

## Crusoe's dog(s): Woolf and Derrida (between beast and sovereign)

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1. I dedicate this paper — and the larger work that whelpt it — to the memory of Professor Paul Edwards, the great scholar of Slave Narrative, of Icelandic Saga, and of Romanticism, who used to set his first year students the following essay:

EITHER, A: Discuss Milton's use of the epic simile in Books 1 and 2 of *Paradise Lost*

OR, B: Brave dog!

2. The figurative play between human and canine subjectivities informs my work in progress, *Virginia Woolf and the Signifying Dog*, where I consider Derrida's feline meditations in *The Animal That Therefore I Am [Follow]* (2008) alongside both the Manx cat and signifying Johnsonian dog of Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. I read his discussion, in *The Beast and the Sovereign: 1* (2010), of animal allegory and "pas de loup" (the step of the wolf and the absence of the wolf) in the presence of Woolf's animal allegories. I try to follow Derrida by following Woolf's steps in thinking and figuring modern subjectivities that move between (canine) animality and the human. I enlist in the chase the assistance of Henry Louis Gates, Donna Haraway, Emmanuel Levinas, Giorgio Agamben, and others.
3. What kind of subjectivities are inscribed or produced by Woolf's chimerical canines? And what happens to the politics of gender? Will that governing metaphor of hierarchized binary opposition (gender) disappear too when we find, as Agamben contemplates, "a way in which living beings can sit at the messianic banquet of the righteous without taking on a historical task and without setting the anthropological machine into action"?<sup>1</sup> The "ironic apparatus" of the "anthropological machine" installs a shifting caesura in the narrative of the historical "passage from animal to man" where or when an animal-not-yet-human births a human-animal,

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1 G. Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, 92.

and where the acquisition of language is a key indicator of that passage from animality to humanity.<sup>2</sup> In patriarchy, we might add, the “passage from animal to man” where or when an animal-not-yet-human births a human-animal, occurs every time a mother whelps a son!

4. And the verb “whelp” serves my dogged interests here precisely because of its canine provenance. As the *OED* shows *whelp* is both a noun and a verb, applicable to “the young of various animals” and humans, but distinctively canine in pedigree. As a noun it is primarily “the young of the dog”, and to be “with whelp” or “in whelp” is used “(of a bitch) pregnant, in pup”. But it also applies in shading jocular and derogatory tones to “the offspring of a noxious creature or being” and to an “ill-conditioned or low fellow” and a “saucy or impertinent young fellow; an “unlicked cub”, a “puppy”. Interestingly whelp also has particular bite in its specifically nautical and engineering meanings: “One of the longitudinal projections on the barrel of a capstan or the drum of a windlass”; “One of the teeth of a sprocket-wheel”. The transitive verb, “whelp”, means to “bring forth” or to give birth to “(a whelp or whelps)”; and it may also serve intransitively meaning to “bring forth whelps”; and again slides toward the derogatory in its frequent use “with contemptuous implication”. Its “uncertain” etymology is perhaps related to that other rare transitive birth verb “to world.” “To world” means “to bring (a child) into the world at birth” as well as “to provide with a world of people; to people, inhabit.”
5. I find only one recorded use of the term “whelp” by Virginia Woolf (then still Stephen), in a letter to her brother-in-law Clive Bell (29 December 1910), in which the gender politics of Agamben’s anthropological machine are quite apparent in her canine caricature of her sister, the artist Vanessa Bell, currently all too preoccupied with her infant sons to pay her sister enough attention (or indeed to notice the rising flirtation between her sister and her husband):

Dearest Clive,/ I didn’t deserve another letter from you because that old Bitch left off suckling her whelps and wrote—However, I did deserve one, because of the quantity that goes into mine. I didn’t neglect you; it seemed to me as though I were vociferating to a stone wall. So please write again—Nessa has a chow hand—three words, with all the fur on them, take up a line.<sup>3</sup>

6. So “on or about December 1910”<sup>4</sup>, the childless Woolf transforms her sister, whose more usual epithet was “Dolphin”, into a (now “overcomotose”) dog-woman, in danger of becoming stone! “Human character” has indeed “changed”<sup>5</sup>. The treacherous zone inhabited by women artists and writers, stalked by the Johnson’s notorious and damning figure of the woman preacher (the woman speaking, performing, creating “art” in public) as a dog on its hind legs, is opened. Lapsing or devolving from artist/sister into mother/(wife), Vanessa relinquishes literacy and is turning

2 G. Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, 37.

3 V. Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf* 1, 445.

4 V. Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* 3, 421.

5 *Ibid.*

dog. She rides Agamben's caesura, the caesura between animal and man, ridden by every mother who whelps a son in patriarchy.

7. There is a sentence in *Between the Acts* (1941), Woolf's final novel, that fascinates me (and that will put us back on the scent of Derrida too) because it seems to mark, in a distinctly canine way, the gender politics of Agamben's shifting caesura between man and animal—by the pivotal placement of a comma, this time between dog and man: "As a dog shudders its skin, his skin shuddered."<sup>6</sup>
8. The effect of the comma between clauses is the thickening at the caesura between skin and skin ("its skin" and "his skin")—skin piling up at the comma, between dog's skin and man's skin, so we are not sure *who* or *what* is being referenced by each iteration of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person possessive pronoun, neuter and masculine. The literal and figurative collapse too at this point of proximity between vehicle and tenor, all but undoing the safe caesura of the simile that the comma is there to secure. This comma marks the elision of the feminine bridge, the whelping, birthing, worlding maternal link between man and dog. And in the context of the surrounding sentences we see a somatic and physiognomic blurring of canine and human.
9. Is Bartholemew, with "the dog's paws padding on the carpet behind him"<sup>7</sup>, on two legs or four? Is it the man or the dog who "rose" and "shook himself"<sup>8</sup>? The simile "as a dog shudders", suggesting not only the involuntary reflex of an organ common to both man and dog (skin), but other somatic experiences common to both too, orgasm as much as birth pangs, [this simile] has in fact been anticipated a few pages earlier when in the same scene, we find Giles's "One hand caressing the dog rippled folds of skin towards the collar."<sup>9</sup> Again, the rippling syntax and imagery open a zone, a Möbius strip, between man and dog in which agency and identity slip, blur, ripple and shudder. The rippling syntax invites us to question: Is the hand that is caressing the dog also in the process of rippling the folds of skin; or is the hand in the act of caressing folds of skin that are being or have been rippled by the dog ("dog rippled folds of skin" here a noun phrase)? And who is wearing the collar? The rippling here anticipates, grounds, perhaps, the later figurative shuddering. Further thickening occurs, then, in the shuddering and shaking reprisal of the earlier rippling image. These shuddering, rippling skins enact the "abyssal rupture [which] doesn't describe two edges"<sup>10</sup> between Human and Animal, "complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply."<sup>11</sup> Derrida does not use the term *invagination* but it might well be relevant.

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6 V. Woolf, *Between the Acts*, 157.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*, 156.

10 J. Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 30.

11 *Ibid.*, 29.

10. My canine work continues here by considering Derrida's passing allusion to Woolf's essay "Robinson Crusoe" (1926; 1932), in *The Beast and the Sovereign: 2* (2011), in which he reads Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* alongside "Heidegger's Seminar on *World, Finitude, and Solitude*"<sup>12</sup>. He embarks us on a heady tour of these two heterogeneous works, touching on many other works by Rousseau, Pascal, Montaigne, Marx, Celan, Lacan, Joyce and Woolf et al..<sup>13</sup> Woolf drafted the first version of her essay "Robinson Crusoe" in 1926 when she was also writing her own novel set on an island, *To the Lighthouse* (1927), and a fragment of the essay appears in the holograph draft of that novel, a Robinsonian island adrift in a Woolfian one. Woolf also wrote elsewhere on Defoe and on *Robinson Crusoe*, as a founding primal narrative of childhood, but we will keep with this one essay on Crusoe.<sup>14</sup>

11. Derrida likens Woolf's "false" observations (in her 1932 version of the essay) to "false" accounts of deconstruction. He derives this analogy from snatches of the long passage by Woolf given on the handout. Woolf, Derrida explains "explains that Robinson Crusoe is a "masterpiece" not only because Daniel Defoe was able to maintain and impose his own perspective on us in a consistent way, but because, in doing so, he annoys us, "thwarts us and flouts us at every turn"<sup>15</sup>. Derrida snatches the following from Woolf:

There are no sunsets and no sunrises; there is no solitude and no soul. There is, on the contrary, staring us full in the face nothing but a large earthenware pot. [...] God does not exist. [...] Nature does not exist. [...] Death does not exist. Nothing exists except an earthenware pot. Finally, that is to say, we are forced to drop our own preconceptions and to accept what Defoe himself wishes to give us.<sup>16</sup>

12. The sentences from Woolf that Derrida isolates are in keeping with her comments, here in "Robinson Crusoe" (1932) and elsewhere, on "the massive and monumental reality of Crusoe"<sup>17</sup>, and Defoe's relentless appetite and "genius for fact"<sup>18</sup>. Derrida continues his contradictory reading of Woolf:

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12 J. Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign: 2*, 31.

13 In fact Woolf's essay was published in two forms, first in 1926 in the *Nation & Athenaeum*, and then in expanded form, in 1932 for her volume of essays *The Second Common Reader*. It is this latter version that Derrida cites.

14 "Defoe" (1925), "David Copperfield" (1925), "How Should One Read a Book? (1926; 1932)", "Phases of Fiction" (1929). *Robinson Crusoe* she claims to resemble "one of the anonymous productions of the race rather than the effort of a single mind [...] we have all had *Robinson Crusoe* read aloud to us as children, and were thus much in the same state of mind towards Defoe and his story that the Greeks were towards Homer." (V. Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* 4, 98) Like Dickens's *David Copperfield* and Grimm's *Fairy Tales*, it is one of those "stories communicated by word of mouth in those tender years when fact and fiction merge, and thus belong to the memories and myths of life, and not its aesthetic experience." (*Ibid.*, 285)

15 J. Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign: 2*, 17; V. Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*: 5, 378

16 V. Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*: 5, 379; J. Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign: 2*, 17.

17 V. Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*: 5, 43.

18 "If you are Defoe, certainly to describe the fact is enough; for the fact is the right fact" (V. Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* 5, 381); "Here, in *Robinson Crusoe*, we are trudging a plain high road; one thing happens after another, the fact and the order of the fact is enough." (*Ibid.*, 574)

This is false, of course, as we shall see, and it sounds like the (just as false) newspaper descriptions you see of deconstruction today: “Nothing exists, not God, not nature, not death, and we must drop our own preconceptions.” It is false but it is interesting to see someone reading *Robinson Crusoe* as a sort of “deconstruction” creating a desert, on an island, a desert island, deserted by humans, by the human, creating a desert, then, of all our prejudices, all our preconceptions.<sup>19</sup>

13. Let us leave aside this startling maneuver, which ignores Woolf’s own modification of this initial readerly response to the priorities of Defoe’s narrative at the close of her essay: “Thus Defoe, by reiterating that nothing but a plain earthenware pot stands in the foreground, persuades us to see remote islands and the solitudes of the human soul”<sup>20</sup> — and so on. More startling, I suggest, given his seminar title *The Beast and the Sovereign*, is Derrida’s reluctance to follow the path of the Woolf, and his silence on Woolf’s closing remarks in her essay where, in reaching to this final statement, she expands on the difference between readerly expectations and the actual priorities of the fictional castaway, and re-admits humanity, death and nature to Crusoe’s island, and, in doing so, points up how he understands himself in relation to the animals that he encounters on the island and those that he brings with him from the ship:

A sense of desolation and of the deaths of many men is conveyed by remarking in the most prosaic way in the world, “I never saw them afterwards, or any sign of them except three of their hats, one cap, and two shoes that were not fellows”. When at last he exclaims, “Then to see how like a king I din’d too all alone, attended by my servants” — his parrot and his dog and his two cats, we cannot help but feel that all humanity is on a desert island alone — though Defoe at once informs us, for he has a way of snubbing off our enthusiasms, that the cats were not the same cats that had come in the ship. Both of those were dead; these cats were new cats, and as a matter of fact cats became very troublesome before long from their fecundity, whereas dogs, oddly enough, did not breed at all.<sup>21</sup>

14. Woolf is referring to the dining passage in *Robinson Crusoe* that Derrida too cites later in *The Beast and the Sovereign*:

It would have made a Stoick smile to have seen, me and my little Family sit down to Dinner; there was my Majesty the Prince and Lord of the whole Island; I had the Lives of all my Subjects at my absolute Command. I could hang, draw, give liberty, and take it away, and no Rebels among all my Subjects.

Then to see how like a King I din’d too all alone, attended by my servants; *Poll*, as if he had been my Favourite, was the only person permitted to talk to me. My Dog who was now grown very old and crazy, and had found no Species to multiply his Kind upon, sat always at my Right Hand, and two Cats, one on one Side the Table, and one on the other, expecting now and then a Bit from my Hand, as a Mark of special Favour.

But these were not the two Cats which I brought on Shore at first, for they were both of them dead, and had been interr’d near my Habitation by my own Hand; but one of them having multiply’d by I know not what Kind of Creature,

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19 J. Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign*: 2, 18.

20 V. Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*: 5, 381.

21 *Ibid.*

these were two which I had preserv'd tame, whereas the rest run wild in the Woods, and became indeed troublesome to me at last; for they would often come into my House, and plunder me too, till at last I was obliged to shoot them, and did kill a great many; at length they left me: With this Attendance, and in this plentiful Manner I liv'd; neither could I be said to want anything but Society, and of that in some time after this I was like to have too much.<sup>22</sup>

15. Woolf surely points up with heavy irony the shifting and spectral presence of woman and maternity in this model of “all humanity”, elided somewhere between the sovereign Crusoe and his servile beasts. Derrida himself ventures “nothing equivalent or similar, analogous was ever [...] written about a woman alone: like an island in an island.”<sup>23</sup> Yet Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* is a novel set on an island on which we can find Mrs Ramsay finding herself, an “elle” in “une île” perhaps<sup>24</sup>: “To be silent; to be alone.”<sup>25</sup>
16. Woolf pokes fun at Crusoe’s retrospective explanations of the provenance and genesis of the cats, over-fertile, only too willing to enter miscegenous relations with the wild cats, and therefore requiring frequent culling by him, acts of violence that Defoe has closely woven into Crusoe’s declaration of his own sovereignty. Crusoe reports his rescuing of the dog and cats on his salvaging expeditions for “many things” back to his wrecked ship, and that they are among the “things of less Value but not all less useful to me, which I omitted setting down before”: “Pens, Ink, and Paper, [...] Books, all which I carefully secur’d.”<sup>26</sup> The nameless cats and dog are commodities, then, like the inanimate goods he salvages, but the dog’s ability to swim puts him above the cats in the sliding hierarchy of man over animals. Despite his autonomous escape, the dog makes “a trusty Servant”, but fails to attain equal subjectivity by his inability to talk. And the colon after “but that would not do”, commenting on the dog’s lack of language suggests some sort of connection with the observation that follows it, on his master’s salvaging of the tools of his advanced literacy: “I only wanted to have him talk to me, but that would not do: As I observ’d before, I found Pen, Ink and Paper, and I husbanded them to the utmost”<sup>27</sup>. The human/animal hierarchy is inscribed between and by the very tools of inscription salvaged during—and now inscribing—this very event.
17. The dog’s superiority over the cats seems affirmed by Crusoe’s account of his assistance on hunting expeditions to kill other animals including cats, such as: “This Day went abroad with my Gun and my Dog, and kill’d a wild Cat, her Skin pretty soft, but her Flesh good for nothing: Every Creature I kill’d, I took off the Skins and preserv’d them.”<sup>28</sup> Crusoe uses the diminishing epithet “Dog” of himself, in a sanguine, matter of fact way, when recalling the danger of losing his life, his own sovereignty: “I

22 D. Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 108 ; J. Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign: 2*, 28-29.

23 J. Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign: 2*, 2.

24 *Ibid.*, 3.

25 V. Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, 99.

26 D. Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 48.

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*, 53.

only said to my self often, that I was *an unfortunate Dog*, and born to be always miserable.”<sup>29</sup> Later he applies it to his human subject Friday: “*You Dog*, said I, *is this your making us laugh?*”<sup>30</sup> And compare the dog-like Friday, who earlier on being “call’d” to his master [...] came jumping and laughing, and pleas’d to the highest Extream; then I ask’d him, If he had given his Father any Bread? He shook his Head, and said, *None: Ugly Dog eat all up self*”<sup>31</sup>.

18. The dog, then, is Crusoe’s inferior companion, a commodity tasked with guarding his other commodities, as when Crusoe “set my Dog to guard [his crops] in the night, tying him up to a Stake at the Gate, where he would stand and bark all night long”<sup>32</sup>, or with assisting—“so taking my Gun, a Hatchet, and my Dog”<sup>33</sup>—in the hunting and killing of them. However, the dog is no match for the wild goats when Crusoe “set him upon [them, he is] mistaken, for they all fac’d about upon the Dog, and he knew his Danger too well, for he would not come near them.”<sup>34</sup> Yet the dog is instrumental in assisting Crusoe in the struggle to tame the goats: “sav’d [...] alive from the Dog”, a kid is tamed because Crusoe wants to “raise a Breed of tame Goats, which might supply me when my Powder and Shot should be all spent.”<sup>35</sup> So tame becomes the kid that, after Crusoe’s “having made a Collar to this little Creature [...] it follow’d [him] about like a Dog”<sup>36</sup>. The irony is not lost on Woolf (whose own nickname let us recall, was “the Goat”): “When for a wonder he leaves some inconsistency hanging loose — why if the wild cats are so very tame are the goats so very shy? — we are not seriously perturbed, for we are sure that there was a reason, and a very good one, had he time to give it us.”<sup>37</sup> Perhaps the goats’ ability to become dog-like is the distinction?

19. The cats too are of special interest to Woolf, something Derrida overlooks in her essay: “cats became very troublesome before long from their fecundity, whereas dogs, oddly enough, did not breed at all.” Her acidic comment on the fecundity of the cats — “Females”<sup>38</sup> — *contra* the oddly unbreeding male dog ignores Crusoe’s explanation that the dog “had found no Species to multiply his Kind upon”<sup>39</sup>. But perhaps Woolf is also nodding to the fact that the dog, who cannot whelp nor find a wild canid to make whelp, eventually dies, but is nevertheless miraculously replaced, and not by the reviled feline method of birthing! First, let us note Crusoe’s account of his first dog’s death “of meer old Age”, while commenting on the greater longevity of Poll, the parrot, and the need to cull the horrific-

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29 *Ibid.*, 66; cited J. Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*: 2, 80.

30 D. Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 212.

31 *Ibid.*, 172.

32 *Ibid.*, 85.

33 *Ibid.*, 79.

34 *Ibid.*, 56.

35 *Ibid.*, 81.

36 *Ibid.*, 81, 82.

37 V. Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*: 5, 380.

38 D. Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 75.

39 *Ibid.*, 108.

ally proliferating, all devouring, cats. It is Poll the parrot who draws Derrida's eye, and he has much less to say on the dog, cats, or the goat-kids. But notice Crusoe's fear of being *devoured* by the over-fertile cats! Notice too that family-making for Crusoe is more emphatically the art of violent culling rather than birthing. In contrast to the proliferating cats whom he is "forc'd to kill [...] like Vermine, or wild Beasts"<sup>40</sup>, Crusoe's companion dog is replaced or reproduced, so to speak, when Crusoe fortuitously finds another fully grown male dog while attempting to salvage goods and commodities from a second ship-wreck. Notice how "a dog appear'd upon her"<sup>41</sup> rather than *out of* her! Woolf's comment on the oddity of the commodified dog's not breeding may also extend to Crusoe himself, and to the three male human "subjects" his island eventually admits: "My Man *Friday* was a Protestant, his Father was a *Pagan* and a *Cannibal*, and the *Spaniard* was a *Papist*"<sup>42</sup>. The population of men increases, just as the dog has been replaced, without recourse or reference to whelping.

20. Whereas Woolf archly points to Crusoe's representations of the oddly non-breeding dog, and thence to the bracketing of whelping and maternal birth, Derrida, on the other hand, cites the passage on dining with the animals in illustration of the "auto-affirmation of sovereignty by Robinson himself [...] the theater of an autobiography or an Autopresentation of the sovereign by himself"<sup>43</sup>, a path of argument that will open to his preoccupation in *The Beast 2* with dying and death, of being buried alive, savaged by beasts, ingested by cannibals. He couples this affirmation of (violent) sovereignty over wild and domestic creatures with the passage (cited above) where Robinson's sovereignty over his three human subjects is expressed. These passages set Derrida on his path to "do an initial reconnoiter [...] around one word" in his reading of "Heidegger's Seminar on *World, Finitude, and Solitude*"<sup>44</sup>, the work where sets out Heidegger's famous triple thesis, distinguishing between man and animal: "1. The stone is worldless [*weltlos*]; 2. The animal is poor in world [*weltarm*]; 3. Man is world-forming [*weltbildend*]"<sup>45</sup>. Derrida identifies in *Walten* "a recurring word that in [his] opinion is given too little attention in Heidegger in general". He draws out its violent valences, its "sense of sovereign and super-human violence": "humans themselves are dominated, crushed under the law of this sovereign violence. Man is not its master, he is traversed by it [...] dominated, seized, penetrated through and through by the sovereign violence of the *Walten*"<sup>46</sup>.

21. The *Walten*, Derrida makes explicit, "produces nothing less than the difference between Beings and beings; i.e. everything that is going to organize more or less indirectly in this seminar on the difference between

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40 *Ibid.*, 75.

41 *Ibid.*, 138.

42 *Ibid.*, 174; cited J. Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign: 2*, 31.

43 J. Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign: 2*, 28, 31.

44 *Ibid.*, 31.

45 *Ibid.*, 27; M. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, 176.

46 J. Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign: 2*, 39, 41.



man, between human *Dasein*, and the animal: the animal is unable to accede to the as such of beings, i.e. the difference between Being and being.<sup>47</sup> He returns at the close of *The Beast 2* to demonstrate how the *as such* of *Dasein* or the “*als*, the *als Struktur* that distinguishes man from the animal is thus indeed what the violence of *Walten* makes possible [...] All of this does not depend on a [...] power, on a faculty that man has at his disposal, but consists in taming and joining [...] forces or violences (*Gewalten*) that come to grip man and thanks to which beings are discovered *as such*.”<sup>48</sup> And this is where the historicity of man becomes possible, “the historicity reserved to *Dasein* and to Being, denied to the animal and to the other forms of life. There is historicity of man (and not of animal) only where the *Gewalt* of this *Walten* irrupts to make beings as such appear, in the middle of which man is gripped by violence.”<sup>49</sup>

22. Derrida presses that for Heidegger “violence characterizes not only [man’s] acts, his action, but his existence, his *Da-sein*, the there of his being there [...] he is violent in as much as he is exposed to the violence of *Walten*, of beings, and in as much as he is in a position to exercise this violence himself, to do violence.”<sup>50</sup> His closing remarks are ominous—that “the idealism that then dominates Western metaphysics through and through is a determination of violence. Ideology [...] and idealism are not innocent, one must recognize their violence.” He asks us to consider “a single, final quotation from Heidegger [...] as you watch the war on television, in Iraq, but also closer to us”: “[...] (There is only *one* thing against which all violence-doing, violent action, violent activity, immediately shatters).” [...] “*Das ist der Tod* (it is death).”<sup>51</sup> And death is now, on the final page, identified as Derrida’s dominant question in his seminar, and it “remains entire: To whom is this power given or denied? Who is capable of death, and through death, of imposing failure on the super- or hyper-sovereignty of *Walten*?”<sup>52</sup> Derrida draws on Freud to counter Heidegger’s distinction that whereas men die as such, animals merely perish, but he might have found support too in Woolf who not only wrote a famous biography of a dog, but, in one of her earliest published pieces, an obituary of a dog.

23. Yet, folded (invaginated, carried) into Derrida’s seminar is the possibility—“a discreet intrusion [*à pas de loup*]”<sup>53</sup>—of a shared status of human with animal, and indeed with stone, which emerges in Derrida’s reading of an opening in Heidegger where he draws out of *Walten* the (Freudian) sense of a birthing drive (*Trieben*). Holding on to the point on Heidegger’s path where he says “toward this Being as a whole [...]—it is that toward which we are driven (*getreiben*) in our nostalgia”, Derrida concludes that therefore the world “is where we are not at home”. This justifies our saying

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47 *Ibid.*, 105, n.25.

48 *Ibid.*, 288, 289.

49 *Ibid.*, 289.

50 *Ibid.*, 287, 288.

51 *Ibid.*, 290.

52 *Ibid.*

53 J. Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign*: 1, 2.

“that we are also *without* this world, or poor in world, like the stone and the animal”. Does Derrida, who understands “the gaze of the animal opens a world to which we can have no epistemological access”,<sup>54</sup> waver here? Or is the isolation increased? Here Derrida intrudes a compelling but truncated reading of a poem by Paul Celan, “Grosse, Glühende Wölbung” (“Vast, Glowing Vault”) (1967), the last line of which serves as a haunting contrapuntal refrain throughout his seminar:

Or else as Celan says [...] “Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen.” [The world has gone, I must carry you] [...] This poem can be read as a poem of mourning or of birth (the final “ich muss dich tragen” signaling either toward the dead one that, as one mourning, I carry or must carry in me, or toward the child to be born and still carried by its mother, or even toward the poem and the poet himself who would also be called, familiarly apostrophized by the *dich* of “ich muss dich tragen” [...]).<sup>55</sup>

24. He begins a reading of the ram imagery in Celan’s poem that is begging to be read alongside Crusoe’s goats, but I must refrain. To sum up, from Heidegger’s *Welt* and *Walten*, Derrida, with the forceps of Celan, induces a kind of whelping:

beyond all the imports I’ve already tried to count here or there of this unheard-of double proposition, of this performative lodged like a pearl in the oyster of a constative, like a still unborn child, to be born, to be carried to term in the uterus of the origin of the world as it is, there would be today the import of a declaration of love or of peace at the moment of a declaration of war.<sup>56</sup>

25. In the context of the Iraq war, which had irrupted during the period in the Spring of 2003 when he was delivering these seminars, Derrida is devastating in his exegesis of *Die Welt ist fort*:

The armed word of politicians, priests and soldiers is more than ever incompetent, unable to measure up to the very thing it is speaking and deciding about, and that trembles in the name “world”, or even in saying good-bye to the world. And that what there is to bear, as the responsibility of the other, for the other, must be borne where the world itself is going away by going into absolute disaster of this armed word that I shall not even call psittacist, so as not to insult Poll, Robinson Crusoe’s parrot (*psitakos*), first victim of the humanist arrogance that thought it could give itself the right to speech, and therefore to the world as such.<sup>57</sup>

26. Derrida, plumping for Poll, and dog-legging into Woolf’s essay only to elide her arch and highly germane observations on beasts, sovereignty and gender, may not overtly have followed the step of the Woolf, the path of the oddly non-breeding, non-whelping dog, yet here he is, unwittingly, following her steps in the poignant, late essay, “Thoughts on Peace in an

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54 Cf. Claire Colebrook, commenting on a draft of this paper: “I’d still insist that Derrida knows that the gaze of the animal opens a world to which we can have no epistemological access while Agamben feels that a philosophical rethinking of the caesura will allow for a more authentic and lived relation to the limit between man and animal, which he questions but still leaves in place because of language.”

55 J. Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*: 2, 287, 288.

56 *Ibid.*, 259.

57 *Ibid.*, 260.

Air-Raid” (1940), where she unites reader and writer in the textual locus of a shared vulnerability that extends beyond the originating historical experience of the author’s enduring of German bombardment of England in WW2 to the future horizons of successive contemporary readers. Woolf’s essay meditates—in the first instance, then, while German bombs drop on British civilian targets, but it also continues to meditate more recently and now, while NATO bombs, for example, drop on Libyan civilians, and unmanned, but man-directed, drones are unleashed over Afghanistan—[Woolf’s essay meditates] on the “queer experience, lying in the dark and listening to the zoom of a hornet which may at any moment sting you to death”<sup>58</sup>. (Judith Allen has more to say on this.)<sup>59</sup> Woolf warns of the gender politics inherent in this horrific aspect of modern warfare which has young men bombing unarmed women and children: “Unless we can think peace into existence we — not this one body in its one bed but millions of bodies yet to be born — will lie in the same darkness and hear the same death rattle overhead. Let us think what we can do to create the only efficient air-raid shelter while the guns now on the hill go pop pop pop and the searchlights finger the clouds and now and then, sometimes close at hand, sometimes far away, a bomb drops.”<sup>60</sup> “Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid”, then, espouses feminist, anti-fascist culture and writing, and defines the “mental fight” we should muster in times of war as a fierce, intellectual independence. Woolf rallies us to think “against the current, not with it”. And like Derrida, she points up the violent drives harnessed by the male warmongers (“ancient instincts, instincts fostered and cherished by education and tradition”), in tandem with maternal drives (“Could we switch off the maternal instinct at the command of a table full of politicians?”):

But if it were necessary, for the sake of humanity, for the peace of the world, that childbearing should be restricted, the maternal instinct subdued, women would attempt it. [...] We must create more honourable activities for those who try to conquer in themselves their fighting instinct, their subconscious Hitlerism. We must compensate the man for the loss of his gun.<sup>61</sup>

27. Woolf’s matriarchal imperative here compares interestingly with Celan’s “ich muss dich tragen [I must carry you]”. To conclude: in rethinking the caesura between man and animal, and following in the steps of Woolf, Celan, Agamben and Derrida,<sup>62</sup> as much as down their paths not taken, we must continue to carry and rethink the words: *world, welt, war, walten, whelp*.

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58 V. Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* 6, 242.

59 For a more sustained account of the contemporary relevance of this essay, see Judith Allen’s concluding chapter, “Thinking Against the Current”, *Virginia Woolf and the Politics of Language*, 113-118.

60 V. Woolf, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* 6, 244.

61 *Ibid.*

62 C. Colebrook: “After reading your work I’d still say that they are looking at the same problem but with different relations to the caesura, and it’s only Woolf, who both links it with a history of gendered figures, and who has a more positive notion of writing and its capacity to rework the limit between human and nonhuman.”

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