



The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II (The Seminars of Jacques Derrida)

By Jacques Derrida

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Following on from *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume I*, this book extends Jacques Derrida's exploration of the connections between animality and sovereignty. In this second year of the seminar, originally presented in 2002–2003 as the last course he would give before his death, Derrida focuses on two markedly different texts: Heidegger's 1929–1930 course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. As he moves back and forth between the two works, Derrida pursues the relations between solitude, insularity, world, violence, boredom and death as they supposedly affect humans and animals in different ways.

Hitherto unnoticed or underappreciated aspects of *Robinson Crusoe* are brought out in strikingly original readings of questions such as Crusoe's belief in ghosts, his learning to pray, his parrot Poll, and his reinvention of the wheel. Crusoe's terror of being buried alive or swallowed alive by beasts or cannibals gives rise to a rich and provocative reflection on death, burial, and cremation, in part provoked by a meditation on the death of Derrida's friend Maurice Blanchot. Throughout, these readings are juxtaposed with interpretations of Heidegger's concepts of world and finitude to produce a distinctively Derridean account that will continue to surprise his readers.

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Editorial Review

Review

“This splendid translation of Derrida’s last 10 seminars brings to completion the 23 seminars he devoted to “The Beast and the Sovereign”....Derrida’s argument proceeds through a juxtaposition of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and Heidegger’s *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, wherein the shipwrecked sailor on the “Island of Despair,” haunted by phantasms of death and being buried alive, becomes a fellow traveler of the German phenomenologist who, over two centuries later, is no less beset by the thought of that which overwhelms thinking....Derrida shows how these disparate writers and texts engage an enigmatic otherness that captivates and rules over them.”

(*Choice* 2012-03-06)

“The second volume of *The Beast and the Sovereign*, a meticulously edited transcript of the seminar’s second year (2002–03), shows us a different though complementary and perhaps more essential Derrida, a forensically close reader. . . . What Derrida seeks to highlight in both Defoe’s and Heidegger’s texts is the precariousness and fragility of the purportedly stable borders demarcating the human from the animal. The fantasy of sovereign solitude is always secretly feeding off the bestial other it wants to banish.”

(Josh Cohen *Times Literary Supplement*)

About the Author

Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) was director of studies at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, and professor of humanities at the University of California, Irvine. He is the author of many books published by the University of Chicago Press. **Geoffrey Bennington** is Asa G. Candler Professor of Modern French Thought at Emory University and the author of numerous works, including *Interrupting Derrida*.

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