Postscript

Another ethical theorist of the *zoon*, near the end of his followings-after, meditated, perhaps melancholically, on the ends of “man,” and on the relations among the living who share the passionate condition of mortality. To end where I began, to add one more “*griffure*” to Sarah Kofman’s feline genealogy, I cannot help but wonder whether Derrida’s cats are the interlocutors—no, the mirrors—of a certain other gaze, not this time the gaze of the human-in-the-making, naked like an infant, but that of the philosopher contemplating death. Claude Lévi-Strauss, in a beautiful passage that closes *Tristes Tropiques* (that “sad” place he went to as a Jew fleeing Europe, following the tracks or traces of an earlier denunciator of carno-phallogocentrism, Jean de Léry, who was also fleeing Europe’s religio-racist persecutions), writes, of “our” time between the beginning of the world and its end:

> Le monde a commencé sans l’homme et il s’achèvera sans lui… l’homme n’est seul dans l’univers… tant que nous serons là et qu’il existera un monde—cette arche ténue qui nous relie à l’inaccessible demeurerà, montrant la voie inverse de celle de notre esclavage et dont, à défaut de la parcourir, la contemplation procure à l’homme l’unique faveur qu’il sache mériter: … cette faveur que toute société convoite …chance, vitale pour la vie, de se déprendre et qui consiste … pendant les brefs intervalles où notre espèce supporte d’interrompre son labeur de ruche, à saisir l’essence de ce qu’elle fut et continue d’être, en deçà de la pensée et au delà de la société: dans la contemplation d’un mineral plus beau que toutes nos oeuvres; dans le parfum, plus savant que nos livres, respiré au creux d’un lis; ou dans le clin d’oeil alourdi de patience, de sérénité et de pardon réciproque, qu’une entente involontaire permet parfois d’échanger avec un chat.37

The world began without man and will end without him

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... [M]an is not alone in the universe ... as long as we continue to exist and there is a world, that tenuous arch linking us to the inaccessible will still remain, to show us the opposite course to that leading to enslavement; man may be unable to follow it, but its contemplation affords him the only privilege of which he can make himself worthy ... a privilege coveted by every society ... the possibility, vital for life, of unhitching, which consists ... in grasping, during the brief intervals in which our species can bring itself to interrupt its hive-like activity, the essence of what it was and continues to be, below the threshold of thought and over and above society: in the contemplation of a mineral more beautiful than all our creations; in the scent that can be smelt at the heart of a lily and is more imbued with learning than all our books; or in the brief glance, heavy with patience, serenity and mutual forgiveness, that, through some involuntary understanding, one can sometimes exchange with a cat. (413-415)
Fig. 2: Derrida and Lucrece.