Unfreedom, Servitude, and the Social Bond

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"L'homme fut toujours dependant; par conséquent jamais libre, dans le sens de l'illustre citoyen de Genève," declares P.L de Bauclair in his 1765 refutation of Rousseau's *On Social Contract* ("Man has always been dependent and consequently, man has never been free in the sense of the illustrious citizen of Geneva," n.p. [p. 3]).[1] Because human beings reproduce sexually and because the impulse to reproduce is an essential need, Bauclair explains, each human being necessarily depends on another. Sexual reproduction creates a society; the force of life propels human beings into society and society is unfree since it is coextensive with dependence:

"L'intérêt de la multiplication lui ayant suscité une campagne qu'il dut envisager comme une autre lui-même, ses besoins naturelles exigerent bientôt qu'il devint esclave, si cependant l'esclavage peut consister dans les égards qu'on rend aux individus de son éspèce [...] On conçoit aisément que la femme n'est pas plus maitresse de son sort: ses besoins et ses affections voluptueuses, sa faibless, ses infirmités lui firent sentir qu'elle n'était que la moitié d'un tout dont l'autre partie avantages." (Bauclair, 1765, pp. 3-4)

"The desire to multiply provoked him to acquire a companion that he must have had to consider as a second self; his natural needs soon required that he become a slave, if, that is, slavery can be said to consist in the consideration that one owes to individuals of one's species […] We can easily conceive that woman is even less mistress of her destiny: her needs and her voluptuous longings, her weakness, her infirmities caused her to feel that she was half of a whole whose other part lay outside her. She accepted the yoke with considerable pleasure since she perceived its many advantages to her."

1 All translations are my own unless specified otherwise.

"Slavery" here is nothing other than the work required to obtain and keep a sexual partner. The "slavery" that nature imposes on us, Bauclair writes, is the necessity to please and satisfy other human beings. And although such a necessity would seem to be a fundamentally social compulsion, in fact it rests on an essentializing notion of human beings as, above all bodies. Any social relations or social obligations spring immediately from basic bodily drives. Bauclair's vision is strangely egalitarian, despite its assumption of the natural inequality of men and women, because it proposes that unfreedom is a form of mutual self-binding that does not regard sex or class but instead all humans as (mere, unqualified) humans.

Of course Bauclair's opening sentence is meant to echo and overturn Jean-Jacques Rousseau's celebrated phrase "Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains." Rousseau's assertion provokes questions immediately: if man is born free, why is he in chains? How did this transformation occur? Can it be made right? Rousseau offers answers in *The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1754) and in *On Social Contract* (1762). But to pose the question is to posit a story of loss – of a movement that begins with a free, autonomous individual and ends with a miserable slave. Bauclair's response is simple: we do not need to ask for an account, or a justification, because an autonomous individual never existed: man's nature is to live in society and society means unfreedom.

Rousseau's great text and Bauclair's slightly silly one both emerge out of a profound consciousness of society as, in Keith Baker's words, "the essential frame of human existence" and the "essential domain of human practice" (Baker, 2001, p. 84). Many, although certainly not all, enlightenment accounts of society's institution posited a process whereby free individuals jointly bound themselves to a whole. The theory, although with tremendous variation, presumes a loss of individual freedom and an acceptance of constraint. The forms, limits, and practices of constraint would dictate a given society's degree of freedom or unfreedom. For if wholesale subjection might logically seem a necessary correlative of society, it was less clear why the shape and experience of that subjection should be variable. Put another way, why do some (and not others) command, and some (but not others) obey? If individuals are equally free prior to entering into society why should they be unequally unfree upon joining it?

This question was posed prior to the Enlightenment – surely Etienne de la Boétie and Montaigne come to mind – but it was posed with increasing frequency, urgency, and even with more concreteness during the Enlightenment. Many answers were offered. Of course, some argued that inequality in society was simply an extension of inequality in nature; Rousseau rejected this explanation most famously in *The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. Others argued

that social inequality was a vestige of ancient conquests. No matter which account was offered, one thing was clear: if a divine explanation was "set aside," as Rousseau put it, some other explanation was required. Moreover, historical description could purport at best to detail how social inequality and the servitude that was its corollary arose and was institutionalized; it could not lend it legitimacy.

In this essay, I would like to explore one writer's response to this impasse. In *L'Île des esclaves* (*Slave Island*, 1725) Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux, one of France's greatest comic playwrights, suggests that there is no way out. The social institutionalization of servitude lacks legitimacy, and yet, the play's plot and its denouement appear to conclude that servitude must persist, for it is synonymous with society itself. Political terms, like legitimacy, cease to make sense in Marivaux's world and in their place Marivaux's characters adopt the unreasoned language and action of affect and sacrifice. But Marivaux's yoking of unfreedom and society differs importantly from that of Bauclair. Marivaux's society, the society whose preservation trumps all other values, has no natural or bodily basis at all. It is absolutely anti-foundational. Marivaux repeatedly introduces bodies in his play in the form of hints of love or accounts of physical suffering only to reject the body as an agent, cause, or origin. Instead, human beings are above all formed by society itself.

Marivaux's relentless identification of society as cause, effect, and sole aim of human "nature" and human action allows him to concentrate on society's fundamentally unequal distribution of unfreedom and to explore some of its ramifications. Marivaux was concerned with the relation between class position and personal identity throughout his career. Many of his plays turn on cross-dressing masters and servants. But the stakes of Marivaux's canonical plays differ dramatically from those of *Slave Island*: in *The Game of Love and Chance*, for example, disguise risks but also ensures a successful, class-appropriate betrothal. *Slave Island*, however, puts at stake the problem of social cohesion and its relation to subordination. In *Slave Island*, Marivaux asks how social relations can be maintained given the fact of servitude and, conversely, how social relations can be maintained in the absence of servitude. In this one-act play, Marivaux seems to represent the fall of voluntary servitude. Given the chance afforded by the utopian, green world of the island, the servants, seemingly good students of La Boétie, declare their servitude at an end. They cease to recognize their master's dominion over them. The play then presents a difficult social problem: how to reestablish relations of mastery and servitude in the full recognition that those relations are without political or moral legitimacy or efficacy.

Servants offer a remarkably literal example of voluntary servitude: for them this was no metaphor. Slavery and servitude are resonant terms in the figural

language of politics in eighteenth-century France. Rousseau's great axiom – "man is born free and everywhere he is in chains" – is only the most famous example. But servants were not just figures or metaphors; they made up roughly one-tenth of the population of Paris and something like one-thirteenth of the population of France. Servants were both utterly familiar and uncannily unfamiliar. They were emphatically visible in public and of course ever present in the home. Yet servants were overwhelmingly strangers: nearly all were migrant workers from the countryside come alone to towns and cities in search of work; turnover was remarkably high and a source of persistent annoyance to masters. Servants often stood apart from their working class fellows geographically since they lived with their masters; sartorially, since they often wore livery or their masters' cast-off clothes; even linguistically, since they might speak a different dialect. They were also nearly universally unmarried. Nor was there necessarily much society among servants since the vast majority of them did not work in large multi-servant homes. In all these ways, servants' social bonds seem more tenuous, more modest than do those of many other groups: artisans, for example, had customers, employees, landlords, guilds, and families of their own. Contemporaries seemed obsessively interested in the one bond into which servants entered: that with masters (Maza, 1983 and Fairchild, 1984).

A wealth of writing – religious tracts, conduct books, treatises on household management, etc. – sought to explain the correct relation and reciprocal obligation of masters and servants. Much of that literature suggested a paternalistic relation. That is, the master-servant bond could be understood only by way of a figural assimilation to what was a putatively natural relation: masters were like parents; servants were like children. On this account, masters owed protection and servants owed obedience and fidelity. The metaphor of the family, of course, could be put to work to explain nearly all social structures: kings are like fathers, fathers are like kings; children are like servants; fathers are like masters, etc. In other words, all these relations could be understood as constructing and participating in a metaphorical, rather than a natural or literal system. The presence of a social term like the servant in such a system simply underscores the artificiality, the sociality of the system as a whole even as the purpose of this figural system is precisely to naturalize relations. The servant relation reveals the essential truth of all these relations: they are all figural. There is no prior literal, natural, transcendent term to serve as a stable point from which to derive the metaphor. To propose that the relation between servants and masters was paternalistic, in other words, is just to reframe rather than answer the question (Maza, 1983, pp. 7-18 and pp. 317-318; Fairchild, 1984, pp. 5-6 and pp. 137-144; Montesquieu, 1951, bk 23, chs 1-7, pp. 682-87; and Rousseau, 1997, bk 1, ch 2).

If some commentators assimilated servants to the model of the family, others understood them in relation to slavery (Sarti, 2005). On the one hand, the racial nature of contemporary slavery helped clarify the difference between white domestic servants in France and enslaved African servants in the colonies. On the other hand, slavery was still largely theorized in relation to the classical world – where slaves and masters might *not* be distinguished from one another by what the French revolutionaries called the "aristocracy of color" – rather than in relation to contemporary practices. That servants were not slaves seemed clear; yet that both groups were characterized by their state of personal servitude sometimes made this distinction less than absolute (Linguet, 1767). Nor did consent draw a bright line between slavery and servanthood in early modern France. Slavery in the classical world was often seen as having an origin in consent: people were enslaved when, after a military defeat, they consented to exchange their liberty for their life. Moreover, servants themselves understood that their own consent was not necessarily freely given; necessity compelled many to become servants. Once engaged as household servants, their freedom to leave their masters was curtailed by law and they were not legally protected from physical punishment (Fairchilds, 1984, pp. 123-124).

The anonymous poet who gives voice to a male servant in "L'État de servitude, ou la misère des domestiques," ("The State of Servitude, or the Servant's Misery," 1711), and who may have been a servant himself, at once assumes and disowns responsibility for having become a servant:

"[…] je suis un grand benais [sic],
Je suis un grand faquin de m'être mis laquais:
Quand un sort malheureux la cruelle inconstance
Aurait versé sur moi sa maligne influence,
Quand le Ciel justement irrité contre moi,
M'aurait laissé sans bien, sans crédit, sans emploi,
Fallait-il pour cela par un esprit de rage,
M'empêtrer dans les fers d'un si rude esclavage,
Et sur ce vil état fondant tout mon appui,
M'asservir lâchement au caprice d'autrui?" (Anon., 1711, n.p. [p.2]).

"[…] I am a great fool,
I am a great idiot to have made myself a lackey:
When a miserable fate and cruel deception
Enveloped me with its evil influence,
When heaven, justly angry with me,

Left me without property, help, or occupation,
Was it necessary, nonetheless, that in a rage,
I bound myself with the irons of such a brutal slavery,
And relying for all my support on this vile condition,
I have, like a coward, subjected myself to the caprices of another?"

The servant partly blames forces beyond his control ("un sort malheureux," "le ciel") for the desperate straits in which he found himself, but he attributes his "vil état" to his own agency: "de m'être mis lacquais"; "m'empêtrer dans les fers." The servant, then, allows that he serves a master by his own consent, and yet he describes his service as "rude esclavage." To be subject to the "caprice d'autrui," the servant suggests, is to inhabit a servitude no different from that of slavery even if one has submitted oneself to this subjection. The condition of being bound by the will of another, regardless of the circumstances of its institution, is sufficient to unsettle the distinction between servant and slave. And, for this poet, such a fate merits the language of tragedy. While this speaker is a great fool and of lowly position hence suitable for comedy, he is also sufficiently dignified to have earned the wrath of heavens – a position usually reserved for tragic, not comic figures. The tragic language, seemingly misplaced in the mouth of a lackey, might make the domestic servant more ridiculous – but it might also ennoble the suffering of servitude. If tragic heroism seems to depend on possessing a self-directed will, this poet's appropriation of tragic language to describe the misfortunes of heteronomy would seem to create a new kind of tragic subject (Arnold, 2007).

Servants resemble slaves not only because of the type of labor they perform but, more significantly, because they must obey the "caprice d'autrui," the will of another. Certainly this was a widely held conception of servants. When politicians in the early days of the French Revolution excluded servants from the franchise and from eligibility to hold office, they argued that slaves could not exercise political rights because they lacked a "volonté propre," that is, their own independent will. Servants act as mere means to accomplish the ends of the master: they may act as an extension or reflection of the master, or, on the contrary, as the antithesis of the master performing work the master would never perform. In all these cases, the servant's actions are willed and dictated by another. The servant is a thoroughly heteronomous subject. In a world that increasingly identifies autonomy as the chief quality and qualification of the modern subject, servants, as Sarah Maza points out, seem to be pre-modern (Maza, 1983, p. 4).

Marivaux's *Slave Island* does not focus on the political category of the will; Marivaux seems less interested in the problem of self-direction than in the

psychological and material conditions of servitude. Thus the play underscores the ways in which the master-servant relation denies the servant's personhood and it insists on servitude's physical suffering. Marivaux's reflection on unfreedom in *Slave Island* is fundamentally social, not political. The play explores the ways in which lived experiences of freedom and unfreedom shape society and humanity itself. For Marivaux, modernity does not signal humanity's throwing off its shackles, but rather new organizations and practices, new consciousnesses, and new meanings of heteronomy. In this sense, servants offer new figures of humanity and modernity.

SERVITUDE AND COMEDY

Servants were not only central to Old Regime France's social order; they were central to its theatrical order. In so many of the period's plays, servants construct, unsettle, and dismantle social bonds as they ferry messages, reveal secrets, articulate truths, and conspire with and against their masters. There can be no tragedy without the stage presence of inferior confidants to hear sentiments voiced or, like Phèdre's nurse Oenone, to carry out actions beneath the dignity of their masters. There can be no comedy without the bumbling but truth revealing queries, interjections or literalisms of the servant class. While the number of servant characters who enable dramatic plots is legion, the degree to which playwrights were interested in servants is variable. And while some servants are major characters, for example, Dom Juan's servant Sganarelle, it remains nearly always the case that servants act as agents of their masters rather than agents of their own will. The abundant presence of servant characters on the French stage is not only functional in nature; instead I want to suggest that in this most social of art forms, the representation of servants also permitted authorial reflection on the practical and theoretical issues the social presence of servants and the practices of service and servitude posed.

In the first moments of *Slave Island*, a one-act play that launched Marivaux's trilogy of island plays about the constitution of human society, a male servant Arlequin, and his master Iphicrate look about themselves in the aftermath of a shipwreck that has cast them up on the shores of a remote island. Soon after, they meet a female servant Cléanthis and her mistress Euphrosine. Soon after the curtain rises, then, the audience of this comedy sees before it fissionable material that must, one would think, produce one of two dramatic resolutions: we might be on our way to radical couplings (the servant Arlequin and the mistress Euphrosine; the master Iphicrate and the servant Cléanthis) or to conventional

couplings (the servants Arlequin and Cléanthis and the aristocratic masters Iphicrate and Euphronise). But *Slave Island* does not end with marriages or romantic unions of any sort, although perhaps we could call the play a comedy of remarriage that ends with servants and masters reunited after an estrangement. My point, for now, is that we expect these four characters to knit themselves together romantically, and they do not: at the end of the play, the only relationships that bind these characters are relations of servitude. Among these four protagonists, society is nothing other than the bond between masters and servants. And despite the term "esclave" and despite the background of a fictional Athens and the green world of the island, it is clear the play is set in contemporary society – the major preoccupation with gallantry, with vanity, and with superficiality are all hallmarks of critiques of French society throughout the eighteenth century – it is likewise evident that the characters Arlequin and Cléanthis are meant to be French servants, not classical slaves.

If Marivaux thwarts our generic expectations about comedy, our assumption that the two unattached men and two unattached women we meet at the outset of the play must pair off into two romantic couples, he also thwarts our generic and philosophical expectations about utopian texts and the discourse of social formation. When we discover that the island our protagonists find themselves on is inhabited and governed by slaves (or, rather, ex-slaves who are now free), we know we are in the speculative, philosophical realm – one so important to Marivaux's moment – of the social blank slate. What sort of society would ex-slaves create? The answer, it seems, is a utopia that seeks to eradicate, rather than reproduce in a different form, the relations of servitude under which the slaves once suffered. Trivelin, who is the representative of the island's political order and the only inhabitant of the island we ever see, explains to the new arrivals that the ex-slaves have constituted themselves as a Republic of equal citizens: fate may have given them the opportunity to be free, but their own actions and choices have maintained them in freedom. The citizens of the island even have an unusual scheme to spread freedom: they enslave any masters whom shipwreck brings to their shores, but the period of enslavement is limited to three years and its aim is therapeutic rather than exploitive. The ex-slaves temporarily enslave masters only to humanize them:

"Nous ne vengeons plus de vous, nous vous corrigeons; ce n'est plus votre vie que nous poursuivons, c'est la barbarie de vos coeurs que nous voulons détruire; nous vous jetons dans l'esclavage pour vous rendre sensibles aux maux qu'on y éprouve. […] Votre esclavage, ou plutôt votre cours d'humanité, dure trois ans, au bout desquels on vous renvoie. […] Vous voilà en mauvais état, nous entreprenons de vous guérir; vous êtes moins nos

esclaves que nos malades, et nous ne prenons que trois ans pour vous rendre sains, c'est-à-dire humains, raisonnables et généreux pour toute la vie."

"We no longer take revenge on you; we correct you. We no longer pursue your life; we seek to destroy the barbarity of your hearts. We enslave you in order to make you more sensitive to the sufferings felt by those in servitude. […] Your enslavement, or rather your course in humanization, lasts three years at the end of which we send you back . […] You are in a bad condition, we undertake to cure you; you are less our slaves than our patients and we only require three years to make you healthy, that is to say, human, reasonable, and generous for the rest of your lives." (Marivaux, 1955, p. 430)

Much could no doubt be said about how the two great secular discourses of improvement, education and medicine, have replaced Christian morality and conversion here. Indeed, the play retains the Christian theme of suffering only to turn it to this secular account. Marivaux, however, was apparently dubious about the fruits of sentimental education: at the end of the play, Iphicrate and Euphrosine have not been educated out of their desire to have others serve them; the play does not dwell at all on the "hearts" of the masters, it does not stage a process of "sensibilization." For despite the importance of the language of feeling in this play, the characters' interior affective states do not really matter and are not explored onstage. Ironically, Arlequin and Cléanthis are the ones who become good, sentimental subjects. They take pity on Iphicrate's and Euphrosine's "suffering," which is identical to their loss of status – though Marivaux, in yet another case of withholding, never shows us the masters serving the ex-slaves – and, rather than stay on the island, they sail back to civilization willingly with their masters, sustained by the modest hope – and it is only a hope – that their servitude will now be gentler.

To understand the play's disappointments – no romantic unions, not even a glimpse of the Republic of ex-slaves, no transformation in which Iphicrate and Euphrosine learn to abhor subjecting Arlequin and Cléanthis to their wills – we have to take stock of Marivaux's radical privileging of servitude as the foundation of society and of his equally radical account of the bond between master and servant as the essence of the social bond. Marivaux's entire oeuvre reveals a fascination with servants. In Marivaux's most celebrated plays, masters and mistresses often temporarily exchange clothing and places with their servants as they pursue love and marriage; this theatrical probing of the fragility of class identity is replaced in the island plays by a more transparent meditation on the relation between servants and social order, on the place of servitude in the foundation of society. We can see this shift in the very populations of the island

plays. In Marivaux's comedies with conventional settings, the masters always outnumber the servants; the servants, after all, merely further the plots of their masters and so that servants' other relationships – with fathers, mothers, and siblings – are not represented. Those potential social bonds have been displaced by domestic service. In *Slave Island*, by contrast, humanity always appears in two, equally represented forms: servant and master. Thus, *Slave Island* stages a primal scene: with Trivelin as an onstage spectator, Iphicrate, Euphrosine, Arelquin and Cléanthis play out the formation of social order. How, Marivaux asks, can humanity – in the sense of a bond shared by all human beings – itself be preserved? How, in other words, can the dispersion of humanity into solitary, indifferent atoms be prevented?

Dispersion, rather than physical violence (Hobbes' state of war), is the unspeakable threat. When Arlequin learns that he has been washed up on the island of slaves, he announces that he is going to leave his master, Iphicrate. "Chacun à ses affaires," he announces, "que je ne vous dérange pas," ("to each his own, don't let me bother you," Marivaux, 1955, p. 427). When Arlequin takes his leave – "Adieu, mon ami," ("farewell, my friend") – Iphicrate pursues him sword in hand (ibid., p. 428). As we shall see, it is telling both that Iphicrate assumes that only physical violence could enforce servitude and that the drawing of his sword has no effect. Arlequin does not offer any physical threat to his (perhaps now former) master; he simply refuses to recognize him as his master and, in the absence of some external structure to enforce servitude, it seems that simply refusing to recognize a social bond is sufficient to efface it.

Iphicrate's desperate need for Arlequin's help seems to anticipate a Rousseauian analysis: being a master has made Iphicrate the needy dependent of his servant. Moreover, that it also goes without saying that Arlequin does not share Iphicrate's desire to leave the island – why give up being a citizen in a Republic to return to servitude in a hierarchical society? – suggests that the asymmetry between the master's interest and the servant's interest is (or should be) intolerable and unsustainable. Since it is clearly in the servants' interest to remain on the island and the master's interest to leave the island, resolution can be found only by superseding the category of interest. As we shall see, the rhetoric of sentiment, of the heart, of "sensibilité" is offered as just such a supercession.

Neither the sword nor interest can produce social formations among the four protagonists, but feeling eventually does. This feeling is purportedly created by the former servant's witnessing of the former masters' suffering. But strangely, the only suffering the masters are forced to undergo on stage has nothing to do with the physical burdens of servitude. Rather, Iphicrate and Euphrosine suffer a dissolution of identity – an identity which consists solely in their status as master

and which therefore, ironically, is once again utterly dependent on Arlequin and Cléanthis. The masters suffer when they are forced to listen as their former slaves describe their characters and habits.

Trivelin: il est nécessaire que vous m'en donniez un portrait, qui se doit faire devant la personne qu'on peint, afin qu'elle se connaisse, qu'elle rougisse de ses ridicules, si elle en a, et qu'elle se corrige.
[…]
Cléanthis: Vaine, minaudière et coquette, si cela la regarde? Eh! Voilà ma chère maitresse; cela lui ressemble comme son visage.
[…]
Euphrosine: Je n'y saurais tenir. (Marivaux, 1955, p. 433)

Trivelin: you must depict her character for me and you must rehearse this description in the presence of the person you depict so that she can come to know herself, to blush for her foolishness if she is foolish, and to correct herself.
[…]
Cléanthis: Vain, affected, a flirt, does that describe her? That's my dear mistress, that is her to a tee.
[…]
Euphrosine: I cannot withstand this.

These portrait scenes – although quite mild in their criticism – are portrayed as indescribably painful for the masters. Arlequin and Cléanthis describe their masters' vanity, silliness, and pettiness. The pain these scenes produce is that of the destruction of the masters' narcissistic satisfaction. Under the regime of servitude, Arlequin and Cléanthis serve as flattering mirrors for their masters. By offering undistorted images in the portrait scenes, the servants not only dissolve their masters' sense of self, they annul the bond between them precisely because that bond had been predicated on the servants' distortingly reflective function. The portrait scenes also underscore the tight relation between servants and comedy itself since dramatic theorists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries continued to argue that comedy was a social mirror: comedy showed audiences their faults so that they might correct them.

The relation between masters and servants supports the masters' social identities and in so doing sustains their deepest subjectivities. But this same relation works to deprive the servants of any inter-subjective recognition at all. Indeed, the masters deny the servants what we might well think of as the most fundamental attribute of personhood: a name. When Trivelin asks Arlequin "Comment

vous appellez-vous?" ("what is your name?") Arlequin makes clear that names are the property of masters alone:

Arlequin: Est-ce mon nom que vous demandez?
Trivelin: Oui, vraiment.
Arlequin: Je n'en ai point, mon camarade.
Trivelin: Quoi donc, vous n'en avez pas!
Arlequin: Non, mon camarade, je n'en ai que des sobriquets qu'il m'a donné; il m'appelle quelquefois Arlequin, quelquefois Hé. (Marivaux, 1955, p. 428)

Arlequin: Are you asking my name?
Trivelin: Yes, of course.
Arlequin: I don't have one my friend.
Trivelin: What do you mean you don't have one!
Arlequin: No my friend. I only have nicknames that he has given me. Sometimes he calls me Harlequin, sometimes he calls me Hey You.[2]

The master, on the other hand, has a proper name just as he has property in himself: speaking of Iphicrate, Arlequin explains "il s'appelle par un nom lui," ("him, he's got a name"). Despite the depersonalizing practices of servitude, Arlequin and Cléanthis are represented as full, morally autonomous beings: they know their own minds; they observe social relations accurately; they express their own judgments clearly and forcefully; they make decisions. The masters, on the contrary, are seemingly ineffective and often speechless.

While Marivaux shows masters' selves predicated entirely upon their mastery over others, he represents slaves/servants' selves as grounded in their humanity, a humanity understood as a kind of affective self-presence and thus outside and beyond the seemingly closed system of servitude and hence autonomous. But the autonomy of this humanity is also resolutely social since it requires a "coeur bon" – that is, a sympathy with the sufferings of others in order to come into being.

What can establish a lasting social bond? Marivaux immediately dismisses the notion of a legitimate, or for that matter efficacious, social bond based on force. Marivaux was not making his point subtly here: while Arlequin and Trivelin

2 Marivaux might have found inspiration for this exchange on names from the practice, common at the time, of servant's employers to rename them and refer to them by the name of the province from which they came. Both Maza (1983) and Fairchilds (1984) discuss this practice.

are traditional names of *zani* from the *commedia dell'arte* repertory, the male master Iphicrate is named for an Athenian general – ironically, a man of humble birth – and his name literally means "rule by force." Arlequin reminds Iphicrate repeatedly that his characteristic mode of relation to him has been physical violence:

Iphicrate: Mais je ne te comprends point, mon cher Arlequin.
Arlequin: Mon cher patron, vos compliments me charment; vous avez coutume de m'en faire à coups de gourdin […] et le gourdin est dans la chaloupe.
Iphicrate: Eh! Ne sais-tu pas que je t'aime?
Arlequin: Oui; mais les marques de votre amitié tombent toujours sur mes épaules, et cela est mal placé. (Marivaux, 1955, p. 427)

Iphicrate: But I do not understand your point my dear Arlequin.
Arlequin: My dear boss, your compliments are charming; your custom usually is to make them with blows from a club […] and the club is in the boat.
Iphicrate: But don't you know that I love you?
Arlequin: Yes; but the marks of your affection always fall on my shoulders and that is a bad place for them.

The reversal of position demonstrates the bankruptcy of the argument that might can make right: Iphicrate recognizes no legitimate authority in Arlequin once their roles are switched. Force may create servitude but it cannot create right or obligation and it is therefore prone to produce not only suffering but instability: "Tu me traitais comme un pauvre animal," ("you treated me like a poor animal,") muses Arlequin, taking up arguments that Montesquieu had worked through just a few years earlier in his tales of the Troglodytes, "et tu disais que cela était juste, parce que tu étais le plus fort. Eh bien! Iphicrate, tu vas trouver ici plus fort que toi," ("and you used to say that that was just because you were the strongest. Oh well, Iphicrate, you will find something stronger than you here", Marivaux, 1955, p. 427).

But Arlequin's quick political-philosophical awakening is more profound; he recognizes that his own participation, indeed his own consent, endowed Iphicrate with the power of mastery: "Doucement," he warns the threatening Iphicrate, "tes forces sont bien diminuées, car je n'obéis plus," ("be careful, your forces are greatly diminished because I no longer obey you," Marivaux, 1955, p. 428). Arlequin explains, in other words, that he had delegated his own power and agency to his master and that Arlequin's power was the source of his master's power over him. Arlequin's consent to his servitude constituted the bond

between them, and his refusal to consent to his own disempowerment dissolves that bond.

If social relations maintained by coercion are neither a legitimate nor a stable foundation for a social order, what might produce more felicitous, more efficacious social cohesion? The answer Marivaux seems to entertain is the force of love. A new society which has overcome the obstacles of social hierarchy that separated its members and is newly bound by love, would seem to fulfill perfectly the generic requirements of comedy. Marivaux tantalizes us with the possibility that the four castaways might pair off into cross-class couples: the servants cook up a plot to order Euphrosine to marry Arlequin and Iphicrate to marry Cléanthis, but Marivaux then stages the unspeakable impossibility of such a resolution. Nor does Marivaux develop the more conventional prospect of ending his play with the marriage of Iphicrate and Euprosine and the marriage of the servants Arlequin and Cléanthis. Such a resolution would posit a sexual or romantic satisfaction as a substitute for a political one. Such a solution would elevate the transcendent value of love in and for itself above worldly values of rank or power; such a revaluation too would seem to provide a suitable comic reshaping of the play's social world. But Marivaux offers none of that. The play's structure keeps reminding us of the possibility that the society of masters and slaves could be united by ties of love, desire, and even kinship, but Marivaux relentlessly presents only one social relation, only one social bond – the bond between master and servant, and makes the possibility of society depend upon it. Marivaux's exclusive representation of the master servant bond as the sole social bond and the foundation of society itself begs the question of how, exactly, society is to reproduce itself. The exclusion of reproductive sex, indeed all sex, in this comedy, underscores the purely social, rather than natural, account of human relations.

To achieve a resolution the play must re-establish and re-affirm a bond among subjects who have no bond. Marivaux rejects something like a natural basis for subjection: nothing that happens on the island affirms that masters are naturally superior to their servants. He rejects another possible natural bond when he rejects sexual desire as the basis for a social bond. The play goes out of its way to negate any basis for affection between master and servant. And yet the resolution to the crisis is nothing other than an explosion of sentiment: "Que vois-je? vous pleurez mes enfants; vous vous embrassez," ("what do I see? You are crying my children, you embrace each other," Marivaux, 1955, p. 451), Trivelin asks rhetorically as both servants are on their knees before their masters, kissing their hands, and they all embrace as the final scene begins.

The play makes this sentimental outpouring and resolution dependent on Arlequin's unearned, unmerited and therefore absolutely freely given compassion. Upon seeing Euphrosine's unhappiness, Arlequin is moved and when his master Iphicrate reproaches Arlequin for his lack of affection and fidelity, despite Arlequin's clear-sighted understanding that his master has never shown him anything but violence and scorn – "tu disais bien que tu m'aimais, toi, quand tu me faisais batter," ("sure, you used to say you loved me when you were having me beaten," Marivaux, 1955, p. 447) – he is moved to accept once again his subaltern position, to pardon his master's past faults, and to leave the island of the slaves and to return with his master to resume their former life together. When Cléanthis sees this reconciliation between Arlequin and his master, she follows the example, despite her own mistress's lack of repentance for her cruelty. The masters in turn appear to be moved by their servants outpouring of sentiment: Iphicrate exclaims "Mon cher Arlequin, fasse le ciel, après ce que je viens d'entendre, que j'aie la joie de te montrer un jour les sentiments que tu me donnes pour toi!" ("My dear Arlequin, after what I have just heard, may heaven someday allow me the joy of showing you the feelings you have inspired in me!" Marivaux, 1955, p. 448). But Iphicrate's "someday" seems a meager guarantee of change. In the final scene Trivelin congratulates the servants on their successful conclusion to the social experiment and everyone on their good feelings and he counsels the masters to learn to be less cruel.

For those seeking a representation of social change, this conclusion is obviously a disappointment. It is also less than compelling dramatically since it is at odds with all that comes before. We can, of course, read the sentimental conclusion as a kind of ideology, a way to mask real social conflict. But what is striking is precisely the anti-foundational nature of that sentiment. No change, no revelation, no act inspires the servants to love their masters. For Marivaux, the sentiment that re-forms the bonds between master and servant is nothing other than the recognition that nothing links them and the recognition that such a nothingness is impossible. Iphicrate argues repeatedly to Arlequin that they are bound by affection, friendship, and love. He invokes too the ethical weight of duty that, he believes, should tie Arlequin to him. But Arlequin refutes all these claims with ease and in each case points out the pure violence of the relation between them. Yet, precisely because Arlequin perceives the lack of any ethical or affective basis for the social bond between master and servant, he is never convinced by his master's claims, he alone freely chooses to resume that relation:

"Tu me remontres bien mon devoir ici pour toi; mais tu n'as jamais su le tien pour moi. […] Tu veux que je partage ton affliction, et jamais tu n'as partagé la mienne. Eh bien!

Va, je dois avoir le cœur meilleur que toi; car il y a plus longtemps que je souffre, et que je sais ce que c'est que de la peine. Tu m'as battu par amitié: puisque tu le dis, je te le pardonne. […] Je parlerai en ta faveur à mes camarades, je les prierai de te renvoyer, et s'ils ne le veulent pas, je te garderai comme mon ami; car je ne te ressemble pas, moi; je n'aurai point le courage d'être heureux à tes dépens."

"You remind me of my duty to you here but you never knew your duty to me. […] You want me to share your affliction and you never shared mine. Oh well, so be it! I must have a better heart than you do because I have suffered for a long time and because I know what pain is. You beat me out of friendship, since you say so, I forgive you for it. […] I will talk to my comrades on your behalf, I will beg them to send you back and if they will not I will keep you as my friend because I do not resemble you. I will not have the courage to be happy at your expense." (Marivaux, p. 448)

Arlequin refutes the very idea of a shared human commonality, "je ne te ressemble pas," and makes this lack the basis and the engine for a social bond, "je te garderai comme mon ami *car* je ne te ressemble pas," ("I will keep you as a friend because I do not ressemble you.") Unlike Iphicrate, Arlequin cannot establish his "happiness," that is his freedom, at the expense of the freedom of another--by expropriating the will of another. But the initial plan, to send Iphicrate back or to remain on the island with him bound by friendship, is immediately and without elaboration or explanation altered. Indeed, in the very next exchange with Iphicrate, Arlequin abandons the familiar "tu," resumes the hierarchical "vous" along with his slave costume, and asks Trivelin for a boat so he and Cléanthis can go back to Athens with their masters. In other words, once the lack of any real social bond is recognized as fact and once that fact is rejected not as untrue but as unsustainable, the only way the social bond can be resumed is in the form of subordination and servitude. The emotional force that explodes onstage is the force of the simultaneous admission and refusal of the impossibility of a social bond based on subordination. The libidinal source of that emotional energy is the force of terror and necessity.

Arlequin apprehends the absence of any basis for a bond; by willingly accepting his subjection, he manages to stave off the terror of the absence of social bonds. The ability to see for humanity, as it were, while the other characters perceive and act as atomized individuals, makes Arlequin the embodiment of the human and the founder of society. Arlequin renounces his own pursuit of happiness. He willingly accepts the expropriation of his will in favor of society – "je n'aurai point le courage d'être heureux à tes dépens," ("I will not have the courage to be happy at your expense.") He accepts, in other words, that a constitutive

heteronomy is the norm of a social order that sees itself precisely as based on the will of its members – here invoked by that most political of eighteenth-century words: "happiness." In a sense, Arlequin reveals by literalizing the fundamental and inescapable truth not only that to live with others is to be unfree, but that society survives only because of the consensual assumption of an unequal unfreedom.

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