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Without Name: The War Without End

SANS NOM

In 1976 Emmanuel Lévinas published *Noms propres*, a short collection of essays devoted to individual philosophers and writers, including Buber, Celan, Derrida and Proust. In *Noms propres*, there are fifteen essays each with a proper name in the title, but there is also a sixteenth and final essay in this book of meetings and duels, which is entitled ‘Nameless’ (*Sans nom*). It is with those who do not *choose* to be without name that Lévinas ends his work.¹ He is concerned with the end of the war and with a war without end, and the countless, nameless victims. He writes ‘Since the end of the war, bloodshed has not ceased. Racism, imperialism and exploitation remain ruthless. Nations and individuals expose one another to hatred and contempt, fearing destitution and destruction’.² ‘Sans nom’ confronts us with anonymity as catastrophe, as deprivation, as the loss of the singularity of the name, of names upon names erased without end.³

There is an echo of this injunction without rest to resist and to protest against the worst anonymity, the state's violent imposition of namelessness, in Derrida's 1996 intervention in support of the *sans-papiers*, the undocumented aliens in France, 'Dereliction of the Right to Justice (But what are the "sans-papiers" lacking?)'. Derrida was responding to the introduction of a law in France to permit 'the prosecution, and even the imprisonment, of those who take in and help foreigners whose status is held to be illegal'. Any hospitality towards the *sans-papiers* is a crime, a breaking of the law.⁴ What, Derrida asks are these so-called *sans-papiers* lacking? The without (*sans*) of anonymity has been claimed by the state and ostensibly put to work: *sans* papers, these foreigners are without rights and, ultimately, without the rights of human dignity.⁵ For Derrida, this prompts a question: 'one must ask oneself what happens to society when it ascribes the source of all its ills ... to the "without" of others'.⁶

In supporting the *sans-papiers*, Derrida reiterates that this does not mean a speaking 'for them'. Those whom the state has defined as *sans-papiers*, as *sans nom*, as being without a name that has been recognised and processed by the state, 'have spoken': 'They have spoken and they speak for themselves, we hear them, along with their representatives or advocates, their poets, and their songsters'.⁷ The anonymous, those without a state-name, those who have had the anonymity of an unrecorded and unrecordable name imposed upon them, are speaking. But how does one hear, or how does one stop hearing the nameless speak, the political and philosophical reverberation of the *without name*?

WAR WITHOUT NAME

War *tells* us nothing. War has nothing to say, nothing at least that philosophy could make into a concept, which it could harness to an *epistēmē*. As Clausewitz's unfinished work *On War* suggests, with its five accidental prefaces on 'a collection of materials' that cannot be

collected into ‘a theory of war’, writing *on* war would interminable. Both Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari position their writing *on* war in opposition to Clausewitz’s famous saying that ‘war is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means’. Clausewitz informs his reader at the start of his treatise that ‘if this [dictum] is firmly kept in mind throughout it will greatly facilitate the study of the subject and the whole will be easier to analyze’. In other words, if we read Clausewitz as he wished to be read we would take this dictum as our guiding thread, not least because it should make the whole easier to analyze and allow us, as he says, to ‘fill in various gaps, large and small’ in the work.

In ‘Psychoanalysis Searches the States of its Soul’ (2000), Derrida suggested that to think about war in our times, we must read Freud again. He writes:

If there is still war, and for a long time yet, or in any case war’s cruelty, warlike, torturing, massively or subtly cruel aggression, it is no longer certain that the figure of war, and especially the difference between individual wars, civil wars, and national wars, still corresponds to concepts whose rigor is assured. A new discourse on war is necessary. We await today new “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death” ... and a new “Why War?” ... or at least new readings of texts of this sort.⁸

Writing in 2000, before the start of the so-called wars *of* and *on* terror, Derrida argued that today the ‘figure’ of war may no longer correspond to the assurance of a rigorous concept. Today, it is unlikely that we can still follow Clausewitz’s already tortured attempts to assert that ‘war is nothing but ...’. Today, there is a good chance that *la figure de la guerre*, the picture, the illustration, the representation or diagram of war will not match the concept (the signified even) of war. What sounds and images (signifiers) would there then be for a new discourse or reading of war that exceeds or remains disproportionate to its concept?

In *Vanity Fair* (1847-1848), Thackeray makes a remarkable and important statement: in the midst of the events leading up to the battle of Waterloo, he writes: ‘We do not claim to rank among the military novelists. Our place is with the non-combatants’.⁹ Thackeray suggests that the place and the work of literature ‘is with the non-combatants’, and one can trace this distinguished literary tradition to Primo Levi and beyond. Freud takes a similar position in ‘Thoughts for the Times on War and Death’. While he uses the concept of war to uncover a deception or illusion that can only reveal psychoanalysis as the truth, Freud also argues that the war of the ‘non-combatants’, war from afar, is already set at a distance from war *itself*, from the concept of war. This other of war, this war at home, is a state-run deception that can only reveal another deception. The state not only encourages ‘the practice of lying and deception’ in its citizens, but it also deceives them, and leaves ‘the citizen of the civilized world ... helpless in a world that has grown strange’. But Freud also turns to the question of literature as a non-state run deception that reveals another deception. In times of war-from-afar, as the other of war, when death is everywhere and nowhere, and we cannot ‘imagine our own death’, we are drawn, we are pulled towards literature, *where death still has a chance*.

In the presumption of narrative, of representation, of naming all its animals and all its objects, literature does not necessarily tell us what war cannot tell us. For Derrida, the *récits* of Blanchot hover in the vicinities of not what war can tell us, can teach us, but in what war *leaves* us with, with what remains and remains to come of war: the *sans nom*, which Lévinas argued ends all works on the proper name.¹⁰ The silent resonance of the *sans* in Blanchot’s *récits*, of the name *Blanchot*, tears itself from all ‘filiation with the name’.¹¹ The *sans* is an affirmation, but an affirmation without redemption, a narrative that is always undone by what cannot be named, a narrative without name. This is neither making use of a deprivation

without name, nor is it a celebration of a chosen anonymity. One cannot avoid, Derrida writes, ‘the anonymity in the name’.¹²

One can see this unavoidable anonymity not only in works without name where the principal characters have no name or discernable marks of identity, but also in the great works of the nineteenth century that labour without rest to name everything, and perhaps most of all when it comes to war, to war and its other. In *War and Peace* (1865-1869), the young Nikolai Rostov has his first experiences of war between the disastrous battles of Ulm and Austerlitz in 1805.¹³ Tolstoy writes:

The squadron in which Rostov served had just had time to mount its horses when it was halted facing the enemy. Again, as on the Enns bridge, there was no one between the squadron and the enemy, and there lay between them, separating them, the same terrible line of the unknown and of fear, like the line separating the living from the dead.¹⁴

At the command to charge, Rostov drives his horse Little Rook forward and crosses into ‘the middle the line that had seemed so terrible’. Exhilarated at surviving this crossing, Rostov inadvertently gallops *ahead* of the rest of his squadron. Out in front, beyond the line, Rostov’s horse is shot from under him, and the next moment he finds himself ‘alone in the middle of the field. Instead of moving horses and hussar backs, he saw the immobile earth and stubble around him’.¹⁵ These displacements – sudden proximity and insurmountable distance, crossing lines and closing gaps that end in solitude, silence and emptiness – register the strange spatial and temporal anonymity of war: ‘Where ours were, where the French were – he did not know. There was no one around’.¹⁶

Rostov can now no longer find ‘that line which had so sharply separated the two armies’, he no longer knows how to orientate himself in relation to the battle.¹⁷ This disorientation becomes deadly when he fails to recognise that the enemy is running towards him:

‘Well, here are some people,’ he thought joyfully, seeing several men running towards him. ‘They’ll help me!’ In front of these people ran one in a strange shako and a blue greatcoat, dark, tanned, with a hooked nose ... ‘What men are these? Rostov kept thinking, not believing his eyes. ‘Can they be Frenchmen? He looked at the approaching Frenchmen and, though a moment before he had been galloping only in order to meet these Frenchmen and cut them to pieces, their closeness now seemed so terrible to him that he could not believe his eyes. ‘Who are they? Why are they running? Can it be they’re running at me? Can it be? And why? To kill me? *Me*, whom everybody loves so?’ ... The first Frenchman with the hooked nose came so close that the expression on his face could already be seen. And the flushed alien physiognomy of this man who, lowered bayonet, holding his breath, was running lightly towards him, frightened Rostov. He seized his pistol and, instead of firing it, threw it at the Frenchman, and ran for the bushes as fast as he could.¹⁸

What remains of war, the former soldier Tolstoy suggests, is an inexorable and disorientating *gaining* of anonymity. In war, one not only loses one’s own bearings, crossing the line and running ahead of oneself, but one is also unable to recognise or to name the enemy. In war, the enemy is *without name*.

Seven years later in 1812, Rostov is once again in action and fighting the French. Once again, he is rushing forward into battle: ‘With the feeling with which he raced to intercept a wolf, Rostov, giving his Don horse free rein, galloped to intercept the disordered lines of the

French dragoons'.¹⁹ Catching a French officer, 'Rostov, not knowing why himself, raised his sabre and struck the Frenchman with it'. Tolstoy writes:

The moment he did this, all Rostov's animation suddenly vanished. The officer fell, not so much from the stroke of the sword, which only cut his arm slightly above the elbow, as from the jolt to his horse and from fear. Reining in his horse, Rostov sought his enemy with his eyes, to see whom he had vanquished. The French dragoon officer was hopping on the ground with one foot, the other being caught in the stirrup. Narrowing his eyes fearfully, as if expecting a new blow any second, he winced, glancing up at Rostov from below with an expression of terror. His face, pale and mud-spattered, fair-haired, young, with a dimple on the chin and light blue eyes, was not at all for the battlefield, not an enemy's face, but a most simple, homelike face. Before Rostov decided what to do with him, the officer cried out: '*Je me rends!*'²⁰

While it has perhaps become a cliché today to see one's brother or oneself in an enemy on the battlefield, Tolstoy suggests that war is a terrible ever-increasing proximity with anonymity, with the eyes, the face, and body of the other who has no name. This anonymity is the *only* possibility for the state-run imperative to kill and, at the same time, it is this nameless other, this broken mirror, that announces the (im)possibility of a proximity without name, and the persistence of the 'invisible line' that cuts across the frail privilege of every state-given name.

Tolstoy returns to this connection between anonymity and war in his account of Pierre's experiences during the French occupation of Moscow. As much as a reaction to witnessing the battle of Borodino and his wife's announcement that she wants a divorce as concern for his own safety, when he is arrested by the French Pierre is unable to give his name. As he is processed by the occupying army Pierre is officially designated 'as *celui qui n'avoue pas son*

nom [he who does not divulge his name]'.²¹ Named as the one-who-has-no-name by the new power of the state, when he believes that he has been sentenced to death, Pierre experiences the full force of the anonymity of the state-run imperative to kill:

There was one thought in Pierre's head all that time. It was the thought of who, finally, had sentenced him to be executed. It was not the people of the commission that had interrogated him: not one of them would or obviously could have done it. ... Who was it, finally, who was executing, killing, depriving of life, him – Pierre – with all his memories, longings, hopes, thoughts? Who was doing it? And Pierre felt that it was no one.²²

It is perhaps not fortuitous that Tolstoy goes on to link this terrible anonymity of the state to the anonymity of an animal, a dog, that belongs to no one and that has lost all marks of identity: its name, its breed and its colour. Spared execution, Pierre has been imprisoned with other regular soldiers. Tolstoy writes:

On the sixth of October, early in the morning, Pierre stepped out of the shed and, on his way back, stopped by the door, playing with a long, purplish dog on short, bowed legs that were fidgeting around him. This dog lived in their shed, spending the nights with Karataev, but occasionally went to town somewhere and came back again. It had probably never belonged to anyone, and now, too, it was no one's and had no name at all. The French called it Azorm the storytelling soldier called it Femgalka, Karataev and the others sometimes called it Grey, sometimes Floppy. Its not belonging to anyone, and the absence of a name and even of a breed, even of a definite colour, seemed not to bother the purplish dog in the least.²³

Later, Tolstoy makes this ‘purplish dog’, this animal without identity, the only possible witness to the murder of Karataev on the forced march of the Russian prisoners from Moscow. Tolstoy writes:

A dog began to howl behind, in the place where Karataev had been sitting.

‘What a fool, what’s it howling about?’ thought Pierre.

Like him, his soldier comrades, walking beside Pierre, did not turn to look at the place from which the shot had been heard and then the howling of the dog; but there was a stern look on all their faces.²⁴

ANIMALNIMITY

On 8 June 2004, Derrida delivered what would be his last conference paper in France, ‘Le souverain bien – ou l’Europe en mal de souveraineté’.²⁵ Tolstoy reiterates the connection between the animal and the anonymity of war in Nikolai Rostov’s struggle with both combat and his relation to the absolute anonymity of the sovereign. For both Derrida and Tolstoy, it is the question of the wolf.²⁶ ‘With the feeling with which he raced to intercept a wolf’ Rostov pursues the French enemy at Borodino.²⁷ Tolstoy reiterates this link between war and hunting animals in his account of Rostov’s involvement in tracking down and killing a wolf in 1810. ‘Austerlitz ... vividly but fleetingly flashed in his imagination ... “If only once in my life I could chase down a seasoned wolf, I’d ask for nothing more” he thought, straining his hearing and sight, looking to the left and then to the right, and listening to the smallest nuances in the sounds of the chase’.²⁸ What is striking in Tolstoy’s description of the hunt is that every hunting dog has a name while the wolf remains nameless: ‘each dog knew its master and its name’.²⁹

The *loss* of anonymity in the hunt is absolute: ‘Suddenly the wolf’s entire physiognomy changed; he shuddered at the sight of human eyes, which he had probably never seen before, directed at him, and turning his head slightly towards the hunter, stopped’.³⁰ When Rostov’s favourite dog, Karay, brings the wolf down, it is ‘the happiest moment of his life’.³¹ Before he can stab the wolf, Rostov is persuaded to capture the wolf alive. Tolstoy then tells us that the dogs had killed five of the wolf’s cubs. With a ‘stake thrust between her jaws’ and her legs bound the wolf is carried away: ‘everyone came to look at the wolf, who with her broad-browed head hanging down and the bitten stick between her jaws, gazed with great glassy eyes at the crowd of dogs and the men surrounding her. When they touched her she jerked her bound legs and looked wildly yet simply at them all.’³²

While Rostov has no scruples about the wolf’s terrible loss of anonymity, he is still unable to overcome the anonymity of his enemy in battle. Derrida begins his 2004 paper by noting the sexual difference between ‘the beast’ and ‘the sovereign’, and one could add Tolstoy’s description of the capture of the she-wolf to the many instances of his problematic representation of women.³³ Examining the history of the political links between the development of concepts of sovereignty and the many fables and proverbs about wolves, Derrida concentrates on an idiomatic phrase in French, ‘*à pas de loup*’, which can be translated roughly as to act stealthily, furtively, silently.³⁴ For Derrida, this phrase links a historical *use* of the concept of the animal, of the wolf, to war, to the commander-in-chief of the army, to the sovereign.

As Derrida points out, the concept “wolf” has long been ‘allegorising the hunt and war, the prey, predation’.³⁵ He takes great care to distinguish a ‘real wolf’ from the political concept of the wolf or she-wolf, warning that in speaking of an animal, we are not already speaking for the animal or assuming that the animal cannot speak for itself, in a language that we have yet to understand. One can see an example of this easy idealisation or automatic

‘allegorising’ of the animal in *War and Peace* when Pierre dreams that he is ‘surrounded by dogs’ and writes in his journal, ‘suddenly one small dog seized my left thigh with its teeth and would not let go’. Pierre immediately interprets these dogs as symbols of his own spiritual struggles: ‘Lord, Great Architect of nature! help me to tear off the dogs – my passions’.³⁶ Derrida marks his own caution around the uses and abuses of the “wolf” by emphasising that the phrase ‘à pas de loup’ implies what has *not yet* been seen or heard. In other words, in this bracketing Derrida insists that the “wolf” has not yet been named, and resists all the names that have been imposed on it. He writes:

If I have chosen the locution that names the ‘pas’ [step/not] of the wolf in ‘à pas de loup’, it is without doubt because the wolf itself is named *in absentia*, if one can say this. The wolf is named where one neither sees nor hears it coming yet; where it is still absent, save his name. It announces itself, one apprehends it, one names it, one refers to it, one even calls it by its name, one imagines it or one projects on it an image, a trope, a figure, a myth, a fable, a phantasm, but always by referring to someone who, stealthily advancing, is not there, not yet there, to someone who neither presents or represents itself yet.³⁷

At stake in this stealthily slipping away from being named is not only a presentation or making present, a presumption of putting to use, but also a warning against treating this furtive absence as a resource, as ‘*la ruse de guerre*’, as an act of mastery or sovereignty.³⁸ For Derrida, the “wolf” as a political concept has acted as both a critique of the tyranny and violence of an indivisible sovereignty *and* as a mirror that supports the claims of sovereignty to be – like the ‘wolf’ – outside of and above the law.³⁹ ‘The beast *is* the sovereign’, Derrida concludes, it is at once the possibility and the ruin of an absolute sovereignty.⁴⁰

In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy appears both to reinforce and to undermine this traditional link between the “wolf”, war and sovereignty. Wanting to find the logic or force to kill in battle, to fight for the sovereign, Rostov relies on his passion in hunting and killing the she-wolf. Rostov relies on the *absolute* anonymity of the she-wolf (redolent symbol, as Derrida says, of foundation and institution of Rome). The violence of the beast, of what *cannot* be named or tamed, is the *possibility* of killing the enemy in war. While Tolstoy does all he can to break away from this powerful trope of animal anonymity as the possibility of state sanctioned murder, not least by shattering the exceptional anonymity of the sovereign as Rostov sees the Tsar weeping under an apple tree at Austerlitz, he neither challenges this tradition of what we might call *animalnimity*, nor, despite his best intentions, diminishes the aura around the greatest sovereign of all, Napoleon. In *War and Peace*, “Napoleon” remains the oldest of names for when ‘the beast becomes the sovereign who becomes the beast’.⁴¹

As Derrida had suggested in ‘The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)’ (1999), the animal has always been *waiting to see* how it will be addressed, asking of the human ‘what is he going to call me?’⁴² This tradition of animalnimity, of relying on and exploiting the animal that can never be named *and* that is always being named in philosophy and literature, of the animal as a never ending loss of an *inexhaustible* anonymity, has always been political, always stood as a witness *sans nom*, for the most equivocal political events of our times, for the wars without end.⁴³

 NOTES

¹ In contrast to those who, for some strategic, political, institutional or creative reason (and perhaps some form of good conscience) have embraced anonymity, if such a thing is possible.

² Emmanuel Lévinas, 'Nameless' in *Proper Names*, trans. Michael B. Smith (London: Athlone, 1996), 119; 'Sans nom,' in *Noms propres* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1976), 141.

³ See also, Jacques Derrida, 'Force of Law: "The Mystical Foundation of Authority",' in *Acts of Religion*, ed. and intro. Gil Anidjar, trans. trans. Mary Quaintance (London: Routledge, 2002), 296.

⁴ Jacques Derrida, 'Dereliction of the Right to Justice (But what are the "sans-papiers" lacking?)', in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews 1971-2001*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 133.

⁵ 'Dereliction of the Right to Justice,' 135.

⁶ 'Dereliction of the Right to Justice,' 139-40.

⁷ 'Dereliction of the Right to Justice,' 134.

⁸ 'Psychoanalysis Searches the States of Its Soul', 246; *États d'âme de la psychanalyse*, 24.

See, Jacques Derrida, 'Geopsychanalysis: "and the rest of the world" ', in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume 1*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 339. See also Derrida's remarks on war in 'The "World" of the Enlightenment to

Come (Exception, Calculation and Sovereignty)', in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 154-9.

⁹ William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without A Hero* (London: Penguin, 1985), 364. See also, Mary Hammond, 'Thackeray's Waterloo: History and War in *Vanity Fair*', *Literature and History* 11 (2002): 19-38.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, 'The Thing', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 165-66.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, 'Pas', in *Parages*, nouvelle édition revue et augmentée (Paris: Galilée, 2003), 59. My translation.

¹² 'Pas', 104-5. See also, Jacques Derrida, 'LIVING ON. Border lines', in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, trans. James Hulbert (New York: Continuum, 1979), 127, 147, and Jacques Derrida, *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 17-18, 32, 65-6.

¹³ See also, John Bayley, *Tolstoy and the Novel* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1968), 163-76; Leo Tolstoy, 'Sevastopol Stories', in *The Cossacks and Other Stories*, trans. David McDuff and Paul Foote, intro. Paul Foote (London: Penguin, 2006), 185-333.

¹⁴ *War and Peace*, 188 [I: II: XIX].

¹⁵ *War and Peace*, 189.

¹⁶ *War and Peace*, 189.

¹⁷ *War and Peace*, 189.

¹⁸ *War and Peace*, 189.

¹⁹ *War and Peace*, 653 [III: I: 15].

²⁰ *War and Peace*, 653-54.

²¹ *War and Peace*, 962-63 [IV: I: X].

²² *War and Peace*, 965 [IV: I: X].

²³ *War and Peace*, 1008-9 [IV: II: XI].

²⁴ *War and Peace*, 1064 [IV: III: XV].

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, 'Le souverain bien – ou l'Europe en mal de souveraineté,' *Cités* 30 (2007): 103-40. My translation.

²⁶ For Derrida's argument against using 'the general singular that is *the animal*,' see 'The Animal That Therefore I am (More to Follow),' 402, 408-9, 415-16.

²⁷ *War and Peace*, 653 [III: I: XV].

²⁸ *War and Peace*, 500 [II: IV: V]

²⁹ *War and Peace*, 495 [II: IV: IV]. See, 495-502.

³⁰ *War and Peace*, 500.

³¹ *War and Peace*, 501.

³² I have chosen to follow Edmonds's translation in this case, Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (London: Penguin, 1982), 592. In Edmonds's translation the wolf is identified as a female. This is the only significant discrepancy I have found in the quoted passages with the new translation by Pevear and Volokhonsky, see *War and Peace*, 502. As Derrida suggests, translation is always encountering and registering the snags of sexual difference.

³³ 'Le souverain bien', 110.

³⁴ 'Le souverain bien', 111.

³⁵ 'Le souverain bien', 113.

³⁶ *War and Peace*, 443 [II: III: X].

³⁷ 'Le souverain bien', 113.

³⁸ 'Le souverain bien', 115.

³⁹ 'Le souverain bien', 119-26.

⁴⁰ On Derrida's work on sovereignty, see Peggy Kamuf, 'Introduction: Event of Resistance', in Jacques Derrida, *Without Alibi*, ed. trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 14-16; Michael Naas, '“One Nation ... Indivisible”: Jacques Derrida on the Autoimmunity of Democracy and the Sovereignty of God', *Research in Phenomenology* 36.1 (2006): 15-44; Geoffrey Bennington, 'The Fall of Sovereignty', *Epoché* 10.2 (2006): 395-406. Alberto Moreiras, 'A God Without Sovereignty: Political Jouissance, The Passive Decision', *The New Centennial Review* 4.3 (2004): 71-108.

⁴¹ 'Le souverain bien,' 126. See also, *War and Peace*, 891 [III: III: XXV].

⁴² 'The Animal That Therefore I am (More to Follow)', 387.

⁴³ 'The Animal That Therefore I am (More to Follow)', 379, 381, 384-88, 410.