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Everywhere, Animals Appear: Species, Race, and the State in Literature from the Raj to Global India

Jason Sandhar, *The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Nandi Bhatia, *The University of Western Ontario*

Joint Supervisor: Joshua Schuster, *The University of Western Ontario*

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Abstract

In recent decades, postcolonial writers and critics have started attending to representations of animals in literature from the global south (e.g. Armstrong 2002; Huggan and Tiffin 2010). While the turn toward literary animals has been acknowledged for its potential to complicate how colonial violence dehumanized colonized groups, scholars such as Lucille Desblache have pointed out that animals can also go “unseen” or “unheard” in the service of human narratives about emancipation from colonial dominance if they are treated as allegories for the emancipatory process (Desblache 2016). Critical animal studies, meanwhile, has extensively critiqued how liberal humanism in the West has marginalized animals (Cavell 2009; Nussbaum 2007; Shukin 2009), but the field has only recently started to engage with the Global South (e.g. Sivasundaram 2015). As a contribution to both of these fields, this thesis dwells in the fissures between India’s environmental history and the corpus of Indian literature about animals to reimagine the boundary between humans and animals as a zone of potential resistance against the state’s mandate to control how animals live and die. Over the last 150 years, key shifts in the colonial and postcolonial state’s environmental, administrative, and fiscal policies—such as the founding of the Imperial Forest Service in 1864, constitutional amendments to animal husbandry following the withdrawal of the imperial government in 1947, and the Indian Forest Service’s ongoing engagement with the global conservation movement—have accompanied shifts in the species boundary as a means to secure the state’s control over animals through its legislative and economic mechanisms. Throughout this period, the state has constructed animals variously—and, at times, simultaneously—as deviants, labourers, fetish objects, and commodities. This

thesis shows how literary representations of Indian animals by Rudyard Kipling (1893), Bhanu Kapil (1935; 2009), Tania James (2015), Amitabh (1992), and Arjun Dangle (1992) might disrupt and reimagine the totalizing logic of species boundaries constitutive of colonial and postcolonial legislation even as the texts themselves remain unavoidably embedded in the state's hegemonic paradigms of race, class, caste, gender, and species.

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Introduction:

Everywhere, Animals Appear

The Imperial Farce

George Orwell once shot an elephant “solely to avoid looking a fool” (10). The incident, described in his 1936 essay “Shooting an Elephant,” exemplifies the circuits of power that reduced the sahib, the poor, and the animal to bit players shaped by the logic of British rule in the Indian subcontinent. In the essay, an elephant in *musth* kills a day labourer. Orwell—who was stationed in Burma as a colonial police officer at the time—is called to help. The Burmese prod Orwell into killing the elephant, even though the *musth* has passed. As Orwell clutches the rifle, he writes,

I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man’s dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd—seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of the sahib. (6)

Orwell the man did not want to shoot the elephant, but for Orwell the sahib, “[i]t was perfectly clear what I ought to do” (7). The crowd goaded Orwell into performing as their ruler: to avoid looking a fool, Orwell chose to act the fool. The elephant paid for this farce with its life.

In a powerful reading of “Shooting an Elephant,” Ranajit Guha parses Orwell’s forked hatred of both the Raj and the natives as the foundational crux of a moral dilemma

that transcends the immediate problem of whether or not Orwell should shoot elephant. Guha focuses on the fact that Orwell hates the Raj for what it has done to Burma's people at the same time as he hates the people themselves, "the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make [his] job impossible" (Orwell 2), for their hatred toward him. However, this latter circuit of hatred activates the possibility of Orwell's freedom when the natives prod the young sahib into performing his role as the face of imperial authority by shooting the elephant. That is, Orwell has the option not to shoot; in so refusing, he may also refuse his role as the sahib that the natives so revile, and whom he reviles in return.

But he shoots the elephant. For Guha, the nexus at which Orwell's hatred of the natives coincides with his submission to their will reflects the shortcomings of a liberal conscience that cannot live up to its own ideals. This failure, ironically, makes Orwell's essay all the more profound insofar as it reveals how a genuine moment of human vulnerability, exemplified here as Orwell's failure to resist the hateful will of the mob, can impose a painful reality check upon us when we fall short of the moral heights to which we might aspire. The Raj, meanwhile, would never be the same, "[f]or it had caught a glimpse of freedom in the flash of time's passing, and had known, if only for the duration of a blink, the possibility of not being at home in empire" (Guha 493).

But what about the elephant? The animal seems to disappear when Guha dialectically advances from the immediate dilemma of shooting the elephant to the abstract question of freedom and agency. Yet the elephant also remains as a necessary and sufficient condition for the circuit of power between the mob and the sahib that articulates Guha's formulation of freedom. This thesis investigates the forked logic of the animal's appearance and disappearance in the literary and historical contexts of the

Indian subcontinent from the Raj to the present. As it proceeds from the founding of the Imperial Forest Department in 1864 as the crucial historical watershed that continues to impact India's animals and people today, the thesis steps back from the brink of Guha's humanist conception of freedom to reconsider how the colonial and postcolonial state have exploited the species boundary as a means to control the lives and deaths of animals, and how literature responds to those mechanisms of control. As it dwells in the fissures between India's environmental history and the corpus of Indian literature about animals, the thesis reinterprets the boundary between humans and animals as a historically-constituted zone of resistance against the state's mandate to control how animals live and die. As such, the thesis is not about parsing the species boundary in general, but of understanding how the Indian state has exploited the human/animal divide, and of how literary animals might resist or speak back to the state. Additionally, the thesis does not produce a linear historical survey of India's articulation of species boundaries since 1864. Instead, I will show how the state has forced the human-animal divide to uphold its interests across different permutations of India's administrative structures over time through mechanisms of power over animal life and death.

Over the last 150 years, key shifts in colonial and postcolonial India's environmental, administrative, and fiscal policies—such as the founding of the Imperial Forest Service in 1864, constitutional amendments to animal husbandry following the withdrawal of the imperial government in 1947, and the state's engagements with the global conservation movement from the 1970s to the present—have accompanied shifts in the state's construction of the species boundary as a means to secure its control over animals through legislative and economic mechanisms. Although the material conditions

of Indian capitalism and its relationship with animals have undergone profound material changes throughout this period, the state has consistently sought to maintain control over animals' bodies by constructing them variously—and, at times, simultaneously—as deviants, labourers, fetish objects, and commodities. Moreover, the state's efforts to control animal life resonate with categories of race, class, caste, and gender that have maintained power inequities amongst the subcontinent's human populations.

“Everywhere, Animals Appear” asks how literary representations of Indian animals by Rudyard Kipling (1893), Bhanu Kapil (1935; 2009), Tania James (2015), Amitabh (1992), and Arjun Dangle (1992) might disrupt and reimagine the totalizing logic of species boundaries constitutive of colonial and postcolonial legislation even as the texts themselves remain unavoidably embedded in the state's hegemonic paradigms of race, class, caste, gender, and species.

The intersection of postcolonial criticism and animal studies is not new, but interpretive strategies vary. Postcolonial critics of Indian literature such as Jopi Nyman, Shefali Rajamannar, and Davide Torri, for example, deploy methodologies reminiscent of Yale deconstruction and anti-colonial reading practices outlined in 1989's *The Empire Writes Back* to draw out the latent content in texts such as Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Books* to re-read non-human animals as sites of resistance. Similarly, Sundhya Walther draws on animal symbols to celebrate the liberatory potential of “becoming animal” in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*, and Justin Omar Johnston critiques representations of protest in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* as examples of how the poor unwittingly uphold ideals of Western humanism that the novel's eponymous protagonist critiques. These are powerful interpretive methods, but they tend to construct a singular notion of “the

animal” or “animality” as an allegory that stands in for a universal “subaltern” who “resists” power in general, thereby flattening the complex lived conditions of both animals and people as historically constituted subjects that struggle against a given power structure. Indeed, as Lucille Desblache notes, animals in the context of postcolonial literature and criticism often appear as “allegorical agents of a counter discourse instrumental to the revision of human histories and to an emancipation from Western dominance.” While the figure of the animal provides postcolonial writers and critics with a means of critiquing imperial power, animals themselves remain “unseen” and “unheard” others who serve human narratives (Desblache). Animal studies, meanwhile, has extensively critiqued how liberal humanism in the West has oppressed animal life—an approach I unpack in more detail throughout this introductory chapter—but the field has only recently started to seriously engage with the Global South.

To complicate the trope of the “animal subaltern” in the contexts of postcolonial criticism and critical animal studies, I investigate how the human and animal figures in the literary works I analyze might respond to historical conditions such as the founding of the Imperial Forest Department in 1864, post-Independence constitutional amendments concerning cattle husbandry, global conservation from the 1970s to the present, cow vigilantism in the context of contemporary Hindutva, and underground poaching networks in present-day Kerala. I put historical documents and scholarship by environmental historians of South Asia such as Ramachandra Guha, Anand Pandian, and Mahesh Rangarajan into conversation with the analytical tools developed by South Asian postcolonial theorists and animal studies scholars to investigate how India’s animals and colonized people underwent distinct, yet enmeshed, experiences of subjugation and

resistance that continue to this day. Throughout the thesis, I consider how literary representations of Indian animals both resist and reinforce the way that such power formations have variously sought to control and destroy animal life, and of the ways in which power renders the lives of Indian animals inseparable from the lives of the colonizer and the colonized. In a word, the thesis prises open the gap between the Indian animal's body and its cultural, literary, and material ubiquity across time and space, from post-1857 India to present-day Hindu fundamentalism, to investigate how animals and the people close to them navigate and resist the specific conditions of violence and oppression in which they dwell.

Chapter One draws connections between the imperial state and the Jungle Law in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Books*. Predictably, I find that Kipling reimagines the dynamics of native rebellion and the imperial order through the Jungle Law as a mechanism of order that imposes obedience over justice, but I also find moments in which deviant characters such as Shere Khan the tiger and Buldeo the village hunter question the symbolic orders in which they dwell. I consider how these momentary fissures render visible the networks of power that position Kipling's text as a literary project in the broader historical context of the way that the Raj imposed the Right of Conquest as a legal mechanism to exercise power over life in forested areas of the Central Provinces after the Forest Act of 1878. I also find that Mowgli dwells in a double-interstice of power insofar as he masters both the Jungle and the village while belonging to neither. However, his liminal state of being at the level of the text is doubled through his uniquely complicated relationship with Kipling's readers, where he is both the embodiment of a bourgeois fantasy of jungle life and the didactic imperative of

Kipling's jingoism. Consequently, Mowgli's feelings of unbelonging, which also express his alienation from himself, are crucial for his role as the site through which Kipling's fiction and imperial discourse exercise power in the context of the Crown Raj and late-Victorian England.

The second chapter moves from Kipling's fantasy about human ferality and talking animals to claims about real-life feral children in latter nineteenth and early twentieth-century India. Beginning with several historical examples of Indian feral children, I argue that the state refuses to recognize the wild child as a subject at the same time as it imposes mechanisms of power upon it. To illustrate the concrete implications of this impasse, I analyze the story of Amala and Kamala, the so-called "wolf girls" of Bengal who lived under the care of an Anglican missionary named Joseph Singh in 1920. After claiming to have discovered the girls in a wolf den, Singh documented his attempts to socialize them. When word of his efforts reached American shores, an anthropologist named Robert Zingg set about publishing Singh's account in a volume that included several other case histories of feral children. With the exception of a Eurocentric monograph about the girls' development in 1940 by the Yale psychologist and pediatrician Robert Gesell, the girls' story was largely forgotten until 2009, when Bhanu Kapil, a contemporary conceptual poet based out of Boulder, Colorado, attempted a historical revision of Singh's story in *Humanimal: A Project for Future Children*. Throughout the collection, the poet's memories of her childhood as a first-generation Bengali in London and her father's experiences of violence and poverty in rural India bleed into her efforts to recover the wolf girls' story. I suggest that Kapil complicates Vijay Mishra's notion of the diasporic imaginary, the collective projection of a

remembered homeland by a given ethnic group. Whereas the diasporic imaginary involves a group's efforts to remember and reproduce a lost homeland that never existed, I argue that Kapil deploys memory, trauma, spatial displacement, and animality to generate new ways of imagining species boundaries and racialized embodiment out of loss.

Chapter Three turns to the Indo-American novelist Tania James. In 2015's *The Tusk that did the Damage*, James attends to how transnational corporations, NGOs, and the state marginalize India's poor and the animals who live with them. The novel consists of three distinct but intersecting narratives. In the first narrative, a Keralan teenager named Manu Shivaram relates his family's involvement in the elephant poaching trade. Emma, an American filmmaker who travels to Kerala with her friend Teddy to shoot a documentary about Indian elephants, provides the second narrative. Both Emma and Manu tell their stories from the first person. The third narrative follows a traumatized elephant calf into adulthood. The elephant story, told in the limited third person, shifts between the elephant's perspective and the perspectives of his handlers. James' foray into the mind of a traumatized elephant overturns anthropomorphism as a literary trope in that James does not imagine the elephant's experience through terms that are recognizable to humans. Instead, she imagines its lived experience—as that which is necessarily unknowable to humans—in a way that is understandable to her reader. The chapter unpacks how James' representational strategy provides a cogent alternative to the state's imposition of the species boundary.

In the fourth chapter, I attend to the entanglements of state violence against Indian cattle and Dalits. I investigate how Marathi poetry and fiction about cattle disposal can

disrupt state legislation that upholds cattle protection while failing to improve the conditions of emaciated and diseased cattle that live off of urban waste. The Marathi literary works I investigate—Arjun Dangle’s short poem, “The Cantonment has Begun to Shake” and Amitabh’s short story, “The Cull”—shed light on the experiences of Dalits and cattle at the same time as they contest the aesthetics of mainstream Indian literature and Hindu cow veneration.

All of the literary texts that this thesis engages with present different approaches to the species boundary. They also provoke us to reimagine the animal’s relationship to the state without reducing the animal to an allegory for human narratives of resistance to colonialism, the state, or transnational capital. Two important Indian novels that raise salient questions about species boundaries and the state, Indra Sinha’s *Animal’s People* and Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*, fall outside of the scope of this thesis because they do not substantially engage with the lives of animals. *Animal’s People* deploys the trope of the animal to interrogate how transnational capital exploits the law to avoid assuming responsibility for ecological disasters in the Global South, but the animal victims of the Kampani—Sinha’s fictional appropriation of Union Carbide—get lost in the overall arc of the narrative. Meanwhile, Adiga makes frequent allusions to buffalo, canines, roosters, and the eponymous white tiger in his novel, but the text offers little by way of the lives of these animals or their relationships with the book’s characters. Instead, Adiga allegorizes them to critique how the flows of transnational wealth maintain separations between rich and poor that are expressed, particularly in rural settings, as feudal relations that predate colonization.

Everywhere, Animals Appear: Complicating the “Disappearing Animal”

“Everywhere animals disappear,” laments John Berger in his 1980 essay “Why Look at Animals?” A seminal analysis of how Western capitalism has marginalized animals through the modern zoo, Berger’s essay has informed milestones in animal studies such as Akira Lippit’s *Electric Animal* (2000)—which interrogates how modernist aesthetics both erases and fetishizes the figure of the animal—and Nicole Shukin’s *Animal Capital* (2009)—a post-Marxian analysis of how the logic of commodities destroys animals’ bodies in the spheres of culture and industrial production in the West. This thesis revisits and complicates Berger’s formulation of the “vanishing animal” to render visible suffering animal bodies amidst their ubiquitous presence as cultural symbols over the 150 years that have passed since the founding of the Imperial Forest Department. As the thesis proceeds from 1864 as its point of historical departure, it engages with Indian animal stories to track how animals continue to influence an imagined sense of “Indian-ness” both in the subcontinent and abroad.

To put it another way: Everywhere, animals appear—so much so that the animal’s ubiquity across the documents and literary works I investigate is unsurprising, even mundane. Yet the animal’s lived condition risks going unheard and unseen amidst the symbolic representations we map upon its body. How, then, might we analyze the animal as a representation of a given cultural formation at the same time as we respect the animal as a thing in itself, all while remaining mindful of the material conditions of animal marginalization, endangerment, and extinction that force us to rethink how we understand life in general? Why, for example, are “sacred” cows left to die of disease and malnourishment amongst stinking towers of human waste in urban centers such as

Calcutta and New Delhi? How are we to understand the elephant as both a colourfully-painted icon for the ongoing “Incredible India” marketing campaign and a “pest” that destroys the crops of impoverished Keralan farmers? How have tigers gone from being “vermin” in the heyday of the Raj to charismatic megafauna that, today, evade gawking weekend adventurers at Corbett Park? We might proceed with Ursula Heise’s suggestion that representations of animals reflect the salient themes of a given culture’s *zeitgeist* over and above the lives of animals themselves (5). In the context of Indian animals, this means that certain narratives are valued over others in such a way that an animal’s lived conditions stand in bleak contrast with the narratives we construct about it. “Everywhere, Animals Appear” positions literary texts about Indian animals against legislation and policy to investigate how literature sheds new light on the lives of animals at the same time as it can resist the state’s encroachment upon animals’ bodies.

I also argue that any approach that targets a given intersection between postcolonial thought and critical animal studies frameworks must articulate how empire exercised violence against animals and colonized human populations without flattening the differences across and within specific colonial and postcolonial contexts. I align myself here with Marjorie Spiegel, who warns us to not reduce non-humans and colonized people to a homogenous category of marginalized, non-European, and subhuman Other. As Spiegel notes in *The Dreaded Comparison*, investigations into the European slave trade’s reduction of colonized populations to beasts of burden might trivialize human suffering if those investigations fail to include a careful critique of the species divide. Heise, more recently, has parsed the conceptual entanglements of speciesism and racism at the heart of imperial violence. Indirectly gesturing toward

philosophers such as Stanley Cavell and Paula Cavalieri, both of whom unpack the juridical limits of human rights, Heise notes that

[t]heorists of posthumanism have argued that discrimination against other humans is structurally related to discrimination against non-humans—put somewhat simplistically, that the same underlying logic informs racism and speciesism. It is the category of the animal, understood as another that does not have the same claim to moral consideration as a human and can therefore be killed or let die with impunity, that opens up the possibility of relegating other humans legally, ethically, and politically to that category. (164)

Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, in their call to problematize the circuits of power that animalized non-Europeans, deconstruct the conceptual thresholds of race and species from a slightly different angle than Heise. According to Huggan and Tiffin, we must attend to how the philosophical category of “the human” remains complicit in Eurocentric constructs of imperial power:

a re-imagining and reconfiguration of the human place in nature necessitates an interrogation of the category of the human itself and of the ways in which the construction of ourselves *against* nature—with the hierarchisation of life-forms that construction implies—has been and remains complicit in colonialist and racist exploitation from the time of imperial conquest to the present day. (6)

Spiegel, Heise, and Huggan and Tiffin are careful to not prescribe a resolution between postcolonial thought, ecocriticism, and critical animal studies as abstract categories. Instead, they sketch a point of conceptual departure to be refined through specific instances of human and animal abuses justified by the instruments of imperial power.

Although the categories of “racism” and “speciesism” both emerge from the broad sweep of imperial history that implicitly begs for a critique of Western humanism in the tradition of Hegel, John Stuart Mill, and, more recently, Niall Ferguson, their real-world instantiations do not satisfy a predetermined set of universal conditions. That is, we can juxtapose analyses of species violence with analyses of violence against colonized populations to glean points of coincidence determined by imperial power in general, but the juxtaposition does not, and cannot, reduce the *-isms* of race and species to an absolute historical or conceptual determinant. To that end, I investigate how specific processes of policy-making—which continue to be unpacked by historians—can better nuance how administration and capital acted as instruments that codified racism and speciesism as cultural norms under the Company and Crown. In this introductory chapter, I find that although the Company and Crown justified colonial violence against humans according to different legislative principles than those that appropriated, commoditized, and destroyed animal life, the dehumanization of the natives was predicated on similar logics of domination and power that justified the slaughter and control of animal populations. It is at this juncture that the thesis unpacks the material conditions of India's human and animal histories to complicate existing critiques of “animal subalternity” by some postcolonial critics.

In *Dominance without Hegemony*, Ranajit Guha argues that the Raj system eschewed the hegemonic structure of citizenship that characterized nineteenth-century England, pursuing instead a quasi-feudal admixture of paternalism, lordship, and military

dominance over the colonized.¹ Animal bodies, meanwhile, were rendered as commodities through resource extraction predicated on the commercial imperatives of Company mercantilism and, later, industrial capitalism. Although the material conditions that facilitated the Company and Crown's domination of the natives qualitatively and quantitatively differed from those that led to the destruction of animals' bodies, both humans and animals were filtered through bureaucratic mechanisms of Crown control that facilitated the flows of capital. The upshot here is that the lives of animals and the lives of colonized Indians are irreducible to each other with respect to the specific juridical or administrative circuits deployed by the colonizer. So it would be spurious to claim that the British simply animalized the natives, or constructed natives and animals as a homologous mass constitutive of an unruly and unknowable subcontinent from an administrative point of view. Nevertheless, violence against colonized people and animals was justified through instruments of imperial power that presupposed the right of

¹ Vivek Chibber has forcefully critiqued Guha for oversimplifying the liberal democratic tradition in the West. The European revolutions of 1640-1660 and 1789 were not spontaneous uprisings predicated on universal rights or liberty, Chibber insists, but conspiratorial efforts by local elites to overthrow monarchical overreach; the peasant uprisings that accompanied bourgeois descent in England and France came about as incidental consequences of elite strife, but they had little long-term influence on the power inequities that continued well into nineteenth-century Europe. Despite Chibber's assertions to the contrary, I would argue that Guha's apparent oversimplification of European liberal democracy does not entirely invalidate his analysis of dominance without hegemony in the Indian context. If anything, it seems that Chibber's rigorous interpretation of the European revolutions and peasant struggle strengthens and nuances early material-historicist analyses of the Raj system by Subalternists such as Guha, Shahid Amin, Gyan Pandey, and Sumit Sarkar.

European colonizers to inflict that violence through mechanisms of commercial extraction, forest management, and imperial governance between the early period of colonial contact in the seventeenth century and 1947.

An analysis of how imperial forestry marginalized humans and non-humans also contributes to existing critiques of state-sanctioned speciesism by animal studies scholars. Although scholars such as Cary Wolfe and Stanley Cavell have exhaustively contested the philosophical and political assumptions that articulate the species divide under European liberalism,² only recently has the field of animal studies started to interrogate how imperial agents erased interspecies relationships in the colonies.³ Philip Armstrong's suggestion in 2002 that non-European epistemologies can contest speciesism remains a salient point of departure for those who wish to build anti-speciesist critiques of imperial history. However, this thesis takes a slightly different approach than that prescribed by Armstrong. Although non-European epistemologies inform aspects of my close analyses of interspecies relationships in some of the texts under investigation—particularly in my discussions of Kipling and James in Chapters One and Three, respectively—the thesis argues that we must first understand how mechanisms of imperial power following the 1860s sought to control animal life. To that end, this chapter draws on scholars of South Asian environmental history to investigate how the Raj's administrative and commercial

² Critiques of how Western humanism, from Aristotle to Heidegger, marginalized the lives of animals is beyond the scope of this thesis. For a critique of liberal debates about animal rights, see the introductory chapter of Wolfe's *Animal Rites* (2003) and Cavell's essay in *Philosophy and Animal Life* (2009).

³ The May 2015 issue of *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* offers a number of cogently argued strategies to integrate non-human life into postcolonial studies more generally.

apparatuses, particularly in the period that immediately followed the establishment of the Imperial Forest Service in 1864, marginalized both animals and people, and how animals and people responded to the state's oppressive apparatuses.

As the Crown consolidated power over the subcontinent after the 1857 Rebellion, its agents claimed that the government would maintain forest cover and restore animal biodiversity in order to reverse decades of ecological destruction by the Company through the latter eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, the Crown's post-1857 vision of "conservation," substantiated through the Forest Acts of 1865 and 1878, upheld Britain's assertion that nature was a resource to be exploited for industry. Consequently, the conservation projects undertaken by the Crown after 1865 maintained the trends of biodiversity loss and ecological destruction triggered by the Company at the turn of the nineteenth century. As I will show throughout the remainder of this chapter, the Crown's imperative to reshape and control the forest as a colonial "resource" had particularly dire consequences for elephants, big cats, rhinos, wild pigs, and cattle; subsistence societies such as the Baiga and the Gond; and tree species such as *chir*, *deodar*, *sal*, and *teak*.

To investigate the broad intersections of species and race in the Indian subcontinent, the upcoming sections separately unpack the Crown's commercial expropriation of Indian animals following the 1865 and 1878 Forest Acts and its oppression of colonized subjects in the latter nineteenth century. I focus on the lives of animals before turning to how the Raj dominated human populations. My aim is not to reduce the dynamics of power over animals and power over humans to an abstract principle of colonial power, but to parse how the logics of capital and administration

subsumed the lives of animals and people under the material processes of Crown and Company interests that were, at times, subject to their own internal contradictions.

Science, Empire

As nineteenth-century capital captured or destroyed animal bodies under the imperative of resource extraction, the Raj subscribed to culturally constructed notions of animal life defined by Victorian science. Consequently, the bodies of wild animals such as tigers, elephants, deer, and boars in the late Raj were variously—and, at times, simultaneously—constructed as commoditized cultural icons, scientific specimens, trophies, and impediments to resource extraction. In effect, these animals were symbolically and materially subsumed under the administrative instruments of Company extraction in the early nineteenth century and Crown governance after 1857. These instruments found their expression in the Raj context through the commercial imperatives of industrial forestry and hunting policies that, in turn, reflected scientifically constituted, cultural ideals about what separated animals from humans in Victorian England.

Breakthroughs in biological sciences in the earlier parts of the nineteenth century provided England's Victorian imaginary with a means to assimilate the animal into a coherent system of signification that complemented the assimilative thrust of empire. John MacKenzie has thus argued that “[t]he study of a global natural history became closely related” to the latter nineteenth-century “hunting cult,” an obsession with capturing and categorizing flora and fauna under the rubric of humanist presumptions about “nature” that worked in concert with imperial conquest:

The emergence of natural history specialisms, the division and ordering of the scientific effort, reflected the accelerating urge to order the world of nature, which was itself both an impulse towards and a symptom of the developing yearning to order and classify human affairs through imperialism. (36)

At the same time, popular interpretations of Charles Darwin, Richard Owen, and J.E. Gray facilitated the imperial sportsman's "intelligent interest" in exotic specimens (MacKenzie 36-37). Hence, British discourses of taxonomy facilitated an intrinsic connection between the hunter and the scientist, as the former worked in the "service of a scientific knowledge which epitomised Western man's command of a global natural world" (36). Richard Owen's 1858 address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science is typical of the feverish intersection between science, hunting, and imperial conquest that MacKenzie describes:

Our colonies include parts of the earth where the forms of the plants and animals are the most strange. No empire in the world had ever so wide a range for the collection of the various forms of animal life as Great Britain. Never was there so much energy and intelligence displayed in the capture and transmission of exotic animals by the enterprising traveller in unknown lands and by the hardy settler in remote colonies, as by those who start from their native shores in Britain. (qtd. in MacKenzie 37)

England's voracious appetite for specimens from abroad catapulted imperial sportsmen such as F.C. Selous, C.H. Stigand, Denis Lyell, and Richard Meinertzhagen into the elite circles of natural history (38). Additionally, English interiors and architecture aestheticized the Empire's appropriation of the natural world. By the latter nineteenth

century, the great stairwells of Gothic houses and “male sanctums” such as the billiard room, smoking lounge, and the great hall were filled with hunting trophies from home and abroad. In short, the British elite’s country home became a site where “[f]oreign service and hunting prowess, social status and ‘manly’ pursuits, together with an intelligent interest in natural history” would intersect and reside (30).

Additionally, the associative links between sportsmen, empire, and nature were brought into England’s popular imagination by figures such as Sir Stamford Raffles. A British statesman who famously installed imperial outposts in Java and modern-day Singapore, Raffles founded what would eventually become the Zoological Society of London in 1824. Harriet Ritvo remarks that Raffles envisioned a collection of captive animals “that would serve not just as a popular symbol of human domination, but also as a more precise and elaborate figuration of England’s imperial enterprise” (206). To that end, Raffles’ menagerie catered to elite classes “that produced officers, administrators, and commercial entrepreneurs” (210) to be sent abroad. Scientific inquiry was, again, couched in notions of “patriotic obligation” for imperial England that also supported a distinctly upper-class worldview.⁴

Tigers

Keith Thomas has credited nineteenth-century England’s “revolution” in interspecies “perceptions” to the development of natural history as the catalyst for “a new concern for the suffering of animals” (qtd. in MacKenzie 98). Yet nineteenth-century

⁴ The Society’s exclusivist aspirations gradually dissolved, however, as Raffles permitted public access to the gardens for a shilling each, a comparatively reasonable price in the 1830s.

museum culture, defined by the union of science and imperial sport discussed above, complicates Thomas' narrative of Victorian England's empathy. Meanwhile, as MacKenzie notes, elite sport-hunting entered a "golden age" that brought with it the British trophy craze in the subcontinent (27-28). Tigers bore the brunt of the Empire's bloodlust for sport. Mahesh Rangarajan finds that trophy hunters killed approximately 20,000 tigers between 1860 and 1960 in the Sundarbans; the Plains, meanwhile, witnessed 56,000 kills between 1875 and 1920. Rangarajan adds that the official figure of 56,000 is likely much lower than the actual number of tigers killed, as 13 years' worth of files were missing at the time of his inquiry ("The Raj" 285).⁵

Trophies alone cannot account for the imperial *shikari's* destructive impulses. Anecdotal accounts of man-eating, aggravated further still by the fact that tiger habitats were situated in sites designated for major infrastructure projects, earned tigers the reputation of "vermin" and "dacoits." Although he served as an imperial forest officer in the 1930s, S.R. Daver's response to the imagined threat of tigers was typical of the post-1857 Raj. Daver qualified the imperative to kill tigers *en masse* with an absurd non-sequitur, asserting that the state would tolerate tigers if they obeyed the administrative imperatives of commercial forestry:

⁵ The Empire's war on tiger pales in comparison to its mandate to eradicate wolves. According to Rangarajan, imperial officers destroyed over 100,000 wolves between 1871 and 1916 ("The Raj"). Tigers also fared better than lions, whose populations declined massively because of hunting and the ecological destruction of northwestern India (Rangarajan, "Animals with Rich Histories" 112). Comparatively speaking, elephant hunting was not especially prolific in India. Although imperial *shikaris* coveted elephants because of the unique dangers of the hunt, Indian ivory did not fetch high prices (MacKenzie 183).

As long as a tiger is a game-killer, he is a gentleman, he never interferes with man or his property. And so long as a tiger remains a gentleman, he has our admiration and respect. But cattle-lifters and man-eaters adopt new ways of life (perhaps compelled to do so by man himself) which makes them a source of danger and menace to man and his livestock. Such creatures are in no way better than ‘*goondas*’ (scoundrels) among human society, and surely nobody feels any compunction about how a *goonda* ends his life. (qtd. in Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest* 138)

The baleful tenor of Daver’s words—“And so long as a tiger remains a gentleman, he has our admiration and respect”—is palpable. He appears to concede that the Raj would readily leave tigers alone were they not man-eaters, and he goes so far as to entertain the theory that tigers are “compelled” to eat people because people invade the tiger’s territory. But he immediately nullifies his concession when he derides man-eaters and “cattle-lifters” as “*goondas*,” regardless of the fact that colonial forestry drove tigers to man-eating in the first place.⁶

Bearing the imperial myth of the thuggish tiger in mind, Mahesh Rangarajan is careful to emphasize that tigers did not simply and suddenly disappear across the subcontinent as a whole. Some British agents, such as Joseph Frayer, drew a straight line between William Sleeman’s Thuggee Department and a national tiger extermination program. The rationale here was that informal and desultory rewards systems specific to

⁶ After the 1878 Forest Act, colonial officers and shikaris realized the ecological consequences of the tiger culls over the last century. Nevertheless, the restrictions around hunting licenses after the Act ensured that colonial elites could continue to hunt indiscriminately (MacKenzie 172).

the Permanent Settlements and presidencies were inadequate in light of human fatality rates in Lower Bengal and the Central Provinces. Other officials, however, did not want to spend the money for an undertaking as massive as a centralized rewards scheme, while officers in the Madras Presidency appealed to personal experience to attest to the efficacy of local shikaris. This latter position stirred controversy amongst administrators, who debated whether travelling specialists or local hunters should be granted autonomous decision-making capacity for animal control (Rangarajan, "The Raj" 272). A third camp argued that agricultural expansion would simply eliminate wild animals by destroying their territory. Agriculture and local extermination schemes wiped out tiger populations in the Plains, while reserve forests established after 1878 had mixed results. Although tree cover ostensibly afforded protection for tigers, Raj administrators were adamant that reserve forest not be a "sanctuary" (281). Colonial officers also bickered amongst themselves about access to hunting grounds. European sportsmen, for example, accused officials in the United Provinces of favoritism toward forest officials and those who could afford the annual Rs. 12 fee for a hunting permit (Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest* 161). The Forest Service, for its own part, claimed that it was merely protecting lands from non-resident sportsmen who "recklessly damaged game" (Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest* 162). Rangarajan is also careful to not rule out the possibility that indigenous subsistence practices contributed to declines in tiger populations, as ecological imbalances triggered by imperial intervention may have forced the locals to over-hunt prey species such as wild boar, thereby triggering an uptick in man-eaters ("The Raj" 283).⁷

⁷ R. Sukumar has analyzed crop destruction by elephants and man-eating by tigers according to a given area's carrying capacity, "the number of individuals or biomass of population that can be supported given

To make matters more complicated, the Permanent Settlements continued to support independent collaborators after the 1857 Rebellion, while small zamindars enjoyed local power in rural areas. Some native authorities ignored man-eaters, while others held that local *shikar* and agriculture remained an adequate measure for population control. Some British agents, while subscribing to market capitalism, opposed extermination programs altogether. G.P. Sanderson was an especially vocal proponent of conservation. As Natasha Nongbri points out, however, Sanderson's agenda was driven by profit-seeking schemes between the state and private interests rather than humane attitudes toward animals such as tigers, pigs, and elephants.

The further wrinkle here is that the imperial myth of the tiger as a dangerous pest was something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Since commercial forestry displaced both humans and animals, man-eating by tigers spiked exponentially in Kumaon and the Central Provinces after commercial logging disrupted tigers' habitats in the early nineteenth century (Ramachandra Guha, "Colonialism and Conflict" 285). Although

the area and productivity of habitat" (306). When forest boundaries shift to accommodate permanent human settlements, wild animals such as elephants and tigers are more likely to encounter humans because these animals cover significant ground in short periods, often traveling 10-15 km a day with a total home range of over 100 square km (307). Sukumar finds that "shifting cultivation practised on a small scale with sufficient interval between rotation of sites does not seem to have any adverse impact on wildlife populations." However, "the expansion of human populations" through interventions such as industrial agriculture and forestry "has increased the area under shifting cultivation and decreased the period between rotation of sites to less than five years in many states in the northeast" areas of India (307). See also Thapar, Valmik, Fateh Singh Rathore, and Mahipal Singh. *The Tiger's Destiny* (London, 1992); and Prater, S.H. and Paul Barruel. *The Book of Indian Animals* (Oxford 1998).

Crown and Company officials vigorously debated the finer points of state-sanctioned animal control, all agreed that tigers were potential man-eaters, “the animal counterparts of ‘thugs’ and ‘dacoits,’” a “formidable scourge” that preyed on human flesh and disrupted progress. Indeed, the British government would not “dare to conserve such a dangerous animal” (MacKenzie 182). As tiger attacks escalated in direct proportion to early nineteenth-century road and rail projects that disrupted their habitats, provincial officials such as Richard Temple developed organized systems of rewards “graduated on a scale proportionable to the mischief of which” a “pest” such as the tiger “was considered to be capable” (Temple 246). Temple’s attitude coincided with the nineteenth-century trophy industry’s obsession with tiger skins. Consequently, the circuits of commodity production formative to commercial forestry and trophies—as expressions of production on the one hand, and culture on the other—both operated on the premise of destroying all big cats. The material or economic upshot here is that tigers inhibited infrastructure projects—thus contributing to their status as “vermin” to be eradicated under the pretenses of man-eating—but the Crown also needed tigers to uphold the trophy economy.

While scripted, on the one hand, as an unruly pest that inhibited infrastructure development, the tiger was also an allegorical figure for unruly, lascivious natives that threatened white purity before and after 1857. The tiger’s disruptive presence recalled, for example, Tipu Sultan (1750-1799), the self-proclaimed “Tiger of Mysore,” whose hatred for the imperialists found its most salient expression through Tipu’s Tiger, a life-sized organ shaped as a man-eater eviscerating a hapless Englishman. Tipu’s legacy, as an amalgamation of tigers and unruly natives, later informed the Raj’s fear of the popular

force that threatened to upend the Company and the Crown during the 1857 Rebellion. Davide Torri, meanwhile, has suggested that the so-called tiger epidemic fabricated by nineteenth-century administrators expresses the Empire's failure to understand and control the subcontinent as a whole (56). That is, the imperial tiger connoted "an irreducible alterity that the Empire needs to tame, harness, or alienate in order to exert the degree of control" necessary for its colonial adventure (Torri 56). Vijaya Ramdas Mandala, in a similar vein, notes the proliferation of tiger imagery in imperial memoirs about rural uprisings (98). Seen in this light, S. Mukherjee's insight about the Empire's compulsion to kill tigers over and over again is also pertinent:

No matter how many successful campaigns the British had waged, how many decisive battles they have won, how many cantonments they had founded to guard settlements, some basic fear of India continued to haunt British Indian life and imagination. Therefore the tiger had to be shot again and again. (12)

Indeed, the upstanding sportsman's ideal of "fair play" was a distinction in name only, as British hunters had no compunction about devoting cutting-edge firearms technology to the hunt while recruiting thousands of local villagers as beaters in hunting parties that operated more as large-scale military strikes than sport (MacKenzie 69).

Yet the tiger's symbolic value as a remnant of feudal power that stood on equal footing with the Raj also upheld notions of fair play that were crucial to the British sportsman's self-styled persona of noble masculinity. Joseph Sramek, for instance, suggests that the fraught, multivalent figure of the tiger was, for the British imaginary, a conscious effort to "emulate the Mughals and other Indian rulers by killing tigers" while "symbolically staging the defeat of Tipu Sultan and other[s] ... who dared to get in the

way of Britain's imperial conquest of India" (661) even as the British sportsman drew a cultural boundary between himself and the marginalized brown shikari. For instance, British officers borrowed indigenous hunting techniques while denigrating Indian *shikaris*' "unsportsmanlike" deployment of those very practices. Sramek posits that the imperialists, in so doing, unconsciously sought "to legitimate their own intervention in tiger hunting and to present it in more chivalrous terms" (675). Ezra Rashkow, in an illustration of Sramek's assertion, finds that native *shikar* became a means for peasants to earn a living following an 1878 amendment to the Arms Act that permitted Indians to buy weapons for crop protection and defense against predators. However, the state disbursed meagre rewards for tigers killed by native *shikaris* while continuing to fetishize imperial trophies. This discrepancy only further aggravated racial and class tensions between whites and rural Indians (Rashkow 4). Moreover, "European and native gentlemen" were welcome to keep their kills, but the government seized trophies procured by impoverished natives (4). The state's reasoning was based on the assumption that impoverished *shikaris* would present the same trophy to different officers to collect multiple rewards.

In a word, tigers were bursting with ambiguous symbologies that influenced colonial racism, management, and commerce as material processes with significant economic stakes. As a destroyer of men, an impediment to commercial forestry, a trophy, and a projection of imperial racism, the tiger came to represent the Empire's anxieties about the fact that the Indian subcontinent was, and always would be, too large and too complicated for the epistemological limits of knowledge and power constitutive of Empire, which found its material expression in the subcontinent through legislation that

codified the Company's rapacity during the eighteenth century into the later strictures of the colonial state after 1857.

Elephants

While the tiger was saddled with a glut of imperial symbolologies that precipitated its near-eradication, the Crown subjected elephants to both destructive and protectionist policies. Natasha Nongbri notes that the elephant's mystique, brought about from the unique danger and rules of the hunt, made it something of a holy grail for imperial *shikaris*. Yet elephants were also subject to administrative protections because they served the state's military and infrastructural ambitions. Sir Sidney Cotton, for instance, marveled at the elephant's utility as both a vehicle and labourer:

Of all animals of the creation there are none so intelligent and so useful in military operations in mountains as the elephants, and sufficient value and importance is not attached to them in the British (Indian) Services. One elephant can transport over long distances six British soldiers, with arms, ammunition, and bedding, besides rations. (qtd. in Nongbri 3190)

Cotton's appraisal speaks to the instrumentalizing imperative that gave imperial anthropocentrism its heft: as with tigers, British agents sought to maintain sufficient elephant numbers for hunting stocks.⁸ Unlike tigers, however, the elephant also had

⁸ The lives of birds and rhinos, too, were reduced to monetary sums. Varun Sharma and Neera Agnimitra note, for instance, that the early twentieth-century ornithologist P.T.L. Dodsworth used the market value of plumage to analyze bird populations.

“worth” to the Empire because of its usefulness as a tool for imperial might in both military and infrastructural applications.

This is not to suggest that the elephant’s value, both culturally and as a commodity, was universally accepted by the administration. Varun Sharma and Neera Agnimitra, for example, cite Ajay Singh Rawat’s finding that elephants were essentially redundant as military vehicles after Dalhousie imposed the Doctrine of Lapse in the 1840s and 50s (107). Major General Roberts, in 1897, stated that the 1857 Rebellion precipitated a shift away from elephants for tactical infrastructure as communications technologies improved. By the 1920s, imperialists had transitioned to cars, which further reduced the necessity of travel by animal. Perversely, cars also became a common means for sportsman and poachers alike to hunt elephants at the turn of the twentieth century. F.W. Champion, meanwhile, remarks that telegraphs and railways displaced and segregated elephant populations much in the way they displaced tigers (107). As the elephant’s commodity value declined in the early twentieth century, some imperial agents who sought to deregulate hunting operations resorted to rhetoric that echoed the Raj’s hatred of tigers. In 1940, for example, J.E. Hall asserted that the state’s failure to control elephant populations had created a “menace” for cultivators that had to be “controlled” (108). Samuel Baker, meanwhile, lamented the “uncertainty” of the elephant’s “character” (qtd. in Sharma and Agnimitra 107).

Disdain for elephants can be tracked to the mid-nineteenth century. As the colonial state imposed a glut of regulations on forestry and hunting in the 1870s, British hunters fell back on the argument that elephants, like tigers, inhibited infrastructure development. The crux of the tension between the state and private hunters circulated not

around any ecological premises for elephant protection, but questions of revenue. Conflicts over revenue, in turn, emerged from disagreements between lease operators, state agents, and private hunters over how to squeeze the most value out of the animal. G.P. Sanderson, a prominent elephant conservationist, deployed *Kheddah*, a trapping system first perfected by the Mughals, to monopolize the elephant trade in the 1860s under the auspices of the state. The state sought to further codify its right to hunting and trapping through the Elephant Preservation Acts of 1873 and 1879, but conflicts of interest arose in light of a pre-existing license leasing system that secured hunting rights for private enterprises and local zamindars (Nongbri 3193-94).⁹ Since conservation arguments were predicated on the security of elephants as commodities, the fundamental point of disagreement between agents such as Sanderson and proponents of a decentralized lease system arose around how to maximize the elephant's value as both labour and trophy (3192).

Historicizing Humans and Other Animals

Interspecies relations add a further variable to the circuits of power and unrest that distinguished Crown and Company rule from Mughal systems of power that predated Company mercantilism. As Rangarajan points out, “there is sufficient reason to assert

⁹ The consequence for the locals was that the lease system, prior to the 1870s, marginalized local shikaris while still granting proprietary rights to zamindars, whereas the post 1879 state monopoly—which was fully secured in 1896 following a protracted legal battle (Nongbri 3196)—erased the class distinctions between the landed gentry and tribals from the imperial purview, as all rights to animals on zamindar territories were granted to the Crown.

that the dynamics of people-nature relations in the pre-colonial period were very different from what was to follow the consolidation of British power, especially after 1857” (“The Raj” 266). Rangarajan adds that, in the centuries prior to imperial contact, the subcontinent was something of a hodge-podge of religious or magical beliefs about certain animals that coincided with strategies of interspecies co-existence ranging from “avoidance” to “self-defence” (267). Local governance systems maintained equilibrium between the feudal superstructure and its economic base through agricultural practices that eroded the forest line at a relatively slow rate. Additionally, animal eradication programs were nearly non-existent in pre-colonial India, although Vijay Ramdas Mandala reports that Mahmud Khalji, the ruler of Malwa in the fifteenth century, ordered the extermination of all tigers and leopards in his territory (81). While it is true that the bombast of the Mughal hunt influenced ostentatious displays of hunting prowess amongst colonial administrators in the period from the 1870s onward (MacKenzie 168), the Mughal aristocracy did not eradicate their quarry with the genocidal delirium characteristic of imperial shikaris. Anand Pandian does, however, find that the massive hunting expeditions of Akbar’s reign served a symbolic and practical function in Mughal governance, as *qamargah*, an enclosure technique for hunting large quarry, was also deployed as a military maneuver to subdue insurgents.

According to Pandian, Akbar conceived of disobedience by refractory noblemen, petty kings, and chieftains as acts of “oppression” against his imperial subjects (80). Akbar’s logic was predicated on the assumption that the feudal power structure operated as a mechanical system of sorts that required all of its components to secure the authority of a sovereign who would, in turn, oversee the smooth operations of the system’s

requisite components. If any component of the feudal structure were to short circuit, the system as a whole would be at risk. Because Akbar prioritized the structure in its entirety over any particular member of the landed gentry, he earned a reputation for granting clemency to insurgent chiefs in exchange for their cooperation (98). His rationale here arose from the fact that power was predicated on the logistics of control across vast swaths of arable territory. Simply put, the bureaucratic machinery of sovereign rule required a centralized system of cultivation and taxation in which the sovereign had to strike a balance between force and benevolence to ensure that the power structure aligned with the material conditions of agricultural production.

Pandian's significant insight about Mughal power in this context is that both hunting and warfare were predicated on *qamargah* as a tactical and symbolic action that secured the flow of sovereign power downwards. Pandian refers to this phenomenon as "predatory care" or "predation":

Mapping this terrain [of sovereign rule] requires attention to both the symbology of power and the power of symbology; that is, both the representations through which authority is expressed and the practices through which it is exercised, both the metaphors that organize rule and the engagements that recruit its subjects. The political logic of predation is best grasped in its concrete instantiations, singular cuts between life and language. (100)

Whereas quarry were habitually released after being marked by the emperor to signify their privileged relationship with him, Pandian explains, rebellious chiefs were granted amnesty in exchange for loyalty. In effect, the symbolic connotations of interspecies relations reflected the overall functioning of Mughal governance as the motor that

sustained the feudal mode of production. Animals and local fiefdoms were integrated components of a total system that had stakes in both the social and the ecological spheres insofar as hunting and the material conditions of agriculture, as elements of the latter, influenced the former.

Flora, Fauna, Power

This dynamic changed with the advent of colonial capitalism, although we should not assume that the change was inherent to capitalism or Western incursion in the abstract. Europe, unlike India, had a centuries-long tradition of vermin eradication programs. Wolves, for instance, were subject to a focused extermination effort in seventeenth-century Scotland (Rangarajan, “The Raj” 269). Moreover, the Game Act of 1671 in England excluded otters and big cats from protection because they were “vermin, to be killed as and when possible” (269-270). As I discuss above, a similar imperative put tigers in great peril during the Company’s adventures in the colonies. England’s landed gentry, meanwhile, reserved for themselves the right to indiscriminately shoot wild animals that lived on birds and fish.

Early-modern England’s bias against certain species suggests that the Raj’s historically-determined brand of colonial capitalism brought with it the particular prerequisites of widespread animal slaughter that would augment the Company’s rapacious appetite for the subcontinent’s natural resources. Indeed, by the early nineteenth century, British railway production had denuded India's forest canopy and decimated biodiversity. While the Company’s ecological indiscretions during this period are accepted as givens amongst historians of colonial India, the conditions around how

imperial intervention disrupted the relationship between forest dwellers and the subcontinent's flora and fauna remain a matter of fierce debate. Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha build their analysis from the claim that British imperialism demarcated a discrete break from princely dominion over arable territories. In short, "the imperatives of colonial forestry were essentially commercial," in contrast to Mughal feudalism (141). However, other environmental historians find both breaks and continuities between feudalism and the British period. Mahesh Rangarajan, for example, argues that the scarcity of labour, in conjunction with surpluses of arable land between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries, contributed to a "shifting boundary" of the forest line as peasants would abandon their feudal holdings if local landlords and princes imposed unreasonable tax increases on the lands they worked (*Fencing the Forest* 15). Richard Grove, meanwhile, provides historical evidence of forest denudation that had already reached significant proportions prior to British domination. While Grove's tendency to veer toward imperial apologetics arguably overshadows his legitimate criticism that historians such as Gadgil and Guha too-readily posit a difference in kind between pre- and post-Raj India, his evidence-based analyses of the continuities between how forests were regulated and controlled before and after imperial intervention is well taken. Gregory Allen Barton augments Grove's position when he asserts that "the inhabitants of India had abused the forest for centuries before the rise of European imperialism," as shifting cultivation practices dated to at least 2000 BCE (43). Vital to Barton and Grove's respective defenses of imperial intervention is the assumption that the policies enacted by the Forest Acts of 1865 and 1878, while implicated in unprecedented levels of ecological exploitation and species destruction justified by the

injunctions of commercial forestry, nevertheless brought about a systematic program of conservation while consolidating resource regulation at a level of organization that did not exist prior to 1864.

Regardless of the ongoing controversies or political sympathies that differentiate these historians' positions, the genealogical through-line of biodiversity loss and resource exploitation in arable territories was unquestionably accelerated by market-driven methods of resource extraction following the Company's intervention at the turn of the nineteenth century. At the same time as imperial monoculture and deforestation precluded rural subsistence, the government imposed new controls on hunting practices, effectively transforming local shikaris into cheap mercenaries and trackers for European hunters (Rangarajan, "*Shikar*" 183). For their own part, however, the locals demonstrated diverse attitudes toward wild animals. Some groups abhorred the notion of killing any animal, while others that were more flexible might hunt as a last resort. Rangarajan notes that the Khonds of Ganjam, for example, were initially hesitant about killing tigers "for fear of destroying their ancestors," but they would make exceptions if officials offered a large enough bounty. No amount of money, however, could persuade the Mikirs of Nowgong (Rangarajan, "The Raj" 287). The Gonds, Baigas, and Parthans were hired to kill wild boars and tigers at the same time as the government banned traditional subsistence hunting after the implementation of the 1878 Forest Act (Rangarajan, "The Raj" 287). Proximity with carnivores also informed local attitudes, as a given society's subsistence system and ritual practices were inseparable from the carrying capacity of the areas they cultivated. But local practicalities did not necessarily mesh with imperialists' cultural assumptions about wildlife. While hunter-gatherers and swidden cultivators in

the Central Provinces viewed deer or pigs as crop destroyers and food, for instance, the British prohibited the natives from hunting these animals on the basis of European sentiments toward herbivores. Pig-sticking, however, remained a popular sport amongst imperial officers (MacKenzie 180). Given the extent to which imperial incursion disrupted both local ecosystems and sustainable forestry, Rangarajan concludes with the important insight that

[m]an-eating was largely an expression of a breakdown of strategies of avoidance on either side. The practices of many forest users allowed for coexistence, if not total harmony, between them and the great cat. What is remarkable is not the degree of conflict with the big cats as its relative rarity. If the animosity to the tiger was at the time less than that felt by the British or professional shikaris, it was because there was a degree of tolerance for the species. The war against the tiger had its moments of peace. (“The Raj” 288)

For rural groups, human-animal relations were, first and foremost, specific to land use as a material catalyst for the sociology of interspecies relationships. That is, if man-eating exemplifies a general “breakdown of strategies of avoidance on either side,” we may infer a functional interspecies social system based on land use that predated the Raj system. For historians, the difficulty lies in the fact that the specifics of that system remain only as traces that are scripted as primitivism by the colonial officials who documented their relationships with both the natives and the man-eaters. Ezra Rashkow’s claim that native sportsmen were responsible for man-eating in the United Provinces between the turn of the twentieth century and the 1930s is true to an extent (5), but the archival evidence unequivocally implicates European sport-hunting as the prodigious

culprit behind the geometrical uptick in both the prevalence of man-eaters and tiger deaths (Rangarajan, “The Raj” 286). Ultimately, the government’s decision to place protections on certain animals, but not on others, disrupted local ecosystems at the same time as it disrupted the human societies that had contributed to that ecosystem as such.

Empire Forestry After the Forest Acts of 1865 and 1878

Feudal modes of production from the fourteenth to eighteenth centuries slowly eroded the forest line through a combination of royal hunts, agriculture, and criminal tribes that waged small-scale wars against local aristocracies, while British monoculture projects from the turn of the nineteenth century through Independence were structured around the commodification of natural resources through logics of capitalist exchange and state management. The latter triggered ecological consequences at a heretofore unimaginable scale. For instance, the Company initially targeted teak in the Malabar region in 1806 after railway and shipbuilding production methods had already eviscerated Britain’s forests canopy (Mishra 107). In the early nineteenth century, the Company targeted the Himalayan foothills for railcar production, with similarly devastating results (Gadgil and Guha 120). In the midst of the Company’s rapacious extractivism, however, colonial agents nevertheless took note of local sustainability practices. In 1823, G.W. Traill, Deputy Commissioner of the Kumaon district, remarked on how the hill people designated certain growths for preservation. *Deodar* near temples, for example, was venerated and marked for protection as recently as 1953 (Guha 283).¹⁰ In addition,

¹⁰ Ashish Kothari and Neema Pathak, citing more recent examples from the late 1990s, note that “researchers from the North East Hill University have recorded 79 sacred groves in Meghalaya, ranging in

villagers marked boundaries (*banis*) at which “branches and trees were only cut at specified times and with the permission of the entire village community” (283). In short, joint rights around usage were agreed upon between villages as a sort of ecological failsafe for the local subsistence system. Yet the colonial officers’ recognition of local sustainability remained little more than an anthropological curiosity, as organized forestry and Europe’s demand for railway sleepers played a pivotal role in the regulation and monopolization of Kumaon from 1815 to the 1920s (283).

It was not until 1864 that the British administration acknowledged that prior decades of resource exploitation by private contractors had decimated Kumaon’s surrounding forests. Following reports by Edward Balfour (1840) and Alexander Gibson (1846) that urged the Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras presidencies to reform their environmental policies at an all-India level, Lord Dalhousie sought to regulate timber extraction in 1862 (Grove 442-461). Dalhousie’s intervention prompted the presidencies, in consultation with German surgeons, to establish the Imperial Forest Department in 1864 (Gadgil and Guha 121). In 1865, the state drafted the Forest Act. Predictably, the protectionist veneer of the Act was entangled in the state’s commercial interests, as it amounted to little more than a legal mechanism that would settle all claims of user in the interests of the state (Ramachandra Guha “Colonialism and Conflict” 284).

size from .01 to 1200 ha, of which about 40 range between 50ha to 400 ha” (56). Moreover, add Kothari and Pathak, several village communities who engage in sustainable forestry in Uttaranchal devote tracts of forest to a local goddess (56).

While the Forest Department and subsequent 1865 Forest Act ostensibly sought to protect what remained of the subcontinent's uncultivated lands, these measures also constituted legislators' most organized attempt to inscribe into law the colonial state's monopoly over the forests. In effect, after decades of failed negotiations with subsistence tribes and both Hindu and Muslim agriculturalists, the Crown codified its arbitrary rights over those territories through the Right of Conquest to justify the appropriation of these resources through the Act (Ramachandra Guha, "Colonialism and Conflict" 284). Consequently, the government asserted its right to the land and then leased it back to the local cultivators who had already been subsisting off that land prior to the British government's intervention. Even when environmentally-minded surgeons such as Balfour or Gibson lobbied Dalhousie for environmental protections, then, their efforts were mediated through the mechanisms of a state that prioritized expansionist policies predicated on the colonial center's fiscal instruments. Gibson's appointment as Conservator of Forests in 1847 raises the question of how he would have negotiated his investment in the subcontinent's ecological well-being as a scientist against his responsibilities as an imperial statesmen charged with ensuring the economic viability of resource extraction for the Company and Crown.¹¹

Even with Right of Conquest in place, legislators had to circumvent the Indian government's recognition of forests and other uncultivated areas as property of the village communities who dwelled there (Gadgil and Guha 123). The Forest Department,

¹¹ John MacKenzie notes that Gibson faced such resistance from timber merchants and landowners that he had to "restrict himself to seeking controls on probably the least damaging set of forest-clearers, the shifting-cultivators" (*Imperialism and the Natural World* 45n37).

through the 1865 Act, sought to deploy legislation that would curtail access to rural and tribal societies who had lived on the land for centuries. After bitter debate amongst administrators over the question of whether the natives or the government should control the forests, the 1878 Forest Act came to pass under B.H. Baden-Powell and Dietrich Brandis, the presidencies' Conservators of Forests at the time (124). The 1878 Act ceded all rights of ownership to the state over long-standing, informal agreements about land use amongst the village communities themselves (124). Consequently, as Gadgil and Guha explain, the 1878 Act provided the underpinnings for “scientific” management of forests, enabling the workings of compact blocks of forest for commercial timber production. Consistent with this legal and institutional structure, the administration of the forests reserved by the state—some 99,000 square miles in 1947—was contingent on the imperialists it served—first, during the era of railway expansion, and later, during the two world wars (135).

Additionally, the provisions set forth by the 1878 amendments would render indigenous subsistence practices such as trapping, hunting, and fishing punishable offences (Gadgil and Guha 159). The mandate to protect flora and fauna effectively displaced local people and animals across the subcontinent as a whole while opening those territories to resource extraction for imperial projects specific to the Crown's interests, rendering criminal the “life-blood” of “tens of millions of Indians” who had lived and worked on that land for centuries (135). The Forest Department legitimated its criminalization of rural subsistence through its assertion that “[i]t is the province of the forest department to grow timber; pasturage is the province of the agricultural department” (*Indian Forester* XV qtd. in Gadgil and Guha 141). This bureaucratic

sleight-of-hand justified the Forest Department's monoculture policies by effectively silencing and criminalizing the people and animals that these policies displaced.¹² At the same time, the government's monopoly restricted the available space for subsistence groups, enforcing a total ban on nomadic or semi-nomadic subsistence practices such as slash-and-burn agriculture or hunting-gathering (149-166). The imperial monopoly resulted in the forced relocation and assimilation of non-agricultural societies into sedentary farming communities in Kumaon, Almora, and Naini Tal, all of which were dominated by caste Hindus (Ramachandra Guha, "Colonialism and Conflict" 284). Ultimately, as Rangarajan notes, the Crown used policy to prioritize commercial forestry over the interests of forest dwellers. To do so, it mobilized its interests through restrictions of use and access by the Forest Department. In 1893, following a survey that detailed the composition of the hill forests of Kumaon, Almora, Naini Tal, and the town of Ranikhet to create tracts of reserved forest, the government declared all "unmeasured"

¹² Ramachandra Guha outlines four major phases that represent "the progressive diminution of villagers' rights" in nineteenth-century Kumaon ("Colonialism and Conflict" 285): 1815-1878: Kumaon's forests remain untouched, but the *sal* forests of Bhabhar, Naini Tal (1850s), Ranikhet (1873), and Almora (1875) are demarcated; 1878-1893: the Forest Act designates the above as reserved, in addition to more tracts in Almora and Garhwal; October 17, 1893: District Protected Forest is now made to encompass "tree-covered lands, snow-clad peaks, ridges and cliffs, river beds, lakes, buildings, temple lands, camping and pasture grounds, and roads and shops" (285); 1911: As government holdings grow to nearly 3000 square miles of reserve forest, villagers must navigate a restrictive and elaborate set of procedures to apply for timber for houses and agricultural implements. Gadgil and Guha, meanwhile provide a survey of the myriad tribal groups and low-caste agriculturalists throughout the subcontinent who suffered displacements following the 1878 Act (149-166).

land in Kumaon “district protected forest” (284). The imperative here was “to assert the proprietary right of government in these forests and lay down certain limits to hitherto unregulated action of right-holders” (284). Additionally, the Crown passed myriad animal protection acts throughout the 1870s-90s, including the Nilgiri Game and Fish Preservation Act II (1879), Elephant Preservation Act (1879), and Wild Birds Protection Act (1887). At the same time, forest policy produced conflicts of interest between the presidencies and local governments, as the 1878 Act was not necessarily coterminous with the commercial objectives of provincial forest officials or small landowners in local protectorates.

I have thus far contextualized how imperial conservation policies in the late nineteenth century disrupted the lives of animals and rural groups in the colonial subcontinent. Despite the Crown’s stated aim of maintaining forest cover, I find that the vision of “conservation” expressed through the Forest Acts upholds extractivist practices of the ‘natural world’ that conform to the British imaginary. Consequently, the conservation projects undertaken by the Crown Raj after 1868 maintained the trend of biodiversity loss and ecological destruction triggered by the Company at the turn of the nineteenth century. The material processes of colonial resource exploitation were, additionally, informed and reinforced by Eurocentric narratives about wild animals and local people as bodies that were not subject to basic rights, with devastating consequences for both. Chapter One applies this context to Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Books* in order to complicate existing postcolonial critiques that read Mowgli and his animal friends as allegories for rebellion. I read Kipling’s villagers and animals as active

political subjects that question the material conditions of Indian forestry after 1878 as mechanisms of animal and ecological control.

Chapter One:

Between Seoni and “Seeonee”: Outlaw Tigers and the Villager as Critic in Rudyard

Kipling’s *The Jungle Books*

“Postcolonial” Animals and the Psychology of Empire in Western Kipling Criticism

This chapter unpacks how interspecies conflict and imperial power inform Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Books* (1893).¹³ Kipling critics such as Angus Wilson, Charles Carrington, and Jan Montefiore have variously analyzed freedom, law, and the state as general themes that structure the text, while postcolonial scholars such as Jopi Nyman, Shefali Rajamannar, and Davide Torri have recently interpreted deviant animals such as Shere Khan the tiger and the *Bandar-log* as allegories for rural unrest after the 1857 Rebellion. However, the specificities of how Raj governance exercised control over its colonized people and animals has yet to be investigated. At the same time, postcolonial critiques that allegorize the Jungle’s animals as tropes of human rebellion overlook the material conditions of the species boundary as a state instrument that exercised power over non-human life.

In order to complicate existing postcolonial approaches to *The Jungle Books*, I position characters such as Mowgli, Shere Khan, and Buldeo—the bumbling village

¹³ *The Jungle Books* has remained a cultural staple since its publication in 1893. In addition to providing Robert Baden-Powell with the founding principles of the Scout movement, the text has been subject to countless literary, theatrical, filmic, and musical adaptations throughout the twentieth and early 21st centuries. For the sake of clarity, this chapter focuses only on Kipling’s 1893 text as a case study for the questions of state power and species boundaries that inform the thesis.

headman who caricatures rural dwellers such as the Baiga and the Gond—against the historical conditions of Seoni, the region of Madhya Pradesh in which Kipling set *The Jungle Books*. I then read for inconsistencies or gaps in relations to Kipling’s text to imagine how its characters might respond to the conditions foisted upon them. Shere Khan and Buldeo implicitly question the premises upon which the colonial state—expressed throughout *The Jungle Books* as the Jungle Law and the Forest Department office in Khaniwara—regulates human and non-human bodies. Mowgli, meanwhile, dwells in a double-interstice of power insofar as he masters both the Jungle and the village while belonging to neither. However, his liminal state of being is doubled through his uniquely complicated relationship with Kipling’s readers, where he embodies a bourgeois fantasy of jungle life and the didactic imperative of Kipling’s jingoism.

Jingoism has been synonymous with Rudyard Kipling since critics first took notice of his work in the 1890s.¹⁴ However, in-depth analyses of how the racialized political economy of the Raj informed Kipling’s writing did not appear until the 1980s.

¹⁴ Kipling remained a polarizing figure from the heyday of empire (see, for example, Adams’ “On Rudyard Kipling” (1891); Buchanan (1899) to the early decades after Independence (Dobreé 1967; Eliot 1941; Lewis 1965; Orwell 1942; Trilling 1943; Tindall YEAR; cf. Alan Sandison YEAR). But these critics treated Kipling’s jingoism as a biographical issue rather than one that had material political repercussions. That is, macrostructural analyses of how European power shaped the imperial violence in which Kipling was embedded remained something of a non-starter. Instead, Kipling criticism between the 1890s and 1970s synthesized New Criticism-style analyses of works such as “The White Man’s Burden,” “Soldiers Three” or “Wee Willie Winkie” with biographical details of Kipling and his worldviews. Bhaskara Rao remains something of an exception amongst the white, male critics at this point, but his *Kipling’s India* (1967) nevertheless mirrors the biographical preoccupations of his European contemporaries.

Lewis D. Wurgaft's *The Imperial Imagination: Magic and Myth in Kipling's India* (1983) contextualizes Kipling's lived experience as an Anglo-Indian subject against the historical frame of post-Rebellion India. Sandra Kemp's *Kipling's Hidden Narratives* (1988) builds on Wurgaft to further question how race and identity influenced Kipling's writing. Additionally, Zoreh Sullivan (1994) investigates how Kipling "reproduces and complicates the ideological structures that determined imperial patterns of thought" at the turn of the twentieth century (3). Meanwhile, B.J. Moore-Gilbert's *Kipling and "Orientalism"* (1986) incorporates Edward Said's contributions to postcolonial thought to interrogate Kipling's oeuvre (24). With specific respect to *The Jungle Books*, John Murray has argued that Kipling's Jungle Law resembles analytical positivism, a form of English jurisprudence first formulated by John Austin (1790-1859) and later taken up in the Indian Civil Service by James Fitzjames Stephens. Austinian jurisprudence, Murray explains, emphasizes obedience over social justice, much like the Jungle Law (4). Don Randall has picked up on Murray's analysis to suggest that the Law reflects Kipling's personal tendencies toward vigilantism, while John McBratney has argued that "In the Rukh," which takes place after Mowgli grows up, reveals how the logic of imperialism allows Mowgli to grow into manhood "without quite outgrowing his lupine identity" (278). The extent to which these critiques problematize the logic of empire, however, is impeded by their preoccupations with Kipling as a figure who affirmed imperial power. Rural dwellers and non-human animals, as subjects marginalized by the Crown, remain invisible in these analyses.

Since the 1990s, a number of expressly "postcolonial" approaches to Kipling's *The Jungle Books* by critics such as Jopi Nyman, Shefali Rajamannar, and Davide Torri

have sought to re-read imperial power through Kipling's representations of Mowgli and the jungle. At the same time, these critics implicitly problematize earlier analyses that valorize Kipling's biography or an individual character's psychological state. In short, postcolonial critiques of Kipling read for moments in the text that reveal the animals' resistance to authority as a sort of allegory for how the colonized might resist the colonizer. Although this method opens a space for subtle moments of resistance by the rural poor, it effaces the lives of animals, using them instead as an allegory for a binary of colonizer and colonized that applies only to humans. Such a binary also effaces the power inequities amongst the colonized or the so-called "subaltern." Grassroots efforts for Indian self-determination that coincided with the founding of Congress in 1885, for instance, aggravated class, caste, and religious divisions between local elites and the urban and rural poor. But a reading method that pits imperial domination against "subaltern" resistance erases the complexities within and between those who resist.¹⁵

¹⁵ The rise of religious or communalist revivalism during this period demonstrates how such inequities played out on the ground. As different strains of Hinduism jostled for dominance in the late nineteenth century, communalist revivalism rose to prominence following the establishment of Arya Samaj by Dayanand Saraswati (1824-83), a wandering *sanyasi* from Kathiawar (presently, the Gujarat region). Arya Samaj forwarded a form of fundamental Hinduism based on Vedic scriptures that forcefully rejected certain Hindu practices such as Brahmin dominance and the taboos on widow remarriage, but which nevertheless asserted the primacy of Hinduism over other faiths such as Christianity, Islam, or Sikhism. In 1893, Arya Samaj split into two factions, the relatively moderate "College," which engaged with Congress politics and *swadesh*, and a militant group called "Gurukul," which preached strict vegetarianism and proselytization (Sarkar 74-75). Meanwhile, Indian Islam witnessed myriad revivalist tendencies of its own. Sayyid Ahmed Khan's Aligarh movement "stressed the need to import Western education to the upper-class Muslims"

Postcolonial Critiques of *The Jungle Books*

This section unpacks how postcolonial thought has thus far reread *The Jungle Books* through the lens of colonial power and the way that it has yet to take the lives of animals into account. I then consider how we might build on or complicate the existing analyses to interrogate how the Raj marginalized both animals and people. The Jungle Law, as an ethical code predicated on obedience and punishment, reflects the Raj's attempts to impose power over animal life according to normative codes of behaviour that instrumentalized animals either as bodies to be used in the service of the Imperial Forest Service or as impediments to be eradicated.

According to Jopi Nyman, the "racialized and interrelated images of Indian children and animals" in *The Jungle Books* "contribute to an imagining of Englishness as a site of power and racial superiority" (38). Such images, Nyman continues, differentiate "threatening Others" from the imperial self in a colonized space where "national identity is inseparable from racial identity" (38-39). Hence, the "mere existence" of "the animal trope" in British India "poses a threat to the maintenance of order and hierarchy, challenging conventional ideas of the primacy of masculinized reason and culture" (39-

while "foster[ing] a sense of coporate unity" (Sarkar 77). Ahmed was supported by British patronage and by Muslim landlords in the United Provinces. An orthodox religious seminary founded in Deoband in 1867 attracted poor students who could not afford Western education, and it supported Congress nationalism in the twentieth century. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, an unwieldy political radical, established "modern pan-Islamism" in the early 1880s. Pan-Islamism contributed, in part, to the Calcutta riots in 1897 as it catalyzed the anti-imperialist Khilafat movement (Sarkar 78-79).

40). Nyman's argument resonates with Don Randall's claim that Kipling's beasts represent "native" India as a "jungle" (Randall). To further parse this notion of India as jungle, we might turn to Daphne Kutzer, who has interpreted Kipling's jungle as a "confusing and confused space which has an internal code" that only Mowgli can "master" and "shape" (24). This "internal code" expresses itself as the Jungle Law, a code of ethics predicated on Austinian legal theory that regulates how and when the beasts may kill. Davide Torri has built on these analyses to further argue that the Law organizes the Jungle into "an orderly and hierarchical society" sympathetic to the imperial imaginary (49). Mowgli, through his gradual mastery over both the Law and his animal friends, negotiates the threats inherent to the subcontinent-as-Jungle. In so doing, he acts as an informant of sorts into the savage primitivism of darkest India as that which escapes the civilizing influences of European colonialism. Yet Mowgli, according to this schematic, also embodies a dangerous and cautionary presence for Kipling, as he represents the "risk of going native" that would undermine the racist boundary that separates colonizer from colonized (54).

These reading methods deploy interpretive strategies of postcolonial literary criticism reminiscent of 1989's *The Empire Writes Back*. That is, critics such as Kutzer, Nyman, and Torri proffer "reading practices" that highlight moments of "resistance" to colonial intervention by the Jungle People (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 189). According to this interpretive schematic, the "subversion" of the Western canon "involves the bringing-to-consciousness and articulation" of institutionally embedded practices of reading "that will result not only in the replacement of some texts by others, or the redeployment of some hierarchy of value within them, but equally crucially the

reconstruction of the so-called canonical texts through alternative reading practices” (189). Such reconstructive practices might consist of appropriative re-writings of classic works of Western literature or close readings that reveal subtle admissions of imperial violence or injustice by colonizers (189-193). Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* is, perhaps, the most well-trod subject of postcolonial appropriation, as Caribbean writers including George Lamming (*The Pleasures of Exile* [1960]) and Aimé Césaire (*A Tempest* [1970]) have rewritten Caliban to highlight the dehumanization of African subjects by European humanism. With respect to alternative readings, Yasmine Gooneratne’s classic analysis of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* investigates how the novel’s narrator can only “skirt” or “gloss over” the centrality of slavery to property and wealth in colonial Antigua (qtd. in Ashcroft, Griffins, and Tiffin 193).

In the context of *The Jungle Books*, Shefali Rajamannar reads for moments where Kipling “quietly subvert[s] the jingoist rhetoric he was otherwise well known for” (141) to consider how the *Bandar-log* flout the Law as a deliberate expression of social protest.¹⁶ Torri, similarly, ventures into the secret lives of elephants in “Toomai of the Elephants” to claim that “the chance of refusal, disobedience, or rebellion is always beyond the corner” (52). These critiques proceed from the premise that the infantile and animalized Indian subject of the racist imperial imaginary inherently emanates an undercurrent of primal urges, expressed metaphorically as Kipling’s animals, that

¹⁶ In light of Ramachandra Guha’s analysis of the thugs or roving groups of bandits who would hide under the forest canopy following Som Chand’s unification of Kumaon in 960 C.E. (Guha 275-277), the *Bandar-log* may also gesture toward a much longer history of outlaws formative to the subcontinent’s pre-imperial history of interethnic and inter-caste conflicts.

threaten the national, sexual, and racial sanctity of the post-Darwinian European self. The Jungle Law, in turn, acts as a failsafe that holds the threat in check. In other words, *The Jungle Books* mythologizes the threat formative to the subcontinent's animal urges through Mowgli's adventures in Kipling's Jungle, and postcolonial critiques of the text seek out moments in which Kipling's animals resist the power dynamics that articulate this allegory.

These analyses do not, however, address how power shapes interspecies relationships and the lives of animals. Hence, the question at stake for this chapter is not whether, or even how, the “infantilization” or “animalization” of the natives “contributed to the enactment and legitimization of a practice of domination” (Torri 48). Nor is it one that reads against the grain, so to speak, for the ways in which Kipling's animals threaten imperial power within this dynamic. Instead, I unpack the nexus at which interspecies conflict and imperial power in post-1857 Seoni—the village in Madhya Pradesh where Kipling's *Jungle Books* take place—intersect. In so doing, I seek to complicate how the existing critiques construct animals as allegorical figures that respond to colonial power as a universal phenomenon.

Shere Khan, the “Lame One”

Given the Raj's longstanding antagonism with real and figurative tigers, Shere Khan's role as *The Jungle Books*' quintessential villain is something of a given. Interpreted variously as a representation of “treachery” (Islam 132), a “cowardly and weak-minded character” (Buchinger 48), or an affront to imperial authority (Nyman 43), Shere Khan connotes a threat to both Mowgli and the structure of Law. At the same time,

Shere Khan also reveals the extent to which the specter of Mughal power piqued the post-1857 Raj. Davide Torri suggests that the name “Shere Khan” echoes that of Sher Shah Suri, a Pashtun and famed shikari who founded the Sur Empire in the mid-sixteenth century (56). Rajamannar, meanwhile, links Shere Khan with Bahadur Shah Zafar, a Mughal leader whose symbolic importance to the Sepoys haunted the imperial psyche following the “near-disaster of 1857.” The association between tigers and Indian Muslims grows still more fraught in “How Fear Came,” a prelapsarian story in Kipling’s jungle cosmology that documents the origins of the tiger’s hatred of men. If the man in the cave, whom the story’s tiger initially fears but eats later on, suggests a metonym of Western power, the tiger could very well stand in for Tipu Sultan (1750-1799). According to Susie Green, “[t]he walls of [Tipu’s] capital were decorated with life-size caricatures of the British, a number of which featured trembling white men being seized by tigers” (103). The encounter between the man in the cave and the First Tiger also recalls Tipu’s Tiger. Green explains that the organ, when struck, emits “the growling cough of the Bengal tiger as it devours a Britisher who emits pathetic groans” (103). Indeed, Kipling evokes these very images of the trembling and groaning white man when “the Hairless One fell down before [the First of the Tigers] and lay along the ground, and the First of the Tigers struck him and broke his back, for he thought that there was but one such Thing in the Jungle, and that he had killed Fear” (“How Fear Came” 162). Clearly, Kipling’s tigers embody the fraught symbolism of unruliness that, imagined or not, threatened the imperial order. But critiques of Kipling that reduce the tiger to a metaphor for resistance erase how Raj imperialism marginalized tigers. For, as I discuss in the Introduction, the Crown conjured

a narrative of tigers that transformed them into both vermin and commodities through the logic of commercial forestry and imperial *shikar*.

I propose to invert the formulation of the tiger as a metaphor for “unruliness” in order to interpret Shere Khan as a response to the imperial shikari’s ravenous appetite for tiger trophies in the latter nineteenth century. To do so, I suggest that the presence of imperial power in the text, expressed here as Kipling’s Jungle Law, alienates Shere Khan from his own body as a means to vilify tigers in order to justify their slaughter. Just as Mowgli’s fantastic jungle duplicates the basic norms, values, and mores of the imperial mindset even as it appears to create an escape from the world of men, Shere Khan’s compromised embodiment, I argue, speaks to both his deviance and his powerlessness before the Law. I also find that Shere Khan’s vexed relationship with the Law stands in stark relief to animal “subjects” such as Bagheera the panther and Akela the wolf, who cannot conceive of an “outside” that dictates the Law’s instrumentalizing logic.

There will always persist some aspect of Shere Khan’s animal-being—his tigerness, so to speak—that resides beyond the limits of the Raj’s confused attempts to fetishize the tiger as a trophy while constructing it as “vermin.” Shere Khan’s ubiquitous limp, which earns him the nickname *lungri* (“the lame one”) by the Free People, assumes a profound symbolic charge here, as his compromised embodiment motivates his deviance before Kipling’s Jungle Law. That is, the tiger’s body becomes the site of that tiger’s deviance, much as tigers for the imperial imagination were rendered criminal for acting as tigers naturally act in the wild.

We first meet Shere Khan after he fails to kill the infant Mowgli at the beginning of “Mowgli’s Brothers.” As the Free People debate Mowgli’s fate at the Council Rock,

Shere Khan repeatedly insists that Mowgli “is mine,” demands that the Free People “[g]ive him to me,” and sees not what the animals would have “to do with a man’s cub” (“Mowgli’s Brothers” 7). The animals rebuff Shere Khan’s demands. Bagheera the Panther offers the Wolf Pack a sacrificial bull in exchange for Mowgli’s life, after which Mother Wolf adopts Mowgli. At this point, Shere Khan represents a treacherous presence that skirts the margins of a jungle populated by animals who abide by the Jungle Law and its requisite sanctions on who, how, and when to kill. Kipling’s anthropomorphized animals, in short, organize themselves according to something like a gentleman’s agreement that limits the violence they enact upon each other in their shared struggle to survive. Shere Khan transgresses these principles. As an “eater of cattle,” he violates the Law’s taboo against killing buffalo and cows. Moreover, his taste for human flesh, a cardinal sin that risks “the arrival of white men on elephants, with guns, and hundreds of brown men with gongs and rockets and torches” (3), further aggravates his enmity with the Free People.

However, Shere Khan does not necessarily eat cattle and humans by choice. In a moment evocative of early twentieth-century naturalists such as Jim Corbett, who understood that big cats such as tigers typically resort to human and cattle-killing only if some sort of injury inhibits their movement, Mother Wolf remarks in hushed tones that Shere Khan hunts vulnerable quarry such as cattle and humans because ““he has been lame in one foot since birth”” (“Mowgli’s Brothers” 2). Curiously, Shere Khan’s birth deformity erases the human hunter and his responsibility toward his quarry from the equation. In *The Temple Tiger*, Jim Corbett gestures toward human responsibility when he insists upon the importance of a kill-shot, but he refuses to acknowledge the

consequences of creating a man-eater (31). Kipling's Shere Khan evades this question entirely, as he does not resort to man-eating because of a careless shikari. He is, rather, born evil.

The upshot here is that the Jungle Law stigmatizes Shere Khan for surviving into adulthood precisely because of his deformity. That is, Shere Khan's disability and subsequent taste for cattle and humans assumes a moral valence in the context of Kipling's imagined jungle. Since *The Jungle Books* was widely received as a children's adventure story in the fin de siècle, Shere Khan's man-eating, necessitated by his lameness, offends the sensibilities that boys' fiction valorized during this period, particularly respect for authority and vigorous health as fundamental mores of Christian manliness (Sullivan 7; cf. Featherstone 28-30). That is, Shere Khan, the vicious and crippled man-eating tiger, evokes both the forest officer's imagined "scourge" and the sickly urban dweller. Moreover, the informal agreement amongst the animals that man-eating is "unsportsmanlike" and that "man-eaters become mangy, and lose their teeth" ("Mowgli's Brothers" 3) also signals the English valorization of rules and strong, healthy, white male bodies that signalled the militarization of the West leading up to WWI (Baden-Powell 2). Consequently, Shere Khan's broken body gives him a unique, but vexed, insight into what it means to live as an animal under a social order—expressed here as the Law—that disavows a subject whose deviance before the Law materializes out of that subject's body.

At the same time as Shere Khan repeatedly demands that the animals "give Mowgli to me" because he was "my meat from the first," he also insists that he "hate[s]" Mowgli from the "marrow of my bones" ("Mowgli's Brothers 16). This entanglement of

desire and hatred, expressed through the corporeal language of “meat” and “bones,” signals the tension between Shere Khan’s body and his subjecthood. Specifically, Shere Khan’s deviance before the Law reflects his compromised embodiment, but his compromised embodiment necessitates his need to transgress the Law. This dilemma suggests a crisis for Shere Khan. Even though he transgresses the Law, he still lives at its limits, walking in and out of its edges along a crooked path, so to speak, much in the way that his bad leg leaves a crooked trail of pug marks wherever he ventures. His transgression as such might or might not necessarily be of his own volition, but his lameness necessitates his hunting habits. This necessity to hunt vulnerable quarry compels Shere Khan to direct his hatred toward Mowgli as the representation of his desire that simultaneously gestures toward his compromised body. This forked hatred emerges from a fundamental aspect of Shere Khan’s subjecthood that recognizes his embodiment as a condition for his violation of the Law. Such a quandary would, at some level, engender a moment in which that aspect of Shere Khan that acknowledges his subjecthood before the Law would have to respond to his man-eating side. Since Shere Khan does not exactly choose to violate the Law in this respect, his hateful desire for Mowgli remains entangled in the relationship between his broken body and his abstract sense of self as a deviant subject before the Jungle Law as that which is beyond his control, but which he must nevertheless answer for.

Shere Khan’s compromised position lends itself to a more fundamental question of how Kipling’s animals assert personal agency. That is, if the Law is a necessarily anthropocentric and imperialist power structure, how do Kipling’s “animals” understand and assert their presence as animals in the first place? For his own part, Shere Khan is, in

this moment, both more and less than a tiger. He is a broken chimera, not quite animal, not quite Law-abiding and anthropomorphized subject. Under this chimeric mode of being, Shere Khan's hateful desire for Mowgli expresses itself as his fundamental anxiety about Mowgli's presence. During a meeting at Council Rock near the conclusion of "Mowgli's Brothers," for example, the wolves who have decided to follow Shere Khan in light of the leadership void in the Wolf Pack want Mowgli to return "to his own place" amongst men and to leave the animals alone ("Mowgli's Brothers" 17). The other Free People, meanwhile, feel more inclined to welcome Mowgli into the jungle's social fold. Bagheera asserts that he "paid" for Mowgli "with a bull when he was accepted" into the jungle, and he adds that "Bagheera's honour is something that [Mowgli] will perhaps fight for" (17). Even Akela the Wolf, who had "fallen twice into a wolf-trap" and suffered severe beatings at the hands of men, tolerates Mowgli (7). Akela proclaims that Mowgli "has eaten our food. He has slept with us. He has driven game for us. He has broken no word of the Law of the Jungle" (17). Those animals who buy into their existence as Free People accept the conditions foisted upon them by the Law, a power network that must remain ultimately mysterious. That is, Law-abiding subjects such as Bagheera or Akela would not question the underlying premises that articulate the Jungle Law as a set of universal principles.¹⁷ The young wolves under Shere Khan's influence, meanwhile, call to cast Mowgli out, but they do so by virtue of a pack mentality that sees Shere Khan as a leader at the same time as they do not entirely understand the processes through which his reasoning works. Shere Khan, by virtue of his dubious subjecthood,

¹⁷ Shamsul Islam's argument that the Jungle Law promotes self-preservation amongst the Free People also relies on unquestioning obedience to the Law.

can conceive of life beyond the Law because he understands firsthand how the Law imposes the responsibilities of embodiment on the subject. In other words, the animal-subject must prove its legitimacy before the Law even as the Law remains the shared construct of its subjects.

Moreover, Shere Khan sees Mowgli as constitutive of a profound threat to animal life. Fearful that Mowgli could “turn all the people of the village against us,” Shere Khan demands that the animals “give Mowgli to me. He is a man, and none of us can look him between the eyes” (17). Shere Khan’s anxiety evokes the historical problems unique to tigers in British India.¹⁸ As the only tiger in the jungle inhabited by the Free People,¹⁹ Shere Khan obliquely gestures toward the fact that imperial hunters had, through the 1890s, either eradicated or displaced nearly all of the tigers in the Central Provinces (Rangarajan, “The Raj” 285). In this context, the circuit of Shere Khan’s desire, hatred, and anxiety also resonates with the British officer’s construction of tigers as vermin. The foresters’ animus toward tigers also coincided, perversely, with desire in the form of trophies, or the neurotic imperative to shoot the tiger “again and again,” as Mukherjee aptly puts it (12). The desire for tigers, expressed as hatred for vermin that reconstitutes

¹⁸ Although hunted to near extinction, tigers did fare better than lions, whose populations in North India declined massively during this period (Ranagarajan, “Animals with Rich Histories 116). Pigs also suffered greatly, as pig-sticking was arguably equal in stature to trophy hunting amongst imperial foresters. Elephant hunting, meanwhile, was short-lived, perhaps because Indian elephant ivory was not especially profitable (MacKenzie 183).

¹⁹ Two other tigers do, however, appear briefly in *The Jungle Books*. The mythical First of the Tigers features heavily in “When Fear Came,” and Mowgli refers disparagingly to another, unnamed tiger in the early pages of “In the Rukh” (329), which takes place several years after the other Mowgli stories.

itself as a fetish for trophies, reverses itself in the figure of Shere Khan, who desires and hates Mowgli. At the same time, Shere Khan also embodies a perverse or fractured mirror image of the trophy in light of his deformity.

The Jungle Law, at this juncture, stands in stark relief to Peter Gay's wistful reflections about the way that Kipling's Jungle offered fin de siècle readers a reprieve from the daily grind of bourgeois life in the West:

Kipling's lesson seems plain, almost obtrusive: men cover up their libido and their aggressiveness behind bland and mendacious surfaces; animals are superior beings, for they acknowledge their drives. They can hate and hate well, but, as Kipling explicitly and emphatically observes, they can love no less. The stories he wove around Mowgli, then, are intended to lift the reader above the humdrum, mediocre, middle-class world into the realm of candor, of free experience, of heroism. (105)

Gay's celebration of Kipling's "superior" animals rests on the assumption that the Mowgli stories provide a gateway into the id, that primal sense of self repressed by the Freudian superego that, in Kipling's context, expressed itself through Victorian social norms. But, as I argue above, the animals are not given free rein in Mowgli's world. Instead, their "animal" drives articulate the Jungle Law. Consequently, Kipling's jungle orders itself through the same disciplinary structures of Anglo-Indian jurisprudence that it appears to evade when it features talking bears and panthers who espouse the Law's preeminence. When Kipling's animals speak through the Law, they reiterate Kipling's political position, thereby precluding Gay's idealistic vision of the animals as a reprieve from politics or the Victorian superego. Meanwhile, Anglo-Indians and Europeans—with

the exception of Gisborne and Muller the German surgeon in “In the Rukh”—remain invisible because imperial power’s immanent authority maintains the jungle fantasy through its very refusal to interfere in the fantasy as such, lest it taint the illusion of Mowgli’s idyllic world as a self-determining structure.

The slippage between the Jungle Law and Raj imperialism also shapes the text’s human characters, as the libidinal economy of the Jungle as a site of unencumbered nature demands that the natives bear the burdens of humanity and its foibles.²⁰ Through the villagers who live at the edge of the jungle, Kipling represents humanity’s shortcomings as an ever-present threat of man’s corrupting influence that lurks at the edges of Mowgli’s idyllic life. This brings about a puzzling contradiction: the village’s antediluvian culture—ritual and superstition, the village’s proximity to the animals, the wealthy villagers’ exotic outfits—resonates with a mythology of darkest India that upholds the fantastic aesthetic of Mowgli’s jungle world, but the villagers also represent the encroachment of civilization. Consequently, the locals embody human corruption and greed at the same time as they are not quite civilized enough to qualify as entirely human. In light of this impasse, the upcoming section considers how we might adjust our interpretive lens to read Kipling’s villagers not as ahistorical specimens who reaffirm the utopian innocence of Mowgli’s fantastic world through their own corruption and avarice, but as representations of the real crises that imperial domination imposed upon rural

²⁰ “The King’s Ankus,” the parable in which Mowgli disposes of a bejeweled goad only to watch a host of local hunters kill each other for it, highlights the text’s fraught relationship toward wealth and greed as sinful traits inherent to the racial Other.

dwellers. Before I return to Kipling, I provide a brief survey of interspecies relationships in the Seoni region.

Village and Empire in “Tiger! Tiger!”

For subsistence societies in the Central Provinces, the mythological symbolism around the tiger echoed its ecological value as both a protector of crops and a crucial contributor to biodiversity. Elephants and deer, considered symbols of nobility and virtue by the Raj, were understood as crop destroyers and food, while the “pestilential” tiger, in fact, historically contributed to local ecosystem balance. In effect, the cultural or mythological spheres of a given society expressed the tiger’s concrete value to that society’s subsistence system through its abstract representation as a cosmological or mythical figure. Indian mythologies have long revered the tiger as a benevolent presence that represents selflessness and valour. The Baiga and the Gond, pre-agricultural societies that have lived for centuries in and around Seoni—the site of Kipling’s semi-fictional “Seonee” (Slater)—venerate tigers as protectors of the forest (Tiwari 288). Additionally, Shiv Kumar Tiwari reports that the Bharias of Madhya Pradesh worship Baghashwar, the tiger god, and believe that a tiger “will never eat a Bharia” (288). So revered is the tiger by the Bharias that, every October, Bharia households leave a dish of gruel behind their homes for Baghashwar as tribute (288).²¹ Also deviating from Shere Khan is the tiger-deity Chitan deo, whose status amongst the Muria of Central India as the “God of good

²¹ This tradition resembles Nag Panchami, a ceremony in which locals leave bowls of milk for cobras. The Seonee villagers appear to participate in something similar to Nag Panchami, as Kipling includes a bowl of milk for the snakes in his description of a local gathering (“Tiger! Tiger!” 52).

hunting” (288) stands in sharp relief to the Free People’s notion of “good hunting,” the latter being predicated on adherence to Kipling’s Jungle Law as an allegory for Victorian jurisprudence (Murray 4-5).²²

Historical instances of resistance by local groups to imperial tiger-killing, then, should not come as a surprise. Susie Green reports that North Indian villagers at the turn of the twentieth century “often refused to lead white hunters” to tiger lairs, “a reluctance that the hunters in ignorance attributed to fear” but which more likely reflected small acts of resistance (83). Indeed, Mahesh Rangarajan reports that villagers in the Central Provinces and Kumaon often shunned imperial hunters, or refused to cooperate with them altogether (166-174). Moreover, tension and skirmishes between hunters and natives was not unheard of, especially in light of the boorish disregard some hunters demonstrated toward the peasantry (MacKenzie 189). According to John MacKenzie, white hunters who shot and killed the locals were typically exonerated for their actions by the courts (189).

This is not to suggest that humans and non-humans on the subcontinent lived in harmony prior to imperial intervention, especially in light of historical evidence that man-eating and interspecies conflict date at least to the Middle Ages (Green 80). Indeed, competition for land between humans and animals in rural North India became especially acute in the early nineteenth century, as villages that had been deserted during the wars

²² Tiger worship extends well beyond the Central Provinces amongst rural subsistence groups. Daksin Ray, a mythical figure believed to oversee the Sundarbans, can enter a tiger’s body at will (Montgomery 143). Susie Green gestures toward a variant of the Daksin Ray myth when she alludes to Lord Krishna’s reverence of tigers in the *Harivamsa Purana* (83).

between 1780 and 1800 were repopulated by tigers and elephants (MacKenzie 184). Nevertheless, rural subsistence societies understood local ecosystem stability while European imperialists did not. As I discuss in the Introduction, the imperial administration's systematic ignorance of local ecosystems accompanied Eurocentric ontologies that privileged industrialization whilst effacing local animal mythologies. Indian animal mythologies, meanwhile, gave expression to the necessity of interspecies relationships in particular and the ecological symbiosis that came out of those relationships in general.

I will now position local dissent against Kipling's representation of Seoni/Seonee in "Tiger! Tiger!" In so doing, I read Kipling's text as an expression of imperial power over central India's forests. "Tiger! Tiger!" opens with Mowgli's arrival in Seonee. An unnamed Brahmin priest and a hunter named Buldeo surmise that Mowgli is the lost child of a local woman named Messua. As Mowgli adjusts to village life, he begins to work as a cattle-herder alongside the other children. In the evenings, the villagers gather around a fig tree, where Buldeo tells stories about the ghosts that sit at the jungle's edge. Mowgli, whose firsthand experiences in the jungle have been nothing like Buldeo's stories, scoffs at the villagers' gullibility. Gray Wolf arrives a few days later, and Mowgli rallies the bulls to fatally trample Shere Khan, who has been lurking at the outskirts of the village. This final confrontation between Mowgli and Shere Khan is oddly anticlimactic, as Shere Khan fails to resist Mowgli's attack. Buldeo then confronts Mowgli and demands Shere Khan's hide, but Mowgli orders Gray Wolf to subdue Buldeo as he takes the remains for himself. A terrified Buldeo returns to the village and announces that Mowgli is a sorcerer who controls the animals, and the villagers drive

Mowgli away. Mowgli returns to the Council Rock with Shere Khan's hide, where he announces that he will leave the Jungle People, lamenting that he has been banished by both the animals and the villagers. A few of the wolves join him as he disappears into the jungle.

The story relies heavily on the contrast between Mowgli's and Buldeo's respective views of the Jungle. Mowgli flouts Buldeo's local authority when he dismisses the stories about Shere Khan and ghosts as "cobwebs and moontalk," or naive superstitions that even a "child" would refute (53). Since Buldeo's stories are presented through Mowgli's perspective, Buldeo is set up here as something of a racialized, one-dimensional buffoon who fails to force Mowgli into the social order of the village. Yet the existential aspect of Mowgli's *bildungsroman* takes a turn here, as well. Mowgli arrives in the village after the animals reject him. But he quickly realizes that he does not belong in the village, either, as his refusal to defer to Buldeo marks him as an outcast. His marginal status in Seonee is further exacerbated by his failure to give Shere Khan's hide to Buldeo. The cash reward for the hide, in turn, signals the villagers' reliance on the Forest Department office in Khanhiwara. Mowgli's refusal to cooperate with Buldeo demonstrates his refusal to participate in the hierarchies of power and cash economy that articulate the Raj and the village.

But Mowgli's refusal slides back into the same generalized power mechanism of imperial power that he appears to dodge. As John McBratney argues, Mowgli's otherness as both wolf-child and imperial subject may exist only under the gaze of imperial authority (278). His ability to remain both wild and gentlemanly, McBratney suggests, circulates around the notion of "felicitous space," described by Gaston Bachelard as

“those childhood images of enclosed space—houses, drawers, chests, wardrobes, nests, shells, corners, etc.—that arouse a sense of recollected delight, intimacy, and comfort in the adult writer and reader” (qtd. in McBratney 278). In effect, Mowgli embodies a fantasy of late-nineteenth-century British identity that is defined through “narrow, nationally self-serving rather than large, international terms” (277). Although Mowgli mobilizes felicitous space to maintain a dual sense of self that “resists” a “single, unitary adult identity” (278), his wild side does not resist imperial power. Instead, he upholds an imperialist fantasy of resistance to bourgeois norms that slips back into the structures his wildness appears to subvert. Citing “In the Rukh,” the final Jungle Book tale in which Mowgli has grown up to marry a village woman and assume a post with the Forest Service while maintaining close ties with the wolf-pack, McBratney argues that Mowgli’s ongoing kinship with the wolves is not an emancipatory expression of his unassimilable wildness, but a symptom of Raj ideology’s immanence:

[Raj] authority ultimately determines the lives of all who live under it, including Mowgli’s. It regulates his relations with his jungle friends and finally governs the riddle of his identity. As much as we are meant to believe that he can withdraw into the glade to be a brother to his wolf friends, the Raj’s insistence on hierarchy foils this dream. Likewise, as much as “In the Rukh” would have us believe that he can escape the straight-jacket of a unitary adult selfhood to enjoy the liberty of juvenile castelessness, imperial ideology, with its need for clear distinctions between colonizer and colonized, forbids such murkiness of identity. (290)

McBratney elucidates how Kipling deploys the Mowgli narratives to map the macrostructures of imperial power upon the microstructures of certain individual subjects

more generally. This is why Anglo-Indians and Europeans—with the exception of Gisborne and Muller the German surgeon in “In the Rukh”—remain an invisible, but ubiquitous, presence throughout the text. Imperial power’s immanent authority maintains the jungle fantasy through its very refusal to interfere in the fantasy as such, lest it taint the illusion of Mowgli’s idyllic world as a self-determining structure.

We can push McBratney’s analysis further to investigate how Mowgli’s slippage in this power dynamic turns on a metatextual question of how the Mowgli stories are received and disseminated in the context of Kipling’s Victorian audience. In “Tiger! Tiger!,” Buldeo is set up as an unsympathetic villain whose incompetence and greed put him somewhere between Shere Khan’s treachery and the *Bandar-log*’s hedonism. Mowgli easily disposes of Shere Khan because Buldeo replaces him as a foil in the economy of Kipling’s fantasy. But when we situate this caricature of the primitive and superstitious Indian native against the real struggles of rural life after 1878, Seonee and its people become more than just metonyms for the wayward lives of men that Mowgli both rejects and is rejected by. In the discursive space of Victorian literature, we accept Mowgli’s adventures with his jungle friends as a temporary escape from the mundanity of middle-class life, albeit one that includes valuable life lessons for the children who delve into Kipling’s world. But this pretext precludes the possibility that Buldeo’s stories might serve a symbolic or allegorical function at the level of their own distribution throughout the fictional village. Consequently, we are expected to suspend our disbelief at the level of Mowgli’s narrative, while Mowgli’s realm negates the proclamations of “wizards” and “sorcery” that inform Buldeo’s stories.

The Jungle Books has been so widely disseminated and received over the last century that Kipling's mythology risks overruling the real conditions that articulate the local groups that Kipling's fictional Seeonee caricatures. This is not to refute Kipling's appropriations of rural Indian cosmologies and social mores. Indeed, rural identities in nineteenth-century India would have been necessarily fluid by virtue of the geographical proximities between neighbouring ethnic and tribal groups. Some of these groups were endogamous, and some were not, but a degree of cultural borrowing and appropriation would have been inevitable. If anything, Kipling's grab-bag of cosmologies is probably accurate in principle, if not necessarily in practice. In addition to the protective amulet he wears around his neck, for example, Buldeo takes Shere Khan's whiskers after Mowgli kills him because "[m]ost native hunters singe a tiger's whiskers to prevent his ghost from haunting them" ("Tiger! Tiger!" 60). Kipling was perhaps thinking of the Korku tribe, who burn tigers' whiskers to prevent the tiger's spirit from returning to a village (Khinnavar).

Mowgli's mockery of the villagers' "tales of gods and men and ghosts," or his laughter at the desultory assortment of local superstitions that populate Buldeo's stories, implicitly impels us, Kipling's readers, to laugh along with Mowgli at this caricature of traditional subsistence societies. Mowgli becomes the cipher through which imperial power speaks at the same time as he, paradoxically, continually struggles with and against the smaller power structures of jungle and village that he inhabits. The text scripts Buldeo, meanwhile, as a simplified caricature of local hegemony, a duplicitous schemer who makes up stories to maintain his status at the head of the village as he exploits the villagers' gullibility. Hence, our moments of disbelief in *The Jungle Books* are suspended

and bracketed according to context, and context in this instance is filtered through the Mowgli fantasy. The Mowgli fantasy, in turn, flows from the power networks of literary distribution in the imperial center.

Buldeo's greed and self-interest stands in relief to Mowgli's inherent sense of honour. His conspiratorial relationship with the priest, who covets Messua's wealth, reveals how this works. At the beginning of "Tiger! Tiger!," the narrator introduces Messua as something of an Orientalist vision of feminine affluence. The "heavy copper rings on her wrists and ankles" signal her status as "wife to the richest villager in the place (49).²³ The Priest, described here as a "clever man" who wants to exploit Messua's standing for his own gain, exhorts Messua to "take the boy into thy house, my sister, and forget not to honour the priest who sees so far into the lives of men" (49). The motives behind the priest's remarks grow clear near the end of the story. Gray Wolf attacks

²³ In addition to Conrad's notoriously adorned "African mistress" in 1899's *Heart of Darkness*, Messua's regal femininity echoes a passing remark from an 1877 memoir by W.H. Angel, the captain of an indentured ship for Indian coolies. The captain is captivated by "a fine looking woman about forty years of age" who "wears the bells of *jhumkas* in her earlobes, a diadem-like *matha patti* along the part in her hair and concentric circles of heavy, elaborate necklaces, a widening gyre of gold florins and enchantment" (qtd. in Bahadur 68-69). Gaiutra Bahadur suggests that the captain's "Orientalist projection" of this woman, "evocative of wealth, sensuality, and the exotic" recalls the Queen of Sheba, the exotic Biblical seductress who bears King Solomon's son (Bahadur 69). Messua arguably falls into the same lineage in Kipling's rural/jungle context as the Orientalized symbol of rural feminine wealth and affluence, albeit complicated by interspecies relationships: Whereas Sheba bears the King a bastard son and Kurtz's mistress metonymically represents the sexual allure of "darkest Africa," Messua, replete with her bangles of "heavy copper," bears Mowgli, the bastard son of the Jungle.

Buldeo, after which the hunter “hobble[s] away to the village ... looking back over his shoulder in case Mowgli should change into something terrible” (61). As he returns to the village, Buldeo tells “a tale of magic and enchantment and sorcery that made the priest look very grave” (61). Although Buldeo fails to secure Shere Khan’s coat for the hundred rupee reward, his tale of Mowgli’s “sorcery” prompts the priest to establish a new scheme: If the villagers accept the notion of Mowgli as a sorcerer, it is not a stretch to accuse Messua and her husband, who took Mowgli into their care, as “wizards” in secret collusion with Mowgli. This reasoning justifies Messua and her husband’s imprisonment at the priest’s behest in “Letting in the Jungle,” as their pending execution for witchcraft opens an opportunity for the villagers to seize the husband’s wealth.²⁴

Messua’s unnamed husband understands this. When Mowgli encounters Messua and her husband gagged and bound in their hut in “Letting in the Jungle,” the husband asserts that the villagers imprisoned him and Messua because “I was too rich. I had too many cattle. *Therefore* [Messua] and I are witches, because we gave thee shelter” (“Letting in the Jungle” 193). The forked conditional logic of the husband’s utterance—“I was too rich” “Therefore [Messua] and I are witches”; “[Messua] and I are witches” because “we gave thee shelter”—signals a moment where Kipling’s take on local

²⁴ The sorcery accusation also gestures toward the Raj’s discomfiture with local religion. The Crown’s efforts to ban widow immolation (*sati*), for example, was a failure, as *sati* continued throughout the nineteenth century, particularly in rural areas with low literacy rates such as Rajasthan (Robb 287-88). Peter Robb cites an incident in Patna District where two thousand residents who witnessed a *sati* “refused to co-operate with the police,” effectively leaving the administration stymied (Robb 288). By scripting Messua and her husband’s imprisonment and execution as a religious matter, Kipling evokes a breakdown of judicial discipline in the Raj system evocative of Robb’s analysis.

superstition coincides with the wealth economy of the Raj.²⁵ That is, Messua's husband sees the connection between the villagers' fear of "witches" and their collective jealousy at his and Messua's high status amongst the villagers. That fear justifies their robbery. Meanwhile, the husband himself is not immune to the same logic of greed that provoked the charge of witchcraft in the first place. He vows to Mowgli that

'If we reach Khanhiwara, and I get the ear of the English, I will bring such a lawsuit against the Brahmin and old Buldeo and the others as shall eat the village to the bone. They shall pay me twice over for my crops untilled and my buffaloes unfed. I will have a great justice.' (197)

Shere Khan's specter, as it so often does throughout *The Jungle Books*, haunts this moment, subtly expressing itself here as "justice" that will "eat the village to the bone." But of greater significance here is the way that greed drives the Indian characters, with the notable exception of Messua, Mowgli's biological mother. Mowgli, meanwhile, can only laugh and respond that he "do[es] not know what justice is" (197), presumably because it is linked here to a cash economy that Mowgli, in all of his innocence, simply cannot understand.

At the same time, Mowgli's reaction at this moment triggers a dark turn in the Mowgli stories more generally. While Mowgli, up until this point in his narrative arc,

²⁵ In one respect, Messua and her husband's high status gestures toward a longer genealogy in the history of Brahmanical Hinduism undergirded by local power politics that predate the colonial period. But at the same time, their wealth also assumes new symbolic valences in the context of skirmishes between Hindu and Muslim sects that arose in the closing decade of the nineteenth century.

might be characterized by his longing to become fully animal, the smell of Messua's blood after he discovers her and her husband in the shed awakens a thirst for vengeance that characterizes the latter stories at the same time as it awakens Mowgli to his own power over the beasts. The rampage that culminates in the complete destruction of Seeonee in the latter half of "Letting in the Jungle" ushers in Mowgli's role as Master of the Jungle, a role he also exploits in "Red Dog" after he rallies the Free People to eviscerate a pack of hunting dogs that he perceives have wronged him. In effect, Mowgli bypasses his identification with "the animal" when he moves from a state of not-quite animal in the early stories to Master of the Jungle. But he can never exemplify animalness in its pure state.

I have thus far considered Buldeo's tales in the context of his and the other villagers' cynical self-interest, with the qualification that their self-interest reflects the invisible gaze of imperial power. To further complicate Kipling's representation of the villagers, I would like to position Buldeo as a teller of "wonderful" stories about "the ways of beasts in the jungle" (52) against Kipling as teller of his own wonderful stories about Mowgli and his jungle friends.

Buldeo, at one point in "Tiger! Tiger!," claims that Shere Khan is a ghost whose body is inhabited by a "wicked old money-lender" named Puran Dass (52). Buldeo's reasoning rests on the fact that "Puran Dass always limped from the blow that he got in a riot when his account books were burned, and the tiger that I speak of *he* limps, too, for the tracks of his pads are unequal" (52-53). Mowgli, who "covered his face to show that he was not laughing," retorts that Shere Khan "limps because he was born lame, as everyone knows. To talk of the soul of a money-lender in a beast that never had the

courage of a jackal is child's talk" (53). According to Mowgli, Buldeo "has not said one word of truth concerning the jungle, which is at his very doors" (53). But what if Buldeo's ascription of Shere Khan as a "reincarnated money-lender" resides beyond the limits of Mowgli's innocence as a product of Kipling's overall literary-imperial project? Might the symbolism of tiger as money-lender express a forked circuit that, from a local perspective, productively complicates the relationship between tigers, villagers, and Empire? Maybe the notion of Shere Khan as a money-lender's ghost codes the tiger's (re)incarnation as a man-eater to echo the way that the Raj, citing Right of Conquest after the passage of the 1878 Forest Act, would "lend back" land that the natives had already owned in the first place (Ramachandra Guha, "Colonialism and Conflict" 284). As a consequence of monoculture and a monopoly of uncultivated land earmarked for imperial resource extraction, the state's impositions propelled the influx of man-eating tigers in Kumaon and the Central Provinces (Rangarajan, "The Raj" 280-281). This double-displacement of animals and people marks the tiger as an aggressor that is also a victim of larger circumstances. In other words, the tiger threatens the locals at the same time as it also suffers before the ecological violence of imperial resource exploitation. Perhaps this intersection engenders a re-interpellation of the tiger by Buldeo into a new local cosmology that subtly conflates tigers and imperialists as necessarily violent forces that encroach upon the village, even whilst tigers, like local people, are marginalized by empire.

In effect, the imperial state's incursion into a local subsistence society triggers a rupture in the species boundaries that contributes to that society's overall structure. That is, labelling Shere Khan as a reincarnated moneylender might, for rural dwellers trapped

between empire and a man-eater, offer a cosmological justification to kill a symbolically revered, and feared, animal; the hundred rupee reward offered by the local authorities for Shere Khan's skin signals the encroachment of a new ideological superstructure that appropriates tigers' bodies according to an exploitative economic circuit. This circuit effaces traditional cosmologies as an organizing principle for a small pre-industrial society. The hinge between cosmology and British India's industrial market economy appears in the story. After Mowgli scoffs at Buldeo's claims about Shere Khan as the moneylender's ghost, Buldeo responds that "If thou are so wise, better bring his hide to Khanhiwara, for the Government has set a hundred rupees on his life" (53). When Mowgli rejects Buldeo's reasoning about ghosts, Buldeo shifts discursive registers, from the cosmological to the colonialist, and in so doing, shifts the representational conditions around Shere Khan's abstract value, from a "ghost" to a commodity. At the same time, the tiger's alienated value as a commodity remains as a sort of trace in the cosmological aspect, given that he is the "ghost" of a moneylender. The commercial or colonial superstructure finds its expression through a market economy that positions itself over and against the heterogeneous cosmological superstructures of a given formation of communities in a given district. As a salient fetish object in both of these ideological scenarios, the tiger oscillates between a sacred body in the form of something like Chitan deo—expressed crudely here as the moneylender's ghost—to a profane body to be destroyed under the aegis of commercial forestry and the nineteenth-century trophy industry.

This chapter has focused on the points of contact and overlap between the lived experience of nineteenth-century Seoni and Kipling's fictional "Seeonee" to imagine how

the jungle's animals and villagers might respond to their lived conditions. I have also argued that Mowgli's ambiguous figuration as neither/both human nor/and animal finds its expression through Kipling's perceptions of imperial power. Chapter Two inverts the imperial fantasy of feral childhood to investigate the enigmatic, unspeaking double to Mowgli that escapes Kipling's vision: the abandoned child, thought to be raised by wolves, that has repeatedly occupied imperial diaries, scientific monographs, and a 2009 collection of conceptual poetry by the British-Bengali writer, Bhanu Kapil.

Chapter Two:

“In Trauma We are Untimely Ripped”: The Untellable Story of Amala and Kamala, Wolf Girls of Bengal

The Indian Wild Child

India was something of a hotbed for anecdotes about feral children in the late nineteenth century. According to the diaries of William Sleeman, an imperial officer stationed in Oudh in the mid-nineteenth century, local villagers would occasionally happen upon an abandoned or feral child at the outskirts of the jungle. The child might be taken in by a sympathetic local, but its uncontrollable bathroom habits and pungent body odour would soon render its presence unbearable. Soon enough, the child would be released, only to disappear once again into the jungle from which it emerged. Meanwhile, the only tangible engagement the wild child experienced with the state was the latter's obsession with cataloguing even the most minute goings-on of the colony, as the diaries of an officer such as Sleeman attest. Still, this momentary intervention is vexed; by the time the wild child's story has been entered into the historical record, the child has disappeared, leaving behind a ghostly trace to be reconstructed and debated in Western newspapers, scholarly books, and scientific journals. This chapter engages with these traces to locate the lived experience of the feral child as that which is neither human nor animal, yet nevertheless subjected to imperial power.

Sleeman's diaries include 20 reported sightings of feral children. Most of the stories follow a predictable arc with little differentiation between them: A villager spots a child, usually a boy, prowling around the outskirts of a village on all fours. Sometimes, the child scurries off into the jungle; at others, it loiters around the village long enough to

become a local curiosity. Inevitably, the child dies a few days or weeks after it is spotted, and life in the village goes on. The odd anecdote, however, proves unsettling enough to grant us a glimmer of insight into the child's profound suffering. David Mandelbaum, for instance, cites the story of an unnamed boy in the United Provinces. According to the Raja of Hasunpoor, the boy remained silent until the moment of his death in 1847, whereupon he complained of a headache, asked for water, then keeled over and died (Mandelbaum 27-28).

As Kalpani Seshadri remarks, however, most stories about wild children “almost always proceed according to a predictable pattern, beginning with a haunting and ending with a forgetting The children melt away into obscurity, having metamorphosed from being interesting feral creatures to simply asocial, pathetic, and abnormal adults” (Seshadri 143). Despite the paucity of details, the figure of the wild child became a minor obsession in the West from the turn of the twentieth century until the post-war period. Often interpreted as a wayward human to be reintegrated into society, the wild child, in its way, inverted the imperial centre's historical dehumanization of the colonized. However, and as this chapter will discuss, the trope of recovery nevertheless subsumed the wild child under the punitive gaze of the state, as clinicians with a vested interest in feral children assimilated them into the anthropocentric paradigms of Western humanism.

To investigate the consequences of this circuit in its historical context, I focus on the story of Amala and Kamala, the so-called “wolf-girls of Bengal” who lived under the care of Joseph Amrito Lal Singh, an Anglican missionary, in 1920. Singh documented his attempts to socialize the girls following their discovery. After word of his efforts reached

American shores, an anthropologist named Robert Zingg set about publishing Singh's account in a volume that included several other case histories of feral children. Singh's narrative triggered a flurry of responses in the UK and the United States, with reactions ranging from bemused skepticism to a lengthy debate in the scientific community about the nature/culture divide. Amala and Kamala also captivated the child clinician Arnold Gesell. In 1941, Gesell published *Wolf Child and Human Child*, a speculative account of the wolf girls based on his research at the Yale Clinic of Child Development in the late 1930s. Gesell's book triggered a minor scandal in scientific circles, as his colleagues expressed shock at his credulity toward an uneducated Indian's claims about two feral children. The story was then largely forgotten until 2009, when Bhanu Kapil, an experimental poet of Bengali descent who teaches creative writing at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado, appropriated Singh's text to produce a revisionist account of the wolf girls.

Singh's publisher, Robert Zingg, called the text a "diary," but the extent to which we might classify it as such is debatable. Irina Paperno remarks that the diary is committed to a first-person narrative, "but not to an addressee" (562). She makes this distinction to highlight the diary's privileged relationship with privacy and secrecy. Andrew Hassam, however, cites Jean Rousset's suggestion that a diary's addressee can include the diarist's friends (Hassam, "Reading Other People's Diaries" 435); published diaries, meanwhile, invoke questions about the extent to which secrecy, disclosure, and intention delimit the centrality of secrecy as a diary's defining feature (437).²⁶ Singh

²⁶ Hassam also finds that taxonomic definitions of diaries, such as those variously provided by Robert Fothergill, K. Eckhard Kuhn-Osius, and Gerald Prince, tend to reduce the ineffable quality of the diary as

initially contrived to keep the diary a secret because he claimed he wanted to protect the girls' privacy, but when word of their discovery reached American shores, he sought to publish it in the hopes of earning enough from the book's sales to pay off his many debtors. The published "diary," with its thick descriptions of the girls' skeletomuscular conditions, diet, and bathroom habits, bore the standard hallmarks of an anthropological study, no doubt the product of Zingg's editorial interventions.

Gesell used Singh's account as a sort of case study against which he positioned *Wolf Child and Human Child* as his own version of the wolf girls' cognitive and biological development. Like the Singh/Zingg "diary," *Wolf Child and Human Child* loosely follows the conventions of post-war social science writing. Ornamented with references to Kipling and a self-celebratory utopianism that scripts the girls' reintroduction into human society as a testament to the human spirit, the text perhaps also sought to outbid Sigmund Freud's *Wolf Man*, *Dora*, or *Little Hans* as the pre-eminent studies of childhood psychology and the human/animal divide. However, *Wolf Child and*

such to a universal condition of diary-ness, so to speak, that can be inferred from norms of literary convention. Hassam's proposed alternative begins with prioritizing the reader as the arbiter of how, and to what extent, convention oscillates with the cultural expectations that structure both diary and reader, and the extent to which the text both affirms and challenges those expectations (23-26). Bearing these contingencies in mind, it might be the case, as Kuhn-Osius suggests, that a working definition of the diary genre might start "from a Wittgensteinian theory of *Familienähnlichkeiten* and assume that many traits belong to the diary but that not all diaries have all of them all of the time" (qtd. in Hassam *Writing and Reality* 20).

Human Child only reaffirmed what Gesell had decided that he already knew about psychological development.

In 2009's *Humanimal: A Project for Future Children*, Bhanu Kapil appropriates the source material of Singh's diary to produce a counternarrative about the wolf girls that also incorporates Kapil's childhood memories, episodes from her father, Krishan's, life, and commentaries about her struggle to represent the girls as she travels to Midnapore. These three threads are interspersed throughout the collection in such a way that the reader is left to construct a coherent narrative from the remnant the poet leaves us. Kapil's technique is consistent with contemporary styles of experimental or avant-garde poetry that use parataxis, mixed media, and non-linear temporality as aesthetic strategies to disrupt or problematize the limits of poetic convention. As such, Kapil's text has been variously heralded as an "authentic meditation" on the wolf girls that "allows the reader to metamorphose" across the multiple discursive frames it presents (Cronk), a "visceral" contribution to posthumanist philosophies espoused by theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari (Beckett), and a "silicon computer with its guts torn out" (David). Additionally, the experimental poet and literary critic Sarah Dowling argues that Kapil's representation of the wolf girls' animality makes her project uniquely "valuable to contemporary poetry's representation of the nonsubject" (738). For Dowling, the "planar space" of Kapil's revisionist poetics "records [the girls'] history without reference to the biographical structures that shape Gesell's rendering of Kamala's life or the lyric structures that shape our assumptions about personal testimony" in American poetry (749-750).

While remaining mindful of how Kapil's reconstruction of the wolf girls opens new possibilities for poetry and poetics to represent a hybrid "humanimal" figure, I consider how the girls' trauma flows into *Humanimal's* other two narrative threads, which focus on the poet's and Krishan's experiences as racialized and diasporic subjects who travel between Bengal, England, and the US. I suggest that Kapil's synthesis of the wolf girls, the poet, and Krishan complicates Vijay Mishra's notion of the diasporic imaginary, an ethnic enclave's collective projection of a lost homeland that never existed. Kapil, I suggest, deploys notions of "home," loss, and trauma to newly reconfigure how we imagine species boundaries and racialized embodiment.

Before I attend to these three texts, I will establish a theoretical framework through which we may read the figure of the feral child. Given the descriptions of feral children as mute, unhygienic, and affectless by Western scientists such as Wayne Dennis (261), the "wild child" likely suffered a severe cognitive impairment at the same time as its allegedly poor hygiene coincided with racist assumptions of the non-white other as dirty or diseased. The child may have been abandoned, the parents may have died, or it may simply have wandered off for any number of reasons, only to return to its village at some later point. The transformation of impairment into the trope of the wild child might be an outcome of imperial Europe's fascination with the mythology of children raised by wolves—as evidenced by texts such as Kipling's *The Jungle Books* or Edgar Rice Burrough's *Tarzan of the Apes*. This mythology likely expresses the racist imperial psyche's fear of the non-white other, a dynamic I have discussed in Chapter One.

In this chapter, I suggest that the reality of severe cognitive impairment in the Indian rural setting collapses into a racialized narrative of ferality. From this confused

synthesis of race, disability, and ferality, the wild child dwells in a peculiar space of social marginalization that is not exactly human nor animal while being both. In other words, the child's existence is determined by its cognitive impairment at the same time as its cognitive impairment is effaced to maintain the fiction of the wild child.

Consequently, the border at which species meet in the figure of the wild child is shaped through the codification of race and mental illness as a narrative of ferality.

I position this vexed circuit of race, mental illness, and animality in dialogue with Kalpani Seshadri's recent theorization of the nineteenth century wild child as one who teeters at the brink of speech (174). As a figure whose speech remains suspended at the tip of the tongue, Seshadri's wild child does not fall into the symbolic order of language and its requisite disciplinary strictures. In other words, the wild child suggests a break between humanity and savagery predicated not on human exceptionalism, but on the feral child's indifference to, and inevitable refusal of, the human as an anthropocentric and teleological construct. Yet to be pursued, however, is the question of the feral child's lived trauma. To integrate Seshadri's figure of the wild child that refuses language into its lived condition, I draw on David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder's critique of the way that the state constructs the mentally ill as deviant bodies subject to punitive correction. I then argue that the wild child, through its mute speech, both escapes from and suffers under the disciplining gaze of biopower. This nexus of illness, ferality, and punishment loops back into my theorization of a broken circuit of ferality as a conceptual category that effaces the real conditions of disability in the space of the Indian village.

Feral Biopolitics, or the Child who Refuses

In a variation of Giorgio Agamben's suggestion that "all languages mean to say the word that does not say anything" (*Potentialities* 55), Seshadri theorizes the wild child as a radical non-subject that evades the disciplinary order of language and law by virtue of its vexed relationship with speech. For Seshadri, the state cannot assimilate the figure of the wild child into its symbolic order because wild children dwell "in language—neither technically mute (as in speech-impaired) nor speaking—silent and beyond reach with no proper name of their own" (143). The wild child, in other words, exemplifies "the experience of the human being at its most original and contemporary condition" (174), that of a being on the brink of speech who, at the moment of utterance, does not fall into the abyss of language and its disciplining symbolic gaze. Its refusal to speak, Seshadri continues, mobilizes a "radical humanity" that forgoes the entanglements of law and language to produce a distinct ontic interplay between human and animal being.

Seshadri's figuration of the wild child as both "original" and "contemporary" evokes John Berger's analysis of language as that which both excludes and includes animals before human consciousness. Berger builds his argument from an imagined scenario of a prehistoric human whose ability to ponder his existence through the eyes of an animal resides in the aporia of sameness and difference constitutive of the Saussurian sign:

The eyes of an animal when they consider a man are attentive and wary. The same animal may well look at other species in the same way. He does not reserve a special look for man. But by no other species except man will the animal's look be recognized as familiar. Other animals are held by the look. Man becomes aware of himself returning the look. (5)

In effect, the man's gaze assimilates the animal into a projection of that man's rational faculties. As the man reflects upon how he and the animal are both like and unlike each other, he also presumes that he alone has the cognitive capacity to reflect on that play of sameness and difference. The man's cognitive capacity, in turn, arises through the mediating properties of language and semiotics, with the caveat that the animal qua Other triggers the formation of language as a means for the man to realize his uniqueness. Consequently, the animal occupies a unique position in the man's consciousness as both the object and the catalyst for language:

What distinguished man from animals was the human capacity for symbolic thought, the capacity which was inseparable from the development of language in which words were not mere signals, but signifiers of something other than themselves. Yet the first symbols were animals. What distinguished men from animals was born of their relationship with them. (Berger 9).

The man's realization implies a number of interconnected contingencies that structure the relation as a whole: that of the immediate or inaccessible animal, the animal accessed through language, the man from the animal's inaccessible purview, and the man's self-reflexive awareness of the animal's awareness of him. Even as the man tries to assimilate these refracting valences of the self-other encounter of "man" and "animal" into a self-identical signified that bears the signifier, the animal-as-sign carries with it the germ of metaphor as that which encapsulates the difference between humans and other animals on the one hand, and the sign as a negotiation between signifier and signified on the other.

Jacques Derrida's longstanding preoccupation with the lives of animals offers one possible schematic to nuance the semiotic impasse at which Berger arrives. Akira Lippit

encapsulates Derrida's thesis when he states that "[t]he economy of human subjectivity and speech is restricted: only human beings are capable of speech, which, in turn, founds the human subject. Animals enter that tautology as a phantasmatic counterpoint to human language" (15). The tautology to which Lippit refers here is that language affirms humanity's difference from animals through its privileged relation with human consciousness. To put it another way, the human, through language, regards himself as special for being human. Meanwhile Derrida's animal, like Berger's, escapes this circuit even as it constitutes the human's central preoccupation about himself as a self-conscious subject that cannot access the primordial essence of the animal's gaze. That essence, in turn, constitutes both the human and the human's conception of the animal. However, Derrida nuances this aporia when he introduces the trace and the *supplement* as metaphysical properties that dwell in both difference and *différance*, the neologism for difference and deferral as the preconditions of language qua *logos* (*Of Grammatology* 279). *Différance* deflects the animal's radical otherness from *logos* as that which both/either excludes and/or is excluded from the animal as such. The trace and *supplement*, as ineffable categories of *différance*, may be implied but never explicated nor distilled regardless of which side of the human/animal divide on which they fall. Hence, the "possibilities or necessities" proper to the trace and *supplement* "are themselves only human" even as they gesture toward the radical exteriority constitutive of animal life. For Derrida, then

[i]t is not a question of covering ruptures and heterogeneities. I would simply contest that they give rise to a linear, indivisible, oppositional limit, to a binary opposition between the human and the infrahuman. And what I am proposing here

should allow us to take into account scientific knowledge about the complexity of “animal languages,” genetic coding, all forms of marking within which so-called human language, as original as it might be, does not allow us to “cut” once and for all where we would in general like to cut [...] And this also means that we can never know, and never have known, how to *cut up* a subject. (qtd. in Lippit 16)

In effect, humans cannot prise apart the self-enclosing circuit of language as the originary media through which we encounter and talk about animals as entities that radically differ from humans even as they leave their indelible mark upon us. The difference/*différance* embedded in Berger’s animal-metaphor, refined and exploded through the Derridean trace and *supplement*, permeates cave paintings, ritual sacrifice, poetry, biology, or any other form of human expression that concerns animals as examples of language’s frustrated effort to access the animal’s absolute difference in its entirety, and of how that difference shapes our understandings of ourselves, other animals, and the play of differences and resemblances those understandings entail. That is, these formations of speech, thought, and knowledge, as epiphenomena that assume their peculiar expression through human brains and minds, can partially reveal animals as entities that fundamentally differ from and influence our experiences of being human, but they cannot show us the animal in its wholeness.²⁷ *Pace* Martin Heidegger’s famous assertion that the animal is poor in “world,” one could argue in this instance that humans are poor in animal.

²⁷ This is not to discount non-human animals’ advanced communicative abilities. What I am emphasizing here is the peculiarity of human language as a distinctly anthropocentric structure that preemptively signals its limits.

To Berger and Derrida's play of differences, Seshadri adds the figure of the wild child as a distinct category that further complicates the split between signifier and signified. Following Giorgio Agamben's schematic of the human subject as that which precedes and dwells beside speech, Seshadri interprets the wild child as a living example of the human that exists in a space between that state of "preceding" and "dwelling beside":

Insofar as human beings experience this lag [between embodiment and language by virtue of language acquisition] ... they are given a possibility for muteness and silence that testifies to nothing if not the potentiality of language itself. The wild child undoubtedly appears in this space of silence, in the interval between *langue* and *parole*. As a human child abandoned and isolated, he or she is in a relation to language that is at the tip of the tongue. In a sense, then, the wild child is not so much "deprived" of language so much as it is on the other side of the "moat" between *langue* and *parole* *If the speaking person finds him/herself on the side of signification yet haunted by the trace, the wild child dwells in the trace and is hunted if not haunted by the sign* In not speaking, the wild child demonstrates its radical humanity—for only humans have the potential to be mute, in the space between having and not having language, between *logos* and *onoma*. (174, emphasis added)

To Seshadri's conclusion, I would suggest that the sign's redirection from "haunting" to "hunting" brings terrible consequences for the child. For the wild child's power to "surprise" the law by virtue of its semiotic indeterminacy also disqualifies it from the state's protection. Although the state's refusal to "care" for the wild child opens a

moment of indeterminacy in which the “wild child confronts the force of law, familial as well as juridical, with an equanimity that can disclose its limits simply by not answering” (Seshadri 144), the wild child can embody this radical possibility only retroactively, prior to its emergence before the biopolitical power structures of the state. In so doing, the wild child’s curious relationship with language becomes a matter of indifference before the law at the moment of its disclosure. That is, the state’s “surprise” at the absolute otherness embodied by the wild child is preemptively effaced by the imperative to control bodies through the circuits of power articulated by language and the law, be they instruments of violence (such as the military or police), public health, or basic subsistence. Consequently, the law’s moment of surprise produces a vexing impasse at which the sign’s failure to “haunt” the child prefigures the “hunt”—for the wild child’s apparent exclusion from the state nevertheless leaves it vulnerable to its mechanisms of power. Indeed, the historical documents that catalogue the lives of feral children reveal a consistent pattern of neglect and cruelty.

As David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder point out in their discussion of Victor of Aveyron and his master, Jean Gaspard Itard, for example, the wild child is branded as abhorrent the moment it falls under the gaze of institutional power even as the category of “wild child” makes it effectively non-existent before the state. Mitchell and Snyder unpack this double-bind when they elucidate the medical and psychological horrors imposed upon feral children following their discovery in the wild. Children such as Amala and Kamala or Victor, for example, are “trained in the manners and customs of the moderns” as they learn their “savagery” is a form of “barbarism” that they could not have been conscious of prior to their “ingestion in the classification of feral” (Mitchell

and Snyder 631). While evidence of Victor's refusal to speak or even acknowledge Itard might evoke Seshadri's image of the originary human's refusal to meet the master's gaze—not to mention a peculiar narrative of unrequited love by the scientist who “dreamed of rescue for the young and abandoned boy” (Newton qtd. in Mitchell and Snyder 629)—Victor was nevertheless subjected to a rigorous host of psychological and biomedical cruelties by that master: He received regular electric shocks for bad behaviour; was subjected to countless psychological and physiological tests; and was hung out a fourth-story window by his feet “to better align his interests with the goals of his training” (Mitchell and Snyder 630). Consequently, the wild child's refusal to respond to human norms and mores might make him inaccessible before the law in the abstract, but his body remains subject to punishment for reasons he cannot know. Human interlopers such as Itard, Singh, or Gesell might retrieve some aspects of the wild child from its radical psychological otherness, but this retrieval produces terrible consequences.

The wild child's otherness necessarily eludes the seats of state or medical power insofar as those instantiations of power remain a matter of indifference and unknowability to the wild child's state of radical otherness. Yet the wild, although it persists in the mind and body of the child, comes with an enormous price, for the child suffers enormously for it. Although the wild child gestures toward the limits and contradictions of the law as both a legal and a literary fiction—we see the latter through Mowgli in Chapter One—its real conditions complicate the emancipatory possibilities that its fictional apparition discloses. I turn now to Joseph Singh's account of Amala and Kamala, and the reactions to that account in the West, to unpack how early twentieth-

century American child psychology subsumed the Indian wild child into its scaffolding of power.

The Wolf Girls' Story, According to the Reverend Joseph Singh

An Anglican missionary stationed in rural Bengal, the Reverend Joseph Singh received his vocation in 1910. He oversaw an orphanage and parish in the village of Midnapore (sometimes spelled "Midnapur" or "Midnapure"), but he would tour the jungles every winter, intent on saving the souls of the tribals who lived therein. During one of his tours, Singh claimed to have organized the hunting party that captured a pair of girls raised by wolves after a forest-dweller approached him about a creature with the "hideous head of a ghost" (3). The hunting party flushed out the "ghost" from a white ant-mound that was, in fact, occupied by a pack of wolves and the girls. Singh reportedly sold the wolves at a local bazaar and brought the girls into his care at the orphanage.

Other accounts of the story leave unclear the extent of Singh's involvement in the girls' capture. Paul C. Squires, in a number of correspondences with W.N. Kellogg between 1930 and 1931, sought to determine whether Singh was part of the expedition or if the girls were delivered to Singh's orphanage two weeks after their capture (Kellogg 508). Kellogg, meanwhile, claims to have heard from E.W. Mumby that Singh was, in fact, present at the hunt (508). Academic gossip notwithstanding, the story of the girls would not have reached American and European shores had not S.R. Sarbadhicari, the local doctor who treated the girls, leaked the story to a Midnapore newspaper (Maclean 193-194).

As luck would have it, Singh himself also happened to have kept a diary about the girls. The diary, written over the course of seven years between 1920 and 1927, catalogues the girls' diet, bathroom habits, physical and mental states, attempts to communicate, emotions, and interactions with the Rev. Singh, his wife, and the orphanage's other inhabitants. The girls' behaviour was consistent with anecdotal descriptions of other feral or severely isolated children such as those found in the diaries of William Sleeman from 1852. Singh reports that Amala and Kamala's emotional responses were limited to a sort of extreme apathy, although they would snarl and bare their teeth if they felt threatened. Bathroom and eating habits were, predictably, a constant issue. To the Singhs' further dismay, the girls would devour dead animals, growling at anybody who tried to intervene. They walked about on all fours, lapped milk and water from a bowl and, with the exception of the odd cookie, refused a human diet. In short, the girls acted like distressed animals yanked from the only existence they had ever known and into a life of forced domestication.

Amala, who was thought to be a year and a half old upon the girls' discovery, died less than a year later from dysentery. Singh noted that Kamala perceived a "change" in Amala at the time of her death, and took this as evidence that Kamala could understand what it means to die. According to Singh, Kamala reportedly mourned Amala's death by smelling her bed, her dish, the garden, and other objects that Amala favoured. Singh's conviction that Kamala could conceptualize death is perhaps indicative of his persistent belief that she could be integrated into human society, for in the years that followed, the Singhs were preoccupied with training Kamala to walk upright. In addition to a daily massage routine administered by Mrs. Singh, the bulk of the diary describes how the

Singhs designed a number of contraptions, built from modified benches, to encourage Kamala to stand up straight. Mrs. Singh would put a cookie or other treat at the top of the bench, which was set just high enough for Kamala to reach if she stood up. More often than not, Kamala would crawl over to the bench, sniff the cookie, stand up to grab it, and then drop back onto all fours. Nevertheless, the Singhs interpreted Kamala's upright posture, momentary though it was, as progress.

Kamala died at the approximate age of fourteen in 1929. By the end of her life, she had managed to learn about 50 words, wore a frock, favoured the colour red, and went on daily walks in the compound with Mrs. Singh. According to Singh, the other children loved Kamala dearly. Kamala, meanwhile, had overcome her apathy and formed a close bond with Mrs. Singh.

The Diary's Publication and Reception in the West

The first edition of Singh's diary, published by Harper in 1942 and edited by an American anthropologist named Robert Zingg, includes forewords by a sociologist, two clinical psychologists—one of whom, Arnold Gesell, would write *Wolf Child and Human Child*, his own speculative account of Kamala's upbringing in the wild—the Chair of the Human Hereditary Bureau at the University of London, and Bishop H. Pakenham-Walsh, a European missionary of Singh's acquaintance. The Zingg edition also includes several pages' worth of footnotes that consist of arcane questions addressed to Singh from a panel of biologists and anthropologists about the girls' musculoskeletal condition. A monograph by Zingg, "Feral Man and Cases of Extreme Isolation of Individuals", also accompanies the diary. "Feral Man" does not consist of fieldwork by Zingg, drawing

instead on Sleeman's diaries. Finally, Zingg obtained an affidavit from the Midnapore District Judge attesting to the veracity of Singh's character.

The race and power inequities that necessitated the authority of imperial agents and scientists to uphold the credibility of a document by a comparatively uneducated Indian are obvious. Equally unsurprising, perhaps, is the way that the published diary was received and disseminated in the West more generally. A torrent of think-pieces and op-eds in daily newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Times of London*, in addition to a decades-long debate in scientific journals, fixated on the question of whether or not the story was true. Those who supported the accounts espoused racist fantasies of the wolf girls as "Mowgli's Sisters" ("Mowgli's Sisters" 58) while sceptics appealed to popular psychological theories of the day to dismiss them as "congenital idio[ts]" (Zingg 135-136). A feature from the January 30, 1927 edition of the *NYT* encapsulates the sentiments of Westerners who believed the story. Described by the writer as the embodiment of "fairy tale animals," Amala and Kamala are "seen carrying on a long and honorable tradition—revealing once more the bond of sympathy between animals and humans which is as old as Genesis" (E.A.J.) References to Kipling, the myth of Romulus and Remus, and William Hudson's *Green Mansions*, in which "Rima, more like a hummingbird than a girl, poignantly expresses the free, joyous life of the forest primeval" (E.A.J.), punctuate the feature's idyllic, Christian-humanist vision of the girls.

The idealized fantasy of the girls was countered by skeptics who sought to debunk the story on the grounds that wolf children were "microcephalic idiots" (Sheffield) exploited by cynical and self-interested opportunists such as Singh. Meanwhile, a letter from Jacqueline Nollet in the July 17, 1927 edition of the *NYT*, in response to reports

about a wolf boy discovered in Miawana, remains the lone published piece to question the ethics of reducing feral children to lab specimens:

Have men for “humanity’s sake” the right to take away this Miawana boy from his mother-wolf and from his brotherly playmates, from the jungle’s new and enthralling life, and to condemn him instead to an existence devoid of companionship and a life of utter misery just because he was a man and should remain a man? (Nollet)

Nollet’s intervention, by idealizing the jungle’s “new and enthralling life,” betrays the same nostalgic romanticization of unfettered nature imagined by those she critiques. Nevertheless, her view remains an outlier in a debate whose preoccupations with the veracity of the story oscillated between Kipling-esque racism and the then-prevailing opinions on cognitive impairment.

The academic debates fell into roughly the same camps. Skeptics such as Wayne Dennis dismissed the girls as “mute idiots” whose “inarticulated grunts, screeches and discordant yells” resemble animal sounds, adding that, like wild children, the “mentally defective” are “untidy” and eat things that “civilized man considers disgusting” (“Wolf-Child Stories are Doubted by Psychologist” 261). Others, most notably W.N. Kellogg and Paul C. Squires, sought to corroborate conflicting accounts of the girls’ discovery through correspondences between Singh and a number of American scientists. Meanwhile, Singh’s proponents, most notably Gesell, subscribed to a similar formula of racialized anthropocentrism as the *NYT* op-ed writers, accompanied by the implicit assumption that the hardships faced by recovered feral children such as Amala and Kamala were ultimately a testament to the resilience of the human spirit.

Arnold Gesell's Utopian Wild Child

Gesell's speculative account of Amala and Kamala, *Wolf Child and Human Child*, gained infamy in the scientific community upon its publication in 1941. No doubt, Gesell's position as the Director of Yale's Clinic of Child Development only fueled the uproar. He confesses that he wrote the book because "I was so haunted by Kamala and Amala that I could not exorcise them until I had written out a story which would satisfy my own questionings" (qtd. in Maclean 266). Yet his doggedness raises several questions about his methodology, as his conviction that the girls were raised by wolves put his credibility as a serious scientist in jeopardy. Adriana Benzaquén surmises that Gesell risked his reputation not out of concern for either the wolf girls or Singh's interests, but because a study predicated on the successful maturation of an abhorrent case such as Kamala—a radical other that was simultaneously gendered, raced, and subhuman—would universalize his theories about childhood development beyond any possible doubt. In effect, *Wolf Child and Human Child* implicitly supports his hypothesis that maturation "develops in consistent and characteristic behaviour patterns, governed by laws of growth similar to those which control the development of [the] body" (255). As Benzaquén puts it, then, "[u]like other scientists who expected the wild child to furnish the key to human nature and development, Gesell turned to his wild girl for confirmation of a knowledge that he already had" (61). Moreover, the fact that Kamala was not white would universalize his findings from the case studies at Yale that did not control for racial, geographic, and class discrepancies.

To make his case, Gesell presents a narrative of Kamala's life-course inferred from his work with children in the Clinic. He grafts atop these inferences a narrative about Kamala that is predicated on "three great crises which never have befallen any other mortal child" (4): the loss of Kamala's human mother, the loss of her wolf-mother, and the loss of her "wolf-sister," Amala. To reconstruct Kamala's pre-feral life, Gesell assumes that she was born into what he imagines as a typical Bengali family:

In one of the mud and thatched huts of Godamuri a dark-skinned Hindoo mother, perhaps from the primitive tribe of Kora, gave birth to a daughter. An ancient midwife, we may suppose, gave attendance and comfort. Not much comfort was needed. Childbirth was an old story in this household. Perhaps there was expression of regret that this babe was a mere girl, when the father came home at evening with his white bullock dragging the ploughshare which had turned the spring soil. (9-10)

Gesell's questionable foray into amateur anthropology notwithstanding (he had never traveled to India, let alone experienced firsthand the daily routines of village life), the ensuing narrative of Kamala's infancy could easily be mistaken for any of his observations at Yale, as the bulk of this section provides basic descriptions of infant head and eye movement, pattern recognition, and responses to sound and touch. Kamala's mother, meanwhile, strikes an ideal figure of Gesell's vision of feminized domesticity, giving "heed" to the baby's cries for milk while providing Kamala with "the deepest satisfaction when she felt the snug pressure of adult hands, which held her in secure grasp and which rubbed her smooth swarthy skin with sweet-smelling ointment" (12). Incidentally, Kamala would experience a "dim reawakening" (12) of these sensations

years later when Mrs. Singh would administer her daily massage to Kamala (Singh 61). The striking resemblances between Singh's construction of Mrs. Singh as a sort of archetypal mother figure and Gesell's nurturing human and animal mothers is suggestive of a universalist assumption about mothering, womanhood, and domesticity that men such as Singh and Gesell, despite their vast class and cultural differences, seemed to share. Singh's heteropatriarchal inclinations in the domestic sphere are, perhaps, symptomatic of his impassioned support for the empire's colonial project, which I discuss in a later section.

Kamala's human mother, in Gesell's narrative, remains little more than a dismembered assortment of breasts and hands that abandons the child in a field, leaving a she-wolf to occupy the slot of motherhood abandoned by an anonymous Bengali subaltern. So it is that after Kamala's biological mother "laid her daughter prone in the stubble," a she-wolf with "gorged" teats and "preternaturally mild" eyes took Kamala in her jaws "with great gentleness" (13). Gesell attributes the wolf-mother's sensitivity to his own assumptions about women and motherhood in general, so that "a she-wolf whose whole being is warmed by the chemistry of maternal hormones can be as deft and gentle as a woman" (13). Additionally, the text's persistent references to Kipling's *Mowgli*, complete with epigraphs from *The Jungle Books* that precede each section, also betrays shades of Raksha, the benign mother-wolf who, like Gesell's mother figures, exists only as a static, one-dimensional ideation of maternal labour. Gesell, in effect, is careful to construct a benevolent, feminized, and nurturing figure of motherhood, human and otherwise, that aligns with his research on white babies from the functional and affluent

suburbanites who frequented his practice. Hence, Kamala's life in the wolf-den bears a striking resemblance to the lives of healthy babies in the developed world:

She had no difficulty even at the age of six months in finding the udders which nourished her with mammalian milk that was chemically very like the milk to which she was accustomed. She already had good control of the movements and postures of her head. She was learning by alternate flexion and extension of her arms to pivot on her stomach, so she could swing through the arc of a circle. A week or two later she flexed her arms simultaneously and pulled her body weight forward; that is to say, she crawled on her stomach. She was more than able to hold her own in the competition for milk supply. (19)

The rest of Kamala's story relies on the same theme of smooth, gradual adaptation and maturation predicated on Gesell's conviction that human psychological development is biologically self-regulated (Ames 189-191). After adapting to the ways of wolfhood, Kamala and her recently discovered "foster sister," Amala, face another great crisis upon their discovery by Singh (Gesell 23). Yet the story of their transition to the orphanage essentially duplicates their experiences in the wolf den. Their capture is "gently affected" and, following a brief emergency whereupon Singh discovers the girls starving and dehydrated after a week away, they are easily nursed back to health (23). Singh then brings them to the orphanage, where he and Mrs. Singh share the role of benevolent mother in place of the wolf as Kamala continues her stunted journey to human normality. Both Amala and Kamala demonstrate throughout the remainder of Gesell's text an "unmistakably strong" tendency "toward human ways" (59) reminiscent of his conviction that heredity and physiology ultimately override environmental influences in

psychological development. While granting that Kamala “both suffered and survived her fate” (98), Gesell assumes that she would have nevertheless achieved a reasonable modicum of human functionality had she lived into adulthood.

As Benzaquén reminds us, the most unsettling aspect of Gesell’s position here is that he grants no space for Kamala’s death in the story of her life (70). Rather, he assumes that Kamala, had she survived into adulthood, would simply have followed a steady rate of mental and physiological progression consistent with his theoretical template. To acknowledge both her and Amala’s deaths as fundamental aspects of their lived experiences would raise a host of uncomfortable and difficult questions, perhaps none more crucial than that raised by Jacqueline Nollet, of why we feel compelled to both domesticate and experiment with children who deviate from a post-industrial society’s anthropocentric expectations. That is, when a self-proclaimed utopian such as Gesell celebrates the “dignity and stamina of the human spirit” through his version of Kamala (6), the demonstrable misery and early deaths of feral children are effaced from the historical record.

The media spectacles that accompanied the West’s fascination with feral children transformed Amala and Kamala into near-mythical figures reminiscent of Mowgli or Tarzan, themselves metonymic representations of imperial conquest and, in the case of Tarzan, hypermasculine sexuality. Meanwhile, a pseudo-scientific text such as Gesell’s appropriated the figure of the wild child as a means to prove a theory of childhood development in which he had a vested interest. The striking aspect of the backlash to Gesell at the time was the way that skeptics who denounced the text attacked it not because of its self-serving utopianism, but for Gesell’s purported credulity at the notion

that a child could, in fact, be raised by wolves. The critiques of Gesell put forth by skeptics such as Wayne Dennis and M.F. Montagu, for instance, are predicated on a scenario in which the wild child is either feral or mentally defective, with the burden of proof resting on the former.

The Diasporic Imaginary and Impossible Trauma in Bhanu Kapil's *Humanimal: A Project for Future Children*

The obsession over the girls' animal upbringing effaced the trauma that they would have endured. Gesell, in particular, excised Amala and Kamala's suffering when he forced their narrative into his rubric of childhood development. But Bhanu Kapil's 2009 poetry collection, *Humanimal: A Project for Future Children*, uses trauma as the departure point for a revisionist history of the girls that also works through themes of global migration and family histories. The collection consists of an assortment of short poetic prose pieces, all of which traverse three interspersed narrative threads: the wolf girls' revised narrative, which Kapil assembles from sections of Singh's text and her own attempts to relive the wolf girls' experiences; biographical snippets from the life of Kapil's father, an illiterate Bengali goatherd who grew up to become a headmaster in the UK; and an account of Kapil's research trip to Bengal with a French documentary team that makes a film about the wolf girls. The three narratives follow a fractured dream logic built on associative connections between people, objects, events, and memories.

For the most part, the wolf girls' perspective consists of colours and simple objects, although Kapil's narrative sometimes morphs into a humanimal voice that suggests a hybrid of the poet and the wolf girl. Additionally, Kapil designates the five

concluding wolf girl entries with the letter “O,” described by the poet as both “a kind of mouth” and an incomplete alphabet that suggests lives interrupted and displaced. The wolf girls’ “alphabet to ‘O’” also resonates with the fact that it seems the most Kamala could do with her words was treat them as arbitrary vocalizations that may or may not have served an indexical function from her cognitive perspective.

The wolf girls’ narrative sometimes bleeds into the collection’s “second space,” which the poet refers to as a “companion text.” The companion text focuses on Krishan, Kapil’s father. Following his decision to flee rural poverty and pursue an education in the UK, the poet remarks that her father “dragged himself out of the field and into the sky” (18). Kapil incorporates themes of trauma and global migration into Krishan’s stories through fragmented episodes that feature his violent childhood in Bengal, his tenure as an abusive British headmaster, and the poet’s bedside presence at his deathbed. Krishan and the girls’ threads occasionally meld into a “third space” (17) in which the poet, having lived most of her life in England and the US, returns to India and struggles to engage with the locals in Midnapore. The poet’s narrative also includes frequent interjections that offer a gloss for the humanimal poetics of the wolf girls and the poet’s struggles to both represent and revisit the girls’ lives and deaths.

Humanimal’s typesetting mirrors its disjunctive poetics. While the girls’ entries are designated by letters and set in a large serif font, those about the documentary team and Krishan are numbered and feature smaller, sans serif characters. Aesthetically, the jostling fonts and text sizes recall Suzanne Wise’s description of contemporary poetry’s “restless unease upon the page” at the same time as they signify the “humanimal” and human realms through which the collection travels.

To consider how *Humanimal* deploys memory and displacement to stage its encounter with the wolf girls through Krishan and Kapil as two diasporic subjects who do not quite belong in either Bengal or the West, I turn to Vijay Mishra's theorization of the diasporic imaginary, "any ethnic enclave in a nation state that defines itself, consciously, unconsciously, or through self-evident or implied political coercion, as a group that lives in displacement" (14). For Mishra, a double-loss articulates the diasporic subject's condition vis-à-vis the imaginary—the material absence from one's geographical homeland, and the fact that the idea of that homeland consists of a collectively imagined projection from the diasporic group in general.²⁸ Mishra's formulation also draws on Slavoj Žižek's definition of the "imaginary" as the representation of "what we would like to be," a desire that is, in turn, linked to the question posed to the hysteric: Not "What is his object of desire" but "Where does he desire from?" (qtd. in Mishra 14). The Žižekian imaginary then cathects onto the "Nation Thing," or the collective fantasy of what constitutes a nation, which is seen as vulnerable or under threat before the presence of the Other. In the diasporic context, Mishra explains that the Nation Thing is both an abstraction and an absence.²⁹ Consequently, self-created "political myths" sustain diasporas in place of a non-existent "real" or material homeland that fuels the diasporic

²⁸ Mishra makes a distinction between "old" and "new" diasporas to indicate the historical break between early modern, classical capitalist, and nineteenth-century conditions of coerced displacement and "postmodern" migrations that followed the advent of high-speed travel and communications technologies after the turn of the twentieth century (2-3).

²⁹ The Nation Thing inevitably foments xenophobic and racist violence between the subject and the Other, but the material expressions of that violence assume different forms that depend on context.

subject's desire. The question of "where" a diasporic subject might "desire from" is thus doubly-fraught, in that the displaced diasporic has no material "home" from which he or she is exiled, yet the imagined or desired "homeland" binds the diasporic enclave to its collective displacement.

To ground the politically fraught structure of loss peculiar to the diasporic subject, Mishra borrows Derrida's gloss of "impossible" and "possible" mourning:

What is an impossible mourning? What does it tell us, this impossible mourning, about an essence of memory ([of anamnesia, of remembrance])? And as it concerns the other in us [...] where is the most unjust betrayal? Is the most distressing, or even the most deadly infidelity that of a *possible mourning* which would interiorize within us the image, the idol, or ideal of the other who is dead and lives on in us? Or is it that of the impossible mourning, which, leaving the other his alterity, respecting thus his infinite remove, either refuses to take or is incapable of taking the other within oneself, as in the tomb or the vault of some narcissism? (qtd. in Mishra 7)

Impossible mourning's absolute absence of the lost other, as the expression of a loss that cannot be captured or enunciated, stands in opposition to "true" mourning, our acknowledgement of the inexpressibleness of a loss through language. In true mourning, the loss "exists," so to speak, as a negative concept that escapes language, like an object that escapes our gaze whenever we turn toward it. Impossible mourning, on the other hand, is the representation of loss or the lost object that can never again materialize.

Mishra posits that the double-valence of impossible/possible mourning finds its expression as a "trope of absence, a ghostly trope of prosopopoeia (the mode of

personification that implies an absent speaker), by which memory (which like stone is silent) is given a voice” (8). He then mobilizes the tension between possible/impossible mourning and melancholia to theorize the diasporic imaginary’s affective condition:

the diasporic imaginary is a condition (and “imaginary” is the key concept here) of an impossible mourning that transforms mourning into melancholia. In the imaginary of diasporas, both mourning and melancholia persist, sometimes in intensely contradictory ways at the level of the social. *In fact, if we examine the characteristics of mourning and melancholia more closely ... we are struck by the match between a diaspora’s memory of homeland (which defies representation) and the nature of the lost object that forms the basis of melancholia.* (9, emphasis added)

Paul Ricoeur interprets mourning as a period of ego work in which the subject wrests the libido from the lost object (71). A melancholic, in contrast, remains affixed on the loss, even if her or his conscious awareness of the lost object itself is not necessarily obvious. As Freud reminds us, a melancholic subject “knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 245). The melancholic remains frozen in time, so to speak, so long as he refuses the temporal work of mourning. Meanwhile, the structure of the loss as a recognizable object dissolves, and its remnants secrete themselves in the melancholic’s unconscious. From this profound sense of loss, the melancholic demonstrates “an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale” (246). Given that “the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object” (244), we can further infer that mourning works out of

melancholia in that the former constitutes the subject's struggle to reorient the libido's cathectic energy away from the "shadow" of the "object" that falls on the ego (249). That is, both mourning and melancholia proceed from the remnants of the lost object. But the work of mourning draws the libido away from the loss, whereas melancholia protects the loss by reinscribing an impression of that loss back onto the ego as a melancholically reconstituted object that sucks the libido into the ego. The diasporic subject who dwells between mourning and melancholia, then, looks both inward and outward as she or he longs for "home" as an impossible object that never could have existed at the same time as her or his necessary inability to recover from that loss transfers the condition of impossible mourning to the condition of melancholia.

In the context of *Humanimal*, questions of "home," "desire," "trauma," and "loss" are imagined through Krishan and the poet in different ways. Krishan, having grown up amidst rural poverty and violence, flees Bengal to pursue a better life in the UK. However, as we learn throughout the collection, he cannot entirely sever himself from his childhood suffering, even as he establishes a comfortable, middle-class life for himself and his family in the West. In light of a childhood episode in which Krishan's mother "beat him to blood with a bamboo cane" (Kapil 34), the poet recalls the way that her father, as a headmaster in London, methodically battered a black student. Krishan, "[w]ithout warning, both incredibly fast and in slow motion ... came out of his headmaster's office with a cane. Within moments, the boy was writhing on the carpet, doubled up" (53). The simultaneity of speed and slow motion evokes two temporally disjunctive Krishans that dwell in both the past and the present as he reenacts the

violence he experienced as a child upon the student. As such, the incident recalls Juliet Mitchell's insights about the temporal structure of trauma. For Mitchell, trauma

must create a breach in a protective covering of such severity that it cannot be coped with by the usual mechanisms by which we deal with pain or loss. The severity of the breach is such that even if the incident is expected, the experience cannot be foretold [...] In trauma, we are untimely ripped." (qtd. in Mishra 12)

Additionally, a new trauma gives expression or form to an earlier trauma that could not have been recognized beforehand (12-13). In other words, a present trauma, either as one that is enacted upon a subject or which a traumatized subject imposes upon another, casts earlier traumas into relief in such a way that both traumas can be made newly tangible or recognizable in ways that would not necessarily have been possible otherwise. As Mishra notes, empirical or evidence-based models of trauma—the assumption that a traumatized subject has to put her or his trauma on display for it to be “real”—precludes the untimeliness of trauma as something that might only be understood retroactively, or which might manifest subtly or indirectly. Here, Krishan relives his own trauma at the same time as he passes that trauma on to the boy he beats. It also seems that Krishan's efforts to “teach English to the English” includes the imperative to beat black bodies through the authority of the English headmaster. Moreover, the disjunctive temporality of Krishan's violence signals how the split between Krishan's two lives—his impoverished and violent Bengali childhood and his successes in the UK—reflects Britain's historical embeddedness in Bengal in light of the centrality of English education in Bengal through the late nineteenth century. Even as he pulls himself out of rural poverty and into the

middle class, Krishan's decision to leave Bengal for the UK raises the bigger historical question of whether he leaves Bengal—or British Bengal—at all.

In addition to witnessing his penchant for corporal punishment during his tenure as a British headmaster, we learn that Krishan dies in his fifties. As he lies in his deathbed, a hospital doctor tells the poet that “his body was clearly ravaged by the debilitating effects of poverty, early malnutrition and the multiple musculo-skeletal traumas that he appeared to have sustained as a child” (53). In several entries, Kapil evokes the severe scarring on Krishan's legs from a childhood street beating to show us how he wears the marks of his history on his body even as he “embodies” the figure of professional success. The poet then synthesizes her experiences of transcontinental travel with images of Krishan's scars to deploy the spatiotemporal displacement of the diasporic subject's embodied experiences. She recalls a moment “[i]n the aeroplane from London to Kolkata and in the jeep to Midnapure” in which she “put my knib on the page and let motion wreck the line. My notes were a page of arrhythmias, a record of travel” (43). The illegible, arrhythmic lines from the poet's pen, as a “record of travel,” echo Krishan's legs (20): At the center of the book, Kapil has superimposed a grainy, black and white photo of Krishan's scars atop a map of Childs Hill, a fashionable neighbourhood in North London. The image spills into the following page of text with a caption that reads:

Krishan, my father, was born in India in 1937, ten years after Kamala died. This is a photograph of scar tissue, to represent a deep cut in his leg from a street beating. What is a street? Here, the flesh is healed over, repaired by natural processes. If the image, the excess rectangle, extends to the next page, mark it black. This scar doesn't fade; it doesn't melt, over time, into a skin. (19)

The poet reflects and refracts Krishan's childhood beating through the superimposition of the scar atop Childs Hill. In the photo, the scar resembles an erratic road carved into the map. This uneasy overlaying of urban affluence and rural poverty as ordered and disordered lines—her father's uneven flesh, "repaired by natural processes" atop the geometrically carved up landscape of residential London, both of which, in turn, fold over onto the next page of text, thereby "colonizing" the main text, so to speak—is central to the collection's free-associative assemblages between embodied trauma and the symbolic conventions that demarcate urban and rural spaces. In contrast to a road as a sort of surgical alternation of the earth, the scar's ragged path becomes a non-linguistic roadmap upon which the poet reads her family's recent migration history. As such, Kapil's question, "What is a street?" interrogates the material processes of migration, class, and urban construction that underlie our everyday relationships with urban space.

The caption under the image of Krishan's scar also distills a story from his narrative in which he describes the revelation that prompted him to leave Bengal:

A twelve-year-old, illiterate boy, my father was standing in a field when he had a vision. He said: "I suddenly knew that when I grew up I would be a teacher in England. I said, 'I will go to England and teach English to the English'." And he did. He dragged himself out of the field and into the sky. (38)

Yet for the poet, Krishan's story of self-made global mobility is fraught with the poet's experiences of race and shame growing up in England:

Note for a companion text. The coast of Wales. Your legs were a brown and silver frame to the day: bony, skinny really, and smashed-up looking beneath a coat of course, black hair. The sand was white, as were the other holidayers. I felt bitterly

the contrast of our own exposed skin against the blueness of the sky and the waves. Your legs were frankly an embarrassment: visible chunks of flesh taken from your thighs and shins at another point in history. Mummy's bright yellow sari with its schizophrenic border of green and black zig-zags, and so on. Only in the water were you and I a family: colorless, wavy, and child-centered. Invisible to the eyes of the other families. Do you remember? (50-51)

The poet's question to her father, "Do you remember?" is especially pointed in contrast to the revelatory connotations of his "vision" in the field. For Krishan, England was an escape from the poverty and violence of Bengal, but for the poet, England represents the shame of unwelcome brown bodies in a sea of white, punctuated by the remnants of street violence and poverty that mark Krishan's legs. Additionally, Krishan's scars read here as movable objects. As "chunks of flesh" from "another point in history," it is as though the scars have been peeled off of the young, Bengali Krishan and affixed on this older Krishan vacationing at the beach as a mark of shame for a racialized past the poet longs to erase.

Krishan's scars also offer a port of entry for the humanimal narrative. In Amala and Kamala's story, "a silver sky collapses in folds upon the canopy. The grid divides us again" (58). Here, the wolf girls' spatiotemporal crossings bring them to Krishan. For the "silver" sky refracts an earlier description of "the humanimal sky [that] is copper like lids" (9), replacing it with the "silver pockets" of Krishan's scars. Meanwhile, the "grid" that "divides us again" evokes the map of Childs Hill that divides the urban landscape as a historically materialist abstraction of wild nature at the same time as Amala and

Kamala's forced socialization extracts the beast from the child. Krishan's scars become a glimmer of both sky and road that encompasses this fraught conceptual landscape.

The juncture at which the “untimely” quality of trauma encounters the “unhomely” quality of the diasporic’s migration clears a space for the poet, who has profoundly different experiences of “home” and race than her father. Whereas Krishan flees Bengal to pursue a better life, we learn throughout the collection that the poet, having endured childhood racism and suspicious questions from Midnapore’s locals when she returns to document the girls’ lives, does not quite belong in the UK, the US, or Bengal. Hence, her question to the reader near the end of the collection: “My blood let out a deep sigh. Is it wrong to feel immediately at home in India, where, if its citizens knew you felt that way, would laugh you out of the house?” (59). Freud’s etymological excavation of the uncanny/unhomely (*unheimlich*)—as the site of both familiarity and concealment—intersects here with the diasporic’s double-state of mourning and melancholia. That is, the affective and material production of the diasporic’s longed-for “home” conceals the material impossibility of home as such. By synthesizing the embodied experiences of Krishan, the wolf girls, and the poet with a spatialized temporality in which migration histories and the complex temporality of trauma coincide on the page, the poet complicates the melancholic diasporic’s struggles to remember and reassemble loss. Instead of dwelling in memory to recover a lost sense of home, the poet deploys memory to produce new lines of convergence or states of being out of that loss.

Refused Temporalities

When Gesell narrativized the wolf girls, he celebrated how Kamala overcame three major traumas—the loss of her human mother, the loss of her wolfhood, and the loss of her “wolf-sister,” Amala—to proceed on her journey to healthy psychological development. Gesell’s rosy picture of Kamala suggests another attempt to sidestep Freud, whose theories of mourning and melancholia would have taken precedence in psychological circles amongst Gesell’s contemporaries. Kapil, who introduces the collection as “a blue sky fiction, imagining a future for a child who died,” disavows the temporal scheme of Gesell’s utopianism and its subsequent denial of the emotional and physical ruptures that Kamala would have suffered. Whereas Gesell established a linear narrative of progress that restricted Kamala’s life course to his template of psychological development, Kapil delves into the untimely temporality of trauma to find the wolf girls. She starts by rewriting the sunny portrait of rural Bengali family life from Gesell’s ad-hoc ethnography with an unsettling account of Kamala’s abandonment that opens a realm of temporal, bodily and environmental flux:

This is the humanimal project. All the fingers are still inside the hands. A mother-to-be’s hips ache. In the forest behind her hut, the birds are so red, the wrong red, against the bed of green. A forest is a bed for animals. When the rains come each June, these animals make nets in the upper branches, suffering nightly, twitching, from an incomplete, lunar darkness. It’s the time before electricity. Those are not birds. They are wolves, switching their glossy brown tails in the heat. As custom dictates, the woman gives birth, then places her newborn girl on a shawl beneath the tree, massages her with coconut oil, and leaves her there to sun. Lit up like

that, the baby is vulnerable, naked thus fleshlike, fleshed like prey, but flailing—
four legs in the air like pink, elongated stars. (16.10.i)

The poet's descriptions of the mother's aching hips, suffering animals, and the newborn's "pink" legs stand in stark relief to Gesell's quasi-mythical portrait of the "dark-skinned Hindoo mother," "white bullock," and "ancient midwife" who offered the newborn Kamala "attendance and comfort" (Gesell 9). Additionally, the poet throws temporality, space, and bodies out of joint at the levels of both narrative and metanarrative. In a later passage, the poet confides that she saw a "giant pink moon" as a child, and that she "put it in India. I put it inside the jungle like the light given off by certain animals even in the dark Have you ever seen pink moonlight? It is frightening. It is cousin to shadow, just as a wolf is to a dog" (30.29). The "frightening" pinkness of the poet's "moon" projects backwards to both the poet's childhood and the beginning of the collection, as the earlier entry about the wolf child's abandonment features a "lunar darkness" set in relief to the newborn's "pink" legs as "elongated stars." Moreover, the poet's displacement of the pink light—from the moon to legs and stars—juxtaposed with the wolf as both a "cousin" and "shadow" to the dog, suggests further misaligned pairings and material properties such as, for example, pink/shadow, limbs/moon, and newborn/wolf. These textual misalignments suggest metatextual misalignments as well, such that the relationship between reader, poet, and animals also blurs. In light of the poet's self-reflexive disclosure that she put the pink moon from her childhood into India, for instance, we can interpret the newborn in this passage simultaneously as Kamala, Amala, and the poet.

The collection's deliberate misalignments of bodies, discursive realms of text and species, and phenomenological properties such as light and colour also complicate the

boundary between human and wolf mothers. In place of Gesell's universalizing trope of "motherhood" as a quality that transcends species, Kapil blurs the boundaries between the human and animal realms:

But how she went into her garden, an indivisible red, and was not seen by her mother when a passing wolf picked her up in her quick beak. The mouth of the wolf was the sharp pink O that covered her and kept her still as they—the girl and her new, animal mother—crossed into the green. Nearer to the *sal*, I can see the tree trunks are red-orange, dusty, and that the lines they make are clear. I walk for hours between the rows as she did not. This is a different place and I want to know what happened, to the trees. (13.18)

Kapil signals the specificity of difference from the perspective of a being whose perceptions of that difference escape our everyday sensations of space and time. For example, colours, objects, and animals morph into each other as red birds turn into wolves against a bed of green forest. Meanwhile, the baby is "unseen" by her human mother as she vanishes into the animal realm. The "indivisible red" of the garden signals the limits of the mother's human perceptions as the girl and her new wolf mother, whose mouth absorbs the pink light of the stars, melt into the "green" forest. Additionally, as the perspective shifts to the poet, we enter a space of "red-orange" trees. Unlike Gesell, who deploys the wolf girls to affirm knowledge that he already has, the poet acknowledges difference as she "want[s] to know what happened." She signals her desire to know by establishing a space of uncertainty that consists of fluid boundaries between bodies, objects, and colours from the perspective of an infant that is, itself, several possible infants at once.

The fluid boundaries between the collection's human, animal, and humanimal realms show us how the poet struggles to remember two girls who did not have language. "To write this, the memoir of [the wolf girl's] body" (15), Kapil synthesizes her own embodiment with that of the wolf girls: She slides her hands across Kamala's grave to "feel the rhythm" of "breathing" and "cardiac output" (12). At another moment, the "humanimal question" is a "disc, transferring light from corner to corner of the girl's eye" (14). We also learn that "[f]eral children are fatty, complex, and rigid" (12). Later, the poet "slip[s] my arms into the sleeves of your shirt. I slip my arms into yours, to become four-limbed" (15). By making poetry out of the humanimal body as a way to remember Amala and Kamala, Kapil reverses Derrida's notion of possible mourning as a necessary "betrayal" to the dead as we attempt to "interiorize within us the image, the idol, or ideal of the other who is dead and lives on in us" (qtd. in Mishra 7). Humanimal poetics does not interiorize the dead through the living, but reanimates the living through the remnants of the dead.

The poet deploys this same strategy of remembering—or re-membering—Kamala through the poetry of bodies in a later passage. Here, the poet starts by relating an episode in which the French documentary team, after hiring a local theatre troupe, "persuaded a mother to undress her daughter, cut her hair, and dress her in a makeshift diaper" (56). The overtones of sexualized infantilization and bestialization, on the one hand, echo rumours that Singh—having doctored the whole story—would force two of the children at the orphanage to wear diapers for the photos that would accompany his diary. At the same time, the poet's response to the scene signals her effort to remember the girls in a space that escapes language. As she retreats from the makeshift filmset, the poet

encounters a woman rolling beedis in front of her hut. She asks the woman “if I could rest in her garden. Smiling, she said yes and offered me papaya from a stainless steel bowl at her feet. In Bengali. And I ate it. I ate language.” Later in the same entry, the woman “shoved my head into her lap and started to massage my scalp” (49.57). The retreat from the filmset into the woman’s garden signals the poet’s shift into the humanimal realm, complete with “edible” language in a moment that duplicates the real Kamala’s daily massages from Mrs. Singh. At the same time, the poet’s ingestion of language recalls an earlier entry about childhood racism. Upon returning to England after having lived for a year in India as a child, the poet encounters her neighbour, who asks if Indians eat snakes for breakfast. “As a joke, I said yes, and for a summer or so read books in my garden, shut out from their games: ‘little black pig,’ ‘Paki snake-eater,’ and so on” (40). The poet remembers Amala and Kamala through her body by dwelling in the ritual care that Mrs. Singh offered them at the same time as Kamala’s vexed relationship with language coincides with a painful episode about food and racism from the poet’s childhood.

Writing of her relationship with the wolf girls, Kapil tells us that

I wanted to write until they were real. When they began to breathe opening their mouths in the space next to writing, I stopped writing In this way, I wrote until the children left the jungle, the country itself, their families of origin, and time. I saw how they changed time. (41-42)

As the wolf children leave the country, their families of origin, and time itself, Kapil synthesizes the incongruent temporality of humanimal memory, embodiment, and trauma with the spatial displacement of the diasporic imaginary formative to her and Krishan’s narratives. At this juncture, we begin to learn that the collection is not only an attempt to

remember the wolf girls as humanimals through Kapil's conceptual poetics, but also a self-reflexive account of how the poet's efforts to remember them trigger her own memories of global migration. In effect, humanimal writing provides the poet with a space for her and Krishan's migrations to bleed into her struggles to remember a future for the wolf girls as children that died.

While Kapil uses Singh's diary as a source text throughout the collection, she also rearranges the temporally circuitous violence of Krishan's trauma to stage imagined exchanges between Kamala and Singh. After Kamala bites a child, Singh "beats her with a bamboo wand and pricks her in the palm with its tip" (41). The association of stigmata brought about by the pricking is, in turn, complemented by a harrowing description of Kamala's forced baptism in which the Reverend "held her elbows behind her back, and, with his other, bathed her forehead with water at the front" (36). The brutality of the scene is but one example of how Kapil imagines Singh as an archetypally cruel missionary throughout the collection. Much like the East India Company's early adventurers, Singh transgresses a "wild space of gold" during his hunt for the girls. He rapes them upon killing their wolf mother in their den (26), breaks their legs while forcing them to walk upright (55), and, by forcing them to learn language, assumes the antagonistic role of a violent patriarch that wrenches the girls from their humanimality.

Kapil's version of Singh is a dark counterpoint to Charles Maclean's biographical portrait of the Reverend in *The Wolf Girls*, in which Maclean interviews Singh's descendants and investigates the archival records of his correspondences. Maclean finds that Singh believed he was called upon by God to save Amala and Kamala's souls, and that the substantive content of their salvation was premised upon the norms and values

that defined Singh's sense of himself as an Anglican missionary who supported the Raj. Maclean also reports that Singh kept the girls' story a secret for several years, and that he was equivocal, at best, about whether or not he actually found the girls in the wild or whether they suffered from a severe form of autism (267). Additionally, all of the money Singh received from Robert Zingg for the diary seems to have gone into securing the orphanage from bankruptcy (269-270).

In Maclean's account, Singh's dedication to the Anglican mission affirms his sycophancy toward the Raj. Amidst the persistent outbreaks of famine and peasant unrest following the Bengal partition of 1905—including a 1920 revolt in Midnapore and the surrounding areas during a visit from the Prince of Wales (Sarkar 219-220)—Singh reputedly forbade the children and Mrs. Singh from leaving the orphanage during a 1925 visit by Mohandas Gandhi (Maclean 175). Moreover, his convictions about socializing the girls rested on his assumption that they would grow into ideal figures of female domesticity under the auspices of the Anglicized Indian nuclear family. In the introduction to the published edition of the diary, for instance, Singh remarks that he kept the girls' discovery a secret on the grounds that "it would be difficult for us to settle them in their life by marriage when they attained that age" if the story spread (xxxiii). Singh was not alone in this sentiment; the unattributed author of a 1941 *Time* magazine article that compared Kamala to a dog stipulated that Kamala was "unmarried" when she died at 17 (60).

One could, moreover, interpret the orphanage as the concrete expression of Singh's will to power, the locus through which he maintained control over the children, Mrs. Singh, and the tribals he sought to convert. The violent pedophile that stalks through

Humanimal's pages, as a nightmarish caricature that fluctuates between a distorted reflection of Krishan's trauma and Kapil's imagined experiences of Singh from Kamala's perspective, raises questions about how we are to remember him. By Maclean's account, Singh was a toady, and his treatment of the girls, whether they were feral or severely autistic, is grounds for condemnation. But he offers no evidence to make any meaningful conclusions about Singh's lived relationship with the girls, or of why he chose to tell his story as he did. Does the girls' rape and Singh's penchant for horrific violence in *Humanimal* reduce Singh to an icon of unspeakable violence? Alternatively, might the *Humanimal* Singh's violence suggest a conduit through which he acts out his own traumas that have been erased from history? In other words, can we read Singh as a product of traumas to which we are not privy? Is it ethical, or even possible, to clear a space to imagine Singh's traumas, or to mourn for him at the same time as Kapil invites us to mourn for the wolf girls?

Kapil incorporates memory, trauma, migration, and embodiment—animal and otherwise—to write about herself and Krishan as diasporic subjects through the wolf girls. By confusing the limits of embodiment that differentiate the text's three protagonists, Kapil also complicates our assumptions about where one's sense of self begins and ends. As a text that wants "to keep her safe" (62), *Humanimal* leaves unanswered, and unanswerable, the question of who "her" refers to, be it Kamala, the poet's imagined version of Kamala, or a projection of Kamala that doubles as the poet. Moreover, we do not know where we are to find safety in a world, or collection of worlds, that productively thwart *Humanimal*'s search for "home." When an audience member from Kapil's reading at Eastern Michigan University remarked that "you feel

like you know them but you don't" (Langset), then, I would posit that they referred not just to the wolf girls, but to the myriad figures that emerge from the poet's sense of racial, geographic, species, and aesthetic displacement. And that is precisely the point. To reiterate Mishra's argument, the great quandary that holds the diasporic imaginary together is that those of us who dwell in a diasporic state of being can really only know ourselves through absences. Kapil helps us know ourselves by questioning what we think we are not.

Chapter Three:

Plotting the Elephant Graveyard: Anthropomorphism and Interspecies Conflict in

Tania James' *The Tusk that did the Damage*

Conservation's Limits

As John Dixon Mirisola has remarked, Tania James' 2015 novel, *The Tusk that did the Damage*, coincides with a "recent swell in ivory awareness" that includes a spate of star-studded public-service advertisements (Williams ST1), a near-ban on ivory antiques by the Obama administration in 2014, and a growing body of literature in the social sciences about poaching crises in Africa and Asia. Given that elephants, like polar bears and tigers, enjoy a peculiar charisma in the Global North, we should perhaps be unsurprised by the flood of concern about elephants that coincides with James' novel. While conservationists valorize elephants, however, they have been accused of minimizing, or overlooking entirely, both the suffering that state governments inflict on local residents who must live and die with wild animals and the vexed role of poaching as an economic necessity for desperate people (Madden and McQuinn 98). In spite of Ramachandra Guha's call for socioeconomic and ecological redress nearly 20 years ago, conservationists continue to police vulnerable people in environmentally fraught territories in the Global South. To investigate how James' fiction challenges conventional narratives of ivory awareness that have been accused of excluding the poor, I argue that *The Tusk that did the Damage*—which consists of three interwoven narratives told from the perspectives of a South Indian villager, an American filmmaker, and a traumatized elephant, respectively—refuses to offer easy answers for poaching crises in the global

south. Further, I posit that it is precisely through this refusal that the text nuances the political and social entanglements that structure local communities as spaces that thwart resolutions to human-animal conflicts prescribed by First-World conservationists.

I begin by unpacking how conservation biologists have analyzed the way that power mediates local interactions between the state, rural dwellers and poachers, animals, transnationals, and conservationists themselves. Although these analyses describe the conditions of conflict, they erase the circuits of power that differentiate these groups' unequal relationships before transnational capitalism. As Rob Nixon has shown in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, transnational interests wield influence over the state while both the state and transnational entities marginalize the rural poor and animals. Sociological and conservation biology perspectives, as I will explain in more detail below, tend to forward static theories of conflict resolution that erase the voices of the poor and the animals embroiled in those conflicts. I then turn to James' novel to suggest that literature compensates for conservation biology's blind spot, and that James' implicit call for resolution demands a radical reimagining of interspecies relationships that questions the category of the human. Instead of a species divide in which the human understands himself through his radical difference from the animal, James provokes us to think about how we conceptualize the "human" as the filter through which we construct the animal as radically "other." In other words, a practical solution to the human-animal conflict, especially in the Global South, demands that we first interrogate the political conditions through which we embody our taken-for-granted assumptions about what it means to be human. James' novel, I suggest, provides one possible point of entry to engage this conceptual shift.

In 1997, Ramachandra Guha argued that conservation biologists such as Daniel Janzen and Michael Soulé engaged in an updated version of the White Man's Burden. According to Guha, this line of thinking assumes that indigenous communities in South Asia should surrender their territories to "biologists, park managers and wildlifers" who would then "determine collectively how [that] territory is to be managed" ("The Authoritarian Biologist" 15-16). Guha's intervention precipitated a sea-change in Western attitudes to interspecies conflict management in the global south. A 2000 anthology of essays on conservation biology edited by John Knight, for example, proceeds from the premise that "many people-wildlife conflicts can be understood as ... people-state conflicts" (2). Moreover, environmentalists and conservation biologists have begun to acknowledge Rob Nixon's formulation of "slow violence," long-historical processes of disenfranchisement characterized by environmental toxicity, the forced displacement of the rural and urban poor, and the struggles by the poor to resist those processes. Pre-industrial communities in South Asia such as the Gonds and the Baiga, for instance, continue to suffer displacement at the behest of state officers who appropriate their traditional lands for tiger and elephant reserves, even though their local presence on such lands predates the arrival of Portuguese traders at the turn of the sixteenth century.³⁰

³⁰ Large-scale displacements began at the end of the nineteenth century, when the British government appropriated 23,920 acres of forest that consisted of traditional Baiga territories (Gadgil and Guha 253). Verrier Elwin reports that while the Baiga did not revolt outright, they nevertheless engaged in passive resistance and non-cooperation as they continued to engage in shifting cultivation (Gadgil and Guha 150). The Baiga continue to resist incursions by the state and transnational interests to this day, but subsistence practices for local groups continue to deteriorate.

The conservation movement's emerging consciousness of these struggles has prompted, in Francine Madden's words, "a collective vision ... for how conservationists, biologists, social scientists, practitioners and researchers should address human-wildlife conflict" (248). Madden's remark echoes Nixon's affirmation that "Western activists are now more prone to recognize, engage, and learn from resource insurrections among the global poor that might previously have been discounted as not properly environmental" (5). Indeed, central to Madden's "collective vision" lies the acknowledgement that "[t]he conflict about wildlife is between people with historical wounds, cultural misunderstandings, socioeconomic needs, as well as gaps in trust and communication over how to conserve wildlife and ensure the well being of people at the same time" (250). However, the transition to a more inclusive environmentalism has not always been smooth. Madden, in a 2014 article co-authored with Brian McQuinn, admits that the conservation field's move toward "more collaborative governance models of engagement" still "fail[s] to recognize or reconcile the deep-rooted conflict" between conservationists and the rural poor (98). For Madden and McQuinn, as with other conservation scholars who hold sympathetic views toward subsistence groups, this misrecognition lies in the persistence of decades-old mistrust fomented by the same neocolonialist attitudes Guha critiqued in 1997. To make matters worse, the interhuman aspects of human-wildlife conflict remain entangled in an uneasy network of power inequities between conservationists, the state, national and international law enforcement agencies, animals, and local peoples.

On the one hand, then, conservation scholarship has made considerable headway toward concrete solutions for an urgent problem. Indeed, fieldwork that borrows conflict-

resolution models from sociology, social psychology, and anthropology claims demonstrable reductions in poaching traffic and crop-raiding.³¹ But these studies say little about how power circulates between the state, conservationists, rural groups, and animals. For example, state-installed protections against Adivasi displacement through legislative mechanisms such as the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers Act of 2006 (Taghioff and Menon 72) ostensibly protect local interests. But the entanglements of multinational capital, local corruption, and the conservation lobby continue to marginalize the poor (Brockington and Igoe 442-443). Additionally, published studies in the conservation field tend to emphasize “law-and-order” type narratives that consist either of ballistic analyses of animal remains to determine quantities of ivory poached, or arguments that proceed from the premise that poaching necessarily constitutes a criminal act but which do not analyze why people poach in the first place.³²

Struggles between animals, people, and law-enforcement define anti-poaching scholarship, yet the macrostructural power inequities that perpetuate this circuit remain under-investigated. Moreover, conservation scholars who focus on conflict resolution or community initiatives to solve poaching tend to favour historically static theoretical models of conflict resolution that cannot account for the lived histories of colonial violence that exacerbate poaching in the first place (e.g. Steinmetz et al. 1471-1472; Madden and McQuinn 103-104). The fundamental misrecognition here seems to lie in the way that “community”-centered strategies for conflict resolution implicitly posit

³¹ E.g. Karanth et al. (2013); Madden and McQuinn (2014); Redpath et al. (2015); Steinmetz et al. (2014).

³² See, for example, Andrew Lemieux; Rama Sukumar (*The Living Elephant*); Raman Sukumar, Uma Ramakrishnan, and J.A. Santosh; Surendra Varma.

conservation officers as the final authorities behind a given initiative, and they do so according to the same logic of Western domination and global corporatism that Guha critiqued over twenty years ago (“The Authoritarian Biologist” 16).³³ An anti-poaching initiative in Thailand by Robert Steinmetz et al., for example, proceeds from the “theory of planned behaviour,” a social theory that emphasizes social norms, mores, and values as disciplinary standards for everyday societal interactions (1470). Steinmetz et al.’s application of planned behaviour theory attempts to “educate” local communities about poaching according to an ethical code that effectively shames low-level poachers without taking into consideration the socioeconomic exploitation formative to the poaching industry itself. Madden and McQuinn, similarly, cite an anecdote from a conservation team that worked with a Mozambican community to curb the local ivory trade, only to realize that the chief of a local tribe with whom the team worked closely had, in fact, been setting elephant snares himself. The conservationists, in response, “developed a process to bring the communities together and empowered them to make the decision” (104) over how to handle the matter. Madden and McQuinn interpret the episode as an opportunity to “develop” a “solution” that gave the community “ownership” over the incident and its resolution (104). Although the solution afforded the community the

³³ Sushrut Jadhav and Maan Barua’s “The Elephant Vanishes” (2012), which studies the “psycho-social” impacts of crop damage on poor rural dwellers in Assam, remains an important exception to this general trend. Instead of a conflict-resolution model, Jadhav and Barua begin from the premise that the poor face legal and bureaucratic obstacles that render fair settlements for crop damage by animals nearly impossible (cf. Karanth et al., who qualify their methodology by first positing the tendency of their interview subjects to “exaggerate” their losses [183]).

opportunity to solve the poaching problem through its traditional justice systems, Madden and McQuinn fail to broach the question of why the chief would disavow the very act he engaged in to begin with. It is as if the instrumentalist, neocolonial approach of earlier generations of conservationists has been replaced by a prohibitory methodology that, in spite of its emphasis on concepts such as “conflict resolution,” “best practices,” or “community engagement,” continues to obscure the institutional power inequities embedded in interspecies’ conflicts themselves.

In a word, mechanical solutions such as electrified fences or trenches that stop animals from eating crops have given way to social mechanisms that stop people from poaching. But neither of these methods account for the real processes of social and historical violence that perpetuate interspecies conflicts in the first place. Consequently, mechanical and social solutions to interspecies’ conflicts implicitly parallel each other. This implicit parallel reduces people and animals to each other at the same time as it dismisses the needs of both, effectively animalizing the natives while vilifying an artificial construct of “wild nature” as something to be controlled through scientific management. That is, a technological solution such as an electric fence does not account for the social-geographical conditions that influence an animal’s feeding or migration patterns in the context of that animal’s needs.³⁴ Rather, the solution works according to

³⁴ R. Sukumar, for example, analyzes crop destruction by elephants and man-eating by tigers according to a given area’s carrying capacity, “the number of individuals or biomass of population that can be supported given the area and productivity of habitat” (“Wildlife-Human Conflict” 306). When forest boundaries shift to accommodate permanent human settlements, wild animals such as elephants and tigers are more likely to encounter humans because these animals travel 10-15 km a day with a total home range that exceeds 100

an assumption of a universal “nature” that must be halted through technology. The conflict-resolution mechanisms I cite above, similarly, disregard the macrostructural economic and social determinants that compel people to poach, assuming instead that poachers are criminals, at best, or like their prey, savage predators subject to preemptive halting measures.

Statistically, these initiatives have demonstrably reduced elephant trafficking. But scholarship on interspecies’ conflict remains silent on the historical legacies of imperial violence—and those legacies’ contemporary iterations in the form of transnational corporatism and neoliberal economics—that have brought about these conflicts in their present forms. The lines of reasoning that articulate these studies thus beckon us to reimagine the grounds on which conservationists conceptualize interspecies encounters. Tania James’ *The Tusk that did the Damage* takes up this challenge by provoking us to rethink the material conditions that underlie how we differentiate ourselves from animals. It does so by presenting an elephant’s point of view that inverts the formula of conventional anthropomorphism: that is, rather than “humanizing” the animal, James “animalizes” the reader’s engagement with it. In effect, the novel’s confrontation with the nexus at which global inequality converges with interspecies encounters suggests that anthropomorphism errs not when we mistakenly impose human characteristics upon non-

square km (307). Sukumar finds that “shifting cultivation practised on a small scale with sufficient interval between rotation of sites does not seem to have any adverse impact on wildlife populations” (307). However, “the expansion of human populations” through interventions such as industrial agriculture and forestry “has increased the area under shifting cultivation and decreased the period between rotation of sites to less than five years in many states in the northeast” areas of India (307).

human animals, but when we assume that “the human” constitutes a stable ontological or political category in the first place.

Hence, at the same time as interspecies relationships raise questions of “how ‘the human’ has been formed and transformed amid encounters with multiple species of plants, animals, fungi, and microbes” (Heise 195), the power differentials formative to broad neoimperialist structures—be they America’s military presence abroad or lax environmental regulations for transnational corporations—shape heterogeneous human experiences across the Global North and South. To take but one example, the ongoing crisis of farmer suicides following India’s decision to open its markets to global trade in 1991 (Sujit Mukherjee 1-2), coupled with the state’s subsequent lack of oversight for transnationals and monetary agencies such as the IMF (Nixon 1-6), continues the long history of global injustices that accelerated with the British Crown’s appropriation of uncultivated territories from pre-industrial societies following the 1878 Forest Act. Although popular narratives of species boundaries compel us to assume that the non-human’s otherness rests on the primacy of a self-identical, stable human subject, the symbiotic contingency of interspecies encounters—coupled with the discursive economies of power that order human and non-human subjects before the law under the aegis of the modern political state—throws our notions of a self-identical human into question. At the same time, the politically contingent figure of “the human” destabilizes the trope of “the animal” as an ontologically and biopolitically stable being that resides on the other side of the species divide.

The figures of the human and non-human animal morph into discursively contingent bodies if we displace the biopolitical scaffolding that determines how we

conceive of them. In effect, “human” and “animal” encounter each other at the horizon of a necessarily fluid assortment of species boundaries predicated on an axis of power that cuts across the politically fraught categories of Global North and South variously critiqued by scholars such as Nixon and Guha. The epistemic and ontic instability of the species divide—as it might pertain to Neel Ahuja’s formulation of “dread life,” the racialized fear of infectious diseases that justify medical animal research; Vinciane Despret’s investigation of animal intelligence and ethology; Donna Haraway’s musings about the bacterial, or even viral, exchanges between her and her dog; or Akira Lippit’s notion of “animetaphor,” the “demetaphorization” of language in which “words are thrust ... into living animal bodies” (163)—impels us to interrogate the institutional power discrepancies of global capital that shape our assumptions about life in general. Bearing in mind this network of instabilities between species as well as global and local subjects, I consider how *Tusk*’s two protagonists, Emma and Manu, offer vastly different interpretations of the elephant. Their incommensurable interpretations, I suggest, complicate the apparently stable figure of the animal as Other such that the elephant’s perpetually shifting roles as a mass murderer, a mascot for animal rights, a deity, and a commodity is refracted through the structural, class, and race inequities that destabilize the species boundary.

Intersecting Boundaries, or the Biopolitical Limits of Anthropocentrism

The Tusk that did the Damage consists of three distinct but interwoven narratives. In the first narrative, a local teenager named Manu Shivaram recounts his family’s involvement in the local poaching trade. The reader bears witness to Manu’s father’s

alcoholism and gambling, his brother Jayan's poaching career, the decline of the family farm, and the riots that follow Manu's death at the hands of an overzealous Forest Officer. The second narrative follows Emma, a young American filmmaker who travels to Kerala with her friend Teddy to shoot a documentary about an internationally celebrated veterinarian named Ravi Varma. When she arrives in Kerala, Emma envisions her film as "a rescue mission involving elephants" (14), but the project gradually falls apart in light of a love triangle between Emma, Teddy, and Ravi. The elephant narrative, told in the limited third-person, shifts between the elephant's perspective and that of Old Man, his caretaker (*pappan*). While still a calf, the elephant, later nicknamed The Gravedigger by Sitamala's villagers, squeals in terror as a group of poachers eviscerate his clan. The poachers spare the baby Gravedigger, and he eventually ends up under Old Man's care. Gravedigger and Old Man live a precarious existence as part of a travelling festival. Certain sights, smells, and events trigger in the Gravedigger a sort of dissociative reverie wherein he cannot distinguish between his present experience and his fragments of memory as a calf. After a number of bad episodes at the hands of an abusive trainer, the Gravedigger turns rogue. He kills several of his handlers, including Old Man, before he buries them with leaves and disappears into the forest.

These three narratives alternate by chapter, but James staggers their respective timelines so that the Gravedigger's narrative ends shortly before he enters Manu's world, while Manu's and Emma's narratives accelerate at alternating speeds, thus providing us with different insights into certain events that are revisited from multiple perspectives. In some respects, the novel's tripartite structure resembles the "network narrative" of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (Jaising 69), but James departs from Ghosh insofar as

The Hungry Tide's "shifting narrative gaze" reveals the gendered, classed, institutional, and racialized complexities that articulate the exchanges between Piya, Kanai, and Fokir. With the exception of Manu's penultimate encounter with the Gravedigger, *Tusk* maintains a narrative boundary in which Manu, Emma, and the Gravedigger occasionally bump at the edges of each others' worlds, but never meaningfully engage with one another. Whereas Ghosh, at least for some critics,³⁵ offers potential for meaningful engagement between the rich and the poor by representing the way in which globally mobile figures such as Piya and Kanai acknowledge the entanglements between Bengal's ecological crisis and rural poverty, James thwarts any such possibilities in her representation of Kerala by maintaining a narrative boundary between Emma and Manu that reflects the classed, cultural, and racial inequities that bar Emma from meaningfully engaging with the rural poor.

The Slow Violence of Cosmopolitan Environmentalism

The power differential that mediates Manu's and Emma's respective relationships with elephants recall Ursula Heise's observation that multispecies ethnographers have recently started to explore the question of "who benefits, *cui bono*, when species meet" (195). For residents of Sitamala such as Manu, elephants represent crop destroyers and a threat to human life on the one hand, and, given the state's bid to destroy local

³⁵ In response to Steinwand's position, Shivani Jha asserts that "[i]t will be reductive to assume what Steinwand posits that through a deft and masterly handling of the issues at hand, Ghosh has left the novel open-ended for his readers to look for answers for the issues of marginalization, leading to a politicization of space and ecological damage."

subsistence through the mechanisms of the law, a vital commodity for the underground poaching economy on the other. Early in his narrative, for instance, Manu remarks that Sitamala's Forest Department officers, nicknamed "greenbacks" by the villagers "for their dingy green uniforms and their love of currency" (8), uphold local laws that

forbid us from doing anything in the park, not even picking up a finger length of firewood without being fined for trespass and stealing. Stealing from trees that had dropped us fruit and firewood for centuries! Meanwhile, the laws looked kindly on the greenbacks and timber companies (10).

This all too familiar narrative of the state's marginalization of the poor extends to the greenbacks' response to the Gravedigger when the Forest Department, following the Gravedigger's rampages, "promoted [the Gravedigger] to rogue status but stopped short of issuing the order for its killing. Not until it would kill more of our own" (78). Emma, meanwhile, sees the Gravedigger as a violent anomaly in the popular narrative that informs her vision of elephants as gentle, primitive creatures to be protected by Ravi's state-funded elephant rescue. Although Emma and Teddy investigate the corruption that undergirds the Forest Department, they ultimately stand to gain from Ravi and his elephants because their documentary addresses itself to globally mobile consumers, eschewing the material displacements that accompany "the juggernaut of conservation" (Guha "Authoritarian" 17) as it "proselytise[s] Western ideals of wilderness" and "people-less landscapes" (Brockington and Igoe 443). Manu, whose family is "neither poor enough nor princely enough to appear on Western screens," has "never seen this Ravi Varma, M.D., though I had heard of his exploits with the greenbacks, and I was no fan of theirs nor his by association" (James 10). Manu's disdain for Ravi suggests a

further point of departure with *The Hungry Tide*, which “demonstrates the process through which cosmopolitan elites must go in order effectively and responsibly to use their privileges and agency in solidarity with the disenfranchised” (Steinwand 192), in that Emma’s First World environmentalism betrays how her privilege reasserts her and Teddy’s insulation from the very environment they claim to engage with. Whereas Piya comes to realize the interstices at which the Sundarbans’ ecological and social crises converge following her relationship with Fokir,³⁶ Emma’s ignorance of Manu’s world presents an implicitly pessimistic view of Western environmentalism’s self-serving insularity before the ongoing social and environmental crises that articulate James’ vision of the Global South.

In addition to the disconnect between Global North and South that punctuates Emma’s failure to engage with Sitamala’s locals, the conclusion of Manu’s arc refuses to provide any resolution for the local unrest that follows his death, and the narrative’s irresolution resonates with the novel’s concluding image as a promise of a death yet to come. As the Gravedigger “hover[s]” over Jayan with “its tusks dimly aglow,” Manu speaks to us posthumously:

See him there: my brother, buried and breathless at the base of a tree with only a thought in his head. *So Manu was right.*

³⁶ However, as Shakti Jainsing importantly notes, Piya’s realization does not entirely disentangle her from the discursive circuits of Western privilege. Even as her idealized and romantic impressions of Fokir and the other fishers in the villages give way to the ugly realities of rural life in the Sundarbans, Piya never entirely unyokes them from her fantasy of an “authentic” subaltern that gestures toward an idealistic and universal pre-colonial past (Jainsing 82).

And with this thought comes another, a realization that chokes him slow. The rest of his life is coming for him with all its grief and bitterness. He closes his eyes and wills the elephant's foot to take him first. (221)

Because of the novel's fluid temporality, we know that Jayan survives this encounter—we learn a few pages earlier that the “hoopla” surrounding Manu's death comes about in part because Jayan mobilizes the locals (219). James' decision to conclude the novel with the elephant's foot as a deferred promise of death after a life that will bring only “grief and bitterness” plays on Manu's earlier lamentations about a future that promises only drought and starvation:

In the late afternoon I wandered over the land that two weeks prior had been harvested. The dirt was brittle and pocked, and soon we would have seed again. From here I could see all five of my mother's acres; she would will half to each son. And so would Jayan and I divvy our plots for the generation to come, on and on, all of us living elbow to elbow, head to toe. I felt my future dragging me deep underground. I thought of my brother and my uncle and the greenbacks and the farmers. I thought of the elephants and the forest creatures, all their vengeful yellow eyes. (149)

Manu's remarks speak to the conditions that a rural subject confronts after the Indian state's failure to provide justice and meaningful redress for the violence and marginalization of tribal peoples by the British Crown's appropriation of uncultivated territories in the nineteenth century. That is, Manu sees in the “brittle” and “pocked” dirt a future in which individual human lives blur into an undifferentiated mass of hungry mouths that beget hungry mouths across generations. Meanwhile, the animals, the

greenback forest officers, and the farmers push and pull against the toxic flows of global capital that poison what little remains of the earth's obliterated landscape. Sitamala's collective death drive, invoked by Manu's vision of the imminent suffering of its future generations, does not work according to Freud's formulation of the death instinct, in which reproduction and death exemplify the species' collective desire to restore the world to a state of rest,³⁷ but one in which life chokes off life in its drive toward a future of absolute scarcity accelerated by capitalism's impulse to infinitely reproduce itself. Land dwindles into nothingness under a bloated biomass of human bodies, and this unbearable condition feeds a longer process of suffering specific to a legacy of mismanagement and exploitation by state actors and transnational corporations.

Admittedly, Manu's fatalistic outlook does a disservice to Adivasi tribes such as the Ho, the Oraon, the Kols, the Santhals, the Mundas, and the Gonds, who, as Arundhati Roy importantly reminds us, have long resisted the imperialist imperative to be "civilized" or "assimilated" (Roy 119). Indeed, as the "backbone" of ongoing struggles that date to the British Crown's monopolization of the subcontinent's uncultivated territories following the 1878 Forest Act, Adivasis continue to "wag[e] nothing short of a civil war against the Indian state which has signed over Adivasi homelands to infrastructure and mining corporations" (119). However, the question of how those of us in the Global North are to actively and respectfully engage with the armed struggles of Adivasis remains an open question, and Emma's failure to acknowledge Manu's world

³⁷ "If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for *internal* reasons—becomes inorganic once again—then we shall be compelled to say that '*the aim of all life is death,*' and, looking backwards, that '*inanimate things existed before living ones.*'" (Freud *Beyond* 45-6).

gestures toward an overall sense of frustration throughout the novel that resonates with Guha's still-trenchant critique of Western conservation as an updated version of the White Man's Burden (Ramachandra Guha 16).

Emma's subject position as a globally mobile consumer initially reveals itself when she admits to learning about Ravi's elephant rescue from an in-flight magazine. She remarks that her initial motivation for the film turned on the "photos of fuzzy elephant calves" that "hooked me for the usual cutesy reasons" (15). The magazine's "description of the veterinary doctor," Emma adds, "glowed with dramatic potential" (15) for her and Teddy's first documentary. The reader gradually learns that "dramatic potential," for Emma, entails a preference for action and trauma that flattens the uneven and contingent historical structures of interspecies conflict into documentary as a form of spectacle. Indeed, when Emma and Teddy arrive in India, Ravi assures them that "there would be no shortage of rescues and calamities to film" (15). Rescue and calamities, in turn, are enmeshed in Emma's notions of authenticity. For Emma, however, authenticity does not concern the lived conditions she encounters so much as her personal aesthetic and professional goals. She admits that her commitment "to stand behind every frame, every choice," arises from her anxieties around the fact that "[o]ther people my age had reels and résumés; all I wanted was a single work that could speak for me" (16). Unfortunately for Emma, the "period of Pax Romana in which zero calamities had taken place" falls short of her aspirations to capture what she envisions as the essence of Indian elephants in the wild, resulting instead "in footage that had all the depth and nuance of a promo video" (16). Eventually, however, Ravi—"in a last minute break"—calls Emma and

Teddy to a calf rescue, signaling the long-awaited disaster that she had been waiting for (16).

Camera Hunting the Vanishing Animal

In the high-octane episode that follows, Ravi retrieves the calf and returns it to the mother just as the mother begins to charge Ravi, Emma, and Teddy. For Emma, the mother-calf reunion is to become the “heart of our film,” consisting of a single shot that “would hold its weight onscreen, all sixty-two pulsing seconds” (39), an eternity in filmic time. The camera dwells on the elephants’ “twining trunks, whose ministrations seemed to suggest comfort and tenderness, and yet seemed somehow private, primal, on a plane of communication we could glimpse only indirectly” (39). The camera’s fixed position on the trunks—body parts that express a “primal” “plane of communication”—augmented by Emma’s description of this moment as the film’s “heart,” renders the lived engagement between the reunited elephant calf and mother through a metonymic iconography of dismembered elephant bodies mediated by the shot’s spectacular economy. That is, the shot evokes what Matthew Brower identifies as an “image of ahistorical eternal nature,” a visual semiotic of deep time wherein the “evolutionary temporality” of the natural world “positions nature as an eternal and unchanging base outside of human affairs” (4). Thus, “in presenting us with an image of deep nature, the image detaches itself from the moment of its taking, adhering instead to a deeper chronology” (4). The unintentional consequence of this imperative to access a “deep” history embedded in animals’ bodies ascribes upon those animals a notion of temporal stasis or ahistory such that Emma’s documentary image (re)interpellates life into a

universal economy of nature as an unchanging, primeval force, the im/passive witness of the Anthropocene's Protean fluctuations. In so doing, the image effaces the material conditions that establish Emma's sentimentally-imagined scenario.

The semiotic dismemberment and reduction of animal being and bodies to abstract, anthropocentric signifiers of eternal "Nature" resonates with the material necessities of late nineteenth-century animal photography. According to Brower, photographers during this era would kill and stuff their animal subjects to produce carefully staged portraits that conformed to the conventions of composition that reflected Victorian aesthetics (Brower 6). As film speeds improved through the early twentieth century, the camera started to replace the rifle—Jim Corbett, the Anglo-Indian shikari-turned conservationist, famously renounced tiger killing in favour of animal photography during this period. The preservationist ethic of the camera signaled a shift in which the urge to protect or preserve wildlife remained invested in notions of taxonomy or ownership over nature that defined the imperial shikari. Corbett's remarks about Fred Champion reflect this curious double-valence:

Had Champion shot his tigers with a rifle instead of with a camera, his trophies would long since have lost their hair and been consigned to the dustbin, whereas the records made by his camera are a constant source of pleasure to him, and are of interest to sportsmen in all parts of the world (237).

Although the material conditions shifted in the tiger's favour, then, the symbolic conditions of mastery and ownership through the "trophy" remained intact.

Moreover, the techniques behind animal photography, which Brower describes as "camera hunting," consist of the same skill sets as hunting with a rifle, essentially

establishing a libidinal economy in which the camera becomes a sublimated weapon (30-32). The “synecdochic relation” of animal bodies to the hunter, where “certain prized animal parts come to stand in for the whole,” also transfers over to a photographic logic in which the animals’ images stand in for a hypermasculine hunting economy in which trophies signify European man’s conquest of the untamed wild (43). In the case of Emma’s elephant reunion, the camera remains fixed on the trunks. Unlike tusks, the elephant’s trunk “escape[s] the trophy relation” (43) because it does not represent a commodity. However, Emma recasts the mother and calf’s trunks as signifiers of a primal familial closeness. As such, they remain embedded in the necrofetishistic elements of camera hunting, for “[i]n camera hunting, the ‘ownership’ displayed in the image does not belong to the viewer but rather the photographer” (65).

Alternatively, the preservationist ethic of contemporary nature photography that speaks through discourses of animal extinction perhaps situates the animal somewhere between life and death. Akira Lippit theorizes this impasse as a state of “perpetual vanishing.” That is, “[a]nimals enter a new economy of being during the modern period, one that is no longer sacrificial in the traditional sense of the term but ... *spectral*. In supernatural terms, modernity finds animals lingering in the world *undead*” (1). Using Darwin and Freud as his points of historical intercession, Lippit positions the figure of the vanishing animal on a conceptual axis whereby animals symbolize both “new structures of thought” and “the process by which those new thoughts [are] transported” (2). Lippit then argues that modernity demarcates a moment in history whereby animals, mediated through the symbolic economy of the vanishing animal, dissolve into representative modes such as literature and film through which the human defines

himself. That is, the animal is not an independent entity but a perpetually fading, anthropocentric projection of the human's imagined sense of him- or herself refracted through the animal's body (3). Similar to John Berger's parable about the originary encounter between human and animal, Lippit interprets this difference as evidence of a life that is both present and absent before human consciousness expressed through language: "Animals seem to necessitate some form of mediation or allegorization—some initial transposition to language—before they can be absorbed into and dispersed throughout the flow of everyday psychology" (8). The animal can never be the animal in-itself from the human's purview, instead remaining accessible only through the mediating properties of human consciousness and symbolic thought. Consequently, human media such as literature or photography efface the animal from human consciousness as a precondition for that consciousness itself. Since the unmediated "in-itself" of the animal preemptively escapes us, we are left with a non-human entity whose very "non-humanness" is, in an apparent paradox, unambiguously human.

To Brower and Lippit's observations I would add that the semiotics of Emma and Teddy's filmic gaze also elicit a racialized genealogy of animal photography when Emma objectifies Vasu, the Forest Department officer who shoots and kills Manu, according to the same metonymic shot economy that dictates the elephant scene. Emma describes Vasu as he "pulled out a wafer-thin wallet, and from it he extracted what seemed to be a single puzzle piece" (101):

"Me," he said.

And it was him, albeit a younger him, trim and proud in his beige uniform, his foot hitched on the bumper of a jeep. He had cut around his own shape and that of

the jeep attached to his foot, as if they were one. I pulled focus on the photo, held delicately in his fingers, dirt under the nails. There was something so humble, so heartwarming, about both Vasus, large and small, now and then, neither of whom seemed capable of harm. Yet two days later, Officer Vasu would shoot a poacher dead. At first I wouldn't believe it; the shooter had to be some other Vasu, not our Vasu, not Vasu of the clown-sized camo shoes. Even in the space of a few hours, I thought I'd come to know him. Had he been playing to the camera? Or had I cast him as the sweet, clumsy native before he'd even opened his mouth? (101)

From this “single puzzle piece,” Emma constructs her fantasy of “sweet, clumsy” Vasu, crystallized by his “clown-sized” shoes, monosyllabic utterances, and the image of his disembodied, dirt-encrusted fingers as they hold a cut-out from a photograph that severs the smaller Vasu from his surroundings. Emma's construction of this doubly-dismembered and displaced Vasu effaces his personhood through the role that he plays as the forest officer who shoots the unnamed poacher. That is, even after she realizes that Vasu disappoints her fantasy of the “sweet, clumsy native,” Emma continues to script him according to selectively cultivated signifiers of her own choosing. In other words, “both Vasus” are restricted to *either* the “clumsy native” of Emma's Orientalist fantasy *or* “Officer Vasu,” a violent state agent who kills an anonymous poacher in cold blood. So preoccupied is Emma with the mutually exclusive logic of the doubly-fragmented Vasu—dirt-encrusted fingers that pinch a dislocated body—that she fails to see Vasu in the larger context that surrounds him.

Unfortunately, James puts us into the same position as Emma insofar as she gives us little to no information about Vasu himself. Were it not for the fact that Vasu shoots

Manu, his underdeveloped character would not weigh so heavily in an overall assessment of the novel. When Emma confronts Ravi about his role in Samina's conspiracy, which involves a bullet planted in a dead elephant to frame Manu after the fact, Ravi justifies his choice out of pity for Vasu, who was "frightened" and "one year from retirement," prompting him to approach "Samina Madam for help" (204). Ravi's appeal to clichés as justification for the cover-up leaves the reader with little choice but to also construct Vasu as either a fool or a manipulative opportunist. In any event, Vasu refuses to take responsibility for his actions when he defers to Samina. This, in turn, casts both Ravi and Samina into the role of Vasu's representatives, and they side with the institutional power of state conservation, which is implicated in the generalized imperatives of global capital over the interests of local people and animals.

For Ravi, the choice ostensibly appears as one between animal and human, or more accurately, Ravi's continued assurance of his role as Kerala's internationally celebrated elephant doctor. For when Ravi chooses to protect Vasu, he ultimately protects his own self-interests because Samina, as head forest officer, controls the fate of the Rescue Center. This, again, marginalizes the villagers under the auspices of Ravi's choice to protect his animals by demonstrating his loyalty to Samina. But in choosing to protect the animal through the discursive networks of state-sanctioned conservation, Ravi also feeds the structure that forces the animals' dependence on him and, at the same time, reinforces the criminal-discourse of the local poaching economy that displaces local farmers. This complicates Ravi's outburst at Emma after she insists that she wants only to understand "what happened" following Manu's shooting:

“You people.” He locked onto me with slitted eyes. “Always hunting for a story so others can watch and feel outrage. What about my outrage? What about the outrage of another dead elephant, one I might have pulled from a ditch or a cave and brought here and bottle-fed with my own hands? Plucked like that, easy as a weed?” (204)

Ravi’s “outrage” is fraught from the outset, as his justification for framing Manu is entangled in his investment in the Rescue Center, which both helps and hinders the elephants. That is, the elephants need Ravi because of the ecological displacements that they suffer. But those ecological displacements come about through incidents such as the timber scandal and Manu’s shooting, when the issue at stake beyond the material consequences of the event itself is the way that agents with political sway protect their own institutions even if that means displacing people and animals or framing an innocent person, as Samina does when she asks Ravi to plant a bullet in an elephant carcass. Ravi can delude himself with the belief that the Rescue Center helps the elephants in its care, but in so doing, it is implicated in the conditions it claims to alleviate. Consequently, Ravi’s outburst speaks to his own self-delusions about the Rescue Center, that he ignore as best he can the reality that the Rescue Center, by virtue of its very existence, implicates him in the state’s necessary, but politically cynical, solution to the human-elephant crisis that plagues Sitamala. Even though he can genuinely express his frustration to Emma that he is “bailing water from a sinking boat with only my hands” (206), that boat also ensures his livelihood, his local celebrity, and most importantly, the elephants’ dependence on him.

Meanwhile, the Forest Department's complicity in human and animal suffering under the aegis of neoliberal capital—which the novel demonstrates most saliently through a local scandal involving Samina and a transnational timber conglomerate—is inextricably embroiled in its efforts to perpetuate a narrative of criminal justice in which Sitamala's elephant crisis begins and ends with poachers while it fails to provide practical solutions for farmers who suffer crop destruction by invasive animals. When Samina approaches Leela, Jayan's wife, to act as an informant, Leela furiously reproaches her, and demands to know why, when Jayan asked the Forest Department for a job following his prison sentence, Samina's "peons laughed in his face" (111), before adding to Samina that "I hear you also take tea with those Shankar Timber People" (112). In effect, Leela understands that while Samina, on the one hand, espouses the neoliberal rhetoric of "pilot project[s]" that seek to "harmonize the economic needs of local people with the needs of wildlife" (111), her interests extend only to a model of private accumulation that excludes local people such as Jayan from participating in those projects at the outset. Samina, meanwhile, maintains her veneer of law-and-order, stating that poachers "are like chin hairs [p]luck one, and four more pop up in its place," and that they "make the same mistakes again and again whether they want to live right or not" (113). The question at stake here is not exactly whether Samina is justified in excluding Jayan from the project, but in the tension between the Forest Department's law-and-order approach to poaching and state-sponsored initiatives that espouse a veneer of social justice but, in fact, support the self-interested structures of global capital.

The contradiction at the heart of this tension lies in the fact that Samina's proclivity for criminal justice indirectly reinforces poaching so long as the state remains

beholden to power networks of NGOs and transnational capitalism that destroy farming communities and local subsistence practitioners who turn to poaching out of economic necessity. In other words, the state effectively feeds into a circuit whereby conservation networks save animals and marginalize people who, in desperation, marginalize the very animals that the state claims to save. The horrible irony here is that in spite of Samina's claims to the contrary, poaching remains not a problem to be solved, but, perversely, a vital component of a tangled network through which the faces of local and global power speak. Capitalist desire, as the engine that drives these entanglements—and which remains necessarily ineffable because it flows through state actors, NGOs, poachers, rural dwellers, animals, and global industry—ensures that the circle of death continues.

“And Say the Animal Responded?” James’ “Strange and Methodical” Elephant

I would like now to consider how the elephant responds to the dynamics of life, death, and institutional power that surround him. Throughout the Gravedigger's narrative, James constructs an approximation of the elephant's experience by drawing inferences based on zoological findings about elephant behaviour, and she has remarked in interviews that, to avoid anthropomorphizing the animal, she would shift perspectives to the Gravedigger's human handlers as a means to “write around the elephant” (Turtis). Hence, our window into the elephant's world is not exactly structured around feeling the world from the elephant's body (a phenomenological impossibility) or an anthropomorphized version of the Gravedigger, but from the relationships that structure

the shared experiences between the Gravedigger and the people he encounters.³⁸ Early in the novel, the Gravedigger initially appears to share a tender intimacy with his pappan, Old Man, “who bent low and let [the elephants] drape their trunks along his neck” (23). For the Gravedigger, “it was a comfort, to touch and to be touched” (23). The serene affection of this exchange explodes into pain and shock, however, as Old Man uncoils himself from the Gravedigger’s trunk, assumes a “hard” face, and holds in his “fist” a long stick, capped my a metal talon:

!! said Old Man. !!

The Gravedigger stared. Old Man wore a strange new face, hard and blank as a wall. He reached out and tugged sharply on the Gravedigger’s left ear. The Gravedigger squealed, but Old Man kept pulling until the Gravedigger swerved to the left.

!!! said Old Man. !!!

A sharp tug to the Gravedigger’s right ear. He squealed, swerved right.

!!

!!!

!

!!!!

On and on until the Gravedigger could extract a meaning from each ugly note.

Left! Right! Stand Still! Kneel!—the last learned by the whack of the stick across

³⁸ Brett Buchanan’s notion of onto-ethologies—which builds on Jakob von Uexkull’s notion of *umwelten*, the distinct phenomenological worlds that articulate embodiment—provides a useful point of departure to think through how questions of consciousness and embodiment inform interspecies’ encounters.

his flanks. Pain pulled his mind to a taut and terrible line, its only goal: to do whatever would prevent the pain. (James 24)

At the same time as Old Man's affection is shot through with violence, James reverses the terms of conventional anthropomorphism here so that the animal's incomprehension, by way of the exclamation points, becomes our new point of entry into that animal's experience. Hence, our focus rests not entirely on the animal, but on the necessary coerciveness of dominion and care that the power relation between human and animal produces. Romeo, the drunken pappan who chronically abuses the Gravedigger, justifies this formulation when he insists that "you cannot be friend and master. An elephant is not like a cow or a horse. You cannot tame it fully. Some part of it will always be wild. That is the part you cannot trust, the part you have to break again and again" (James 165). For a pappan such as Old Man, cruelty and affection flow through each other as expressions of power. And power, first and foremost, structures the human-elephant relationship.

The Gravedigger's tendency to bury his victims later on in the novel echoes the tension between affection and violence that defines his experiences with Old Man, as Manu's description of his cousin Raghu's mutilated body fluctuates between carnage and an attention to detail that flirts with artisanship:

By morning, the palli was strewn about as if exploded. Roof smashed, legs snapped. At the calm center of this chaos: a pile of thatch laid with care across the body of my cousin.

Raghu's mouth was a hollow of astonishment. From the chest up and the hip down he looked unharmed. The middle of him looked like something the elephant had tried to erase. (49)

The villagers who bear witness to Raghu's mutilated body cannot help but infuse the trace that the elephant leaves behind with significance as they "[push] in with all manner of theories" about the Gravedigger's "work" (49), and their awe at the gravesite implies any number of questions for readers: Is Raghu's grave a symptomatic reversal of the Gravedigger's relationship with Old Man, in which the elephant repeats the fraught synthesis of violence and care he learned from Old Man upon the humans he encounters? Might we read Raghu's makeshift grave as an open signifier in which life and death from the perspective of an elephant might speak—or refuse to speak—according to registers that escape human conceptions of life and death? For that matter, if we interpret Raghu's grave as a representation of the Gravedigger's trauma, might that representation imply an elephant unconscious, or does the very notion of elephant trauma only betray an anthropocentric reduction of non-human animals to what we, as storytelling animals, tell ourselves about other animals through Western rubrics of thought? Perhaps such questions demand that we open ourselves to indigenous modes of environmental stewardship and relations with the land as a meaningful way to engage with the world that evades the anthropocentric biases embedded in Western thought.

Although a sustained investigation of these issues exceeds the scope of this chapter, I gesture toward them here because the unknowability of the Gravedigger's state of mind impresses upon us the urgency to respond to his actions, even if we do not—and perhaps cannot—know how to. And although we cannot know what the elephant feels (to paraphrase W.G. Sebald), our urge to speculate about what his actions mean signals our responsibility to the animals with which we share our world. Manu's encounter with the Gravedigger perhaps speaks to the necessity of response, if for no other reason than to

acknowledge the presence of life in general as something that escapes our systems of knowing, and to raise the question of how we might deploy our imperfect knowledge in response to the impossible complexity of life. *Manu and the Gravedigger* share a confrontation with this impossible complexity when they encounter each other in the forest near the end of the novel, as Manu gapes in wonder at the immensity of the creature before him:

Aside from an ear twitch, the tusker did not move. Its legs were granite columns, supporting such a spectacular bulk. It regarded me with its honey-hued eyes as if to take my measure, my potential for harm. As I stood there, I felt an odd calm settle over me. Fathoms deep, those eyes, small inside the cliff sides, close to the colour of my own. Remote and ancient. Eyes that had seen the wild and not-wild, eyes that knew things. (197)

The “odd calm” that settles over Manu signals a moment where he gives himself over to the unknowability of the encounter with the elephant, and in which he and the elephant, wild and not-wild, momentarily arrive in a realm of presencing where the elephant’s “regard” for Manu exceeds any symbolic order we might try to impose upon the exchange.³⁹ While power expressed through the tension between affection and violence articulates the Gravedigger as a recognizable subject before Old Man, and the “twining trunks” of Emma’s filmic gaze reduces animals to objects that serve the spectacular

³⁹ In making this assertion, I do not wish to dredge up a sentimentalist or reductive dichotomy in which Manu is somehow “closer” to the animal because he lives next to a forest. This line of reasoning only reproduces the speciesist and racist assumption that the primitive, racialized Other is akin to the lower beasts.

impulses of cosmopolitan conservation, James provides us with no conceptual anchor for this encounter. We are, like Manu, struck dumb, and left without any means to orient ourselves in this state of being that presents itself to us through its absolute strangeness. Manu and the Gravedigger's encounter suggests, at least from Manu's perspective, a flash of insight into an absolute alterity that includes both himself and the elephant as brute life—to which Giorgio Agamben alludes in *The Open* as embodiment unmediated by the law and the law's requisite investment in language⁴⁰—and in which contingent human and animal subjects dwell in a vast, inexpressible horizon of being that exceeds the discursive and biopolitical power networks that surround both the elephant and the boy.

To return to my earlier remarks about Neel Ahuja's insight about the ontological and biopolitical instability of human life, Manu's encounter with the Gravedigger as an absolute other also reflects back upon Manu those elements of himself, as a subject of power, that are unknowable by virtue of their contingency. The Gravedigger resides on the other side of a necessarily unstable species boundary, so the very question of how we are to define and understand that boundary—and, by extension, the Gravedigger's otherness—grows more complex in light of the fact that the embodied human subject can no more make sense of itself than it can of the non-human other that it encounters. Anthropomorphism's breakdown at this juncture expresses itself in such a way that, in addition to the fact that the very contingencies that define “the human” deconstruct themselves at their point of anthropomorphic departure, the Gravedigger is himself both radically other as racialized/speciesist “Other” to Manu in the Western humanist tradition

⁴⁰ Brute life is not to be confused with *zoē* (bare life), which implies a state of exception before the law.

of subject-object relations at the same time as the elephant body's radical alterity encounters a human self that refuses any stable definition in the first place.

As I suggest at the outset of this chapter, *The Tusk that did the Damage* refuses to provide us with a solution to the conflicts it presents, and that refusal is what makes the novel powerful. Manu's story matters because we bear witness to an average person who struggles with, and falls victim to, the confusing and confused web of power networks instantiated by the legacy of imperial forestry and its resident commercial interests. Elizabeth Kuruvilla dismisses Emma's narrative as "tiresome" and "unnecessary," but Emma's self-serving idealism forces us to reckon with the absolute disconnect between the cosmopolitan left's self-celebration of its so-called progressivism and the real damage it commits to those who suffer from the circuits of global capital. The elephant's violence, coupled with James' refusal to sentimentalize him through conventional anthropomorphism, explodes out of a world that articulates Emma's cynical idealism and Manu's struggles. But his violence is not vengeance for what we have done to him, nor a symptom of what we do to each other, but an elephant's response to the world we must share. How, then, do we respond to how the elephant feels?

Chapter Four:

Religious Beef: Dalit Literature, Bare Life, and Cow Protection

“If Untouchability is a reflex of the nausea of the Hindus against beef-eating, how long after the Hindus had given up beef-eating did Untouchability come into being?”

– B.R. Ambedkar (*The Untouchables*)

The Cow’s Two Bodies

As we peer into the heart of B.R. Ambedkar’s rhetorical question about the origins of untouchability and the Brahmin beef taboo, a ghastly figure confronts us: A Brahmin, doubled over in a fit of nausea, spewing from his mouth an untouchable figure that produces the retching Brahmin. The object that imbues form into this defiled mass of saffron, bile, and the untouchable Other consists of raw matter: A mound of rotting cow flesh slathered in the symbolic residue of Mohandas K. Gandhi’s *gau mata*; the Indian state’s mismanagement of bovine life; and the humiliating, yet crucial, role of Mahars, Chamars, and other untouchables who must clear the streets of carrion, a material consequence of the agrarian economy’s failure to develop into a functional industrial paradigm in post-partition India. Given Ambedkar’s extensive analyses of the long, socially-constructed history of untouchability and beef taboos throughout the subcontinent, his remark was surely crafted as a rhetorical polemic not to be taken literally.⁴¹ Yet the wretched quality of the Brahmin’s nausea profoundly resonates with

⁴¹ In *The Untouchables*, for instance, Ambedkar remarks that Hindu beef taboos most likely emerged shortly after the Vedic period, as caste-Hindus and Buddhists struggled for sociocultural supremacy (cf. Jha

the violence that engulfs cow protection in South Asia at this very moment. The violence provoked an explosive response from the Dalit community after July 11, 2016, when a group of self-appointed “cow vigilantes” (*gau rakshaks*) publicly flogged seven Dalit men for skinning a dead cow in Una, Gujarat. Given the lack of any forensic evidence that proved the Dalits had killed the cow, the *gau rakshaks* justified their actions on pure conjecture (Mohan). The ongoing attacks, which target Muslims, Dalits, and other untouchable sub-castes,⁴² have triggered a mass uprising headed by a Gujarati attorney named Jignesh Mewani (Mohan). In addition to daily updates through *The Wire*, an independent news outlet founded by concerned Indian academics and journalists, the demonstrations have received international attention in mainstream Western publications such as *al Jazeera English* and the *New York Times*. The enormous media response also coincides with a new “phase of Dalit assertion” that, according to its organizers, boasts an ethos of “clarity” and “gender conscious[ness]” with no specific “political affiliation” (Mohan). If, as Arjun Dangle asserts, the “mix-up of politics and religion in our country is the beginning of a long struggle” for Dalit liberation (*liv*), the Una protests also signal a renewed attention to the inseparability of animal life from the entanglement of Indian religion and politics that defines this struggle at the outset.⁴³

68-72). The contemporary iteration of cow protection emerges from the revivalist uprisings of the late nineteenth century.

⁴² Sunita Reddy Barathi (2002) reminds us that “Dalit” does not denote caste, and cannot account for the thousands of marginalized urban, rural, and tribal groups who fall under generalized political economic schemes such as the Scheduled Tribes/Castes Act.

⁴³ Historians including Peter Robb, Sandra B. Freitag, C.S. Adcock, and Anand Yang have unpacked extensively the connections between late nineteenth-century religious revivalism, communalism, and cow

While remaining mindful of existing theories and critiques of Dalit liberation struggles, this chapter revisits two seminal Dalit texts about cow slaughter—Arjun Dangle’s “The Cantonment has Begun to Shake” and Amitabh’s “The Cull” (1992)—to consider the ways in which they speak to the current moment of Dalit representational politics in response to cow vigilantism. I begin by revisiting Article 48—a poorly understood Directive in the Indian Constitution that supports a prohibition against cattle slaughter without actually imposing it—to investigate how it continues to validate the logic of cow vigilantism in the present. Building upon Shraddha Chigateri’s suggestion that the “secular garb” of Article 48 elides the real conditions of caste oppression, religion, and the division of animal labour in India (“Negotiating the ‘Sacred’ Cow” 138), I argue that the figure of the sacred cow slips between religion and secularism, and that this slippage sutures its overdetermined symbolic “body” to the mutilated flesh of disposed and disposable cattle in the realm of Dalit life. I interpret this entanglement through Giorgio Agamben’s formulation of bare life as the condition through which one may be killed without being murdered. The double-valence of Agamben’s “sacred man,” as one who may be killed yet not sacrificed, finds its animal double in the sacred cow by virtue of the cow’s lived conditions; *gau rakshaks* prohibit the cow’s ritual slaughter by Muslims and the use of its flesh by Dalits, yet they implicitly condone the material conditions that perpetuate the daily death and disease of urban and rural cattle. At the

protection in North India and Maharashtra. These analyses debunk popular myths about “a primordial conflict between Hindus and Muslims that has always existed throughout history” (Jones 55) at the same time as they reveal the way that the cow embodied a useful symbol around which to foster populist sentiment.

same time, the oppressive conditions of untouchability produce a state of exception in the human realm of Dalit life that oscillates between the poles of radical inclusion that are expressed as protections for Scheduled Castes and radical exclusion that is expressed as cow vigilantism or revanchist injunctions against concessions for marginalized groups.

In the concluding sections of the essay, I turn to Dangle and Amitabh to consider how their work might formulate a response to the symbolic economy of bare life peculiar to oppressed castes and Indian cattle. I argue that although both texts powerfully critique the symbolic economy of cow veneration that perpetuates violence against Mahars and cattle, Dangle and Amitabh inadvertently duplicate the logic of those conditions when they deploy the figure of the cow corpse as an abject foil to the sacred cow. That is, Amitabh and Dangle invert the symbol of the cow to critique Dalit oppression, but they fail to critique the logic of the symbolic economy that binds the sacred cow and the cattle corpse as fixed points on opposite ends of the spectrum of caste oppression.

Article 48, Cow Protection, Bare Life

During the Constituent Assembly Debates in November of 1948, Hindu and Muslim representatives debated the wording of Article 48 of the Indian Constitution, “Organization of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry.” B.R. Ambedkar insisted that cow protection be enshrined not as a Fundamental Right, but as a Directive of State Policy (Constituent Assembly of India Vol. VII). Ambedkar reasoned that endowing cows with rights would destroy the livelihoods of vulnerable groups such as Chamars and other untouchable castes charged with handling animal carcasses—not to mention Muslim butchers—at the same time as it would further stigmatize them (Chigateri 142). For

Muslims such as Z.H. Lari—who, *pace* Ambedkar, requested that Article 48 be written as a Right—the question of religiosity remained a matter of indifference. More pressing was the way that confusion around slaughter bans aversely affected rural and urban Muslims who thought that slaughter was permitted, only to be attacked by *gau rakshaks* after the fact (Constituent Assembly). Meanwhile, the caste-Hindu contingent felt that the Directive equivocated on a total ban of cattle slaughter, thereby effacing Gandhi’s formulation of *gau mata* as a logical extension of ahimsa. The Hindu constituents at the Parliamentary debates sought to conceal their religious biases under ostensibly disinterested analyses of bovine use-value. Pandit Thakur Das Bhargava, after Seth Govind Das’ failed amendment to ban cow slaughter on religious grounds (Constituent Assembly Vol. VII),⁴⁴ insisted that bovine cattle and buffalo deemed useful needed protection. While transparent about his religious biases, Bhargava provided a fairly tortuous statistical survey of Indian cattle numbers to make his point. In presenting his findings, however, Bhargava failed to explain how a slaughter ban would benefit the agrarian sector (Bhargava also insisted that a ban would curb milk shortages and dietary deficiencies, but, again, he did not explain his reasoning). If Bhargava had been simply playing for time, as Vice-President H.C. Mookherjee seems to have suspected (Constituent Assembly Vol. VII), he successfully secured at least a trace of Hindu ideology in the Constitution.

⁴⁴ Prof. Shibban Lal Saksena, meanwhile, moved to reword Article 48 from “prohibiting” to “prohibit.”

The shift back to prohibit, Saksena argued, would reestablish the state’s power to impose a religious injunction he felt was the right of Indian Hindus.

The Houses failed to achieve a substantial consensus, and the final draft of Article 48 reads as follows: “The state shall endeavor to organize agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall, in particular, take steps for preserving and improving the breeds and prohibiting the slaughter of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle.” The Directive’s “endeavor” to “take steps” toward “prohibiting the slaughter of” cattle, while expressly non-committal, nevertheless leaves embedded in Article 48 an unspoken, and irresolvable, gap between religion and secularism in both its substantive content and its non-binding status as a Directive. Indeed, as Shraddha Chigateri remarks in her analysis of Article 48, the “secular garb of a dominant-caste Hindu ethic in effect creates a chimera that results in the persistent non-recognition of the diversity of conceptions over the human relationship to ecology in specific context of an agrarian economy” (“Negotiating the ‘Sacred’ Cow” 138). This very chimera has befuddled the courts for decades, as the Directive’s non-committal phrasing—itsself an outcome of the ongoing, and arcane, semantic disagreements that defined the debates—continues to provoke challenges to the law by plaintiffs from all sides of India’s religious divide, thereby revealing the State’s failure to untangle secularism from religion. The ambiguous logic of the Directive, which teeters between animal husbandry and the use-value of cattle as the grounds for slaughter prohibition, remains unaddressed in the legal decisions of those challenges. In the space of this ambiguity arise religious biases that favour caste-Hindu interests. The courts have, for instance, consistently ruled against Muslim plaintiffs who have sued the State between 1956 and 2005 on the grounds that Article 48 impinges on their right to animal sacrifice as a religious injunction specifically, and of their right to equal representation before the law more generally (Mathur). As

Elizabeth Thomas points out, the courts' rulings have followed an exhaustive exegesis of the Quran's injunctions about ritual sacrifice while no such rigour exists for Hindu cow worship, thereby suggesting that the latent religious aspects of Article 48 rest, at least in part, on religious hearsay rather than philological interpretation (141).

This is not to imply that the courts consciously deploy orthodox Hinduism as a means to oppress Muslims and untouchables in their judgments. Despite the unacknowledged religious biases in their rulings, the courts have insisted upon the rights of butchers and leather tanners to practice their livelihoods pursuant to Article 19(1)(g), which secures the right for Indian citizens to "practice any profession, or to carry on any trade or business." Indeed, the courts must rule this way as a matter of practicality; regardless of caste society's distaste for cow products, butchery and leather tanning are embedded in the caste system as hereditary professions that have existed since time immemorial. To deny the right to practice one's hereditary profession would deny the logic of the caste hierarchy, which remains the bedrock upon which the modern Indian state rests so long as orthodox Hinduism remains embedded in its fabric. The courts, then, are left with the unenviable task of legitimating one's right to caste, even when the job associated with that caste contradicts the demands of fundamentalist ideologues who wield influence over the state.

The tension between secularism and orthodoxy constitutive of Article 48 manifests in the present moment through the Bharatiya Janata Party's efforts to implement a nation-wide beef ban, thereby delegitimizing the very livelihoods that the courts have historically sought to protect under the interests of caste Hinduism. Moreover, the recent wave of attacks by *gau rakshaks* against Muslim butchers and

Chamar leather tanners implicitly reinforces the conflation of Hindu nationalism and latent casteism in Article 48. Although Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken pains to publicly condemn the *gau rakshaks* as criminals (Barry A6), the BJP continues to impose increasingly severe criminal penalties on Muslim butchers and untouchable castes who dispose of dead cattle for their living (*The Wire* “A Year after Beef Ban”). Indeed, the BJP-held state of Gujarat arguably imposes the severest restrictions on cow slaughter, as recent amendments to the 1954 Gujarat Animal Preservation Bill includes life imprisonment for violators (Langa). Meanwhile, local police in countless districts leave investigations against so-called *gau rakshaks* unsolved while states such as Chhattisgarh pass increasingly harsh legislation that imposes heavy fines and life imprisonment for cow slaughter even though the existing prohibitions on slaughter have not been violated in 15 years (*The Wire* “Cow Killers will Hang”). In a perverse legislative twist, victims of *gau rakshaks* can become subject to criminal investigations themselves, even when no forensic evidence exists that the victims had transported, slaughtered, or stored cattle to begin with (Raj and Barry A11). There also persists the ongoing problem of so-called “nuisance” cattle who die in the streets or cow “retirement homes” (*gau shalas*) because their impoverished handlers cannot sell useless cows for slaughter lest they incur the wrath of *gau rakshaks* (Prabhu). The legions of dead cows on the streets provide skin and meat for low-caste leather workers who also risk attack.

With the exception of Shraddha Chigateri’s groundbreaking interviews with Dalit women about their views on vegetarianism, sustained engagement with this problem by Western academics remains ineffectual. A desultory debate sparked by Marvin Harris in 1965, for example, has failed to generate any meaningful interventions in state policy in

spite of 50 years of research, analysis, and recommendations by North American and Indian scholars who responded to Harris' initial study.⁴⁵ For his own part, Harris sought to complicate anthropological analyses that reduced cow protection to theological or “irrational” beliefs (Harris 261). To analyze the material and economic catalysts for cow protection, Harris employed a cultural materialist methodology built on the premise that farmers would not prioritize the sanctity of the cow over their own interests, a distinction that anthropologists had thus far ignored. Critiquing anthropologists such as I.W. Moomaw, who attributed “religious superstitions” as the rationale behind a given farmer's decision to keep unprofitable cattle rather than selling them for slaughter, Harris reasoned that the loss of any animal could push an already destitute farmer further into debt, as the farmer would have to borrow money at a usurious rate to make up for his lost profits (266). In making his case, Harris does not see *ahimsa* alone as a satisfactory explanation for the farmer's reasoning; rather, the farmer's rationale turns on his social and economic constraints. However, a further question— why do so many useless cattle populate the country when they drain its resources and could be put to much better as a cheap protein source?—continues to vex social scientists after Harris.⁴⁶ That is,

⁴⁵ See, for example, Corry Azzi; Paul Diener, Donald Nonini, and Eugene Robkin; Ariel Glucklich; Alan Heston; Reece Jones; Frank J. Korom; Deryck O. Lodrick; and Peter Robb.

⁴⁶ Alan Heston sought to integrate Harris' ecological and materialist approach into a model of classical economics. However, Heston failed to take the uneven class, ethnic, and caste landscape of rural India's division of labour as overdeterminants for India's cattle economy into account. Consequently, Heston's proposition for an “alternative use” of bovine resources cannot apply to a real-world scenario. More recently, Frank J. Korom sought to reintegrate the cow's theological connotations into anthropological analyses that favoured explicitly material analyses of India's cattle economy vis-à-vis ecology (183). Like

fundamental questions about responsibility for breeding, from where upgrades to agricultural infrastructure will come, and, most importantly, the pragmatic connection between an all-India slaughter ban and agricultural improvement, remain unresolved. It is my contention that these studies cannot account for the overdetermined variables of the Indian context, so their solutions can only work under the rigour of the model they deploy as opposed to the instabilities built into the superstructures of formal and informal Indian institutions.⁴⁷ Statistical analyses, macroeconomic models, or rhetorical appeals to the so-called “use-value” of cattle cannot provide us with adequate insight into India’s cattle economy if the day-to-day practices of agriculture, with specific attention to the way farmers struggle to maintain their livelihoods, remain unaddressed.

Meanwhile, casteism expressed as cow worship maintains its legitimacy by ensuring that cows and their owners continue to suffer. And herein lies the problem that continues to be overlooked, for Article 48 remains a symptom of the state’s deference to orthodox religiosity through its very self-proclamation as a secular document. Out of this impasse, *ahimsa* indirectly supports the sin of omission that maintains the criminal neglect of cattle as a necessarily materialist act of self-preservation by the farmer; rather than a humane system of cattle husbandry that organizes milk production and bovine

D.N. Jha, Korom surveys the historical writings on cows and animal symbolism and sacrifice in religious texts such as the Rg Vedas and the Visnupurana. What remains to be considered, however, is the rationale behind Brahmins’ persistent appeals to scripture in light of the fact that the Vedas do not unambiguously disavow cow slaughter.

⁴⁷ For a sustained study of corruption as a crucial element of India’s institutional infrastructure, for example, see Robbins, Paul, “The Rotten Institution” (2000).

labour, and which can work toward a cheap market of sustainably and ethically-sourced meat, the dogma of *gau mata* perpetuates the material suffering of people and animals who must respond to a crushing set of institutional and economic constraints. A reformation of India's beef industry could feed millions of poor citizens while providing workplace regulations, protections, and dignity for Chamars and other untouchables who dispose of cattle carcasses, and begin to provide better overall living conditions for beef, draught, and milk cattle who could, likewise, live and die with dignity. Yet such a scenario remains impossible at the level of policy so long as caste-Hinduism dominates the political sphere. The biopolitical implications of this impasse establish a double-helix of contradictions: the daily attacks on those accused of killing cows in a deprived, and depraved, ecological environment in which cows simply die from neglect reveal obvious human and animal rights abuses, yet the ongoing suppression of rights for the human and animal victims of this economy by both local and national governments effectively imposes an unofficial state of exception upon those victims' bodies⁴⁸; the cow, meanwhile, remains sacred-yet-not-sacred when the ideals of *gau mata* confront the real conditions of the starving and abused cattle that pervade the subcontinent's urban and rural landscape, themselves the outcome of human poverty that betrays a confluence of failed government schemes and poorly planned agricultural infrastructure projects both before and after Independence. Hence, the biopolitical and symbolic structure of the sacred cow elides caste-Hinduism as an ideological imposition through a spurious logic

⁴⁸ Dalit Media Watch maintains a daily listserv that collects and disseminates updates about social justice struggles by Dalits and other untouchable communities in South Asia (<https://dgroups.org/groups/pmarc>). Stories about atrocities committed against the downtrodden remain, sadly, a near-daily occurrence.

of “preservation.” Statistics and claims about the cow’s “usefulness” do not provide us with any insights if the day-to-day practices of agriculture and bovine husbandry—with specific attention to the way farmers struggle to maintain their livelihoods—are overlooked. As Syed Muhammad Sa’adulla succinctly put it during the 1948 debates, the Hindu emphasis on economy rather than religion betrayed the reality that the dogmatic sentiment against cow slaughter was snuck in through the “back door” (25), an argument echoed the following day by Frank Anthony and elaborated upon much later by Chigateri. We continue to see the brutal outcomes of this back-door policy today.

The violence against those accused of eating beef or killing cows in socioeconomic and ecological conditions that prohibit impoverished farmers from providing their cattle with basic nourishment, let alone functional facilities for husbandry, indicates a peculiar impasse predicated on orthodox interpretations of the cow’s sanctity that loosely borrow from ancient Hindu texts. As D.N. Jha has recently argued, however, neither the *Brahmanas* nor the *Vedas* unequivocally impose beef taboos or venerate cows. Although ancient texts occasionally suggest prohibitions against beef, Jha finds examples of beef-eating in the *Rig Veda*, while the *Brahmanas* state that a bull or a cow should be sacrificed when guests arrive (Jha 143). The *Dharmasutras*, moreover, grant that “[i]t is permitted to eat the meat of milch cows and oxen,” and that “[t]he meat of oxen is fit for sacrifice” (Olivelle 28). Even the *Shatapatha Brahmana*, which at one point expressly forbids beef, includes commentary from a sage named Yajnavalkya who eats cow flesh “provided that it is tender.”

Bearing these ambiguities in mind, Romila Thapar has posited that cow worship coincided with advances in agriculture throughout the subcontinent, as the growing

economic value of draught and milk cattle would reflect their veneration (115). The cow's body, in this formulation, is abstracted from beef and milk as products that reflect the hierarchy of caste and the religious codification of agrarian economics. In addition, M.N. Srinivas has argued that prohibitions on beef consumption after the rise of Buddhism and Jainism ca. 600 BCE gradually became a marker of caste status such that food restrictions delineated one's position in the social hierarchy. Shraddha Chigateri conceptualizes this phenomenon as a "food hierarchy" that, in the contemporary context, "sustains an order of superiority of food consumption—which goes down from vegetarianism, meat-eating (no beef), to beef-eating" ("Glory to the Cow" 11). In other words, the higher one's caste, the higher the dietary restrictions. The horrific irony here is that victims of *gau rakshaks* are punished for a caste-based religious imperative that should not even apply to them.

Consequently, the theological rationale for the sacred cow is shaky, at best, with the further repercussion that the orthodox discourse of veneration neglects the real conditions under which cows suffer. At the same time, the taboo against slaughtering cattle for beef becomes something of an *ad hoc* justification for violence against low castes and Muslims. In contradistinction to Article 48, then, it seems that the conditions to support bovine life in the agricultural sphere remain a matter of indifference while the conditions of bovine death rationalize fundamentalist violence against low castes who rely on the cow's flesh for their livelihood and sustenance. Because the caste hierarchy orders certain low castes to handle cattle carcasses, moreover, victims of *gau rakshaks* such as the Gujarati leather tanners are effectively flogged for performing the work imposed upon them. In other words, the contradiction between the imperative to worship

the cow and the daily neglect and abuse of milch and draught cattle displaces and imposes itself upon Muslims, Dalits, and other untouchable castes as sacrificial bodies to be punished for this very impasse, even while the structure of caste relies on untouchables to perform the work of disposing of cattle carcasses.

The victim's interstitial position, as a figure that is punished for violating a sacred injunction of which he cannot even be party, under the terms of a secular state that gives way to a religious injunction, suggests a variation of Giorgio Agamben's formulation of *homo sacer* and bare life. Citing an obscure figure in Roman law, Agamben argues that the sovereign ban formative to *homo sacer* circumscribes the limit of a subject's inclusion and exclusion from the society it inhabits under the auspices of the law. The figure of *homo sacer* embodies bare life, a state of political exclusion that renders *homo sacer* outside the law such that he may be killed but not sacrificed. The ontological quandary here is that the terms of the ban qua exclusion necessarily imply terms of inclusion, as the excluded body may be understood only in relation to its inverse. The sovereign will to reduce a subject to bare life in the Roman context carried over into the post-Enlightenment structure of state and civil society.⁴⁹ As Agamben puts it, the citizen of a democratic state is "a two-faced being, the bearer both of subjection to sovereign power and of individual liberties" (125). Bare life, as an implicit or hidden term embedded in the modern political subject's aporetic condition as a free citizen that is always and already vulnerable to the possibility of state violence, finds its expression

⁴⁹ Sarah Beth Hunt's observation that the "feudal" tenor of caste is at odds with the cosmopolitan aspirations of the Indian middle class signals the need for a rigorous historical analysis of how bare life and the sovereign shifted from the body of the king to civil society in the specific context of the subcontinent.

through oppressive instruments that marginalize select subsets of the population.

Agamben cites the concentration camp as the most extreme realization of bare life in the modern political state, although we continue to see examples of radical exclusion or states of exception through American imperialism, failed postcolonial states, settler colonialism, refugee camps, terrorist cells, and, in South Asia, the current permutation of Hindutva violence expressed as cow vigilantism.

Ewa Ziarek has critiqued Agamben for his failure to account for how his formulation of bare life might account for the heterogeneous conditions of violence specific to gendered, colonial, ethnic, class, or racial contexts as historically contingent “political forms of life” (4). Instead, Agamben flattens the state of exception into an aporia of inclusions and exclusions predicated on an abstract representation of bare life that erases its real conditions in a given context.⁵⁰ Indeed, the subcontinent’s long-historical genealogy of caste oppression scatters Agamben’s formulation of bare life across a complex spectrum of political violence that determines both the internal and external contingencies of the “outcaste” as a general category. A sustained analysis of those contingencies is beyond the scope of this chapter, but I would like to isolate the conditions of cow vigilantism as but one example of caste violence that complicates Agamben’s schematic.

The oppressive structure of caste in the contemporary Indian state resonates with bare life insofar as those scripted as untouchables or outcastes are simultaneously

⁵⁰ Ziarek goes on to argue that Agamben’s formulation of bare life cannot take rape into account because bare life is exclusively defined as a life that can be killed with impunity.

included and excluded from Indian society.⁵¹ The modern Indian state grants concessions to Dalits, tribals, and other untouchables oppressed by casteism through policies such as the Prevention of Atrocities Act (1989) and the injunction to designate spaces in universities or representative assemblies for marginalized groups. Such mechanisms ostensibly secure political inclusion for those who would otherwise be excluded, a dynamic that Ziarek describes as the “disjunctive inclusion of the inassimilable remnant, which still remains the target of sovereign violence” constitutive of bare life in the paradigm of the state. However, Supreme Court rulings that erode the Atrocities Act under the assumption that Scheduled Castes will abuse it as a means to gain concessions from public servants or private citizens,⁵² in addition to the state’s inaction against cow vigilantism, reinstate the exclusionary logic of outcaste bare life.

At this juncture, outcaste bare life dwells in a double state of exception that oscillates between the poles of radical inclusion (expressed as protections for Scheduled Castes) and radical exclusion (expressed as cow vigilantism or revanchist injunctions against concessions for marginalized groups). But the structure of cow vigilantism in relation to bare life reveals a deeper layer of discontinuities. The religious injunction against beef reflects dietary restrictions that might be specific to higher caste Hindus

⁵¹ Although the term “Dalit” remains invested in empowerment, self-assertion, and pride, Sunita Reddy Bharati notes that the movement should not be ascribed to other marginalized groups who might identify as untouchables, Otherwise Backward Castes, or Scheduled Tribes.

⁵² Justices A.K. Goel and U.U. Lalit, who wrote the decision, insist that the judgment does not dilute the law, but only protects those who have been falsely accused (TNM 2018). Sthabir Khora, however, has argued that the justices relied on prior decisions that assumed oppressed castes would abuse the act without taking into account the possibility of misuse by upper castes who use the lower as a proxy (2018).

under a selective interpretation of the Vedic and Brahmanical texts, but these prohibitions cannot apply to those considered “untouchable” by virtue of the fact that Shudras and those considered *avarna* were historically prohibited from interpreting them.⁵³ The fact that the alleged transgressor is beaten or killed by *gau rakshaks* without fear of reprisal grotesquely caricatures the Roman figure of *homo sacer* at the same time as the state’s indifference to vigilante violence expresses the political condition specific to outcaste bare life. According to Agamben’s interpretation of *homo sacer* in its Roman context, the sovereign ban is imposed in the event of a crime that violates some fundamental societal taboo. If we assume that the sanctity of the cow constitutes a transgression never to be violated under the ideological cloak of Hindutva, beef eating or cattle killing would render the violator subject to the sovereign ban. For the ban to apply to the untouchable caste accused of cow slaughter or eating beef, however, the *gau rakshak* would have to first drag the untouchable into a realm of Brahmanical injunctions that have historically excluded him in order to thrust him out again. This horrific absurdity antithetically reflects the state of exception that mandates spaces for Scheduled Castes in the Indian political state: Whereas the flawed logic of citizenship interpellates oppressed castes into a political formation that condones their ongoing exclusion through cow vigilantism and the fraught legislative boundaries of the Atrocities Act, the cow vigilante integrates the untouchable into the caste fold only to reinstitute the exclusion as a means to freely inflict violence upon him. This twisted circuit traverses the state and Hindutva as two

⁵³ Aniket Jaaware cites a longstanding opinion amongst Vedic interpreters that *Shudras* may neither study the *Vedas* nor perform Vedic rituals, even though they dwelled within the fourfold structure of *varna* (263).

inextricably intertwined political orders that render members of oppressed castes as bodies to be destroyed with impunity.

The double-bind of outcaste bare life inevitably raises the question of resistance by the oppressed, a possibility that, as Ernesto Laclau has noted, Agamben either overlooks or dismisses (9). Ziarek, similarly, cites Agamben's grim conclusion that nothing in the structure of the modern biopolitical body, as a synthesis of bare life and the political order, "seems to allow us to find solid ground on which to oppose the demands of sovereign power" (qtd. in Ziarek). Yet the history of resistance by oppressed castes—such as the nineteenth-century *Satyashodhak Samaj* founded by Jyotiba Phule, Swami Achutanand's Adi Hindu movement, and, most prominently, Dalit liberation struggles influenced by Ambedkar's efforts to annihilate caste—suggests otherwise. The pertinent question thus becomes that of the extent to which anti-caste struggles substantively contest sovereign power and bare life in the modern Indian state. To investigate this question, I would like to position the oppressive conditions of cow vigilantism against two works of Dalit Marathi literature that confront beef eating and cattle disposal: Arjun Dangle's short poem, "The Cantonment has Begun to Shake", and Amitabh's short story, "The Cull" (1992). I am interested in how these texts might speak from the position of outcaste bare life as a means of contesting the conditions that perpetuate it.

Politics and Aesthetics in Dalit Literature: Arjun Dangle's "The Cantonment has Begun to Shake" and Amitabh's "The Cull"

Dalit literary works substantially differ according to the regional history, political situation, and dialect that inform a given text, but the relationship between aesthetics and

politics has dominated Dalit literatures in general since the 1950s and 60s (Dangle, “Introduction” xxviii). The rise of the Dalit Panthers in the 1970s heralded a still more forceful assertion of Dalit identity in the literary and political spheres, albeit one that privileged Marathi writing and politics over mass mobilization for untouchable castes throughout the country (xxxiii). By the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s, critical and scholarly attention amongst Dalit and non-Dalit audiences in the subcontinent shifted to Dalit autobiographies, while translations of seminal texts such as Daya Pawar’s *Baluta* and Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan* brought Dalit struggles to the attention of a global readership.⁵⁴

While the linkage between aesthetics and politics in Dalit literature is readily apparent, the dynamic between the two remains a controversial topic amongst writers and scholars of Dalit literature. According to Sharankumar Limbale, Dalit writers value analyses of their work that proceed “from a sociological perspective focused on social values [rather] than on beauty. An exclusively aesthetic consideration of Dalit literature will disregard the Dalit writers’ fundamental role, and hence is not acceptable to Dalit writers” (qtd. in Thiara 257). While Limbale privileges politics over aesthetics, Aniket Jaaware indicts the latter outright as a form of political self-sabotage. For Jaaware, the establishment of a Dalit aesthetic inevitably stirs up controversies over “taste” and “authenticity” that distract from, and foreclose, the possibility of substantive political

⁵⁴ An in-depth analysis of the possibilities and challenges of translation are beyond the scope of this thesis. In a wide-ranging discussion, Alok Mukherjee, Arun Mukherjee, and Barbara Godard discuss the challenges of translating Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan* (2006). Additionally, Nicole Thiara unpacks how syntax and vernacular might shift as translations strive to attract a global audience.

mobilization (276-277). Jaaware adds that upper-caste readers of Dalit literature delude themselves into thinking that they are participating in Dalit political struggles while foregoing the real work of local organization and resistance (282).

Limbale and Jaaware's arguments subordinate aesthetics to a brand of politics predicated on an abstract notion of liberation that is, itself, fraught with conflict amongst Dalit activists. Limbale, for example, has analyzed the tension between Marxist and Buddhist strains of Dalit mobilization. Although Ambedkar's critique of caste was sympathetic to elements of Marxist thought, Limbale explains that Ambedkar felt Marxism's analysis of class left no space for caste-based resistance. The distinction between caste and class influenced Ambedkar's decision to convert to Buddhism in October of 1956. Nevertheless, as Arundhati Roy remarks, Ambedkarite Buddhism, predicated on the distinction between religion and dharma (*dhamma*), carries echoes of Marxist thought (Roy 139). A prominent point of contention between Dalit Buddhists and Marxists arises from the Buddhists' insistence that Dalits should not have to repeatedly put their humiliations on display through literary forms such as autobiographies or poetry (Limbale 43-44). Implicit in the Buddhist position is that those writers who persistently return to narratives and images of dangerous and humiliating labour practices such as dragging animal carcasses or sweeping human excrement from railroad tracks assume that savarna society would, or could, feel compassion for untouchables from the outset, while Dalits should not dwell on oppression but instead work toward building an equitable society. Limbale, who favours the Marxist perspective, critiques the Buddhists for not taking seriously enough the real social conditions that perpetuate inequity and oppression, and for focusing unduly on abstract notions of suffering and compassion.

Dalit Buddhism's lack of a concrete political program is perhaps due to the fact that Ambedkar died suddenly in December of 1956 before he could publish *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, his magnum opus on Buddhism's relevance to Dalit liberation.

Bearing the fraught politics of Dalit activism in mind, other critics have argued that aesthetics does not necessarily have to register at such a high level of political abstraction to productively contribute to emancipatory struggles for Dalits and other oppressed groups. Toral Gajarawala, for instance, suggests that Dalit literature critiques scholarly and popular norms of Indian literary production and consumption. By rejecting the "wide-angle lens" that informs the social-realist, "objective" proclivities of canonical novelists such as Premchand or Yashpal, the Dalit literary perspective can "differ in significant ways from savarna readings of the historical, as well as from the more Westernized conceptions of history that circulate in postcolonial fiction" (Gajarawala 576-577). In addition, Nicole Thiara argues that the formal experimentalism of Bama's *Sangati*, Limbale's *Hindu*, and G. Kalyana Rao's *Untouchable Spring* articulates a politically valuable "aesthetics of empowerment" (258). Specifically, Thiara finds that these texts deploy "fragmented" and polyphonic narrative techniques to position the "communal legacy" of Dalit cultures against the fraught political conditions of caste oppression at the turn of the twenty-first century. In light of this recent turn toward Dalit literature's aesthetic value, I revisit two texts from an earlier phase of Dalit Marathi writing, Arjun Dangle's "The Cantonment has Begun to Shake" and Amitabh's "The Cull," to unpack how their aesthetics resonate with both their contemporary political contexts and the present crisis of cow vigilantism.

The English translation of “The Cull” appears in *The Poisoned Bread*, a seminal anthology of Dalit writing for English-speaking audiences edited by Dangle in 1992. Several undated translations of “Cantonment” have appeared online within the last ten years, although no single version might be understood as “authoritative” in conventional terms. Although its English-language publication date is obscure, the poem’s style resonates with that of “The Cull” and other Marathi short stories that appear in the *Poisoned Bread* anthology. Both texts feature a cacophony of humans and animals that tear apart a cow’s corpse, and they use clipped, direct syntax that relies heavily on concrete nouns to transmit the figures’ experiences of flesh and death. These stylistic choices evoke Pramod K. Nayar’s notion of “embodied suffering,” a textual strategy common to Dalit Marathi writing between the 1970s and 1990s that oscillates between an individual’s visceral experience of bodily or psychic trauma and the social context that facilitates a narrative frame for that experience (Nayar 33). Moreover, the texts’ emphases on suffering bodies reflect how Marathi literature resists mainstream Indian literary aesthetics in general. Contemporaries of Amitabh and Dangle such as Bandhumadhav, Baburao Bagul, Shankarrao Kharat, and Daya Pawar, for instance, flout neo-Platonic ideals of Beauty and Truth formative to colonialist conceptions of “high” literature introduced by English language education for Indian upper classes (Mukherjee et al. 17), favouring instead expletive-laden prose in jarring, sparse narratives. A number of texts in the *Poisoned Bread* anthology deploy this approach. Prakash Jadhav’s “Under Dadar Bridge”, for example, provides a necrophilic description of a rape victim’s venereal sores that “traced / the world’s map on her flower-like breasts / shrivelled during the malaria epidemic” (Dangle 66); Bandhumadhav’s “The Poisoned Bread” relates the

story of an old man left with no choice but to grovel for rancid bread “smearred with dung and urine” (172); and Anna Bhau Sath’s “Gold from the Grave” concludes with a surgical description of a villager who, following a botched exhumation of a wealthy landlord, must pry his mangled fingers out of the dead man’s jaws. Consequently, Dalit anti-conventions such as “Untruth,” “Unholy,” and “Unbeauty” pose a peculiar methodological challenge for what we might properly call “postcolonial” literary analysis insofar as Dalit writers resist conventional modes of restoring colonized subjects into the historical record. In effect, these texts’ engagements with embodied suffering as a social-political phenomenon constitutive of lived experience can also resonate with style and aesthetics as a retort to the mainstream literary sphere’s erasure of Dalit narratives.

Generally speaking, then, aesthetics and politics coevally shape Dalit writing as a medium of resistance against caste oppression. However, I find that Amitabh and Dangle’s texts also risk duplicating the oppressive structures that Dalit literature seeks to transcend. Both texts, through a series of displacements between the figures of the Brahman, Dalit, and animal, render the cattle carcass as an abject surplus that stands in uncanny opposition to the Brahmanical figure of *gau mata* as an abstract representation of Hindu purity. The problem with this strategy is that the opposition circulates within the same symbolic economy as the figure of the sacred cow. In effect, both Dangle and Amitabh invert the symbol of the cow to critique Dalit oppression, but they fail to critique the logic of the symbolism itself.

“Cantonment” speaks through the collective voice of a group of Mahars tasked with clearing the roads of carrion. As they slice up a cow’s corpse for meat, hordes of crows, jackals, dogs, and vultures descend upon the speakers:

We fought with crows,
 Never even giving them the snot from our noses.
 As we dragged out the Upper Lane's dead cattle,
 Skinned it neatly
 And shared the meat among ourselves,
 They used to love us then.
 We warred with jackals—dogs—vultures—kites
 Because we ate their share. (Dangle qtd. in Adagale 255)

The poem works as a portal that takes the reader from the realm of caste and class privilege into a hellish scenario that blurs the boundaries between life, death, animals, and humans. For as they drag the “dead / Cattle” from the “Upper Lane,” the speakers drag the sacred cow downward, from the upper spheres of Brahmin worship into the profane space of untouchable life. The speakers’ horrific labour strips from this corpse the popular myth of the sacred cow as that which effaces the suffering of real cattle. In the sacred cow’s place we encounter the fleshy pulp of caste violence and agricultural neglect that begets this monstrous and uncanny realm.

Yet the poem cannot help but reconstitute its figures through the logic of caste as the exclusionary condition of untouchability. The speakers who covet this unholy cow withhold its flesh from the jackals, dogs, vultures, and kites that descend upon them. The crows in line 1, meanwhile, correspond to the excluded fifth substrata of untouchables excluded from the caste hierarchy, which in the abject realm of the poem occupies the position through which its interspecies economy is accessed. Although the organization of bodies changes between the lived and poetic realms of the Mahars, the injunction of

the caste hierarchy persists in a distorted form, and the poem uses the figure of the cow as the means of maintaining the exclusion. Consequently, the logic of caste exclusion remains intact even as the poem appears to critique the symbol of *gau mata*, through the corpse as its grotesque inversion, as a symptom of caste society's pathology.

The manic energy of Amitabh's "The Cull" deploys a similar strategy by using the cow corpse as the centerpiece of the narrative's interspecies struggle. The story opens at dawn in a Mahar slum, where rumours of a fresh animal carcass spark a frenzy amongst the locals who scramble for pots and bowls to bring back a piece of flesh for their families:

"Who says there's a cull?" said the old woman Bulkai.

"Don't know!" Rodba replied.

"Who says there's a cull—could be a fib to hassle us!" commented Nagai, another old woman.

"Come on, who says ..." Bulkai shrieked.

"Oh that Dhondya, Dagdya's son ..."

"What does he say, how does he know?" (Amitabh 219)

The dialogue, peppered with interruptions and short, grunted phrases, augments the Mahars' urgency, while similes and metaphors of animals abound throughout the text. Large families are described as "broods" with "suckling" infants (220), and slum-dwellers rush from their mud huts like "hens fluttering out of their coops" (219). A whirlwind of figures, "Warlya, Chindhya, Chindhi, Ughdya, Godi, Lahanya, Barkya," scurry across the page, loaded down with "basins and baskets, creels and crans, troughs and trugs, tall aluminum pots, flat plates woven out of palm leaves, earthen pots" with

which to scoop up fistfuls of flesh (220). Just as quickly as these figures appear, they dissolve, wraithlike, into the chaos. Meanwhile, the metaphors of individual slum-dwellers as animals gives way to real animals—kites, vultures, and dogs—who fight and struggle with the Mahars, much as they do in Dangle’s poem.

The manic and fragmentary narrative gaze momentarily settles on Nilya, a teenager who struggles to push past the other Mahars in the scramble for meat. The uproar seizes as Nilya watches Pandu, the local butcher, carve out the cow’s liver, heart, lungs, and steaks before covering his fresh cuts with the “neatly folded hide” and walking home (Amitabh 222). At the same time as “Pandu” suggests a reference to the king of Hastinapur in the Mahabharata—and thus a subtle association with the specter of Brahmanical presence in the slum—his careful dissection of the cow evokes Ambedkar’s indictment of caste society’s “division of labourers” (qtd. in Limbale 63). In effect, humanity is cut up, ordered, and arranged, like Pandu’s cuts, according to one’s hereditary profession under a Brahmin-centric interpretation of the social order. As Pandu walks away and the Mahars proceed to slash and rip at the remnants of the blood-spattered carcass, the abject chaos of untouchability fills the vacuum that he leaves behind (Limbale 222).

As the carnage dissipates, leaving a pile of bones and a handful of Mahars “covered in blood as if they had played Holi” (223), Nilya struggles home with his meagre spoils as vultures and dogs attack him from all sides. The story closes by reintroducing the image of frenzied bodies that punctuate its opening, but rather than a roll-call of animalized slum-dwellers, we are left with an image, in the present-continuous tense, of Nilya “filling up his pot” as he brandishes a stick to fend off the dogs

and birds that “are still hovering over his head, swooping and pecking” (225). Suspended in space and time, Nilya and the animals embody an interspecies composite of Sisyphean struggle that refuses teleology or resolution.

The salient takeaway from Dangle and Amitabh’s texts is the way that the figure of the cattle carcass represents an abject verso to the recto of the sacred cow. In effect, the conditions that maintain the veneer of cow reverence in the sphere of Brahman dominance perpetuate and penetrate the horrific conditions to which we bear witness in both of these texts, such that the realm of Dalit life enacts a nightmarish caricature of the Brahman realm. In effect, the cattle’s corpse embodies the abject surplus that the symbolism of veneration must siphon off to maintain its legitimacy. As an expropriative inversion of the sacred cow, however, the cattle’s corpse is, like its opposite, reduced to a symbol that erases the real conditions under which the cow itself is reduced to an object for consumption. Be it sacrilegious beef or holy milk, neither Dalit writer nor *gau rakshak* can incorporate the cow’s lived experience into the symbols they deploy, even as the cow’s rotting flesh seeps through the interstices of the opposition between the two.

The Lives of Indian Animals

The horrific suffering that characterizes texts such as “The Cull” and “Cantonment” seems incongruent with recent assertions of Dalit pride such as the 2012 beef festival at Osmania University in Andhra Pradesh. Students and faculty organized the festival as an assertion of Dalit culture and identity, only to violently clash with the *Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad*, a campus *gau rakshak* group. Interestingly, the Dalits took exception not just to the *gau rakshaks*, but to police intervention that

ostensibly sought to quell the violence in support of the Dalits. Ramesh Hazari, a festival organizer, remarked that help from the police would only “insult[] the food habits of a vast majority of Dalits and other downtrodden people whose staple diet is beef” (Krishna). For Dalits such as Hazari, state intervention in this scenario would reproduce the aporetic circuit of outcaste bare life exemplified by affirmative action or the Atrocities Act.

Meanwhile, the animal’s life remains an unaddressed question for the Osmania Dalits. Just like Amitabh and Dangle’s texts, beef consumption at Osmania risks reducing the cow to a flat signifier that stands in binary opposition to the sacred cow. This opposition strips from the cow’s body the conditions of its life and death, an impasse that recalls a recent observation by Krithika Srinivasan and Smith Rao:

the politically conscious in India more often than not eschew vegetarian/vegan diets and support meat-based ones to express solidarity with those who have been traditionally marginalized on account of their caste and food habits If you are left-wing, secular, and politically progressive, chances are you will eat meat even if you grew up in a vegetarian household. (14)

The Indian Left’s deployment of meat as a signifier of progressive politics presents an ethical dilemma for those with a stake in animal welfare or rights. Indeed, Srinivasan and Rao’s imperative to “make visible the animals that have remained hidden and deployed instrumentally” (15) in India seems at odds with the socioeconomic realities of a country whose most marginalized people need access to meat as a source of both nutrition and livelihood. This double-bind raises further quandaries about the liberal notion of basic human and animal rights in the South Asian context. That is, Western rights paradigms

proceed from the assumption that human rights beget the unquestionable sanctity of life—a mechanism of power over death most famously critiqued by Foucault and more recently nuanced by Roberto Esposito and Agamben—but the universalist assumptions that affix life to rights cannot entirely account for the centuries-old symbolic, social, and financial economies of caste-hierarchies and interspecies dynamics in a former colony such as India, the entanglements of religion and secularism that define India’s nationhood, or the quandaries that undergird a setting such as Osmania. These complexities raise more questions than they might answer. How are we to respect the traditions of Dalit beef-eating while respecting bovine life and death? Can Dalit liberation resonate with animal liberation, or does beef-eating as an assertion of Dalit pride foreclose such a possibility? How can Dalit assertion unyoke itself from the symbolic logic of Hindutva? Calls for animal justice in India that do not take into account such complexities risk imposing upon Muslims, Dalits, and untouchable communities an ethics of privilege propagated by First-Worlders and caste-Hindus who, intentionally or not, “do no harm” to animals as a matter of luxury, class mobility, and the violent oppression of the poor. Questions of animal rights or welfare paradigms cannot easily apply to Indian meat politics, but nor can we efface the lives of animals as we provide spaces of self-assertion and dignity for South Asia’s historically marginalized populations.

Coda:

Animal Sovereignty, “Flourishing,” and the “Infrahuman”

Ludwig Wittgenstein’s famous declaration, “If a lion could talk, we could not understand him,” is tantamount to a Zen Kōan for animal studies scholars. The responses to Wittgenstein by contemporary philosophers and theorists of animal ethology have typically focused on the species divide as a site of cognitive incommensurability between humans and other animals, with particular attention to the role of language as a marker of difference. In effect, the species divide is understood here to have a dual implication—we cannot get inside the cognitive and embodied experiences of the other species with which we share our planet, and we do not have the conceptual tools to articulate our inability to do so. Despite, or perhaps because of, this double impossibility, our differences from other animals have profound philosophical, political, cultural, and ecological ramifications. To meaningfully pursue those ramifications, however, we must restage the terms of difference according to a negative premise: If we cannot understand the animal, how might we understand the ways it changes and touches us even as it seems to exist on the other side of an unbridgeable gulf of existence? Moreover, and more urgently, what are our responsibilities toward animals in our current age of mass extinction and climate change?

While remaining mindful of the philosophical quandaries that Wittgenstein invites us to pursue, this thesis has slightly refracted the doubly-illegible speech of his lion to focus on the consequences of what happens when those in power impose a framework of understanding upon that which cannot be understood. That is, I have approached the

species boundary not only as a space of impossibility between humans and other animals, but also as an instrument of state control with profound and ongoing implications for Indian animals and subsistence societies. By identifying several historically-grounded examples of how the state instrumentalized species difference, this thesis has explored how the corpus of Indian literature about animals might resist or reorder the state's construction of that boundary as an instrument of power. Each text has offered different insights into how the human/animal divide might be imagined as a space of contestation against the state's exploitation of species difference. As such, I hope to have shown how literary animals can provoke postcolonial scholars to approach animals as complex subjects beyond allegories for human emancipation, and animal studies scholars to approach the Global South as a site of geopolitically distinct histories that demand continuously shifting approaches to the species divide.

Because this thesis has focused on the nexus of the postcolonial state and the species boundary, I would like to conclude with a short discussion of Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka's theorization of animal sovereignty in 2011's *Zoopolis: A Political Theory for Animal Rights*. Although Donaldson and Kymlicka do not explicitly engage with the Indian state's fraught history with animals, their analysis raises several important questions about the intersection between the state and the species boundary outlined by this thesis. Moreover, as Clare Palmer notes, the book is something of a watershed for scholars of animal ethics and animal rights, as it moves beyond animal liberation in the tradition of Peter Singer and Tom Regan to "explore ethical and political relationships with the animals alongside whom we live" (Palmer 759). In effect, Donaldson and Kymlicka argue that "we need to think about wild animal communities as organized and

self-governing communities, whose relations to human societies must be regulated through norms of sovereignty and fair interaction” (166). As a legislation-oriented position that calls for the inviolable rights of animals, Donaldson and Kymlicka align themselves with Martha Nussbaum, who, in response to the debates that followed Singer and Reagan’s respective interventions, has introduced the concept of “flourishing” as a condition of animal sovereignty. “Part of what it is to flourish, for a creature,” Nussbaum states, “is to settle certain very important matters on its own, without human intervention, even of a benevolent sort” (Nussbaum 373). Donaldson and Kymlicka, in their turn, propose “a theory of sovereignty which recognizes that the flourishing of individual wild animals cannot be separated from the flourishing of communities, and which reframes the rights of wild animals in terms of fair interaction between communities” (167). They then propose a liberal framework of animal sovereignty based on the establishment of “international norms” similar to those between weak and strong states as an attempt to curtail the exploitation of the weaker state by the stronger.

By taking an explicitly liberal position predicated on international relations, Donaldson and Kymlicka break from Cary Wolfe, another prominent animal studies scholar who critiques how the tradition of liberal humanism and contract law abstracts a legally-constructed notion of “the animal” from “the human.” Following Giorgio Agamben, Wolfe rejects liberalism to instead pursue a potential interspecies relation that begins with the biopolitical continuity between humans and other animals:

Rather than freezing and reontologizing the difference between reason and its other (all its others), I argue that the other-than-human resides at the very core of the human itself, not as the untouched, ethical antidote to reason but as part of

reason itself—that “trace” that inhabits it, to use Derrida’s terms. By thus keeping open the incalculability of the difference between reason/the human and its other/the nonhuman (animal), we may begin to approach the ethical question of non-human animals not as the other-than-human but as the *infracuman*, not as the primitive and pure other we rush to embrace as a way to cure our own existential malaise but as part of us; *of* us—and nowhere more forcefully than when reason, “theory,” reveals “us” to be very different creatures from who we thought “we” were. (17)

Wolfe cogently constructs a space for potential interspecies relations predicated on ontological continuities between humans and other animals. But without a material means of substantiating the post-theoretical “infracuman”—a way of understanding animals not as sites of difference from the human but as sites of continuity—his scenario remains suspended in the realm of possibility. Donaldson and Kymlicka, on the other hand, leave the juridical limits of the species boundary intact, but they pursue a notion of animal sovereignty modeled after the liberal state.

Although Donaldson and Kymlicka assume a politically and philosophically conservative position in relation to Wolfe, their formulation of animal sovereignty upends orthodox animal rights theories that do not articulate how we are to engage with animals beyond simply leaving them alone (180). According to Donaldson and Kymlicka, the orthodox position is unrealistic and untenable because resource exploitation and man-made species extinction has disrupted the ecosystem to the point where humans must intervene, if for no other reason than to at least impose limits on ecologically destructive practices of resource extraction and animal exploitation. To a liberal theorist of animal

rights in the tradition of Singer or Reagan, meanwhile, inviolable rights for animals might appear controversial or counterintuitive because animal exploitation constitutes a fundamental aspect of human development throughout history. In effect, an inviolable rights position—especially in contrast to welfarist and ecological positions that grant some rights to animals but ultimately leave human exceptionalism intact—challenges the accepted norms of conventional animal rights because many people would balk at the notion of granting inviolable rights to animals in the way that democratic states are supposed to grant inviolable rights to humans.

In staking their position, however, Donaldson and Kymlicka do not clarify who would maintain the material conditions of a sovereign animal territory, who would decide upon what constitutes the animal's inviolable rights under a liberal democratic paradigm, or what inviolable rights for animals might look like. Their theory of animal autonomy also does not address the power inequities within and between states when they propose that a sovereign animal territory should be “free internally to evolve along its own autonomous course” (191). Instead, they argue that animal sovereignty means that human “management” of wild animal territory must go through a process akin to decolonization, replacing unilateral extraction with fair trade, and replacing ecologically destructive cost-externalizing practices with sustainable and mutually beneficial ones (194). As I discuss in Chapter Three, the Indian Forest Department, transnational corporations, and NGOs began to engage in the sorts of practices that Donaldson and Kymlicka recommend in the 1970s. In some cases, they continue to impose paternalistic modes of forced cooperation upon the local societies in which they intervene. Moreover, as *The Tusk that did the Damage* has shown, joint initiatives between the state and non-state actors also risk

exploiting both the animals and people these entities ostensibly seek to protect. Consequently, a “sustainable” or “mutually beneficial” set of practices would risk reproducing a private property scenario in which a corporate body would stake a claim over the animals’ interests, effectively reducing the animal to a commodity that serves the corporate body. At this juncture, Donaldson and Kymlicka’s model no longer holds the animal’s best interests at heart, but instead upholds the interests of capital under the guise of animal sovereignty.

At the same time, geopolitical conflicts in the Global South are overlooked in Donaldson and Kymlicka’s formulation of animal sovereignty. Given colonial and postcolonial India’s historical legacy of animal abuse, how can we assume that legislation to protect the inviolable rights of animals would not be broken just as easily and just as quickly as legislation to protect the inviolable rights of humans? If recognizing animals as citizens comes down to an issue of granting territorial sovereignty to animals, on what grounds is such sovereignty to be upheld, given that humans cannot even agree upon sovereign territory amongst themselves? How will we put this policy forward without getting bogged down in bureaucratic procedures when faced with the lobbying power of the resource sector? Moreover, how are we to negotiate the rights of rural peoples who share territory with wild animals, and who do not necessarily buy into the ideals of the liberal democratic state? Can we now officially declare war on animals if their sovereign territories impede a state’s economic growth? Are animal citizens subject to criminal law? Most urgently, how are Donaldson and Kymlicka to resolve the violence that a

capitalist state inflicts upon animals' bodies through a framework of animal sovereignty that supports that very state?⁵⁵

In posing these questions and challenges, I do not want to suggest that conservation in the liberal democratic mode is entirely exploitative or destructive—states no longer tolerate the outright eradication of species as they did, for example, in nineteenth-century India, and conservation biologists such as Kailash Sankhala and Raman Sukumar have significantly improved the lives of Indian tigers, elephants, and lions. Consequently, it would be premature to dismiss Donaldson and Kymlicka's argument outright, as they offer a potentially generative model of interspecies existence that grants sovereignty to animals. The problem lies in how the model is to be implemented in light of the fact that animal sovereignty in a liberal democratic framework is inseparable from the competitive accumulation of capital. Although it seems absurd, animals would likely have to demonstrate their value as sovereign bodies within the total political system in which they dwell, a possibility that Nussbaum explores through her formulation of "capabilities." According to Nussbaum, a capabilities approach to animal flourishing "wants to see each living thing flourish as the sort of thing

⁵⁵ Nicole Shukin has exposed the horrific economy of animal capital through her analysis of how industrial meat production or gene manipulation perpetuate industrialized violence against animals' bodies while concealing that violence through marketing strategies and corporate loopholes. Moreover, the necessarily disparate processes of industrial violence against animals make it impossible to pin responsibility for the animals' abject conditions to a single agent. In effect, the conditions that articulate species boundaries in the context of the state "hinge on the zoo-ontological production of species difference as a strategically ambivalent rather than absolute line, allowing for the contradictory power to both dissolve and reinscribe borders between humans and animals" (11).

it is, and wants political principles to protect, for all sentient beings, a set of basic opportunities for flourishing” (33). Again, however, the caveat here is that “flourishing” is not necessarily a value in and of itself, but a condition through which a given animal’s presence is justified through its contribution to the total political system. Consequently, an animal’s flourishing would depend upon its perceived value according to the ideological paradigm that surrounds it. But as this thesis has argued, we must first understand the material conditions that determine how animals’ bodies are deployed as instruments of power, as an analysis of those instruments reveals the ideological interests that determine a given animal’s “value.” The literary texts I have analyzed signal the need to continue critiquing and reassessing the conditions of power that theorists such as Nussbaum and Donaldson and Kymlicka overlook in their attempts to establish a model of rights for animals predicated on liberal sovereignty.

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Curriculum Vitae

Education

- 2019 Western University – PhD English (thesis submitted Aug 2018; defense date Jan 8, 2019)
- 2013 Western University – MA English
- 2011 Simon Fraser University – BA English (Hons., First-Class)

Academic Publications

- Peer-Reviewed Articles
- 2019 “Of Peasants and Large-Hearted Gentlemen”: Ordinary Histories in Jim Corbett’s *Man-eaters of Kumaon*.” In-progress.
- “Religious Beef: Dalit Literature, Bare Life, and Cow Protection in India.” *Interventions*. doi: 10.1080/1369801X.2018.1558097
- Peer-Reviewed Book Chapter
- 2018 “Anthropomorphism and Interspecies Conflict in Tania James’ *The Tusk that did the Damage*.” *Postcolonial Animality*. Eds. Suvadip Sinha (Minnesota) and Amit Baishya (Oklahoma). Forthcoming, Routledge.

Peer-Reviewed Publications on Teaching

- 2017 “Thinking Clearly About Confusion: Threshold Concepts, Bafflement, and Meaning as ‘Contestation’ in the English Classroom.” *Teaching Innovation Projects* 7.1 (2017). <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/tips/vol7/iss1/7/> .

Creative Publications (poetry)

- 2017 “oak creek 5 aug 1919.” *Red Hen Anthology of Indian Writing*. Eds. Ravi Shankar and Sampurna Chattarji. Manassas, VA, Red Hen, forthcoming.
- “port of entry.” *Contemporary Verse* 2, forthcoming.
- “afternoon rush hour on mcbride blvd, to coast salish punjab (unceded).” *South Asian Ensemble* forthcoming.
- “marx in flight.” *South Asian Ensemble*, forthcoming.
- “letter from the ss komagata maru (née sicilia) to an unknown starship, 23 may 2914.” *South Asian Ensemble*, forthcoming.
- 2015 “untilted.” *filling Station*, no. 61.
- 2013 “Pelican.” *Alive at the Centre: Contemporary Poems from the Pacific Northwest*. Portland, Ooligan Press, 2013.
- 2012 “Belch.” *ditch*, May 2012.
- “Hiccup.” *ditch*, May 2012.
- “Retch.” *ditch*, May 2012.

- “Snooze.” *filling Station*, no. 53.
 “Synaptic sneeze.” *filling Station*, no. 53.
 “Deep time cough.” *filling Station*, no. 53.
 “for assistance press the ache and spill digital.” *West Coast Line*, no. 72.
 “words that sell real estate.” *West Coast Line*, no. 72.
 “words that don’t sell real estate.” *West Coast Line*, no. 72.
 “before this thought talks us.” *West Coast Line*, no. 72.

Select Conference and Symposium Presentations

- 2017 “The Politics of Meat and Caste Oppression in Contemporary Dalit Writing.”
 Postcolonial Studies Association. London, UK. Sept 18-20, 2017.
 “Troubling ‘Species-Thinking’: Partial Anthropocenes and Precarious
 Futures in Vandana Singh’s ‘Delhi.’” Canadian Association for
 Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies. Toronto, ON. May
 27-29, 2017.
 “Scholarship as Conversation: Online Tools for Peer Engagement and
 Community Building Beyond the Undergraduate English Classroom.”
 2017 Department of English and Writing Studies Teaching Symposium.
 Western University. April 10, 2017.
- 2016 “Anthropomorphism and Interspecies Conflict in Tania James’ *The Tusk that
 did the Damage*.” Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature
 and Language Studies. Calgary, AB. May 28-30, 2016.
- 2015 “Re-Imagining People of Colour and Treaty in Canada: *Sui Generis*
 Aboriginal Citizenship, Diaspora Space, Subjectless Critique.”
 Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language
 Studies. Ottawa, ON. May 30-June 1, 2015.

Invited Lectures

- 2016 “Indian Novels about Animals.” Retiring with Strong Minds Public Lecture
 Series, Windermere Retirement Residences. London, ON. Dec 2, 2016.
- 2015 “Biopolitics and Indian Literature after Independence.” Arts and Humanities
 1020. Western University. Nov 17, 2015.
 “The Narratology of Interspecies Conflict in Tania James’ *The Tusk that did
 the Damage*. Postcolonial Studies Group Speaker Series. Western
 University. Oct 26, 2015.

Awards & Distinctions

- 2017 Banff Centre Scholarship \$1,975
 CACLALS Graduate Student Presentation Prize (finalist, “Troubling
 ‘Species-Thinking’: Partial Anthropocenes and Precarious Futures in
 Vandana Singh’s ‘Delhi’”)
 McIntosh Prize (best paper, “Religious Beefs: Untouchable Life,
 Constitutional Secularism, and Sacred Cows in Arjun Dangle’s ‘The

- Cantonment has begun to Shake”) \$900
- 2016 CACLALS Graduate Student Presentation Prize (best paper,
“Anthropomorphism and Interspecies Conflict in Tania James’ *The Tusk that did the Damage*”)
- 2015-18 SSHRC Doctoral Award \$60,000
- 2015 Ontario Graduate Scholarship \$15,000 (declined)
- 2014 Ontario Graduate Scholarship \$15,000
- 2013 Western University Dean’s Entrance Scholarship \$2,000
- 2012 SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship (Master’s) \$17,500
Western University Chair’s Entrance Scholarship \$1,000
University of British Columbia First Year Scholarship \$8,000 (declined)
Simon Fraser University Graduate Scholarship \$6,250 (declined)
- 2009 John H. MacDonald Award for Excellence in Investigative Journalism
\$500
- 2008-11 Simon Fraser University Open Scholarship \$3,480

Teaching Experience

- 2016-17 Teaching Assistant, ARTHUM 1020E, School for the Advanced Study of the Arts and Humanities, Western University
- 2013-14 Teaching Assistant, English 1022E, Department of English and Writing Studies, Western University
- 2013-15 Instructor, Reading Town
- 2012-13 Teaching Assistant, English 2033E, Department of English and Writing Studies, Western University

Research Experience

- 2018 Research Associate, Academica Group, London ON
- 2017 Research Assistant, Dean’s Office, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Western University
Research Assistant, Dr. Nandi Bhatia, Dept of English and Writing Studies, Western University
Research Assistant, Dr. Joshua Schuster, Dept of English and Writing Studies, Western University
- 2016 Research Assistant, Dr. Nandi Bhatia, Dept of English and Writing Studies, Western University
Research Assistant, Dr. Joshua Schuster, Dept of English and Writing Studies, Western University

Literary Residencies

- 2017 Centering Ourselves, Banff Centre for the Arts

Community Service/Volunteer Experience

2017 Tree Specialist, ReForest London
2016 Postcolonial Studies Group, Western University
2016 Peer Editor, *The Word Hoard*, Western University

Professional Affiliations

Postcolonial Studies Association
South Asian Literary Association
Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies

References

Dissertation committee:

Nandi Bhatia – Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts, Western U

519.661.2111 ex. 85728 | nbhatia2@uwo.ca

Joshua Schuster – Associate Professor, Dept. of English and Writing Studies, Western U

519.661.2111 ex. 85826 | jschust@uwo.ca

Teaching:

Christine Sprengler – Associate Professor, Dept. of Visual Arts, Western U

519.661.3440 ex. 86835 | csprengl@uwo.ca

Joel Faflak – Director, School for Advanced Study of Arts and Humanities, Western U

519.661.2111 ex. 85529 | jfaflak@uwo.ca