde.” Marion is clearly right that Descartes does not undertake an “intersubjective definition of the truth,” but he is wrong to overlook the difficulty of dismissing others; the role of others appears as a problem of attachment, theodicy, and, as my close readings demonstrate, as a problem emergent from the text. Marion, in his search for other minds, seems to overlook the more nebulous view of others that the text creates. See Jean-Luc Marion, Questions cartésiennes, 195-196.

The complaint genre was popular beginning in the Middle Ages, and William Race notes that features of the complaint made their way into elegy and that there was already a blurred sense of genre to begin with: “In the Middle Ages and Renaissance, three sometimes overlapping strains of complaint are evident: satiric poems that expose the evil ways of the world (contemptus mundi, e.g. Alain de Lille, De planctu naturae...), didactic, that relate the fall of great persons...and amatory, including both short poems written
repeated blows of the meditator’s frustration. The verb hearkens simultaneously to a pained embodiment and to the howls of grief. But this lament, were it to happen, would happen together: in the Latin conqueror, the prefix “con, together with,” makes this lament less of a solitary affair. In the strange, solitary chorus Descartes provides in saying he will not complain inheres another kind of complaint, one in which it might be said other creatures would participate, a chorus in which what made the complaint would be other voices and not merely the meditator’s echoes filling a meditation in which the conceit is that of being “as if it were only me in the world.” Even in the near-perfect confines of the meditation, attachment inheres in the language of the meditations, even if the meditator disavows their content as he utters them. For it is not just “conqueror,” quarreling together with or complaining, that the meditator refuses to do but also queror; no lamentation, solo or collective, will be tolerated. In “queror,” of course, lurks the root of “quarrel”; there is something of a pacifist strategy, perhaps, lurking behind this protestation. Our meditator will not wage war against the God who has made the conditions that might provide cause for complaint. The meditator’s refusals to complain, harnessed to a reassertion of the will, reject the solution he appeared to have found in arguing for a plenitude that justified God’s ways or that validated his existence by appealing to a principle of relatedness outside of the space of solitary meditation. The meditator must turn his gaze away now from how all things fit together and solve his objections one by one.

In the span of all six meditations, these are the only times that Descartes uses this language: conqueror or queror in the Latin, and in the French, “plaintre,” the verb to “complain.” But the meditator’s insistence that he has no reason to “complain” also engages a problem of poetry, for in both the French and the Latin, the meditator summons not just the loosened claim to singularity that the prefix of his verbs registered. He also names poetic genres: what the meditator will not do, maybe cannot do, is write the genres he names over and over again: the complaint, the plainte or complainte in the French, the querela in the Latin. Readers sharing with Descartes a humanist education, Renaissance schoolboys who had gone through the drills of reading Ovid and Propertius, would recognize that “querela” named not merely a quarrel but also elegy. Vernacular readers familiar with the poetry of the Pléiade, and with Marot, would know well that “plainte” named a living genre and part of the literary achievements of sixteenth-century humanism and the world of letters that contributed to Descartes’s cultural formation.

53 Satan, however, will! See the following chapter on Milton’s Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained.
54 See the helpful concordance compiled by Katsuzo Murakami et al., Concordance to Descartes’ Meditationes de Prima Philosophia (Hildesheim, Germany: Olms-Weidmann, 1995).
56 Michael von Albrecht explains that “it was France that became a focus for the influence of the [Roman] elegists” (762). Michael von Albrecht, A History of Roman Literature: From Livius Andronicus to Boethius Vol I. (Leiden: Brill, 1996). Both “élégie” and the “complainte” appear in poetry of the period. Roman elegy was an important genre for imitation in the sixteenth century as the elegiac form passed from France to Italy, though, obviously, it left space for much by way of invention, too, for poets of the era. François Rigolot’s
The meditator’s four complaints resound somewhat differently, then, when considered as the projects of failed poems. I have no subject for complaint, the meditator says; I have no causam or cause for my querela. The curiosity of these formulations is less that the meditator will not complain but that he claims to have no subject or cause to do so, to have too few reasons to write. What the meditator says are inadequate causae or sujets for his complaint all have to do with his own creation and createdness. These clauses refer again and again to the fact that the way God made the meditator is insufficient subject or cause for complaint. God cannot be charged because his works cannot be questioned, of course, but the creator in chief also fails to supply sufficient grounds for elegy. Where the creator God is fertile, the meditator is sterile, unwilling or unable to cultivate cause or subject for creation. In other words, in the description of God’s creation, we find the materials of a writer’s block that forbids the meditator’s own creation. On the one hand, this makes of Descartes’ Fourth Meditation a sterile poetics, one that has no subject or cause for creation. And it turns in on itself: this is not a poem, it says; there are no tools for poetry to be found here. But on the other hand, there is a curious fecundity as the meditator elaborates just what his non-objections are, as if even without cause or subject, something of the engine of making – of poiesis – perdures, the exile of the elegiac notwithstanding. And this, too, puts the dismembering and the world-destroying moves of the First Meditation in a different light. The meditator’s bizarre auto-blazoning and his stunted elegy are the bedrock of modernity: a fragmented and vexed relationship to desire and being desired, a grief mingled with the deepest ambivalence about grieving and loss.

In the poetics of the Cartesian project, this meditation is unique in carving out a space for itself as not-elegy (the complaint that lacks a subject) and seems to suggest that treating the true and the false, the propensity to error, might somehow trouble the very form of the meditation and introduce a form of fiction. In lieu of elegy, Descartes seems to create a kind of querela without a cause – that is, he says he must not complain, but it is impossible, as I have suggested, not to hear the protest in his repetition. The elegy that is not one, the Fourth Meditation seems unmistakably nervous about what lies at its edges: the absolving power of creation, the other forms of creation that themselves might merit a plaint or querela. Perhaps the meditator has it half right here: perhaps he finds himself stumbling not on a subject for elegy but one for epic, where a good-enough-subject might emerge from precisely what is at issue in the Fourth Meditation – namely, something like “the ways of god to men,” to quote Milton’s formulation for his theodicy in Paradise Lost, to which I will turn in the following chapter. If the meditator had glimpsed a moment of the sublimity of “all things” (the swell of confusion before the fact of error and the

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57 For an interesting philosophical work on “creation” in the Cartesian context, see Kim Sang Ong-Van-Cung’s Descartes et l’ambivalence de la création (Paris: Vrin, 2000). Ong-Van-Cung grapples with the problem of “la nécessité pour la création d’être ex nihilo” (13) and its intersection with theories of causation, arguing that Descartes successfully yokes creation ex nihilo with the creativity associated with human invention (18). While she argues that Descartes moves away from “[l]a conception historique et théologique de la création…[où] la finitude est marquée parce qu’être créé, c’est être soumis à la dépendance radicale” (13), moments of Descartes’s text, like this one seem to display at the very least a different kind of ambivalence, one that points toward a deep unease with dependency.
glimmer of a reprieve promised by all created things), it is clear that such creation will not provide him with a subject for poetry. It is clear that his God will not act as muse.

Yet the Fourth Meditation seems nevertheless to remain an elegy that is not one. The poetic form most often associated with a grief for lost attachments was also a form that, in its historical role and in Descartes’ time, dealt with the everyday, with the range of “all created things” — and from antiquity, the elegiac form also grappled with a range of everyday experience that might be described accurately as “rerum universitatem.” The Fourth Meditation rejects its many objects of mourning, its reason for complaint or quarrel; it looks briefly outside of itself, finds a kind of reprieve in weak attachments outside of the meditator’s mind, but finds them too threatening or inadequate to the problem at hand. The victory of the meditator’s will, however, is a triumph of negation: it does not absolve God so much as assert what the will won’t do — the non-complaint complaint — the elegy without subject or cause. What this suggests, then, is that this unsatisfying compromise is the achievement of the principle of detachment that not only informs the proper way of reading the text (that is, detaching oneself from the commerce of the senses) but also supplies the structuring principles behind a writing that contains the germs of its own defeat. Setting aside or neglecting the principle of attachment demands that the moment of plenitude in which it is possible to see or to sense that it is not simply “as if it were only me” be set aside: it is neither clear nor distinct to hold all of these things in view simultaneously, and the solution that would allow it might mean not just that the meditator is not as smart or as capable as he would like to be — but that all created things are part of a greater botch.

In the Fourth Meditation, Descartes’ signature solitude finds the nexus of attachment to be both a threat and a salve for his intellectual autonomy and his pursuit of the truth. The attachments that appear in the framework of reading and writing, along the periphery of the meditation itself, will become internalized within the self by the time Milton writes his monist epic or by the time Rousseau gives us in his Émile a figure in which relationship is not part of the outside world but literally wrapped around the soul. The Cartesian compromise here seems potentially to give Descartes’ readers a new way out of an old narrative—the story of a Descartes whose legacy to modernity is a wretched alienation that reduces others and the self to efficient machines under glandular rule, that makes detachment so structuring a principle that the post-Cartesian is consigned to utter alienation, from others, from the body, from “all created things.”

This reading sees in the Fourth Meditation something of an implicit apology for that alienation. But the inclusive style of reading that opens the Meditations would bar an approach that might want to see in these moments the abandoned community of creation, the elegy that cannot happen. Yet to do so would be its most elegiac move: to summon the lost attachment back to life if only through marking its loss. Reading the Meditations in the way Descartes wants would require the impossible, both detaching clauses that ought not to be detached and viewing them holistically, to view all things together as that which justifies and explains, as that which is cause enough for meditation but not for elegy. It would mean forgiving God by means of a “totius” and of a “creation” crushed in the First Meditation, and it would entail undoing some of the lessons of that First Meditation in which the student of the meditator has been taught not to want. For Descartes, not having a subject for elegy means not being able to write the poem that would grieve for lost or unattainable attachments; not having a world or a body means dismantling the materials of desire and being desired—preempting loss by preempting wanting.

58 See note 6. I am especially grateful to Jocelyn Saidenberg for her insights on Roman elegy and the “querela.”
In this light, it seems no accident that the creative project of the Meditations keeps the fact of its own creation, along with its attachments, at the edges of its work, understated or stated only as negation. And at the end of his prefatory writings, Descartes places a retraction of sorts of the Meditations and its creator: “I would advise none to read [these meditations],” Descartes wrote in his preface, placating the learned members of the Sorbonne and sparing himself the criticism of bad readers. But Descartes had set a still better trap to spare his work the ambiguity of attachment: these meditations come with a poetics that he advises none to read – and with a poem that none, it would turn out, could want or write anyway. “Nullis author sum,” he continues: “I’m nobody’s author.”

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59 It’s hard not to read this moment (“nullis author sum”) as a strange sort of naming of the creature made by the cogito, as if Descartes were adopting the strategy of Odysseus, who transformed himself into Outis or “Nobody” in his encounter with the cyclops Polyphemus. (See book nine of the Odyssey, and see also Adorno and Horkheimer’s discussion of Odyssean cunning and the formation of the subject in Dialectic of Enlightenment, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).)
“Solitude is Best Society”: On Milton’s Immanent Attachments

Neither kings nor husbands are safe from Milton’s subversive philosophy of relation. In *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, Milton leads the charge to lop the head of the king as he chides those who might otherwise be shy about executing the recently deposed Charles I. Exposing the defunct attachments of subjects to a king who is already, in Milton’s words, “un-kinged,” Milton negates a regime of relationship with one fell prefix. If the prophet Samuel could put forth a law that “nullified all relations…between brother and brother, father and son, master and servant,” Milton asks, “wherefore not between king, or rather tyrant, and people?”¹ In his *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton one-ups the prophet Samuel and applies his philosophy to the boudoir: the marriage contract only counts as such if it can be broken. In his poetry, no less than his prose, Milton confronts the problems of faction and division, of fragile attachments rendered more fragile still by parasitic bids to sway “right reason.” But while Miltonic heroism confronts ambivalence about relationships, his solution is not dissolution, I argue, but rather a startling inward turn: the poet who shatters so many hierarchical relationships will also declare relationship inescapable and essential.

Milton’s writings convey a keen sensitivity to the compromises inhering social life, to the difficulties of living outside of solitude. But in the middle of the seventeenth century, an awareness of the problems of relationship was impossible to avoid. The English Civil War and the upheaval leading to it had shaken whatever might be taken for granted in the already-fraught question of obligation. While the language of “relation” itself was shifting, as I have shown,² it absorbed deeper uncertainties about what relational roles might be played as revolution unmoored the structure of state and society. The onslaught of loyalty oaths required of English subjects, the proliferation of texts grasping for natural law and theorizing “contract,” and the bid for a revival (at least in theory) of absolutism and paternalism à la Filmer: these political and philosophical phenomena reassessed how state and society ought to be organized. Yet they also made it clear that the materials of attachment, of the social bond itself, were not just the urgent subjects of revision in a moment of chaos but also susceptible to reinvention. Not only instruments of political necessity, the body of texts concerned with attachment also carried a latter-day mythmaking within, and in articulating what constituted primary relationship, poetry would participate as much as political theory. In arguing for how society should be or why it became the way it was, these imaginative outpourings had to posit a “natural” order that would make sense of the present moment either as it asserted a primary chaos (Hobbes’ tumultuous state of nature, for instance) or as it demonstrated just how far the society had fallen from its paradisal beginnings.

While works like those mentioned above sought to reshape the state, central to the problem of reorganizing society was the contest between a primary solitude and a primary sociality. Part of the project of justifying a social order would entail proving why society was preferable to an arguably safer solitude and imagining why solitude had been abandoned in the first place. One solution would be an appeal to nature. Aristotle provided a useful precedent for

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² See the introduction.
such an argument; declaring man a political animal, Aristotle had contended famously that “[t]he man who is isolated, who is unable to share in the benefits of political association, or has no need to share because he is already self-sufficient…must therefore be either a beast or a god.” In the seventeenth century, Francis Bacon would follow suit, citing Aristotle in the first sentence of “Of Friendship” (1625) and confirming the bestiality of a preference for solitude. Bacon would make an exception for isolation sought “not out of a pleasure in solitude, but out of a love and desire to sequester a man’s self for a higher conversation: such as is found…truly and really in divers of the ancient hermits and holy fathers of the church.” Though he follows Aristotle closely, Bacon changes the definition of solitude to encompass a broader and increasingly figurative meaning. In his account, isolation is available even in society. Bacon comes to characterize solitude as a very particular state, one brought about by the absence of the intimacies of friendship: “it is a mere and miserable solitude to want true friends, without which the world is but a wilderness.” What “solitude” consisted of had changed, but the circumstances of sociality had, too.

In Milton’s time, the permissible pleasures of solitude extended beyond the admirable askesis of monastic life to which Bacon alludes; against a backdrop of internecine conflict, retirement and the contemplative life hardly needed justifying. But in addition to familiar models of the relative solitude of the pastoral or the vita contemplativa were accounts that would assert an originary isolation consisting of total solitude and, crucially, of autonomy and invulnerability—all things that were, and not coincidentally, in especially short supply in early modern England. It was in this context that Andrew Marvell’s “The Garden” could expose human solitude as the first (and most desirable) state:

Such was that happy garden-state,  
While man there walked without a mate:  
After a place so pure and sweet,  
What other help could yet be meet?  
But ’twas beyond a mortal’s share  
To wander solitary there:  
Two paradise ’twere in one  
To live in Paradise alone. (57-64)

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5 Bacon would also have had more recent exceptions to the Aristotelian rule to consider. The medieval tradition of the contemptus mundi, the rural solitudes (or approximations of solitude) of pastoral, and other instances of “admirable” askesis, not to mention the long history of valorizing the vita contemplativa, also contributed to the cultural materials available to Bacon as he assessed what, precisely, solitude was. For a thoughtful account of the expanding variety of “solitudes” available during the Renaissance, see Thomas Greene, “Scève’s ‘Saulsaye’: The Life and Death of Solitude,” Studies in Philology 70.2 (April 1973): 123-140.
7 Greene helpfully points out that the “solitude” of pastoral usually is not a “true solitude”: “The pastoral mode, for example, had almost never been used to praise a life of true solitude. The speech of Meliboeus in Virgil’s first eclogue which evokes Tityrus’ felicity (‘Fortunate senex...’) alludes twice to the old man’s neighbor and again to the song of a nearby vine-dresser” (124).
Milton’s amanuensis resists the presence of the famous “help meet” of Genesis 2:18 as his exclamatory “What other help could yet be meet!” distorts the unity of the “help meet” by holding the words apart literally—a moment that likewise offers a flicker of free indirect discourse, a blurring of the poet’s longing for “a place so pure and sweet” and the impossibility of imagining sharing paradise for its originary, solitary inhabitant. Inhering in Marvell’s reminder that “‘twas beyond a mortal’s share” is death itself: here, being “mortal,” subject to mortality, occurs not with the Fall but with the bitter truth of experiencing “a mortal’s share.” The collapse of the garden’s solitude, the very idea of having a “share” and the sociality required by the fact of sharing, diminishes the scope of the paradisal. The earlier state can only be approximated in numerical contrast—as “two” paradies, a doubling that trips over the singularity of Paradise but that, in its repeated “Two” and “to” and “in one” and “alone,” shows a mathematical discontentment: in the “two” echoes a “too” in the sense of “also” that impedes the pleasure of the solitary. In the wish to be “al-one,” is a repetition of that “one” that is no longer just one.

While the penultimate stanza of Marvell’s poem captures succinctly the yearning and conflict within this contest between primary solitude and sociality, it is Milton’s unique solution to the problem that interests me in this chapter. Milton’s writing of primordial relationality makes the problem of solitude or society more complicated than the Aristotelian assertion of a solitude that is either bestial or divine. Consistent with Milton’s broadening of the field of “things indifferent” or adiaphora, relationship can be the basis of the height of moral life, an index of devotion to God or love of humanity, or part of a noxious sociability (à la Satan), a rotten intimacy that threatens to shatter the integrity of society. Across Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained, Milton generates a philosophy of immanent relationality: in Milton’s hands, solitude is marked by a principle of relatedness that inheres a priori in all created beings. In other words, relation is a foundational principle that makes a “pure” primary solitude impossible. Within Milton’s monism, then, is a revolution of relationship. There is a physical transformation in the “one first matter all” that defines the material universe, as Phillip Donnelly and others have uncovered, but what existing accounts of monism consistently overlook and what I will show here is that Milton’s monism changes the terms of moral life completely, making the relatedness of matter part of the essential drama of human existence.

How to exist together in society and the ethical problems it raises are questions posed not only at the moment of encounter with another person but in the very matter of the human. But what this relatedness does not do is naturalize relationships of heredity or provide divine sanction for political hierarchy, nor does it endorse all models of sociality even as it asserts the fundamental sociality of human beings as a principle independent of social arrangements. Rather, the wide field of “things indifferent” makes relationship the site of negotiation in both solitude and society. Staging and restaging primal contests between solitude and society, Milton shows the enduring appeal of primary solitude but saves it as an inconceivable quality of an absolute God and ultimately recuperates the value of solitude more generally in asserting an immanent relationality in the Son that is itself the safeguard against bad relationship. Solitude, in other words, is recast as a variant of sociality for all but God. It is a mode of critiquing toxic socialities or, at its extreme, the assumption of a more peaceful society with only one member.

I begin this argument in the garden of Paradise Lost, where, contra Marvell, the question of primary solitude shows how “defect” is a quality found within humans in their solitude—an argument for the necessity of a primary society and a point of contrast to the “sufficiency” of Milton’s God. Turning to the creation of the Son in Paradise Lost and the absolute power of the Father, I show how Milton creates a visual marker of relatedness that survives the image-breaking
of his iconoclasm and that undergirds a moral and not just material monism. Finally, looking at the Son in *Paradise Regained*, I reveal how the Son’s resistance to temptation itself restages the conflict between solitude and society but shows the contest to be predetermined: in Milton’s universe, primary solitude is rendered impossible for all but the Father. For fallen humans, this means that the “solitary way” that Adam and Eve take out of Eden is the burden of the imperfect sociality of postlapsarian life.

I. Paradise’s Defective Solitude

The creation stories of Adam and Eve both portray originary isolation: Adam is alone in the garden, and Eve finds herself, at least at first, with no Adam in sight. In these primary isolations, Milton shows the beginnings of social life – and the challenges that subtend it. While Adam’s request for a companion elicits God’s scrutiny and a “Trial” that opens him to the risk of blasphemy, Eve mistakenly identifies her own reflection as her ideal companion. Yet these paradisal gaffs leave the essential innocence of the first humans untarnished: rather, these brushes with potential error indict primary solitude, showing the defect to be not so much the errors of the first humans but, rather, a primal loneliness always meant to be banished. In Milton’s Eden, the desire for society and the defect of the solitary human are simultaneous: it is this “perfect” defect that underlies and valorizes the social, that makes one of the founding problems of human history the question of solitude, its lure and its hazards.

Prior to Eve’s creation, Adam’s request for a “help meet” exposes the defective solitude undergirding community and the proto-politics of Eden. Book 8 rehearses Adam’s appeal to God for a companion, Milton’s elaboration of Genesis 2:18. Wondering how he could possibly achieve “happiness” (8.365) by himself and deeming the animals in his midst unsuitable friends, Adam worries “what society” can exist “Among unequals” (8.383). Adamic worry is absent in the Genesis tradition; there, God does not consult Adam at all but rather determines, independently, that it is, simply, “not good” for Adam to be alone: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.”

What in scripture is God’s independent assessment of the “good” is, in Milton, triggered by Adam’s request – and requires an extended exchange with a Miltonic God whose own relationship to sociality at first puts Adam’s request in doubt. Realizing he might be “presumptuous” (8.367) even to ask for a companion, Adam nonetheless pursues the “nice and subtle happiness” (3.399), as God later puts it, that companionship might bring. God meets Adam’s “presumptuous” demand not with acceptance or denial but with a test: if Adam finds solitude so unpleasurable, what does this mean for Adam’s view of a God who can never have an equal interlocutor?

What think’st thou then of mee, and this my State,
Seem I to thee sufficiently possesst
Of happiness or not? who am alone

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9 Gen. 2:18 (King James Version).
From all Eternity, for none I know
   Second to mee or like, equal much less,
   How have I then with whom to hold converse
Save with the Creatures which I made, and those
   To me inferior, infinite descents
Beneath what other Creatures are to thee? (8.403-411)

Adam faces a dangerous challenge: God hints at a formula that would have Adam understand his role according to proportional analogy (i.e., Adam is to beasts as God is to all other creatures), but the narrative seems to caution Adam against the hubris implicit in any comparison to God, heightened by a Raphael who, only moments earlier, cautioned Adam to think “lowly wise.” What God reveals to Adam here is as much a test of faith – the proper trust in God’s “sufficiency” – as it is a test of political science: “What think’st thou then of mee, and this my State,” he demands.

God’s “State” is a kind of Being inaccessible to Adam’s imagination, and it is also an economy of “sufficiency” that ensures a politics that needs no society. What Adam articulates in response to this trial is a theory of divine perfection: “Thou in thyself art perfet, and in thee / Is no deficience found” (8.415-416). God is perfect, Adam affirms, and wants not; companionless among his creatures, God only converses with those “infinite descents / Beneath” him. (The enjambed line hints at the immeasurable distance between God and his created interlocutors.) Faced with the task of assessing whether or not this God appears “sufficiently possest / Of happiness,” Adam’s reply is “lowly answer’d” (8.412); he humbles himself before God and announces that “All human thoughts come short” (8.414) of understanding him. Without desire for companionship, free from any need to “solace his defects” (8.419), God exposes the “defects” that do need “solacing” in Adam: the test that Adam passes in affirming the perfection of God portrays an Adam who, despite being created perfectly thanks to the perfection of his maker, is defective in solitude. As God reveals that he knew all along that Adam needed company, he reveals that he created Adam’s initial solitude “for trial only” (8.447):

   I, ere thou spak'st,
   Knew it not good for Man to be alone,
   And no such companie as then thou saw'st
   Intended thee, for trial onely brought,
   To see how thou could'st judge of fit and meet (8.444-448)

In Milton’s Eden, it is not enough for God to decide that it is “good” for Adam to have a companion; rather, this paradisal test suggests that Adam must recognize something about primary solitude in order to escape it. He must recognize that only divine perfection can find goodness in “be[ing] alone.”

In contrast to the perfect solitude of the Godhead, Milton exposes primary solitude as a flaw that exists in Paradise, one that can only be remedied by the politics adumbrated in Adam’s assessment of the differences between divine solitude and his own:

No need that thou
Shouldst propagate, already infinite;
And through all numbers absolute, though One;
But Man by number is to manifest
His single imperfection, and beget
Like of his like… (8.419-424)

Adam’s elaboration of God’s sufficiency holds the kernel of the social – and it does so in attempting to expose the alternative politics that appears in being “through all numbers absolute.” From Adam’s successful response to God’s test emerges a primary politics of sociality. Adam exposes a “State” belonging in God with a politics that diverges sharply from his own: God’s experience is “sufficient” and “absolute” while Adam’s depends on reproduction, the population of a polity that, at most, can claim a figurative absolutism (for instance, over beasts). Adam’s encounter with the divine stages a scene of political pedagogy: Adam must describe two kinds of states: that of God and that of man. But part of describing the “State” of God adequately lies in the revelation of the inadequacy of human description and comprehension. The terms of Adam’s politics place the coordinates of divine power in the abstract: a unity that encompasses the infinite, not “number,” characterizes God’s state. In contrast, Adam’s own state is both conceivable and countable: “by number…manifest.” It cannot look to unity for its satisfactions but must find relationship. In saddling man with “His single imperfection,” Milton’s poem condemns primary solitude. Yet in doing so, it makes from the original “imperfection” something of a theological knot: How can paradise be perfect if there is an original flaw? Milton’s God solves this problem first by way of the trial (and, outside of the confines of the garden, as I explain later, by a visual schema of relatedness), letting Adam pass the test and deeming the divine motive benevolent, a part of God’s plan “To see how thou couldst judge of fit and meet” (8.448). In this test of human judgment, Adam must avow his own perfect imperfection, reject the lure of primary solitude, and recognize that he would be “In unity defective, which requires / Collateral love and dearest amity” (8.425-426).

The problems of loneliness that Adam’s trial exposes return with Eve’s creation where her initial errors portray a bad sociality that should also be understood in light of this negotiation with a defective primary solitude. Frequently read as a premonition for the Fall or as evidence of a female fallibility doomming Paradise from the start, Eve’s creation should not be dismissed as simply “vain desire” or narcissism; rather, Eve’s mistakes are central to justifying a prelapsarian desire for social life. For Eve, a “defective” singularity prompts her to desire society; her mistake necessarily precedes the realization of the first society that appears when Adam and Eve meet. As Eve awakens after her creation, she immediately errs:

Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound
Of waters issu’d from a Cave and spread
Into a liquid Plain, then stood unmov’d
Pure as th’ expanse of Heav’n; I thither went
On the green bank, to look into the clear
Smooth Lake, that to me seem’d another Sky. (4.453-459)

Eve responds as if hailed\(^\text{11}\) by speech emanating from the water: the “murmuring sound” that comes from the mouth-like “Cave” prompts Eve’s first movements. Milton will later invoke

\(^{11}\) I obviously use this term with Althusser in mind. It’s fair to ask why Eve turns in response to the water, and these early moments of her paradisal subjection might be understood in Althusserian terms or in terms of the question Butler asks of Althusser’s passerby: “Why does this subject turn…? Might the
“murmuring” in characterizing Satan and his allies, and the “murmur” Eve hears is itself an echo from an Old Testament tradition in which “murmuring” characterizes dozens of instances as the vocalizations of complaint, often against God. But in Milton’s hands, what might be a lapse of faith in the biblical tradition is an earnest call to society, and the materials of postlapsarian literature become innocent again as they reappear in the poem of prelapsarian life. Before Eve even sees her own figure in water, she locates in the natural world a voice of complaint that it does not actually possess. There is, then, not vanity in Eve’s haste to look at the lake but, rather, a demonstration of lack, of a desire and need to find society so contagious and insistant that the syntax hesitates before attributing the sound to the landscape (the “murmuring sound,” we learn only after the line break, is “Of waters”). In her misprisions, Eve repeatedly errs in misidentifying things that seem to be for things that are; Eve responds to metaphor before she responds to the “things themselves.” But what prompts these errors is a perspective that anthropomorphizes the landscape. When she sees her reflection in the water, Eve attributes to the watery image a hailing that she mistakenly located in the cave’s waters: “I started back, / It started back, but pleas’d I soon return’d, / Pleas’d it return’d as soon with answering looks / Of sympathy and love” (4.461-4.464). The communication Eve thinks she experiences with her reflection is mirrored in the echoing repetitions of the poem (“I started back, / It started back” and so on). But Eve’s “unexperienc’t thought” leads her not to the mistake of self-love – Narcissus cannot exist before the Fall, however nervous Eve’s pool-gazing might make Milton’s reader – but to a misidentification of society before she finds the true society of her relationship with Adam.

In Eve’s botched encounter with her own reflection, Milton conveys the necessity of negotiating with forms of sociality and the lure of solitude. Though Eve errs again in longing for the “society” of her image, Adam persuades Eve to stay with a language that mimics the sociality of the redoubled mur-mur in the voice of the water, that begins with the very duplications that first drew Eve’s attention – justifications of an innate desire for sociality rather than portrayals of a prelapsarian lapse: “Return fair, Eve, / Whom fli’st thou? Whom thou fli’st, of him thou art” (4.481-482). The draw of the murmur, of the reflection, is the innocent appeal of society, an echo quite apart from the besmirched appeal of Echo to Narcissus. Consistent with the “trial” that God makes Adam endure before his initiation into society with Eve, Eve’s error inculcates an essential lesson: the necessary exclusion of primary solitude. Eve’s mistaken comparison, her

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12 The “murmur” also characterizes the sound of pandemonium in response to Mammon (2.284-285) and of the rebellions angels agreeing with Satan’s objections to the Son’s powers (5.873). The inchoate expression within the “murmur” that characterizes these social formations might also form a useful counterpoint to Milton’s valorization of “conversation.”

13 There are dozens of such “murmurs” (and murmurers, moreover) in the King James Bible.

14 One could also suggest that an implicit sociality lurks in the allusions themselves. The “company” of the literary – here, in the allusions to biblical and classical precedents – would seem to mark the landscape with a community of reading before there are texts (fallen or otherwise). See Greene’s suggestion that the solitude that Scève imagines a solitude even without “texts,” and see Montaigne’s “Des livres” for another solitude populated with literary interlocutors in Essais II (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1979), 78-90.

15 The type of error Eve reveals here (confusing things that seem to be with things that are) amounts to the one of the definitions of perception-based errors that Augustine articulates in his Soliloquia. For a more detailed discussion of this, see Gerard J. P. O’Daly, Augustine’s Philosophy of Mind (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987).
sense that Adam was “Less winning soft, less amiably mild” (4.479), is a blunder that Milton’s paradise allows to fall outside the scope of sin.

In a paradise the foundational lesson of which is the banishment of solitude, Eve’s decision in Book 9 to work alone is especially fraught, exposing both the appeal of solitary labor and the vulnerability it entails. “Let us divide our labors” (9.214), Eve proposes, and as she debates the merits of the division of labor with Adam, Eve urges Adam not to “suspect our happy State / Left so imperfect by the Maker wise, / As not secured to single or combin’d” (9.337-339). Adam finds it hard to disagree with Eve, of course, and he confirms that “what obeys / Reason, is free, and Reason he made right” (9.351-352). Eve will soon fall prey to the serpent’s seductions, and in her “single” state, she will be unable to withstand temptation. But sinless in Paradise, Adam and Eve are right: Reason still exists, and the single interdiction God issues about the Tree of Knowledge means that Eve has not erred in calling for a distribution of labor. In contrast, Adam articulates what Milton’s vision of a relational and theological monism will (I argue in the following sections) sustain: “solitude is sometimes best society” (9.249). Adam’s paradoxical statement is no paradox at all in light of the Miltonic compromise that subtends Adam’s “Trial” and Eve’s initial errors. The “bad” solitude that Eve experiences when she “reach[es] to the Fruit” (9.781) is a different kind of solitude, a solitude without society: “Back to the Thicket slunk / The guilty Serpent, and well might, for Eve / Intent now wholly on her taste, naught else / Regarded” (9.786). In sin, Eve loses sight of the principle of society altogether, noticing “naught else.” When she starts to speak, Eve “to herself pleasingly began. / O Sovran…” (9.794/795); Eve is addressing the most “precious of all Trees / In Paradise” (9.795-796) as “Sovran,” but for a moment, it actually appears that Eve addresses herself as “Sovran.” In the moments of this solitude, Eve conceives as herself, at least momentarily, as without society, aware of “naught else,” neither God nor Adam. The “best society” available to God’s creation in solitude, at least “sometimes,” vanishes in the moment of Eve’s sinfulness.

In Adam’s fall, however, a surfeit of “society,” a noxious sociality, makes the “lov’d society” of Eve more alluring to Adam than obedience to God; in Adam’s fall, a language of “bonding” supplants the principle of attachment that, I show in the next section, propounds an immanent relatedness. In other words, what is an innate drive for sociality and an immanent attachment to God is here perverted for the sake of exaggerated external attachments. For Adam, Eve’s Fall “draws” him both to panic at the thought of “liv[ing] again in these wild Woods forlorn” (9.910) and to lose sight of the divine relationship that joins him to Eve and that subtends all creation. “The Link of Nature” (9.914) that Adam thinks compels him to fall with Eve reappears in Eve’s assessment that they are “linkt in Love so dear” (9.970) and in Adam’s appeal to “The Bond of Nature” (9.955). Adam looks outward as he justifies his disobedience by appealing to the “links” between Eve and himself and to a “Bond of Nature” that privileges “Flesh” and “Bone” over the substance and spirit of the divine. Adam’s decision foregrounds a sensuous attachment that foregoes the necessary adherence to divine relationship while Eve’s privileged a solitude that overlooked the importance of either divine relationship or human sociality. Both Adam and Eve forget that Adam’s insight that “solitude is sometimes best society” (9.249) came after the certainty that a pure solitude is impossible. They forget that they participate in “society” already by virtue of their creator’s edict that society is “good” and by the fact of their createdness. In Eve’s sensuous abandon and Adam’s fear of abandonment, both Eve and Adam fall at the moment they think a pure solitude to be either preferable or possible.

In Book 3, the Father makes relationship that which earns humanity grace; that is, even after the dangerous extremes of solitude and society in the sins of Adam and Eve, a principle of
relatedness allows them to receive grace and to avoid the demonic guilt that comes from the disavowal of relatedness or the cultivation of noxious socialities. Indeed, the Father stresses that the fall of humanity differs from that of the rebel angels in terms of the relationship of the self to the other:

The first sort by thir own suggestion fell,  
Self-tempted, self-deprav’d: Man falls deceiv’d  
By th’other first: Man therefore shall find grace,  
The other none (3.130-133)

The distinction here is that man is lied to while the fallen angels deceive themselves. Yet it is because of the sociality of man and his errors that he can receive grace: “Man therefore” – a logical language of cause and effect punctuates the space between the Fall and redemption – “shall find grace” because of “th’other first” (3.132). Falling “by th’other first” positions deceit alongside grace. Following the logic of the felix culpa, whereby man’s fall is “felix,” happy, precisely because it is the precondition of Christ’s advent, the deceit of humanity is good for grace. Further, it articulates a kind of community – one that emerges in an ethics God describes here, an ethics that works “By th’other first.” An ethics that puts the other first will trigger man’s disobedience (Eve responds to Satan, Adam to Eve), but it will also inform a principle of relationship that comes with the possibility both of error and of community. In contrast, the fallen angels are not deceived “By the other”; rather, they are “self-tempted,” “self-deprav’d,” and the relationship that emerges revolves around the relationship of the self to itself. While Eve’s seduction obviously exposes the threat of satanic sociality, the problem with Satanic relationship is not so much its trickery but its creation of a relationship with a split self rather than with the other. Part of the serpent’s promise is self-sufficiency: “ye shall be as Gods” (9.708). It is, after all, through the immanent principle of relationship that Milton’s monism creates that humankind is seduced not only to Satan but also to Christ, whose glowing face is the signal of divinity.

II. The Absolute Father and the Glow of Relation

The problem of relation extends beyond the trials of the first humans. Throughout the text, luster indexes divinity in created things; more than an ambient answer to the visual fracture of Miltonic iconoclasm, the light of the divine subtends a principle of relationship essential to what I show in the remaining two sections is an immanent relationality. Indeed, Book 3 describes the Son in large part through this language of light:

Thee next they sang of all Creation first,  
Begotten Son, Divine Similitude,  
In whose conspicuous count’nance, without cloud  
Made visible, th’Almighty Father shines,  
Whom else no Creature can behold; on thee  
Impresst th’effulgence of his Glory abides…. (3.382-87)

In contrast to Satan’s sneaky shape-shifting, the hyper-visible Son, with “conspicuous count’nance” (384) is “Made visible” (385), designed for the devout to behold as divinity itself cannot be beheld directly. (Later in Book 3 even the “brightest seraphim” must shield their faces with their wings in the presence of God.) In this divinely “impressst . . . effulgence” the Latin root
premure echoes: the relationship to God is “im-pressed” in the sense of stamped or printed upon the face of the Son. Notably, the marks of this divine relationship endure even the severing of ties of fidelity; when Satan falls to hell, Satan has lost his lustre, but some residual lambency remains nonetheless: “his form had yet not lost / All her Original brightness” (1.591-92). And as he presides over the hellish empire, “Princely counsel in his face yet shone” (2.304). This veneer is a borrowed quality, reflected from God, and through it, the fallen Satan remains, in his way, part of the created universe like all other matter: relationship as such is not, therefore, external even for the rebel angels who prefer to think of themselves as “Authors.”

The Son’s luster is evidence not simply of his glory but of a relationship, an index of someone else’s (that is, God’s) original form – something that even Satan’s dimmed face betrays: its luminescent quality, described of in terms of possession or property (“his form”), actually registers an encounter with someone else (“her Original brightness”), and the change in the gender of the possessive pronoun conveys a kind of pronominal alienation that registers Satan’s estrangement stranger still and more potently than the visual cues alone.

The shining signature of God on the face of the Son signals a divine relationship which cannot be eclipsed even by the purposeful distortions of Satan. The light of created matter provides an index for relation that does not need the “Bond of Nature” in order to be articulated; an inflection rather than a discrete tie or contract, Milton’s “one first matter all” (5.472) expresses relationship in glimmers. In other words, the relationship to God is not contractual or countable but an a priori principle discernible but not reducible to bonds alone. But if Milton’s monism can be understood as a marker of relation, it also preserves the pure solitude, the absolutism, of Milton’s God. Rejecting the possibility of a perfect and pure solitude in Eden – the kind that invites the kind of prelapsarian lapse Marvell’s poem imagines – Milton provides a theological model that nonetheless glorifies the solitude of the godhead. The visual politics of relatedness do not extend to a Father who cannot be beheld at all. The apparent negative theology that appears around Milton’s God is a strategy to maintain the conceptual possibility of pure solitude while forbidding it to human society – a strange and powerful preservation of absolutism that simultaneously renders it illegitimate for human society. Milton’s God is above the fray of relational woes, but he is crucially also not a model for imitation: for humans, there is no opting out of relation as such.

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16 Marshall Grossman argues that the inwardness of Milton’s characters is specifically textual, that being an “author” is tethered closely to a providential authorship. See his Authors to Themselves: Milton and the Revelation of History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

17 Barbara Lewalski notices precisely such a shift in Milton’s image of Truth as “Bastard” from Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, arguing that “[t]hese curious gender shifts are dictated by Milton’s need to accommodate the myth of Truth to himself as male teacher, but they also reveal Milton’s subconscious disposition to elide or subsume to himself the female sphere of experience” (171). I would suggest that the gendered pronouns here have as much to say about how Milton conceives of the relationality subtending truth and lie through the schema of gender as it does to the gender politics of authorship to which Lewalski refers. See Barbara Lewalski, The Life of John Milton (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

18 The Miltonic sublime that Burke so admired in his On the Sublime and Beautiful would seem to recuperate aesthetically the power of the absolute. For more on Milton and the sublime, see David Sedley, Sublimity and Skepticism in Montaigne and Milton (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006) and Sanford Budick, Kant and Milton (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

19 In “When I Consider . . .”, the poet seems to further develop this sense of relatedness, famously expanding what it means to “serve” God to include the patience of waiting, in blindness: “They also serve
Milton’s monism changes the navigation of relationship because the “matter” that characterizes all creation is moral, fusing the material with the ideal. The secondary literature probes Milton’s monism\(^{20}\) primarily as a question of the relationship of body and spirit – an answer of sorts to Cartesian mind-body dualism, but it seems to miss the consequences of monism for the landscape of moral philosophy and intersubjective relationship. Steven Fallon, D. Bentley Hart, and Phillip J. Donnelly disagree on the extent to which “matter” and “corporeal spirits” amount to a Hobbesian materialism, but their varying accounts of Milton’s monism never budge from the coordinates of a relatively narrow philosophical debate. John Rogers’ work is a refreshing exception to these stricter readings of “matter,” and in his study of scientific and philosophical texts helpfully remarks that “a sensitivity to the generic disparity between works of natural and political philosophy need not blind us to the shared conceptual logic structuring the systems devised in both…”\(^{21}\) Monism’s revelation, then, is in a moral and political philosophy that infuses matter with the stuff of relation and attachment. When all matter is inflected with divine relation, no solitude, no state of nature, can admit total isolation, whether imagined as solitary peacefulness or unmitigated savagery; Milton’s lux fiat makes the most atomic individual inflected forever by relation.

Before Leibniz thinks of “possible worlds” (and, for that matter, coins the term “theodicy”), Milton beats him to it, making three worlds (Heaven, Earth, and – as I discuss in the third section of this chapter – the desert scape of Paradise Regained) that provide forceful accounts of a relatedness subtending human experience. The ethical and moral dimensions of his monism, then, seem not to reside in the mere description of the spiritual corporeality or “first matter” but in the inherent signs of relatedness between and within “spiritual bodies.” What comes to the fore in this reading is the urgency of understanding the mereology that sustains the Miltonic vision. Rather than thinking of the bond between created beings as something countable or discrete, Milton makes the marks of relationship easy to spot but difficult to quantify. It is not invisible, but its source (God) is, and the nature of the glimmers and glosses appearing in created persons that marks relatedness does not respond readily to measurement. In allying relatedness with a diffuse qualiqa, Milton thus makes the relationship to the divine manifest without being the object of appropriation.

Through the “absolute” Father of his poem, Milton negotiates with the consequences theological, political, and social emerging from the diffuse monistic theology outlined above. While previous chapters have traced fugitive – and, in some cases, irretrievable – primary states of society or solitude, Milton’s epic often exposes the continuities of prelapsarian experience and


\(^{20}\) It is curious to note how rarely works that mention Milton’s monism stress that the term used to describe the impression Milton gives of the universe’s “one first matter all,” of monism in short, precedes the coining of the term itself and arises just before its first and most famous proponents (Wolff, Leibniz). Of course, “monism” as such occurs in stoic and platonic formations, not to mention its formulation in Spinoza, but that Milton’s monism appears in roughly the same period as these thinkers seems worth emphasizing; it is not a mere coincidence that Milton’s possible worlds precede the famed “possible worlds” of Leibniz and occur in the same period as Spinoza. Milton’s monism, then, might also be understood as part of a progression of types of truth claims – and types of visions of the false and the falsifiable – that emerge throughout this discussion of monism.

life after the Fall. This is not to suggest that Milton’s title errs; paradise is “lost,” indeed, but disobedience’s cost does not include entirely new rules for grasping attachment. In the Father, Milton’s work of justifying the ways of God imposes a limit on what can be grasped by even angelic and prelapsarian minds. In doing so, *Paradise Lost* conceives of an absolute that sustains faith and reason for prelapsarian and postlapsarian experience alike. Milton presents a God whose absolute truth (and absolute power) never once appears before created vision. Making this divine truth exist entirely outside of the social, the Father becomes an inaccessible object of the strivings of faith and reason, an absolute that can never be imitated, an impossible model of the asocial that is valued but marked as off limits. But this restriction on mimesis is no punishment for the creatures whose faces shine, to varying degrees, with proof of their own relation to their creator.

Critics have long argued about what important truth the Father has to convey, but in *Paradise Lost*, theodicy is actually a quite focused question about relation and attachment, not the justification of God but of the “ways of God to men.” If “God” evades perception, his “ways”

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22 Fish’s famous formulation stresses the readerly reception of (difficult) truths at the risk of discovering one’s own sinfulness in resisting a true narrative; the Empsonian tradition, meanwhile, sees in Milton’s God a still more painful truth, namely, that the God of Christianity is wicked, “morally disgusting.” Both readings envision in Milton’s God the locus of a kind of truth and of an absolute power, though the place for hypocrisy moves from the reader (in Fish) to God himself (in Empson). Pushing the Empsonian line to the point of reversal, Michael Bryson argues that Milton’s God is indeed a “tyrant in heaven,” but the figure through which Milton criticizes tyranny. Bryson attempts to relieve Milton’s Father of Empson’s criticism and Milton’s reader of Fishian sinfulness as he echoes Victoria Silver in arguing that “[t]he Father is not Milton’s illustration of how God is, but Milton’s scathing critique of how…God is imagined.” Whatever the power of the text to chastise wayward readers à la Fish, it seems obvious enough that Milton would not possibly confuse his poem with a factual portrayal of things as they are or of “how God is.” Better understood in the context of Milton’s iconoclasm, the representation of God presents a limit of the visual (see the previous section on the blinding light of God) and of the comprehensible. Criticism that acts as if God were fully visible seems to miss what Maureen Quilligan helpfully frames as “not a question of seeing God face to face” (143). What the Fishian reading makes more clear, if in a way that proves inflexible and weirdly indifferent to the vastness of Milton’s own things indifferent, is the importance of relationship and attachment between the narrative and its readers, between God and his subjects. Simple attacks on God as character overlook the fact that this character problematizes “character” as such – makes the knowledge of his character the unreachable end of human striving. See William Empson, *Milton’s God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); and Maureen Quilligan, *Milton’s Spenser: The Politics of Reading* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

23 Like “monism,” the word “theodicy” does not come into English usage until much later, with the translation of Leibniz’s *Théodicée* (1710). The *OED* quotes Milton’s *Paradise Lost* for the very definition of the term.

24 Milton critics seem to abbreviate “the ways of God to men” into simply “God” with astonishing frequency. (Phillip Donnelly is a notable exception.) However mysterious “the ways” of God might be, they point nonetheless to something quite different than “God.” It is still more startling to level this difference in light of Luther’s inquiry about a *iustitia dei* whose palatability relies upon scrutiny of the genitive. This is, like Luther’s *iustitia dei*, not a question of defending God (transitively) but, rather, a “dative” defense; Milton’s choice of the term “ways,” too, should give the reader similar pause, especially when Satan will lure Eve to the Tree of Knowledge with the promise of being able to discern divine “Ways” (9.680). See Phillip Donnelly, “‘Matter’ versus Body: The Character of Milton’s Monism,” *Milton Quarterly* 33.3 (1999): 79-85.
are rarely easier to decipher, yet the Father’s own account reveals the unreliability of representing
the divine or of isolating it as a simple object of criticism. In Book 3, the Father addresses the
apparent freedom of the fallen angels: “Such I created all th’Ethereal Powers / And Spirits, both
them who stood and them who fail’d; / Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell” (3.100-102). As if to demonstrate the absence of ulterior motives, the Father collapses cause and effect,
subject and predicate into identical terms: “they stood who stood, and fell who fell” – a
grammatical and narrative circumstance qualified by the adverb “Freely,” which seems at once to
describe the “freedom” of created persons and to draw attention to the oddity of the free-falling
chiastic pair “stood who stood…fell who fell.” The “freedom” accorded to created beings allows
for the severance of attachment in a provisional way; rejecting society, even Satan cannot remove
the fact of his participation in the matter of the universe, but he can effect a “free” fall. Rather
than positioning himself as the efficient cause of any fall at all, the Father makes a distinction
between “creation” and “authorship,” describing himself as a creator or “maker” and his subjects
as “authors.” The basic conditions of freedom and choice simply come with the fact of being
“created, nor can [they] justly accuse / Thir maker, or thir making, or thir Fate” (3.110-111). The
Father not only hearkens to the language of the poet’s invocation in positing the impossibility of
“justly accus[ing]”; he also fractures the object of such unjust accusation into three, into a
“maker,” a “making,” and a “Fate.” The free Fall of created beings and the difficulty of securing
an object of accusation suggest that the personality of God or even a vision of him cannot be
available to knowledge, that any theodicy would have to think of God’s “ways” rather than of
“God.”

The politics that emerges from Milton’s God who cannot be beheld is no ordinary one:
an absolutism that cannot be imitated, the “State” of Milton’s God reenacts the “Triall onely”
meant for Adam. These representations of God beyond the limits of apprehension suggest that
Milton imagines the value of the absolute in ways that differ from and even debunk many of the
assumptions of theorists whose absolutes inform a virulently monarchist politics; the asocial
divinity cannot provide a model for either politics or society. The lesson Adam learned in his
earliest moments must be learned again by his children. In the context of contemporary
discussions of the “absolute,” the invisibility of Milton’s God and the “truth” and power he
possesses forecloses the possibility of successful imitation and effectively indicts those who
would attempt it. Relationships to God inhere in creation, and while God cannot allow for an
earthly attachment that would breach his “sufficiency,” the matter of man is itself made of his
attachment. As a counter-narrative to political discussions of the absolute, Milton’s thinking
forecloses any earthly imitation, for none can perceive “clearly” the Father presiding anyway.
While England already had a parliamentary tradition long before Milton, thinking about
absolutism had, for all that, significant intellectual traffic, from historical theories of absolutism
(Bodin) to articulations of the divine right of kings (James VI/I) to works that tethered
sovereignty to absolute power (Hobbes) – not to mention monarchist texts or the expressions in
Milton’s later works of a cynicism as to the capacity of the people to engage in self-government.25

25 See John Rogers’ interesting account of this development in the context of vitalism in his Matters of
Revolution. In the context of absolutism, Glenn Burgess rightly cautions the student of seventeenth-century
England against “confat[ing] the divine right of kings with absolutism” and suggests instead that the
divine right of kings theory may have actually diminished royal power by fixing a hierarchy in which God
was at the top – that may have advanced a chain of analogous relationships rather than asserting the
exceptional solitude of God above all society. What Burgess’ stance (against Figgis) illuminates is the
presence not of one strand of absolutism but of absolutisms – multiple ways of theorizing power and the
While doubtlessly reactionary in their thrust, many accounts of absolutism roughly contemporary to Milton appealed to paternal authority as the natural principle legitimizing hereditary rule, as itself a kind of truth-claim – a critical counterpoint to the relationship between Father and Son in Milton. In Milton’s Father and Son, this unique “paternal” relationship so often appealed to in the justification of the ways of kings to men cannot be reproduced to legitimize the patriarchal narrative. Lewalski’s suggestion that “familiar royalist analogies” are impossible exposes the blasphemy in Satan’s comparisons that treat the Father as if he were an earthly monarch – as if he could be either compared or drawn into society. Yet Lewalski’s imposition of limits on the grounds of comparison do not go far enough: there is no “possible parallel” for would-be kings to find, and there is also no “absolute” that they can perceive or manipulate. If even the Son is “Beyond compare” (3.138) while visible to observation, the invisible, absolute Father cannot possibly participate in the business of comparison at all. This is a dead-end for metaphor: no comparisons will be allowed past this point. But in contrast to Milton’s contemporary, Samuel Parker, who would suggest that the best control over dissent would be “an Act of Parliament to abridge Preachers the use of fulsom and luscious Metaphors,” Milton makes the literary the best tool for understanding the incomprehensible, even as he deprives metaphor of its ability to justify political regimes by way of comparison. The absolute – from ab-sovere or “loosed from” – conceives a position separate from the nexus of relationship informing political and social allegiances, occurring away from the created matter inflected by the gloss and reflection. The “freedom” of those who fall cannot begin to touch the “absolute” of the Father; only that “absolute” exists invulnerable and isolated. The Father of Paradise Lost thus claims an absolute power that forecloses the possibility of justifying man’s way to men on the basis of imitating the divine. Milton, however, seems to suggest that the absolute truth, whatever light it casts into the created universe, cannot, by definition, participate in the social – whether that social is in the garden or in the fallen wilderness or in the Son, even if that absolute truth was responsible for its creation.

III. Paradise Ingrained: The Immanent Son of Paradise Regained

Alone in the “wast wilderness,” the Son of Paradise Regained occupies a literal solitude, but, in contrast to the isolated “sufficiency” of the inaccessible Father, the Son embodies relationality rather than figuring the absolute. In other words, the Son makes possible a solitude that is neither a failed imitation of the Father (Satanic authorship with its “free” falls) nor a misanthropic rejection of attachments; instead, the Son appears here as the incarnation of attachment, as relationship essentialized. Having exiled the “absolute” with his representation of the Father, Milton makes the Son the culmination of the project of ethical inquiry he has undertaken across his two epics and their paradises. In a work that takes a more overt interest in the matter of the temptations of sociality as an alternative to the hardships of solitude, Milton positions the Son’s embodied relationship as the alternative to the parasitic relationship-forming of Satan.

absolute with vastly different networks of relations between the absolute figure and the subjects of the polis, a welcome complication of a facile historical picture extolling English exceptionalism against a caricatured version of France’s sun king and other continental absolutisms. See Glenn Burgess, Absolute Monarchy and the Stuart Constitution (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 93.

Critics of *Paradise Regained* tend to concur that Satan has lost some of his luster in the time intervening between *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. His serpentine seduction of Eve, his suave shape-shiftings give way to paltry party tricks (conjured smorgasboards, thunderstorms) that elicit only boredom in the Son. In the encounters of *Paradise Regained*, Satanic seductions have lost their might, yet the efforts of Satan to tempt the Son reveal the underpinnings of relational structures for both of them. Existing criticism of *Paradise Regained* does seem concerned about the structure of relationships in the epic: many critics ask what kind of relationship the Son has with the Father, unpacking the problem of Milton’s Arianism or potential Socinianism, while still others want to think about the relationship the text has to its influences, literary and biblical. The Satanic articulation of relationship in *Paradise Lost* hinges upon the kind of genealogical claim that critics of *Paradise Regained* tend to repeat; that is, Milton’s critics appear to pose satanic questions in their deductions about the Son’s lineage. Both Satan and a majority of critics depend on genealogy to explain the nature of the Son and his relationship to God, whether literary or historical, but what the Son will show, consistent with the claims to absolute truth of the Miltonic God I describe in the previous section, is that while satanic relationship summons and relies upon genealogy, the Son appeals to a different principle. Indeed, Milton’s “Son” shows a relationship of kinship that dismantles conventional rules of heredity as its basis, that invokes the name of “Son” for a relationship that foils genealogy (and, with it, satanic reasoning). I begin first with an examination of Satanic seduction and the principles of relationship he puts forth before discussing the alternatives available in the Son and the consequences of the Son’s position for the problem of primary solitude.

In *Paradise Regained*, Satan fully fits the role articulated for him in John 8:44 as the father of lies, changing costumes at will in his bid to bind the Son to himself. Satan’s first appearance casts him as the old man of pastoral, “now an aged man in Rural weeds, / Following, as seem’d, the quest of some stray Ewe, / Or wither’d sticks to gather” (1.314-316), a perverse transformation not only in its mimicry of the shepherding God but also in its promise to transform the primal landscape of the desert into the *locus amoenus* of pastoral. The rustic Satan’s request for the “Miracle” (337) of transforming stones into bread signifies not just the end of the fictive hardship of “Liv[ing] on tough roots and stubs” (1.339) but also the transformation of the world of *Paradise Regained* into a familiar bucolic setting. Though this temptation fails, it marks the beginning of a barrage of Satanic efforts at relationship, based on deceit. It is no coincidence, then, that the Son should describe Satan as a liar so early in the epic: “Deservedly thou griev’st, compos’d of lyes / From the beginning, and in lies wilt end” (1.407-408). Formally tautological, Satan’s “composition” shows a developmental trajectory without spiritual transcendence, redemption, or change (he “end[s]” exactly where he begins). Indeed, Satan’s temptations will mimic that form, revealing no real change from “beginning” to “end” but rather a tedious literalism deaf to spiritual signification; in spite of his efforts to seduce the Son, Satan cannot any real companionship at all. Among his many tricks, Satan summons a buffet before the starving Son – no salve at all in comparison to the spiritual nourishment of the Father – and he offers up the “kingdom” of David, which of course cannot begin to contend with or compare to the heavenly kingdom ultimately awaiting the Son. In the landscape of the “wast Wilderness,” Satan’s attempts at relationship are part of a high-stakes contest for the power to shake the Son’s

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certainty in the truth and enduring power of his relationship with the Father. Satan’s temptations, however, are themselves based on deceptions and the logic of a bad intimacy; in his “temptation,” Satan signals the breadth of the word’s etymology: temptation here is both trial (the attempt) but also carries with it the physical literalism of the word’s Latin root tempt-are (to touch). Satanic lying is a ploy for power, but it also an attempt to make relationship a question of achieving the right kind of “touch” to bind the Son.

The Satanic temptation or “touch” attempts to forge attachments based on faulty reasoning about relation that looks for links of external attachment. Foremost among Satan’s errors is his appeal to the conventions of lineage and maturation. Satan reveals to the Son that his efforts to subvert him began with the Son’s birth announcement in “Angelic Song” and amounted to a lifelong surveillance program: “From that time seldom have I ceas’d to eye / Thy infancy, thy childhood, and thy youth, / Thy manhood” (4.507-509). Satan looks for some kind of answer in watching, in “eye[ing]” the development of the Son. Each object of his observation (infancy, childhood, youth, manhood) deploys a diachronic reasoning that thinks of being a “Son” as the product of linear temporality accompanied with the phases of development proper to such a trajectory. Satan chooses both the wrong method and the wrong object of analysis in “eyeing” the education of the Son; vision and narrative are both inadequate to deciphering the Son. Milton seems to suggest that the locus of truth here is neither in a story of growing up nor in the Son’s passion in the sense of the narrative of Jesus’s crucifixion. The “sons” Satan imagines are products of heredity, figures who succeed one another in a lineage beginning with a knowable father. Satan’s stumbling exposes that his misunderstanding of the Son also has to do with his misunderstanding of himself:

Thenceforth I thought thee worth my nearer view
And narrower Scrutiny, that I might learn
In what degree or meaning thou art call’d
The Son of God, which bears no single sence;
The Son of God I also am, or was,
And if I was, I am; relation stands;
All men are Sons of God; yet thee I thought
In some respect far higher so declar’d. (4.514-521)

Satan’s analysis gets a lot right here, and tellingly, what he asserts with certainty is born out by the rest of the poem: the Son “bears no single sence,” and “relation stands.” But in his moments of equivocation, it becomes clear that Satan is ignorant of what being the “Son of God” really means. Looking at the maturation of the Son cannot reflect the nature of “relation,” what it means for the Son to be, in the Father’s own words, “by merit call’d my Son” (1.166). Considering his own relationship to God, Satan reasons that “The Son of God I also am, or was” – a moment

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29 See the especially interesting accounts of Milton’s avoidance of the crucifixion and depiction of the Son in line with Arianism in John Rogers, “Milton and the Heretical Priesthood of Christ” in Heresy, Literature, and Politics in Early Modern English Culture, ed. David Loewenstein and John Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Kahn’s argument in her reading of Job that avoids the “hermeneutical closure” maintained by accounts that trace a story from temptation to crucifixion.
that reflects oddly on the status of what it might mean to be a Son, for in Satan’s reflections, the equivocating “or was” seems to suggest that being a “Son” is subject to revocation, that something about the identities of both Satan and the Son is wildly in flux. Satan’s “And if I was, I am” (4.519) seems to quiet his hesitations but assumes an unnecessary continuity between past and present even as his “if” threatens to unmoor his understanding of the creature he was before his rebellion.

Satan’s struggle to understand what it means to be the Son of God represents a relational and theological bind. On the one hand, Satan seems to understand that the relationship of the Son of God to God calls for some redefinition of what it means to be a “son.” On the other, his haste to assert that “All men are Sons of God” fails to grasp the theological importance of God’s only begotten Son. Satan’s method in trying to apprehend the Son will consist largely of repeating the error he makes in this moment of reasoning. He will look for continuity where there is only the rupture of messianism in suggesting that the kingdom to come will simply replace David’s kingdom, for instance, and his sense of historical heritage — of being offspring to Alexander and so on — will make him privilege a genealogical model that loses sight of the radically different principle of relationship the Son will afford. But what Milton’s theology teaches, and what the relationship of the Son conveys is that, in spite of Satan’s convictions, what stands is “relation” — and not heredity. The Son obviously remains a son in a genealogical sense, as the child of Mary and Joseph, but he is also the Son of God — and, in spite of the parallels Satan draws or the examples the Son evokes in his replies — the Son’s relationship to God follows a sacrificial logic that eschews the worldly antecedents Satan summons as exempla and that the Son himself bandies in his rejoinders.

If Satan’s reasoning attempts to form lineages rather than to ponder what constitutes “relation,” his temptations find the basis of their deceit in Satan’s deceptions of himself. In contrast to God’s creation of the Son, Satan’s trickery reproduces only worldly matter. Satan’s frustration when the Son spurns his offerings, wanting “neither wealth nor armour, arms nor arts” (4.368) exposes the limits of Satanic creativity: in contrast to the pure creation, ex nihilo of God, Satan can only make tawdry reproductions, replications and imitations. Satan’s production of likenesses, however, hardly spares him from missing obvious resemblances. Berating Belial for proposing a sensualist seduction strategy for the Son, Satan admonishes his co-conspirator: “Belial, in much uneven scale though weigh’st / All others by thy self” (2.173-174). Satan’s charge here echoes the source of human’s fall, the result of following the “other first,” and contrasts again with Satan’s self-deception. But it also accuses Belial of adopting a strategy that Satan routinely employs as he attempts to understand the Son in comparison to himself. Indeed it is Satan who cannot tolerate alterity, whose staff consists “Of Spirits likest to himself in guile” (2.236). Satan’s attempts to “tempt” the Son consistently expose the parasitic, autophilic nature of Satan’s attachments. In his conjuring and contorting, Satan offers a profane relationality, a desire for social dominance that works by facsimile rather than faith.

Satan’s effort to tempt the Son is framed as a trial of sorts, but it is also a primordial scene for relationship-making and principles of relationship as Satan and the Son meet. Steven Goldsmith has described the exchanges between the Son and Satan as mutual cancellations: “Jesus’ absolute invulnerability suggests the extent to which he and Satan inhabit antithetical and exclusive realms, eliminating the possibility of conflict that arises from mutual interaction. In a very real sense the two characters talk past one another.”30 While the extent to which the Son is

“invulnerable” is the object of considerable debate for those attempting to define Milton’s theology,\(^{31}\) the poem’s language sustains Goldsmith’s sense of the void created from this interaction: “So spake Israel’s true King, and to the Fiend / Made answer meet, that made void all his wiles. / So fares it when with truth falsehood contends” (3.441-443). When “with truth falsehood contends” a “void” might well be left, for the placement of the nouns side by side presents a relationship between truth and falsehood that seems to be one of mere proximity rather than contest, at least for the instant before the conjoining “contends” completes the line. Goldsmith highlights the absence of violent enmity apparently characteristic of “mutual interaction,” but he assumes that satanic encounters are characterized by strife. It is not just “conflict” that can arise, though, but also seduction: the apple with which Satan beguiles Eve in the garden should not be conflated with the one Eris hurls. At stake are also bonds of friendship and love, the ostensibly positive attachments of community and polity that arise from “interaction” as well. Satan’s “temptations” of the Son are efforts to supplant the principle of relationship the Son embodies with profane relationships and attachments.

While the Son of Paradise Regained obviously shuns all of Satan’s efforts to acquire his affections, the primordial, as Paradise Lost conveys, can also be the place where the social is born and modes of relationship are legitimized. Goldsmith’s contention that the Son and Satan “talk past one another” is more than just the fallout of opposites failing to attract. It amounts to a confirmation of what Satan gets right, though only inadvertently, when he exclaims in the midst of his filial temper tantrum that “relation stands” (4.522). When Satan makes this claim, he struggles to defend his divine status and to put the Son on equal footing with all other angels and even other men, but while the poem rejects Satan’s premises, it upholds his statement. When the Son stands on the pinnacle, his miraculous response to Satanic taunting is not figured as the answer to Satan’s test. Rather, what stands on the pinnacle is “relation.” Satan keeps demanding proof of the Son’s relationship to the Father: “Now shew thy Progeny; if not to stand, / Cast thy self down; safely if Son of God” (4.554-555). Satan’s anxious, doubled “if” returns to a search for legitimacy rooted in paternity, but the Son’s reply, “also it is written / Tempt not the Lord thy God” (4.560-561), unravels Satan’s demand. His ability to “stand” evades engaging Satan’s temptation. The Son’s “standing” on the pinnacle amounts to a punning reworking of Satan’s own “relation stands,” a casuistical answer that neither lies nor gives the truth to the father of lies. In spite of the Son’s riddling replies, the groundwork he sets here makes even a “mutually-cancelling” social interaction or total isolation in the desert unable to banish the primacy of the relational entirely.

In this light, the apparent heterodoxy of Milton’s Arianism, whereby the Son is not equal to God, actually seems to endow the Son with a crucial quality that the Father himself does not possess, for the Son incarnates relation in a system in which relation to the divine is the greatest gift divinity bestows. As Adam’s “need” conveys, the Son’s autonomy, his “no need,” is an impossibility for even the most devout adherent. In the Son, Milton has formed a primordial subject in whom a primary subjection has occurred out of view: though Paradise Regained resembles the primal landscape of Paradise Lost and is an example of the tradition I describe throughout this project, the Son’s relational solitude neither severs ties nor presupposes the

\[^{31}I\text{ refer here to the extensive discussion about Milton’s unorthodox stance on the trinity and the abundant discussion it has prompted. John Rogers helpfully reminds readers of Milton not to diagnose Milton’s theological stance, however, at the expense of asking }\text{[w]hy Milton believes what he believes, or, better yet, why he seems in this or that passage to embrace, if only provisionally, a particular theological idea… “}}(204).\]
absence of attachments – nor does it supply a conventional meaning for either “Relation” or “Son.” Rather, this moment maintains a kind of prohibition of attachment, foreclosing the possibility of an intimacy or bond between the Son and his interlocutor, but it does so, paradoxically, through a figure already defined by his status as pure relation. The “absolute” remains with God in heaven (as do the politics of the absolute and the absolute truth), but the Son’s relation to his father make him both a figure who cannot be touched by the pernicious sociability Satan represents and who also does not need to seek entry into the fictions and fallibilities of the social.

It is in the desert that the Son’s relational solitude appears most starkly. The locus of the Son’s “trial,” the desert emerges as the setting for social and theological experimentation. There, Milton’s Son is a figure whose “need” the narrative foregrounds. Starving, alone, and faced with an urgent injunction to “holy meditations” (1.195), he finds himself in a landscape that seems to ask what kind of primary attachments exist in his internal landscape – and whether the exigencies of an external landscape can prompt an exchange for any other kind of relationship. In the Son, Milton imagines “conversation” occurring without an interlocutor as the Son

One day forth walked alone, the Spirit leading
And his deep thoughts, the better to converse
With solitude, till, far from track of men,
Thought following thought, and step by step led on,
He entered now the bordering Desert wild (1.189-192)

The solitude that accompanies the Son here marks not the dissolution of relationship or the absence of conversation (as it did with Adam) but the plenitude of a fully immanent relationship of Father and Son. The Son certainly resembles the exempla discussed in previous chapters in his isolation, but the Son’s solitude differs most of all in that the Son will not have to “exit” solitude to find relationship, for as “Son,” he has always embodied a principle of relationship independent of the social world outside of him. In joining the public at the end of the poem, he affirms his role in a spiritual sociality, but he already carries within him the stuff of relationship. In a slightly different light, as Goldsmith notes, the Son’s foray into the wilderness signals the Son’s departure from private life and the beginning of his entrance into the public world. Yet Milton’s contribution here, as with the continuities he allows in the post-Edenic landscape, is to allow the solitude of the Son to endure. The Son’s solitude involves neither the expulsion of forms of the social (as it does in Montaigne’s posture of retirement, say), nor does it amount to an expression of needing the social (as Adam’s solitude before Eve’s creation does). While the Son’s relationship to the Father is unique, the Son’s example, in contrast to the Father’s, is visible and can be imitated. Yet what characterizes the Son’s state in the desert is an inimitable absence of need, as the Son himself explains to Satan who remarks on the “wonder that the Son of God / In this wild solitude so long should bide, / Of all things destitute” (3.303-305); replying to Satan, the Son dismisses Satan’s concerns: “They all had need, I as thou seest have none” (2.318). While the Father likewise has no “need,” the Son’s lack of need does not amount to a lack of relation, does not require becoming “absolute.” The Son’s relationship to the Father is not created because of any relational deficit. This renders the Son’s experience of “hunger” all the more curious. At once an index of the Son’s appetitive faculties and a symbol for lack, the Son’s hunger turns his struggle inward. Rejecting Satan’s offerings of food – and also noticeably rejecting the time-
honored strategy of the misanthrope who forages for roots – the Son feeds on an internal object that differs from mere self-absorption: the spiritual sustenance of his relationship to the Father.

In his encounters with Satan, Milton’s Son often seems to resemble that famous inhabitant of solitude in early modern literature: the misanthrope. Those characters, who often exile themselves from a world that cannot tolerate their bitter truths or which they themselves can no longer abide, provide a critical counterpoint to the tradition I describe here. Keen observers of the noxious potential of certain forms of sociality, the misanthrope condemns the world and values solitude in contrast. The same cannot be said for the Son, whose privileged theological position makes him embody the relational even as he leaves society, but his responses nonetheless hearken to the style of speech of the misanthrope and thus traces a very fine boundary separating the style of Christian philanthropy from that of worldly misanthropy. As others have noted, the Son’s speech oscillates between laconic riddles and near-tirades that excoriate Satan and amount to “steadfast anger.” At one moment deploying riddles that ironically twist the terms of the temptations and disarm Satan, the Son nonetheless exhibits what Northrop Frye dubbed a “haughtiness and aloofness.” In his scathing criticisms of Satan, the Son of Paradise Regained seems brethren to the Timons and Alcestes of early modern drama who alienate their compatriots through their rages. What seems to distinguish the Son’s fury from that of his misanthropic counterparts is not simply a love of humanity that will culminate in sacrifice. It is also that the speech of the Son neither breaks nor creates bonds with his Satanic interlocutor. The Son can have no society with Satan. As Frye explained, the Son’s affect “mean[s] that, before Christ can work in the world, he must recognize and repudiate all worldliness. In Paradise Regained Christ is looking at the world as it is under wrath, as the domain of Satan. Wrath is the reaction of goodness contemplating badness; it is disinterested and impersonal and is the opposite of anger or irritation.” The righteous indignation of the Son expels “worldliness” in the same way that the misanthrope must banish the world and its wicked occupants, and in this case the Son uses an empty world (the desert) to do so. The Son is not tempted (or touched) by Satanic society, nor does he struggle to resist the Satanic touch: “Thy coming hither,” he explains, “though I know thy scope, / I bid nor forbid” (1.494-495). Unlike the raging misanthrope who strives to control the condition of his exile, the Son neither “bid[s] nor forbid[s],” a posture that collapses the movements of equivocation into a full neutrality. The mystical quality of the Son’s relational embodiment, expelling the world yet containing a world within, necessarily differs from the chosen asceticism of the misanthrope even as the Son occupies a terrain familiar to that tradition.

Milton’s Son joins Adam in recreating a primal, if not quite Edenic, landscape in the desert, in recreating originary scenes in which relationship and sociality are at stake. One of the poem’s ostensible aims – showing “Eden rais’d in the wast Wilderness” (1.7) – doubly reveals that Eden has been both razed and raised, has been lost forever because of the Fall but has also been regained in the figure of the Son. In every post-Edenic wilderness, the problem of negotiating among forms of solitude and society will reappear. In harnessing the “raised” and “razed” Eden, Milton’s Paradise Regained looks ahead to the scenes of education where

32 I am grateful to Susan Maslan for suggesting the importance of this parallel to me.
relationship will be instilled and solitude banished by the internalizing mechanisms of pedagogical and disciplinary techniques. The immanent relationality that appears in the Son is thus part of a broader push to internalize relationship rather than simply preserve or monumentalize it in bonds and links (of “Nature” – or of contract). The Son’s imperative in the desert is framed from the beginning in a pedagogical key in spite of the fact that he is, with or without trial, part of the “relational.” The Father characterizes the Son’s travels in the desert in the language of the “exercise”: “I mean / To exercise him in the Wilderness” (1.155-156). Though he employs a pedagogy designed for one with “no need,” the Father nonetheless places value in the trial as an end in itself. In turn, the trial shifts the object of the Son’s “meditations” from a familiar pursuit of self-knowledge – the nosce teipsum that Cassirer would call the “ultimate moral and religious law” (qtd. in Rushdy 11) – to a “meditation” at which relationship rather than self-consciousness is what matters. In moments that seem to hearken to the necessity of “self-knowledge,” the Son exposes that his certainty relies upon having “no Single sence” of who he is; Satan’s observation that being a Son means having “no Single sence” thus ends up being true as the Son’s patience seems to rely upon a subject who incarnates relationality rather than singularity. In Eikonoklastes, Milton had already imagined such an unselfconscious pose for Christ: “Martyrs bear witness to the truth, not to themselves. If I bear witness of my self, saith Christ, my witness is not true.” In Paradise Lost, Milton makes that “truth” impossible to see. In Paradise Regained, the Son is no witness of himself, not just because his meditating thoughts do something other than observe the self (in contrast, notably, to Satanic self-absorption) but also because the relational structure imbedded in the Son necessarily unmoors such a self. Milton’s Son maneuvers through the perilous primordial landscape of the desert, revealing that the vibrancy of the social emerges not with the tempting intrusions or the touch of the lies of Satan but from a relationality preceding the social, one that conceals the absolute truth of the Father but that summons a glimmer of the divine leaving the single, solitary Son with “no single sence.” For Adam and Eve, then, the “solitary way” they travel after their expulsion from the garden is no mere punishment – but, rather, the beginning of our “best society.”

Walkden makes an argument about this lack of self-consciousness in connecting this to the Son’s unique status as incarnation of the Word: “The irony of the Son’s defense…is that the Son is himself the Incarnate Word, the instrument through which the Father produced all things, although he does not know it yet. The Son’s ability to refer to the Word without knowing that he refers to himself is the condition upon which he is able to speak about himself in his own words in Paradise Regained” (178). See Andrea Walkden, “Sacred Biography and Sacred Autobiography: Rewriting the Life of the Son in Paradise Regained” in John Milton: “Reasoning Words,” ed. Kristin A. Pruitt and Charles W. Durham (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2008), 165-181.

For more on Eikonoklastes in relationship to truth-claims, see chapters by Lana Cable and John R. Knott, Jr. in Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton’s Prose, ed. David Loewenstein and James Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
In Secret Society:
The Soul of Émile

In Rousseau’s state of nature, even infants enjoy a kind of liberty, the spell of childhood easily broken:

Le premier sentiment de l’homme fut celui de son existence ; son premier soin, celui de sa conservation. Les productions de la terre lui fournissaient tous les secours nécessaires ; l’instinct le porta à en faire usage. La faim, d’autres appétits, lui faisant éprouver tour à tour diverses manières d’exister, il y en eut une qui l’invita à perpétuer son espèce ; et ce penchant aveugle, dépourvu de tout sentiment du cœur, ne produisit qu’un acte purement animal : le besoin satisfait, les deux sexes ne se reconnaissaient plus, et l’enfant même n’étoit plus rien à sa mère sitôt qu’il pouvait se passer d’elle.¹

Man’s first feeling was that of his existence, his first care that of preserving it. The productions of the earth yielded him all the assistance he required, instinct prompted him to make use of them. Hunger and other appetites made him at different times experience different modes of existence; one of these excited him to perpetuate his species; and this blind propensity, quite void of anything like pure love or affection, produced nothing but an act that was merely animal. Their need once gratified, the sexes took no further notice of each other, and even the child was nothing to his mother, the moment he could do without her.²

In the Second Discourse (1755), Rousseau outlines a “premier sentiment” or “first feeling” above all of pure individuality; it is one’s own “existence” that is felt. Rousseau’s brief Bildung here is so vehemently solitary that the final dative construction, linking mother and child, only goes in one direction: the child is nothing to the mother, but what the mother is to the child has no place at all in this world of fiercely independent first feelings. The question of affection or any kind of lingering attachment in the realm of “first feeling” cannot be posed: the feeling of mere existence knows no other, no tie. That solitude is at the heart of Rousseau’s thinking — not to mention his narrative of his life — almost goes without questioning.³ And nearly the same sentiments appear many years later in the mouth of the Savoyard vicar in Émile (1762): “J’existe, et j’ai des sens par lesquels je suis affecté. Voilà la première vérité qui me frappe et à laquelle je suis forcé d’acquiescer.”⁴ The “première vérité” or “first truth” here requires recognizing one’s own existence and one’s own senses. But Rousseau’s thinking about the first feelings of the solitary subject in Émile take something of a different turn when there is an observer to watch and guide

that subject’s growth; in the work Rousseau deemed his “best” and “most important,” attachment is the guarantor of solitude, not an afterthought for solitary selves but the condition of possibility for our autonomy.

Even with the state of nature long gone and the isolation of primitive life forever out of reach, any subsequent breach of solitude comes with considerable anxiety. Apart from the family Rousseau imagines eating its supper in pre-linguistic harmony in his Essay on the Origin of Languages (1781), scenes of sociality in Rousseau are inherently fraught. In his Social Contract (1762), Rousseau imagines a state of nature that began with essential goodness and equality marked by benign solitude. In the Second Discourse, Rousseau imagines a process of habit that leads us to the family and dreams up a model of solitude in which even infants could fend for themselves earlier, before society softened them. In Émile, the relative solitude of the countryside spares Rousseau’s young charge the corruption of the city. It’s impossible, Rousseau explains, to raise someone in the city without giving a child a premature sense of society’s rapports and attachments. It’s not just that the city air will make for a healthier child (and Rousseau thinks it will), it’s also the case the city makes toxic ties. And no wonder, then, that the alienated Rousseau seeks for himself an exile in the countryside; the Rousseau we know the best is the first to lead the charge to thinking of each of us as first of all isolated individuals.

Inevitably, then, Rousseau’s educational novel Émile begins as a tragedy of broken men:

L’homme naturel est tout pour lui ; il est l’unité numérique, l’entier absolu, qui n’a de rapport qu’à lui-même ou à son semblable. L’homme civil n’est qu’une unité fractionnaire qui tient au dénominateur, et dont la valeur est dans son rapport avec l’entier, qui est le corps social.”

Natural man is entirely for himself. He is numerical unity, the absolute whole which is relative only to itself or its kind. Civil man is only a fractional unity

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5 See Chapter XI of Rousseau’s Confessions.
6 Dorothea von Mucke argues that Emile is precisely not a novel: “[D]espite its novelistic features, Emile cannot be called a bildungsroman, not even quite a novel” (55). Yet early readers could easily identify it as belonging to the tradition of the Bildungsroman. In his Plots of Enlightenment: Education and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England, Richard Barney stresses the wider impact of Rousseau on the Bildungsroman, showing that “Rousseau’s work is especially important because it had tremendous influence on the development of its counterpart in Germany. As Wilhelm Dilthey explains, Rousseau was largely responsible for having ‘inspired’ the ‘interest in inner culture’ that sprang up in Germany during the eighteenth century. ‘The Bildungsroman,’ he observes, ‘is closely associated with the new developmental psychology established by Leibniz, with the idea of a natural education in conformity with the inner development of the psyche. This had its beginnings with Rousseau’s Émile and swept over all of Germany’” (308). See Richard A. Barney, Plots of Enlightenment: Education and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999) and Dorothea von Mücke, Virtue and the Veil of Illusion: Generic Innovation and the Pedagogical Project in Eighteenth-Century Literature (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991). The conflict over how to characterize genre in Émile usually positions the work as somewhere between a novel and treatise, but the problem of generic classification extends to Rousseau’s work more broadly. On this account, see especially Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982).

7 Rousseau, Emile, 39.
dependent on the denominator; his value is determined by his relation to the whole, which is the social body.\textsuperscript{8}

The “homme civil” lives a life of grasping relation, his unity precisely not any unity at all, “fractionnaire.” The bourgeois man is doomed to be neither man nor citizen, as the one who, “dans l’ordre civil veut conserver la primauté des sentiments de la nature ne sait ce qu’il veut…. [I]l ne sera jamais ni homme ni citoyen.”\textsuperscript{9} In constant self-contradiction, the bourgeois man finds himself “toujours flottant entre ses penchants et ses devoirs.” The bourgeois man seems eternally adolescent in this rigid system, yet to become either man or citizen, characterized by this flimsy “floating” identity. While his oscillations are constant reminders that the maturities of natural or civil man are unavailable to him, they also haunt the project of Émile: how to imagine an ideal education – the formation of an ideal person – in a compromised world. Part of the pathos of Émile is its unflagging persistence in light of a nearly certain failure: what stands in Rousseau’s way is the world.

The ambition of the work resides in its sense that an approximation of this protected upbringing could be possible, but this extraordinary optimism notwithstanding, Rousseau’s strategy, I show, depends chiefly on a strategy of relationship – and not only one, as we might expect, between Émile and his tutor. Relation is what secures autonomy in Émile, but autonomy looks different once Rousseau has laid his hands on it: it’s not the autonomous will of Kant erecting itself to make judgments so much as a mode of being apart from the sickening influence of a corrupt society. Rousseau’s vision of autonomy consists in forgetting the shackles of our origins. But in contrast to the transparency and open spirit of education that we might expect from other Enlightenment educators, Rousseau’s tactics reside in secrecy, ignorance, and forgetting – a surprising move given the book’s activist effort to reform childrearing practices and to end the opacity around it. Rousseau’s solution to the problem of society in Émile presents a secret form of sociality as the guarantor of a good individualism. There, autonomy emerges through an internalization of attachment, one that relies on techniques of cultivation but also on a crucial primary installation. This might sound like a similar solution to Milton’s: a principle of internalized relation undergirding the figure of the Son in Paradise Regained, a relational principle universalized in the stuff of all matter. But Rousseau gives us no monistic solution here: relation does not inhere in all matter but is subject to an original installation. And what Milton makes impossible to forget (every gleam of matter is proof of a relationship to the divine for any onlooker), Rousseau happily allows us to repress.

In this light, it is Rousseau who is the true dualist of the story I have been outlining here. Descartes might separate body and mind, but for Rousseau, the individual is infected and inoculated by an other that the text simultaneously identifies and withholds. In other words, there is another kind of substance in us, a relational kind, but knowledge of it is forbidden. The kind of person Rousseau’s narrative in Émile imagines as ideal is as autonomous as someone could hope to be in an imperfect world, but his attachments are secured by the secret of an original attachment and a successful method of forgetting it – strategies that the text of Émile itself similarly employs. If we are looking to early modernity for the story of our origins as autonomous

\textsuperscript{8} The English translations come from the Kelly and Bloom translation throughout this chapter. Where I have modified their translation, I indicate my changes with square brackets. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Emile or On Education, trans. and ed. Christopher Kelly and Allan Bloom (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2009).

\textsuperscript{9} Rousseau, Ém, 40.
subjects, our most obvious exemplar is in the figure who gives us a subject formed essentially through attachment who nonetheless demonstrates the eclipse of attachment. As Rousseau gives us someone decidedly modern in his deeply psychological, solitary subject, he also imagines a solitude obtained by a necessary repression. I begin this chapter with the project of education; contextualizing Rousseau alongside some of his contemporaries, I show how teaching relation subtends education itself – and how the novelty of Rousseau lies in rendering this invisible. Over the subsequent two parts, I argue that chief among Rousseau’s strategies for securing Émile’s goodness and relative solitude is a tropic one that creates a kind of permanent pregnancy; central to Rousseau’s tactic, however, is withholding knowledge and a dialectic of secrecy and forgetting that allows the myth of the isolated self to endure.

I. Secrets of Education

Most forms of education evoke secrecy, even in spite of themselves: the teacher knows something more – or knows something better – than the pupil. The process of educating, in this sense, involves giving up a secret, initiating someone who might not know otherwise. And so it would seem, for instance, in Dumarsais’ entry in the Encyclopédie. In “Education,” an extended passage describes the necessity of teaching the young student how to decline Latin nouns using an example that collapses the recognition of grammatical and familial categories. After first teaching the student to recognize nominative “Diana” from accusative “Dianam,” the passage then explains,

Dans la suite, à mesure qu’ils voyent un mot qui est ou au même cas que celui auquel il se rapporte, ou à un cas différent, Diana soror Apollinis, on leur explique le rapport d’identité, & le rapport ou raison de détermination. Diana soror, ces deux mots sont au même cas, parce que Diane & soeur c’est la même personne: soror Apollinis, Apollinis détermine soror, c’est-à-dire, fait connoître de qui Diane étoit soeur. Toute la syntaxe se réduit à ces deux rapports comme je l’ai dit il y a long-temps. Cette méthode de commencer par l’explication, de la maniere que nous venons de l’exposer, me paroit la seule qui suive l’ordre, la dépendance, la liaison & la subordination des connoissances.10

Afterwards, when they see a word that is in the same case as the one to which it refers, or in a different case, Diana soror Apollinis [Diana is the sister of Apollo], the teacher explains to them the relationship of identity, and the relationship or reason of determination. Diana soror, those two words are in the same case, because Diana and sister is the same person: soror Apollinis, Apollinis determines soror, that is to say, makes Diana known as a sister. All of syntax is reduced to these two relationships as I said a long time ago. This method of beginning by explaining, seems to me the only one that follows the order, the dependence, the linkage and the subordination of ideas.11


Identifying all the nouns in the nominative case, the beginning student can recognize that Diana is a sister and Apollo’s no less. The entry’s author, the same Dumarsais who would author numerous entries on moral and philosophical issues including that for “Philosophe,” concludes, “Toute la syntaxe se réduit à ces deux rapports comme je l’ai dit il y a long-temps.” Setting aside the philological claim, the characterization at the very outset of the entry of “education” as a “terme abstrait et métaphysique” suggests that what education holds is more complicated than the banal details of classroom instruction. The classical learning at the center of Dumarsais’ entry on education places this line of thinking in the tradition of Renaissance education, but what Dumarsais’ text reveals is the centrality of understanding the “rapport” not only for its syntactical purposes – but also for its more abstract, more metaphysical value. The “rapport” is the principle behind education itself.

In the case of Dumarsais’ instruction in grammar teaching the pupil how to translate “Diana, sister of Apollo” is an exercise in recognizing case, but it also initiates the child into the proper organization of society. Here, the question of “case,” of finding the “rapport,” describes an unstated political and social history: in the mythology familiar to any reader of the Encyclopédie, Diana and Apollo are fraternal twins, but Diana’s legend exposes her decision never to marry – her choice to refuse a “rapport.” Dumarsais’s example extends the problem of the absence of “rapport” beyond the marital bond to fraternity. The process Dumarsais describes, from seeing “Diana soror Apollonis” as a string of unattached nouns (Diana, sister, Apollo) to a linguistic affirmation of relatedness that supplies the copulative “to be” (Diana is Apollo’s sister) lays bare concerns common to Rousseau, to Locke, to the Encyclopedists: the “relationships” education inculcates and exposes and the precariousness of those ties.

If the study in Latin “case” manifests how the inflections of relationship might be confusing to the untrained eye, the repetition of the purpose of education seems clear: understanding relationship is a primary aim and a primary technology, both at the heart of rhetorical education and a vehicle for instruction. Indeed, it is the method of moral inculcation as Locke’s Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693) reveals; there, the relation of parent or tutor to the child determines obedience: “[C]hildren when little should look upon their parents as their lords, their absolute governors, and, as such, stand in awe of them; and that when they come to riper years, they should look on them as their best, as their only sure friends, and, as such love and reverence them.” The “rapport” is flexible, either means or ends, depending on the circumstance. Central to both a moral and pedagogical economy, the “rapport” itself is at stake as education becomes the locus for cultivating individual ethics and the role of the individual in society. Both Locke and Rousseau write works that narrate origins in addition to their works on education, for the scene in which making the rapport (or breaking it) matters most is not just political, epistemological, or theological: it is also at the heart of lived experience and the formation of the human. But Locke’s tremendously influential work sculpted a very particular kind of pupil, a very particular kind of adult. There, knowledge does not give the child the tools to undermine, question, or become his own authority but the docility to obey. Locke’s regime is one in which subordination is the defining quality of the relationship between parent and child, tutor and student. If reasoning doesn’t work, Locke outfits the parent with a blunter instrument: force.

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12 For a recent reconsideration of Renaissance education and its relationship to literature, see Jeff Dolven’s Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
But as relationship emerges as the grammar of instruction across his precedents and contemporaries, Rousseau pursues a different strategy in his secret approach to education. But, in opposition to Locke, what is secret is not so much surveillance (though there is no shortage of surveillance, to be sure) but of forbidding the child to know he has a soul:

À quinze ans il ne savait s’il avait une âme, et peut-être à dix-huit n’est-il pas encore temps qu’il l’apprenne; car, s’il l’apprend plus tôt qu’il ne faut, il court risque de ne le savoir jamais.¹⁴

At fifteen he did not know whether he had a soul, and perhaps it is still too early to learn it at eighteen; for if he learns it sooner than he ought, he runs a great risk of never knowing it.

Childhood has a separate epistemology: one with the constitutive organ of the human left unknown – a move that seems to link knowledge of the soul temporally with sexual development, on the one hand, and with a kind of delayed onset of spirituality, on the other. In other words, the child’s knowledge graduates only slowly to spiritual knowing, accedes to a kind of belated innocence as it defers an encounter with the most tender organ of human goodness to secure that encounter at all. For Rousseau, education depends as much on knowing as not knowing. Indeed, ignorance is so important a value for Rousseau that he asserts outright the importance of knowing how not to know: “Bon jeune homme, soyez sincère et vrai sans orgueil ; sachez être ignorant : vous ne tromperez ni vous ni les autres.”¹⁵ Ignorance, moreover, safeguards the pupil from deceit and error, protecting the pupil himself and others, too. As Graeme Garrard explains, “[f]or Rousseau, ignorance was not only a desirable condition for most people, but was actually necessary for the preservation of moral, political, and social order, all of which rest on foundations that are not primarily rational.”¹⁶ In this case, however, ignorance is not just a strategy for “order”; it heralds a shadowy internal theology. It restores the Tree of Knowledge along with its Edenic prohibitions.

Indeed, this trick – making the soul a secret from its possessor lest it vanish – puts Rousseau in the world of myth and fairytale. Open any door but this one. Don’t touch the tree of knowledge. In order to keep a soul, one must not know what one has.¹⁷ Mikhail Bakunin’s well-known rage at Rousseau’s theory of state strung the Social Contract together with Eden and “La barbe bleue,”¹⁸ but Rousseau revises the story of threat and punishment quite a bit here. The

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¹⁴ Rousseau, Émile, 335.
¹⁵ Ibid., 409.
¹⁷ For more on the prohibition, see Vladimir Propp, Morphology of the Folktale (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1968), especially 26-28.
¹⁸ Comparing the State in the contract tradition to the kinds of prohibitions I describe, Bakunin praises these transgressions assertions of liberty and ends up staging an inverted kind of theodicy: “Liberty is indivisible….It is the story of Bluebeard’s wife who had an entire palace at her disposal, with full and complete liberty to enter everywhere, to see and to touch everything, except for one dreadful little chamber which her terrible husband’s sovereign will had forbidden her to open on the pain of death….She opened that forbidden door, for good reason, since her liberty depended on her doing so….It is also the story of Adam and Eve’s fall. The prohibition to taste the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for no other reason than such was the will of the Lord, was an act of
weight here falls on “savoir”; if the pupil learns he has a soul too soon, he might never really know that soul at all. Real knowledge might be possible, but Rousseau’s conditions make a special kind of ignorance the precondition of a more important kind of knowledge. Rousseau’s tutor comes to teach Émile about his soul, but this structure, that is, not knowing in order not to destroy the possibility of knowledge, will be the condition of autonomy. Rousseau’s trick, I want to suggest, is in keeping a secret of our dependency. But while the secret of the soul depends on reaching an age where we can reasonably learn we have one, Rousseau seems to wants us never to know our dependency apart from flickers of insight, even if the relationship from our earliest, most vulnerable moment secures our goodness.

Reaching maturity, however, the pupil invariably becomes an initiate of the world of “rapports” and of the moral language that was absent during his upbringing. Ultimately, then, this initiation means not simply instructing the pupil in the niceties of social life and the language that subtends it; it also means telling him about an organ he does not yet know he has. In contrast to this singular problem for Émile, Rousseau points to the impossibility of keeping the secret of the “rapport” from a child raised in the center of society:

Je tiens pour impossible qu’au sein de la société l’on puisse amener un enfant à l’âge de douze ans, sans lui donner quelque idée des rapports de l’homme à homme, et de la moralité des actions humaines.

I hold it to be impossible to bring a child along to the age of twelve in the bosom of society without giving him some idea of the relations of man to man and of the morality of human actions.

But what is occluded in this statement, in spite of its clear yoking of morality and attachment, is the interior principle that would make these “rapports” touch the student’s soul: for Émile, the “rapport de l’homme à homme” will appear meaningless. It is something he cannot not know on a certain level (it’s “impossible” not to give him some idea of it), but in contrast to the drama of the outside world, the rhetoric of its morality and its empty and alienated spectacle, is the secret merging of relationship and epistemology within the human.

As he shows the disaster of teaching the child about reason and morality too soon, Rousseau shows how such a morality creates a child fit for the toxic “rapports” of society but also endangers the relation with the preceptor. Indeed, the means to Émile’s inner life follow no typical route, and it is very early in Émile’s education that Rousseau indicates the absolute futility, atrocious despotism….Had our first parents obeyed it, the entire human race would have remained plunged in the most humiliating slavery. Their disobedience has emancipated and save us” (129-30). See Mikhail Bakunin, “Federalism, Socialism, Anti-Theologism (Critique of Rousseau’s Theory of the State)” in Bakunin on Anarchism, ed. and trans. Sam Dolgoff (New York: Black Rose Books, 2002), 102-47.

19 Daniel Heller-Roazen points to Rousseau’s “insistence on the priority of ‘sentiment’ or ‘feeling’ (sentiment) with respect to knowledge as a general principle” in his The Inner Touch: Archaeology of a Sensation (New York: Zone Books, 2009), 215-16. Heller-Roazen’s suggestion that a feeling precedes knowledge is helpful, but here the soul is something felt by another, a secret that will only be felt later by the subject. Also helpful on the question of a relational precedent is Peter Sloterdijk’s discussion of its loss, rendered unavowable by virtue of isolated subjectivities, in his Bubbles, Trans. Wieland Hoban (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011).

20 Rousseau, Émile, 117.
even the hazard, of moral instruction for his young charge. Rather than instructing Émile in the rules and restrictions of morality, Rousseau shows that invoking the rules of moral life requires participation in a society from which he is at pains to shield his young charge (and that also runs counter to Rousseau’s principle of hands-on education). The invocation of the moral does not communicate anything to the young pupil but rather teaches him how to wield abstractions to ill effect; it is, on the contrary, sensory experience that gives Émile the tools of learning, however inexact the pupil’s relationship to these objects may be. In the context of educating his student about misbehavior, in particular, Rousseau positions himself against Locke whose stance calls for “reasoning” with the child (before, if need be, resorting to blows): “Raisonner avec les enfants était la grande maxime de Locke ; c’est la plus en vogue aujourd’hui ; son succès ne me paraît pourtant pas fort propre à la mettre en crédit ; et pour moi je ne vois rien de plus sot que ces enfants avec qui l’on a tant raisonné.”21 But it is not only the children who have been taught to reason who are especially “stupid” or “sot”; it is also the technique of reasoning that has been indicted. What follows Rousseau’s condemnation of reasoning is an extended exchange between a fictive master and child:

Le maître : Il ne faut pas faire cela.
L’enfant : Et pourquoi ne faut-il pas faire cela ?
Le maître : Parce que c’est mal fait.
L’enfant : Mal fait ! Qu’est-ce qui est mal fait ?
Le maître : Ce qu’on vous défend.
L’enfant : Quel mal y’a-t-il à faire ce qu’on me défend.
Le maître : On vous punit pour avoir désobéi.
L’enfant : Je ferai en sorte qu’on n’en sache rien.
Le maître : On vous épiera.
L’enfant : Je me cacherai.
Le maître : On vous questionnera.
L’enfant : Je mentirai.
Le maître : Il ne faut pas mentir.
L’enfant : Pourquoi ne faut-il pas mentir ?
Le maître : Parce que c’est mal fait, etc. (107-108)

Master: You must not do that.
Child: And why must I not do it?
Master: Because it is bad to do.
Child: Bad to do! What is bad to do?
Master: What you are forbidden to do.
Child: What is bad about doing what I am forbidden to do?
Master: You are punished for having disobeyed.
Child: I shall fix it so that nothing is known about it.
Master: You will be spied on.
Child: I shall hide.
Master: You will be questioned.
Child: I shall lie.

21 Ibid., 106.
Master: You must not lie.
Child: Why must I not lie?
Master: Because it is bad to do, etc.

This exchange, which Rousseau follows with his pithy “Voilà le cercle inévitable,” makes deception both the basis and the consequence of the exposure to reason. Once the master begins to tell his pupil what will happen (“On vous punit,” etc.), the child begins to speak in the future tense; it is the tutor, however, who leads the child, straight to vice, for his reasoning, his attempt to show the child what will happen, makes the child his collaborator in a circular fiction that abandons the present tense (and the pretense) of education for a future of punishments and deceptions. The child’s vow to lie if questioned, rather than instilling any lesson in him, makes him part of an “inevitable circle” of the fictional. What the child says he will do is engage in making more fictions – more fictions, that is, than the one he has already made in fabricating what he would do. But the stichomythic exchange here also stymies fiction. The “infant” and “master” give only the barest drama; emptied of all specificity, Rousseau’s sequence of deictic pronouns – the series of “cela” and “ce” – point nowhere. We see a process of learning language here, but what the language means is emptied of substance before the reader’s eyes. The parroting of the infant turns statements into questions, and we watch the child acquire a moral vocabulary as he echoes the master’s language of interdiction.

Moral instruction turns the child and his teacher into sophists, severing the intimacy between them and ending transparency and innocence in favor of baffling and abstract obfuscations. As their exchange takes a theatrical form, a structure that appears intermittently in Émile, it evokes the philosophical exchanges of the Socratic tradition and the dialogic project of the theatre, which, elsewhere, Rousseau treats with fear and contempt. It is striking that a discussion on moral abstraction takes the rather concrete form of theatre here, as if the power of the theatre to elicit catharsis and unduly affect the spectator is here turned on its head, instead designed to exhaust, deter, or even alienate. What is most compelling in this passage is not the fact of its dramatic form; it is that the stichomythic structure of its exchange, its rapid back-and-forth, underlies just what has been lost in pursuing a moral education in the language of philosophy and morality. Indeed, what has been severed is the vital connection between the governor and Émile, for what remains is an endless exchange in which each speaker speaks a functionally different language, unable to persuade or relate to the other. As Dorothea von Mücke suggests, one “reason for Rousseau’s hostility toward the theater is that it externalizes and disintegrates what should be united in the subject: intention and action, individual and role.”

Telling the child the “truth” about the moral world seems to be useless or even dangerous, rendering the pupil and his interlocutor tired sophists both – or, worse still, the puppet participants of a genre Rousseau elsewhere condemns outright. However generative their collaboration, the mutually canceling responses demonstrate what Rousseau will say without equivocation, namely, that the bond between teacher and student has been destroyed, that the student is no longer listening at all: “l’enfant ne vous entend plus.”

As Rousseau forbids knowledge of the soul and, contra Locke, outlaws abstract lessons in Reason, he creates what amount to lexical secrets: Rousseau’s secret organs come with a secret vocabulary. Just as Dumarsais’ lesson in Latin case showed how language carried relation, so

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22 Ibid., 108
23 Dorothea von Mücke, _Virtue and the Veil of Illusion_, 281.
24 Rousseau, _Émile_, 108.
Rousseau’s educational schema depends on a vocabulary, albeit a forbidden one, that ties abstract reasoning to the secrets of relation and the “rapport.” It is almost as if Rousseau sets up in these areas of forbidden knowledge (the soul, the rapport) with passwords at the gate, terms that might magically unravel the child’s ability to become properly human. As Émile navigates the world of objects with varying degrees of success, his encounters with the outside world expose the very hazards justifying Rousseau’s decision to withhold from his pupil the language of obedience and orders:

Avant l’âge de raison, l’on ne saurait avoir aucune idée des êtres moraux ni des relations sociales ; il faut donc éviter autant qu’il se peut, d’employer des mots qui les expriment, de peur que l’enfant n’attache d’abord à ces mots de fausses idées qu’on ne saura point ou qu’on ne pourra plus détruire….Faites que tant qu’il n’est frappé que des choses sensibles, toutes ses idées s’arrêtent aux sensations ; faites que toutes part il n’aperçoive autour de lui que le monde physique….

Before the age of reason one cannot have any idea of moral beings or of social relations. Hence so far as possible words which express them must be avoided, for fear that the child in the beginning attach to these words false ideas which you will not know about or will no longer be able to destroy….Arrange it so that as long as he is struck only by objects of sense, all his ideas stop at sensations; arrange it so that on all sides he perceive around him only the physical world.

But what Rousseau yokes together here elides the moral and the relational, the two fields of Émile’s ignorance. Limiting Émile’s experience to the sensuous matter of the physical world, Rousseau keeps him from experiencing attachment and from understanding moral life. Explaining that the interior of the human is originally without vice, Rousseau will show how the only “natural passion” is the internal solitude of the man with attachments to himself alone: “il n’y a point de perversité originelle dans le cœur humain ; il ne s’y trouve pas un seul vice dont on ne puisse dire comment et par où il y est entré. La seule passion naturelle à l’homme est l’amour de soi-même, ou l’amour-propre dans un sens étendu.” At the center of “natural” human experience is a passion without others. It is this state of isolation that Rousseau attributes to the natural world, but Émile’s presence in the world – not on an island as one might wish – necessitates the internalization of a different kind of relationship: one that secures autonomy and solitude but that also hinges upon a principle of relationship. But the preceptor will adopt a strategy for securing the soul that will extend (“étendre”) the parameters of “amour-propre” and reveal that the structuring presence of the preceptor himself will become an essential part of what is “proper to” a subject originally marked by relation.

II. Fortresses of the Self: Imbeciles, Automatons, Statues, Souls

Early in his explanation of his pedagogy, Rousseau challenges his reader to imagine a child born as man:

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26 Rousseau, *Émile*, 106.

27 Ibid., 111.
Supposons qu’un enfant eût à sa naissance la stature et la force d’un homme fait, qu’il sortît, pour ainsi dire, tout armé du sein de sa mère, comme Pallas sortit du cerveau de Jupiter ; cet homme-enfant serait un parfait imbécile, un automate, une statue immobile et presque insensible : il ne verrait rien, il n’entendrait rien, il ne connaîtrait personne, il ne saurait pas tourner les yeux vers ce qu’il aurait besoin de voir.  

Let us suppose that a child had at his birth the stature and strength of a grown man, that he emerged, so to speak, fully armed from his mother’s womb as did Pallas from the brain of Jupiter. This man-child would be a perfect imbecile, an automaton, an immobile and almost insensible statue. He would see nothing, hear nothing, know no one, would not be able to turn his eyes toward what he needed to see.

Conjuring the image of the “homme-enfant” or man-child, Rousseau gestures to the birth of the fully adult Minerva out of Jupiter’s head. Émile himself may be as much the product of Rousseau’s mind as the goddess of wisdom was of her divine father, but Rousseau effectively declares an end to adults born out of immaculate minds as he conjures the catastrophe of the man-child or “homme-enfant.” The Greco-Roman myths that found wisdom in adult births have led us horribly astray, indeed; instead of offering the wisdom of a Minerva, the homme-enfant is born a “parfait imbécile.” Rousseau’s hyperbole yields an interesting problem: what the automaton, the imbecile, and the statue share in common is an innocence that rests on having little or no relation to other people. While Rousseau strings together these examples to dismiss those who would dare to imagine birth without infancy, the creatures he summons are, in some ways, his ideals. The automaton, the statue, the imbecile: these three creatures evade the corruptions of society without having to seek exile. But unable to enter the realm of second feeling and by nature incorruptible, they figure themselves as inimitable. The figure of feebleness attaches itself to a fully armed Athena and undermines the heroism of the ancients, replacing the goddess of wisdom with an earthly archetype of the ineffectual. And the statue – this curious man-made object would seem to have a relationship because it is precisely a made thing – this statue is “immobile et presque insensible.” It is insensitive, nearly, and can’t move. For all that, there’s something interesting in Rousseau’s statue, a being that seems like the only feeling it might have would be that “first feeling,” that of its own existence. The curious statue not only is fixed but also cannot feel (not that most statues can), is “insensible,” the object of the gaze of others and unable even to “tourner les yeux vers ce qu’il aurait besoin de voir.”

But after outlining his proposal for Émile’s upbringing, Rousseau ventriloquizes the accusations of a skeptical reader and returns again to the vexing figure of the automaton:

Mais où placerons-nous cet enfant pour l’élever ainsi comme un être insensible, comme un automate ? Le tiendrons-nous dans le globe de la lune, dans une île déserte ? L’écarterons-nous de tous les humains ? N’aura-t-il pas continuellement dans le monde le spectacle et l’exemple des passions d’autrui ? Ne verra-t-il jamais d’autres enfants de son âge ? Ne verra-t-il pas ses parents, ses voisins, sa nourrice, sa gouvernante, son laquais, son gouverneur même, qui après tout ne sera pas un ange ?

28 Ibid., 69.
29 Ibid., 114
But where will we put this child to raise him like a being without sensation, like an automaton? Will we keep in the moon’s orb or on a desert island? Will we keep him away from all human beings? Will he not constantly have in the world the spectacle and the example of others’ passions? Will he never see other children of his age? Will he not see his parents, his neighbors, his nurse, his governess, his lackey, even his governor who, after all, will not be an angel?

The onslaught of rhetorical questions points to an impossibility but also a wish. “L’écartérons-nous de tous les humains?” – will we remove him from the company of all humans, Rousseau asks. This, indeed, seems to be the wish implicit in the formulation of the pedagogy Rousseau has outlined from the start: “La première éducation doit donc être purement négative. Elle consiste, non point à enseigner la vertu ni la vérité, mais à garantir le cœur du vice et l’esprit de l’erreur.” Preventing vice and error from corrupting Émile, Émile’s tutor is his guarantor more than his instructor, his function to “garantir” rather than to “enseigner.” The “purely negative” education that Rousseau lauds faces challenges to its purity, however, as the skeptical reader exposes the spectacles available to any potential pupil. Accordingly, Rousseau’s fictive interlocutor demands to know how any educator could prevent his charge from noticing the figures of vice all around him. Rousseau will concede the difficulty of the task, but Rousseau’s reader has already heard the lexicon of the skeptic’s complaint. When, earlier, Rousseau exposed the foolish experiment of imagining the homme-enfant, he had imagined that such a man would be an “imbécile” – and, more alarmingly still, a statue and an automaton. The implication here, however, is that actually succeeding at creating “un être insensible, comme un automate” would signal the project’s success. The mocking interlocutor who hurls accusations at Rousseau’s plan gets it right in marshaling these comparisons, for no pupil could be better at withstanding the dangers of society than an infant Crusoe, exiled from the world from the start. Rousseau will brush off the charges, but the casual tone of his question about the “automate,” positioned defensively, belies its urgency, for the relationship of the automaton to the moral universe marks out for Émile, as for the homme-enfant, the absence of attachment. The social victory of the automaton is that, whatever interactions it might have with others, it is always at a distance, “écarté” from humanity. Rousseau’s response will silence the critical interrogation and draw attention to the distance between Rousseau and the mass of “hommes” whom he appears simultaneously to address and to lament:

Cette objection est forte et solide. Mais vous ai-je dit que ce fût une entreprise aiseé qu’une éducation naturelle ? O hommes ! est-ce ma faute si vous avez rendu difficile tout ce qui est bien ? Je sens ces difficultés, j’en conviens : peut-être sont-elles insurmontables ; mais toujours est-il sûr qu’en s’appliquant à les prévenir on les prévient jusqu’à certain point. Je montre le but qu’il faut qu’on se propose : je

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30 Ibid., 113.
31 See Bruno Bernardi, La fabrique des concepts : recherches sur l’invention conceptuelle chez Rousseau (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006) for more extended thinking on the distancing achieved in forms of “écarter” in Rousseau. Todorov also gives this “distance” pride of place “To begin with, others must be put at a distance, not only from one’s life but also from one’s being.” See Todorov, Frail Happiness, 45.
ne dis pas qu’on y puisse arriver ; mais je dis que celui qui en approchera davantage aura le mieux réussi.32

This objection is strong and solid. But did I tell you that a natural education was an easy undertaking? O men, is it my fault if you have made everything good difficult? I sense these difficulties; [I agree: perhaps they are insurmountable.] But it is still certain that in applying oneself to overcoming them, one does overcome them up to a certain point. I show the goal that must be set; I do not say that it can be reached. But I do say that he who comes nearest to it will have succeeded best.

Ascribing strength and solidity to his imagined interlocutors’ objections – similar qualities to those he assigns to the useless homme-enfant – Rousseau foregoes a direct reply to the questions posed of his program earlier (whether or not Émile should be separated from all people, whether he is an automaton, and so on), suggesting they affirm the superiority of raising a child in the countryside but overlooking the questions that form his imagined interlocutor’s questions. But in his refusal to engage with the specificity of the imagined charges, Rousseau attributes to his questions the very impenetrability that those criticisms insinuate he could not provide for the conditions of Émile’s education. Out of the opacity of his response, then, Rousseau protects the ideals under siege. His wily reply neither answers nor ignores his imagined interlocutors and signals the protection he will extend to Émile himself: he has “guaranteed” his program from rhetorical assault of prying and corrupted minds.

But however strange and lonely Rousseau’s man-child may be in the context of Émile, he has good company, at least, in political theory, for if nature abhors nothing so much as a void, political science hates children.33 The figure Rousseau imagines here, born as an adult, is curiously similar to that inhabitant of the state of nature in so many works of early political theory who appears as the adult resident of the world before the state. Jonathan Marks suggests that Rousseau’s notion of a vast history developing “between man’s natural state and society, both civil and precivil [in] a long series of accidents and multitudes of centuries” is but “one of Rousseau’s striking departures from Hobbes and Locke,”34 but the history he provides also extends to the mortal history of every man, that is, to the trajectory from birth to death. While Hobbes might be able to make a case for the priority of mothers in the lives of their children, Leviathan is relatively quiet on the question of children. In his De Cive, Hobbes would absent children from his thinking altogether, replacing birth and childhood with men who appear in the

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32 Rousseau, Émile, 114.
33 One of the great innovations of the creation of the “state of nature” is its imaginative infanticide, and while certainly one might level the same charge at the origin myth in Eden, where no child’s cries ever sound, it is a bold move at the beginnings of political science to pass by the problem of childcare in political life. Where to put them and how to educate them is, of course, a problem that one can see in Plato, but to get to Hobbes’ war of every man against every man, every babe must be sent to the sacrificial altar of theory. Swift’s modest proposal should shock its readers less than it so often does, for a curious antinatalist fantasy already seems to be at play in some of early modernity’s contributions to political thought. (For some provocative suggestions on antinatalism, see, of course, David Benatar, Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).)
world like mushrooms: “So let us return to the state of nature, and consider men as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly, like mushrooms, come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement to each other.” The fungal residents of the state of nature go without mothers or fathers, and they savagely wage war, but even the losers of the war of every man against every man can claim they never endured the larval phase that Hobbes himself – born a “poor worm” – had to endure. The Edenic tradition of Adam and Eve reminds us that in the polis of paradise, there are no children. And while the paternalist tradition of political theory can imagine the relationship of kings to subjects like that of fathers to children, it is clear that the parties who matter are fathers and kings, that the subjects over which they rule are a problem for containment, subjects of political or social life. Part of Rousseau’s great innovation with Émile is in replacing the adult resident of the state of nature without resorting to the paternalist model in the style of Filmer. But his innovation also lies in inviting his reader to imagine a primary state without spontaneous generation, where people are born as babies rather than ejected fully grown from the earth. The homo-enfant Rousseau conjures, who is here rendered more useless than threatening, perhaps capable of living a short life but certainly not a nasty or brutish one, turns Hobbes’ war of every man against every man into farce. The “force” of the homo-enfant cannot overcome what the state of nature or the ease of Paradise has to mask: the helplessness of our origins.

What Rousseau’s intervention in this lineage conveys is thus precisely what Hobbes would have his state of nature’s fiction forget: the utter dependency and vulnerability of the beginnings of human life. In place of the savages of the state of nature or the noble savage of Rousseau’s own state of nature, Rousseau offers up the infant with neither stature nor force, an utter dependent. In contrast, too, to the farcical send-up of Hobbesian natural man that Rousseau portrays in his homo-enfant, Rousseau’s vulnerable infant is no “parfait imbécile” but, rather, a perfect student: “Je le répète, l’éducation de l’homme commence à sa naissance; avant de parler, avant que d’entendre, il s’instruit déjà. L’expérience prévient les leçons; au moment qu’il connaît sa nourrice, il a déjà beaucoup acquis.” In the beginning, Rousseau’s infant is helpless, ill-equipped to survive in civilization, let alone in the harsh conditions of nature, but the child is also ushered immediately into education. Rousseau cannot seem to stress enough that “en naissant, l’enfant est déjà disciple, non du gouverneur, mais de la nature.” Birth itself is an initiation into education, then, and the baby is a natural student. With neither language nor understanding, “il s’instruit déjà.” And the reflexive language of instruction (s’instruire) conjures an infant who acts as his own teacher from the start: he already instructs himself. Rousseau’s earliest student begins learning and begins having attachments simultaneously: “De ces pleurs, qu’on croirait si peu dignes d’attention, naît le premier rapport de l’homme à tout ce

35 Hobbes, Leviathan, 8.1.
37 See Hobbes’ verse autobiography for the Monster of Malmesbury’s humble beginnings: “April the fifth (though now with Age outworn) / I’th’ early Spring, I, a poor worm, was born. / In Malmesbury Baptiz’d, and Named there / By my own Father, then a Minister” (liv).
39 Rousseau, Émile, 70.
40 Ibid., 68.
qui l’environne : ici se forge le premier anneau de cette longue chaîne dont l’ordre social est formé.41 The earliest ties Rousseau imagines are themselves born (“nait”) with birth pangs of their own, but it is not the mother’s labor pains we hear, but the cries of the infant. The “premier rapport” is an echo of the cries of birth, a marker of continuity between the birthed and the birthing. (But it is also curious to note the slippage in Rousseau’s own description of who is attached to what, for at this moment it is not the infant whose cry makes “le premier anneau” of social life, but the man (“le premier rapport de l’homme”). The first rapport of man to his environment apparently does not have to wait for adulthood.) Rousseau’s safeguard against the vulnerability of dependency is not, then, the constitutive fiction of men who spring from the earth ready to battle but the quotidian material of education, meticulously implemented in recognition of the child’s natural aptitude for learning and the hazards of a hopelessly corrupt society. It is, then, a far slower and more tedious path to autonomy that Rousseau imagines for the infant Émile, but the goal of eradicating dependency and erasing vulnerability informs Rousseau’s vision of this sponge-like child. The end of education will be neither the inculcation of reason nor the acquisition of bookish wisdom but the cultivation of an ability to withstand living in the wild of society without harm. In the civilization that surrounds Émile, there will be no confrontation with the extreme violence of the Hobbesian state of nature, but Rousseau will follow Hobbes’ definition of “the life of man” as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” to the extent that he will stress the solitary first.42

Rousseau stresses that his Émile, however ideal his education, must be a real boy, but the ideal of the automaton, the statue, and the imbecile betrays the importance of isolation to Émile. In Émile, the strategy for self-sufficiency is bought by a primal compromise, and it is a compromise with special purchase on the soul. I suggest that this opening move not only tells us what the tutor’s task is, it also sets in motion an anatomical subplot – one with miraculous surprises and if not quite secret agents, then at least secret organs. Rousseau has no illusions about being able to save any person from the world entirely, but we learn at the outset of Émile that there is something that must happen at the very beginning lest the experiment of raising any child at the hands of any tutor (even Rousseau himself) become an utter failure. And so, Rousseau addresses himself to the ideal reader of his text, a mother:

C’est à toi que je m’adresse, tendre et prévoyante mère, qui sus t’écarter de la grande route, et garantir l’arbrisseau naissant du choc des opinions humaines ! Cultive, arrose la jeune plante avant qu’elle meure : ses fruits feront un jour tes délices. Forme de bonne heure une enceinte autour de l’âme de ton enfant ; un autre en peut marquer le circuit, mais toi seule y dois poser la barrière.43

It is to you that I address myself, tender and foresighted mother, who are capable of keeping 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

41 Ibid., 73.
43 Rousseau, Émile, 35-36.
an early date. Someone else can draw the circumference, but you alone must [place the barrier.]

As Rousseau describes this abstract mother, we learn that she is a “tendre et prévoyante mère”; the two qualities that define her are tenderness – a trait she shares with her delicate offspring – and foresight; she has future fruit to protect. Yet we might also understand this moment as a kind of Edenic labor; in the imperative to cultivate and water the sapling child – “cultive, arrose la jeune plante” – the narrator reminds us of the innocent labors of paradise, but this Edenic moment kicks Adam out and invites children in. If Rousseau’s garden restores paradise to humanity, it revokes Genesis to make room for children before the Fall. In spite of his cynicism about society, Rousseau lets us imagine birth before or without the birth of sin. His prohibition of knowledge later will take place in a landscape that is Edenic from the start.

But Rousseau’s reader risks missing the more astonishing measure, I think, if she fails to notice what has just appeared in the afterbirth of this babe, however abstract the child may be. For quickly after she gives birth, the mother is asked to protect the child’s soul, to put a fortress around it – and these protective fortifications, in the varying forms they take, are a hallmark of Rousseau’s push to solitude and his pursuit of exile: “Forme de bonne heure une enceinte autour de l’âme de ton enfant,” Rousseau says. But what Rousseau asks of this spectral mother, the thing that only she can do (and if there is an able tutor around, Rousseau is not too upset about dispensing with parents altogether after that) is a maneuver that happens textually in plain sight even as it performs an invisible transformation. What Rousseau demands of the mother is a syntactical contortion, one that transforms adjective into substantive without anyone noticing, including, perhaps, many of Rousseau’s readers. The mother, “enceinte” or with child, gives birth and then makes an “enceinte” or fortress around the soul of the child: the quality or adjective that describes the mother becomes the technology that surrounds souls in Rousseau. The child’s pursuit of liberty already comes with the claim of another person around his soul. If this moment translates poorly into English – that is, the adjective for pregnant “enceinte” is a homonym for fortress “enceinte” in the French – it is itself a translation as it carries over a quality and wraps it around the child’s soul. In this moment, there appears to be a bid for permanent pregnancy, if in an inverted way. Someone else can “marquer le circuit” or trace the border, of the soul, but only the mother can perform this weird transubstantiation, converting a quality proper to her into a substance that protects another. The mother has foresight, but much more important than that is her ability to turn flesh to spirit – or at least to transform her pregnancy into a membrane that surrounds the organ of the soul.

What I want to suggest about this almost magical operation is threefold: first, this means that the moment of exiting the womb, there’s a kind of inverted womb that wraps around the soul. For orphan Émile, biological parents vanish from view after the first few pages, but our famously solitary Jean-Jacques seems to make here the possibility of a relational moment that precedes the solitude we might want to experience in the world if everything goes right. Second, this seems to be a kind of inoculation: only this primary relational structure will save Émile from the bad relations of the world – and, I’d like to suggest now that this inoculation works, and that it

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44 Joan DeJean’s *Literary Fortifications: Rousseau, Laclos, Sade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984) traces the motif of the fortress or “enceinte” as a defensive literary strategy in the wake of classicism. Her account of the “impregnable” enclosure surprisingly overlooks the homonymic potential of the term, even though the word appears already in Nicot’s *Le Thresor de la langue françoys* (1606) as the definition of “femme enceinte, muller praegnans, gravida.”
is this “enceinte” that so miraculously translates pregnancy that will also provide the basis for part of Rousseau’s “negative education” (this is the term he uses to describe his regime; education must be “purement negative”) to operate. Finally, it is an operation that works as the first security of our goodness. Long before Rousseau says that the baby’s first cries bind him into the social world, we get the scene that secures his soul. We get an original syntax that makes Émile innocent.

If this primary marker is a secret, so too, as I have mentioned, is the soul itself. Rousseau insists that the lessons of religion and the soul should be kept from his student, and in place of telling his student that he has a soul, instead of initiating him into the art of reason and thinking about moral life, Rousseau insists that the child has to have a hands-on education, encountering the world not as abstraction but as a source of sensuous knowledge. The problem with reason alone is that it seems to have nothing to do with the feelings of the child; it will turn him into a sophist and a liar, fit for society but not for virtue. I want to argue now, though, that the apparent absence of a relationship to less relevant lessons leaves space for a provisional magic. What I suggested before was a question of delayed kind of entry into innocence leaves the child in a realm in which magic still enchants. In the scene I examine next, it takes the form of a science experiment, but it’s not proof of science so much as the success of Rousseau’s relational strategy. In other words, the power of the foundational relational moment that occurs after birth persists, and I’ll suggest that it suggests that relationship is powerful enough to change the rules of the world itself.

In Book 3, Rousseau recalls having tried to instill in a previous student a taste for chemistry; committed to hands-on learning, he decides to run a chemistry experiment examining adulterated wines, which, in turn, reveal the principle by which ink is made:

Je me souviens que, voulant donner à un enfant du goût pour la chimie, après lui avoir montré plusieurs précipitations métalliques, je lui expliquais comment se faisait l’encre. Je lui disais que sa noirceur ne venait qu’un fer très divisé, détaché du vitriol, et précipité par une liqueur alcaline. Au milieu de ma docte explication, le petit traître m’arrêté tout court avec ma question que je lui avais apprise : me voilà fort embarrassé….Je pris dans un petit flacon de la dissolution d’alcali fixe ; puis, ayant devant moi, deux verres, de ces deux différents vins, je lui parlai ainsi….46

I remember that once I wanted to give a child a taste for chemistry and once I explained to him how ink is made, I told him that it was only iron very finely broken up, separated from the vitriol and precipitated by an alkaline solution. In the midst of my learned explanation the little traitor stopped me short with my question, which I had taught him. Now I was quite at a loss….I took a fixed alkaline solution in a little flask; then, with two different wines in two glasses before me, I spoke to him thus…


46 Rousseau, *Émile*, 235.
Our narrator interrupts himself as he realizes that his abstract explanations are no good – the question the student has asked, which is “what is this good for?,” makes the tutor move from abstraction to demonstration; he’ll show the student what this procedure looks like, and he’ll do so using two kinds of wine, one a finely aged bottle from the master’s cellar and the other the cheapest he can find. The lesson he gives to his student is a hybrid lecture, part economics, part chemistry lab:

On falsifie plusieurs denrées pour les faire paraître meilleures qu’elles ne sont. Ces falsifications trompent l’œil et le goût ; mais elles sont nuisibles, et rendent la chose falsifiée pire, avec sa belle apparence, qu’elle n’était auparavant…. On falsifie surtout les boissons, et surtout les vins, parce que la tromperie est plus difficile à connaître, et donne plus de profit au trompeur….Le plomb uni aux acides fait un sel fort doux, qui corrige au goût la verdeur du vin, mais qui est un poison pour ceux qui le boivent. Il importe donc, avant de boire du vin suspect, de savoir s’il est lithargiré ou s’il ne l’est pas.47

Many foodstuffs are adulterated to make them appear to be better than they are; these adulterations deceive the eyes and the taste, but they are harmful to the body and make the adulterated thing, for all its fine appearance, worse than it was before….Drinks, especially wines, are adulterated because the deception is more difficult to realize and gives more profit to the deceiver….Lead combined with acids makes a very mild salt, which corrects the greenness of the wine to the taste but is poison for the human body. It is, therefore, important before drinking wine to know whether or not it has been treated with litharge.

Suddenly giving his student a taste for chemistry (un gout pour la chimie) also becomes a question of avoiding a kind of trickery of taste. The tutor’s lecture continues for several paragraphs of instruction in the anatomy of wine, how acids and alkalines work, how to loosen the metallic substance out of the adulterated wine. Somewhere in this introductory chemistry lecture, though, Rousseau’s pupil stops paying attention. The tutor has already proven that the stakes are high: this profit-maximizing strategy means that it is a poison for those who drink it – “[c’est] un poison pour ceux qui le boivent.” But the student does not care. I want to suggest that the student is indifferent because he has no relationship to the science experiment in front of him, and this is what Rousseau will say, too. But what Rousseau deems proof of the necessity of a pedagogy that makes examples relevant to the lives of the students, I see as the extension of a far more daring strategy: a formation that has so inoculated the child that he cannot be poisoned by relationships to the world. Rousseau reviews the failure of his lesson and makes this lesson a cautionary tale for would-be tutors, but I think what also echoes in this moment of pedagogical self-criticism is a congratulatory note that proves that the initial strategy of safeguarding the soul has actually worked:

J’étais fort content de mon exemple, et cependant je m’aperçus que l’enfant n’en était point frappé….Sans parler de l’impossibilité qu’à douze ans un enfant pût suivre mon explication, l’utilité de cette expérience n’entrait pas dans son esprit,

47 Ibid., 236.
I was quite satisfied by my example; nevertheless, I perceived that the child was not struck by it...not to speak of the impossibility of a child of twelve years following my explanation—the usefulness of this experiment was nothing to him because, having tasted the two wines and finding both of them good, the word *adulteration*, which I thought I had explained to him so well, did not correspond to any palpable idea he had. The words *unhealthy, poison* did not have any meaning for him.

The bored student we see here lets Rousseau make an impassioned plea for a curriculum that speaks to one’s students. (This is a good idea.) But the more urgent preoccupation here seems to me to be that what falls out of solution is the miraculous revelation that the student does not feel the relationship of cause and effect. That this experiment doesn’t enter the spirit (“cette experience n’entrait pas dans son esprit”) might not shock the reader, but that the poison wine has no effect on the body should. Engrossed in the tutor’s experiment, the reader hardly noticed that in giving the student a taste for chemistry, the preceptor made him sample a poisonous substance—and with no ill effect. While one might reasonably assume that the tutor would not hazard his employment by causing his young charge to poison himself, in the several paragraphs that intervene between the moment he sets out the glasses of wine in front of the student (and in front of his reader, by extension) and the quiet revelation that the student has *tasted* both of them, the reader learns that this wine cannot touch the spirit, that the language of poison cannot render it toxic, that it passes through the body without doing any harm, is neither toxic nor intoxicating. I want to suggest that this wine actually *is* nothing to the student. The radical potential of this lack of connection, this absence of relationship, signals a collapse of the “rapport” that extends beyond the mundane details of the experiment itself. Rousseau has won for his student an autonomy so complete that it defies some of the most basic connections between person and object and cause and effect. And he has done so not by making his student essentially atomic but through his relational guarantee.

This scene is also a stunning rewriting of a kind of heroics that Émile derides elsewhere with even more force. Knocking a Lockean education that would treat the child as an adult, Rousseau demonstrates how children can stumble upon novel interpretations, without really understanding what they’ve heard; they can seem to have knowledge while really being ignorant. Rousseau describes a child who misinterprets the famous story of Alexander drinking the medicine his physician Philip has given him, in spite of rumors of a conspiracy to poison the ailing Alexander. This example brings Rousseau again to the question of taste, but here the tongue in question is Alexander’s. The child, however, sees bravery before a treacherous substance where the adult reader reads trust loyalty. As Frances Ferguson writes of this scene, “Although the story is usually taken to demonstrate Alexander’s trust in Philip’s loyalty, the boy, it turns out, had seen it to indicate Alexander’s enormous courage because ‘he had swallowed at a single gulp a bed-tasting potion without hesitation.’”

What the child cannot read, again, is

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48 Ibid., 237.
relationship. The extraordinary fealty that impels Alexander to imbibe is rerouted by a child reader who sees only individual and substance. Rousseau’s child misunderstands the lesson in grammar that makes the tie between Diana and Apollo, that links poison to poisoning, that forms the basis of trust and community. That this scene is duplicated between tutor and student and that it fails twice in a relatively short amount of text brings with it an insistence on failed communities of taste. The child’s misreading makes Alexander brave before a bad taste; the child’s ignorance of chemistry untethers cause from effect—or signals, insidiously, a lead poisoning whose effects won’t be traceable to these early causes. In correcting these two failed instances of pedagogy, Rousseau chides himself, for his previous mistakes, and the storyteller who would be so foolish as to think the child could extract the moral from Alexander’s story. But he also creates a parallel between Alexander and his former student—and, by extension, he seems to align himself with Alexander’s famous teacher: Aristotle. But Émile sets out not to let the child think he is an emperor, in spite of the “love of dominion” born in every child. Rousseau revises Aristotle’s pedagogy just as he has already revised his thesis of spontaneous generation.

Yet Rousseau’s repeated insistence on taste—giving the student a taste for chemistry, tricking the taste with adulterated goods, tasting the wine, not to mention rehearsing the story of Alexander’s gulp—belie the real threat to learning, which is the absence of passion: “[Il] n’y a que la passion qui nous fasse agir ; et comment se passionner pour des intérêts qu’on n’a point encore ?” “It is only passion which makes us act; and how can one become passionate for interests one doesn’t have yet?” Rousseau’s call for a pedagogy that is aware of the passions casts the science experiment in a different light, for with the invocation of “passion,” the flasks of wine suddenly resemble the chalices of communion. What we have just witnessed was not just casual pedagogy but the mimicry of a rite of passage that would initiate us into a corporate body. It is not just the physical world that has stopped obeying the rules; it is also the spiritual one. While womb can become fortress, wine can no longer become blood. The most astonishing miracle here is not that Rousseau has given his reader a figure who can drink poison and survive (and that is astonishing), but that Rousseau shows us a child who has attended communion without the passion.

The wine that is at once wine and not wine thus reorganizes the principle behind Émile’s isolation to reject not just a field of linguistic abstraction or actual objects but also the miracle of community-forming transubstantiation. Maybe we should expect this of Rousseau; the construction of community through the wine is itself corrupted: any wine could be false wine; any community-forging rapport could really be a form of expulsion or a threat to safety. In the

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50 See Ferguson, “Reading Morals,” 70-71.
51 Rousseau, Émile, 237-38.
52 Bernardi suggests that a keen interest in the workings of chemistry subtends Rousseau’s thinking more broadly and contributes in particular to the structure of his concept of association and attachment: “L’association au contraire est une union de telle nature que le tout a des propriétés qui lui sont propres, et d’un autre ordre que celles de ses constituants. Constitution, composition, liaison, sont les notions au moyen desquelles on peut penser l’idée d’association. Cela ne saurait vraiment nous étonner, puisqu’il s’agit là du vocabulaire de base de la pensée politique de Rousseau dans le Contrat social. Mais ici Rousseau dit explicitement quel est le référent à partir duquel il constitue son vocabulaire de base : la chimie. Et il ne s’agit pas d’une référence vague : la seule affirmation que les composés chimiques sont formés de mixels et non d’éléments comme on l’attendait a priori, montre le degré de précision de son vocabulaire…” (55).
53 The adulterated wine, of course, was a real threat in the period. Like the purveyor of tainted wine, “[t]he baker could hope to enhance his profit beyond the allowance…only by small stratagems, some of which—short-weight bread, adulteration, the mixing in of cheap and spoiled flour—were subject either to
The miraculous subplot of Émile, there is only one moment for the conversion of word and substance. And it is the earlier moment for the crucial safeguarding of the soul, a soul that doesn’t need to be saved, cannot even be touched by, the symbolics of the wine. Or, to put it another way, the relational guarantee (that is the “enceinte” or fortress around his soul) that we met at the beginning of the book keeps Émile uncorrupted from the transformational relationships of the world: its sham commodities and its divine revelations alike. The moment that disposes of original sin also obviates the need for passion and revelation. “There is no original perversity in the human heart,” Rousseau has told us. We don’t need this passion because there’s nothing to be forgiven.

To this point I have argued that the soul comes with this special wrapper and that it is so successful that it is the guiding principle for changing Émile’s experience of the sensual world and for carving out what is relevant to it; with the tutor’s careful supervision, it is the barrier against the relations of the world, and it is also the relational fixture that maintains Émile’s solitude. For Rousseau, the imperfect autonomy he will try to secure for Émile has to happen through relationship; this is a constitutive compromise that will make the experience of being in society bearable. But I want to finish tracking the fate of this soul by making some remarks on the odd conclusion of Émile’s relationship to it. As I hinted at earlier, the tutor insists that the soul be kept a secret, lest conversations about it corrupt the child’s mind: If you tell the child that he has one, he runs the risk of never realizing that he has one at all, he said. It would seem that at the moment of announcing the arrival of the soul, it could no longer be secret, but if I’m right and there’s a kind of relational hold on the soul, if Rousseau’s isolated subject owes its success to relationship, then there is always this secret accompaniment, even when we put the soul in plain sight.

But the text itself carries this secret beyond its shadowy appearance in scenes of failure like the one I describe above. It’s an additional oddity that for all the insistence on waiting until the child is ready to know he has a soul, we never see a scene of the soul’s revelation. Though it was a necessary ignorance, the secret that had to be kept, that couldn’t be touched by communion or the temptations of learning, the soul’s story seems nearly left out of the text as well: Émile grows up, gains a sense of the different kinds of rapports that connect people in the world; he experiences desire, plans ahead for his life with Sophie, but there is no epiphany as Émile gains majority, no formal introduction of the boy to his soul. That is, I think there’s no concern about the soul and its secrets until the final moments of the text in which Rousseau quietly plays his hand and returns us not to the secret soul but to the still greater secret: the thing that surrounds it. For the barrier around the scene of failed communion here is made of ink. The experiment begins with an effort to explain how ink is made, and the preceptor chooses to titrate adulterated wine by analogy. Yet what follows this moment is the introduction of Émile’s first reading assignment. The failed experiment of the wine comes with what is itself an “enceinte” of ink.

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54 The episode also seems to rework a startling moment in Book 5 of The Confessions when Jean-Jacques tries to make invisible ink, botches the experiment, and accidentally blinds himself for several weeks. David Marshall stresses the importance of this “sympathetic ink” in his “Rousseau and the State of Theater,” in Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Politics, Art, and Autobiography, ed. John T. Scott (London: Routledge,
The liquid confusion that arrives with the melding of ink and wine begins to make sense of the voluminous work of Rousseau’s novel. Has the very production of *Émile* been itself a kind of “enceinte” all along? But it also seems to recover parts of a literary history that would aspire to the depths of solitude our narrator claims to admire. In *Robinson Crusoe*, the title character famously runs out of ink after a year of careful journal-keeping, and “[t]he ‘Copy’ Crusoe gives reads like anything but a direct transcription of an original manuscript written day by day: it deals conspicuously in omissions and compressions, as well as in retrospective interpolations….” The failure of ink cannot stop Crusoe’s story (or Defoe’s text), nor can the botched science of ink thwart the project of Rousseau’s text here. Immediately following the failed lesson in titration, we learn that Émile’s first text will be *Robinson Crusoe*.

Puisqu’il nous faut absolument des livres, il en existe un qui fournit, à mon gré, le plus heureux traité d’éducation naturelle. Ce livre sera le premier que lira mon Émile ; seul il composera durant longtemps toute sa bibliothèque….Quel est donc ce merveilleux livre ? Est-ce Aristote ? est-ce Pline ? est-ce Buffon ? Non ; c’est Robinson Crusoe.

Since we absolutely must have books, there exist one which, to my taste, provides the most felicitous treatise on natural education. This book will be the first that my Emile will read. For a long time it will alone compose his whole library….What, then, is this marvelous book? Is it Aristotle? Is it Pliny? Is it Buffon? No. It is *Robinson Crusoe*.

As Rousseau makes the book itself the sole resident of Emile’s library (“seul il composera…toute sa bibliothèque”), he creates a solitary canon, but the “natural education” he evokes is, for one, the education of a Robinson Crusoe who is already an adult. Rousseau suggests that the book will be so compelling that Emile himself will think that he himself is Crusoe (“qu’il pense être Robinson lui-même”). The transformation of Emile into Crusoe, however, retrieves the transformation of community that did not occur. The nested structure of this moment – ink around wine – suggests, for one, that another substance is just as likely to form a community as the one that comes with religious authority. But as it encircles this episode and anchors Émile’s education, it would seem that the material of the “enceinte” is ink. The body and the blood of communion, that is, the holy wafer and the wine, undergo another kind of transformation, for the word made flesh here seems really to be the word *made word*: ink prevails in this narrative (or, at least, our narrator hopes it will) as the instruction gives the aspiring tutor, governess, or even parent the materials to try to fortify the soul.

III. Continuing Education

2006), 139-170: “[N]ot simply disappearing ink or invisible ink, sympathetic ink is a kind of ink that disappears and becomes invisible but then becomes visible again when some catalyst with the proper chemical affinities is applied…” (162).


58 Ibid., 239.
At the very end of the text, Émile declares himself a man. The arrival into adulthood here is the moment Rousseau’s reader has been waiting for: the arrival of the fully formed, mature subject, successfully educated to maintain some kind of hold on virtue. But the event that triggers Émile’s declaration is not the attainment of reason, is not the display of virtue, is not, to borrow Kant’s formulation, a release from tutelage, self-incurred or otherwise. Rather, it’s the reappearance of the “enceinte”:

Mon maître, félicitez votre enfant; il espère avoir bientôt l'honneur d’être père….J’aurai besoin de vous. J’en ai plus besoin que jamais, maintenant que mes fonctions d’homme commencent. Vous avez rempli les vôtres; guidez-moi pour vous imiter; et reposez-vous, il en est temps. (629)

My master, congratulate your child; he hopes to soon have the honor of being a father… I will need you as long as I live. I have more need of you than ever, now that my functions as a man begin. You have fulfilled your functions; guide me so that I may imitate you, and rest: the time has come.

Within the span of a single sentence, Émile transforms from “enfant” to “père.” The story of maturation is here condensed into one arc from the child that is the object of congratulation (“félicitez votre enfant”) to the “beginning” of the functions of man, “maintenant que mes fonctions d’homme commencent.” When Émile asks his tutor to help him learn to imitate the tutor, I assume that the imitation he has in mind is the project that the tutor undertook, the project of education that begins in “marking the perimeter” around the soul. We could read this moment as the story of Émile’s transformation from babe to father, but we might also consider it as the transfer of flesh made spirit back into flesh again. This heretical movement turns the passion and the resurrection into casual miracles, the product of the industry of the tutor made possible by that first secret safeguard. But its heresy also seems to me to be a narrative one: we’ve been charting the life and maturation of Émile, but it seems like the real revelation here is not the moral Émile but the thing that makes him, the novel—or any of us—possible: what we might call dialectical pregnancy. What I want to suggest by way of conclusion, however, is that this principle of reproduction depends very much on a sustained ignorance: when it comes to understanding the internal relations that secure our imperfect solitude—and our essential goodness—we must shirk an education that would bring knowledge and pursue a regime of ignorance and forgetting instead.

In Rousseau’s Émile, then, the story of education is as much an education in the etymological sense of e-ducere or leading-out as it is an education about leading in or even away. The guiding image of the “enceinte” turns pregnancy inside and out, transforming the fact of pregnancy into the fortress of the soul and back again. In positioning this relational substance around the soul, those other bids for our attachments (the community or spiritual rebirth possible in communion, for instance, but also, the snares of moral language) lose their efficacy: an original syntax has rendered them useless and has let us be innocent, however imperfectly. This “enceinte” is also the marker of maturity and continuation, and it will actually be what keeps the story itself going (the sequel to Émile begins, notably, with a moment of narrative infanticide: the promised baby of the previous volume dies). In the story of the rise of our autonomy, the relational hold around the soul would seem to be an occluded chapter, but it is also the thing that reproduces our liberty. But Rousseau’s freedom requires not just secrecy but also forgetting; it
provides a principle of protective reproduction that is ambivalent about its singularity, that reappears tropically as the force producing example and the novel but that also seems reluctant to deny the singularity of any single episode.

In contrast to the family of the *Social Contract* in which the absence of need marks the dissolution of attachment ("Sitôt que ce besoin cesse ; le lien naturel se dissout"), for Émile, education will mean an ideal of solitude in which the principle of the preceptor remains, even once the tutor has abandoned his role as mentor in response to Émile’s sexual maturation:

> Puisqu’il faut que l’homme meure, il faut qu’il se reproduise, afin que l’espèce dure et que l’ordre du monde soit conservé. Quand, par les signes dont j’ai parlé, vous pressentirez le moment critique, à l’instant quittez avec lui pour jamais votre ancien ton. C’est votre disciple encore, mais ce n’est plus votre élève. C’est votre ami, c’est un homme, traitez-le désormais comme tel."  

Since man must die, he must reproduce in order that the species may endure and the order of the world be preserved. When, by the signs of which I have spoken, you have a presentiment of the critical moment, instantly abandon your old tone with him forever. He is still your disciple, but he is no longer your pupil. He is your friend, he is a man. From now on treat him as such.

Rousseau exposes a morbid logic subtending reproduction, and it comes with high stakes: the continuance of the species (l’espèce) but also the “ordre du monde.” Consistent with his century’s concerns with the relation between population and economy, Rousseau suggests that reproduction is necessary for a wider stability. Rousseau signals that the relationship has changed, but the drama of the shift – happening in the flash of a moment, “à l’instant” – is more subtle. While rhetorically Rousseau marks this occasion with an accretion of new nouns, new offices the student might occupy (friend and man), we learn that, for one, the student remains a *disciple* and, for another, that the change is *tonal*. I stress the quality of tone here for two reasons: first, to show how the apparent transformation occurs as a question of modulation rather than metamorphosis, but second, to suggest that knowledge is imparted through cues of atmosphere – not in naming the student anew, really, but in altering a climate.

As Rousseau shows how the efficacy of his curriculum endures, the person who emerges reveals that he has fully internalized the preceptor. But Rousseau’s continued success depends on a pupil who remains ignorant or even forgets the continued power of this relation as well as the kind of knowledge that inheres outside of substance in atmosphere and mood. Émile will be “free” to live without his tutor at the end of the text but seems to choose not to do so:

> [J]e ne vienne de lui-même au point où je veux le conduire, qu’il ne se mette avec empressement sous ma sauvegarde, et qu’il ne me dise avec toute la chaleur de son âge…Je veux obéir à vos lois, je le veux toujours, c’est ma volonté constante ; si jamais je vous désobéis, ce sera malgré moi : rendez-moi libre en me protégeant

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59 Ibid., 414.

Émile arrives at a fantasy of obedience: I want to obey your laws. I want it always. Kant’s formula allowing for free reasoning on the condition of obedience – “argue as much as you like…but obey” – is surpassed as Rousseau imagines an Émile who wants nothing so badly as eternal obedience: Émile will obey, and, he promises, he will always want to do so. The Émile who has seemed so much the dupe of the tutor’s master plan seems almost to articulate its very terms: the construction of a desire to obey the tutor and his laws. Yet in Émile’s voluntary servitude is the wish for internal attachment – a wish for something be already has. Émile now knows he has a soul, of course, but the knowledge he demonstrates here exposes how he has forgotten his soul and its genealogy.

The oddity of Émile’s request lies in the way he asks his preceptor to compel him into liberty, asks for something like a request for indoctrination. His desire to obey is also a desire to always desire; it is not just his “constant will,” but the thing he always wants to want – otherwise it will be “malgré moi.” Though this scene appears to show an Émile prowling for internal resolution, what we see much more clearly is the conflict of desire born out of the history we have just read, out of the tutor who has insinuated himself into Émile so much so that be has become the unvoiced subject of Émile’s psyche, the object of Émile’s command and the subject of the internal command. The pronominal contortions that arise here show us a weird plurality of agent Émiles: moving from the subject of desire (he wants, and he wants: je veux obéir, je le veux) to the animator of a possessive adjective of impersonal phenomena (it is my constant will…) to the object of the outside world and the preceptor’s forcefulness (in spite of me…render me free in protecting me…force me) and back again to the possessives (my own master, my senses, my reason). I stress this multiplication because this is a moment of unusual awareness and self-consciousness, and it comes with understanding a self that shifts from subject to object, from possessor to possessed. Yet the very wish to be coerced shows an Émile whose desires and “constant will” have already been shaped by the preceptor. What this scene reveals is a wish for what has already happened – and a flicker of a possibility that it might be undone, even if the cost is psychic unraveling, “malgré moi.” This flash of desire for his preceptor’s law, marked by Émile’s “chaleur” recedes, of course. It is a fleeting moment of passion, but Émile’s confession conveys simultaneously a knowledge that he does not realize he has and the necessity of forgetting such moments for the coherence of the self, a self shown here to be a whirligig of pronouns, subject and object – his own and his preceptor’s. In this moment, what is “properly” Émile’s seems less to be a “volonté constante” that we know has already been so carefully shaped so much as the climate in which flashes of knowledge appear. While Ricoeur explained that

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61 Rousseau, Émile, 426.
“Émile will never learn anything by heart, not even the fables, not even those of La Fontaine, charming as they are,” what Émile is not learning “by heart” extends to these flashes of extraordinary insight about his own constitution. Indeed, it seems as if it is Émile’s atypical “warmth” that permits this sudden insight. At room temperature, such thoughts don’t come to Émile’s mind, and the momentary wish of forcing another to force oneself is forgotten again.

In this moment, Émile’s subjectivity seems to have grown too warm — but also too large. In this moment of unknowing knowing, so to speak, Émile generates other possible Émiles. With his outpouring of speech, he also demonstrates the principle of textual reproduction that has threatened the book from the very start. For, whatever the “enceinte” placed around the child’s soul in the very beginning of the book, the text itself has also already taken on unusual dimensions, experiencing a “grossesse” of its own: “ce mémoire devint insensiblement une espèce d’ouvrage trop gros, sans doute, pour ce qu’il contient, mais trop petite pour la matière qu’il traite.” The work that is “too big” for its container will, like Émile, remain within its confines, though — and though its apparent “grossesse” seems to convey a principle of reproduction, it inheres in the genre most famous for inducing solitude, for making solitary readers. As Rousseau reminds his reader that “les enfants ne jouissent même dans l’état de nature que d’une liberté imparfaite, semblable à celle dont jouissent les hommes dans l’état civil,” the oddly infantilizing condition of Émile’s liberty will be that which will also make it possible for him to achieve the least corrupted adulthood imaginable. It is, after all, “les lois et la société” that have stood in the way of attaining maturity, Rousseau explains; those laws and society are precisely those things which “nous ont replongés dans l’enfance.” Rousseau’s “enceinte” treats the problem of raising the child from infant to man with homeopathic means: only by making this pregnancy permanent can Émile become a man, for without it, he will be plunged into the society of “les riches, les grands, les roi [qui] sont des enfants.”

In his writing on the hazards of the theatre, Rousseau condemned the actor for taking on a part other than his own. In doing so, he willfully forgot other people; “cet oubli de l’homme” is how Rousseau defines the art of the actor in his Lettre à D’Alembert. It’s striking then that here we get a different kind of forgetting: one that would not transport one outside the self in a toxic way but more firmly secure one’s boundaries (think of the tutor’s world-forming tactics or the “fortress” around Émile’s soul). As Émile’s own wish conveys, disobedience to the preceptor actually erodes his self. This rooted introjection is subject to a positive form of forgetting, a positive ignorance that is articulated more clearly in Rousseau’s explicit and repeated injunctions urging (an often intentional) forgetfulness. In Émile, what emerges is not just part of the arsenal of Rousseau’s classic counter-Enlightenment moves: to call for forgetting and ignorance where a majority of philosophes might praise memory and knowledge. It is partly this, to be sure, but what Rousseau asks us to forget is the confidence he has placed in us at the beginning of the work. The danger of imitating the tutor is a theatrical danger, of course; in following the role of the tutor, we might forget what it is to be a man, and the whole point of Émile is to imagine that creating a “man” is still possible at all. In Émile, Rousseau famously declares that there is only one natural passion for man: his love for himself.

64 Rousseau, Émile, 31.
65 Ibid., 100.
66 Ibid., 100.
67 Ibid., 100.
“La seule passion qui naît avec l’homme et ne le quitte jamais tant qu’il vit,” he explains, “est l’amour de soi.” (“The only passion that is born with man and never leaves him as long as he lives is his love of himself.”) From that alone, setting aside the Rousseau we know as solitary walker or the curmudgeon in lonely exile, it would make sense to understand that the ideal state would be man by himself, without attachments, self-sufficient. But Rousseau gives us a more complicated passion here and has let us reimagine the moment of our origin as one in which the first passion we come to know already had relation quietly wrapped around it. If Émile were to love himself, the object of his love would already be plural. In Émile, Rousseau creates the possibility of a singular person with fewer toxic ties, provided that his earliest ties remain forever unraveled.
Coda

In previous chapters, I have shown how behind the wish for autonomy or the effort to be alone is the problem of attachment. At the start of this dissertation, I attempted to show how the bond constitutes community but is itself a fragile substance subject to especially vexed negotiations. Even talking about it can be a problem – and not just because of the difficulties posed by the abstract notions of “relation.” (Think of Cordelia and Shylock and their respective – and grim – fates.) I have also shown how part of the problem of attachment is simply a question of placement: where can I put the bond to protect my liberty? Or, sometimes: where can I put the bond to protect the bond itself? The ambivalence about the bond extends to an ambivalence about autonomy, seen most sharply, I think, in Descartes’ efforts at theodicy; in his negative poetics lurks a kind of fugitive concession: even the most “pure” pose of reflection seems unable, and might not want, to shirk relation entirely. The request in Shakespeare to “see” the bond follows an unrelenting logic for Portia, but in succeeding chapters, concealing the bond provides substantial relief (Descartes, Rousseau) or, with greater transparency and perhaps more mystery, even a glimmer of the providential (Milton) that in no way undermines the liberty of reason in social life.

But in this project’s story of attachment, the anxieties of compromise bring with them a consistent set of concerns and fears beyond those named above. The fear of attachment often seems to come with a fear of infancy, a fear of a past marked by dependency. The attempt to rebind Cordelia would have her vow to be a child again, for instance, while later examples, less candid about the bond, construct worlds without infancy altogether. It’s likely obvious enough, of course, that autonomy would want to give utter dependency the slip, but in Descartes’ “swamped” mind of childhood or Rousseau’s state of nature, populated by heartier, more rapidly-weaned babes, we see an attempt to shake off a prehistory of inarticulate dependency as well as the shackles of kinship. And it is not just kinship that comes under fire, but also the kin-dred, for along with and alongside the negotiations around family (from Milton’s Son who escapes the conventions of heredity to Jessica’s realization that she is not a daughter to Shylock’s “manners”) is a preoccupation with limiting the powers of imitation: the evil genius who masterly remakes the false world, the face of God that escapes replication in part because it cannot even be beheld. Around the bond is an anxiety about bad mimesis. But these worries only suggest what many of the characters appear to know already: making ties is always about making fictions—telling the story of how two selves have something to do with one another requires “relating” those selves and their story. And how much simpler a story to tell is the one of autonomous creatures and their reluctant encounters than the one that would suspend the iterative prefix of re-lation and imagine relation first. Making relation come after and in no way before the self gives some measure of original autonomy, and it lets us imagine ourselves as adults from the start, or, to disobey Rousseau’s injunction, it lets us see (or at least try to see) the “man in the child” or, at the very least, to sculpt the adult to come.

1 Cordelia is, of course, Lear’s daughter, but I would be remiss if I did not note that the historical “invention” of childhood succeeds rather than precedes her avowal. See Phillipe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life, trans. Robert Baldick (New York : Random House, 1962) and Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). One might argue that if childhood did not exist, maybe it had to be invented in order to make primary dependency less horrifying.
At the beginning of this dissertation, I suggested that the story I relate here corrects a Whiggish narrative about autonomy. The primary corrective it offers to such a narrative of progress, I think, is in framing what amounts to the loss of a way of talking about the bond that recognizes the gravity between people, that understands that talking about the “individual” exclusively runs the risk of missing a large part of the story and of simplifying a rich ambivalence. It is a loss that, I think, has prevented us from seeing how large a preoccupation attachment is for the authors I follow here—as well as many of their (and our) contemporaries. It’s not that Cordelia is somehow more enlightened in naming the “bond” (after all, she lives in a world in which doing so is downright catastrophic), but the conversation she opens about the bond—a conversation that would ask what it is—is one that is rapidly reduced, simplified, and even entirely eclipsed. I want to suggest, by way of conclusion, that the eclipse of attachment I have shown here in the successive strategies to manage it also appears at the end of the period I examine here as a syntactic one. I want to speculate that in this stratagem to manage attachment we see a shift from an ethics of the preposition (or, at least, the possibility of it) to one of the verb—and a verb with a particular modality: the imperative.

My speculative grammar would look like this: in the preposition inheres what I described in the introduction as the pre-individual but also the logic of placement of attachment: a pre-position. But what the preposition does is issue a kind of relation: this “indeclinable word or particle…expressing a relation”2—consider of the odd absolute of the “bond” following Cordelia’s compound preposition3 “according to my bond”—works as prefix or expresses the relation between words. In its Greek form, prothesis, this putting-before also came to name the procedure of setting out the materials for the Eucharist. The prothesis makes the notion of Christian community possible, and it comes before the ritual that constitutes the individual as member of a community. In the language of this dissertation, this prepositional logic announces attachment, both in efforts to secure and in efforts to escape it, and it is a prepositional strategy that each major figure adopts: Cordelia’s “according to my bond” has a surfeit of prepositional logic in its compound prefix and in the relation-expressing “bond” itself. Descartes’ tactic demands a separation that puts the truth within and falsity without (the simultaneous problem of a deceptive world created by the evil genius and a justificatory universe of “all created things”—both frustratingly outside). More abstractly, Milton makes a grammar of the glimmer—“within” and “without” that solves Descartes’ problem by way of monism. And Rousseau creates his “enceinte,” which operates as a kind of cryptic “around” or, literally, as a sort of pre-position around the soul (in the injunction to “poser la barrière”). The preposition, that which expresses a relation, follows the logic Milton considered essential to grace, too, working “by the Other first.”

The success of the imperative, in contrast, continues the story of eclipsing attachment but relies on that eclipse for its success: it has a subject, but that subject need not have any ties. In turning here to Kant’s imperative, I see in the verbal mood that defines ethical life (and that is often held to be a primary philosophical and ethical achievement of modernity) less a revision of, say, Biblical commandments than a grammar designed to obscure relation, another occluded chapter in an occluded history of attachment.

I want to end this story, then, by briefly following Kant along two routes: his defense of the categorical imperative in “On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy” (1797) (“Über ein vermeintes Recht aus Menschenliebe zu lügen”) and his treatment of childhood in “An Answer


3 See definition 5, for “according to…[a]s a compound preposition” in “according, adj. and adv.,” OED Online (Oxford University Press), http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/1177.
to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” “Was ist Aufklärung?” (1784). The autonomous subject central to Kant’s thought makes him a fitting final subject for my investigation, but within Kant’s broader oeuvre, the anxieties of attachment that emerge in the other authors I’ve discussed appear in important ways that exceed the limited scope of this brief coda. I won’t belabor, then, the broader problems with attachment and intimacy we could find easily in Kant, the fear of touch that we might see in Kant’s objections to sex, the objections to “objectification” that seem in part to conceal a fear of connection or attachment, or the problem of a “relational” self one could touch that might undergird his prohibitions of masturbation and suicide. I won’t mention the “ends in themselves” that seem at once to dignify the human but that also sever attachment and hermeneutically seal the person. But what I will suggest is that Kant must make a compromise of his own as he tries to secure autonomy.

To secure the isolation of the categorical imperative’s subject, he tells quite a lie out of (his own) altruistic motives. Responding to Benjamin Constant, who located in Kant’s demand that the truth always be told a monstrous principle, claiming that “no one has a right to a truth that harms others,” Kant makes truth inhere in a solitary self – a self we have seen so many times throughout this project. The first mistake Constant makes, Kant says, is in acting like the truth is something we have a right to: “One must instead say one has a right to his own truthfulness (veracitas), that is, to the subjective truth in his person.” Where truth resides interests me here because always telling the truth, whether or not it harms another person, secures the sanctity of an isolated self: “But if you have kept strictly to the truth, then public justice can hold nothing against you, whatever the unforeseen consequences may be.” “Bist du aber Strenge bei der Wahrheit geblieben, so kann dir die öffentliche Gerechtigkeit nichts anhaben; die unvorhergesehene Folge mag sein, welche sie wolle.” This is a less frightening proposition when the “unforeseen consequences” affect only the inhabitants of, say, a stove-heated room. But in Kant’s logic, the consequences are what we might now call, in the attachment-evading language of our own idiom, “collateral damage,” and the subject is literally untouched. Obeying the imperative means freedom from the very literal possession inhering in the infinitive “an-haben.” This curious “anhaben,” from haben “to have” and the prepositional an “at, to,” gives way to the idiomatic “kann dir…nichts anhaben” or cannot touch you.

In this freedom from the touch of the law is an obedience that gets rid of the ghost of attachment. If, as Kant suggests, the motto of the Enlightenment, “dare to know!” (sapere aude), is famously guaranteed by overthrowing tutelage or nonage, then it is a kind of enlightenment that occurs without prepositions and one that, once again, trips over the vulnerability of infancy: “It is difficult for each separate individual to work his way out of the immaturity which has become almost second nature to him.” “Es ist also für jeden einzelnen Menschen schwer, sich aus der ihm beinahe zur Natur gewordenen Unmündigkeit herauszuarbeiten.” What has become almost “second nature” or just “Natur” is actually just our nature: a vulnerability, a dependency, that

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5 Ibid., 612.
characterizes all of us, utterly at the start and to varying degrees later on. The dream of the “separate individual,” these “einzeln Menschen” is precisely the dream of the mushroom men of the State of Nature or of the automaton, the imbecile, and the statue. It is a dream that depends on the hard work of denying all attachments; this freedom of thought seems to rely on also imagining a freedom from the relations that define everyone’s past. The public that Kant imagines is a society of solitary selves, adhering to an ethics of imperative and not preposition. The structuring obedience that Foucault and others have traced as they read Kant’s essay⁹ with its edict to “think whatever you want, but obey!” is a deal that trades a combination of free thought and docility for a freedom from ties.

The now-familiar attacks on the Enlightenment that this endpoint accrues have made Kant seem like a monster “harbor[ing] totalitarian potentials”¹⁰ or granting us autonomy at the price of our humanity. Fairly so. But if it might be tempting and reasonable to see Kant in the shadow of Sade,¹¹ for instance, I think we should view this moment also as the culmination of a story of relation that moves attachment progressively inward and invites us to forget our primary ties. There seem to be strangely few escapes from this heritage, few routes back to seeing our attachments, with all of the ambivalence they require. As he thought of alternatives to the dark Enlightenment of a “Kant with Sade,” Lacan proposed Antigone,¹² the figure who obeys, in a sense, but whose obedience in no way reduces to following the orders of the state. But there is still an imperative at play in the figure Lacan proposes (though I think we might also conceive of Antigone as obeying her own attachment instead, the law of burial secondary, perhaps, to the first principle of attachment). But I wonder if we might more visibly and fruitfully see the undoing of the Kantian imperative, or its Sadean consequences, by looking at Antigone’s daughter: Cordelia. In an ethics that works “according to [one’s] bond” or at least in recognition of it, the stories about ourselves, our ethical lives, our attempts at freedom, can be related as stories that carry themselves through the logic of the preposition, which is really just to say, in relation.

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⁹ Michel Foucault, Qu’est-ce que les Lumières?, ed. Olivier Denkens (Paris: Gallimard, 2001).
¹² Lacan argues that “the Law is something else, as has been known since Antigone” (68). Reading Lacan reading Kant (and Sade), Žižek argues that, “[f]or Lacan, the Kantian overcoming of the ‘dialectic’ of Law and desire…is a point of no return in the history of ethics: there is no way of undoing this revolution….No wonder Kant is the philosopher of freedom: with him the deadlock of freedom emerges. That is to say: with Kant, the reliance on any preestablished Prohibition against which we can assert our freedom is no longer viable, our freedom is asserted as autonomous, every limitation/constraint is completely self-posit[ed]” (93-94). Against this logic of Law and prohibition, I would position not the “self-posit[ing]” that that imperative seems to create but the pre-position I have described here. See Slavoj Žižek, The Parallax View (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).
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