

Unqueer Rousseau

CONSTANCE FUREY

As he mentioned yesterday, Jimmy Casas Klausen is currently in the Department of Political Science at University of Wisconsin, Madison, and, come this fall, will be joining the faculty of the Pontifical Catholic University in Rio de Janeiro. He has an undergraduate degree in Anthropology (from the University of Chicago) and a graduate degree from Berkeley in Political Science. A recent recipient of an American Council of Learned Societies fellowship and also a past Race, Ethnicity, and Indigeneity Fellow at the Institute for Research in the Humanities, he is the author of a book that just appeared, entitled *Fugitive Rousseau: Slavery, Primitivism, and Political Freedom* (Fordham University Press, 2014) as well as a co-edited volume (with James Martel) *How Not to Be Governed: Readings and Interpretations from a Critical Anarchist Left* (Lexington Books, 2011). Those titles as well as the themes in the paper we read for today encompass, as well as I ever could, the wide range of his interests and writings.

I think we might begin with another nod of appreciation to the organizing committee and Rebecca in particular for the sequence of papers, for this one and the readings that came with it pivot our discussion around some key points already raised but not yet fully explored. If we think, for example, to the last session yesterday and Mary's resistance to hospitality's warm embrace and Heather's question about the distinctions between hospitality and charity, for example, this paper invites us to ponder just these questions further for it trains attention on the link between hospitality and hostility. "*Sacred* hospitality," Rousseau calls it, the "most sacred of all rights." But what Rousseau seems to be doing—as Jimmy said to me yesterday in a conversation during break—is smuggling hostility in under cover of hospitality. This was in response to a question I asked him about why he thought Rousseau declares himself so proud of *The Levite of Ephraim*, the strange four cantos, this "peculiar minor work" (as Jimmy calls it at the outset of his paper). "The sole praise I desire," Rousseau writes in the first Draft Preface, the sole praise "that I accord myself without shame because it is due to me," the only words of praise he wishes for are these he wrote for himself: "In the cruelest moments of his life, he wrote *The Levite of Ephraim*" (138). What is it to declare a singular pride in retelling a tale of unspeakable cruelty? And what is it for us to be offered not one, not two, but three versions of this tale? Are these hospitable texts? There is Rousseau's, of course, but also his source text, Judges 19-21 (and indirectly Genesis 19), and then also Jimmy's analysis. Hostility or hospitality? Clearly both. Yesterday Mary offered three apples; here we have instead a drenching rain of them. Not quite the storm of fire and hail in the Exodus plagues, but still an onslaught.

What might we take as our points of orientation? From a paper written by a professor of political science we might think "politics." But there's no politics in the sense we might traditionally associate with the nation-state or scenes of diplomacy, such as in Evan's paper. So that's one thing I think we might think more about. In fact, the story is set—the author of Judges tells us at the beginning and then again at the end of his narrative—at a time when there was "no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21.25; cf. 19.1). Rousseau excludes politics in his own way, or substitutes sentimentality for politics, when he calls on his readers to identify with Ben-

jamin, sad child of grief and progenitor of an “impious race,” asks his readers to train their gaze on the act of infamy, the source of civil wars, while declaring that it happened in a time when “no one reigned over the people of the Lord” and the “simplicity of its morals rendered superfluous the empire of laws.”

The legacy of empire is one of the focal points of Jimmy’s work, but here we have Rousseau revealing the origins of civil war in a context that he approvingly notes was devoid of both kings and seemingly empire (or, at least, the empire of laws). In the biblical context, Rousseau said, they did not have the material markers of progress that his contemporaries could claim, but they had the resources of “innermost emotions” and they could claim this at least: “hospitality was not for sale, and they did not then traffic in the virtues” (143). So here are the points of orientation Rousseau himself offers: emotions; hospitality that has not yet been commodified; and the infamy from which we “should not avert our gaze.”

Jimmy offers one more, based on his analysis of Rousseau’s “lurid representation” of that which he “demonstratively rejects as morally repugnant” (in *The Levite*, but also in his *Confessions*). In this lurid tale, hospitality is hostility is social relations is sexual relations—and not just any sexuality, Jimmy argues, but first and foremost homosexual intimacy. This is the unqueerness of Rousseau and of his source story in Judges both: that what is revealed in these tales of violence exposes that “sexuality is a central effect” of hospitality but does so without subverting or queering these relations.

Rousseau is unqueer, then, in Jimmy’s telling (rather than just conventional), because although he explicitly endorses complementarity and “masculine respect for women and the expectation of feminine virtue,” he in fact reveals that complementarity and expressions of respect and love for women are underwritten by the specter of homosexuality. If in this story—a story that confirms Derrida’s claim about the link between hospitality and hostility—this conjoining is transacted through the exchange and rape of women and women are proxies for male homosexual intimacy... The exchange of women is not, then, just intrinsic to patriarchy and social organization (per Lévi-Strauss and Gayle Rubin) but to hospitality. This means that hospitality and patriarchy are mutually constitutive and not just masculine but masculinity squared, with male-male intimacy as the root—the root of one, ensuring its continual replication.

So as we rethink these texts together with Jimmy’s point about patriarchy and homosexual intimacy in mind, I’d suggest we might revisit the women, albeit indirectly, by revisiting and comparing scenes of sacrifice. Among other things, focusing on sacrifice might be a way to consider Jimmy’s concluding proposal for the radical openness of a queer hospitality and hostility but also a way to consider the eighteenth-century specificity of Rousseau’s version, given what I would call his sentimentalization of sacrifice (moving into what Scott calls the affective register)—and the possibility that one dimension, at least, of hospitality in the eighteenth century involves the domestication of sacrifice.

To take this sequentially, there are the biblical scenes of sacrifice: tears, prayers, and burnt offerings. There is the sentimentalization of sacrifice in *The Levite*. And then there is the radicalization, ultimately, of sacrifice that Jimmy proposes at the end, with his suggestion that “no class of persons could categorically bar themselves from serving as objects to these hospitality and hostility relations—as compensatory offerings”. What does sacrifice have to do with hospitality? Well, that’s one fruitful question this paper invites

us to consider. And to take my cue more specifically from Rousseau, what about not just sentiment but more specifically love—for the whole story, as he tells it, is “driven by love,” the Levite’s love, a father’s love, Axa’s self-sacrificial love—what does love have to do with sacrifice? That is one place where Jimmy and Rousseau seem to converge in ways that aren’t necessarily explicit, insofar as Rousseau links consent to love and Jimmy seems to follow his lead (if only by leaving open the question of what might motivate this willingness to serve as a compensatory offering). Recalling the link between charity and *caritas*, one of the three theological virtues, this invites us to revisit the blurring of charity and hospitality.

Note for example the scenes of sacrifice in Judges 20.26. The children of Israel wept and sat before the Lord and fasted and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and then again 21.4, when they had no women for the Benjamites, again they came into the house of the Lord and wept and lifted their voices and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. How different is this from the old man’s willingness to open his home to unknown travelers who would otherwise have to sleep outside? Fundamentally different, it seems. And how different than offering your concubine, in order to save your host the shame of allowing men to violate his male guest? Again, quite different. Shelter and food to a stranger rather than an offering to a God. And a sacrifice to save oneself and the honor of one’s host rather than evidence of piety to a sacred being. But this is why the invocation of sentiment and love in Rousseau’s version is so important, because it differentiates two things that it also reveals as similar. For Rousseau, unlike Kant or Diderot, hospitality is about emotions more than obligation. Here, in a story that begins with pastoral scenes of new love’s bliss and, shockingly, a blunt declaration that perfect love is boring, we find in the subsequent retelling that compulsion, when couched in sentiment, is reconfigured as consent.

As a final point, I want to suggest there’s something quite traditional about the queer vision with which Jimmy ends. Notably, queerness in this paper is true equality: “However, if, as the voice of ‘Levite’ desires, happiness turns on true equality rather than asymmetric moral complementarity between the sexes, then not only must women be able to be active enemies (to men and women), but men must voluntarily be hosts in the Eucharistic sense—willing to sacrifice themselves.” Intriguingly, then, queerness is figured in terms of equality and consensual sacrifice—conventional virtues in the emerging nationalist discourse of the eighteenth century.