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After a series of failed attempts to explain a round black spot by human activity, the narrator in "The Mark on the Wall" (1921) (1) progressively drifts away from anthropocentric free association inspired by the mark and involving Shakespeare, Charles the First, and the Archbishop of Canterbury, among others, only to end up questioning the human condition as a whole. The narrator's overall sense of security and pride is thus gradually displaced by an overwhelming sense of insecurity caused by the mysterious mark on the wall. At the point when the mark is finally revealed to be a snail, it has become as important as war : "Curse this war ; God damn this war !... All the same, I don't see why we should have a snail on our wall" (2). A similarly symptomatic and dramatic shift away from an anthropocentric narrative takes place in Woolf's novels as well.

From the cow's skull Jacob picks up at the beach in the opening scene of *Jacob's Room* (1922) (3), through bones that serve to measure time in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) (4) and Mrs Ramsey's proleptic gesture of covering a boar's skull with her shawl in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) (5), to the sheep's thigh bone recovered from the lily pool in *Between the Acts* (1941) (6), nature often seems to haunt Woolf's novels more as an ubiquitous *memento mori* than as a sign of life or rebirth. It seems that man and nature are clearly opposed in an attempt to redefine concepts, such as "savage", "crude", and "primitive", in a time when "civilization [is] in ruins" (7). Dead living forms therefore seem to form a whole parallel narrative in Woolf's novels that has a distinctly anti-war tone.

The shift of attention from human characters onto animals, both dead and alive, in Woolf's work could probably be traced back to Darwin and his contribution to nineteenth-century developments in narrative. As Gillian Beer has argued, the influence of Darwin's theory of evolution (1859) on literature consisted essentially in destabilizing the traditional notion of plot (8). As of the second half of the 19th century, man was no more in the centre of the narrative world as authors strived to abandon the omniscient narrator. Maybe Woolf's way of moving away from traditional narrative is somewhat similar to that of German Expressionist painter Franz Marc who painted almost exclusively animals in the years surrounding

World War I, and consists precisely in focusing on forms of life alternative to the human subject in an attempt to reflect a changed post-war reality.

Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts*, provides an excellent example with its remarkable accumulation of animal imagery (9). Besides birds and butterflies, also found in other works by Woolf, there are cows, a snake "choked with a toad in its mouth" (10) (a powerful image of World War II's fatal standstill), an Afghan hound, and various kinds of fish, not to mention Mrs Swithin's dinosaurs. Human character in Woolf's work is thus quite often presented through its juxtaposition with other, sometimes unusual creatures, as if to stress her characters' being mere descendants of the monkey rather than God's divine creatures.

Woolf's use of images of dead living matter destabilizes plot and subject alike. One vivid example comes from the very first pages of *Jacob's Room*. The novel's opening scene introduces us to the main character as a child, playing at the seaside :

The rock was one of those tremendously solid brown, or rather black rocks, which emerge from the sand like something primitive. Rough with crinkled limpet shells and sparsely strewn with locks of dry seaweed, a small boy has to stretch his legs far apart, and indeed to feel rather heroic, before he gets to the top.

But there, on the very top, is a hollow full of water, with a sandy bottom; with a blob of jelly stuck to the side, and some mussels. A fish darts across. The fringe of yellow-brown seaweed flutters, and out pushes an opal-shelled crab

—— "Oh, a huge crab", Jacob murmured ——

and begins his journey on weakly legs on the sandy bottom. Now ! Jacob plunged his hand. The crab was cool and very light. But the water was thick with sand, and so, scrambling down, Jacob was about to jump, holding his bucket in front of him, when he saw, stretched entirely rigid, side by side, their faces very red, an enormous man and woman.

An enormous man and woman (it was early-closing day) were stretched motionless, with their heads on pocket-handkerchiefs, side by side, within a few feet of the sea, while two or three gulls gracefully skirted the incoming waves, and settled near their boots.

The large red faces lying on the bandanna handkerchief stared up at Jacob. Jacob stared down at them. Holding his bucket very carefully, Jacob then jumped deliberately and trotted away very nonchalantly at first, but faster and faster as the waves came creaming up to him and he had to swerve to avoid them, and the gulls rose in front of him and floated out and settled again a little further on. A large black woman was sitting on the sand. He ran towards her.

"Nanny ! Nanny !" he cried, sobbing the words out on the crest of each gasping breath.

The waves came round her. She was a rock. She was covered with the seaweed which pops when it is pressed. He was lost.

There he stood. His face composed itself. He was about to roar when, lying among the black sticks and straw under the cliff, he saw a whole skull — perhaps a cow's skull, a skull, perhaps, with the teeth in it. Sobbing, but absent-mindedly, he ran farther and farther away until he held the skull in his arms. (11)

One might easily think that in the first paragraph, it is the boy, and not the rock, that is "rough with crinkled limpet shells and sparsely strewn with locks of dry seaweed". A special attention is paid here to the black rock, which Jacob climbs in the beginning of the scene and which towards the end of that same scene has mysteriously evolved into Jacob's black nanny : "She was a rock". Except that Jacob will be anything but like those crinkled limpet shells that stick tight to the black rock : he would rather get lost at sea, that is, fall victim to the Great War. Later on in the novel, Jacob's hobbies are mentioned, which ironically include pressing poppy flowers between the pages of dictionaries and collecting butterflies in glass jars. The novel is thus tellingly interspersed with the motif of a caught biological specimen that builds up a contrast with Jacob's markedly elusive character.

In the context of words such as "primitive", "rough", and "crinkly", "heroic" impresses the reader with being the odd-one-out in the novel's opening passage. It sounds inflated and belongs to a whole different register. Like Jacob himself, with whom the adjective is associated, "heroic" does not seem to fit. *Jacob's Room* is essentially about the deconstruction of masculine identity in a post-World War I world (12), which the ironic oddness of "heroic" here is a sad reminder of. The nanny who grows into a rock is not the only example of Woolf purposefully confounding humans with other living organisms in this opening scene. Just when the opal-shelled crab appears, the subject gets once again destabilized. Thanks to the long dashes Woolf uses to break up the narrative, it might as well be Jacob who begins his journey on weakly legs and ends it shoeless since the novel ends with Jacob's mother, Elizabeth, holding his shoes after his death, wondering what to do with them.

Human and crab species appear to have been transposed : both the crab and the couple are said to be rather big. The crab, however, is light and attractive, while the man and the woman are intimidating. With their intense redness, the couple is eventually more reminiscent of a crab than the crab itself. It is no surprise then that Jacob runs away from the "large red faces lying on the bandana handkerchiefs" rather than from an actual sea beast. On the one hand, the scene establishes a sense of scale by setting little Jacob against the background of the giant rock, couple of sunbathers, and nanny. Yet, on the other hand, it also purposefully confounds

Jacob with other species, while setting him clearly apart from his own, human species.

Finally, we reach the passage's last paragraph, in which Jacob's fright, caused by the giant crab couple, brings him to the cow's skull. "[S]kull" and "perhaps" repeat in the text, forming a rhythmical pattern, possibly to reflect Jacob's confusion and distress. The insecurity that "perhaps" brings into the text further serves to undermine the narrating voice in addition to the main character. The entire scene takes place in a natural setting, yet the way it is narrated is profoundly unnatural and unsettling. Nothing extraordinary really happens ; there are few, if any, events in it : while crab fishing, Jacob gets scared by a couple of oversized sunbathers and runs away to his nanny. The real event, however, is that, following a series of destabilizations of the subject, the main character is eventually drawn to and finds relief in a cow's skull.

In *Between the Acts*, set in June 1939, dispersion in the human world is reflected in a state of chaos in the animal world. The pageant, which forms the core of the novel's plot, is an image of total war : "The very cows joined in. Walloping, tail lashing, the reticence of nature was undone, and the barriers which should divide Man the Master from the Brute were dissolved. Then the dogs joined in" (13). The natural world also serves as a foil for the incoherent human world to a point where human language falls apart, becomes incomprehensible, and the narrator begins referring to "cow language" instead (14).

Meanwhile, throughout the novel, humans are being mocked for their futile attempts at imitating nature by producing decorative paper roses and an artificial pond for the pageant : "Roughly painted ripples represented water. [...] Rather prettily, real swallows darted across the sheet" (15). The episode with the recovery of the sheep thigh bone from the lily pool is another example of human characters' revealing juxtaposition with nature : the bone fails to fulfil characters' high expectations and furthermore exposes their problematic relationship with evolution.

Between the Acts begins with a conversation about a cesspool, which never gets mentioned again in the novel. A cesspool is an underground container for waste matter, and thus functions as an ironic foreshadowing of the novel's moral : "civilization [is] built by [...] orts, scraps and fragments like ourselves" (16). The narrator's interest quickly shifts, however, from the cesspool to the mysterious disappearance of a certain Lady Ermyntrode in the local lily pond. The story interrupts the narrative and, like the cesspool image, is an aside, that is, a fragment that remains vaguely integrated into the rest of the plot. Just as Lady Ermyntrode's name suggests that she is a minor character or an intruder in relation to the plot, so can the object found in the pool after her disappearance be classified as an "ort".

For rather than a Lady Ermyntrude or at least a fragment of her body, all that is found is a sheep thigh bone :

It was in that deep centre, in that black heart, that the lady had drowned herself. Ten years since the pool had been dredged and a thigh bone recovered. Alas, it was a sheep's, not a lady's. And sheep have no ghosts, for sheep have no souls. But, the servants insisted, they must have a ghost ; the ghost must be a lady's, who had drowned herself for love. So none of them would walk by the lily pool at night, only now when the sun shone and the gentry still sat at table. (17)

Following a detailed description of the pond, which stresses its harmonious and idealized homogeneity, the sheep bone is thus introduced. Through its mystical importance to the narrative, it is expected to inherit, but also surpass previous images, related to the distant past, such as Mrs Swithin's dinosaurs which symbolize for her an idyllic past she relates yet also feels superior to, or Old Oliver's ancestors, whose portraits are hanging half-authoritatively, half-forgotten in the dining-room. Nevertheless, the sheep bone fails to fulfil the hoped-for role of Lady Ermyntrude's relic. It betrays Woolf's subtle irony instead : the character's death is no more than a rather pathetic version of Ophelia's drowning.

The sheep thigh bone is a completely natural object to find in a pool ; it forms an organic whole with it. And yet, the mysterious story turns it into dirt, which in anthropologist Mary Douglas's words "offends against order", for it is considered inappropriate in the present circumstances (18). What is in fact offensive about it, however, is that the incident with the sheep thigh bone is an example of reversed evolution : by drowning herself for love, Lady Ermyntrude has gone a few steps down the evolution scale and, no doubt to all the other characters' great disappointment, has taken the shape of a lower form of life. Human beings are always eventually disappointed by the fact that they turn out to be more related to nature than they would expect.

Whether they want it or not, the pool eventually incorporates the characters' entire world. By the end of the novel, the pond has become so polluted that the leaves floating in it resemble a map : "Now the jagged leaf at the corner suggested, by its contours, Europe. There were other leaves. She fluttered her eye over the surface, naming leaves India, Africa, America. Islands of security, glossy and thick" (19). In addition to being a powerful metaphor for fiction, the pond here also functions as a highly ironic image. In June 1939, just before the outbreak of the war, England indeed still believed that it was an "island of security". From the standpoint of 1940-41, Woolf undermines this unfortunately mistaken belief by investing her novel with profound irony through images reflecting human characters' pitiful relatedness to the natural world, which they try to resist and reject.

The cow's skull, the sheep thigh bone, and the pond that contains it are all quite similar to that snail that attracted Woolf's narrator's attention some twenty years earlier. What these images all have in common is that, like the snail, they are not really interested in the fact that either narrator or characters are anthropocentrically mistaking them for mere marks of human activity. Woolf, in her disappointment with the human species, presents us with a deeply pacifist narrative that moves away from the pre-Darwinian anthropocentric world towards a cruder, more primitive, uncivilized, regressive even world in which the fact that a snail is not even concerned with the fact that Woolf is staring at it not only matters, but is also capable of inspiring an infinitely rich fictive world.

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