Disorderly Multispecies Living: Nonhuman Animals in the Spaces of Indian Modernity

by

Sundhya Giselle Walther

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of English and the Collaborative Program in South Asian Studies
University of Toronto

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Abstract

The construction and policing of a hygienic boundary between human and nonhuman animals is one of the ways that Western modernity has established the otherness of the postcolonial world. Drawing on Haraway’s idea of “ordinary multispecies living,” this dissertation attends to the representation of disorderly multispecies living in texts from India. Disorderly multispecies living, I argue, is a form of resistance to the hygiene of modernity and a powerful mode of alliance between human and nonhuman subalterns. In this analysis, I bring together the fields of animal studies and postcolonial studies in order to complicate the dominant Western focus of the former and the dominant humanism of the latter, and I also emphasize the intersections between these two parallel fields.

Each of my chapters considers a physical and conceptual zone of proximity between human and nonhuman beings. My first chapter analyzes the discourse of conservation and its division of space into human and animal in three texts (by Corbett, Roy, and Ghosh). In the second chapter, I consider the way the body itself is imagined as a space of both multispecies contact and subaltern political agency in texts by M.K. Gandhi and Vikram Chandra. Chapter Three examines the connection between home and nation through companionate relationships in
novels by Anita Desai and R.K. Narayan. My fourth chapter analyzes Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* and journalistic accounts of the leopards of Sanjay Gandhi National Park in order to redefine the imaginative geography of the city. Here, I consider urban space as multispecies space, and discover in what I call this spatial transfection the potential for cross-species subaltern alliances.

Throughout this dissertation, I am attuned to the way that texts instrumentalize nonhuman animals as figures of disturbance; at the same time, I attend to the moments when these textual animals evade narrative control and create lines of flight outside their own appropriation. I show that multispecies inhabitations disturb the function of oppressive discourses, as they apply to both human and nonhuman animals. This study proposes both an ethics of representation and an ethics of reading that has wider implications for the study of relationships between human and nonhuman animals in both literature and in life.
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I wish peace, joy, and freedom to all of the beings of this world, both human and nonhuman.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The Wild: Tracking Tigers in the Discourse of Conservation</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td><em>Shikari</em> and Conservationian in <em>Man-eaters of Kumaon</em> and <em>The Folded Earth</em></td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Conservation and Development in <em>The Hungry Tide</em></td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The Body: <em>Ahimsa</em> and the Politics of Vegetarianism</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>The Serious Question of Food in <em>Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth</em></td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Food, Text, and Narrative Multiplicity in <em>Red Earth and Pouring Rain</em></td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The Home: Companion Animals/Companion Narratives</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>The Nation and Its Spectres in <em>Clear Light of Day</em></td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Textual Taxidermy in <em>The Man-eater of Malgudi</em></td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The City: Denizens of Modernity in Delhi and Mumbai</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Subalternity and Species in <em>The White Tiger</em></td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Placing the Leopards of Sanjay Gandhi National Park</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The Zoo: Postscript</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Works Consulted

vii
1. Introduction

Raja Rao’s 1938 novel *Kanthapura* is one of the most important works of its time, and a landmark text in the development of the contemporary Indian novel in English. Early in the novel, one of the villains, the policeman Badè Khan, has a confrontation with a village leader: because of his semi-official position, Badè Khan demands to be given a house, but his request is refused. Khan expresses his anger by giving “such a reeling kick to the one-eared cur that it went groaning through the Potters’ street, groaning and barking through the Potters’ street and the Pariah street, till all the dogs began to bark, and all the cocks began to crow, and a donkey somewhere raised a fine welcoming bray” (14-15). This eruption of collective sound reveals the community of nonhuman animals that shares the human space of the village. Kanthapura, perhaps naturally, given its rural setting, is populated by animals. This moment makes clear in a new way, however, how deeply enmeshed human and nonhuman living spaces are in the novel, as animals who have previously been invisible and unheard in the narrative world assert their presence.

*Kanthapura* uses these animal voices to create a moment of disturbance that, in turn, exposes a few key ideas about the spatial and cultural legitimacy of nonhuman animals in this novel. The dog — the “one-eared cur” — is able to cross human boundaries without penalty. In the pages preceding this incident, the narrator has described in great detail the organization of the village by caste, and has stressed the

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1 Throughout this dissertation, where possible, I will use the term “nonhuman animals” to indicate that “human” and “animal” are discursive constructions, and to suggest a kind of biological alliance — in our shared animality — that is too often disavowed.
taboo on entering the “Pariah street.” This dog’s movement across caste boundaries, however, demonstrates the contingent nature of these borders, and thus prepares the ground for the challenge to naturalized caste structures that will be a source of struggle for the Brahmin narrator in the rest of the novel. The narrator’s word choice also establishes the position of nonhuman animals in the community. This dog is not a dog, but “the one-eared cur,” a being who is known and recognized. “It” (to use the narrator’s pronoun) is a kind of companion to the human community, but is also apart from it, and the animals who respond to the dog’s expressions of pain are thus a part of the human community at the same time that they form a parallel community of their own. “Cur” is a derogatory term, but the narrator is sympathetic towards the dog; this suggests that nonhuman animals live in this village according to a different model of social organization from Western modes of pet-keeping. This dog is not an extension of a human family, is not an “Oedipal” animal, to use Deleuze and Guattari’s term (233), but its position in the community, and in the space of the village, is understood and legitimized by the narrator. Badè Khan’s cruelty to this animal is an early indication that Khan is aligned with the oppressors, and that he is a force of violence. The human inhabitants of the village, including the narrator, and the nonhuman inhabitants are allied here against this violence that intrudes into the community.

I choose to focus on this example because, although animals do not feature very prominently in the rest of the novel, this moment in the early pages tells us that they are there, inhabiting the margins, serving as animate capital — as “livestock” whose bodies literally support human systems of exchange — in the agrarian village economy that the
book represents, and as cultural capital — as bodies of particular symbolic worth — in the expression of Rao’s national imaginary.² Rao’s work ambitiously combines the projects of imagining a nation and imagining a national literature. In line with the Gandhian politics that the book celebrates in its representation of the villagers’ unsuccessful, but noble, nonviolent resistance, Kanthapura imagines the “true” India as existing most perfectly in its village setting, and in settings like it across what would become the Indian nation. The novel represents the political, social, and cultural community of the village as a repository of most things of value in Indian culture; elite urban nationalism, it suggests, is only worthwhile if it defers to and adopts the truths to be found in village life. The novel, then, sets out to represent in English what it sees as the heart of the culture of India. In Rao’s foreword to the novel, he writes about his struggle to accomplish this goal:

The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word “alien,” yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up […] but not of our emotional make-up. […] We cannot write like the English. […]

² On the cover of the New Directions edition of Kanthapura is a faded black-and-white photograph of a small group of cows walking along a rural road. They are being guided by three humans, presumably farmers, but the cows themselves are in the foreground of the picture, and the human beings are small background figures. The photograph, which appears “courtesy [of the] Information Service of India, New York,” evokes the harmonious multispecies existence that occurs in the village, and, by showing the cows moving forward freely, without constraint or restraint (the lead cow is veering off the path), effaces the exploitation and control on which this seeming harmony depends. Although Rao himself did not choose this image, it functions to reinforce the idealized picture of village life that the novel creates.
We cannot write only as Indians. (vii)

Kanthapura’s intimate address — the reader is a “sister” (2), its feminization of narrative — which reinforces the dominant nationalist image of women as the repositories of culture,³ and its village setting all express a particular vision of the Indian novel, and the Indian nation, that was influential in both fiction and in anticolonial and postcolonial politics. Rao’s stated intention, and the way he carries it out in the form of the novel, suggest a clear — if sometimes ambivalent⁴ — imaginative vision of what “India,” the nation about to be brought into being, might become. And by introducing nonhuman animals into this vision, Kanthapura suggests that encounters among species are a part of what it means to be Indian and of what ought to be represented when writing an Indian fiction in English.⁵

Animals are ubiquitous presences in contemporary Anglophone literature from India. This dissertation examines the representation of what Donna Haraway calls “ordinary multispecies living” (When Species Meet 3) as an expansive field of relationships among human and nonhuman animals in the context of a range of Indian prose texts, largely fiction, but also including life writing and, in the last chapter, journalism. This focus allows me to bring together the concerns of animal studies and

³ I will discuss this position of women in the nationalist narrative in detail in Chapter Three.

⁴ The narrator struggles with social and cultural changes such as the Gandhian challenge to Untouchability and the participation of women in the Independence movement; what her response to these changes shows is that, ultimately, the moral authority of the nation resides in people like her, and her moral codes are adaptable enough to incorporate positive development.

⁵ It is true that, in this representation, Rao engages in a kind of essentialism that is also deployed by Orientalist texts. In A Passage to India, for example, the narrator observes that Indian animals do not respect human boundaries: “no Indian animal has any sense of an interior. Bats, rats, birds, insects will as soon nest inside a house as out; it is to them a normal growth of the eternal jungle, which alternately produces houses trees, houses trees” (55). Like Forster’s, Rao’s representation is a construction of India, and it uses this strategic essentialism as part of its political project.
postcolonial studies as two fields that, though they clearly share some important concerns, are only now beginning to be brought into conversation. In 2010, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin wrote that “zoocriticism, understood [...] in the context of intersections between animal studies and postcolonialism, is still in its infancy” (18); in the intervening years, this type of criticism has not, for the most part, developed much further. Previous studies of postcolonial literature that foreground the nonhuman, including Huggan and Tiffin’s, have often been ecocritical in focus, considering animals as part of the representation of land and environment. This tendency has only intensified with the recent turn of both postcolonial and posthumanist theorists to the analysis of the Anthropocene. In interpretations of Indian literature more specifically, the tendency is to read “through the animals” (Huggan and Tiffin 149), as though they are transparently figures for more central human themes. Or, very commonly, nonhuman animals are read purely for their (most prominently Hindu) religious significance. This is an understandable approach, given that animal figures are so important in the practices and texts of Hinduism (as well as other Indian religions), but the reality of lived interspecies encounters in India — the fact that human and nonhuman animals are rarely physically separated, even in the most human-dominated environments — means that representations of animals in Indian literature also suggest embodied ways of living in the world. These texts represent India as a multispecies space, and this dissertation attends to

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6 Examples include: Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley, eds. *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, and Laura Wright, *Wilderness into Civilized Shapes: Reading the Postcolonial Environment*.

7 For example, Lorre on Desai and *The Panchatantra*, Alexandru on performativity in Chandra, Dewari on R.K. Narayan, and Olivelle on the figure of the talking animal.
these nonhuman presences as more than figurative representations. In doing so, it contests a dominant strain of what anthropologist Anand Pandian calls “postcolonial humanism” in both theory and literature.

Pandian argues that Western philosophy’s continual return to animal metaphors indicates that becoming human requires a “critical engagement” with one’s own animality (103). In the context of the particular caste that is the subject of his field research, Pandian investigates the ways that “reform” — both behavioural and moral — is an exercise in becoming human by rising out of one’s animal nature. On the other hand, Pandian documents instances in which animal resistance is figured as particularly laudable; he argues that “[t]o take up this animal as an object of reform is to project humanness as the telos or endpoint of moral development [...] however animals are often celebrated precisely for their obstinate defiance of human demands” (105). This fact, Pandian argues, suggests that it is possible for humans to hold, and to act on, contradictory ideas about nonhuman animals; in this possibility, according to Pandian, there lies the potential for resistance to ideas that define subaltern human beings as morally underdeveloped. These ideas are the basis for the legal and cultural practices of domination that his study documents (140). The implication of Pandian’s argument is that to adopt a postcolonial humanist perspective is, at least on a discursive level, to accept that formerly colonized peoples are nonhuman, and should strive towards the attainment of humanity.

Pandian’s study focuses on the cultivation of ideas of morality among the Piramalai Kallar caste of Tamil Nadu, in relation to colonial history, agrarian economy, Tamil literary traditions, and popular culture.
This kind of postcolonial humanism remains tenacious in theoretical writing. The poststructuralist reconceptualization of the individual human subject and, by extension, the tenets of humanism, did not fully break the attachment to the human in postcolonial work that has its roots in humanist anticolonialism. As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, “Postcolonial critique of the subject was actually a deeper turning towards the human” (“Postcolonial Studies” 4). As an example of these influential roots, I now turn briefly to Frantz Fanon, whose idea of the recovery of the human through anticolonial resistance often depends on certain problematic ideas about animality. In making this critique, I don’t wish to understate the political urgency of Fanon’s context, which certainly informs his rhetorical strategies; rather, I want to examine the limitations of his writing in order to identify a strain of postcolonial humanism that has continued to be significant. Fanon’s *The Wretched of The Earth* critiques the “Manichaean” structure created by colonialism. In the famous first chapter, “On Violence,” Fanon recognizes that the division between colonizer and colonized is framed, by the colonizer, as a division between species. He writes:

> Sometimes this Manichaeanism reaches its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the colonized subject. In plain talk, he is reduced to the state of an animal. And consequently, when the colonist speaks of the colonized he uses zoological terms. Allusion is made to the slithery movements of the yellow race, the odors from the “native” quarters, to the hordes, the stink, the swarming, the seething, and the gesticulations. In his endeavors at description and finding the right word, the colonist refers constantly to
Because of this animalization of the colonized in colonial discourse, the anticolonial struggle, for Fanon, is one that reclaims the colonized peoples’ humanity (8). This strategy responds to the persistent dehumanization of the colonized, and Fanon’s impassioned writing must always be understood in the context of anticolonial mobilization. But to protest dehumanization is itself to accept the primacy of the human, which is an acceptance that, while important to Fanon’s project, has problematic consequences. Fanon replaces the division of colonizer from colonized with one that separates “man” from animal in another dualistic model, as is exposed not only here, in the language of being “reduced to the state of an animal,” but most forcefully in the book’s conclusion, which returns continually to a reassertion of the idea of “man.” Fanon writes that the goal of decolonization must be to “make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man” (239), but what this “new man” would be is unclear, beyond a recognition of the shared humanity of all “men.” According to Fanon, “what we want is to walk in the company of man, every man, night and day” (238), and the great failure of Europe is in its violence towards man, its failure to recognize and acknowledge the humanity of other men (235-236). Europe has been “murderously carnivorous” (236) towards man, and decolonized people cannot afford to “ape Europe” (236).\(^9\) In Fanon’s view, Europe has been carnivorous toward “other species” — by which he means other species of humanity, Europe’s racial others. Fanon’s animal metaphors suggests that any imitation of Europe — any “aping” — would confirm the

\(^9\) This diction is the same in the original French: “Elle ne s’est montrée […] carnassière homicide qu’avec l’homme” and “Nous pouvons tout faire aujourd’hui à condition de ne pas singer l’Europe” (239).
decolonized peoples’ animal status both in the eyes of the former colonizers, and in reality. Fanon’s goal, then, is not simply to reverse the terms of the duality between colonizer and colonized by suggesting that the colonized and formerly colonized inhabit a greater degree of civilization than their colonizers (although he does at times make this move), but rather to open up an outside to the Manichaean duality between civilized and uncivilized — in fact, an outside to the difference between the discursively “human” and the discursively “animal.” In this pursuit, however, Fanon does not follow the implications of his thinking to its logical ends; that is, his consideration of the species boundary as a faulty construct does not move beyond discourse as this discourse applies to the human. In fact, he remains attached to this species boundary, and to boundaries in general, as the best way to express the unity of his concept of “man.” Fanon’s idea of humanity is propped up on the backs of other others, marked by gender, disability, homosexuality, and animality. It is therefore not the universal he claims it is, but is, rather, limited in important ways. Again, these omissions should be considered in the light of the necessarily polemical nature of Fanon’s writing, but what they demonstrate is the way that any humanism — even the most urgent anticolonial humanism — creates a new set of others through its acceptance of species as a binary and hierarchical division.

As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, “Fanon’s struggle to hold on to the Enlightenment idea of the human — even when he knew that European imperialism had reduced that idea to the figure of the settler-colonial white man — is now in itself a part of the global

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10 Some representative moments from Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* include: on disability, 119; on women and gender, 134, 157; on homosexuality, 135.
heritage of all postcolonial thinkers” (*Provincializing 5*). From Fanon to Spivak, elements of humanism are smuggled into the theory in order to descry the dehumanization of the colonial or postcolonial subaltern. This is particularly surprising in Spivak’s case, whose concept of subalternity as a shifting zone of otherness is clearly and significantly applicable to nonhuman animals, as I will discuss later in this introduction. As I will demonstrate in my analysis of, in particular, Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*, in Chapter One, and Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*, in Chapter Four, this postcolonial humanism is also pervasive in fictional writing, and again it relies on the debasement of the animal to shore up the essential humanity of subaltern human beings for emancipatory purposes. Bringing an animal studies perspective to this writing can expand the ethical scope of postcolonial literature and theory and prevent the replication and perpetuation of colonial and neocolonial discourses of othering that affect both human and nonhuman animals.

At the same time that it can bring important nuances to the study of postcolonial texts, animal studies, as a field, also has clear limitations that ought to be tested. I am calling this limitation “posthuman westernism.” Reading widely in animal studies, one notices that the concerns of this work are largely European or North American, from its philosophical surveys to its case studies. The purpose of animal studies thus far seems

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11 Despite this observation, as I will discuss below, Chakrabarty himself does not expand his challenge to the idea of the human into a consideration of nonhuman animals.

12 Chakrabarty discusses the humanism of postcolonial theorists, including Spivak and Bhabha, in “Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change.”

13 I use this term with the qualification that posthumanism as a field includes but is not limited to the territory of animal studies. I want to suggest, through this terminology, that the attempt to move beyond — temporally — the construct of the human in animal studies is particularly limited to western conceptions of that construct.
largely to have been to contest the definition of the “animal” in the western philosophical
tradition; as broad as this categorization is, the analysis is usually limited to a few key
thinkers, beginning with the Cartesian dismissal of animal sentience.\textsuperscript{14} Although it is a
relatively new field and therefore cannot really yet be said to have a “canon,” there are
certain key texts of animal studies that are exemplary: Cary Wolfe’s \textit{Animal Rites},
Matthew Calarco’s \textit{Zoographies}, and Akira Mizuta Lippit’s \textit{Electric Animal} all feature
philosophical genealogies that are based solely in the western tradition. While these texts
— Wolfe’s in particular — do make reference to the connection between the oppression
of those who are nonhuman and those who are racialized or colonized, other approaches
to the “question of the animal” do not appear as subjects for extended analysis. I do not
fault this acknowledged focus in any of these works, nor do I mean to suggest that the
diversity of animal studies can be distilled into a singular perspective, but the genealogies
in which these texts engage do create a set of dominant assumptions that tend to govern
the practice of philosophical and literary animal studies. For example, for many animal
studies scholars, the intensification of the exploitation of nonhuman animals has risen in
an inverse relationship with the physical proximity of nonhuman and human animals —
so that, as “we” are increasingly physically distanced from (non-companion) nonhuman
animals, we are more able to rationalize or disavow the abuses that they suffer.\textsuperscript{15} To
support this point, scholars use examples such as the moving of slaughterhouses outside
of city centres (Shukin \textit{Animal Capital} 63), the industrialization of agriculture (Derrida

\textsuperscript{14} I would like to distinguish the field that I am identifying as animal studies from the more activism-
oriented sphere of Critical Animal Studies, although I am very much influenced by the latter.

\textsuperscript{15} Lippit 1; Carol J. Adams 96; Weil 25-26; Berger 3; Fiamengo 3; Derrida \textit{The Animal That Therefore I
Am} 80.
The Animal That Therefore I Am 26), and the “sanitation” of urban life so that only a limited nonhuman animal presence is tolerated within the limits of the city (Jerolmack 73). All these points are, to different extents, true in North American and European contexts, though they are nuanced by opposing trends such as the increasing numbers of companion animals in urban areas, and the continued visibility of “livestock” animals in rural areas16; as Anat Pick observes, “[t]he disappearance of animals takes several forms, some of them paradoxically those of enhanced visibility” (103). One way to approach these complexities is to examine a context, like India, in which the physical proximity between non-companion nonhuman and human animals is still a fact of daily life in most parts of the country, including urban centres, and in which this interaction is not so insistently disavowed. Scholars working within the field of animal studies need to ask: contrary to the assumptions of the field, how do exploitation and daily physical proximity exist hand in hand, as they do in India? Samir Sinha, a prominent Indian conservationist, told me that people in Delhi are perfectly able to reconcile honouring Hanuman in the temple on Tuesdays with shooting the monkeys who live in their gardens on other days of the week (personal interview). Attention to such paradoxical material and affective entanglements between human and nonhuman animals in the Indian context will broaden the scope of theoretical consideration within animal studies. In this study, I will address some central beliefs in animal studies that can be complicated by an analysis of Indian multispecies living. At times, animal studies makes assumptions about “other” cultures in

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16 This visibility has of course been significantly lessened by the intensification of “food” animal confinement, so that many cows, pigs, and chickens are never actually seen outside the walls of a barn or shed until the day they are transported for slaughter.
order to shore up its critique of the west, but without enough contextual nuance.\textsuperscript{17} As a result, it misses the opportunity to make its analyses more complex and, arguably, more politically powerful, by allying itself with postcolonial theory as it has already, with success, allied itself with the concerns of feminism.

The limitations of both of these fields — postcolonial theory and animal studies — thus restrict in turn their ethical and political scope. Postcolonial studies can challenge more effectively the discourses of othering that it contests by not abandoning the nonhuman animal. Animal studies can expand its concerns beyond the west in order to forge alliances between nonhuman animals and human subalterns. And there are also compelling literary reasons to bring these two fields into conversation. Reading animals as \textit{just} figures in literary texts is reductive. The metaphorical meanings of nonhuman animals are indeed various and important, but an animal figure is always more than just a figure; it conjures real animals at the same time that it is instrumentalized to represent something other than real animals. As Pandian argues, animals enact a “slippery traversal of the very boundary between exterior and interior nature” (139) that cannot really be apprehended by focusing entirely on their “interior” human meanings. Another approach, equally flawed and equally common, is to ignore animals in literature altogether. In the texts that I consider in this dissertation, even those, like \textit{The Man-eater of Malgudi} and \textit{The White Tiger}, for which nonhuman animals are a major point of focus, critical attention is directed away from those animals and towards other formal and thematic concerns. In my analysis, I want to offer a fuller response to these representations of

\textsuperscript{17} For example, Carol J. Adams 115.
animals by, quite simply, taking them seriously as representations of animals, even as I am also attuned to the ways that they are used, by the texts themselves, as figures for the human. This approach represents both a close attention to literary technique and an ethic of reading nonhuman animals. Connected to these literary and ethical reasons for attention to the presence of animal figures is a desire to recognize the presence of animal beings, and not to abandon the nonhuman animal as both a subject for ethics — that is, a being with whom ethics ought to be concerned — and an ethical subject — a being who can practice an ethic, and be involved in an ethical relation. As I will discuss throughout this dissertation, I see productive points of alliance between nonhuman animals and human subalterns as both subjects for ethics and ethical subjects. As many other advocacy theories have taught us, we cannot afford to think of ethics as that which applies only to and within narrow categories; such narrowness inevitably produces harmful exclusions, and does a disservice to the capaciousness of ethics itself.

While I want to stress the possibilities that emerge out of connections between these two fields, it is also true that the stakes of bringing them together are high for both sides. As Fanon demonstrates, the comparison to the animal has been pervasive in the constructions of otherness — particularly in terms of race and gender — against which postcolonial thinkers and writers work. What would it mean, then, for these writers to abandon an attachment to the human? Would this also mean the abandonment of the important struggle for recognition and equality? As Cary Wolfe observes, “It is understandable […] that traditionally marginalized peoples would be skeptical about calls by academic intellectuals to surrender the humanist model of subjectivity, with all its
privileges, at just the historical moment when they are poised to ‘graduate’ into it” (7). As Wolfe himself argues, and as I will expose throughout this dissertation, speciesism is oppressive to human and nonhuman alike. But this contention is in itself problematic. Theorists in animal studies want to focus attention on the nonhuman animal, and in particular the ethical place of nonhuman animals in the context of their systemic exploitation and domination by humans. The risk of a postcolonial approach to animal studies is thus to, once again, have the animal abandoned in favour of seemingly more pressing human concerns. The argument that attention to the nonhuman animal also includes attention to human beings who are other to the sovereign concept of the human crops up frequently to provide a common-sense justification for the importance of animal studies.¹⁸ This argument is a valuable one, but it also recentres the concerns of humans by assuming that human issues will be the “hook” that draws readers into the fold of animal studies. What a postcolonial animal studies would demand is attention to the alliances between subaltern human beings and nonhuman animals, as those groups whose positions are most politically and ethically important to postcolonial and animal studies. It would also refuse to abandon either the human or the nonhuman animal, or to privilege the interests of one group over the other.

Throughout this dissertation, I have been attentive to the human-nonhuman subaltern alliances created by authors, while also maintaining a skepticism about the degree to which these authors are able to do justice to the lives of nonhuman animals. I argue that utilizing animals as figures is an instrumentalization that, to a degree,

¹⁸ For example, in: Wolfe 7, 192; Shukin Animal Capital 10; Wakeham 22; Calarco 10; Huggan and Tiffin 18.
undercuts the anticolonial thrust of some of these texts (as does the use of disabled, 
gendered, or subaltern human characters as figures, as will be clear in my discussions of 
Ghosh, Roy, and Desai). And yet, I am also interested in the ways that the representation 
of animals can exceed a humanist representational politics. Do nonhuman animal 
presences in literature in some sense elude the attempts of texts and authors to contain 
and instrumentalize them? In what ways do they call up the presences of real animals, 
and evoke the exploitations that these animals face? If the writing of nonhuman animal 
lives is, in most cases, primarily about the human, is there a counterdiscursive way to 
read these texts that refuses to read past their animals, such as, in the example of 
*Kanthapura*, by pausing to pay attention to the presence and voices of these animals? To 
say that literature, like other human institutions, exploits nonhuman animals is an 
important claim, but it does not go very far in exploring the emancipatory potential that is 
embedded in art, and in particular in postcolonial writing with its unique political 
investments. In this dissertation, then, I take notice of textual spaces in which this 
emancipatory potential opens up not just to human subalterns, but also to nonhuman 
animals, and try to expand these spaces to consider their wider potential for important 
multispecies alliances.

This dissertation brings together the concerns of animal studies and postcolonial 
Studies by examining texts that are already, to different extents, providing contact zones 
for these two fields. Each chapter examines a physical and conceptual space of 
multispecies encounters as it is represented in texts. While each chapter focuses on an
issue that has been of particular concern for animal studies, the postcoloniality of these
questions becomes clear in the analysis. Considering narrative as an art that both
concerns and creates spaces in which human and nonhuman animals meet, I look at the
way even texts that are seemingly quite rigid in their postcolonial humanism open, and
indeed depend upon, the possibility of alliances between human subalterns and
nonhuman animals against the colonial, neocolonial, and capitalist powers that oppress
them both. By seeking out these fleeting moments, I locate a contagion between the
categories of human and nonhuman — a form of improper touch, or poor hygiene — that
produces political and ethical potential, and contests both postcolonial humanism and
posthuman westernism in a way that expands the scope of both theoretical fields, and of
our interpretations of literary representation. Drawing on Haraway’s concept of “ordinary
multispecies living,” to which I have already made reference, I call this improper touch
“disorderly multispecies living”; each of my chapters examines what takes place when
texts represent nonhuman and human animals sharing space, meeting, and touching in
ways that transgress the “order” of Western modernity. In looking at the way that these
meetings are represented in literature, I am alive to the fact that they are being used, by
the texts, for their transgressive power — a usage that might, in fact, represent the
imposition of a new kind of order. I argue, however, that they also offer ways to think
about how such meetings occur, and might produce the potential for new forms of ethical
relation, in real space.

When I speak of this “order” that nonhuman animals are able to disturb, I mean
the order of modernity as a discursive phenomenon that is, in many ways, premised on
the separation of human from nonhuman animals. Bruno Latour argues that modernity
requires the simultaneous proliferation of nature/culture hybrids and the philosophical/
conceptual division of nature and culture into “two entirely distinct ontological
zones” (10). This process of “purification” by which human and nonhuman are
configured as separate is what Latour calls “the modern critical stance,” and its disavowal
of parallel processes of hybridization and mixing among species is crucial to modernity
itself (11). Modernity, in fact, depends upon the disavowal of the nonhuman on a grand
scale. Annabelle Sabloff, echoing Latour, suggests that the dichotomization of human and
nonhuman is “the most notorious feature of the Western nature-habitus” (27). Latour
conceives of this division in spatial terms — as indicated by the word “zones” — and it is
indeed this kind of effort to “zone” land for nonhuman animals that is the subject of my
first chapter. But, as Latour indicates, and as my project will show, this zoning is an act of
the imagination; it is an impossible project that contradicts the realities of modernity
itself, but at the same time allows their perpetuation. And one of the central elements of
modernity that is tied up with this species division is colonial discourse — and by
extension colonial power. Colleen Glenney Boggs, in her discussion of nonhuman
animals in American literature, suggests that “animal” as a category emerges with a new
solidity in concert with ideas of “modernity,” and that this category is related in important
ways to the exercise of colonial power (24). In this way, like Latour, Boggs agrees that
nonhuman animals are constitutive of modernity itself. If one of the foundational
operations of modernity has been to enforce a separation between human and nonhuman
space, while at the same time depending on the continuous breach of that separation, one
of the significant techniques of colonial discourse has been, as Fanon suggests, to posit an unhygienic proximity between the racial other and the animal other. Shukin also discusses this technique in her analysis of pandemic discourse, in the final chapter of her *Animal Capital*. In the texts that I examine in this study, representational worlds are populated by humans and nonhumans living in proximity, in ways that are “disorderly” in the terms of the discourses of modernity that Latour and others discuss. By their very closeness, these human and nonhuman animals living together disturb the imaginative construct of the modern. Even the texts of postcolonial humanism that appear here depend for their force on the interpenetration of species “zones” in ways that are surprising, disturbing, and transgressive. This disorder is integral to the postcoloniality of these texts, in that it pushes back against colonial taxonomies and against ideas of modernity that continue to construct the postcolonial world as other by pathologizing or exoticizing its multispecies spaces.\(^{19}\) Disorder is thus both a function of the operation of power — in that, as Latour suggests, modernity depends on the breaching of separate animal and human spaces — and something that can challenge that power. In the texts I examine, I locate an intimacy and form of affective connection in multispecies living that resists modernity’s disavowal of the nonhuman animal and of the way that spaces are

\(^{19}\) Both the pathologizing and the exoticizing of multispecies living can be seen in reactions to the presence of monkeys in Indian cities. One story in *The New York Times* describes monkeys in Delhi as a “scourge” that spread disease and blames residents for feeding them and thus contributing to their own persecution by rampaging simians: “Monkeys are the living representatives of the cherished Hindu god Hanuman, and Hindu tradition calls for feeding monkeys on Tuesdays and Saturdays” (Harris). In *The Toronto Star*, a travel writer describes her experiences of visiting Jaipur: “I went to the Galta gorge to see its temples and shrines and holy waters and the mischievous monkeys for which it is famous. I followed beautiful barefoot women in jewel-coloured saris stepping gingerly across the brambles. I walked all the way up to the Surya Temple in stupid shoes. A tilak was placed on my forehead. The sun was starting to set. The monkeys gambolled. I was the only Westerner in sight” (Wells). In these two accounts, the presence of monkeys indicates both the otherness of the place being investigated, *and* the otherness of the people who share space with them.
shared between human and nonhuman.

In the idea of disorderly multispecies living, postcolonial theory and animal studies are brought into contact. To examine these spaces of contact, I call on certain key ideas from both fields. While each chapter has unique theoretical influences dictated by its particular focus, I am indebted throughout to the ideas of subalternity articulated most usefully, for my purposes, by Dipesh Chakrabarty and Gayatri Spivak. Two of the guiding questions that emerge from both the literary and ethical interests in my work are: first, can the nonhuman animal be subaltern? And, second, if subalternity cuts across species boundaries, are there subaltern alliances to be forged in these intersectional spaces? Gayatri Spivak’s is probably the most famous definition of the concept of the subaltern, particularly because of her conclusion (since qualified but not reversed) that “the subaltern cannot speak” (308). There would seem to be no reason, necessarily, that the subaltern must be human, but Spivak herself never extends the term beyond the limits of the human species. It could be argued that the subaltern, bound up as it is with human constructs of caste and class, is a categorization that therefore cannot apply to the nonhuman animal. From my perspective, however, Spivak’s definition of the subaltern as a zone of otherness to some degree frees the concept of its anthropocentrism, while, at the same time, it holds fast to the important reminder of the operations of power that inheres in the term. It is thus in Spivak’s particular usage that we can identify how the nonhuman animal could be seen to be subaltern. Spivak writes, “It is not a mere tautology to say that the colonial or postcolonial subaltern is defined as being on the other side of difference,
or an epistemic fracture, even from other groupings among the colonized” (309). In this sentence, the “epistemic fracture” is an abyss that cannot be crossed. The subaltern is always known by her being unknowable, and so, in discourse (literary and academic alike), she is ventriloquized both as the unknowable and because she is unknowable. This epistemic fracture is particularly useful to authors of fiction; in fiction, the subaltern is instrumentalized as a technique of disturbance precisely because, as an epistemological category, it can be both an object of knowledge and one that resists knowledge. The epistemological category of the subaltern can thus be seen, through representation, to translate into an experience of objectification and instrumentalization. Spivak herself finds it useful to spatialize this idea in her definition, by suggesting that the subaltern is always on “the other side of difference.” It is therefore apposite to consider in what ways the imagination of space expresses this epistemology of difference, as it applies to nonhuman animals and to human subalters.20

In Spivak’s definition of the subaltern, the term “nonhuman animal” could easily be substituted for “colonial or postcolonial subaltern.” Semantically, this substitution is unproblematic — the sentence functions, logically, without interruption. But in real terms this substitution represents an enormous, and perhaps painful, ethical leap for Spivak’s theory; I recognize that it is a grave demand to ask my postcolonially-minded reader to admit its validity. What I want to suggest through this bait and switch is not that experiences of oppression — racialized and species-based — can be levelled, or that there is an absolute equivalency between them. Rather, I want to open up the idea that

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20 This is a particular focus in Chapter Four, which deals with constructions of spatial legitimacy and subaltern spaces in the urban context.
human subalterns and nonhuman animals occupy the same space in this sentence, though the implications of this syntactical space and the way it translates into lived experience are singular. There is no doubt that being on the other side of an “epistemic fracture” defines the position of the subaltern, and if this is our definition, then, by definition, nonhuman animals are also subaltern — they are also objects of knowledge and figures of the unknowable. Spivak argues that the human subject, as a category, is maintained as inaccessible to subalterns because there is no positive identity that can emerge from this zone of always-otherness. I want to expand Spivak’s ideas to argue that the category of the human — of positive identity — is also maintained as inaccessible to nonhuman animals, in a way that similarly forces them to inhabit a negative space of perpetual difference.21 One of the central investigations of this dissertation, then, is how subalternity indeed extends across species boundaries, and in what ways nonhuman animals can be and are subaltern. What seems productive to me about this recognition of nonhuman subalternity is that it may in turn promote recognition of shared interests among subalterns so that, rather than the interests of human subalterns and nonhuman animals being pitted against each other, as is often the case when resources are limited and survival is at stake, their interests can be seen as mutual — that is, their interest in the resistance to the ideologies and powers that place them in subaltern positions. In order for such resistance to take place, of course, we would need to recognize the possibility of the subaltern speaking — of the voicing of subaltern narratives — in a way that Spivak is

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21 It is this idea of subalternity as a space of otherness, drawn from Spivak, that leads me to use “subaltern” as an adjective to describe a state of being-other, at the same time that, as a noun, it can identify specific subaltern figures.
reluctant to do. It is in this respect that Chakrabarty’s ideas are useful. While Spivak despairs of subaltern speaking, Dipesh Chakrabarty seems to propose a provisional, fraught, difficult way of attending to subaltern narratives. He posits that by keeping the plurality of narratives open at all times, by dwelling in heterogeneity, historians can both reject the exceptionalism of one single dominant narrative, and also, while always critiquing their own position *vis à vis* non-dominant narratives, make room for the narration of “subaltern pasts” (*Provincializing* 112). Because of its particular concern with history as *narrative*, Chakrabarty’s claims are applicable and indeed important to the reading of the literary texts I analyze here, in which nonhuman animals inhabit a position of counternarrativity. I want to propose that Chakrabarty’s view that “history” can accommodate competing narratives also applies to the suppressed narratives of nonhuman animals. The passage from *Kanthapura* with which I began this introduction, for example, calls attention to the number of lives lived outside of, or on the margins of, texts. And yet the ever-present representations of nonhuman animals in Indian texts *do* open up at least the possibility of attending to these lives — the presence of nonhuman animals creates, in effect, a “Narrative 2” that works along with, and sometimes against, the dominant human narrative(s). In Chakrabarty’s model, “History 2s” undermine the claim to a singular narrative of history, a “History 1”

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22 The idea of nonhuman animal resistance may be a difficult one. Is casting animal behaviour as “resistance” to anthropomorphize it, and therefore to render it interpretable by human beings in a problematic and reductive way? I choose to foreground nonhuman animal resistance in part because of the tendency in advocacy discourse to suggest that animals are voiceless and therefore require humans to speak for them. In fact, animals resist their confinement, exploitation, and abuse all the time — they escape trucks bound for slaughterhouses, they kill or injure their trainers, they refuse to comply with commands. From my perspective, it is important to pay attention to this resistance, as resistance — as difficult as that idea might be — because it shows us how we might incorporate the forms of embodied speaking in which nonhuman animals engage into our interactions with them.
that is the homogeneous and linear time of capital; they are “not pasts separate from
capital; they inhere in capital and yet interrupt and punctuate the run of capital’s own
logic” (Provincializing 64). Through the course of his book, Chakrabarty shifts this
terminology into a discussion of “subaltern pasts”; though he does not extend this
discussion to nonhuman animals, it could clearly apply to the disavowal of nonhuman
animals’ experience of time. We need only think of the, on the face of it, ridiculous idea
of “dog years” — seven for every one human year — to see an example of the way that
the nonhuman temporality is forced into alignment with dominant modes of human
timekeeping and, by extension, of the narrativization of a life. Chakrabarty is not resistant
to incorporating the nonhuman into his model of subaltern pasts; he devotes a lot of
textual room to the consideration of religious or spiritual nonhumanity. He writes, “I take
gods and spirits to be existentially coeval with the human, and think from the assumption
that the question of being human involves the question of being with gods and
spirits” (Provincializing 16), but Chakrabarty, in this work, does not extend this
doevalness to earthly companions, to the idea of “being with” nonhuman animals.23

As Chakrabarty says in Provincializing Europe, his own discipline, history, “is a
subject that is primarily concerned with the crafting of narratives” (98). It is therefore
appposite to bring his ideas of the “unconquerable” (65) plurality of pasts to bear on works
of fictional and personal narrative. For Chakrabarty, the subaltern “fractures from within”
dominant narratives (94); the subaltern here can thus be seen as a device of interruption

23 In his more recent work on the Anthropocene, Chakrabarty has moved into a consideration of the
earthly nonhuman, namely environments, and to the new and simultaneous humanity and nonhumanity
of the human in the era of the Anthropocene. See “The Climate of History: Four Theses” and
“Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change.”
that calls attention to the limitations of discourse, rather than as a term that denotes the real or embodied “peasant or tribal” (94). But Chakrabarty is aware of the ethical problem that this usage of the subaltern as a figure of disturbance presents, even as he finds it a necessary strategy in exposing the complicity of even the most well-meaning and populist of academics attempting to unearth subaltern histories and restore them to the archive (here he has in mind Ranajit Guha and the historians of the Subaltern Studies Group).

Like this instrumentalized subaltern, nonhuman animals can also be used as devices; for example, animals appear as a deliberate textual strategy — as agents of generic disruption — in Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day*, discussed in Chapter Three. But, I argue, even when nonhuman animals are exploited as figures, the effect of their presence cannot entirely be contained or controlled by the texts. As Haraway argues, “figures have always been where the biological and literary or artistic come together with all the force of lived reality” (*When Species Meet* 4). In one way, then, nonhuman animals inhabit the shifting space of subalternity as Spivak defines it, and their instrumentalization in texts is a mark of their always-otherness. At the same time, Chakrabarty offers a way to consider nonhuman animal beings as allied with human subalterns in the “irreducible plurality” of their narratives (*Provincializing* 108), and, although the effort is difficult and risky, his model suggests that alternate narratives might find space for expression, and that a way of forming mutual relations between

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24 The risk and difficulty of approaching History 2s is redoubled in the consideration of nonhuman animal narratives; appropriation and overwriting by hegemonic narratives, dangers that are ever present in any discussion of human History 2s, threaten even more in the context of the barriers of language and culture between human and nonhuman animals.
Narrative or History 2s — however uneven — might also be possible.

Chakrabarty’s concept of the “timeknot,” an object that exposes the simultaneous existence of multiple histories — “the plurality that inheres in the ‘now’” (Provincializing 243) — and disrupts the idea of teleological temporality, is reminiscent of similarly knotted images used by Donna Haraway,25 whose work is not only referenced in my title, but also animates many of my textual analyses throughout this dissertation. I am indebted to her attentive readings of different forms of contact between human and nonhuman animals, including companionate relationships, transfective encounters, and patriarchal-colonial taxidermy. Haraway is able to propose a type of relationality between human and nonhuman in which both (or multiple) parties are co-constituting, and in which the relationship is mutual, if always contingent and subject to imbalances. This model of mutuality is an important correction to the idea that any relationship between human and nonhuman must necessarily be one-sided, human-imposed, and coercive. While I am skeptical of human efforts to master, contain, and anthropocentrically interpret interactions with nonhuman animals, I also want to hold open the possibility of mutuality in contacts between human and nonhuman, as Haraway does. What Haraway’s ideas manage to do, in effect, is to open the space for responsiveness to one another, and her belief in the responsiveness of nonhuman animals is an important assertion of their capacity for self-determination. Like Haraway, I want to avoid the pitfall of consigning the animal to a fate of continuous and interminable exploitability — in both representation and embodied life — by believing in and

25 Such as, for example, her image of “Jim’s Dog” (When Species Meet 4-7).
respecting their responsiveness and, by extension, their resistance, even if their experiences of responsiveness and resistance remain, to a certain extent, opaque to us. Nonhuman animal autonomy, like human autonomy, lies in this interplay between communicability and opacity, between what is open and what is closed, in every individual subject and in every intersubjective relationship.26

In addition, Haraway’s concept of “ordinary multispecies living” is explicitly associated with the kind of subaltern alliances that I explore in this dissertation. She links this mode of “becoming with” with forms of alternative globalization that contest “militarized neoliberal models of world building” (When Species Meet 3). Haraway writes, “[t]here is a promising autre-mondialisation to be learned in retying some of the knots of ordinary multispecies living on earth” (When Species Meet 3). For Haraway, autre-mondialisation is not a celebratory term for globalization that provides an alibi for global capitalist and military interests; rather, as in the example she quotes from Beatriz Preciado about French bulldogs, art, sex work, and lesbian culture in fin de siècle Paris (When Species Meet 303-304 note 1), ordinary multispecies living is about alliances that cut across divisions — not only of species, but also, in this example, of gender — in order to create rich and promising forms of lived political action. Throughout this dissertation, I will demonstrate how such multispecies contact zones do, in fact, contest

26 There is certainly a claim to be made that we simply don’t understand animals, and in admitting their otherness we respect their autonomy. I want, however, to distance myself somewhat from this perspective, in part because I believe that there are moments when we do understand other animals, and in part because this understanding is so often disavowed in the service of continued human exploitation: we see this disavowal in, for example, the refusal to recognize nonhuman animal familial and emotional bonds that allows calves to be taken from their mothers right after birth, or in the denial of animal pain that allows the perpetuation of abuse and slaughter. There is a balance to be struck between respecting the unknowability of nonhuman animals as a form of autonomy and acknowledging what we can know of them so as not to provide an alibi for the singular pursuit of human interests.
the dominant narratives of nationhood, globalization, and capital, and suggest the already-present subaltern alliances among species and their potential power.

Haraway’s readings of animal-human contacts do, however, often lean towards their redemptive and/or emancipatory potential in a way that is important and joyful, but also limits to a certain extent their applicability to postcolonial contexts. There is little attention in Haraway’s work, for example, to the kinds of embodied violence that might occur in a meeting between two species-differentiated vulnerable bodies (like the meetings between leopards and humans that I discuss in Chapter Four). With this in mind, I often turn to Nicole Shukin, who is herself indebted to Haraway, but who is more explicit in her engagement with the structures of exploitative power that govern the lives of nonhuman animals, particularly in industrialized contexts. In her work on zoonotic pandemics, mentioned above, Shukin opens up the postcolonial and racialized implications of discourses of hygiene related to a separation between animal and human. In this dissertation, I use the concept of subalternity to expand on the kinds of connections that Shukin draws — to recognize the types of violence that stem not only directly from exploitative power, but also from the way that power positions species against one another — and also to imagine provisional, delicate, fleeting forms of alliance that might emerge even out of contexts in which the interests of humans are seemingly directly opposed to those of nonhuman animals.

I use these concepts of subalternity and mutual relation to analyze an admittedly limited range of Indian texts, particularly insofar as they all deal with primarily Hindu contexts. There are several reasons for this limitation. I want to confront the particular
overdetermination of nonhuman animals in Anglophone Hindu contexts; the animal, here, is burdened with many and contradictory meanings, as will be evident in the chapters. Arguably, this is true of any representation of nonhuman animals, but I am particularly interested in the framework of Hindu India because animals, in these texts, are so often read for their religious significance to the exclusion of all other possible meanings.

Hinduism, however, also prescribes modes of embodied relation between human and nonhuman animals as part of an ethical and spiritual life. This dissertation will examine how these particular symbolic and embodied resonances come to bear upon one another in literary texts, and how dominant ideas about nonhuman animals are under pressure from changing contexts, such as urbanization and the industrialization of agriculture.

Additionally, as I discuss in more detail in the chapters, colonial oppression and anticolonial resistance often took place over the bodies of nonhuman animals, whether the question was whether or not to eat them, or where to place them in the landscape while also accounting for human spatial claims, and this colonial coercion was often attuned to particularly Hindu ideas about animals. In the postcolonial context, these Hindu ideas have remained preeminent— for example, in the fact that cow protection was written into the Indian constitution. The problematic dominance of these ideas is all the more important in light of the current mainstream acceptance of aspects of Hindu nationalism, and also the uncomfortable but undeniable association of animal rights and welfare discourse in India with Hindu nationalist ideas.  

27 In January 2014, for example, the BJP-led government of Rajasthan vowed to establish the country’s first “Cow Ministry,” devoted entirely to bovine protection in the state (Patel and Dutta). Cow protection has also been important to the Modi government (Dalal). All of this rhetoric is, of course, belied by the actual treatment of cows in India, which is the second largest exporter of beef in the world (“Beef exporter confidence returns in India”).
context of caste-based and Hindu-Muslim conflicts, in which the eating of meat is a source of tension and is also used as a justification for violent repression (as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Two), and for the future of India as it comes to terms with shifts in its social, cultural, and economic makeup. This focus on Hindu-inflected texts also helps to challenge the assumptions about “other cultures” often relied upon by animal studies, since Hinduism is sometimes taken unproblematically as a religion and culture that respects nonhuman animal life. My analysis looks closely at this particular frame of representation, but its conclusions can be expanded into the examination of other contexts of disorderly multispecies living. The literature that I analyze in these chapters represents the way texts, and societies, can at one time hold multiple and contradictory ideas of the worth of nonhuman animals and their place in the world. These texts are a rich ground in which to examine the intersection of postcolonial and animal studies because they provide space for animals and humans to meet one another in a way that offers opportunities to contest both postcolonial humanism and posthuman westernism.

Each of my chapters in this dissertation considers a physical and conceptual zone of proximity between human and nonhuman beings; these are spaces, in both material and metaphorical senses, that are necessarily multispecies. They all represent disorderly multispecies living, making room for improper touch and unhygienic mixing, and opening the avenues for subaltern alliances. Each chapter takes up a location of multispecies contact that is both discursively and materially fraught, and considers the political and ethical stakes of representing these locations. My first chapter looks at the
literal division of land into human space and animal space through the discourse and practice of conservation, as represented in Jim Corbett’s *Man-eaters of Kumaon*, Anuradha Roy’s *The Folded Earth*, and Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*. Conservation of wildlife was an important initiative of the British colonial administration, and also an immediate preoccupation of the postcolonial state, for which the reservation of space for wildlife was a statement of stewardship over the independent land. Focusing on the representative figure of the tiger, I consider the way that these texts negotiate the colonial roots of the discourse of conservation, as well as its more contemporary implications in relation to the spatial legitimacy of populations of “conserved” animals and subaltern human beings. The texts that I examine in this chapter, in their representation of conservation, engage in boundary-setting between animal and human space. At the same time, they depend on transgressions of those boundaries for moments of transformation in their protagonists, and for their affective force. In order to negotiate this paradoxical relationship to the border between animal and human, these texts utilize what I call conservationist figures — figures who are not necessarily literal conservationists, but who are invested in preserving or conserving the boundaries between animal and human, at the same time that they enjoy the special privilege to transgress those boundaries. In each text, these figures possess this privilege particularly in contradistinction to human subalterns, who are, by contrast, under threat from nonhuman animals who trespass into human space, flouting the borders established by conservation.

Jim Corbett’s collection of hunting tales, *Man-eaters of Kumaon*, represents a perspective that harnesses land and interspecies interactions to late colonial anxieties
about mastery and masculinity. In these stories, Corbett negotiates the instability of the white male subject position in this period of the breakdown of empire through continual and repetitive acts of self-making in encounters with “man-eating” tigers. This fragmented form of autobiography bears witness not only to Corbett’s negotiation of identity, but also to his transition from hunter to conservationist, and to the rigidification of boundaries that occurs through this shift. In her novel *The Folded Earth*, Anuradha Roy, writing in direct reference to Corbett and about the same landscape, charts the change in ideas about conservation and the relationship between wildlife and humanity from Corbett’s hunting stories to his later reinvention of himself as a conservationist. In many ways, *The Folded Earth* is a novel about Corbett’s legacy, both explicitly, in that a biography of Corbett is the life’s work of one of the major characters, and implicitly: Roy’s protagonist is walking the same paths as Corbett, and engaging in similar reflections on the relationship between nature and humanity. This novel, full of interspecies encounters, is conspicuously marked by the absence of the tiger, an absence that expresses the failure of the spatial imagination on which Corbett ultimately settled — the idea that human and animal spaces should be separate, and that interaction between species should be surveilled and controlled. Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* offers another contemporary examination of the legacies of colonial conservation, but this text’s vision of its location, the Sundarbans region of Bengal, is one imbued with disillusionment about what conservation has become in the postcolonial context, not because of the failure of conservation to protect nonhuman animals, as in Roy’s novel, but because of its failure to privilege the interests of subaltern human beings. The ethic of
Ghosh’s novel is based on the recognition of the human. It is an unabashed work of postcolonial humanism that represents conservation and environmentalism as oppressive of subaltern populations. The protagonists and conservationist figures, Piya, a biologist, and Kanai, a translator, come from worlds of privilege outside of the Sundarbans, and their positions are developed in contrast to Fokir, the central subaltern character, whom the novel instrumentalizes as a textual device for the transformation of its protagonists at the same time that it continually asserts his essential humanity. The novel depends for its most dramatic transformative moments, however, on two encounters with tigers that radically shift Piya and Kanai’s perspectives on the ethics of their position in the Sundarbans. The novel utilizes these encounters as tools for the self-(re)fashioning of the characters, and thus these encounters facilitate the entire development of the narrative. The tiger, however, disappears from the story; the ethical redemption that the end of Ghosh’s novel offers quite literally has no room for tigers.

My second chapter complicates the discussion of literal space in the first chapter by considering the way the body itself can be imagined as a space of both multispecies contact and subaltern political agency. Looking at moments of coerced carnivory, this chapter examines the representation of vegetarianism as a political practice that imagines the nation as a multispecies entity in two texts: M.K. Gandhi’s autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* and Vikram Chandra’s novel *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*. Beginning with a brief discussion of *Lagaan*, a film that expresses a millennial nostalgia for an idealized form of Gandhian resistance, I reconsider the Gandhian idea of *ahimsa*, or nonharming, as an ideological thread that connects the individual practice of
vegetarianism to the idea of the nation itself, and to a larger conception of ethical relationships between human and nonhuman animals in both culture and politics. Drawing on Carol J. Adams’s *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, I look at meat-eating as one kind of interspecies encounter (66); however, I also nuance Adams’s reading of non-Western vegetarianism as a manifestation of a culture that is more respectful and compassionate to nonhuman animals (54, 91). The power relations that inform eating practices in India are different from those that Adams discusses, as is the physical proximity of human with nonhuman animals. In this context, the privilege with which vegetarianism is endowed can be oppressive, and carnivory can be an assertion of egalitarianism. This chapter is interested in the connection that Adams’s phrase “the texts of meat” (26) draws between literary and cultural representation and meat as a form of coercive power; it considers the way that Gandhi and Chandra revise and resist colonial texts of meat by representing the body as a space that houses the potential for a lived resistant politics, one that refuses to ingest animals in order to make room for animals in the body politic of the nation. These political commitments become clear in the “vegetarian interruptions” (Carol J. Adams 163) that occur periodically in both texts.

I offer a new reading of Gandhi’s autobiography that discusses his vegetarianism not as a fad or a strange obsession, extraneous to his political ideas, but rather takes it seriously as something that is central to the politics of *Satyagraha*. Gandhi’s dietary practices, far from being mere eccentricities, form a bodily politics that endow the individual with political agency. This fact is particularly important in a movement that seeks to motivate mass grass-roots resistance among people who have little to no access
to the institutions of political power. As in Rao’s *Kanthapura*, in Gandhi’s work we see an effort to connect elite nationalist discourses with the real constituency for the independence movement: the larger and non-privileged population of British India. But, much more than Rao, Gandhi’s writing about vegetarianism, coupled with his representation of encounters with nonhuman animals, imagines the nation as a multispecies space. Since, and even during, Gandhi’s time, however, his ideas have been coopted and manipulated for the justification of oppression and violence, particularly in caste-based and anti-Muslim conflicts. This appropriation of Gandhian *ahimsa* has reaffirmed the perception that vegetarianism is an elite practice, and the idea that to privilege it is to perpetuate oppressive hierarchies and totalizing ideologies. Vikram Chandra’s *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* reimagines a narrative of nationhood from a position of postcolonial disillusionment; it explicitly critiques the ideas of “oneness” that are inherent in Gandhian thought, offering instead a kind of hybridity that also makes room in the nation, and in the text, for nonhuman animals. Like Gandhi’s autobiography, Chandra’s novel positions vegetarianism as a resistant practice, and locates the roots of resistance in moments of coerced meat-eating, but, in this text, the practices of bodily purification so stressed by Gandhi are transformed into a kind of terror. This chapter examines the way that these two forms of resistant vegetarianism offer different visions of the space of the nation, and of the body as a space that can foster political resistance.

Building on the ideas of nationhood and postcolonial disillusionment raised in Chapter Two, Chapter Three asks, for whom is the home a home and, by extension, for whom is the *nation* a home, by thinking through companionate relationships in Anita
Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* and R.K. Narayan’s *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. Using Donna Haraway’s concept of “significant otherness” (*Companion Species* 16), this chapter expands the definition of the category “companion animal” to include all those nonhuman animals with whom humans share living space. Through this lens, I am able to offer a new way of reading two canonical English Indian novels. Both texts are haunted by the effort to enforce absolute partitions; as a result, nonhuman animals function as the spectres of post-Partition, postcolonial disillusionment. Companion species thus create companion narratives within the texts, working counter to or in parallel with the dominant human narratives; this mirrors the way that “subaltern pasts” or Narrative 2s work counter to or in parallel with the dominant narratives of Indian nation-building. In critical evaluations, both of these novels are restricted to certain limited generic definitions, but, in both, nonhuman animals are instrumentalized as agents of narrative and generic disturbance; they trouble from within the dominant representational modes of the texts. Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* deals implicitly with the political context of its narrative: Independence and Partition in its flashbacks, and the Emergency period in its present tense. Spatially, the narrative is largely restricted to a single home, that over the course of the novel becomes a kind of sanctuary for what I call the spectres of the nation — those who are both instrumentalized and excluded by the elite narrative of the Independence movement and, later, of the postcolonial nation, including women (particularly widows), disabled men, and nonhuman animals. The house, in which human and nonhuman spaces are not demarcated, thus makes room for the Narrative 2s of nationhood, as the nonhuman animals themselves constitute Narrative 2s for the novel
that challenge the narrative control of its focalizing characters. With this connection
between narrative exclusions, counternarratives, and nonhuman animals in mind, I turn to
R.K. Narayan’s *The Man-eater of Malgudi*, in which the animals that share space with the
protagonist — and his antagonist — are in fact animal corpses. The novel is the story of a
peace-loving printer whose individual and communal life is disturbed by the violent
intrusion of a taxidermist. The political critique in Narayan’s novel is much more veiled
than that in Desai’s; although the narrative is preoccupied with partitions, the context of
Partition remains a backdrop that is obliquely suggested, rather than a context with which
the text actively engages. But Narayan uses the novel itself as a taxidermic form,
preserving a version of the nation that is “lifelike” but, ultimately, reductive. As the novel
critiques the taxidermist’s work as an exercise in control, it exposes the connection
between taxidermy and text as art forms that attempt to contain what they represent, and
whose objects are always escaping those efforts at containment.

Turning to new narratives of the nation in the context of global capital, my fourth
and final chapter examines the contemporary moment and the connections between
species and subalternity in the urban context, in order to expose the similarly taxidermic
nature of triumphalist capitalist narratives. I explore the new frontiers of animal
geography that suggest that non-companion nonhuman animals should be recognized and
accommodated in the urban space, where their presence has previously been disavowed.
This chapter works to redefine the imaginative geography of the city in order to conceive
of urban space as multispecies space, and to discover in this spatial transfection the
potential for cross-species subaltern alliances. In the first part of this chapter, I look at
another work of postcolonial humanism, Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*. Through a continual deployment of animal metaphors, this novel uses a discourse of animalization to expose the human consequences of India’s emergence as a global capitalist power; as a result, it is not a text that is particularly interested in nonhuman animals themselves, but rather in an insistence on the proper distinction between human and nonhuman, both spatially and ontologically. Like other texts I have already discussed, however, *The White Tiger* depends for its most transformative and affectively charged moments on encounters with nonhuman animals — most particularly the encounter between the protagonist, Balram Halwai, and a white tiger in the Delhi Zoo. This encounter occurs outside the register of identification, and suggests a transfection that can open a space of multispecies subaltern alliances. In the end, however, the novel contains this potential and disavows the power of the incident by displacing the transformative power of the tiger encounter onto the murder of Balram’s employer. The narrative concludes with an emphatic insistence that modern capitalism is an animalizing force, and that, in the contemporary urban context, the sanctity of the human is under threat. The second section of this chapter turns to the case of Sanjay Gandhi National Park, a protected forest, in the middle of Mumbai, that houses a large population of wild leopards. These leopards come into conflict with humans in the informal settlements that surround the park, resulting in both human and leopard deaths. I examine the way that journalistic rhetoric, in the news reports about these leopards and their attacks on humans, tries to re-place animals and subalterns in its construction of Mumbai as a modern city. This rhetoric exposes the ways that spatial belonging is constructed in the modern urban context, and brings to light the
dangerous but tenacious tendency to disavow the multispecies nature of the contemporary city.

Pandian writes: “[p]ursued by means of such unexpected kinships, postcolonial freedom appears less as a path to becoming human in any one sense, and more as a possibility of inhabiting the animal — in multiple, overlapping, and inconsistent ways” (140). Like the narrative of Rao’s *Kanthapura*, the subaltern narratives that Pandian documents and interprets come from a village setting, with its complex social structure, as well as its multilayered and historically-shaped narrative forms. But instead of writing about nonhuman animals that inhabit the space of the village — and that thus must be included, if only at the margins of the story — Pandian writes about the ways that villagers inhabit their own animality, and claim a kind of power by doing so. This is a kind of subaltern alliance, where the resistance of the nonhuman animal provides a model for forms of human subaltern speaking. Pandian’s idea that the human might “inhabit” the animal also spatializes the question of species belonging and multispecies identity in an important way. It exposes the fact that the spaces in which human and nonhuman encounter one another are not just literal — not just the space of the village, for example — but also conceptual, discursive, and potentially transgressive. Pandian offers a way of thinking about space and the way that different beings live inside one another that reflects back onto Rao’s vision of the village, and suggests that nonhuman animals can inhabit texts, and texts can inhabit animality, in ways that are both unexpected and rich with interpretive and political potential. But Pandian’s phrase also suggests that “postcolonial
freedom” is only a matter of concern for the human, and that humans can “inhabit
animality,” but that the reverse cannot necessarily occur; in his sense, then, inhabiting
one’s animality is a form of appropriation of the nonhuman animal, rather than a form of
relation. In this project, I want to open up a kind of postcolonial freedom for nonhuman
animals as well, even as their bodies and habitats are increasingly colonized. I do this by
giving attention to the ways they inhabit the texts in which they appear, and the textual
and material spaces in which they dwell, and by noting the instances when they insist on
their own presence — instances when their actions are a form of subaltern speaking or
Narrative 2, as in the moment of collective vocalization in Kanthapura.

As an example of such subaltern speaking, I want to turn now to the “Robin
Hood” monkeys of Shimla. As their populations grow, monkeys are frequently
interpreted as agents of disorder in India, who frustrate efforts at capture and control. As
one reporter writes, “[s]tories abound in Delhi of monkeys’ entering homes, ripping out
wiring, stealing clothes and biting those who surprise them. They treat the Indian
Parliament building as a playground, have invaded the prime minister’s office and
Defense Ministry, sometimes ride buses and subway trains, and chase diplomats from
their well-tended gardens” (Wells). This account (perhaps unintentionally) represents
these monkeys as a joyously anarchic force, whose disorderly way of inhabiting the
cityscape can be read as a narrative of resistance to human government, institutions,
property, and spatial control. This is a textual reading of their actions, that seeks to
interpret them from a human perspective and instrumentalizes them as resistant figures,
but it is also a reading that refuses to disavow their presence; this balance will be
important to all of my readings in this dissertation. My project will be to negotiate between textual interpretation — how texts are using nonhuman animals — and the desire to respect their otherness and uninterpretability.

In February and September of 2014, monkeys stole large bags of cash from inside buildings in the town of Shimla, the capital of Himachal Pradesh. On both occasions, the monkeys proceeded to throw bills from rooftops and trees until the bags were empty; each time, this activity lasted for over an hour, according to human passersby who followed the monkeys to collect the money they threw. The moniker “Robin Hood” is of course an anthropomorphism; we cannot determine whether these monkeys intended to effect a redistribution of wealth with their actions. One story suggests that the monkey in the second incident had entered a construction site looking for food (“‘Robin Hood’ monkey showers Indian town with cash”). In what way, then, can these actions be interpreted as forms of subaltern speaking, or Narrative 2, if their narrative must in fact remain opaque to the human interpreter? First, these actions are profoundly disruptive. They introduce a disorderly and unpredictable force into the operation of capital. In the second incident, the monkey grabbed a bag of cash that was meant to be distributed as wages to construction workers and scattered it into the street, thus totally bewildering the logic of capitalist exchange. The monkeys created an “ecstatic” frenzy in the humans below them (Seghal), as if these people were incapacitated by the monkeys’ actions — as if, in fact, they were divested of their supposedly constitutive human rationality. Finally, these incidents are a powerful assertion of presence. Like the nonhuman animals who suddenly give voice to their presence in Kanthapura, the actions of the Robin Hood
monkeys are a statement of their very bodily existence, in a context in which they might be ignored or disavowed. These monkeys, like Kanthapura’s animals, briefly turn the tables on the dominant human narrative of life in their town. As a result, it doesn’t matter that we cannot read the text of the monkeys’ actions; in fact, the unreadability of these actions may render them even more powerful as Narrative 2s, since they ultimately reject appropriation, at least by the careful reader. Instead, we have only to see them as acts of disorderly resistance — since the monkeys, by their assertion of presence, resist their disavowal. In their actions, the money-throwing monkeys of Shimla insist on their presence and their autonomy, and they can thus be seen to inhabit a powerful kind of postcolonial freedom, a freedom that inheres in the idea of disorderly multispecies living.
2. The Wild: Tracking Tigers in the Discourse of Conservation

2.1. Introduction

Through their resistance, the “Robin Hood” monkeys of Shimla briefly inhabit a kind of multispecies postcolonial freedom.28 The very fact of their bodily presences makes a spatial claim: they are present in this supposedly human space, and, by virtue of their presence, they introduce disorder into anthropocentric ideas of spatial belonging. This chapter examines one way that spatial legitimacy with regard to species has historically been constructed in India: the theory and practice of wildlife conservation. Conservation — the selective preservation and protection of species and their habitats from human exploitation — functions to reify the idea that animal and human spaces can and should be separate. Working against the reality of ordinary multispecies living, conservation creates and enforces boundaries that are designed to keep human and nonhuman animals apart, and to limit interspecies encounters for all but a select few. Conservation theory thus works on the principle that any contact between human and nonhuman animals and humans must be rigorously managed; reserved space for animals allows this management philosophy to control the lives and life cycles of individual animals, as well as entire species (Sinha).

In this chapter, I look at the representation of conservation in three texts that share an interest in the transgression of boundaries between animal and human spaces and bodies, but have otherwise diverse approaches to the breaching and eventual enforcement

28 Here I mean “freedom” in the sense that Pandian evokes (as discussed in my Introduction) — as something that is perhaps fleeting and contingent, and is a site of potential rather than a fully-realized state of being.
of those boundaries. The first section analyzes the conversation between colonial-era naturalist and hunter Jim Corbett’s *Man-eaters of Kumaon* with a recent revisitation of Corbett’s role in and influence upon the imagination of nature in India, Anuradha Roy’s *The Folded Earth*. The second section examines the place of the tiger in the resolutely humanist ethical vision of Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*. While Corbett’s text is generically different from Roy’s and Ghosh’s, both in that it is a memoir and in that it is composed of short vignettes, rather than an extended narrative, it shares with *The Folded Earth* and *The Hungry Tide* a preoccupation with multispecies spaces, and the potential that these spaces offer for the self-fashioning of the human. Each of these texts engages, consciously or unconsciously, with the privileged position of the conservationist. By conservationist, I mean not only someone who is actively engaged with the cause of species protection; rather, I want to expand the meaning of the term, to suggest someone who is deeply invested in the boundaries between human and animal space as necessary and beneficial to both sides. At the same time, the conservationist is someone who enjoys — either by seeking it actively or by accident — the privileged position of the boundary-crossover. In each text, the human conservationist is brought into contact with the nonhuman animal, and these moments of contact are foundational to the ethical and emotional mechanics of the texts. If, as I suggest, moments of interspecies contact are necessary and yet excessive to the ideologies of conservation presented in these texts, the conservationist is a figure who must be examined: what is the source of her privilege? Why is this person the chosen exception to the enforcement of spatial and species boundaries?
These encounters are manifestations of disorderly multispecies living, in that they unsettle the idea, so central to the discourse of conservation, that human and nonhuman animals can exist in totally separated spaces. Instead, these encounters suggest, it is impossible to impose such order on how interspecies meetings occur and in what locations. These texts use such encounters as representational tools, to introduce moments of transformation into their narratives, and in this way they attempt to fold the ethical and aesthetic potential of multispecies living back into their own forms of textual order. While these moments of encounter may be disorderly to the way conservation imagines space, the figures chosen to experience this disorder — namely, those characters who are most normative in terms of Western modernity — function to reify the hygienic separation of nonhuman from human animals. In this way, the crossing of boundaries is also a confirmation of boundaries, but a confirmation that always holds within it the memory of the crossing. It is impossible for the texts fully to contain the disorder they themselves introduce into the idea of species-differentiated spatial boundaries.

As the human population of India has expanded, the conflict between human development and animal conservation has grown to seem intractable. Living space is necessarily at a premium, and advocates for subaltern human beings are often involved in direct spatial contestation with advocates for the conservation of nonhuman animals. Conservation suggests that nonhuman animals need space that allows them to exist in static suspension. This is precious, “inviolate” territory (Thapar The Last Tiger 161) in which nonhuman animals can be conserved, separated, and protected from the constant threat of annihilation. As Chhatre and Saberwal note, conservation in India is also
dominated by the idea that reserved lands are, through that process of reservation, returned to and maintained in “an earlier pristine condition” (213); conservation thus denies the culturally and historically constructed nature of its values (213). This narrative of return is crucial to the postcoloniality of conservation, since it offers the fantasy that, in these spaces, the period of colonization and its effects can be erased. Postcolonial conservation in India represents a strong statement of national ownership over the land: the way that conservation worked to construct spatial legitimacy in the post-Independence period in turn reinforced the legitimacy of the nation itself, and of the national government. The national policy of conservation (in contrast to, for example, a state-by-state policy) represented one way of constructing and legitimizing the idea of India as a unified and autonomous nation. But, paradoxically, conservation in India has deep colonial roots. As Adams and Mulligan argue, conservation “has reflected the complexity of the overlapping agendas of colonialism and decolonization” (“Conclusions” 292). The colonial history of conservation is thus imbricated with conservation as it exists today.

The history of conservation in India is bound to the history of hunting, as John M. MacKenzie traces in *The Empire of Nature*. MacKenzie makes a persuasive case for hunting as “part of the culture of imperialism” (ix); not only was hunting an important form of conceptual dominance over the colonized, but it also developed as an integral form of spatial control. This spatial control bled into the earliest manifestations of conservation, which were based on the restriction of access to land and to nonhuman animals (MacKenzie ix). From its inception, conservation served the interests of colonial
capital in reserving land for European exploitation and enjoyment. As an example, William M. Adams notes the establishment of the Forest Department in 1864, which created the first forest reserves in India; these reserves were earmarked for the production of timber for the European market ("Nature and the Colonial Mind" 26). Similarly, the first reservations for nonhuman animals were actually “shooting blocks” which restricted hunting access to Europeans and Indian elites (Saberwal and Rangarajan “Introduction” 5). The goal of these shooting blocks was the protection of animals as “game,” rather than the preservation of species or ecosystems (MacKenzie 201).

Postcolonial conservation is rooted in these exploitative and exclusionary colonial reservations in both literal and conceptual ways. After Independence, many of the former shooting blocks were converted, via bureaucratic and legal redefinition, into national parks (Saberwal and Ragarajan “Introduction” 5; MacKenzie 289). Even more important to the concerns of this chapter, however, is the influence of colonial ideas about nonhuman animals on postcolonial conservation. Adams argues that “[t]he classic feature of colonial approaches to nature was the attempt to separate people and wild non-human nature” (“Nature and the Colonial Mind” 39). Similarly, MacKenzie suggests that both colonial hunting and colonial conservation engaged in “the separation of human and animal worlds” (22). This idea of spatial separation between human and nonhuman animals carried over into postcolonial conservation, which worked towards an organized and regimented boundary-setting. Conservation had become part of the Independent government’s five-year-plans by the 1950s, and by the 1970s, MacKenzie argues, “[i]t became obvious […] that the Indian government was anxious to establish itself as a
leader of international conservation” (291). These efforts culminated in the Wild Life (Protection) Act of 1972, and the creation of a nationwide network of national parks, alongside a nationwide framework with which to administer them. This act is still in place today, and still governs the way the Indian state manages the division of space into human and animal zones.

Actual spatial boundaries and their enforcement are thus central to the theory and practice of conservation. Literary texts that engage with conservation issues, however, often anchor their representation in moments of transgression of these boundaries between human and animal spaces. These texts also transgress the limits of discipline to engage with the cultural, scientific, and historical meanings of nonhuman animals. Michael Lewis, a scientist, writes that “[c]onservation biology is a science born at the intersection of science and the humanities” (204), a fact that makes representation key to understanding conservationist perspectives. Conservationists necessarily engage in representation when they perform any kind of advocacy; they choose particular species and particular spaces for their affective value, and in this way conservationists’ accounts of their own work cross into literary territory. This crossover is very often to be found, for example, in the elegiac tone that conservationists adopt. In a personal interview conducted in 2011, prominent Indian conservationist Valmik Thapar declared, “[m]y mission with the tiger is a failure.” Elsewhere, he represents the tiger as a figure of the sublime: “The tiger overwhelms me. I know nothing else” (qtd. in Sridhar). Similarly, Dale Miquelle captures the emotion with which conservationists perceive the connection between human and tiger: “If we can’t save the most magnificent animal on earth, how
can we save ourselves? I don’t believe the tiger’s case is hopeless. [...] At least it’s no more hopeless than our own” (qtd. in Ward 288). The tiger as it appears here is a figure of terrible beauty and terrible loss, and the elegiac tone of conservationists stems, at least in part, from a central question: what does the human become in a world without animals? It is part of the paradox of conservation that the response to this anxiety about the loss of nonhuman animals is to introduce increasing rigidity into the boundaries between human and animal spaces, as conservation seeks to contain — and through this containment to protect — animals.

In tension with this rigid boundary-setting is the fact that, in texts that engage with conservation — both nonfictional and fictional — moments of interspecies encounter lend aesthetic force and ethical gravity to the representation of the struggles and conflicts related to species conservation. These are moments that are necessary for the texts to function, both structurally and thematically. At the same time, however, these moments of meeting cause disorder in the postcolonial humanism of these writings. Interspecies contacts exist in a supplementary relation to the boundaries enforced by the idea of conservation: this contact is necessary to establish the need for and value of separate animal spaces, and yet it cannot be supported within an ideological framework that seeks to divide the animal from the human in physical space. This spatial division depends, paradoxically, on the affective connection created by disorderly meetings that transgress conservation’s own spatial boundaries. The way that both literary texts about conservation and conservation movements themselves deal with this uncomfortable relationship is to route interspecies contacts through the privileged figure of the
conservationist: an individual who is exceptional, and who enjoys acts of transgression that are not meant for everyone else. Valmik Thapar describes himself as “very privileged” to have enjoyed contact with tigers that is unavailable to most (personal interview). At the same time, Thapar insists that “[t]he tiger’s livelihood is dependent on the absence of people,” by whom he means “forest dwellers” (The Last Tiger 163), rather than conservationists. Other prominent conservationists echo this sentiment (Sinha; Sen). But the privilege of the conservationist is akin to that previously enjoyed by the white British hunter, when the reserves that would eventually become national parks were first established. Thapar himself comes from a wealthy and socially prominent family. I met him in his mansion in the Chanakyapuri neighbourhood of Delhi, set among embassies, expensive private schools, and luxury hotels. This is not to diminish his importance as an advocate, but rather to suggest that, as the texts this chapter examines will show, the position of privilege occupied by the conservationist is also bound up with privileges related to colonial and capitalist power, race, and gender. These privileged figures stand in opposition to the subaltern human beings — such as the “forest dwellers” — whose spatial legitimacy is in conflict with nonhuman animals, and whose species identity is, according to human-nonhuman hierarchization, uncertain; the joys of transgression seemingly belong only to those few who are most secure within the normative boundaries that define the human.

Chapter IVB of The Wild Life (Protection) Act of 1972 established the National Tiger Conservation Authority. A year later, the Indira Gandhi government launched Project Tiger, a national initiative that would work in tandem with the internationally-
funded Operation Tiger, which, under the aegis of the World Wildlife Fund, raised $1,800,000 in 1969 alone (MacKenzie 291). As MacKenzie observes, it is ironic that the preoccupation with killing tigers that “had been seen as an imperial obligation and vital social rite of British India” was, under the independent state, “transformed into the rescue of the tiger as a symbol of the independence and environmental awareness of modern India” (291). It is in part because of this interesting shift, suggesting both transformation and continuity, that this chapter focuses largely on texts that represent encounters between tigers and humans. Tigers, with their undeniable charisma, present one of the greatest gifts to the cause of the Indian conservation movement. At the same time, their need for vast territories, and the resulting and inevitable conflicts with human communities, create one of India’s greatest conservation challenges. In terms of its representational significance, the tiger has never been absent from the iconography of power in India, whether that power has been that of the Mughal Empire, the British Raj, the postcolonial democratic state, or the so-called tiger economy of the twenty-first century. It is with these multiple valences in tow that contemporary writers approach the figure of the tiger; its overdetermination, from the outset, creates an uncomfortable and ungovernable figure of representational excess within the literary text. The contemporary tiger has also taken on a particular environmental significance: the health of the tiger is metonymic for the health of India’s forests and, by extension, for the health of India’s human population (Sinha). As the elegiac tone adopted by Thapar, Miquelle, and other conservationists suggests, the vanishing of the wild tiger is an indication of deep crisis,
both emotional and environmental, in the relationship between human and nonhuman animal beings.

The theory of conservation presents itself as an ethic to govern interspecies relationships; it intervenes in warring demands for space made by human and nonhuman animal populations by declaring some space as belonging to the animal and the rest, de facto, as belonging to the human. My intention here is not to suggest that theories of conservation are scientifically flawed, or that efforts towards protection of land and species take an incorrect approach; rather, I want to investigate some of the rhetorics of conservation in India in order to problematize the absolute division of space proposed in the setting aside of lands for animals. This boundary-setting is at the heart of the way that colonial legacies continue to define the postcolonial world. As William M. Adams observes, the spatial division that defined “[t]he ‘fortress’ approach to conservation” remains a “significant and enduring legacy of colonial conservation” (“Nature and the Colonial Mind” 42). Adams goes on to suggest that “[t]he challenge of decolonizing the mind is urgent and of huge significance to the future of conservation” (44). It is the task of contemporary conservationists to open up other possibilities for the idea of nature itself and for the sharing of multispecies spaces. In the texts that I will address, the encounter between the nonhuman animal and the human, face-to-face, functions as a reminder that other ethical possibilities exist, and that setting and enforcing boundaries between human and nonhuman animals may not, in fact, be possible or indeed desirable. This proximity destabilizes the divisions upon which conservation depends. The interspecies encounter interrupts the creation of boundaries,
and challenges the separation of human and animal bodies. Whether texts choose to deny, or instead to embrace and explore the ethical possibilities suggested by the disorderly encounter is a definitive choice, one that has larger implications for questions of species difference, and species-differentiated space, in a postcolonial theory of conservation.

2.2. *Shikari* and Conservationist in *Man-eaters of Kumaon* and *The Folded Earth*

*Man-eaters of Kumaon* was Jim Corbett’s first book, published in 1944, after his life in India and the greater part of his hunting experiences were behind him. The stories take place in the Kumaon region of what is now Uttarakhand, where Corbett was born, and where he worked as a railway inspector and hunted man-eating tigers and leopards until 1938 (Jaleel 40). These accounts depict not only Corbett’s tiger hunts, but also his interactions with local people, their British colonizers, a variety of nonhuman animals, and the landscape itself. The stories present a complex framing of the British colonial project in a genre — the popular hunting tale — that offers important insights into the way that nature and nonhuman animals were imagined as integral to this project.

In this series of short narratives, Corbett casts himself in the paternalist role of the “protective” hunter, a position that was widely symbolic, during the colonial period, of the dependence of local populations on their British administrators (MacKenzie 17-18). But Corbett’s fame as a hunter during his lifetime has perhaps been eclipsed, in more recent evaluations, by his reputation as a prescient conservationist who predicted the
catastrophic effects that unrestricted hunting would have on the Indian tiger population. In 1932, he was one of the founders of the United Provinces Game Preservation Society, which sought to bring forms of conservation legislation that had been instituted in British-ruled African territories to India (MacKenzie 287). As an executive member of this organization, Corbett was an important actor in the creation of India’s first national park; this park, founded in 1935, was later renamed after Corbett (in 1957), and, in the 1970s, became a Project Tiger reserved forest. It is certainly true that later in life Corbett turned from killer to conservationist, but contemporary writers have entirely coopted his voice from a conservation perspective. One contrasts Corbett’s selflessness with the self-serving greed of post-Independence politicians (Jaleel 56), while another, whose book is subtitled “Life and Legend of a Messiah,” openly calls Corbett a “saint” (Khati 148). They continually stress that Corbett was compelled to kill — conveniently ignoring his many sport and trophy hunts, and the broader context of colonial hunting of which they were a part — and depict him as a “deliverer” of desperately frightened people (N.K. Singh 90). Among these hagiographic accounts, it is easy to lose sight of the complexities of Corbett’s writings, but his work, so evocative of its specific location, offers symptomatic representations of animal-human spaces and the formation of identity in the encounter between the human and the nonhuman animal. By examining Corbett as an early conservationist, we can trace, as Jesse Oak Taylor observes, “the ways in which much of contemporary global environmentalism is the inheritor of empire, and the urgent need to come to terms with that inheritance” (152). Corbett’s stories, seemingly so secure in their location as part of a privileged colonial genre, are in fact riven with anxieties
about the instability of the white, male, imperial subject position; this anxiety manifests itself in Corbett’s continual assertions of his own singular power, as well as in the stories’ repetitive structure, which represents a seemingly compulsive return to the tiger-human encounter as a form of self-fashioning. Over the course of his life and the transition from hunter to conservationist, Corbett’s understanding of the boundaries between animal and human spaces became more rigid, but *Man-eaters of Kumaon* represents an understanding of this spatial division that is fluid and changeable, and that leaves room for multispecies living and interspecies encounters. This text exposes the tension between an attachment to boundaries and the compulsion to transgress those boundaries, between orderly division and disorderly encounter, both of which are routed through the conservationist figure of Corbett himself. Corbett’s shift, despite the porousness of the borders between animal and human spaces in his writings, to advocating for the absolute division of those spaces, is at the foundation of contemporary conservation in India.

Although Corbett hunted many species throughout his career, he is most strongly associated with both the killing and protection of tigers. In *Man-eaters of Kumaon*, the stories are constructed around individual tigers but, at the same time, the repetitive structure of the man-eater narrative creates an impression of the tiger as a unitary figure. As such, the tiger appears as a richly layered object of desire for Corbett. The tiger is connected to spatial control: it walks through space with a kind of ownership that is attractive to the late-colonial administrator whose spatial legitimacy is under threat from a burgeoning independence movement. The physical power of the tiger is also harnessed to Corbett’s oblique exploration of gender and sexuality. The penetrative action of the
man-eater codes it as masculine in the stories (whether the individual tiger is male or female), and Corbett aligns his own masculinity with that of the tiger; his colonial and authorial gaze, particularly when it dwells on the victims’ wounds, marks him as another kind of ‘eater,’ however benevolent he appears to be. At the same time, Corbett desires a kind of congress with the tiger, seeking face-to-face encounters in which he can experience his own bodily vulnerability. He repeatedly fantasizes about being bitten or eaten, and imaginatively dwells on the moments of attack. In his insistence on the face-to-face encounter with each tiger whom he kills (and his disappointment when he is deprived of this encounter), he endows the moments of meeting between himself and the tigers with all the significance of a feast: these are encounters in which he is both the eater and the one being eaten. As the locus of the hunter’s desires, the figure of the tiger acts as a conduit for Corbett’s negotiation of identity, and for the anxieties that attend that negotiation. The tiger is thus a useful autobiographical tool, in a way that it is also useful, as we will see, in a work of fiction like *The Hungry Tide*. And yet, when he himself has used these encounters to construct his own sense of self, Corbett feels the need to contain the tiger, to limit its movements, and to eliminate, as much as possible, human-tiger contact. In this urge towards rigid management of interspecies encounters, we see the disturbance that these meetings can create in systems of power like patriarchal colonialism.

In contrast to the political, legal, and physical boundaries for which Corbett would advocate as a conservationist, his hunting stories rely on borders that are constructed through visuality. These boundaries have a necessary fluidity, and indeed intimacy,
created by the need to see — to witness — the transgression of them. In Corbett’s stories, the border between human and nonhuman animal that it is the protective hunter’s responsibility to enforce are based on the tendency of the tiger to be present but unseen, and are thus not rigidly spatial. When the tiger is seen to enter the space of the human community, or the space of the human body, as an undeniable physical presence, it must be punished for transgression. This porous border — not dependent on the cartographic outlines of national parks or reserved forests, but instead bounded by the visual field — might be the reason that Corbett’s stories depend so heavily on scenes in which the transgression is physicalized, concretized, in the breached defences of the human body. The recognition of a transgression of human space, and the punishment for it, is based on the visual proof and, by extension, on Corbett’s representation of that proof in the most ocular language. Corbett repeatedly emphasizes that the reader must picture the scenes he describes. For Corbett, the normal, unseen, tiger is an observer, a benevolent overseer, and a steward of rural lives; in fact, he casts the tiger in a similarly paternalist role to the one he himself adopts. In his “Author’s Note” to Man-eaters of Kumaon, he laments the popular perception of the tiger as a “cruel” killer: “I think of the tens of thousands of men, women and children who, while working in the forest or cutting grass or collecting dry sticks, pass day after day close to where tigers are lying up and who, when they return safely to their homes, do not even know that they have been under the observation of this so called ‘cruel’ and ‘bloodthirsty’ animal” (10). In this way, Corbett casts the tiger as a participant in ordinary multispecies living, and depicts this unrecognized intimacy between animal and human spaces as part of the “balance in nature” (10). If the “normal”
tiger is thus a figure of self-discipline, who exerts control over his instincts, and a figure of balance who supports the structure of natural multispecies relationships, the man-eater is, by contrast, an unbalanced figure of pure appetite. The anomalous figure of the man-eating tiger introduces disorder into Corbett’s harmonious visual field — that is, into the pastoral fantasy of Kumaon that he constructs in his tales.

Despite Corbett’s preoccupation with the visual, the man-eater’s gravest transgression is of course in the touch, and it is here that the disorderly encounter has a strange appeal for the hunter. In the contact between felid teeth and human flesh the boundary between species is thoroughly breached, and this breach is, for Corbett, a subject of both horror and desire to which the text insistently returns. As Taylor notes, the human is defined for Corbett by its “corporeality” (156) — the vulnerability inherent in its body. It could thus be argued that the idea of vulnerability to another species creates, for Corbett, the ultimate experience of his own humanity, which is why he seeks it out at the same time that he fears it. In “The Mohan Man-eater,” Corbett writes, “Few of us, I imagine, have escaped that worst of all nightmares in which, while our limbs and vocal cords are paralysed with fear, some terrible beast in a monstrous form approaches to destroy us” (125). This statement is an aside, unnecessary to the structure of the story, and it thus appears as excessive in the narrative. It universalizes the fear experienced by the tiger’s victims, but it also, interestingly, connects Corbett to the victims and their vulnerability. He fantasizes about being in their position, frozen as the tiger approaches; it

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29 Corbett always stresses, however, that man-eating tigers are forced into their transgressive actions by unusual conditions; he says, “A man-eating tiger is a tiger that has been compelled, through stress of circumstances beyond its control, to adopt a diet alien to it” (5).
is a kind of encounter that Corbett never himself experiences, since he is always stalking the tiger, always armed, and always necessarily has the upper hand. But a moment like this exposes his desire for vulnerable encounters, and combines the fear and fascination with the destruction of the body with the fear and fascination with the destruction of human identity.

This fixation on bodily vulnerability is clearly related to anxieties about identity and masculinity in the text, as I will discuss below, but it is displaced in the stories onto the bodies of women. Despite the book’s title, *Man-eaters of Kumaon*, most of the human beings who are eaten in Corbett’s tales are women. The collection opens with “The Champawat Man-eater,” a story that establishes an obsession with the consumption of the female body that remains strong throughout the text. The Champawat tiger’s female victims are universally described as naked (25, 29), with open wounds, the space of their bodies violently, and visibly, penetrated by the attack of the tiger. The pathos of the wounded human female body provides the ultimate rationale for Corbett’s hunting. The female body is imagined, and imaged, as a space that must be protected; it is a space that is particularly vulnerable to penetration, partition, and invasion by the predator. This vulnerability connects the female body to the feminization of colonized land — both the female body and the land of India are spaces which have allowed themselves to be invaded and are thus figured as defenceless; as such, they are both spaces that are particularly in need of protection from the white male colonizer. For Corbett, this connection between land and female victims is important to the way he constructs himself as a witness to the wounding by the man-eater, and the power he derives from
this position. Corbett’s most detailed description of a male victim occurs in “The Thak Man-eater,” when he tells his reader, “I am not going to harrow your feelings by attempting to describe that poor torn and mangled thing [...] which only a few hours previously had been a Man” (194). In contrast to this terseness and reserve, we can look at this representation of a female victim in “The Chowgarh Tigers”: “The upper part of her clothing had been torn off her young body, and with head thrown back and hands resting on the ground to support her, she sat without sound or movement, other than the heaving up and down of her breast, in the hollow of which the blood, that was flowing down from her face and neck, was collecting in a sticky congealed mass” (67). As is clear in the elaborate picture that Corbett creates here, the act of gazing at the female victim often takes on predatory overtones, with the hunter seeming to enjoy describing the extreme violence of the wounds and the exposure of the body that they create. An even more telling example occurs when Corbett meditates on the severed leg of another female victim: “In all the subsequent years I have hunted man-eaters, I have not seen anything as pitiful as that young comely leg” (30). He is distanced from the violence both by his feeling of pity and, literally, by his elevated position as he looks down on the victims’ bodies. At the same time, the authorial gaze is a devouring one; Corbett’s consumption of female flesh through the repetitive and insistent description of the victims’ naked and wounded bodies aligns him with the man-eater’s predatory perspective. These moments highlight the carnivorousness of Corbett’s paternalism, and the way he displaces a sexual appetite onto the penetrating and transgressive figure of the (wo)man-eating tiger.

But Corbett’s own gender position is not solely aligned with the penetrative,
carnivorous gaze of the man-eater. Femininity seems to have an additional and different attraction for Corbett — one that he himself tries to inhabit. Corbett returns twice to “rumours” that he dresses in women’s clothing to attempt to attract tigers (24, 84), first denying and then acknowledging this practice. In “The Chowgarh Tigers,” in the course of desperate efforts to locate the man-eater, he writes, “on several occasions [I] disguised myself as a woman and cut grass in places where no local inhabitant dared to go” (84).

The prevalence of female victims in these stories is related to gendered labour practices; groups of women performing work outside the protected area of the village (particularly gathering fuel) are, logically, those most often exposed to the tigers and attacked. This material basis for the prevalence of female victims seems to be less compelling to Corbett, however, than the connection he perceives between their femininity and their attraction for the man-eaters. Corbett depicts the gender of these victims — as signalled by their clothing — as integral to their vulnerability; that is to say, while his presence in a particularly exposed location will probably be enough to attract the tiger, Corbett suggests that it is also necessary to present himself as a woman, implying that a female victim is, in and of herself, a kind of lure for the tiger. This representation mirrors the predatory gaze that Corbett adopts in his descriptions of the victims, casting women as seducers of tigers who themselves create the conditions for their victimization. In “The Mohan Man-eater,” for example, a “party of women and girls” at work actually seem to conjure the sudden appearance of the tiger by their very presence (124). Corbett’s stories display both a distrust of and an attraction to the figure of the woman that is similar to their contradictory engagements with the tiger, and they respond to this internal tension
by attempting to contain and control their representation of the feminine. By appropriating the gender of a woman through the signifier of her clothing, Corbett tries to intervene in a connection between predator and prey, tiger and woman. He depicts this intervention as an indication of his deep commitment to the paternal care for the people, connecting his temporary adoption of femininity to his hyper-masculinity as hunter and protector. By adopting the gaze of the tiger and the body of the woman, Corbett transgresses boundaries of species and gender; this transgression is, paradoxically, part of the hunter’s attempt to construct his own subject position as unassailably secure. The representation of women and nonhuman animals signals the anxieties and instabilities that thread their way through these stories as representations of late colonial masculinity.

In each of his stories, Corbett’s own identity, articulated through his position in relation to the tiger, is the central concern of the narrative. Jesse Oak Taylor argues that Corbett’s writings are a retrospective form of identity-construction in relation to nature, empire, and masculinity (152). Taylor’s brief article is unique in taking Corbett’s writings seriously, as symptomatic of a late colonial masculine identity in crisis. Taylor argues that the late text *The Man-eating Leopard of Rudrapayag* exposes a disturbance of masculinity that arose, for Corbett, from the dissolution of the British Raj. Though *Man-eaters of Kumaon* is an earlier text, many of the same anxieties pervade its stories. As Taylor notes, Corbett’s depictions of man-eaters are self-reflexive; they allow their author to negotiate his own identity in complex ways. Although Corbett defines himself most

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30 Taylor connects Corbett with the exilic sensibility of diasporic novelists like Salman Rushdie; as the homeland is “imaginary” for Rushdie, so the British Raj, for Corbett, becomes “fantastical” in retrospect (153).
concretely through the marker of hunter, the activity of stalking tigers allows him to play with and destabilize his own identity. By wearing the clothing of village women, Corbett disguises his place in hierarchies of gender and race. By using the vocalizations of tigers, Corbett destabilizes the security of his languaged species position. In his stories, Corbett represents himself as uniquely able to transcend the spatial boundaries marked by gender, race, and species; his deep investment in these boundaries, by virtue of his position of power, is what seems to allow the transgression to reaffirm, rather than unbalance, his own privileged position as the conservationist. His various identity transgressions thus function as a performative display of his own “positional superiority” — to use Said’s phrase — in terms of racial, gendered, and species hierarchies. Said argues that the “positional superiority” created by Orientalism is “flexible”: it “puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (7). When Corbett calls himself Indian, or dresses in women’s clothing, his narrative control over the representation of these transgressions, like the narrative control of Western Orientalists over the representation of the “East” in Said’s analysis, works to maintain that “relative upper hand,” even as he steps outside of certain markers of his privilege. But despite Corbett’s evident desire to construct himself as a secure and stable subject, attention to the moments of instability in his stories exposes the uncertainties about the security and legitimacy of his position that underlie these tales. These moments of disorder often occur in the encounters Corbett most desires: the face-to-face meetings with tigers.

In his encounters with tigers, Corbett displays a desire for the animal’s address, a
need for recognition that, from his perspective, is mutual. Corbett’s hunting stories always portray him as a being in relation to, and with, the tigers he stalks. He feels “regret” when he kills “The Pipal Pani Tiger,” because “never again would the jungle folk and I listen with bated breath to his deep-throated call resounding through the foothills, and never again would his familiar pugmarks show on the game paths that he and I had trodden for fifteen years” (185 emphasis added). In this description, Corbett claims for himself the spatial legitimacy of the tiger — they inhabit, and possess, the same spaces, and walk the same “paths.” The form of Man-eaters of Kumaon — a series of short, repetitive accounts — displays the way that Corbett marks his own life by the lives and deaths of tigers, and in the intersections of human and tiger spaces. The subjects of Corbett’s stories are ostensibly the individual man-eaters after whom the tales are named, but attention to the moments of encounter reveal their autobiographical nature. Corbett’s tales, when taken together, become what Derrida calls “zootobiography” (34); at different moments in his life, Corbett constitutes and re-constitutes himself through the gaze of the tiger.

The construction of autobiography under and through the gaze of the nonhuman animal is the starting point for Derrida’s exploration of the place of the nonhuman animal in philosophy in The Animal That Therefore I Am. In that text, the discussion begins with a face-to-face, and body-to-body, encounter: “I often ask myself, just to see, who I am — and who I am (following) at the moment when, caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example, the eyes of a cat, I have trouble, yes, a bad time, overcoming my embarrassment” (4). This question — “who I am” when naked under the nonhuman gaze
— suggests that the construction of human identity begins, or can begin again, in this encounter, and opens up a sympathetic link between Derrida’s observations and Corbett’s efforts to compose his own identity in encounters with tigers. Both Derrida and Corbett evoke a kind of desire in the human to find itself in the nonhuman gaze, a desire for the eyes of the nonhuman animal to function as a mirror in which the human will appear as a whole image. While Derrida questions and troubles this kind of desire, Corbett’s repetition of the encounter indicates that, for him, this desire endures, and compels him into these encounters again and again.

Corbett’s creation of identity through the gaze of the tiger is related to anxieties about the erosion of his privilege that we have already observed in his negotiations of space and gender. By suggesting that his position of privilege (in hierarchies of species, race, gender, and capital) is destabilized by the physical vulnerability he experiences under the gaze of the man-eater, Corbett re-forges an identity that is based on his singular power, rather than his sociopolitical position as a white male colonizer. Throughout the collection, Corbett insists on the importance of tracking tigers unassisted. He writes, "I have made it a hard and fast rule to go alone when hunting man-eaters, for if one’s companion is unarmed it is difficult to protect him, and if he is armed, it is even more difficult to protect oneself" (33). It is this claim to absolute self-reliance (and the effacement of his dependence on local labour to support his hunts) that marks the seductive singularity of the identity of the hunter, a being, like the man-eater, who exists only in relation to the hunted. Though Corbett is never naked per se, he does construct himself as stripped — of companionship, of protection, and of position and identity in
relation to other humans. This shedding of identity allows him, paradoxically, to assert a more secure sense of self. Because he is so totally self-reliant, Corbett, suggests, his position is not a result of his privilege in colonial hierarchies. Instead, it is a result of his singularity — a unique selfhood that would, then, remain stable and powerful despite the end of Empire. This representation is a bid to reserve space for an identity under threat, denuded of the things that have previously defined it, but it is also a strategy that exposes the anxieties it tries to assuage, particularly in the way that Corbett fantasizes about being further stripped.

The fantasy of being consumed that we have seen Corbett express in relation to the tigers’ victims also arises in the face-to-face encounters. Corbett again imagines his loss of self through the experience of ultimate bodily and psychological vulnerability. In “The Thak Man-eater,” he describes his “fear of having the teeth of a tiger meet in [his] throat” (225-226), an image of bodily penetration that evokes both a loss of identity through the silencing of his voice, and also a challenge to the distanced position of the gaze. Derrida’s encounter with another kind of cat can open up not just the vulnerability in this moment, but also the way that that vulnerability is entangled with desire. Derrida writes: “I am naked faced with the cat’s eyes looking at me from head to toe, as it were just to see [...]. To see, without going to see, without touching yet, and without biting, although that threat remains on its lips or on the tip of the tongue” (4). For Derrida, the gaze of the nonhuman animal instigates the shame — the awareness of nudity — that constitutes the human (4-5). It is less clear, however, how this “threat” of biting, this suspended bite, contributes to the feeling of shame. It seems to be related to the
association among shame, sexual difference, and autobiography; Derrida describes the
gaze of the cat as concentrated, in this moment “in the direction of my sex” (4). If the
realization of nudity is one source of shame here, another could also be a destabilization
of masculinity — the fear of castration when the suspended bite is aimed at the “sex” of
the human male. But if this is the moment that makes the human and constructs the
human identity, it is also an encounter that must be desired; therefore, the shame is a kind
of confusion that arises both from the fear of the bite and from the paradoxical desire for
it.\footnote{In her critique of this moment in Derrida, Haraway suggests that the “shame” felt here is part of a
preoccupation with masculinity. She argues that “the naked man’s shame” is a “figure for the shame of
philosophy,” and stresses that “Derrida’s full human male frontal nudity,” with which both he and
philosophy itself are preoccupied, is “of no consequence” to his cat (When Species Meet 23).
Haraway’s reading of Derrida suggests both the anxiety about the position of the male and the desire to
be constituted by the gaze of the nonhuman animal, without the need for response from that animal,
that are evident in Corbett. While I disagree with Haraway’s assessment that Derrida is incurious about
animals (When Species Meet 22), primarily because I ascribe a greater degree of irony to his
representation of this encounter, I think her interpretation is useful for the reading of many such
paradigmatic encounters between men and their nonhuman others.}

Derrida recalls this moment at the end of the first essay, when he observes that the
autobiographical subject makes a claim to telling “his totally naked truth,” including the
truth “of his or her sexual difference, of all their sexual differences,” and that this truth-telling nudity, while “perhaps […] untenable,” is desired by the subject (50). Corbett
certainly makes this untenable promise of totally naked truth, and desires to be totally
naked in the encounter with the tiger. He is subject to fear, but he desires this fear — it is
through his vulnerability that he constitutes his autobiographical self. In the moments
when he meets tigers, and kills them, he displays a desire to be desired by the animal,
which often manifests itself as a desire to be eaten.

One of the notable features of Corbett’s writing is the intimacy with which he
depicts the moment of killing. In the stories, these are universally moments of silence and
stillness; they are represented as communions between Corbett and the animal he has long sought and finally met. In “The Bachelor of Powalgarh,” Corbett writes, “I crawled this distance with belly to the ground, and on raising my head saw the tiger in front of me. He was crouching down looking at me, with the sun shining on his left shoulder, and on receiving my two bullets he rolled over on his side without making a sound” (122 emphasis added). Here, Corbett represents death as a gift — as an offering made from the hunter to the tiger that the tiger receives with silent dignity. At the same time, the word “receiving” has sexual connotations, as does the penetrative image of the two bullets; the encounter thus evokes Corbett’s predatory desire for the tiger’s body, which is satisfied when the tiger rolls over, exposing himself. The words “death” or “dead” do not appear here; instead, the tiger “receiving” the bullets suggests a consensual, or at least compliant, passivity, and “rolling over” suggests a voluntary movement of exposure. Similarly, in “The Chowgarh Tigers,” Corbett writes: “I looked behind me over right shoulder [sic] and — looked straight into the tigress’s face. [...] [O]n her face was a smile, similar to that one sees on the face of a dog welcoming his master home after a long absence” (104). The idea that he “masters” the tiger in a way that she naturally recognizes suggests that Corbett finds an affirmation of identity in these encounters. The tiger defers to his mastery by allowing herself to be killed — indeed, she welcomes her killer — and

32 The word “death” similarly does not appear when Corbett kills the Mohan Man-eater: “when the heavy bullet at that short range crashed into his forehead not so much as a quiver went through his body [...]. Nor did his position change in the slightest when I sent a second, and quite unnecessary, bullet to follow the first” (151). The combination of excessive and violent penetration — the “crashing” bullet” and its “unnecessary” follower — with an uncanny passivity or openness to this penetration makes this not only an obvious misrepresentation, since it is physically impossible, but also a particularly disturbing image. Corbett repeats the structure of his stories so insistently, and these moments of death are so compounded, that it is interesting that he feels the need to betray his truth claims so obviously by constructing such fantastical displays of his mastery over the lives and bodies of tigers.
this deference functions to shore up Corbett’s zootobiographical self-construction.\textsuperscript{33}

Corbett’s enjoyment of his encounters with tigers is evident in the tales, and he represents this enjoyment as unique — it is different, for example, from the way that the local people experience their meetings with tigers. This difference belongs to the privilege of the conservationist figure who has a special power to combine the enforcement of boundaries with transgression of them. There is transgression in the stories of \textit{Man-eaters of Kumaon} in the way Corbett tries to inhabit different positions along the matrices of gender, race, and species, but there is enforcement of boundaries in the way that he wants to enjoy transgression without ultimately giving up his paternalist power. At some point in his career, however, Corbett came to see the disorderliness of the meetings between humans and nonhuman animals as dangerous, a danger that, in his writings, he communicates using the elegiac language of conservation. He fears what will be lost with the end of British colonization of India, and the threat to the colonial regime inspires Corbett to propose more and more rigid boundaries between human and animal space. For Corbett, the desire to protect and preserve tigers is also the desire to give up — on behalf of others — the kind of intimate relationship that he has enjoyed with nonhuman animals in shared human-nonhuman spaces.

For Corbett’s success in hunting man-eaters, the British Government of India awarded him the “Freedom of Forests,” a privilege that allowed him “unlimited freedom to roam any reserved forest at will” (Jaleel 54-55). This title not only rhetorically

\textsuperscript{33} There are no marked differences in Corbett’s writing when his subject is a female tiger, as opposed to a male one. Instead, tigers seem to occupy a fluid gender position, coded as masculine when they are the penetrative attackers and as feminine when they are the receptive prey.
transforms Corbett himself into a kind of tiger, but also makes explicit Corbett’s privilege as a sanctioned transgressor of the boundaries dividing animal and human spaces, now defined no longer by the visual field, but by institutions of state power. Corbett’s transition from hunter to conservationist represents a growing anxiety about the freedom of human beings to move through nonhuman animal space and to make violent contact with nonhuman animal bodies.\footnote{Corbett devotes the last vignette in Man-eaters of Kumaon, called “Just Tigers,” to the connection between “the twin sports of shooting tigers with a camera and shooting them with a rifle,” and to the superiority of the former, which “gives far more pleasure to the sportsman than the acquisition of a trophy” (236). The connection between hunting and photography is a common one (see, for example, Matthew Brower’s study Developing Animals), and it is clear that, even in shifting from hunter to conservationist, Corbett reserves for the “sportsman” the right to transgress spatial boundaries.} By the time he wrote *Man-eaters of Kumaon*, he believed that the tiger would be “exterminated” \( (11) \) without active measures being taken to protect it. As we have seen, these active measures included, for Corbett, the institutionalized separation of animal and human space. The effects, in postcolonial India, of Corbett and his advocacy for this separation inform the many different interspecies relationships in Anuradha Roy’s 2012 novel *The Folded Earth*.

*The Folded Earth* is the story of Maya, a young widow who moves from Hyderabad to the small Himalayan town of Ranikhet, near the site of her husband’s fatal trekking accident. She takes a job as a teacher in the local school, and, though she wants to isolate herself, she reluctantly becomes involved in the lives of her neighbours at the same time that she remains an outsider. Her landlord, Diwan Sahib, is a faded aristocrat full of colonial nostalgia who has, for decades, been attempting to write a biography of his personal hero Jim Corbett. While writing about Corbett, Diwan Sahib also tries to
emulate him by promoting conservation in the area, particularly by giving presentations to schoolchildren. Roy’s text, set in the Himalayan foothills that Corbett’s stories also inhabit, presents a spectrum of possible structures of relation between human and nonhuman animals, and in doing so it offers a consideration of Jim Corbett’s legacy. Corbett appears both as a figure who represents colonial hierarchies of power, and as a founding figure for ideas about nature and boundaries between nonhuman animals and their human cohabitants in the postcolonial nation. Diwan Sahib, in a moment of frustration, claims that Corbett’s life and writing can no longer hold anyone’s interest: “who remembers Corbett now, other than a few senile ancients like me?” (131). The question for Roy’s reader, then, is why Corbett’s vision of nature and his idea of conservation are still relevant for a contemporary audience: why should we revisit this unabashedly imperialist, paternalist, privileged voice in the search for new, or newly relevant, models for animal-human relations? What does Corbett have to offer a contemporary conservationist?

For Diwan Sahib, Corbett’s conservationist philosophy is successful because it is, at base, humanist.35 He tells Maya,

> Corbett was one of a kind because he never lost sight of the humans — and I mean the poor, the hill peasants whose cattle and kin were in danger from wild animals. [...] He would have understood Puran [a disabled man

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35 Roy’s character is not alone in stressing this side of Corbett’s work; almost every writer on Corbett emphasizes his humanitarianism, as well as his sympathetic relationship with the local population. There seems to be a contradictory desire to view Corbett as both Indian and as a benefactor of ‘the Indian people.’ N.K. Singh writes, for example, “Jim Corbett’s portrait of Indian people is based on the lifelong experiences of a man who lived and thought as an Indian and who emotionally associated himself with India as his own country” (65).
with whom Diwan Sahib cannot communicate] in a second. [...] He’d have understood that poor idiot’s grunts and groans and whimpers and made sense of them. He’d have talked to Puran in his own language. (73)

Diwan Sahib’s analysis establishes his vision of the conservationist as one who has access to the languages of human and nonhuman others. The source of the conservationist’s privilege is his placement outside of these interested groups. He is not one among the humans affected by the man-eaters, nor is he a wild animal; rather, he is an understanding outsider. This idea of Corbett as primarily a humanist whose importance lies in his relationship to the human population of the region — rather than as a figure who is primarily known for his relationships to nonhuman animals — accounts in part for the central absence in the text: this novel offers an extended and serious engagement with Jim Corbett, in a narrative that represents many nonhuman animals, but it does not include any tigers. Corbett, as both a historical figure and as a writer, is unimaginable without the presence of tigers. As we have seen, he constructed his own life story and sense of self in and through his tiger encounters, and his identity in the absence of the man-eater is therefore uncertain. But the focus on Corbett’s humanism removes his career as a hunter from the discussion, reorienting his life’s work instead around the issue of the conservation of nature, understood in a broad sense to include all kinds of animals as well as the landscape itself, and around the ways in which both human subalterns and nonhuman animals are disadvantaged in their struggles for spatial legitimacy. The absence of the tiger is also undoubtedly related to the species’s contemporary scarcity; this lack at the heart of this consideration of Corbett’s legacy actually dramatizes the
problem of tiger conservation. The novel enters into the elegiac mood of so much contemporary conservation not only through its overall despairing tone about the degradation of nature, but also simply by keeping silent on the subject of Corbett’s most important and impassioned cause: the rescue of the Indian tiger.

In focusing his appreciation of Corbett on the protection of subaltern human beings rather than nonhuman animals, Diwan Sahib interprets Corbett’s conservationist work through a postcolonial humanist frame. And, in the passage quoted above, we can see how this frame undergirds problematic constructions of otherness. Diwan Sahib’s representation of Puran as nonhuman — as a “poor idiot” who communicates using “grunts and groans and whimpers” instead of human language — places Corbett in a privileged position as the translator of subaltern voices. Diwan Sahib also equates different types of human subalternity — poverty and disability — as requiring the protection of a conservationist figure. In this construction, these subaltern human beings are victimized by nonhuman animals at the same time that they are, themselves, rendered nonhuman by virtue of their subalternity. For Diwan Sahib, Corbett’s great contribution lies in his recognition of the essential humanity of the subaltern, rather than in his relationship to animals or nature. That Diwan Sahib claims that Corbett was “adored [...] all over these hills” (73) confirms that his ideal conservationist is a figure of paternal, humanist, understanding. The novel distances itself from this postcolonial humanism by routing it through Diwan Sahib’s perspective; nevertheless, its idealization of subaltern modes of interspecies relation, as we will see, partakes of postcolonial humanist discourse in a different way.
In the way he imagines Corbett being able to communicate with Puran, it is clear that Diwan Sahib sees the conservationist as someone who can read nature and decipher it as a text; he admires, for example, that “Corbett understood the jungle by looking” (73). He also prizes the auditory, but not simply as sound: he emphasizes instead an understanding of the language of nonhuman animals or, rather, Corbett’s ability to translate mere sound into language. Again, he praises Corbett: “If he heard a chital far off, he would know whether it was calling its young or calling to warn other animals of a tiger. [...] He understood the fall of every leaf and the meaning of a cloud” (73). Here, understanding is configured as linguistic; Corbett can read the animal other, functioning as a translator between animal and human worlds and, in Diwan Sahib’s estimation, between elite and subaltern worlds. With perhaps false modesty, Corbett closes “The Thak Man-eater” with the claim that, “having lived the greater part of my life in the jungles I have not the ability to paint word-pictures” (234). Despite this understatement of his abilities as a writer, it is in fact the translation of the visual into language that is Corbett’s currency throughout his writings: as we have seen, he dwells on the visual moment, evoking scenes of an environment unfamiliar and exotic to most of his readers. Indeed, the exoticism of his writing, so central to its appeal in Britain and British India during the uncertain and fearful time of the waning empire, is dependent on Corbett’s ability to connect his imperial gaze with his reader’s through language.36 As I have noted

36 Corbett's editor, R.E. Hawkins, associated Corbett with a tradition of the British hero. He called Corbett a modern “Galahad,” a reassertion of the sanctity of the individual at the end of the Second World War, and a representation of the “Truth and Justice” of the imperial “dragon-killer” (quoted in Jaleel 90). In the repetition and hyperbole of these images, we can sense the anxiety about the meaning and status of Britishness at the end of the colonial enterprise, an anxiety that is evident both in Corbett’s work and in others’ assessments of it.
in Corbett’s writing, his emphasis on the visual and his inhabitation of the gazing position function as distancing techniques, and also as techniques of consumption. Corbett penetrates the bodies of the tigers’ female victims by gazing at them and by allowing his reader to gaze at them through his detailed descriptions, thus positioning his reader as a predatory male gaze. His focus on the visual in his stories allows, also, the predation of the land itself, so that the space of the colony is opened up for consumption by the reader at home in Britain. Diwan Sahib’s focus on language, in his assessment of Corbett, connects the gaze to the word, so that the genre of the “word-picture” can be seen as connecting the visual field — so central to Corbett’s spatial imagination — to the translation of otherness. In his word-pictures, Corbett constructs the subaltern in language as those in need of his protection, the protection that lies in his keen eyes (their unique keenness evidenced in his ability to “sight” the most elusive tigers). The Folded Earth opposes this conservationist gaze to a different kind of encounter with the other. In Puran’s encounters with nonhuman animals, we see a subaltern alliance based in bodily touch that offers an alternative potential for multispecies relationships.

Puran engages in a different mode of being with the nonhuman animal that is distinct from the paternalist role of the conservationist; the narrator remarks, “[h]e could talk to animals, but people left him confused and mumbling. He gave dead bats and birds tender burials and allowed monkeys to pick lice off his head” (59). “Talking” here is something that occurs not in language, but in touch. These moments represent a mutual care of the body that depends on physical contact, rather than a connection through the act of seeing, and these are embodied, not linguistic, conversations. Puran’s sensory
regime, based on touch rather than visuality, is one of “infinite tenderness” (70) as well as infinite vulnerability. Early in the novel, Puran adopts an orphaned fawn who wanders into the village. There is a sense, from the first appearance of this fawn, whom they call Rani, that her relationship with Puran is impossible. Maya describes Rani’s choice to live in the human community as “a rare thing, almost other-worldly” (70). This wild and vulnerable creature’s trust in Puran renders the relationship, for Maya, somehow sacred. The question of trust is embedded in the opposition between the distance of the gaze and the intimacy of the touch; this opposition asks, what kind of trust can exist in interspecies relationships? The novel makes this question explicit in a conversation, recalled by Maya, about Puran’s relationship with Rani: “It was extremely rare, though not unknown, for wild animals to trust human beings, Diwan Sahib said. Why should they, when we have destroyed their world? Puran’s affinity to animals was a lost treasure. Puran was the sanest of us all, because animals knew whom to trust” (74). Trust is a multivalent word in the context of conservation: reserved lands are held in trust by human governments for the nonhuman animals who live there, and managers of the land are entrusted with the responsibilities of protection. In this usage, trust is something assumed by human beings on behalf of nonhumans. The underlying assumption is that animals cannot grant this kind of trust consciously, nor can they understand the larger issues that pertain to the conservation of their bodies, lives, and habitats; therefore, trust is something to be taken from them without their knowledge or consent. At the end of his career, when conservation seemed increasingly urgent to him, Corbett wrote, “A country’s fauna is a sacred trust, and I appeal to you not to betray this trust” (qtd. in Jaleel 75). This idea of
trust connects Corbett’s thinking about the protection of tigers to his previous role as a protective hunter, as someone entrusted with the protection of subaltern human lives. As Corbett’s administrative role ended, he took up the administration of the tiger, and shifted the location of the trust placed in him.

In the way that Diwan Sahib uses the word trust, with reference to Puran, it connotes, by contrast, something given freely, if rarely, by the nonhuman animal to the human. Through her willing bodily proximity to Puran, Rani grants a trust in physical, immediate terms. The type of trust involved in conservation aims to be large, systemic, lasting, and far-reaching; in its paternalism it resembles the language of development (exemplified, as we will see, by the Badabon Trust in *The Hungry Tide*). The trust that, according to Diwan Sahib, exists between Puran and the animals whom he encounters is, by contrast, small, rare, fleeting, and above all fragile. Eventually, Rani is taken away from the village to the zoo — she is removed from human space and re-placed into proper animal space — and, as a result of this move, she dies. The implication of Rani’s removal from Ranikhet is that Puran, while able to form meaningful bonds with nonhuman animals, is unable to function in the context in that other, managerial, sense of trust. He touches nonhuman animals, but he does not gaze at them from a distance, so he cannot see the larger context of multispecies relationships that is dominated by human political interests and bureaucracy. While Puran’s gifts are important and singular, the interspecies relationships that he models are too personal, too vulnerable, to function in the unchangeable and impersonal realities of the human political world.

It is clear that the novel sets up the relationships between Puran and nonhuman
animals (most prominently Rani and Pinki, a goat whose trust in Puran is eventually exploited to lead her to slaughter) as subaltern alliances, based on mutual vulnerability, that fall victim to forms of oppressive power — especially capitalist interests. What goes unquestioned in the text is the association between Puran’s disability and his sympathetic relationships with nonhuman animals; in fact, the novel endorses this problematic alignment, particularly in the way that both Puran and nonhuman animals are exploited by those with greater power. Puran is placed outside of the regimes of gaze and language, and so the discourse of species applies to him (albeit differentially) as it does to the nonhuman animals with whom he interacts. His vocalizations are never characterized as linguistic; instead, they are described like those of animals. He did not speak to Rani, for example, but “groaned and cooed” at her (70). In his analysis of the stories of Akutagawa Ryunosuke, Akira Mizuta Lippit writes, “madness is inextricably linked to the site of animality through the notion of irrationality” (157 emphasis in original). What Lippit does not interrogate is the way that species discourse allows for the oppression of the bodies of the so-called “mad,” as well as their instrumentalization through representation, as it similarly does for the bodies and representations of nonhuman animals. Just as women, for Corbett, are transgressive beings, vulnerable to incursions from animal space into human, so too Puran, as a figure of “madness,” is similarly vulnerable in Roy’s novel. Because Puran’s disability positions him, in the text, as liminally human, he is able to experience mutual communicative relationships of care with nonhuman beings. In this respect, he is actually represented as being more than human, in that he is more humane; it is in this insistence on Puran’s essential humanity that the novel exposes its
postcolonial humanism. This is an idealization of the subaltern similar to, if less
developed than, the idealization of the fisherman Fokir that we will see in The Hungry
Tide, and is quite different from the representations of subalternity that occur in Corbett.
In Man-eaters of Kumaon, subaltern people are not depicted as beings who enjoy a
natural connection with nonhuman animals; instead, that role belongs to Corbett, who,
through this connection, asserts his claim to mastery of the subaltern, to his spatial
legitimacy as an inhabitant of the region, and to his identity as a privileged transgressor
of species boundaries. In The Folded Earth, Corbett’s persona is split between Diwan
Sahib and Puran, so that their different kinds of sympathy with nonhuman animals are
represented in opposition to one another, rather than as harmonious parts of a whole.

Puran’s interspecies relationships also stand in contrast to those formed by his
niece Charu. The representation of Charu recalls the rural women in Corbett’s stories; she
exists in the novel in a state of multispecies living that is cast as typical for agrarian India.
Her life as a small-scale farmer exemplifies the ways in which human and nonhuman
animals are bound together in labour, and the practical impossibility of an absolute
separation of human and nonhuman animal spaces. Her mode of multispecies living
differs from Diwan Sahib’s, in that she is dependent on nonhuman animals for her
survival, and her affective relationships with them are thus coupled with overt physical
exploitation, and from Puran’s, in that her relationships do not stand outside of time —
rather, they are resolutely temporal, defined by both a daily schedule and by the living

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37 MacKenzie documents the British appropriation of local hunting techniques, and of the word shikar, to
indicate the way that colonial administrators shored up their dominant position by claiming for
themselves local knowledge and local labour (173). In Man-eaters of Kumaon, Corbett partakes of this
practice by minimizing his dependence on the assistance of subaltern people during his hunts.
towards slaughter of the nonhuman animal in the agricultural setting. Charu has an
iconoclastic relationship to the constructs of modernity and modern capital. In one scene,
she grazes her animals on the grounds of a new luxury hotel; this action suggests the
importance she places on her own spatial legitimacy, and also connects her to the spatial
transgressions, required by their labour, of the subaltern women in Corbett. In the
contemporary context, rural women are also exposed to threat by the movements through
space that are demanded by their livelihoods. In contrast to the women in *Man-eaters of
Kumaon*, however, Charu is exposed by this transgression to a different kind of
carnivorous menace that threatens to eat up her living and working spaces: that of global
capitalist interests. Charu thus represents, for the novel, an older, idealized form of
multispecies living, but one that is, nevertheless, also rooted in exploitation and the use of
the animal as embodied capital. This representation contrasts with that of Puran’s
relationships, which stand outside of such power structures, or rather form besieged
enclaves within them.

But Charu also has intimate affective relationships with nonhuman animals. Gouri
Joshi the cow and Bilji the dog are confidantes for the young woman; the secrets she is
forced to keep from her domineering grandmother and even from the sympathetic Maya
she is able to share with the cow and the dog. When Gouri Joshi is injured and dying,
Charu grieves deeply, sitting in vigil beside her. Nonetheless, Charu’s interspecies
relationships remain both one-sided and rooted in an assumption of human superiority.
Gouri Joshi’s eyes, “dark pools of patience” (35), only reflect Charu’s secrets back to her;
the cow does not trust Charu with any confidences of her own. And, because of the
agrarian economy in which she participates, Charu’s interspecies relationships are always haunted by the realities of exploitation, since (except in the case of the dog) slaughter is their inevitable end. Since her relationships are never fully mutual, they can never, even momentarily, exist outside of the anthropocentric species hierarchy that values animals according to their use, whether that use is for their flesh, their milk, or their sympathy. In the end, Charu sacrifices all interspecies relationships for her human relationship — a marriage; the animals with whom she lives have performed their usefulness to her, and, albeit with some regret (the same regret she feels for leaving her uncle Puran, whom she views as similarly nonhuman), she is able to abandon them for her new, urban, life.

Puran’s interspecies bonds, unlike Charu’s, exist outside of the political economy of species relations. Puran’s outsiderness in the space of the human world makes him open to the address of the animal; at the same time, the necessity of functioning within that human world, that world that oppresses both animality and disability, means that Puran and the animals who trust him will always be particularly vulnerable. The moment that best captures this vulnerability occurs when Puran leads Pinki the goat away from home; neither Pinki nor Puran recognize that their mutual trust is being exploited, and that Puran in fact is leading her to her death. Maya is deeply affected by the abuse of this bond by Ama, Puran’s mother, and the butcher; when Pinki’s flesh is served the next day, she finds that she cannot eat it. When Veer, Maya’s lover, points out her hypocrisy, she explains, “I knew the goat that had been taken away by the butcher yesterday. It had a name and a personality” (192). The narrative of The Folded Earth follows the trajectory of Maya’s mourning for her husband, Michael; it also follows the deepening of her
understanding of the complex relationships between human and nonhuman animals, and human and nonhuman animal spaces. Coming from the city into this place where animals and humans necessarily live together, Maya negotiates her feelings about species and nature through her relationships with Puran and Charu, Veer and Diwan Sahib, and the narrative voice of Jim Corbett. Her grief for Michael blends with her grief over the fragility of mutually sympathetic interspecies relationships; if she is moved by what she sees as the magic of Rani’s trust in Puran, she is devastated when that trust is destroyed by the rigidity of human-imposed spatial strictures. Maya’s mourning for Rani, after the fawn dies in captivity, seems to replace her mourning for Michael; she becomes “morbidly obsessed with wondering what had happened to Rani’s body in the zoo. They would call it a carcass” (174). This re-naming of Rani’s body belongs to the regime of the gaze, the gaze that sees only the dead flesh. The coldness of the word “carcass” is in direct opposition to the warmth of Puran’s touch, and especially to the funeral rites he offers for the animals he holds in his arms. After Rani dies in the zoo, Maya says, “I could not account for it on a rational level, but after the death of the deer a whispering began in my head that pointed to change” (174). The denouement of the novel, from Rani’s death, involves the breakdown and death of Diwan Sahib, including the abandonment of his Corbett biography, Charu’s escape from Ranikhet, and Maya’s discovery of Veer’s involvement in her husband’s death. “Change” seems to mean the end of a certain complacency for Maya, and the end of the manufactured peace that that complacency brings.

Maya’s autobiographical perspective dominates the novel, but it merges with her
desire to preserve the fragile lives around her by recording their biographies. This urge to
preserve through writing stems in part from her work on the biography of Corbett. Diwan
Sahib, with his implication in antiquated colonial structures of power, as well as his
strong sense of his own physical decline, entwines his life with the life of Corbett that he
consistently fails to write. He uses the different facets of Corbett’s life and persona as
autobiographical tools, as the man-eating tiger functions as a tool for Corbett to define his
own life and identity. The various emphases indicated by the drafts of the biography —
Diwan Sahib makes several attempts to reorganize the project, based first on chronology,
then on themes, then on romantic relationships — signal the different stages of Diwan
Sahib’s life, rather than Corbett’s. It is perhaps for this reason that Diwan Sahib’s
biography of Corbett ultimately fails. He struggles with the organization of his book, but
Corbett, in *Man-eaters of Kumaon*, provides the necessary structure for any account of
his life: he imagines it as moments lived in encounters with tigers. At the end of “The
Thak Man-eater,” Corbett writes, “I have come to the end of the jungle stories I set out to
tell you and I have also come near the end of my man-eater hunting career” (235).
Corbett’s autobiographical account rightly ends with the end of his interspecies meetings.

When Diwan Sahib, near the end of the novel, breaks down and destroys his most
important memento — a photograph of his beloved dogs — and his life’s work — the
manuscript of his Corbett biography, the action marks his disillusionment with the system
of power represented by his own privilege and his privileged relationship with nonhuman
animals. For Diwan Sahib, the paternalist model of conservation has failed to preserve
what he recognizes as the fragile and sacred kind of interspecies connection that Puran
can create. That the hierarchies of power in which he is so deeply implicated are the source of the destruction of Puran’s bond with Rani causes Diwan Sahib profound pain, but he also accepts that he cannot meaningfully challenge these power structures. The destruction of the photograph and the manuscript is a symbolic act of desperation, rather than a subversion. What, in Diwan Sahib’s view, constitutes a truly subversive action is the change in his presentation to the school children. Diwan Sahib models this practice on Corbett, who also delivered educational presentations in schools, and would imitate the languages of animals for the children’s entertainment. Jaleel reports, “[t]he session would end with his making the deep-throated growl of a tiger” (77).38 This ventriloquization of nonhuman animals by the conservationist is a method of engaging an audience’s identification with the vulnerability of endangered species. It also demonstrates the conservationist’s special access to the linguistic world of nonhuman animals: again, we see Corbett, and Diwan Sahib, acting as privileged transgressors, and translators, across a species boundary. In his final presentation to the children, however, Diwan Sahib refuses to engage in this performance, though the children are eagerly anticipating it. Rather, he brokenly lectures them on the total failure of the idea of conservation: “That is the forest now — it is a park, it is what is called a resource, a factory. It belongs neither to the people who owned it before, nor to the animals and plants that lived in it. […] You wanted me to call their calls for you — but I’ve forgotten their voices now. They have no voices any longer” (178). This statement indicates that, contrary to his earlier belief in Corbett’s access to the languages of nonhuman animals, the translation is a failure. The

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38 The modern incarnation of this practice is to be found in the chimpanzee greetings voiced worldwide by Dame Jane Goodall, one of the most compelling personalities in contemporary conservation.
conservationist can no longer speak for animals, because those animals, the subaltern human beings with whom they share space, and that space itself have been thoroughly commodified. He mourns for the multispecies living that, for him, characterized a time “before” the consumption of the land and its inhabitants by capital. Diwan Sahib suggests, then, that the only possible empowerment against this commodification is to be found in a resistant silence, but this resistance is also a form of resignation.

What Roy’s novel suggests, in the end, is precisely the failure, in ethical terms, of the conservationist project inaugurated by Jim Corbett. In its conclusion, it fully adopts the elegiac tone of conservationists as it reflects on the impossibility of conservation itself. It is not accidental that Diwan Sahib conflates “park,” “factory,” and “resource,” all of which suggest that the exploitation of nonhuman animals and their habitats is harnessed to the rigid demarcation of human and nonhuman animal spaces. Here, we see the contemporary result of Corbett’s fearful, late-in-life conversion to the idea that animal and human spaces can and must be separated for the good of both groups. While acknowledging that such a move is practically impossible, The Folded Earth offers a qualified call for a return to the kind of world that Corbett inhabited, as opposed to the one he envisioned as a conservationist — a world in which animal and human spaces and bodies meet and touch, a world in which animal and human are inextricable from one another.39 The continued relevance of Corbett, then, is based on his being seen as a figure that transgresses boundaries imposed by contemporary conservation, a figure that can, paradoxically, be reinterpreted as a challenge to neoimperial power created by the

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39 This sympathetic evocation of a figure of imperial power leads even a positive reviewer to write that the novel is “imbued with Raj nostalgia” (Khair).
confluence of global capital and global environmental movements. This kind of power is an important subject for Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*, a text that aims to place the absolute primacy of the human at both the spatial and conceptual centre of the issue of conservation.

2.3. Conservation and Development in *The Hungry Tide*

*The Hungry Tide* stages a seemingly intractable conflict between discourses of conservation and development in the Sundarbans region of West Bengal and Bangladesh. With large swathes of this region protected under a Project Tiger initiative to conserve the population of famously man-eating Royal Bengal tigers, Ghosh’s novel aims to depict the human costs of absentee ecological patronage. The novel uses the Sundarbans as a limit-case of the theory of conservation; it asks its reader to confront a situation in which the needs of human and nonhuman animal populations seem to be entirely incompatible, and in which the issue of reservation of space, either for animal or human use, is desperately important. Ghosh brings his conservationist figures, the American biologist Piya and the urban, cosmopolitan, translator Kanai, into the contested space of the Sundarbans in order to stage a realization of what the text identifies as the ethical poverty of global conservation movements.

Ghosh is noted for his scholarly approach to writing fiction (Freudenberger). The extensive research that he undertook in order to write *The Hungry Tide*, including living in a village in the Sundarbans and travelling up the Mekong river with a cetologist (Ferdous and Rutsch 49), is the basis of a narrative that is “anthropological” in its
attention to detail (Tepper). The novel explores what it might mean to live as part of a
human community in what conservationists define as “one of the world’s great wild
places” (Seidensticker 418), haunted by the presence of one of the world’s largest
populations of wild tigers. The urgent specificity of the location — the centrality of the
space is so great that Fletcher argues that the Sundarbans becomes a character rather than
a setting (7) — is worth noting in a text that so greatly stresses the constructedness of
location and the artificiality of borders. Throughout the novel, a tension exists between
the desire to claim spatial legitimacy for a subaltern human population living in what can
be seen as a subaltern landscape, and the aesthetic and thematic choice to represent space,
identity, temporality, culture, and other categories as fluid and mutable. The novel’s
relationship to the Sundarbans as an essentially changeable space is an important
expression of this tension, as is the place of nonhuman animals, and particularly tigers,
within the narrative.

The Hungry Tide’s approach to its location and to the tiger who inhabits it is a
paradoxical one. On one hand, the novel wants to insist on the materiality of this
environment and of the lives of its people. The reality of tiger attacks is an important part
of that lived experience, and Ghosh emphasizes the fact of these deaths, a fact that has
been edited out of the official narrative of the region. Nilima, a development activist
who has founded an NGO called the Badabon Trust, tells her nephew Kanai, “Nobody

40 In fact, this population is the “largest single, contiguously-distributed tiger population in the sub-
continent” (McDougal 443). This fact makes the conditions for tiger conservation particularly excellent
in the region; however, it also leads scientists to employ a rhetoric of besiegement in relation to this
island of reserved space. As Seidensticker writes, “there are no tigers in adjacent areas, only people.
Any tiger that ventures out is dead” (416).

41 Ghosh’s representation of this official narrative is perhaps unfair, since the Sundarbans tigers receive
worldwide attention for their attacks on humans.
knows exactly how many killings there are. None of the figures is reliable. But of this I’m sure: there are many more deaths than the authorities admit” (240). The other dangers of living in the Sundarbans are also documented. The novel gives attention to the hardships faced by a marginalized population, economically and politically disenfranchised, depending on precarious, often seasonal labour; we witness storms, floods, lack of resources, and bureaucratic mismanagement. Despite this obvious concern with the meticulous representation of lived experience — the anthropological style — the text continually returns to the symbolic qualities of the landscape and of the tiger, using the lyricism that emerges from these qualities for its aesthetic force. Nirmal, a former teacher who is married to Nilima, describes the Sundarbans as a place where “[t]here are no borders [...] to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea” (7). This impression of a landscape that evades categorization, a place of dangerous encounters and transgressive connections, is positioned in contrast to the artificiality of borders between nations (India and Bangladesh) and between reserved (for nonhuman animals) and human spaces. This landscape, for the novel, has an “epic mutability” (154). The Sundarbans as an environment becomes heavily overdetermined in The Hungry Tide by the novel’s insistence on the location’s symbolic capital in relation to an important, if somewhat ideologically opaque, trope of borderlessness and transformation. Explaining the fascination with borders and borderlessness in his work, Ghosh says, “What interested me first about borders was their arbitrariness, their constructedness — the ways in which they are ‘naturalized’ by modern political mythmaking. I think this interest arose because of some kind of inborn distrust of anything that appears to be ‘given’ or taken-for-
granted” (qtd. in Hawley 9). Ghosh’s investment in certain borders to support his deconstruction of others is clear, however, in his deployment of the nonhuman animal as a given category. The novel instrumentalizes its nonhuman animal inhabitants to suggest that the creation of borders around reserved land is not only futile but ultimately oppressive, but also to indicate that the border between nonhuman animal and the human is a sacred division.

Like the landscape, the tiger, as a living animal and as a figure, is overdetermined in *The Hungry Tide*. The novel tries to bring the reality of tiger attacks to the fore as part of its exposure of the conditions of subaltern living in the Sundarbans, but it cannot resist a dependence on the symbolic meanings of the tiger. Despite the investment in the physical violence of human-tiger encounters, tigers are strangely disembodied in the novel; they are represented as spectral presences. In a description of one attack, Ghosh writes, “the great cats of the tide country were like ghosts, never revealing their presence except through marks, sounds and smells. They were so rarely seen that to behold one, it was said, was to be as good as dead” (108). This is precisely the idea that Corbett articulates in *Man-eaters of Kumaon* — that the transgression of the nonhuman into human space occurs when the tiger breaks into the human visual field. While, for Corbett, the unseen tiger is a benevolent presence, in *The Hungry Tide* the tiger haunts the forest as a pervasive threat that could erupt into the seen world at any time, without warning, and with immediately deadly consequences. But the myth of the tiger — its cultural capital both in the region and for the novel — goes beyond this idea of threat. The idea that the very sight of a tiger can kill emphasizes the transformative power of the
encounter between tiger and human. In the Bon Bibi story, which is represented as the origin myth of the Sundarbans, the tiger is the avatar of the demon; for Kanai, by contrast, the tiger is a figure of forgiveness and benediction. After his own encounter with a tiger, Kanai believes he understands why the people of the Sundarbans see tigers as “something more than just animal” (328). In *The Hungry Tide*, the tiger is a figure of representational confusion, and any interpretation of its presence in the text must take into account its many and contradictory meanings. As Tiffin and Huggan argue, representations of nonhuman animals often present interesting and telling contradictions: “Such representational anomalies are indicative of our attempts to reconcile, and thereby come to terms with, the contradictory attitudes to animals that most human societies harbour” (138). *The Hungry Tide* insists on different meanings of the tiger by turns, utilizing them all, but failing to negotiate among them — failing, indeed, to come to terms with the complexity of its own representation.

The politics of the novel are unabashedly humanist; as Tiffin and Huggan observe, the text assumes that “[p]eople [...] necessarily take precedence over animals” (188). Ghosh represents humanity as the necessary qualification for ethical consideration, and even ecological ethics is routed through the greater good of the human population. Moyna, the wife of the fisherman Fokir who is the novel’s central subaltern character,

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42 Rajender Kaur argues, on the other hand, that the tiger in the novel is purely metaphorical. He writes that “the tiger becomes a Blakean archetype of an awesome natural force” that engages the local people in “an eternal battle of survival” that is “elemental” rather than social, economic, or political (136). Kaur’s discussion does not take into account, however, the material facts of living in the Sundarbans — of which the wild tiger is one — upon which the novel is so insistent. It seems to me that a reading of any aspect of the location here as metaphor alone is reductive of the text’s ethics.

43 Implicit in Huggan and Tiffin’s statement is the problematic idea that nonhuman animals aren’t “people.”
does not want her son Tutul to become a fisherman because the nylon nets used by
wealthy prawn traders are likely to deplete the fish population and destroy the
fishermen’s livelihood. She says, “It’s people like us who’re going to suffer” (134). There
is no representation of the environmental effects of this kind of fishing, nor is there an
effort to consider what the loss of life might mean to the animals themselves. Despite this
insistence on the priority of the human, however, Ghosh employs interspecies encounters
— between humans and tigers — to structure two of the most important ethical moments
in the text: the killing of a tiger by a mob of villagers, as witnessed by Piya, and the
epiphanic moment experienced by Kanai on the island of Garjontola. I will discuss these
encounters in greater detail below, but for now I want to note a central tension in the
novel: it positions the interests of subaltern human beings and those of nonhuman in
direct opposition, at the same time that it evokes affiliations between the same two
groups by privileging the subaltern human as a naturalized figure of difference, of
intuitive knowledge, and of connection to land, location, and nonhuman animals. Fokir,
for example, is uniquely attuned to the movements of the river dolphins. Thus, while
insisting on the humanity of the subaltern, it also suggests that the subaltern enjoys a
connection to the nonhuman that is distinctive and worth honouring. This honouring
occurs when the cosmopolitan is forced, via interspecies encounters, to recognize and
incorporate subaltern perspectives.

Many of Ghosh’s novels maintain a faith in the figure of the cosmopolitan, and
the possibility that, once the limitations of his or her view are tempered by experience
and knowledge, and specifically with exposure to the subaltern, the cosmopolitan can use
his or her position of privilege for the greater good of humanity. Thus, while the cosmopolitan is taught a certain humility, Ghosh ultimately reaffirms the value of cosmopolitanism itself. In *The Hungry Tide*, these cosmopolitan figures are Kanai and Piya, who have travelled from different worlds (the West and the urban) to the Sundarbans. These two characters also take on the role of conservationists. Like Corbett and Diwan Sahib, both Kanai and Piya occupy ultimate positions of privilege in relation to the rest of the novel’s characters, particularly in terms of their economic resources and their status as part of worlds beyond the Sundarbans; both are connected to global systems of power (scientific and linguistic) and, by extension, to global capital.

Kanai and Piya, at the outset, occupy secure identity positions in relation to their own self-perceptions, and in relation to wider systems of power that define them as individual subjects. They experience and articulate their identities through systems of scientific and linguistic knowledge that locate them firmly within the nexus of global power. By virtue of this privilege, their status as human is absolutely certain. The privilege that Kanai and Piya inhabit, then, positions them as ideal conservationist figures, open, like Corbett, to the transformative anxieties produced in the interspecies encounter. Terri Tomsky argues

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44 Piya’s gender complicates her position of privilege, and the representation of a shift in her gender presentation is one of the more problematic transformations in the novel. At the beginning of the narrative, she is clearly represented as someone at a distance from her supposed femininity. When Kanai first sees her, he notices “the neatly composed androgyny of her appearance” (3). She has consciously constructed a gender presentation that has allowed her to gain admittance to the structures of scientific patriarchal power. Part of her transformation in the novel, and the way the novel tempers her scientific cosmopolitanism, is her reconnection to herself as a woman, a change that occurs through her sexual attraction to Fokir. The representation of Piya as a woman connected to Western systems of power is clearly contrasted in the text with the local women, who are essentialized as goddess figures (Bon Bibi, of course, as the archetypal goddess, but this type of representation is also at work in Ghosh’s rendering of Moyna, Fokir’s wife) or muses (as in the relationship between Kusum and Nirmal). At the end of the novel, Piya is both a woman connected to this kind of essentialized subaltern femininity and a figure of cosmopolitan privilege, a hybridization that makes her uniquely able to engage in the kind of grassroots ecology she envisions in the future of Project Fokir.
that Ghosh’s ethic is based on the transformation of the cosmopolitan by “radicalized love” (62) an affective experience disassociated from all “traditional forms of community” (63) and effected through an exposure to subaltern spaces. Tomsky’s reading focuses on the encounter of the cosmopolitan (Piya and Kanai) with the space of the Sundarbans, but the relevance of her interpretation to the representation of species in the novel is clear: she argues that the ethic of the text arises after the destruction of “sedimented norms” in the individual, a transformation that occurs only “in proximity to the other” (59). Piya and Kanai’s cosmopolitan security is indeed challenged by the space of the Sundarbans, but the most radical “proximity to the other,” I argue, occurs in their encounters with tigers. These encounters are prefaced, however, by the exposure to human subalternity that constructs the humanist frame through which we are meant to read the novel’s interspecies meetings.

The ethic that governs Ghosh’s novel hinges on recognition, and specifically on the recognition of the human. Unlike Kanai and Piya’s, Fokir’s status as human is much more fluid in its nature and contested in relation to global power; it is for this reason that the novel must continually assert his humanity, and that of Kusum, Horen, and the refugees. For Rajender Kaur, the novel is about “the sanctity of human life” (131), and Piya’s transformation in particular tempers her environmentalism with “humaneness” (132). Kaur’s postcolonial humanism aligns with the novel’s impassioned commitment to the recognition and recuperation of subaltern humanity. Piya is surprised by Fokir’s “recognition” of her as a “person,” rather than “a representative of a species”

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45 Tomsky’s interpretation, like Fletcher’s mentioned above, figures the setting of the novel as a fictional agent, rather than as a background.
or “a faceless, tongueless foreigner” (71). She discovers that the bonds of their common humanity reach across the gulfs of language and experience. Through moments like this one, the novel attempts to insert the people of the Sundarbans into a construction of humanity that will guarantee their attainment of ethical subjecthood.

The idea of a mutual recognition — of a shared or universal humanity — is complicated, however, by the essentialization of Fokir, who is the novel’s exemplary subaltern figure; his subalternity is signalled particularly in his voicelessness (he is silent throughout the novel, communicating through gesture, in part because of his linguistic difference from the other major characters). Fokir is eroticized through repeated descriptions of his body, “a male anatomy reduced to its essentials” (138). His relationship to the Sundarbans is represented as symbiotic and seamless, and his familiarity with the landscape — including his observation of the dolphins’ migration routes — is naturalized as inborn knowledge. This uncritical essentialization also sometimes extends to Ghosh’s readers. Rajender Kaur observes that Fokir, as a figure of “deep time” (126), is intimately connected, through his body, with the “rhythms” of the Sundarbans (127, 136). Pramod K. Nayar, in a psychoanalytic reading of the novel, identifies Fokir as the “indigenous canny” — as opposed to the “postcolonial uncanny” (116) — whose “mystic knowledge born of folklore and native intelligence” presents an alternative mode of inhabiting space (114). Neither of these scholars notes such instrumentalization of the subaltern as a problem or contradiction in the text, which suggests the seductive nature of this kind of essentialism for a postcolonial humanist perspective.
One challenge presented by this perspective is the question of Fokir’s entrance into the narrative of history; to what degree does Fokir become a historical subject over the course of the narrative, or, by contrast, to what extent is his historicity abandoned or sacrificed to the novel’s neoprimitivist strain? Victor Li argues that Fokir is a figure of “necroidealism,” meaning that his life is sacrificed so that he can remain an idealized figure of resistance to hegemony. Li writes that Fokir’s death and that of his mother Kusum are part of a “sacrificial logic” in which they are cast as “‘authentic’ subalterns who resist and remain heterogeneous to hegemonic modernity” (290); it is precisely because they must inhabit this position of perpetual and resistant difference that they both must die. Their historicity is posthumously reclaimed when, as Li argues, their lives are “recounted and memorialized by literate, modern characters like Nirmal, Kanai and Piya” (290). That task of narrativization, of reclaiming the humanity of the subaltern, is left to the conservationist figures in the novel. They establish the humanity of the subaltern in part through their temporal difference from nonhuman animals. The text’s definition of the human is wrapped up in an idea of history, which is, in turn, related to a narrative of development. The human is a temporal being, and the erasure of subaltern people from the progression of time has amounted to a denial of their humanity. Animals are timeless; human beings must exist in and of time. In their relationship to time, however, the novel treats its two main nonhuman species quite differently. The river dolphins, given a part in a period of human history, and constructed through their relationship to the human

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46 Piya narrates the history of the human discovery of the Gangetic and Irrawaddy dolphins in a chronology that explicitly exposes the colonial genealogy of both natural history as a science and species preservation as an advocacy movement (227-231).
characters, are in some sense grounded in a human conception of time; they are temporally adjacent to the human, but the differences that remain are important. For example, the dolphins’ time is cyclical. Each day, they observe what seem to be ritual movements: they migrate, but their migrations defy scientific expectations (124). In its circularity, the time that the dolphins keep is closer to the tidal temporality of the Sundarbans than to the linear temporality of human beings, but nevertheless the dolphins do exhibit a sense of time. Tigers, the other central nonhumans, are still further from human temporality. With bodies that are ghostly rather than corporeal, the tigers exist in a kind of suspension, articulated through their various mythic selves. Since the tigers cannot really be located in space, they also cannot be located in time; we have no sense of the logic of their movements or their life cycles, as the novel provides for the dolphins, nor are we given an idea of their relationship to human history. The tigers appear as figures of myth, and figures of contemporary state discipline, but their appearances in the novel mark flashes of interspecies exposure, after which the tigers disappear again into unknowable darkness. The tiger is denied a temporality, but it could be argued that this gesture is one of non-appropriation — that the novel refuses to coopt the tiger into its own linear narrative. I argue, by contrast, that the instrumentalization of the tiger lies precisely in this insistence on its opacity. The tiger functions as a figure of opposition to the essential historicity of the human.

In reclaiming a relationship of the human beings of the Sundarbans to history and temporality, *The Hungry Tide* performs a characteristic action of postcolonial humanism; that is, it attempts to claim humanity for the postcolonial subaltern. In this effort, the
novel repeatedly casts a claim to history as the most important way of accessing that human status for the people of the Sundarbans. Nirmal’s historicist narrative of the massacre of the refugees at Morichjhãpi amounts to a claim for the recognition of their humanity and thus of their ethical status. The novel, like many texts of postcolonial humanism, thus both recognizes and does not recognize the centrality of the question of species to its own ideological and political position. If the recognition of the human is so fraught, surely it is the status of the nonhuman animal, the necessary supplement to any exclusive definition of the human, that must be central to our discussion. And the fact that the novel does not engage with its own exclusion of Fokir from its definition of humanity makes the claim for the ethical status of the human all the more problematic.

In order to make the people of the Sundarbans properly historical, a new benchmark of the ahistorical must be created in the novel. The nonhuman animal must be excised from history, in a sacrifice that effects the entry of the Morichjhãpi refugees into the historical narrative. Despite a professed interest in alternative or subaltern histories, Ghosh, in *The Hungry Tide*, seems to suggest that being historical is intimately a part of what it means to be human. Anshuman Mondal documents the influence of Dipesh Chakrabarty on Ghosh’s work (135), and it is clear that *The Hungry Tide* attempts to engage with the kind of “heterotemporality” that Chakrabarty uses to destabilize the Eurocentric narrative of history (*Provincializing* 239). The U.S. mailbag that serves as a shelter on Fokir’s boat, for example, functions as a “timeknot,” an object that exposes how we exist in multiple temporalities at once (Chakrabarty *Provincializing* 243). Nevertheless, perhaps because of its attachment to the idea of the human subject, the
novel attempts to bridge the gaps caused by the “irreducible plurality” of temporalities (Chakrabarty *Provincializing* 108), rather than, as Chakrabarty suggests we must, letting them remain in an uncomfortable but productive relationship. For example, the denial of the refugees’ humanity is continually coupled, in the text, with the fear that their story will be lost to history. Indeed, the Morichjhāpi massacre was underreported at the time and has largely been ignored by historians since. Ross Mallick describes at length his futile efforts to raise scholarly interest in the Morichjhāpi atrocities, noting the constraining influence of government funding upon academic practice: he suggests that the regime carefully controls research access and grants in order to prevent any questioning of its practices or authority (120). Mallick’s effort, in which *The Hungry Tide* also engages, is to reassert the place of the massacre in the official narrative of history. Ashis Nandy, like Chakrabarty, contests the political power or agency offered by the discourse of history. He argues that history offers “only one option” for the dismantling of imperialist thought systems: “that of bringing the ahistoricals into history” (83). This move is obviously one that *The Hungry Tide* makes, but its emancipatory power is, as Nandy observes, questionable. The novel seems to contest the idea that the people of the Sundarbans are ahistorical by proving their historicity through a contrast to the nonhuman animal, who exists only on the fringes of history. If, for Corbett, the tiger provides a way of historicizing the individual autobiographical self, in *The Hungry Tide* the tiger functions as a conduit for the historicization, and thus humanization, of the region’s entire human community. In this way, the conservationist figures, Piya and Kanai, also function as historians. Their role is to reclaim and reassert the historical narrative of forgotten
people, and their contacts with the ahistorical tigers mysteriously confront them with the historicity of the human, a historicity that amounts to an ethical call. History, as a dominant and dominating discourse, presents a cohesive narrative, and this necessary cohesion is another reason for the ejection of the tiger from the novel. If subaltern human beings are to enter the narrative of history, the tiger must exit it.

It could be argued, then, that *The Hungry Tide* betrays the idea of “heterotemporalità” by seeking to incorporate heterogeneous histories into a single narrative, and to reclaim the place of the Sundarbans in the larger trajectory of history. If all of the narratives within the novel’s (staged) multivocality — mythic and material, urban and rural, colonial, precolonial, and postcolonial — can be folded into a single, universally inclusive, model of modernity, as the novel seems to suggest they can, then the nonhuman animal must present the only serious challenge that the text allows to the idea that this universal might always apply. If an encounter with the nonhuman animal interrupts time, interrupts the flow of history, it suggests that another temporality is possible. The timelessness that the western or urban Indian perspective assumes will characterize human life in the Sundarbans gets shifted onto the figure of the nonhuman animal. Most of the subaltern human beings (with the important exception of Fokir) are proved to be properly historical, and the ahistoricity imposed upon them by hegemonic narratives of modernity is displaced onto the already overdetermined figure of the tiger.

Part of the narrative of modernity suggested by *The Hungry Tide* is the complementary discourse of development. The novel proposes a revision of Western-sponsored development initiatives by emphasizing instead a locally-grounded vision in
line with what Tiffin and Huggan call “post-development.” Post-development, without rejecting the idea of development outright, seeks a more nuanced approach in which “development is re-articulated at grass-roots levels” and acknowledges that, in a heterogeneous world, “multiple modernities” must be “negotiated in local terms” (31). In view of this definition, *The Hungry Tide*’s investment in a post-developmental philosophy is clear. Without relinquishing a faith that development can ensure the realization of human potential and human freedoms, the novel attempts to sketch a model through which the complicity of development with global capital and structures of state power can be tempered by appropriate attention to local interests. Nilima, in her work for the Badabon Trust, is able to negotiate between her strategic complicity with government and philanthropists and the realization of her goals for her home village of Lusibari, and this negotiation is not only possible, in the novel, but successful.

Particularly in relation to the refugees at Morichjhāpi, the text presents conservation as a disciplinary force that bars the natural development of human society and perverts a sense of natural justice. The police lay siege to the island, announcing that the land “belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid for by people from all around the world” (261). The policemen are present to enforce the central dictate of conservation: the removal of human beings from reserved animal space. A sense haunts the novel that conservation has taken over space that is properly human, and that conservation has thus upset a delicate balance that has always existed in the Sundarbans. Ghosh turns conservationist rhetoric back upon itself, suggesting that the establishment of balance in nature is not something that conservation attempts to restore, but something
that conservation destroys. In the Bon Bibi myth, half of the Sundarbans is reserved for humans, and half for wilderness, “its two halves, the wild and the sown, being held in careful balance” (103). Project Tiger, government, and foreign interests, have, in the novel, claimed all of the Sundarbans for animals, destroying the seemingly idyllic situation that existed as part of the region’s indigenous wisdom. Kusum, the refugee whose words are reported in Nirmal’s memoir of the massacre, invokes the breakdown of the species boundary when she describes her fear: “this whole world has become a place of animals, and our fault, our crime, was that we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have, from the water and the soil” (262). This statement contradicts the novel’s drive towards historicizing the subaltern. In Kusum’s representation, the essential human is timeless, while the contemporary world — including institutions of government and capital, integrally part of the historical narrative — is animal. We can see in Kusum’s statement one of the essential tensions in the novel: that between the idealized subaltern and the historicized subaltern, which cannot quite be made to coexist. The post-developmental position that Kusum expresses codes the nonhuman animal as unnatural, part of a drive among absentee — whether foreign or urban Indian — forces to change, fundamentally, the definition of the human. By contrast, human development, in the form of settlement, agriculture, and cultivation of the land, is the natural, set against an unnatural domination of the properly human world by the avaricious grasping of the

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47 Ross Mallick argues that this sense of balanced interdependence is part of a “folklore” invented by conservation movements to appeal to, or to assuage the guilt of, Western patrons. “The fact of the matter,” he writes, “is that villagers would be better off if the tigers were nonexistent” (116). This position is one that The Hungry Tide supports; nevertheless, the novel needs the tiger as a figure of cultural representation. The text constructs its own folklore, of which the tiger is an important part, and this construction is central to the humanizing mission that the novel undertakes.
animal (where the animal is, rather than a singular being, a figure composed of the affective and economic investments in conservation and environmentalism). The novel represents the settlers at Morichjāpi as the ultimate subject for development. Nirmal is amazed at their “industry” and “diligence”; he finds their settlement “an astonishing spectacle — as though an entire civilization had sprouted up suddenly in the mud” (191). In this reversal of the typical language of conservation, the separation of human and animal space is equally important, but for the opposite reason: here, land must be reserved from animals in order for human beings to develop along a naturalized course toward civilization. Humanization of the space of wilderness is key, here, to the cultivation of what is proper to the human; in order for this process to take place, space must be reserved for this act of cultivation, space in which the properly human can flourish without the threat of animalization.

The relevance of the novel’s investment in development to the question of species difference is clear not only in spatial terms — the need for separate human space in which development can occur naturally — but also in the casting of the role of the conservationist. Despite its distrust of global conservation movements — those forces that, according to the text, provide support for Project Tiger — the novel is invested in a

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48 Nayar writes that the communities in the novel are “persecuted” by tigers (103), perhaps unconsciously picking up on the anthropomorphically moralistic shading of the tiger-human problem that the novel employs with regard, particularly, to the refugees.

49 Other critics offer a different reading; for them, Ghosh’s use of the Sundarbans — a space whose status as land is shifting and unstable — undermines the idea that any place can be humanized, or that human beings can have any deep connection to place (Fletcher 7, 12; Nayar 93). While it may be true, in the case of the cosmopolitan characters, that the text does not naturalize the bond between human and location, Fokir is clearly depicted as naturally integrated into his environment. For the refugees, it seems that, given space, a connection to place can and should be constructed, and that this construction is essential to humanity.
certain form of conservation. Piya’s work with the river dolphins provides a key perspective on environment; the decline of the environmental health of the region is clearly the fault of the same faceless global interests that promote the protection of tigers. What the novel privileges is not a world without ecology, but rather an ecology that focuses on the relationship between the land and the human, and that, in the event of conflict, will always give precedence to human interests. The novel then might seem to do away with the boundary-setting that conservation involves; it wants, instead, to suggest that human and nonhuman animals can share space. At the same time, however, it is clear that when conflicts over space occur, a barrier between species that has really always been in effect will be absolutely enforced, and the nonhuman animal will always be on the losing side. In line with its post-developmental politics, the novel is “inclined to fetishise local communities” (Huggan and Tiffin 68). Throughout, Ghosh valorizes an indigenous form of multispecies relations, without fully considering the ways that those relations have been shaped by the history that is seemingly so important to the novel, or questioning the problematic naturalization of indigenous populations’ relationship to their environment.

The categorical, if not spatial, separation of animal and human that is effected throughout the novel through the deployment of scientific, literary, and economic modes of humanist thinking is challenged, if only momentarily, in two moments of tiger-human contact. Piya and Kanai connect with tigers in these encounters through means of expression usually inscribed as proper to the human: the voice and the gaze. One night, Piya and Fokir witness the torture of a tiger by a group of villagers, a kind of revenge
against the entire population of tigers for the human deaths. During this attack on the tiger, who is at this point trapped and blinded, Ghosh describes a moment of interruption: “the tiger gave voice, for the first time. Instantly, the people around the pen dropped their staves and scattered, shielding their faces as if from the force of a detonation; the sound was so powerful that Piya could feel it through the soles of her bare feet” (293). The tiger’s contagious voice creates a moment outside of language and historical time, one that connects Piya to the animal through earth and skin, infecting her with the ethic that will define the rest of her actions in the text. The movement of the narrative, in one of its most graphic scenes, is momentarily suspended in this interspecies “contact zone” formed by the physical power of sound. This sound is a gift or an offering — the tiger “gave voice” — rather than a communication. By contrast to the use of the animal voice in Corbett and Roy, the novel offers no reading of animal language here, and no interpretation, in human terms, of the utterance. Instead, the voice appears as a form of touch, traumatic rather than tender, that initiates Piya’s transformation. This moment instrumentalizes the tiger as a transformative tool, as a conduit of the natural world — a grounding force — that works against Piya’s cosmopolitanism to locate her in the Sundarbans and to ethically reshape her environmentalism and conservationism.

Throughout the text, this voice of the tiger, as it appears in Piya’s encounter, alternates with representations of the tiger’s spectral silence. In other words, the tiger is never seen and heard at the same time. When Kusum’s father is killed, for example, the

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50 Donna Haraway borrows the term “contact zone” from Mary Pratt for her discussion of interspecies (canine-human) communication (When Species Meet 216).

51 In the scene of the attack, discussed above, the tiger is trapped inside a building and is therefore not visible.
tiger is terrifyingly visible, but silent; at another moment, the distant roar of the tiger can be heard from Lusibari. Alone on Garjontola, an angry and disoriented Kanai encounters a tiger who may or may not be a mirage. In this meeting, it is the gaze of the nonhuman animal that creates the encounter. Kanai opens his eyes to be immediately confronted by this gaze: “It was sitting on its haunches, with its head up, watching him with its tawny, flickering eyes” (329). The shared gaze of animal and human affects both bodies; both are momentarily stilled by this act of looking. Like the cry of the trapped tiger that resonates in Piya’s body, the gaze between the tiger and Kanai is infectious, transmitting to the cosmopolitan translator the important idea of his own limitations. The torture and killing of the tiger as an act of collective retribution — the moment that Piya witnesses — forces Piya to acknowledge the incommensurability between her own worldview and that of Fokir. She experiences the scene as one of inexpressible “horror” (300) that graphically sketches the distance between Western liberal ecological thinking and the lived experience of interspecies contacts.52 As a moment of critique of “the human costs” (301) of ecologies imposed from above, the killing of the tiger is folded back into the novel’s investment into an anthropocentric discourse of post-development. Similarly, the encounter between Kanai and a tiger on the island is recoded, after the fact, as a moment of pure metaphor, pure representation: the mirage of the tiger initiates Kanai’s transformation into a good humanist, “scrubbed clean” (332) of the stain of his

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52 A similar moment occurs in *Man Eaters of Kumaon*, in which villagers want to “hack” a tiger “to bits” in revenge for its killings. Although Corbett sympathizes with their anger, “for there was not a man among them who had not suffered at her [the Champawat man-eater’s] hands” (37), he is able to control and soothe the “demented” (37) crowd and its ringleader, marking another victory for the supposed rationality of paternalist colonial power.
Westernized, capitalist former life. Kanai is brought to a new humility by his vulnerability in the encounter with the tiger by being reduced to incapacity, as he is, without the benefit of subaltern knowledge. Like Corbett, Piya and Kanai encounter the tiger in moments that destabilize their seemingly secure identities and divorce them from the contexts that define their privilege. Corbett attempts to take from these meetings a reinforcement of his identity and position; they are enfolded in the overall narrative of the colonial protector, but the success of this enfoldment is itself undermined by the repetitive structure of the stories, which read as a cycle of repression and rupture. Ghosh, in *The Hungry Tide*, uses the tiger encounters not to dismantle his protagonists’ privilege, but to provide the ethical call that initiates their transformations into cosmopolitans that are responsive to, and responsible for, the local.

In these transformative moments, do the conservationists Piya and Kanai become open to the address of the animal? Does the tiger address them? They certainly feel themselves to be addressed. Piya feels that transformative “horror” after her experience (300); Kanai emerges from the forest exclaiming, “I saw it Piya. I saw the tiger” (330), and later claims, “at Garjontola I learnt how little I know of myself and of the world” (353). The novel is concerned with technologies of seeing and locating: using her GPS, Piya can see herself concretely, anywhere in the world; her binoculars fetch the object of her gaze with “vividness and particularity” (75), and this technological gaze

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53 Kanai is the “founder and chief executive officer” of a translation business that “specialize[s] in serving the expatriate communities of New Delhi” (20). His work thus represents a nexus of linguistic and economic exchanges that emerges from the context of globalization.
captures and contains what it sees. Through the collection of data, Piya can read the natural world. Kanai, with his command of languages, lays claim to a universal understanding, as well as the universal translatability of experience. Though the novel attempts to destabilize the confidence of these scientific and cosmopolitan positions, it does not question the universality of its own anthropological gaze; it suggests that Kanai and Piya’s positions only need to be tempered with a bit of local knowledge for their understandings to be universally valid. The novel’s narrative voice enters into the consciousness of its characters unproblematically, assuming that it has an unrestricted access to their inner lives and motivations; these lives and motivations it lays bare, in intricate detail, for its reader. In this way, the tiger presents, again, an important challenge to the gaze of the novel itself; since the tiger is given no anthropomorphic inner life or motivation by the narrative voice, the nature of its consciousness remains resistant to interpretation, by both the novel and its reader. This node of resistance to the universal readability of experience opens up counternarrative possibilities. The humanist universality imagined by the novel falters on the resistant nonhuman consciousness, this perspective that it cannot fully appropriate into its vision. I argue that, while Fokir is similarly opaque for the novel, and instrumentalized by it, his death allows him to be re-enfolded by the humanist discourse, while the tiger at the end, who withdraws but does not die, remains to trouble that discourse from within the text itself. Though of course the text controls and shapes these tigers, there is something in the encounters that escapes this control. They create a disturbance, an unsettling remainder to the neat conclusions

54 Although, as Lisa Fletcher usefully observes, the binoculars indicate both Piya’s “control over knowledge [...] and the limits of her vision” (10 emphasis in original).
that the novel proposes for the trajectories of each of its characters.

These ruptures created in the novel by moments of interspecies contact must be suppressed for the functioning of the humanist politics; thus, the narrative appropriates the tiger’s voice into the paternalistic developmentalism of Piya’s Project Fokir, and the tiger’s gaze into the secular humanism of Kanai’s newfound literary ambition. The resolution of the novel is only effected through a relationship of supplementarity with the figure of the tiger: the tiger must be present to inaugurate these moments of epiphany, but must disappear in order for the anthropocentric regime to be maintained. In an echo of Kanai’s experience on Garjontola, Piya and Fokir, attempting to shelter themselves from the storm, see a tiger in a nearby tree. The animal fixes them with her gaze — “Without blinking, the tiger watched them for several minutes” (389) — before slipping back into the water and swimming away. This moment marks the last appearance of the tiger in the novel, and functions to remind us of its irreducible trace in the text, at the same time that it stages the animal’s physical withdrawal from the narrative. Fokir is also supplementary to the text, in that his death facilitates the novel’s idealization of subaltern knowledge. As Li argues, in order for the subaltern to function as a kind of utopian ideal, she or he must die; Li writes, “it is the subaltern’s non-existence that ensures the possibility of its conceptualization as a critical alternative to existing hegemonies” (276). In Li’s reading, the manner of Fokir’s death (being crushed by debris while shielding Piya with his body) suggests that he is “literally incorporated or encrypted into Piya” (290). At the same time that his body is thus incorporated, “his intuitive knowledge of local topography and ecology is transferred to and preserved in the scientist’s Global Positioning System” (Li
While it could be argued that Piya’s Project Fokir, and her appropriation of his knowledge, represents the entry of Fokir into history, it is perhaps more accurate to say that his life is sacrificed for the idea of his alternative, subaltern historicity, and for the idea of his subaltern humanity. What distinguishes Fokir from the tiger in *The Hungry Tide* is precisely this sacrifice; the tiger does not die, but swims away. The resonance between Project Tiger and Project Fokir is perhaps a heavy-handed way for Ghosh to suggest the ethical shift between imposed, oppressive, bureaucratic ecological legislation, and ethical, subaltern-focused, post-development, humanist ecologies, but, in the structure of the novel, the tiger simply cannot be incorporated into a “project” in the same way that the dead subaltern can be. *The Hungry Tide* does not, and ultimately cannot, account for the tiger, and herein lies the key difference between its representation of human subalternity, most notably in the figure of Fokir, and the nonhuman animal.

Despite its reinscription into the hegemonic narratives of development and humanism, the tiger remains so disorderly a presence that the novel is forced to erase it altogether. As Huggan and Tiffin observe, the difficult and long-standing problem of tiger-human coexistence in the Sundarbans is “displaced” in the text by Piya’s locally-integrated vision for the study and protection of river dolphins (188). The novel proposes “neither a practical nor a philosophical answer to the situation of the tiger” (188); rather, the tiger simply disappears. For Huggan and Tiffin, this shifting of focus is a sign that the text reserves no ethical place for the tiger, even as it proposes a certain anthropocentric environmentalism (189). I argue that, in fact, the tiger offers an opening to an entirely different ethic; the tiger is not only positioned to display the failure of Western ecological
discourse in human terms, but also to contest the Eurocentric version of modernity — that modernity exemplified by cosmopolitan (Kanai) and scientific (Piya) hygiene — that physically and ontologically separates the animal from the human. The novel’s instrumentalization of the tiger as a figure of anti-human threat, as well as premodern or subaltern spirituality, is thus incomplete because the presence of tigers in the novel introduces counterdiscursive possibilities for which the text cannot fully account. What my reading here risks, however, is to instrumentalize the tiger in another direction — as a figure for an ethical alterity that destabilizes Ghosh’s postcolonial humanism. While fully aware of this risk, I want to suggest that my reading operates in a different way from the readings that Li rightly critiques of subaltern silence in *The Hungry Tide* and other texts. Precisely because, unlike Fokir, the tiger remains alive even as she withdraws from the narrative space — because she will continue to live and be in and of the space of the Sundarbans — and because she does not stand for, but rather insists on the presence of the tigers of the Sundarbans and the singular and insoluble problems that attend their lives — I argue that to attempt to make more space for tigers in this novel is not to instrumentalize them, but rather to insist that they are there, and that through their presence they are speaking in ways that expand the text beyond its humanist confines, and in ways that point to both the poverty and impossibility of the kind of spatial division that both conservation and development demand.

Tracking the tiger through *The Hungry Tide* allows us to see how the human-nonhuman animal relationship functions in relation to conventions of postcolonial humanism; at the same time, we can witness how the interspecies encounter leaves a
trace in the text that eludes containment by hegemonic discourse. A reading of this novel demonstrates how the interspecies encounter, even in a text that is unreservedly humanist, represents the opening for an anti-anthropocentric ethic, one that destabilizes both animal and human. Ghosh’s novel relies on these encounters to suggest the possibility of imagining a uniquely postcolonial modernity, one that can resist the influence of global capital and Western patronage. But the presence of the tigers cannot entirely be appropriated by the novel’s postcolonial humanism; the tigers, by virtue of their opacity in the text, evoke a counternarrative potential that creates disorder in Ghosh’s humanist vision, and disruption in the ethical and spatial boundaries between human and nonhuman that *The Hungry Tide* attempts to reaffirm.

2.4. Conclusion

The problems that conservation movements seek to address are especially pressing in the contemporary context, and the elegiac tone of conservationist writing seems justified in light of the many threats with which wild nonhuman animals and their habitats are faced. It is important, however, to problematize the discourse of conservation as one that is rooted in imperial structures of power, and therefore participates in the categorization and hierarchization of spaces and of beings, both human and nonhuman. The spatial exclusivity that marked the beginnings of conservation in India — with the shooting blocks and reserved forests — is perpetuated today in the language of conservationists like Thapar, who argue that “forest dwellers” and “tribals” need to be kept out of reserved lands. More evidence of conservation’s imperial foundations is found
in the unchanged importance of the figure of the conservationist in both advocacy
movements and literary representation, as one who is implicated in the systems of power
that define the divisions between animal and human space and being, but who also enjoys
the freedom to transgress those very boundaries.

While the conservationist is a figure of privilege in these texts, the subaltern
represents a utopian figure of either multispecies living, in the case of Roy’s novel, or
humanist development, in The Hungry Tide. In this way, the subaltern human being is
instrumentalized to mark a difference from the conservationist, a kind of difference that
has important ethical implications. But, if the subaltern figures open up a challenge to the
spatial dictates of conservation, the ethical promise offered by their difference capitulates,
in these texts, to the discipline of neocolonial and capitalist power. These texts therefore
suggest that subaltern alliances between human and nonhuman may, in some contexts, be
desirable, but that they are simply untenable in the context of the disempowerment of
both groups.

Saberwal and Rangarajan suggest that Indian conservation is at an
“impasse” (“Introduction” 4) caused by the persistent idea, rooted in colonial ideology,
that “wildlife populations and humans [are] incompatible entities” (8). As Adams and
Mulligan argue, one implication of this division as it has been perpetuated into the
contemporary era is that conservation “has denied the possibility of positive outcomes for
interactions between human and non-human nature” (“Conclusions” 295). Conservation
denies, in fact, both the reality and the potential of ordinary multispecies living.
Conservation in the contemporary context should reflect on its colonial foundations, and
consider the ethical implications of its boundary-setting ideology and its selective control of interspecies encounters. The questions of who can meet the animal face-to-face, of who is the human and who is the animal, of the status of each of those faces in that encounter, have urgent implications for the theory and practice of conservation, at a time when the efforts of conservation movements are of undeniable global importance.

Conservation depends on divisions between spaces on a grand scale. It functions as a method of defining, categorizing, managing, and ultimately controlling the land, the species that live in it, and the nation, and, as we have seen, the union of conservation with nationalism was indeed a powerful one. The next chapter will explore the idea of the nation of India not as a space in which human and nonhuman spaces are divided, but a space in which the human itself is a multispecies entity. By contrast to the individualism of the conservationist figure, the next chapter imagines the individual body both as housing a collective and as being in constant relation to a collective; it imagines the individual body, in fact, as an expression of the nation itself, and of the multispecies polity that the postcolonial nation might become.
3. The Body: *Ahimsa* and the Politics of Vegetarianism

3.1. Introduction

In the early scenes of the 2001 film *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India*, the camera focuses closely on a chital — a small spotted deer — feeding peacefully in a scrub forest. The camera’s gaze suggests that the deer is being stalked by a hunter, and tension builds towards the expected rifle shot. Just before the shot is fired, however, we learn that we are not gazing through the eyes of a killer, but those of a saviour. Our first encounter with the film’s protagonist and hero, Bhuvan, comes as he alerts the deer by throwing a stone and thus prevents the British officers from collecting a trophy. Moments later, Bhuvan himself is in the sights of a rifle. He bravely stands his ground against the commanding officer of the Champaner cantonment, and the villain of the film, Captain Andrew Russell, but he is unable to save either the chital or the rabbit Russell shoots after derisively calling Bhuvan a “protector of animals.” This scene is followed closely by one in which the local ruler, Raja Puran Singh, is taking tea with Russell, his sister Elizabeth, newly arrived from England, and another British officer. The Raja is there to negotiate safe passage for his subjects through the land of another ruler. Russell tells the Raja that he will arrange this passage if he, Raja Puran Singh, will eat the meat from Russell’s plate. Puran Singh’s reaction moves from amused pity (for, surely, Russell has not understood him), to disbelief, to comprehension and disgust. He repeats emphatically, in both Hindi and English, “I am a vegetarian.” When asked the reason for his strange demand, Russell explains, “I just want to see you eating meat.” The Raja refuses, and Russell imposes the double tax (*lagaan*) that instigates the major conflict of the film.
Through the juxtaposition of these two scenes (Russell goes straight from his encounter with Bhuvan to his confrontation with the Raja), *Lagaan* performs a restoration of the “absent referent.” In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol J. Adams argues that “[a]nimals are the absent referent in the act of meat eating,” and that “[b]ehind every meal of meat is an absence: the death of the animal whose place the meat takes” (Adams 13). The two scenes from *Lagaan* immediately connect the meat on the plate with the deer in the forest; the hunt renders the nonhuman animal undeniably present, in order to intensify the horror of Russell’s demand of the Raja. The British soldiers are the killers of animals, and the Indian men — Bhuvan and the Raja — are animals’ protectors. At the same time that these scenes draw the connection between the living animal, that animal’s violent death, and meat, they also create metaphorical links among India’s people, the nation itself, and those vulnerable, exploited, and ultimately killed animals. The hunting trophy functions as a token of control of Indian animals and, by extension, of Indian human beings — a control that reaches beyond administration, beyond the capacity to impose *lagaan*, to the power over life and death. All Indian lives, the scenes suggest, are subject to the will of the British colonial regime. All Indian bodies are exploitable.

Andrew Russell is an inversion of the trope of the protective hunter and administrator that was on display in Corbett’s *Man-eaters of Kumaon*, discussed in the last chapter. Both his hunting and his administration are motivated by cruelty, and the film, by means of a prologue spoken in the authoritative tones of Amitabh Bachchan, connects the particular maliciousness of Russell’s individual action to the larger context of colonial exploitation. Bhuvan’s resistance to the hunt, therefore, signifies a larger resistance to capricious and
evil colonial power as it governs both human and nonhuman animals. This kind of metaphorical connection is, however, problematic, as Adams observes. When butchering (or meat) is used as a metaphor for violence against women, Adams argues, “[t]he animals have become absent referents, whose fate is transmuted into a metaphor for someone else’s existence or fate” (67). As in the case of the images and comparisons Adams discusses, the violence experienced by the animal here is, in part, a metaphor for the violence experienced by Indians under British colonial rule; however, the bodily presence of the nonhuman animal, especially when it can be seen, as in a film, cannot be ignored. The film clearly expresses the idea that all Indian beings — human and nonhuman — are oppressed by colonial power. A conception of how India might exist as a multispecies nation is thus central to the film’s vision of anticolonial resistance, and to its presentation of its protagonist: Bhuvan, the vegetarian hero, leads a nonviolent resistance that recasts ideal masculinity, aligning it with asceticism and nonharming rather than indulgence, violence, and domination. This kind of heroism offers a sharp contrast to the aggressive individualism and entrenched privilege of the last chapter’s conservationist figures. Bhuvan, though an individual, represents an idea of the collective, and the film evokes subaltern alliances not only among the village’s human population, but also between the nonhuman animals who are subject to the violence of the colonial hunt and the impoverished farmers who are subject to the violence of colonial taxation.

The relevance of this film’s imagination of colonial India, fifty-four years after Independence, lies in its reassertion of ideas that were central to the vision of the Indian
nation in perhaps its most influential strain of anticolonial resistance, the satyagraha movement begun and led by M.K. Gandhi. *Lagaan* presents an explicitly Gandhian vision of India. Set in 1893, the year in which Gandhi began his public work on behalf of Indians in South Africa, *Lagaan* takes up all of the major tenets of Gandhian thought. Its setting is rural, and decidedly non-modern and non-mechanized. Its cast of characters is consciously multi-religious and multi-caste (and the film includes an explicit rejection of the doctrine of untouchability). The characters engage in extensive self-purification, through prayer, meditation, yoga, and physical training, in order to prepare for their nonviolent and heavily symbolic resistance: the playing, and winning, of a cricket match against a team from the British Cantonment led by Russell himself. But of all of these central features of Gandhian resistance, the film first engages with *ahimsa* — nonharming — through the presence of the nonhuman animal as living body, and as dead flesh.

Carol J. Adams explicitly casts the eating of meat as an interspecies encounter, albeit one that is disavowed. She writes: “meat-eating is the most frequent way in which we interact with animals” (66). Adams’s “we” presumes a Western audience, since it is the culture of Western meat-eating that she is critiquing.55 Her analysis assumes a division between East and West, and uses the eating practices of the non-West as points of contrast, without giving them much detailed attention. She also frequently draws a direct connection between the ideologies of carnivory and those of colonialism (54, 55, 91, 114). Although she is certainly right to draw attention to this parallel, as the texts I

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55 Of course Adams’s ideas can also be applied to non-Western carnivory, but she herself does not make this move.
discuss in this chapter demonstrate, there is embedded in this model an assumption that meat-eating is a Western imposition on a unitary “East,” and not a practice that exists differently in many contexts across the world. As Jakob A. Klein notes, many academics, like Adams, who seriously consider the cultural and material meanings of meat are relatively unconcerned by what those meanings might be outside of the West, beyond the counterpoint they draw between largely meat-eating cultures and what they assume are largely vegetarian cultures (199-201). The consideration of Indian meat-eating is left to scholars of religion seeking the roots of this practice in ancient texts, or to social scientists who examine the practices of meat-eating and vegetarianism in specific human social groups, with varying sociopolitical valences, but without consideration of the position of nonhuman animals. Klein describes the way that this scholarly omission has created “[t]he impression [...] of a dichotomy between a ‘voluntary’ and ‘modern’ form of vegetarianism located in the West and an ‘involuntary’ and ‘traditional’ form of vegetarianism found elsewhere” (201). As Klein’s statement indicates, this dismissive approach to the motivations behind non-Western vegetarianisms is unproductive, particularly in the context of the increasing complexity of “[c]ulinary encounters and exchanges” (Klein 207) among and across regions of the globe. In this chapter, I want to expand in particular Adams’s valuable reading of meat and meat-eating in the West into the Indian context, to investigate how her ideas might apply in a food culture that operates with significant differences to the one she discusses, and is also more complex than her discussion suggests.

How can we bring the insights of animal studies to a consideration of postcolonial
vegetarianisms? What would it mean to examine meat-eating in a context in which the eating of meat is not “the most direct form of contact with non-human animals” (Adams 96), because nonhuman animals are persistently present, in both rural and urban settings? What is the connection between meat-eating and power when foundational social hierarchies, like caste, privilege not carnivory, but vegetarianism? How do these factors come to bear upon the conscious and consistent deployment of an opposition between meat-eating and vegetarianism as central to the imagination of India as an independent nation? And, finally, how does vegetarianism, which can, as Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi argues, be seen as a refusal to engage in interspecies encounters (567), function as a powerful openness to a new and unique idea of the nation as a multispecies polity? These are some of the questions that this chapter will address through a consideration of Gandhian ahimsa, a concept and practice that clearly and avowedly connects national power not just to vegetarianism, but also to a holistic idea of human/nonhuman relationships.

The connection between carnivory and colonialism, as ideologies, is well-documented. Tristram Stuart analyzes the European colonial response to Indian vegetarianism, arguing that, for the colonizers, vegetarianism “was the ultimate sign of pagan superstition,” a practice that, in its denial of human exceptionalism, “literally turned the world upside down” (261). As Adams observes, colonial ideology “divided the world into intellectually superior meat eaters and inferior plant eaters,” a division that

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56 Klein observes the problem of using the singular term “vegetarianism” to describe “meat avoidances with very different historical, ethical and cultural underpinnings” (206). Pluralizing the term is one way to bear in mind this difficulty.
“accounted for the conquering of other cultures by the English” (54). It was, therefore, colonial thinking that made the individual body — and the individual digestive system — a battleground between the oppressor and the oppressed. If Gandhi has been criticized for an inordinate focus on eating and digestion, he was, in fact, drawing attention to and exploiting a dominant mode of colonial thinking. Gandhi’s resistant vegetarianism is a direct response to the aggressive carnivory upon which colonial ideology relies. As Adams writes, “[v]egetarianism is an act of the imagination. It reflects an ability to imagine alternatives to the texts of meat” (232). Gandhi’s political career, as is reflected in his autobiography, is just such an imaginative act: he envisions a nation where a nation does not yet exist. The “texts of meat” to which he imagines alternatives are those that define the relationship of Indian to European, of colonized to colonizer. A vegetarian nation, Gandhi clearly recognizes, is one that resists the hierarchies of race, gender, and species in which colonial ideology is so invested. The texts that this chapter examines specifically engage with colonial power as it seeks both to define and to transform the bodies of the colonized through a politics of consumption; in response to this power, these texts propose a resistance that begins within the body. In the Indian context, meat is often the contentious substance (and the slippery signifier of many meanings) over which this struggle occurs.

Adams’s concept of the “texts of meat” is particularly apposite for this discussion, because both texts that this chapter considers unite their resistance to carnivory with explorations of textuality and genre, and both explicitly link colonial textual forms with carnivorous norms as forms of oppression. The image of the texts of meat also offers a
way to read the importance of vegetarianism as a resistant strategy both of and beyond the individual body, thus opening up a connection between embodied and linguistic resistance. This link allows us to go beyond dismissive or reductive readings of representations of diet and food that are especially evident in interpretations of Gandhi’s writing. This chapter examines M.K. Gandhi’s *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* as a complex and relentless interrogation of both Indian and European texts of meat, and an imagination of the resistant power of both Indian and European vegetarianisms. What this reading exposes is an alternative to the dominant interpretations of Gandhi’s vegetarianism as either a fad diet or a religious eating practice, an alternative that places Gandhi’s thinking about multispecies living at the foundation of his political vision (which is, indeed, where he himself positions it). As a complement to Gandhi’s *Autobiography*, I then turn to a contemporary reconsideration of the legacies of Indian anticolonial struggle and Independence: Vikram Chandra’s 1995 novel *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*. This novel offers an extended consideration of the question of species in relation to colonialism, the rhetorics of the contemporary Indian state, the experience of diasporic alienation, and the idea of the individual human subject. This text is also an exploration of textuality itself, and of the multiplicity that inheres in its form of storytelling, a multiplicity that opens a space for the presence and the voice of the nonhuman animal. This multiplicity responds to both the oppressive “oneness” of Gandhian thought and to the rigid hierarchization enacted by and in the texts of meat.

In the context of great change in food production and eating practices in India, and the growing industrialization of animal agriculture, the idea of India as a multispecies
nation is increasingly under threat. The vegetarianism that was central to Gandhi’s satyagraha never became the universal that he hoped it would become, and is certainly now in decline, at least among urban populations (Robbins 414). Even where it is still practiced, its meanings, in terms of personal and national significance, are significantly altered (Donner 166, Alter 151). Nevertheless, Gandhi’s ideas about how to live in the world as a human being, in relation to nonhuman beings, are still powerfully persuasive in the Indian context. These same ideas have taken on newly negative resonances in both Hindu-Muslim and caste-based conflicts, as Hindu nationalists have adopted a selective definition of ahimsa into their political program, using the figure of Gandhi in order to push forward the distinctly anti-Gandhian idea of India as an exclusively Hindu nation (Robbins 417). Economic development and transcultural exchange drive the rise in meat consumption. Additionally, the pressures created by industrial animal agriculture threaten — indeed, promise — large-scale environmental destruction. Thus, in some ways, the stakes of food choices in India have never been higher, and choosing to eat meat or to abstain from it is a multivalently significant action. That a film such as Lagaan, which is so invested in creating an imagined Gandhian past in order to project a strong, yet peaceful and harmonious, Indian future, chooses to foreground the Indian animal as an agent in this vision speaks to the continued resonance of the idea of India as a multispecies nation, and of the Gandhian practice of ahimsa as a key to the continued cultural vitality of India and a resistance to both internal and external threats.

57 The industrialization of agriculture in India has also included the intensification of dairy production, since milk, ghee, and yogurt are vegetarian staples in the Indian context. In my focus on carnivory, I do not mean to discount the effects of this equally exploitative industry.
3.2. The Serious Question of Food in *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*

Recalling the practical challenges of his first days living in England as a young man embarking on his legal training, M.K. Gandhi writes, “My food, however, became a serious question” (46). This statement exemplifies Gandhi’s habit of understatement: by the time of his writing, he knew that food was one of the most serious questions of his life and his political career. He had already realized the power of publicized fasting as a strategy of anticolonial protest, and he had established the centrality of what he called dietetics to the program of *satyagraha*, or nonviolent resistance. His close associates were complaining about the complex organization that it took to maintain his supposedly simple diet (Roy 75). Gandhi’s description of his early meals in England captures the moment when food, for him, went beyond the sensual, the cultural, and the traditional — all elements of dietary practice that were already obvious to him. Reading his present context into his past, Gandhi is marking the moment when food became political. That *Lagaan*, decades later, engages with vegetarianism as central to Gandhian anticolonial resistance, and to anticolonial heroism, demonstrates the enduring resonance of the national imaginary that appears in Gandhi’s work. Vegetarianism, as an aspect of *ahimsa*, reconfigures the individual human body as a space of resistance to colonial domination,

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58 The narrative of the *Autobiography* ends in 1922, just before the violence at Chauri Chaura, where protestors attacked a police station in retaliation against the police force’s violent handling of demonstrators. Despite the fact that Chauri Chaura is not included in this text, Gandhi would certainly have had that incident, and his five-day fast in response to it (which effectively halted the Non-Cooperation movement), in mind during the writing (Trivedi 546).

59 *Satyagraha* means “truth-force”; Gandhi chose the term to distinguish his practice from “passive resistance,” which, for him (and his critics) connoted physical and moral weakness and cowardice (Brown 43).
and, at the same time, as the site of a collective political empowerment. Through vegetarianism, Gandhi therefore negotiates the relationship between the relatively disempowered individual, exemplified in the figure of the rural subaltern (like Lagaan’s Bhuvan), and the radical collective power that his movement aimed to create.

Gandhi’s Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth was published serially, in Gujarati, in his magazine Navjivan between 1925 and 1928. The English translation, by Mahadev Desai, was rigorously edited and approved by Gandhi himself, so it can be taken, if not as original, at least as an authentic representation of Gandhi’s narrative, ideas, and beliefs (Parama Roy 88 n. 30). In her foreword to the American edition, Sissela Bok recommends a selective appreciation of Gandhi’s work: “If we take seriously his approach to conflict resolution and social change, […] we must surely stress, as he did, the twin principles of truth and nonviolence. But we do not therefore have to go along unquestioningly with his idiosyncratic, sometimes obsessive, views on diet, sexuality, or bodily hygiene” (xvi). Bok is not alone in this idea that we can and should choose which Gandhian principles to adopt.60 Her statement, however, is strategically placed to influence a reader who will soon be confronted, relentlessly, with Gandhi’s idiosyncrasies and obsessions; it therefore neutralizes in advance a book that is largely concerned with the very views that Bok argues need not be taken seriously.

Gandhi is both a perceptive reader and a careful writer, and he was writing at a time when he was coming into the knowledge of his own personal power, and the power of his ideas, on a national scale. It is clear that Gandhi’s beliefs about food are not marginal but

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60 As Cortright observes (10).
integral to his use of the terms “truth and nonviolence.” Without the concretizing effect of embodied experimentation, Gandhi suggests, these two highly abstract principles are vulnerable to dangerous appropriations. Throughout the *Autobiography*, Gandhi asserts the value of what he calls the “object-lesson” (28), in which an embodied, lived experience provides a clear instance of an abstract principle at work. Gandhi’s vegetarianism, far from being an unimportant idiosyncrasy of his diet, is an embodied enactment of his principles, and is therefore central to his ideas, in this text and elsewhere, about religion, ethics, nationhood, and anticolonial resistance. Dismissing vegetarianism as a fad or pet obsession in the context of Gandhi’s life, work, and thought is to dismiss his entire conception of what it means to be a human who lives, works, and resists domination in a multispecies world.

For Gandhi, the process of imagining “India,” before Independence, offers a unique opportunity to construct the nation as a multispecies entity. India, in his view, provides an ideal testing ground for this particular ethical and political experiment because multispecies living is already a fact, and a necessity, of daily life. He writes,

> [O]ur civilization is fundamentally different [from the West].\(^61\) Our life is wrapped up in our animals. Most of our villagers live with their animals, often under the same roof. Both live together, both starve together. Often enough the owner starves the poor cattle, exploits them, ill-treats them,

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\(^61\) Gandhi’s writing, here and elsewhere, often utilizes or, as in this instance, tacitly supports, a form of “affirmative orientalism” (Steger 95) that relies on essentialized divisions between East and West. These categories, however, do not define or constrain individuals, but rather represent modes of thought that can occur regardless of location or ethnicity, as is clear in Gandhi’s engagement with English radicalism, and in his critiques of certain Hindu practices, both of which I will discuss later in this chapter.
unmercifully extracts work out of them. But if we reform our ways, we can both be saved. Otherwise we sink together, and it is just as well that we sink or swim together. (qtd. in Burgat 242)

Like the elegiac accounts of conservationists in Chapter One, this image is one of the entanglement — and indeed interdependence — of human futurity with that of nonhuman animals. That Gandhi stresses the sharing of living space suggests that the nation he imagines will make room for practices of ordinary multispecies living that already exist, and are integral to the lives of subaltern people. The image of being “under the same roof” is a powerful recognition of the inseparability of human and nonhuman spaces. If the independent nation will be the conceptual roof that covers the Indian population, there must be space beneath it for nonhuman animals as well as human beings. Unlike conservationists, however, Gandhi is most interested in those animals who work and live intimately with human beings; he envisions these relationships as necessary to Indian nationhood as he imagines it, even as he acknowledges that they are based in exploitation. Vegetarianism, in Gandhian thought, is a concrete step toward acknowledging this interdependence, and attempting to minimize its exploitative violence. Vegetarianism is one way to enact, in a mundane, ordinary, embodied way, the central Gandhian principle of *ahimsa*.

Gandhian *ahimsa* transcends an interest in animal welfare, or any simplistic idea of kindness to animals, offering instead a comprehensive vision of the ethical and political place of the human individual in a just society. Scholars, however, seem to be resistant to the centrality of nonhuman animals to Gandhi’s ethical vision as they are to
the importance of vegetarianism. Parama Roy’s otherwise insightful analysis concludes that, “[w]hile much has been made [...] of Gandhi’s tender-hearted response to the suffering of animals as the spur to his vegetarianism, [...] his turn to meatlessness was not prompted primarily or exclusively by any conscious sense of opposing cruelty to animals” (83). Rather, according to Roy, “[t]his meatlessness is [...] more appositely seen [...] as a critical response to the project of modernity itself, to which meat-eating was, in colonial India at least, a privileged point of entry” (83). “Meatlessness” suggests a lack or absence, rather than the full experience of being, the full possession of oneself in order to dispossess oneself, that Gandhi imagined in vegetarianism. Additionally, the phrase “tender-hearted” conveys the way that Roy’s discussion becomes at best patronizing and at worst problematically gendered when confronted with the presence of nonhuman animals in Gandhi’s work. For Roy and others, these animals seem to provoke a strange anxiety, which is perhaps motivated by the dominant postcolonial humanism of their analyses. But, in fact, Gandhi’s perspective on the relationship between human and nonhuman beings, as expressed in his commitment to and advocacy for vegetarianism, is both a response to suffering (of human and nonhuman alike), and a critique of modernity. The separation that modernity enforces, of nonhuman from human, and of human from human — the radical individuation that undermines the collective — is indeed addressed by the philosophy of ahimsa, and so the position of nonhuman animals is central to ahimsa itself, and ahimsa is the centre of Gandhian politics.

Ahimsa is an overdetermined concept, particularly in the context of its

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62 The absence of “meat,” “vegetarianism,” and “animals” from the indices of Steger, Scalmer, and Cortright indicates a similar reluctance to engage with Gandhi’s position regarding nonhuman animals.
appropriation (and redefinition) by, among others, both Hindu nationalist and global consumerist cultures.\textsuperscript{63} Gandhian \textit{ahimsa} must be carefully distinguished from the scriptural term, which dates from about the eighth century BCE, and appears in most of the important texts of Hinduism: first in the \textit{Vedas}, and later in the \textit{Upanishads}, the \textit{Sutras} and \textit{Sastras}, the \textit{Ramayana}, and the \textit{Mahabharata} (most famously in the \textit{Bhagavad Gita}) (Kotturan 64-94). \textit{Ahimsa} is, additionally, part of Buddhism’s eight-fold path to enlightenment, and one of Jainism’s most central principles (Gupta 13, 15). Gandhian \textit{ahimsa} certainly does owe part of its “semantic density,” as Leela Gandhi calls it (“\textit{Ahimsa} and Other Animals” 6), to its association with this classical lineage, but, as Gupta argues, pre-Gandhian \textit{ahimsa} was a religious precept governing individual conduct, rather than a concept with political implications (1).\textsuperscript{64} Gandhi’s usage of the term builds on classical foundations, but is transnational and transcultural in its origin. The ethical-political vegetarianism that was the first expression of Gandhian \textit{ahimsa} was in fact rooted not in his reading of classical texts, but in his experiences in London, and was profoundly influenced by the strain of English radicalism that explicitly connected the individual practice of compassion with political activism.

As the quotation with which I opened this section indicates, much of Gandhi’s narrative of his time in England is focused on the “serious question” of his diet and, particularly, on the problem of his vegetarianism. It is in England, on reading Henry

\textsuperscript{63} Los Angeles-based clothing company OMgirl, for example, offers its popular “Ahimsa capri” as part of its mission “to offer clothing that reflects a state of harmony and balance for the modern woman” (www.omgirl.com). In a loose and often disingenuous usage of Sanskrit terminology, many corporations have identified a method of associating themselves with ethical — and even \textit{ahimsaic} — business practices.

\textsuperscript{64} Gandhi himself claims that his early reading of classical texts, including \textit{Manusmriti}, supported, rather than discouraged, meat-eating and the killing of small animals (34).
Salt’s *Plea for Vegetarianism*, that Gandhi becomes a vegetarian not just in practice, but in sincere ethical belief. He writes that his “choice was now made in favour of vegetarianism, the spread of which henceforward became [his] mission” (48). In England, vegetarianism develops into a secular “faith” for the young Gandhi (48). His devotion to vegetarianism as a “religion” (58) actually predates his other spiritual explorations, all of which are designed to identify, devise, and promote a universal ethical system; vegetarianism can thus be seen as the first ethic that Gandhi identifies as a universal good. The connection between carnivory and Englishness which he represents as a certainty during his boyhood and youth in India (which I will discuss below) is destabilized through his exposure to the vegetarian counterculture that was thriving in London at the time. This counterculture was, as Leela Gandhi observes, inherently anticolonial (“Ahimsa and Other Animals” 4); she argues that English animal welfare activism, founded on affective identification between species, represented the “recasting [of] human-animal relations as an enlightened mode of anarchic, disobedient, cooperative and paradigmatically non-governmental sociality, which [M.K.] Gandhi, in time to come, would call *ahimsa*” (“Ahimsa and Other Animals” 15).65 It was, in other words, an activism founded on the idea of disorderly multispecies living as mode of political engagement, and this political engagement should influence our reading of Gandhi’s vegetarianism through the rest of the text. When, for example, Gandhi is at an expensive restaurant in London and he refuses to hide or to equivocate about his vegetarianism, it is

65 Leela Gandhi could be faulted, at least in this iteration of her argument, for giving M.K. Gandhi almost no credit for his own political program, although he appears as a brilliant adaptor of the ideas of others. Indeed, Harish Trivedi does fault her, arguing that, in her work, M.K. Gandhi “serves as much as a contrastive token of a world beyond the West as a figure of primary importance in himself” (531).
an action of political significance. He makes such a scene in this restaurant that his friend asks him to leave. Gandhi writes, “This delighted me” (49). Then, because he cannot find a vegetarian restaurant, he recalls, “I went without food that night” (49). Remembering that Gandhi is someone for whom going without food was to become a major strategy of resistance, it seems right to interpret this incident as his first political fast. Although he does claim that he created a spectacle in the restaurant, he emphasizes not the public performance of resistance, but, rather, the purifying power of refusing to feed the body under conditions of ethical compromise. Though his later fasts would combine purification and performance in their very public and publicized nature, this early incident displays the rhetoric of individual sacrifice and bodily mortification that would continue to be important as Gandhi’s ideas developed. His “delight” at being asked to leave the restaurant stems from his persistent drive to enact his principles. It is through the ethics and politics of vegetarianism that Gandhi begins to develop his particular idea of ahimsa, which would eventually inform the entire project of nonviolent anticolonial resistance.

Ahimsa is, first of all, Gandhi’s idea of what it means to be a human self, and the responsibility that inhabiting this human self entails. Florence Burgat characterizes ahimsaic compassion as both an “act” and a “capacity” for complete identification with the suffering other (229); similarly, Leela Gandhi writes that the ahimsaic ethic brings, “near-suicidally [...] the terrorizing powers of compassion” (“Spirits of Nonviolence” 170). The source of this ethical “terror” in Gandhian ahimsa is twofold: first, it involves the total renunciation of the self, including the exposure of the self to physical and
psychological harm, and, second, it demands a continuous striving that must necessarily and continually fail. For Gandhi, *ahimsa* “is the farthest limit of humility” (505), and it is only at that limit that the human individual can exist in an ethical relation with the other. The *satyagrahi* must strive for that limit, knowing that she will always fall short; Gandhi writes that the *satyagrahi* “will be constantly growing in self-restraint and compassion, but he can never become entirely free from outward *himsa* [violence, the opposite of *ahimsa*]” (349). According to Leela Gandhi, this ethical work configures compassion as a “discipline” (“Concerning Violence” 108 emphasis in original) that can be both emancipatory and, in itself, oppressive. She claims that Gandhian *ahimsa* “neglect[s] the special and singular claims of ‘others’” (“Concerning Violence” 109), in favour of an ethical totality that governs *ahimsaic* compassion as a practice. As I will suggest later in this chapter, this critique is one that Chandra’s *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* elaborates in its representation of the totalizing power of “oneness” as an ethical principle; what Leela Gandhi’s argument ignores, however, is the role of the individual body in the practice of *ahimsa*.

Gandhian politics is based, above all, on embodied anticolonial resistance. *Ahimsa* is articulated differently inside the body of each *satyagrahi*, and each *satyagrahi* exists in a differentiated relation to her own *ahimsaic* practice. This individuated aspect of *ahimsa* is what makes body of the *satyagrahi* into a space that houses political resistance — that houses, in fact, an idea of the collective. The *satyagrahi* is transformed by the practice of *ahimsa* into a disorderly body that disturbs the work of power. Thus, while, as Joseph Alter suggests, the practice of *ahimsa* is grounded in the self (7), it also demands a
reconfiguration of the idea of the individual human subject: we might well ask what happens to the self “at the farthest limit of humility” (M.K. Gandhi 505)? Florence Burgat claims that Gandhian ethics creates a “diluted feeling of individuation” that, in turn, allows the *satyagrahi* to “identify with any suffering” (229). It is this identification that, as we will see, provides is the affective charge for *ahimsa* as a practice of active compassion. Gandhi establishes the importance of identification with suffering through his representations of nonhuman animals and of vegetarianism as a practice that directly addresses the suffering of the other, and his configuration of the body as a resistant space emerges most clearly in his consideration of what he calls “dietetics,” or the study and practice of food choices.

As I have suggested, Gandhi’s relationship to his own vegetarianism is a central topic for the *Autobiography*, and the the text traces the development of dietetics as a political vision, one that is inseparable from other forms of anticolonial resistance. Gandhi’s political consciousness emerges, in his youth, in and through his relationship to carnivorous culture and to normative texts of meat; before he awakens to the possibilities of political vegetarianism, Gandhi attempts to become a political meat-eater. In the confessional spirit of the book, he narrates the events of what he calls his “meat-eating period” (25), a time in his life that is characterized by many and various moral failings: the eating of flesh has a definite degenerative effect on his character as a whole.

Beginning in a chapter called “A Tragedy,” Gandhi narrates what is, in fact, an elaborate seduction. Gandhi’s carnivorous friend — identified by Parama Roy as Sheikh Mehtab (66) — is dedicated to persuading him to eat meat, and uses familiar colonial tropes about
vegetarianism to do so. He claims that Indians “are a weak people because we do not eat meat. The English are able to rule over us, because they are meat-eaters” (20). He also appeals to Gandhi’s obvious love for experimentation and the value he places on personal experience, saying “There is nothing like trying. Try, and see what strength it gives” (20). He argues for meat’s health benefits — advantages like the avoidance of “boils” and “tumours” — and its contribution to his own prodigious athletic ability (20). And finally, he appeals to Gandhi’s insecure masculinity: knowing that Gandhi feels “ashamed” because he thinks that his wife, Kasturbai, is more courageous than he, he convinces Gandhi that eating meat will eliminate fears that he construes as effeminate (21). All of these arguments amount to a powerful overarching claim: that meat-eating inaugurates and sustains a total transformation of the human self. He promises Gandhi a new, and highly appealing, experience of both identity and embodiment. Gandhi explains,

I certainly looked feeble-bodied by the side of my brother [also a meat-eater] and this friend. They were both hardier, physically stronger, and more daring. This friend’s exploits cast a spell over me. [...] He would often display his exploits to me and, as one is always dazzled when he sees in others the qualities he lacks himself, I was dazzled by this friend’s exploits. This was followed by a strong desire to be like him. (20)

The sexual nature of the language here is clear, as Gandhi connects the impression of his friend’s body with a “spell,” with dazzlement, and with desire. In fact, the act of meat-

As Roy notes, it is obviously problematic that the role of the carnivorous, sensual, hedonistic, and virile tempter should be played by a Muslim man (88 n. 20). Gandhi is often prone to stereotyping for rhetorical effect, but this particular representation is significant and disturbing in light of later, anti-Muslim, appropriations of Gandhi’s ideas, and suggests the troubling directions in which Gandhian thought would be taken in the contemporary context.
eating itself is cast in the form of a sexual liaison: Gandhi meets his friend in secluded locations to eat meat, and he calls these meetings “surreptitious feasts” (23), illicit indulgences in contrast to the licit pleasures of a vegetarian dinner at home. That this same friend also takes Gandhi to a brothel underscores the connection between the gustatory and sexual pleasures of the corrupted body. Meat and sex are joined as forms of unhygienic fleshly contact that the satyagrahi must avoid, and both are thus associated with Gandhi’s recasting of the idea of masculinity.

Although Parama Roy argues that meat is, here, “a sacrificial substance” that enables entry into a “homosocial community of British and modernising Indian males” (66), Gandhi seems to deconstruct the very idea of homosociality, figuring the transgressive behaviour in which male communities engage — like eating meat — as shallow and egocentric, and as contributing to their continued colonization. In this depiction of carnivorous masculinity, Gandhi is perhaps setting the stage for the androgynous sociality that he finds among political vegetarians in London, and for his own performance of androgyny in his later public life. In Mehtab’s demonstrations, Gandhi encounters the power of bodily display that he will later himself exploit by becoming the troubling figure of the “half-naked fakir”67; Mehtab’s aggressive display of normative masculinity offers a counterpoint to the later Gandhi’s calculated androgyny. Roy argues that Gandhi cultivated androgyny as a virtue, and that “he sought, over the course of a long political career, to convert erstwhile badges of humiliation,” including

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67 “Half-naked fakir” was Winston Churchill’s famous description of Gandhi when the latter refused to conform to the conventions of British dress during his visit to the seat of Imperial power (qtd. in Scalmer 16).
his anxieties about his own inadequate masculinity and the feminization of Indian men, “into symbols of carefully chosen renunciation” (70). Alter, in a similar vein, argues that part of Gandhi’s mission was to “decolonize the male body, define the biomorality of self-rule, and thereby democratize India on a national scale” (144). Gandhi’s recasting of androgyny as a form of power disrupts the gendered hierarchy that is implicit in patriarchal colonialism. It is also true, however, that Gandhi’s challenge to Western forms of patriarchal power that oppress Indian men does not extend to the emancipation of women from such oppression. In fact, this redefinition of the masculine occurs in spite of Gandhi’s circumscription of women’s sexual and political agency, a fact that, as Cortright observes, is one of the most troubling aspects of Gandhi’s work for the contemporary reader (163-189). Gandhi’s anti-feminism is one of the central internal tensions of his work and it is one that both lends itself to oppressive appropriations and seriously limits the radical potential of the Gandhian political model.

It is directly owing to Gandhi’s recasting of masculinity, and what Roy calls his “production […] of the meat-renouncing […] male body” (63) that, in Lagaan, we have a male hero whose particular masculine heroism is constructed not in spite of, but directly through, his vegetarianism. In Lagaan, Bhuvan’s vegetarian body is pictured as one of particular physical strength, in parallel to the representation of his character as one of particular moral strength. He is an object of desire for both European and Indian women, and an object of admiration for both European and Indian men. This explicitly Gandhian character is thus projected as the ideal figure of Indian masculinity, but is, interestingly, converted into the less challenging trope of the heteronormative male movie hero — a
role that Gandhi’s symbolic (and deliberate) androgyny would never allow him to inhabit. This neutralization of one form of Gandhian disorder — the challenge to binarized gender performance — in tandem with the enthusiastic incorporation of others offers a view into contemporary appropriations of Gandhian thought, as I will discuss below.\footnote{Women, in Lagaan, are limited to strictly stereotypical and supportive roles; when they step out of these roles even briefly, as Elizabeth Russell does when she helps Bhuvan and the cricket team, they are quickly undermined, seemingly by their own femininity. Elizabeth, for example, is shamed by her inappropriate desire for Bhuvan and her inability to inhabit a position of ideal Indian womanhood. Gandhi’s attachment to an essentialized femininity is clear in his work, even as he challenges normative ideas of the masculine that he represents as texts of meat in his time with Mehtab.}

What is also apparent from Gandhi’s representation of his meat-eating period is that he views consumption, bodily transformation, embodied individual power, and political resistance as already linked. Meat-eating, at this early stage, is a form of “reform” through which Indians will gain the power to expel their colonizers (21). Gandhi is seduced by the connection that Mehtab draws between the carnivory (and, therefore, the virile masculinity) of the individual and collective national power. We can thus — ironically, given the centrality of vegetarianism to his particular form of nationalism — locate the beginnings of Gandhi’s national consciousness in this carnivorous phase.\footnote{In writing of Gandhi’s national consciousness, it is important to qualify it with the remembrance of his explicitly anti-state, anarchist views (Leela Gandhi “Ahimsa and Other Animals” 20). As a young man, though, it is clear that Gandhi adhered to a more conventional idea of nationalism.} At this stage, Gandhi accepts the connection between meat consumption, individual size and strength, and political power. Seen in light of his early carnivory, the centrality of diet to Gandhi’s project could be interpreted as a direct legacy of the colonial trope of the powerful meat eater; after all, casting the individual’s renunciation of meat as a form of resistance is a reversal of the terms of that trope. Despite the parallel that emerges here, however, Gandhi’s thinking about the individual
body as a locus of resistance is more complex than an inversion of the association between meat-eating and power. Gandhi uses his meat-eating period to develop the idea of intersubjective — and interspecies — identification that is at the heart of the practice of ahimsa. His experience of carnivory works as a negative lesson in ahimsa, and the violent language with which he describes it establishes the importance of vegetarianism as an ethical standard.

In his representation of his carnivorous experiences, Gandhi dwells on the extreme disturbance — both physical and psychological — caused by the ingestion of animal flesh. His first encounter with meat is a visual one: “and there I saw, for the first time in my life, — meat” (22). The compounded pause created by comma and dash indicates a moment of horror in which the sight of the dead flesh momentarily blocks his ability to categorize it as “meat.” But, despite his horror, Gandhi eats the meat offered to him by Mehtab. He writes, “The goat's meat was tough as leather. I simply could not eat it. I was sick and had to leave off eating. I had a very bad night afterwards. A horrible nightmare haunted me. Every time I dropped off to sleep it would seem as though a live goat were bleating inside me, and I would jump up full of remorse.” (22). This sickness that Gandhi experiences functions as a link between the physical and the psychological effects of eating meat. Contrary to his friend’s claim that meat will make him more courageous, Gandhi is now even more fearful. His nightmares are a form of ethical haunting: the animal, to the horrified young man, still lives inside him. After its slaughter, its conversion into meat, its cooking, and its eating, the goat is restored to wholeness and to voice by the extremity of Gandhi’s guilt. It embodies itself inside Gandhi’s body and
voices itself through Gandhi’s voice. Gandhi thus imagines meat-eating not as the taking in of sustenance or food energy, but as the taking in of the animal’s pain and anguish. The eating of meat thus engenders for Gandhi a powerful form of interspecies identification. He has literally internalized, or rather incorporated, the nonhuman animal.\textsuperscript{70}

In all of Gandhi’s political projects, taking the pain of the other into the body (whether by fasting, or enduring the discomorts felt by others, or by opening the body to the physical aggression of oppressors) is a key strategy of resistance, and a source of power. In his nightmare, Gandhi appears almost as pregnant with the nonhuman animal, its significance, and its signification. Not only the pain of the animal, but also that animal’s resistance to pain (since “bleating” can be interpreted not only as an expression of pain, but also as a vocalization made against that pain), are now housed inside Gandhi’s body. His interspecies identification thus not only appropriates the pain of the nonhuman other, but also that other’s strategies of resistance, both of which can be politically productive once relocated inside the body of the satyagrahi. In the \textit{Autobiography}, it is his carnivorous period that marks the first instance of this kind of radical identification between self and other which will be so important to Gandhi’s later thinking. It is meat-eating, and not the abstention from meat, that opens up Gandhi’s political thinking on two important fronts: first, it awakens his consciousness of India as a

\textsuperscript{70} Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, who is rightly critical of the contemporary Hindu nationalist rhetoric surrounding vegetarianism, argues that the “total identification with the animal victim” (570) through the “affect of disgust” (557) actually limits the ethical force of such moments. He claims that horror is aligned with desire in an important ambivalence around the object of disgust. Such scenes as Gandhi describes thus engage too much in the voyeuristic thrill, inviting the “secret desire to devour, to take revenge, and to revel in the rejected substance [meat]” (571) to excite the reader’s compassion. It seems clear in Gandhi’s text, however, that he is acknowledging and manipulating this horror/desire tension, especially in his association of carnivory with sexuality (and his explicit account of his struggles with the latter). Perhaps, then, Gandhi’s account involves confronting the ambivalent “affect of disgust” and attempting to overcome it, just as he stresses resistance to other bodily desires.
nation, and of its relative strength or weakness, and second, it brings to light the political nature of the individual body, of what that body chooses to consume, of how that body displays itself, and, perhaps above all, of how that body can connect itself with other bodies through identification — a holistic compassion — that creates the productive potential of an embodied politics. Though many critics identify vegetarianism as Gandhi’s first political cause,\textsuperscript{71} it is meat-eating that lays the ground for his recognition that the choice to eat meat, or not to eat meat, constitutes both an ethical and a political action. In contrast to carnivorous violence, vegetarianism is, ultimately, a practice of nonviolence, and a form of recognition of the nonhuman animal other. Gandhi foregrounds his meat-eating in his \textit{Autobiography} in order to display the demands of \textit{ahimsa}; every development in his thought from this point stems, finally, from his “compassion for the goats” (22), because, for Gandhi, this radical compassion is the root of all politics.

Gandhi’s last statements in his \textit{Autobiography} concern neither Indian nationhood, nor the need for political resistance, but rather the absolute importance of \textit{ahimsa}, especially in relation to nonhuman animals. In order to recognize truth, Gandhi says, “one must be able to love the meanest of creatures as oneself” (504). The realization of the \textit{ahimsaic} ideal is only possible through “self-purification,” a purification that results in “[i]dentification with everything that lives” (504). Finally, Gandhi asserts, “So long as a man does not of his own free will put himself last among his fellow creatures, there is no salvation for him” (505). At the end of an autobiography, and therefore at the end of an

\textsuperscript{71} Stuart 423-424; Alter 10; Parama Roy 63, 71; Leela Gandhi “\textit{Ahimsa} and Other Animals” 3-5
exercise in self-construction, Gandhi resists the very idea of the self. The struggle in which the satyagrahi must engage is that against the desire to assert herself as an individual. Rather, the satyagrahi must identify with the vulnerability of a position of subjection. In Gandhi’s construction, the more subjected a being is, the more deserving she is of ethical consideration, and it is only through a self-renouncing identification with the oppressed that satyagraha can be realized. The figure of the satyagrahi is thus contradictory in nature. She is an embodiment of the collective — of all the others with whom she must identify, because, through the act of self-renunciation, she constructs a collective sense of self. But she is also an individual who takes on the suffering of others and turns it to the purpose of anticolonial resistance. The renunciation of the self is also, in its way, an act of self-affirmation, in that it maintains the individual as a category. The satyagrahi does not disappear into the other; rather, she feels with and for others, and in fact exploits this store of feeling. As a being, she is thus both individual and multiple, and the tension between these two ideas of the self remains unresolved in Gandhi’s work.

The importance of the satyagrahi’s interspecies identification is represented, in the Autobiography, through several moments of encounter. Gandhi uses these scenes to establish the ethical duty of the satyagrahi to nonhuman animals, aligning nonharming vegetarianism with resistance to other forms of violence practised on the bodies of others. They also carefully separate Gandhian ahimsa from the Hindu scriptural usage of that term, and from Hindu doctrine more broadly, by critiquing the hypocrisy of Hindu religious leaders and the violence inherent in Hindu religious practices. Finally, they delineate more clearly Gandhi’s understanding of colonial power and anticolonial
resistance by configuring the human exercise of power over nonhuman animals as a form of colonial power; colonialism is not only a Western, but also an Indian power structure, and the making of an independent state will not automatically eradicate that structure’s oppressions. Gandhi’s consideration of interspecies relationships is therefore also a resistance to the hierarchizing force of nationalist ideology, whether it arises from the colonial or the independent state.

One such encounter that prompts Gandhi to meditate on the power humans exercise over nonhuman animals occurs when he witnesses a mass animal sacrifice at the Kali Temple in Calcutta. The sheep being sacrificed are so numerous that he describes them as a “stream” (234). This is thus not a meeting between individuals, as in the conservationist encounters described in Chapter One; rather, it is a confrontation with the sheer scale of the exploitation of nonhuman animals. When Gandhi asks a sadhu to try to stop the sacrifice, the man replies that the people are a “flock of sheep, following where leaders lead them” (235). This comparison is obviously significant for its alignment of animal consciousness with that of religious devotees, as well as its casting of the religious leader as a shepherd, able to guide and form the thoughts and actions of his followers. The follower here is a contemptible figure, an object of power without individual will. The sadhu’s statement can be compared to Mehtab’s arguments about carnivory; the meat-eating Englishman, for Mehtab, is naturally superior to the “small” and “weak” vegetarian Indian. But the sadhu exposes the fact that this kind of power does not flow only from England to India. Both within India and within the wider imperial context, those who are positioned as the “leaders” maintain their power through consumption —
both literal and figurative — of the followers. This abuse of human power over nonhuman animals displays the way that religion, no less than politics, law, or any other field, is dominated by himsa, the violence that Gandhian ahimsa seeks to minimize. Gandhi also uses this moment to suggest, again, the universality of his political and ethical vision; his concept of ahimsa is not a Hindu concept, but rather a pan-religious (rather than non-religious) ethical dictate that must inform the work of each individual satyagrahi, regardless of her religious background or beliefs. Gandhi’s thought is thus not limited to the anticolonial context, but aims to challenge power structures within India itself. If ahimsa is a transnational and transcultural concept, having been in part inspired by the English vegetarian movement, so too do the texts of meat that it challenges transcend any essentialist division between East and West, even though such a division is often used by Gandhi himself.

In his description of this encounter, Gandhi seeks to interrupt the logic of sacrifice that governs religious and political hierarchies, including those present in the organizations (like the Indian National Congress) working towards Indian Independence. Gandhi’s encounter with the animal sacrifice is profoundly disturbing to him; his description of “rivers of blood” (235) evokes a horrific scene. When Gandhi’s local friends try to assure him that the sacrificial sheep do not feel pain, Gandhi replies, “I could not swallow this” (235). This phrase clearly connects these two forms of exploitation of nonhuman animals — sacrifice and meat — as belonging to the same oppressive power structure, and through this connection Gandhi challenges the myth of India as a vegetarian nation. This incident prompts one of Gandhi’s most unequivocal
statements about species difference in this text: “To my mind, the life of a lamb is no less precious than that of a human being. I should be unwilling to take the life of a lamb for the sake of the human body. I hold that, the more helpless a creature, the more entitled it is to protection by man from the cruelty of man” (235). For Gandhi, ethical consideration thus arises from bodily vulnerability, with the weakest being those who are most entitled to be the subjects of an ethical relationship. It is clear, then, that Gandhi does not entirely dismiss a hierarchical relationship between human and nonhuman animals; rather, his political system stems from an idea of care, and of protection from exploitation. This is a politics that emerges from identification among beings, based here on the common experiences of physical existence — vulnerability to pain and violence — that more profoundly unite than stratify the multiplicity of animal species. Nevertheless, there is a strain of paternalism in Gandhi’s thought that echoes the liberal colonial ideology of someone like Jim Corbett, and contradicts the idea of subaltern alliance that is essential to satyagraha. Like the contradiction between the collective and the individual in the figure of the satyagrahi itself, this tension between radical identification that would dissolve all hierarchy and, on the other hand, a form of leadership based on protection and care, is never resolved in the Autobiography.

Another such unresolved tension arises from Gandhi’s tenacious attachment to the human, which he maintains despite his commitment to dismantling hierarchical categorizations. Burgat observes in Gandhi’s writing on nonhuman animals a desire to “save” the human by ascribing its inherently evil nature to its animality (230). For Burgat, nonviolence is thus a method of perfecting the humanity of the multispecies
entity that is the human being; she argues that, for Gandhi, “the elevation of man [sic] towards non-violence is a victory over his animal nature. [...] Man must make this choice [in favour of nonviolence] in order to be genuinely human” (230). Burgat’s contention is supported by Gandhi’s seeming attachment to a hierarchy of creatures, with “beasts” being both “low” (320) and “mean” (504) in comparison to the human. From this line of argument, it seems that Gandhi is not only paternalist in his ethics, but also that he desires not oneness among creaturely life but, rather, the isolation of the human from the nonhuman. In this case, Gandhi’s vegetarianism would actually function as a refusal to take the “lowness” of the “beast” into the pure and clean human body, rather than as a desire to meet and engage with nonhuman (and human) others by rejecting individual and systemic violence against them. Gandhi’s perception of animality appears in the Autobiography as a resistant kernel of anticolonial humanism that, to some extent, undermines the radical ethic of his writing. It cracks the foundation of his attempt to challenge conceptions of impurity and meanness with respect to multiple forms of oppression, of which caste prejudice, and especially untouchability is perhaps the most well known example. It is not true, however, that (as Burgat argues) this is Gandhi’s dominant way of representing or discussing nonhuman animals; rather, it emerges in the text as a disruption in the movement towards ahimsa, which is, fundamentally, a movement towards non-hierarchical oneness among all beings. This kind of disruption (among the other internal tensions I have noted), is a reminder of the theoretical and psychological incompleteness of Gandhi’s project, which he himself is quick to recognize, and which is in fact a constituent part of the action of ahimsa. Ahimsa is a
constant striving, without the promise, or indeed hope, of realization.

This *ahimsaic* striving is, above all, characterized by Gandhi as a bodily practice, as I have discussed, but it is combined with a powerful form of symbolism. Gandhi is often interpreted as either a powerfully symbolic figure in his own right, or as a canny politician who is able to manipulate symbolism to his own ends; what his engagement with nonhuman animals suggests is that an alternative reading of his work is possible, one that positions him as a proponent of a radically materialist political vision. I do not mean to suggest that these two approaches are exactly separable in Gandhi’s work. The union of material and symbolic can clearly be seen, for example, in the Salt *Satyagraha* of 1930. The obvious drama of the march to the sea is coupled with the pragmatism of the action of making and using salt, in a combination that proved to be extremely powerful. The spinning, use, and wearing of *khadi* offers another such doubling of performance and pragmatism. The distinction, in Gandhi’s thought, is that symbolic power derives from practical, embodied ethics; the material conditions of a cow’s life, therefore, must not exist in direct contradiction to her symbolic value, as happens (in Gandhi’s time and today) in the case of cow worship. When he encounters an abused an injured cow being used as an object of veneration at the Kumbh Mela, for example, Gandhi demonstrates that he is particularly critical of such instrumentalization nonhuman animals (389). As Gandhi clearly recognized, concern for the material wellbeing of nonhuman animals is often at odds with a belief in their symbolic value or power (Burgat 226); for Gandhi, the power of multispecies living lies in embodied, not figurative, actions and interactions. Such embodied politics, as Alter claims, offer a way to undo binaries and challenge fixed
hierarchies; the body is always a complex negotiation, and bodily practices — like vegetarianism — are a way of resisting the forms of power that attempt to work upon, but cannot directly control, the embodied individual. Gandhi’s vegetarianism, as part of his program of *ahimsa*, is thus a way of imagining the political body — both individual and collective — as a space that resists colonialism’s texts of meat and opens the sphere of the political to a nonviolent, multispecies, life. *Satyagraha* uses the body of the individual to create disorder in existing power structures.

I want to build on this idea of disorder by turning now to Gandhi’s use and adaptation of the autobiographical form, which, ultimately, amounts to a reflection on the position of the individual narrating human being, and the status of a human life. As the title indicates, there is a tension throughout *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* between the demands of the autobiographical form and the aspects of his life and ideas with which he actually wants to engage: those ongoing “experiments” through which he arrived at his understanding of ethics, health, politics, resistance, and truth. The “autobiography” — a text that creates and performs the authority of the individual human subject — is in direct contrast to the “story of my experiments with truth,” a phrase that signals renunciation, or at least fragmentation, of the wholeness of the self inherent in the idea of autobiography.72 There is an additional tension within the subtitle itself, between the idea of a “story” — a complete narrative — and the “experiments.” The title thus suggests a progressive fragmentation — from autobiography, to story, to experiments —

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72 The autobiography can often be a sort of *bildungsroman*, a form that necessarily involves experimentation; nevertheless, the difference I would like to stress is that Gandhi’s title suggests no end point to his experiments (he does not arrive at Truth), and thus resists creating a teleological narrative of the self. This question is also complicated by the fact that Gandhi wrote his memoir in the midst of his career, and before what are generally considered to be his greatest achievements.
as well as a direct contradiction — that which occurs over the colon, between title and subtitle. When I use the term “autobiography,” I mean to indicate the definition of that genre to which Gandhi himself would have been exposed, and to which he seems to be responding in his claims that he is not writing such a work. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson discuss the narrowness and exclusivity of the term “autobiography”; they write that “Autobiography, as we have seen, became the term for a particular generic practice that emerged in the Enlightenment and subsequently became definitive for life writing in the West” (2 emphasis in original). This genre, according to Smith and Watson, “privileges the autonomous individual and the universalizing life story as the definitive achievement of life writing” and “install[s] this master narrative of ‘the sovereign self’ as an institution of literature and culture” (3). The term “autobiography,” therefore, obviously does not allow for the full complexity and multiplicity of various forms of life writing; instead, it is severely delimited, and creates a canon of works that excludes or devalues texts, like Gandhi’s, that challenge its generic strictures (Smith and Watson 3).

But it is to this idea of the “sovereign self” as the subject of a narrative that Gandhi’s title and the form of his work explicitly respond. The title also offers no resolution to its own inherent tension, as the text itself offers no resolution to several points of dissonance I have already noted. Instead, the title appears as a miniature of the ahimsaic practice, housing a contradiction that must be confronted, considered, even agonized over, but perhaps never concretely resolved.

In his introduction, Gandhi quotes a friend’s objection: “Writing an autobiography is a practice peculiar to the West. I know of nobody in the East having written one, except
amongst those who have come under Western influence” (xxv). Gandhi’s response is that he does not intend “to attempt a real autobiography,” but, instead, “to tell the story of [his] numerous experiments with truth” (xxvi). For Gandhi’s friend, the autobiography is a mode of expression that is particular to the Western subject, a narrative of the self that focalizes the individual life, and a production of the ego that is inherently not “Eastern.” What Gandhi proposes, however, is an entirely different way of thinking about the self. His text will be episodic, rather than linear, scientific, rather than narrative, and fragmented, rather than teleological. As Leela Gandhi observes, from the beginning of this text, Gandhi signals his “resistance to the inaugurative, unique, completing author-function” (“Concerning Violence” 128). Gandhi’s comment on his form is a subtle way to decentre himself as a subject in his text: he will narrate not the life of the Mahatma, a political and historical figure, but the life of his experiments. Gandhi immediately challenges the sovereignty of the individual human subject, and he will maintain this challenge not only through what he chooses to relate in this idiosyncratic text, but also in how he chooses to narrate it. Parama Roy argues, for example, that Gandhi’s candid narration of his own bodily experiments is not “proper to the genre of autobiography” because these episodes are “too numerous, too repetitive, too generically surprising if not outlandish, and too persistently earthbound” to belong comfortably to the autobiographical form (64). Gandhi thus subverts the generic position that his text inhabits, opening the space of the autobiography to new, revised possibilities.74

73 Gandhi’s opening comments on his adoption of the “Western” autobiographical form recall his other transcultural appropriations, and suggest, at the same time that he engages in essentialist East/West binarizing, that such adaptations are central to his work.

74 As others, such as Rousseau, had done before him.
Gandhi’s negotiation of his genre is pertinent to his political vegetarianism in several ways. First, by categorizing the autobiography as a form peculiar to the West, and then adapting that form to his own aims, Gandhi enacts in this text the methods he will use to appropriate and utilize transcultural ideas in his anticolonial resistance. It also signals the way that he conceives of the relationship of the individual to a collective, since, although he attempts to decentre the idea of the individual, resistance nevertheless begins with a singular being and radiates outward into the community. Finally, Gandhi’s reconception of the autobiography is a consideration of what it means to be human, and an implicit challenge to the priority of the narrating human being. The form of the autobiography can be perceived as one of the texts of meat because it elevates the individual (white, male, Western, economically privileged) subject to a position of literal authority over the texts of his life and those of beings with whom he comes into contact. Gandhi adopts this form and adapts it to suggest other generic possibilities; his redeployment of the genre disturbs the authority of the autobiographical voice, and of the kind of subject that that voice presumes. At the same time, Gandhian disorder and disruption occur with the aim of creating a new order — a kind of order that can be seen in the ahimsaic idea of a unity among all beings, the idea of a collective oneness.

Gandhian ahimsa is a brilliant political strategy because it is, above all, empowering; it invites the participation of each individual, while providing the supportive structure of collective strength. This empowerment also makes it, as demonstrated in its outcomes (in India, in the American Civil Rights movement, and elsewhere), a radical form of resistance that effectively denies the legitimacy of colonial
power. Gandhian ahimsa has ironically, however, proved susceptible to appropriation in the name of violent exclusions and oppressions. Shradda Chigateri discusses the “injustice” (11) and hypocrisy of ahimsa as it has been appropriated by Hindu nationalism. In her estimation, the uniting of nonviolence with a taboo against cow slaughter and beef-eating has resulted in the re-entrenchment of untouchability and caste hierarchies. This re-entrenchment occurs, Chigateri argues, because cow protection has become a specifically dominant-caste Hindu domain, one that is invested in exploiting “the highly-charged symbolism around the cow” (15) and in disseminating a revisionist history of India as a vegetarian, and by extension essentially Hindu, nation (16). Gandhi himself, as we have seen, contested both of these ideas, but his strident advocacy for cow protection could not entirely be divorced from this symbolic and historical lineage, and therefore remained tainted by this troubling inheritance. Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi also explores the connection between ahimsa and Hindutva in Gandhi’s own state, Gujarat, where a cultural history of vegetarianism has rearticulated itself as a manifestation of Hindu unity and power, imagined in particular contrast to the figure of the Muslim (559), and resulting in violent consequences. In the hands of ideologues, Gandhi’s ideas have become a source of violently exclusionary rhetoric. The reason that they can be adapted in this way, I argue, resides in the kind of order that Gandhi attempts to install in the

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75 In March 2015, the state of Maharashtra, which includes the city of Mumbai, introduced a ban on the slaughter of cattle and made the sale or possession of beef punishable by a five-year jail term. Although there was widespread support for this action in the Hindu-majority state, it was also perceived as a specifically anti-Muslim measure, since the beef industry in India is dominantly Muslim (“Indian state bans beef and brings in five-year jail terms for possession”).

76 Ghassem-Fachandi discusses the ideological spurs for the Gujarat pogrom, which took place in February and March of 2002, and resulted in the deaths of approximately 1500, largely Muslim, people (558).
wake of the disorder of resistance. *Satyagraha* itself is rooted in the idea of disorder: it consists of the practice of nonviolent disturbance in the operation of power. But the order that *satyagraha* in turn imposes — that idea of the essential unity of beings — can return as a form of violence that perpetuates constructions of otherness and naturalizes existing hierarchies.

This potentially problematic idea of oneness is, as Leela Gandhi argues, inherent in Gandhi’s thought (“Concerning Violence” 108-109). Unity establishes itself through the exclusion of its others; the category of the human is the paradigmatic example of this tendency. When they are drained of the internal tensions that refuse to allow Gandhi’s ideas to coalesce into a cohesive system or model, and of the embodied “object-lessons” that he considered so important, Gandhi’s principles do distill into a kind of totality, a form of disciplinary power that exercises itself upon precisely those others whom Gandhi particularly sought to protect: minority religious communities, oppressed castes, and exploited nonhuman animals. Vegetarianism thus reverts to its status as a privileged symbol of high caste power (regardless of actual eating practices), and is robbed of its potential as a resistance to the totalizing forces of Western industrial modernity and state power. Gandhian *ahimsa* becomes, in these hands, that which Gandhi most strove to resist: an idea that asserts itself in the exclusion of and violence against its others. In his 1995 novel, *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, Vikram Chandra considers the legacies of Independence from a position of disillusionment, and offers an exuberant response to the ideologies spawned by the formation of the modern Indian state.
3.3. Food, Text, and Narrative Multiplicity in *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*

Vikram Chandra’s *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* is an epic (by virtue of both its size and its scope) reconsideration of the legacies of the Indian Independence movement that does not make explicit reference to any of that movement’s major figures or milestones. Instead, Chandra’s novel turns to a fantastical retelling of the First Indian War of Independence in order to reflect both a deep postcolonial disillusionment and an enduring hope for the future of the nation. The book takes its title from a line of classical Tamil poetry: “in love our hearts have mingled like red earth and pouring rain” (256). This image anticipates a text that privileges fluidity of identity, variegation in tandem with combination, and a naturalized and relatively harmonious hybridity; these are the qualities that this novel identifies as being at the heart of both Indian nationhood and the Indian textual tradition. When the line appears in the novel, it is quoted by Amba, a prostitute. She uses it to describe the levelling effect of sexual desire: she is visited by men without regard to divisions of race, caste, or religion. But this image is resonant in many ways, and not least in its suggestion of the mixing or hybridizing of living bodies. As a text that is narrated by a hybrid human/monkey figure, *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* is clearly invested in the possibilities that are opened by a mingling of embodiments.

*Red Earth and Pouring Rain* tells a fictionalized history of nineteenth-century India in tandem with an account of contemporary Indian diaspora. These twin narratives come from two principal storytellers: Sanjay, the magical instigator of the First Indian War of Independence now reincarnated as a monkey, and Abhay, a disillusioned young
man just returned from living in the United States who, driven by his frustration, shoots Sanjay in his monkey form and returns him to human language. Woven together with these two main threads are dozens of other stories and an enormous cast of characters that ranges from Hindu gods to the denizens of an anglophile Californian country club to Jack the Ripper and the detective dedicated to stopping him. The novel shifts among the timeless world of legend, the hybrid temporal plane of history made magical, and the realist contemporary context in which Sanjay and Abhay are telling their stories, via megaphone, to a growing crowd of listeners who represent the full diversity of modern India. As in Gandhi’s Autobiography, this idea of full diversity includes nonhuman animals. Red Earth and Pouring Rain offers its vision of India as a multispecies nation through the representation of many, and various, interspecies encounters. It also, like the Autobiography, locates the roots of resistance in a moment of meat-eating, and represents the relationships among vegetarianism, anticolonial resistance, and the potentially radical uniqueness of India as a space of lived and embodied interspecies relationships. This section considers the novel’s representation of carnivory as an expression of its ambivalent indebtedness to a legacy of Gandhian thinking.

Like Gandhi, Chandra explores the tension inherent in using a Western textual form to represent Indian life. This exploration is not new in Indian anglophone writing (as is clear from the discussion of Kanthapura in my Introduction), but, among scholars and reviewers, the designation “novel” sits uncomfortably on Red Earth and Pouring Rain (Salvador 180). As Alexandru suggests, the structure of the text resists teleological genre conventions, presenting, instead, a rhizomatic opening of multiple narratives
without cohesion or final resolution (“Performance” 28). The novel also explicitly engages with the problem of writing a human life. Chandra himself positions his alternative structure as a resistance to the idea that the novel must focus on “the individual, the Western individual, that very sort of eighteenth-/nineteenth-century post-Enlightenment individual” (qtd. in Alexandru “Alternatives” 46). Both narrators — Abhay and Sanjay — speak autobiographically, but, as in Gandhi’s Autobiography, the stability and security of the identity of the human individual is called into question by the fragmented, episodic, and inconclusive nature of their stories.

Against the multiplicity of its own narratives, Chandra’s novel positions colonial perspectives on textuality that also engage with the idea of the human. One of Sanjay’s main antagonists, the missionary Reverend Sarthey, writes a book entitled The Manners, Customs, and Rituals of the Natives of Hindostan: being chiefly an account of the journeys of a Christian through the lands of the Hindoo, and his appeal to all concerned believers. This text is excerpted in the novel as a representation of the contempt at the heart of colonial power. It represents the violent totalizing force of colonial ideology, with respect to its others and to textual forms, distilling the diversity of Indian life into a single reductive narrative. Sarthey writes,

[T]he native of India is singular in his inability to make the natural and godly distinction between man and the other creatures. They are apt to treat of the lesser species as if they were separate and equal nations,

77 The inclusion of this text also recalls Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart, which gives its final words to a colonial voice, that of the District Commissioner, that reduces the tragedy of the narrative to a “paragraph” (209).
instead of beasts lacking in the powers of comprehension that are gifted solely to Man by his just and good God. The natives further display the capriciousness of children, which is to say that while they exhibit a sentimental and blasphemously religious attachment to the lower animals, such as the grimacing monkey, the chewing, placid cow, and the elephant, they are capable of displaying the most callous cruelty towards these very same species. (280)

The simultaneous infantilization and animalization of colonial subjects is evident in this passage, as is the denigration of any worldview that does not place “Man” at the top of the hierarchy of being. Additionally, by invoking the nation, Sarthey introduces a politics of both species and race. Nonhuman animals cannot be nations because they are lesser; similarly, the “natives” who are unable to recognize such a logical and natural hierarchy are also lesser, and therefore also not to be considered a nation. Sarthey’s attachment to hierarchical thinking and to clear and rigid categorizations displays what Leela Gandhi identifies as imperial power’s insistence on verticality, rather than horizontality, as a structure for social organization (“Ahimsa and Other Animals” 17). Such a worldview misses the key fact of the mixing and interpenetration of species groups as they appear in the Indian context of Chandra’s text. The novel uses this passage in contrast to its own representation of the fluidity between animal and human bodies and categories: the “natural and godly distinction” that Sarthey prizes does not apply to the world of the text.

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As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Four, I use the term “animalization” to refer to the discourse that defines any being as having the characteristics of an “animal,” and thus to constructions of animality rather than to real nonhuman animals.
By incorporating Sarthey’s memoir into its own narrative, *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* establishes not only its counter-position in terms of textuality, but also the relationship of that textuality to the ideas of human and nonhuman. As Alexandru observes, this representation configures the novel form itself as a space of multiplicity, drawing on both Indian textual traditions and contemporary digital texts (“Alternatives” 44), and on the history of the novel as an inherently heteroglossic form, in contrast to the memoir or the autobiography. Both Salvador and Alexandru suggest that the form of this novel owes a great deal to the “orality” of the Indian epic tradition (Salvador 177, Alexandru “Alternatives” 48). This position may be validated by the construction of the storytelling event in the novel; however, I would like to resist the orality/textuality binary and the assumptions on which it is founded. Chandra is interested in reconfiguring the idea of text as a space of radical multiplicity, rather than one of traditionally opposed categories.

*Red Earth and Pouring Rain* contests colonial hierarchies, both material and textual, by redefining narrative as both bodily and transformative, especially through images of consumption. Throughout the novel, text is aligned with food and eating. The god Ganesha advises Sanjay that a story must be “like a perfect meal with a dance of tastes” (137-138). This connection between narrative and food is in part based on the concept of *rasa*, an ancient aesthetic theory that defines “the aim of all art” in terms of “taste” and “flavour.” The achievement of *rasa*, through this balance and interplay of tastes, is profoundly transformative for both performer/storyteller and audience.
(Alexandru “Alternatives” 55). Such bodily transformation links food with text, and imbues both with a flavour of anticolonial resistance deriving from the power of both substances once each is inside the body. Eating, the incorporation of the foreign, is a central motif throughout this novel, from the magical golden laddoos that result in the births of Sanjay and his close friends Sikander and Chotta, to the public feasting that occurs during Sanjay’s storytelling. Eating is explicitly an act that is laden with transformative significance; often, food nourishes the resistant spirit inside the body of its consumer. Janvi, Sikander and Chotta’s mother, eats the laddoos and conceives her sons in response to her sexual exploitation and physical captivity by her British husband Skinner. Similarly, when Sanjay incorporates Chotta’s ashes, after his cremation, into chappatis that he then sends across the country, this food spreads anger and the will to rebel to every eater: “So the bitter taste of war would spread, multiplying at every eating, until it was rampant and uncontrollable and the hour was right” (570). It is the taste of rebellion, as incorporated into the bread, that actually instigates the war. Chandra observes that eating is a type of encounter, and that all encounters “carry the possibility and risk of consumption of otherness, and therefore transformation” (“Re: An Animal

Red Earth and Pouring Rain”’s dependence on Hindu text, tradition, and iconography, which is evident in — among other aspects of the representation — its use of Sanskrit, somewhat disturbs the supposed inclusivity of its narrative. Like Gandhi’s text (and terminology), it obliquely participates in the Sanskritization, and therefore Hinduization, of Indian culture, at least in its dominant representational subjects and strategies. The same action is performed in Lagaan, which uses the Radha-Krishna love story as an allegory, and organizes its space around the village’s Krishna temple, despite the presence of Muslim characters in the community. In Red Earth and Pouring Rain, it is Hinduism that is able to accommodate the kind of positive hybridity for which the novel aims, in part because of its enormous pantheon and the variety of its textual traditions.

These chappatis are a reference to the mysterious circulation of random numbers of chappatis among villages in 1885. This possibly apocryphal story has been a rich text for theoretical analysis for both Ranajit Guha in Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India and Homi Bhabha in The Location of Culture.
Studies Approach”). Given this emphasis on transformative incorporation, the representation of carnivory in the novel is particularly important. Chandra’s statement complicates any interpretation of the encounter as an ethical event, or of transformation as an ethical development in response to such an event; both, he suggests, are dependent upon a violence practised upon the other. Through the novel’s engagement with colonial food ideologies, the violence inherent in consumption becomes apparent.

The violence of consumption is demonstrated through a representation of carnivory that is similar to moments in both Gandhi’s *Autobiography* and *Lagaan*. Markline, the British owner of the press for which Sanjay and Sikander work as apprentices in Calcutta, decides to act as a patron to Sanjay. When Sanjay is first summoned to meet him, he notices that the house is full of hunting trophies, including the bodies (or parts of the bodies) of deer, boar, nilgai, and elephants (350). These corpses are a kind of catalogue, depicting the scope of Markline’s violent control over the bodies of Indian beings, and their presence makes clear that Markline now wants to add Sanjay to his collection. On this first visit, Sanjay witnesses his patron eating meat, and the sight has a physical effect on him: “as Markline sawed methodically at the meat on his plate, dividing it into identical brown squares, Sanjay stifled a quick upsurge of nausea” (361). As in the juxtaposition of scenes of hunting and carnivory in *Lagaan*, these two forms of exploitation of nonhuman animals are connected in the space of Markline’s home as expressions of colonial violence, and this connection prepares the ground for Markline’s principal confrontation with Sanjay. In exchange for his patronage, Markline compels Sanjay to eat beef, as Russell in *Lagaan* attempts (but fails) to compel the Raja to eat
meat. The power of these moments of carnivorous coercion hinges on the evocation of disgust in the audience, regardless of that audience’s eating practices. In order for these scenes to function, they must create a sense of bodily violation with which their audience can identify. While *Lagaan* can focalize the viewer’s response to colonial coercion through the sympathetic but initially detached Elizabeth Russell, both Gandhi and Chandra employ a visceral representation of the physical and psychological trauma of this violation. Like Gandhi’s, Sanjay’s encounter with meat is an overwhelming physical experience: “the rank smell filled Sanjay's head, he felt it pressing on his lips, then he felt it in his mouth, he swallowed as the four steel points scraped, retreating over his lower lip, felt his throat expand over the gristly mass, contract, but his mouth was full of blood, and he screamed, screamed once for his mother, and fell” (377). This description is designed to engage the senses of the reader: the feeling of the expansion of the throat, the sound of the scraping fork, the smell of flesh, and the taste of blood combine to create a sensory experience from which it is difficult to remain detached. This scene again invokes Ghassem-Fachandi’s discussion of the affect of disgust. Even more so than in Gandhi’s representation of his meat-eating, this description seems to “revel in the rejected substance,” as Ghassem-Fachandi contends that the “vegetarian ethos” of disgust always.

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81 In the last episode of his story, Abhay describes the perspective of the meat-eater in an encounter with the oppressive norm of carnivory. Swaminathan, who is playing on Abhay’s cricket team (against “the Regents” [635]), is pressed to eat animal ribs. When he refuses on the grounds of his vegetarianism, William James, the racist father of Abhay’s girlfriend, remarks to an English player on his team, “No wonder you fellows thrashed them about for two hundred years” (640). Despite the fact that he himself is eating the ribs, Abhay is enraged, and his anger prevents him from eating the rest of his meal. From this moment, Abhay is determined to win the cricket match. The description of his triumph of course calls to mind the nonviolent resistance of Bhuvan and the villagers in *Lagaan*, who similarly use cricket as a (remarkably effective) assertion of indigenous physical strength to contradict the colonial stereotype of the weak vegetarian Indian. Both *Lagaan* and Chandra’s novel, even when they depict sympathetic meat-eaters, renounce the consumption of meat as a form or source of genuine physical or moral strength.
does (571). The particular way that this scene “revels” in the substance — meat — suggests its importance for Sanjay’s transformation; without the temporal slowness and immersive sensory quality of the scene, its transformative nature would not be clear. But the disgust in this scene makes evident that the encounter with meat not only inaugurates a change in Sanjay, but also that the nature of this change is dark and violent. *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* uses the affect of disgust to establish the connection of consumption with bodily and psychological transformations, a relationship that inaugurates many of the key developments in the novel. After this trauma, Sanjay uses the same language as Sikander’s mother following her capture and rape by Skinner: “I have been insulted” (380). This statement connects the different ways that colonial violence works upon the space of the body, and its various internal violations of that space. For all of its victims in this text, the encounter with colonial violence is transformative of both their minds and their bodies. The novel details the way in which this transformative effect is able to trap even anticolonial resistance within the circle of its own logic.

Sanjay’s transformation, both bodily and psychological, comes as a result of his forced carnivory. This trauma marks the beginning of his commitment to violent resistance. He begins by performing a violence on the text of Reverend Sarthey’s book, which he has been asked to reprint in his capacity as Markline’s employee, by inserting a coded message into the text using a slightly altered type. Sanjay incorporates his subversive words into the body of the text, transforming the meaning and effect of Sarthey’s writing. Sarthey and Markline are thus both forced to swallow Sanjay’s resistance — this resistance for which meat is ironically the fuel. After Sanjay eats the
flesh, it “[sits] brick-like in his belly” (382). This horrible object inside him, silent and heavy — unlike Gandhi's bleating goat\(^{82}\) — begins to transform his body into a pure vessel of violence. Further connecting meat to text, Sanjay also consumes his secret type when his code is discovered, and, as a result, a bruise appears on his throat that marks the entry of something foreign and damaging into his body. Later, English letters begin to appear on Sanjay’s skin. He realizes that “what he had eaten was still in his body” (473) and is driving him forward; by “what he had eaten,” he means both meat and text. Meat-eating is an act that changes the body, and that reconfigures the individual. Similarly, English text renders Sanjay foreign to himself, filling him with an “alien gravity” (580) that prompts his most violent actions, including the killing of British civilians trapped inside a church. The influence of meat and text upon his body represents the effects of colonial texts of meat, and their enforcement of that violent totality against which this novel speaks.

The change in Sanjay in response to the consumption of meat may seem to privilege vegetarianism as the ideal form of nonviolent practice; however, the novel complicates any such totalizing (and Gandhian) representation. The practice of eating that is resisted in the novel is not meat-eating per se. When Sanjay encounters meat at Markline’s house, he has already seen Sikander’s family eating it. What is different about Markline’s meat is its lifelessness; it is “pitiful and distorted” (376). Sanjay’s visceral reaction to Markline’s meat arises from his inability to “imagine it as part of some

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\(^{82}\) This difference is suggestive of the endpoint of these two forms of resistance. For Gandhi, the goat he eats remains in some sense a living being, and its presence in his body enlivens his ethical development. For Sanjay, the meat has been and is a dead substance, and its effect upon him is ethically deadening.
animal” (376). Markline’s carnivory divides the flesh from the animal, and effaces the existence and identity of that animal. Markline imposes on the flesh the singular category “meat,” a category that is a construction of his hierarchical system of power, of which he is at the apex. Next, Markline endows this substance with properties that support this system of power. Like Mehtab in Gandhi’s Autobiography, Markline asserts the importance of “proper nutrition” (376) and a “scientific diet” (378), and positions meat as both the emblem and the conduit of these practices and their benefits. He then offers to Sanjay the transformation of the self that accompanies the eating of meat. Like Mehtab, Markline suggests that eating meat will deliver Sanjay from his inborn weakness; through it, he will become a part of that power structure that Markline represents, to which carnivory is a form of privileged access. The change that Sanjay undergoes as a response to the eating of meat — the violent anticolonial resistance in which he engages — supports Markline’s contention that carnivory is transformative. It is because Sanjay eats this meat that he is both inspired and able to launch a resistance movement. At the same time, his resistance is intertwined with the form of power he seeks to expel from his country, in that it employs the very techniques against which he is fighting. In a sense, then, he accepts the idea that he has been weak as a vegetarian, and is now strong. For Gandhi, the power of vegetarianism is to offer a mode of resistance that rejects this premise of colonial power, and refuses to acknowledge the weakness that colonial ideology claims is inherent in Indian eating practices. By representing the resistance that arises from Sanjay’s meat-eating as violent and destructive (and ultimately unsuccessful), Red Earth and Pouring Rain arrives at a similar conclusion. Like the Autobiography, this
is a text that is centred on a bodily politics, and bodily articulations of power and resistance, into which vegetarianism offers an important point of entry.

Throughout the novel, oppression is, explicitly, something always enforced upon the body (that is, oppression is never represented as purely psychological or entirely bureaucratic); resistance therefore arises in response to bodily transformations that occur under colonial oppression. The resistant response is also a form of physical transformation that enables embodied action against oppression. This cyclical pattern of transformations is one of the underlying structures that draw together the various threads, both historical and contemporary, of this narrative. Contesting the assertions of contemporary historians — and, as a result, the authority of the discourse of history itself — the novel provides a version of the anticolonial narrative in which the apocryphal tale of the greased cartridges is true. The type of truth claimed by this text suggests a kind of history that values narratives and recognizes their power. Sanjay tells his followers, in reference to the cartridges, that “if you put this in your mouths, it will make you something else. [...] [T]hey want to make you something else, if you eat this you will become something else” (576-577). Sanjay has already been transformed: carnivory has made him something other than human, something monstrous. In one way, he wants to

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83 There was a rumour that circulated at the time of the First Indian War of Independence that the bullets for the Enfield rifles with which the British were arming their Indian troops were greased with pig fat, a substance considered defiling by both Muslims and Hindus. Here again, the ingestion of bodily material from the nonhuman animal is represented as inaugurating transformation in the individual. Homi Bhabha analyzes the rumour of the greased cartridges in the essay “By Bread Alone” (The Location of Culture 286).

84 At the beginning of Sanjay's tale, the frame storyteller cautions his listeners: “do not think that this story is untrue, because it is *itihasa*” (30). *Itihasa* is a Sanskrit word for history that connotes legend or tradition; it evokes multiple histories and multiple versions of history that interact with and alter one another. It is, again, a concept that resists totalizing identities, of either the subject of history or the discourse of history itself.
prevent such a transformation of others, but, on the other hand, he hopes to effect
transformation by sharpening his followers’ appetite for resistance. In his own practice,
Sanjay adopts an extreme asceticism. He is a form of satyagrahi, but one who purifies
himself through the performance of, and commitment to, violence. His ascetic rites (such
as the ritual dismemberment of his own and his followers’ bodies) are a version of
Gandhian rites of self-purification that brings the “terror” of those rites to the fore; they
also engage with the Hindu trope of the powerful renunciate. Sanjay’s rites represent the
violence that inheres, for this text, in any form of bodily purification, and the novel stands
against any conception of purity, even one achieved through nonharming. The text adopts
its focus on the body and bodily transformation from Gandhian ideology in order to
expose the cruelty of its demands upon its adherents. The body is still, however, a
powerful and empowering space for the resistance of all totalities, especially in the
necessary complexity of its relationship to any ideology. As in Gandhi, resistance must,
first of all, occur inside the body of the resistant subject. The body is a space that makes
anticolonial action available to all who are exploited by colonial power. And, as in
Gandhi, the body is a space through which to imagine and to enact a vision of
multispecies living.

Chandra’s novel presents a kind of multispecies living that is relevant to both its
anticolonial and its postcolonial critiques. In the first instalment of Abhay’s story, which
describes his time as a student in California, his alienation is intensified by the orientalist
representations and assumptions by which he is surrounded. Despite taking part in the
undergraduate culture of his college, Abhay is isolated by virtue of his race and cultural
identity. The importance of the idea of multispecies living to this narrative of a modern diasporic Indian man is immediately apparent through Abhay’s meeting with a dog on the college lawns. After spending the night with Kate, a white American woman, Abhay wakes to a realization of his distance from her: he looks around her room, at photographs that only feature “red-faced white-haired people” (59). On his way back towards his dormitory, Abhay encounters a dog:

A black German shepherd with a blue bandanna around his neck ran up to me and I sat down and rubbed his face, enjoying the warm panting breath on my face. I ran my fingers through the thick hair on his stomach, and he squirmed and reached up and licked my face, pushing me over. We lay happily for a while on the grass laughing at each other and I realized it had been a long time since I had touched an animal. I got up, and he followed me for a while and then veered off, running easily through the water arcing up from the sprinklers. (59)

The mutual experience of intimacy that Abhay describes here is in direct contrast to the distance with which he characterizes his time with Kate (despite their physical contact). The dog recognizes Abhay in a way that his fellow (white) students do not, despite the fact of their shared humanity. Of course this mutuality comes from Abhay’s perspective, but I do think that we can interpret the dog’s gestures — the approach, the voluntary physical closeness, and the licking — as communicative of a kind of interspecies recognition. I would also argue that the acknowledgment of this communicative faculty in the dog is ethically important, both for the novel, which has a nonhuman animal narrator, and for approaching nonhuman animals more generally. This moment can be usefully compared to Haraway’s description of her embodied communication with her dog, Cayenne (When Species Meet 15-16, 205-246).

A comic and grotesque version of this encounter occurs in Hanif Kureishi’s The Buddha of Suburbia, after which the protagonist, Karim, finds himself covered in “dog jissom” (41).
Abhay is animalized, in a postcolonial humanist sense, in his interactions with white Americans; rather, it seems that isolation — of various kinds — is a fact of American life in contrast to Indian life. Chandra refers to this phenomenon as “the great aloneness of America” (qtd. in Alexandru “Virtual Reality” 16). In this interview, Chandra’s description of moving between the United States and India notes the multispecies encounters that characterize Indian life. On arriving in the U.S., he says, “I get to the airport [and] it all seems so clean [...] it’s like... where are the birds?” (21). All of the American characters are profoundly isolated, distanced physically and emotionally from other human beings, as well as other animals. Abhay says, “I realized it had been a long time since I had touched an animal,” to indicate that his time in the United States has been marked by the separation of species, whereas, in his earlier life, sharing touch with a nonhuman animal would not have been such an exceptional occurrence. In the novel, according to Chandra, “there’s not a clean dividing line between the two kinds of beings [human and nonhuman]” (“Re: An Animal Studies Approach”). 

Red Earth and Pouring Rain represents the sharing of spaces and the daily embodied contact between human and nonhuman as destabilizing to the separateness of the human.

Abhay’s experience of transplantation to the West is contrasted with his girlfriend Amanda’s attempt to move to India. She reacts, specifically, to the constant and, in her

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87 The phrase “too clean” resists the superiority of hygiene, both literal and figurative, upon which Gandhi insists. That Chandra associates the presence of nonhuman animals with dirt is of course problematic, but is also a part of his more general commitment, as evidenced in Red Earth and Pouring Rain, to resisting ideas of purity in all forms — ideas of hygiene and purity to which Gandhi is so attched.

88 This representation is a stereotype of American life that perpetuates a binary distinction between East and West. It suggests that India is a place of multiplicity and unhygienic contacts that are profoundly positive for the novel. The use of this trope can be compared to Gandhi’s strategic orientalism in the Autobiography, but I think Chandra’s stereotyping is less self-conscious than Gandhi’s, since the latter was, as we have seen, well aware of the transcultural nature of his own thinking.
view, oppressive presence of nonhuman animals. When she arrives in India, Amanda is
overwhelmed by its “density” (659), by which she means the way that animal and human
spaces bleed into one another, are permeable to one another, and are fluid in their borders
and their definitions. Her most alienating experience is an encounter with a monkey
which occurs when, in an attempt to escape into a less “dense” environment, she and
Abhay have retreated to a mountain resort. Abhay hears her scream, and when he returns
to their cottage he finds a “large red monkey” (660) facing her, eating her breakfast.
While Abhay tries to calm her, and to insist on the ordinariness of this moment, Amanda
experiences it as a terrifying violation of human space, and a traumatic embodiment of
the “density” that so troubles her. This perception is so deeply decentring to her, so
challenging to her own identity, that she decides she must leave. Abhay, in his grief, for a
moment experiences his surroundings as Amanda sees them. He remembers that,
“looking over her shoulder something strange happened to me, the world tilted on some
axis that I had never known existed, suddenly the trilling voices of the Colonel’s
daughters, happily dipping in and out of Hindi and English and two other languages,
suddenly they became a babel, a multiple confusion and harsh, lost in the ceaseless
chattering of birds” (662). Faced with this “uncontrolled profusion,” Abhay “felt nausea,
loneliness, my self was a hard little point, a unitary ball spinning and yawing in a
hugeness of dark where there was no beginning, no middle, no end: no meaning. And
through my terror I saw the monkeys watching me, their reddish pelts glowing in the sun,
their eyes expressionless” (663). What Abhay describes is an almost total identification
with Amanda’s point of view: he feels the terror inherent in the challenge of the multiple
and the “dense” to the individual human self. The multiplicity, confusion, and
disorganization of this experience renders the self meaningless, and the rhizomatic
structure that Abhay suddenly perceives dissolves any stable centre. This traumatic
perception signals Abhay’s position between American and Indian conceptions of human
selfhood, and the particular difficulty of inhabiting that space. His negotiation of the self
brings him, like his fellow narrator Sanjay, into proximity with the figure of the
satyagrahi. This representation asks whether “confusion” or dissolution of the self — the
disindividuation of the individual — actually creates meaninglessness rather than
meaning, and also suggests that this loss of the self can be more isolating than it is
unifying. Abhay’s loss of his secure sense of self does not allow him to blend into an
essential oneness (unlike the satyagrahi’s); rather, Abhay is confronted by the lack of
unity in the scene he witnesses, and it is this lack that prompts his ethical development
through the rest of the narrative.

Abhay’s autobiographical account, which is really an explanation of the events
and thoughts that lead him up to the moment of shooting Sanjay in his monkey form,
represents the perspective of someone disillusioned by the promises of Indian
nationhood, and made cynical by that disillusionment. Abhay’s narrative is, in many
senses, one of return (as the title of Book V, “The Return,” suggests), and this return, for
Abhay, is both traumatic and, in a qualified sense, redemptive. His identification with
Amanda begins a process of transition that he must make, from his life in the United
States to his Indian life, and from his place in an American narrative to his place in an
Indian one. If he first resists the dissolution of his selfhood under the gaze of the animal,
in the density of his homeland, the process of narration will awaken him to the liberating potential of multiplicity, and to the violence of singularity.

One of the ways that the novel explores its own idea of multiplicity in contrast to totality is through its representation of reincarnation, which is a central part of both its focus on transformative incorporation and its consideration of nonhuman life. Chandra himself ascribes the difference between the idea of the human in India and in the United States directly to a predominant belief in reincarnation in the former (“Re: An Animal Studies Approach”). When Yama, the Hindu god of death, appears to Sanjay at the end of his human life, Sanjay sets the following condition for his death and rebirth: “If I must be reborn, I prefer not to be aware, to be always divided against myself, to be a monster [...] I ask that I be reborn not as a human. I demand that I be an animal” (628). What his reincarnation proves, however, and what he comes to understand, is that the division of species along the lines of consciousness is not as simple as he imagines. As a monkey, even before Abhay shoots him and restores his access to human language, he is still Sanjay in a different embodiment, and he is still divided against himself. According to Sanjay, what happens after death is “this, all this: life again” (136). Due to the trauma he experiences when Abhay shoots him, Sanjay’s previous lives return to him, existing in parallel with his present life; his many histories become one simultaneity. Sanjay therefore narrates from a position of multiplicity. His identity as human or animal is carefully maintained as undecidable; at moments when his humanity seems established through, for example, his ability to communicate using human language, his embodiment as nonhuman animal is reintroduced or reinforced. For the novel, this kind of multiplicity
inheres alike in all beings, the nonhuman no less than the human. In this representation, any living being is a body and a consciousness composed of many species identities. Each reincarnated being is already multiple and, therefore, the imposition of a unitary identity on any one embodied living being, based on species or any other category, is a form of violence.

For believers in reincarnation, vegetarianism can be a cautionary measure. Every living being has the potential, in a future life, to become any other living being; likewise, every living being could have been, in a previous life, any other (not just any other kind of living being, but truly any other specific, individual being). Sanjay’s personal history, through many embodiments, presents an idea of the Indian nation as one composed of individual collectives, bodies full of various beings, making up one body politic that cannot be dominated by oneness without a violent disavowal. For Gandhi, *ahimsa* is a response to the essential unity of all creatures, but in this novel, nonharming must be a letting-be of what is multiple and a refusal to force beings, ideas, and ways of living to cohere. In this text, a Gandhian essential unity of creaturely life is a violent imposition. In addition to the porous borders between human and nonhuman in the novel, the proliferation of gods, characters, histories, and narratives in this text resists reductive

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89 This is the way that Haraway, albeit on a more biological level, also imagines the body (*When Species Meet 3-4*).

90 Ghassem-Fachandi writes about a pamphlet titled “The ‘auto-biography’ of a goat” that depicts family members unknowingly dining on one another. He observes that, in this representation of reincarnation, “[i]t is not only cannibalism but kinship that is invoked [...]. To the horror of cannibalism is added the horror of imagining being eaten by one’s own children or eating one’s own father — highly incestuous adumbrations. Meat-eating strikes at the centre of the social unit: family, incest, and generation” (571). This discussion focuses on the manipulation of affect that occurs in such a trope, but the image is quite literally a possibility offered by reincarnation, as is the fact that the goat retains his consciousness after death in order to witness the cannibalistic/incestuous meal. This living after death recalls Gandhi’s goat, living inside his body, and suggests the way that reincarnation may also inform that image.
categorization. In the novel, colonial power (represented, for example, by Sarthey’s memoir) is that which reduces, distills, and categorizes; anticolonial resistance, by contrast, must expand, multiply, complexify, and resist categorization by any totalizing model, including that envisioned by Gandhian *ahimsa*.

At the foundation of Chandra’s novel is the idea that violence is both a unity — an ideology that enforces a singular way of being — and that which seeks to unify the plurality of creaturely life. Colonial ideology in the novel is violent because it tries to enforce its oneness (which, in itself, is an ideological rather than factual account of the experience and perspective of the colonizer) upon the plural. This enforcement takes place through the control of bodies and their interaction with other bodies; this violence is, for example, evident in the effort to enforce one way of eating, a way of eating that is premised on one perception of what it means to be human and, equally, of one position of the human in relation to all other animals. In this way, the critique also applies to the enforcement of vegetarianism as the only way of eating, a position that addresses not only Gandhian philosophy itself, but also the development of a mutated strain of that philosophy into contemporary Hindu fundamentalism. Sanjay’s resistance fails because it too is a violence: it asserts that Indians must be one in resistance to the colonizer’s one. Sanjay derides Sikander before killing him, telling him that he has become a “[g]rinning monkey”; he says, “[t]hey’ve made you into an animal, Sikander, and somehow you don’t even feel the insult” (574). Sanjay’s request to be reborn as an unaware animal displays his continued adherence to this violence, and the text uses his reincarnation as a method of undercutting the authority not only of a binary division between species, but also of the
violent unity of humanity, in opposition to all others, that such a division necessarily involves. Sanjay’s narration is not an autobiography that constructs and protects the individual self, but rather a coming-to-terms with the multiple and the dense. The telling of his story forces him to expand his understanding of narrative, and in the vast and labyrinthine tangle of stories lies the postcolonial ethic of the novel. When, in the end, violence erupts in the crowd, Abhay explains the cause: “there were dozens of factions, a hundred ideologies, all struggling with each other [...] but there was one new thing, one new idea that overwhelmed everything else, and this was simply that there should only be one idea, one voice, one thing, one, one, one” (667). Abhay’s solution is to tell a story “that will grow like a lotus vine, that will twist on itself and expand ceaselessly,” a story that will be “a musical hubbub” (669) of countless voices. In certain respects, this novel presents its national vision in response to the failure of the singular narrative of Indian independence. The practices of the Indian state have resulted, in this text, in a reproduction of the ideological violence of colonialism, here manifested in each faction that violently asserts the power and primacy of its own particular oneness. The idea of India as one nation — which is, of course, a colonial idea — is, in itself, a violence. Chandra’s novel thus deconstructs the idea of a national unity, an idea that would present

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91 Some critics do propose the opposite interpretation, that Sanjay has been punished in his reincarnation as a “lesser” being. Alexandru, despite her interest in Deleuzian multiplicity, adopts this more conventional reading; she writes that Sanjay “is punished for his excessive desire by being reborn in an inferior state” (“Alternatives” 56). While this assertion may be correct in terms of many interpretations of reincarnation as an aspect of Hindu doctrine, I hold that this novel significantly complicates this idea of gradations of value among species in general and in the representation of Sanjay himself, whose status as animal or human is uncertain.

92 This line — “one, one, one” — is most likely a reference to The Satanic Verses, which uses it repeatedly (104, 106, 108) to make a similar point: “This is the world into which Mahound has brought his message: one one one. Amid such multiplicity, it sounds like a dangerous word” (106).
itself as the image of peace. It suggests that any unity is necessarily exclusionary, and is reliant upon its others for its very existence. This violence, then, is right at the root of the narrative of Indian anticolonial resistance; real resistance, real strength, the novel suggests, lies in the “density” of India’s multiplicity.

3.4. Conclusion

Despite the problems with any totalizing ideology that Red Earth and Pouring Rain exposes, the idea of an essential unity remains a seductive one. As the commercial and critical success of Lagaan demonstrates, the narrative of a population united in nonviolent resistance retains a powerful psychological hold in the culture of modern India. The vegetarian remains, in these representations, a figure who can speak to the community of all living beings. At the same time, vegetarianism is still associated with oppressive power structures, despite the Gandhian intervention. In India, meat is sometimes seen as democratic and progressive. In this view, carnivory contests, particularly, the hierarchies of caste and religious power that are associated with Hindu nationalist positions (Robbins 413-414). Indeed, even the promotion of vegetarianism from an animal rights perspective is shaded with more or less subtle forms of xenophobia. Maneka Gandhi, for example, blames the increase in Indian meat consumption on the influence of the “West,” while, at the same time, arguing that most of the animals slaughtered in India are not consumed by Indians, but exported to the “Middle East”; “our animals,” she argues, should not be killed “to feed other nations” ("The Business of Murder” emphasis added). It is in statements like these that
the negative implications of Gandhi’s cultural stereotyping and strategic orientalism become uncomfortably obvious. This exclusionary logic — invoking the unity of India in opposition to its others — clearly supports Chandra’s representation of the danger of totalizing ideologies, and just as clearly contradicts the Gandhian conception of the oneness of all beings. What it demonstrates, additionally, is the necessity of expanding the serious consideration of vegetarianisms, and their many meanings, beyond the Western world. The orientalist assumptions that the position of nonhuman animals in India is based on their “cosmological significance” (Robbins 412), and that India is, essentially, a vegetarian — and therefore harmoniously multispecies — nation, belie the complexity of factors that determine eating practices, oversimplify the social and political meanings of meat, tacitly support already hegemonic and oppressive power structures, and dismiss the, often extremely harsh, material realities of the lives of nonhuman animals in the Indian context. This chapter has examined just two texts that offer much more complex and significant ways of thinking about the position of the vegetarian, and the practice of vegetarianism, in connection with the anti- and postcolonial lives of Indian beings, both human and nonhuman. As the industrialization of animal agriculture increases in India, in tandem with a shift in the meaning and consumption of meat, it becomes all the more urgent to consider the factors that have, historically, shaped relations between human and nonhuman, to contest revisionist histories and oppressive ideologies, and to examine the greater implications of the individual’s choice to consume or not to consume the flesh of other animals in a nation in which all lives are necessarily lived in multispecies contexts.
This chapter has considered the way that the intimate space of the body can be connected to the body politic, and the way that multispecies living exists even within that intimate space as it does within the larger collective of the nation. In Gandhi’s *Autobiography* and Chandra’s *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, different species meet and mix within individual bodies. In the next chapter, I will discuss meetings between bodies and how these meetings reflect upon the traumas of the birth of nationhood. I will look at the way that Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* and R.K. Narayan’s *Man-eater of Malgudi* use companionate multispecies relationships to critique the dominant narrative of Indian Independence, and to expose the violence of its exclusions.
4. The Home: Companion Animals/Companion Narratives

4.1. Introduction

In her *Companion Species Manifesto*, Donna Haraway argues that “‘[c]ompanion species’ is a bigger and more heterogeneous category than companion animal” (15). In the largely Western context of animal studies, this statement suggests, the definition of a “companion animal” is fairly limited, most often encompassing only dogs and cats. For Haraway, by contrast, companion species are any beings who co-constitute one another, biologically, affectively, or spatially; they “make each other up, in the flesh” (2-3). Although her analysis focuses on dog-human relationships, her contentions are widely applicable to the effort to destabilize human exceptionalism, and to challenge those boundaries erected in the interest of maintaining a “hygienic distance” (16) between human and nonhuman animals. Fictional texts offer space to explore the complexities of Haraway’s conception of “significant otherness” (*Companion Species* 16) as they challenge, in particular, the enforcement of divisions between human and nonhuman animal habitations. But, at the same time, “significant otherness” can be a useful textual strategy that, ultimately, only instrumentalizes nonhuman animals as expressions of anthropocentric concerns. The use that fictional texts make of animal companions — as figures of disturbance —exposes the problematics of representation itself, and the way that representation in its own right seeks to control the unpredictability of multispecies spaces.

In Indian texts, companionate relationships between human and nonhuman animals occupy a broad field; as we have already seen in Chapters One and Two,
proximity among species, even in human-dominated spaces, redefines the idea of human-
animal companionship. The gecko, for instance, lives in a symbiotic relationship with
human beings, in what are perceived to be human homes; this relationship is
companionate, despite the fact that the gecko is not a “pet.” I want, like Haraway, to
broaden the field of companionship, and to suggest that companion animals are those
with whom human beings live and share space, no matter to what degree their presence is
legitimized by human recognition. These loose and often imbalanced forms of
companionship are aspects of the disorderly multispecies living that threads through all of
the texts in this dissertation. In this chapter, I want to draw specifically on the spatial
element of Haraway’s argument — on her suggestion that the sharing of intimate space
gives the lie to constructions of species purity (4) — to examine two novels that explore
key political moments in India’s postcolonial history through representations of
The Man-eater of Malgudi are both texts that engage with the repressed traumas of
independent India’s national origins; although these novels emerge from different
locations within India and different historical moments, they both obliquely explore
Partition, Independence, and post-Independence disillusionment. In their concern with the
birth of national borders, these novels suggest the impossibility of enforcing absolute
partitions of space, both literal and textual. The violence of this effort haunts both
narratives. The presence of nonhuman animals in these texts helps to pose their central
questions: for whom is the home a home? And, by extension, for whom is the nation a
home? Nonhuman animals function as remainders of who and what have been excised
from the narrative of postcolonial nationhood. But the presence of nonhuman animals in these texts also goes beyond the idea of remainder — Narayan and Desai actually utilize animals as revenants. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida argues that spectrality is “[a] question of repetition” and that “[o]ne cannot control [a spectre’s] comings and goings because it begins by coming back” (11). These novels transform their nonhuman animals into spectres of repressed violence that re-emerge to signify the failures of social and political change. The lives, and especially the deaths, of nonhuman animals come to represent the upheavals of Independence, Partition, and the struggle of emerging into postcolonial modernity that both novels, in their indirect approach to their political contexts, repress.

These novels instrumentalize nonhuman animals as figures for the “real” (that which human symbolic orders cannot encompass), figures that stand significantly outside the dominant narratives of nation and modernization. Animals are thus utilized as figures of “significant otherness” in ways that in fact attempt to control their otherness and bend it to the purpose of the texts: in Desai, they suggest a parallel narrative that, together with the narrative of the human characters, co-constitutes the story of the nation and the overall contrapuntal effect of the text; in Narayan, the “significant otherness” of nonhuman animals is in fact denied by the smoothness of the fictional plane, but the strangeness of the taxidermy corpses suggests that this smoothness is an illusion. Animal death, in both novels, both represents and is a repressed trauma; while the deaths of nonhuman animals are used to allegorize human forms of violence and the violence of representation itself, the reluctance of both narratives to treat their animals as subjects of
the texts, in and of themselves, in turn proliferates the narrative spectres that haunt each
textual space.

In the first section of this chapter, I consider the way that Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* explores family, gender, and the problems of nationhood through multiple animal figures who share the space of the family home in which the novel is set. Desai’s story of the trials of a bourgeois Delhi family during Independence, Partition, and the Emergency features a struggle for narrative control that mirrors the formation of narratives on a national scale. Desai aligns nonhuman animals with her elite cast of women as those who are excluded from these political histories, but the novel’s animals also point to a more nuanced and intersectional reading of privilege and oppression in the lives of the human protagonists that evokes the further exclusion of subaltern human beings from the textual world. Through the tensions that emerge over the bodies of nonhuman animals — and especially over the dead bodies of nonhuman animals — Desai destabilizes the grip of her focalizers on the narrative, and exposes their detachment and solipsism as markers of class privilege, a class privilege that allows them to repress the violence of their political moment. While *Clear Light of Day* engages quite obviously, if indirectly, with its political and historical context, *The Man-eater of Malgudi* deals more obliquely with the same themes. Although this strange and dark comic novel is not often interpreted in terms of its political engagement, a reading of Desai can facilitate a different encounter with Narayan’s earlier novel, one that allows for more complexity in the text, particularly in its critique of the postcolonial nation. Building on the idea of the remainders of national narratives that surfaces in Desai, I consider the exclusionary
nature of the community that Narayan's novel constructs as it is exposed by the text's engagement with taxidermy.

The Malgudi community is characterized by totally harmonious forms of multispecies living. Into this community, however, the novel introduces the taxidermist Vasu as a figure of postcolonial modernity. In Vasu’s view, taxidermy is a way to live companionately with nonhuman animals by preserving their figurative significance in human culture while actually avoiding the unpredictable engagement with significant otherness that multispecies living demands. Narayan’s novel uses taxidermy and its failures to signify the way that modernity tries, unsuccessfully, to sanitize the social world by constructing spatial divisions between human and nonhuman animals. At the same time, the novel itself avoids the complexities of multispecies living, in that all of its relationships — both human and multispecies — are stable, understood, and predictable. In their complexity and indeterminacy, the taxidermy animals are notable exceptions to this stability. As in *Clear Light of Day*, nonhuman animal death in *The Man-eater of Malgudi* is a site of interpretive tension. This tension is even more challenging in Narayan than in Desai, however, because in *Clear Light of Day* the counterdiscursive position of the animals — their “realness” set against the literariness of the human characters — is a clear strategy on the part of the text. The novel instrumentalizes them to undercut the narrative control of the focalizing characters, and to point out what and whom the stories constructed by those characters exclude. By contrast, the taxidermy animals of *The Man-eater of Malgudi*, though they are similarly utilized by the novel in its critique of postcolonial modernity, seem to exceed the project of the text altogether. If
Desai represents companionate relationships between human and nonhuman animals in order to suggest a shared state of exclusion from the narrative of nationhood, and the further exclusions that all narratives perform, Narayan’s taxidermy animals are the uncanny doubles of companion animals, and the way they inhabit the space of the novel along with the human characters is the uncanny double of multispecies living in the nation. The novel uses them to suggest the deadness that accompanies modernization, but in the end they also signify the deadness of the stable, essentialized, taxidermic community that the novel attempts to create.

The presence of nonhuman animal companions, and their taxidermically preserved doubles, remains a troubling excess that makes two already complex novels all the more ambiguous. In *Clear Light of Day*, the fact that the space of the home is teeming with nonhuman animal life helps to open up for question ideas about the “domestic” as a space, as an ideological construction, and as a microcosm of the nation. For Narayan’s novel, the “home” that is shared by human and nonhuman animals is the grounding space of indigenous myth and the illusion of a precolonial community upon which an anti-modern postcolonial conception of nationhood can be based. The taxidermy animals of *The Man-eater of Malgudi*, however, inhabit the spaces of the novel in a way that infects the entire narrative with an instability of purpose, shaking the plot’s mythic foundations. The reversal of narrative that taxidermy represents — death moving backward into “life” — is an ill-fitting parallel of the teleological structure of the myth on which the novel is based. These taxidermy animals — not living, not fully dead — are strange companions
in the space of Malgudi, and strange remainders of the construction of the postcolonial
nation.

Although I am drawing these two novels together, it must also be noted that their
differences are significant. Desai’s novel is defined by the idea of the literary; that is, it
makes self-reflexive use of literary conventions in order, I argue, to destabilize them.
Narayan’s framework is a mythic one; the novel is based, in part, on the myth of
Bhasmasura, and it thus negotiates the tragicomedy of the post-Independence state using
a precolonial form as its structuring principle. Critical readings of both of these texts tend
to confine them to rather limited generic codes: Desai’s novel is “domestic” realist
fiction, while Narayan’s is a quaint comedy. These generic limitations function as a kind
of textual space that both writers are compelled to inhabit. Nonhuman animals, in both
novels, help to push against these limitations, troubling the boundaries between the real
and the fantastic, the comic and the tragic, the private and the political. In both Desai and
Narayan, nonhuman animals both create and reflect internal tensions that suggest the
problematic nature of narrative itself, and expose the violence of narrative exclusions.

4.2. The Nation and its Spectres in *Clear Light of Day*

Animal lives and deaths could be said to haunt the lives of the human characters
of Anita Desai’s 1980 novel *Clear Light of Day*, and to haunt the narrative itself.
Nonhuman animals are ever present in the spaces of the text, but the attention devoted to
them is sporadic, rather than sustained. Dogs, cats, birds, horses, lizards, and insects burst
into the narrative at key moments, like apparitions from another, parallel world. Seen in
another light, however, it is in fact the human characters who are the ghosts, unable, in
some cases literally and in others psychologically, to move beyond the confines of their
childhood home, a space in which they are trapped between living and dying. From this
perspective, the nonhuman animals serve as a counterpoint of “real” life, set against the
spectral, insubstantial, and, as I will argue, even textual movements of the human
protagonists, the Das siblings — Bim, Tara, Raja, and Baba. The first line of the novel —
“[t]he koels began to call before daylight” (1) — introduces animal voices. In the same
paragraph, Tara, one of the two main focalizers, watches as “[a] silent line of ants filed
past her feet and down the steps into the garden” (1). This opening establishes that
nonhuman animals speak, while Tara is silent, and that they pass her by, while she stands
still. From this beginning paragraph, we see both the presence of a variety of animal lives
in this space, and the spectatorial, and spectral, position of the human family in relation to
those animal lives: Tara watches nonhuman animals, and is silent and still in contrast to
their vocalizations and movements. My purpose in this section is to examine the troubled
partition between animal and human homes in the novel, and how Desai’s representation
of the nonhuman animal in the space of the home relates to the politics of gender and
nation. I will discuss the way that nonhuman animals inhabit the spaces of this text, and
share those spaces with the Das siblings in a way that exposes the violence of the life
narrative that the siblings themselves construct. The animals in the text are often co-opted
into the Das siblings’ obsessive return to the past, and are enlisted as figures of repressed
traumas and as fetish objects that have a profound psychological hold on the human
characters. They are revenants from the siblings’ bourgeois childhood that perpetually
return to haunt their present tense. But the novel itself also instrumentalizes these animal figures as agents of generic disturbance, as figures of the real that trouble the literariness of the human characters’ sensibilities. The animals undercut the solipsism of the Das siblings and bring into focus the institutional violence that is the repressed subject of the novel, and the repressed subject of the Das siblings’ memories. In this doubled and overlapping usage, though, what space is there for nonhuman animals themselves? *Clear Light of Day* is a text that is riven by formal antagonisms and internal tensions. These instabilities — of genre, subject matter, and narrative perspective — mirror the instability of the social and political categories that the novel challenges, as well as the history of violence from which these categories emerge. As both the Das siblings and the text attempt to negotiate the narratives of postcolonial modernity, and the violence produced by narrative exclusions, do they make any room for nonhuman animals, or do the animals that populate and enliven this novel serve only as textual tools, with no significance beyond the figurative?

The Old Delhi home that is the novel’s principal setting is usually described by critics as a place of stasis, stagnation, and almost imperceptibly slow decay. The house seems to block human movement, and its walls circumscribe any human ambitions and involvements that reach outside of them. Going largely unnoticed in the critical attention paid to Desai’s novel, however, are the myriad animal lives that run parallel to the lives

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93 At the same time, the nonhuman animals, in their role as textual figures, are forms of a different kind of literariness.

94 For example, Riemenschneider 188 and Jain *Stairs* 67.
of the human characters, inhabiting the same space of the home and garden.\textsuperscript{95} Throughout the novel, the house is literally teeming with nonhuman life. Not only is the home inhabited by at least two generations of conventional companion animals — the children’s aunt Mira’s cat and Bim’s cat, and Begum, the dog, and her son Badshah — but it, and the garden, are also full of other nonhuman companions, including ants, geckos, coppersmiths, and of course the cow, whose position in the novel I will discuss in detail below. Though the space of this home has been a major topic for critical inquiry, the space for whom it can be a home has not, and the associations in nationalist discourse between the nation and the home and family make companion animals — those who are at home with human beings — a particularly important subject for analysis.

Desai’s novel is set during the Emergency of 1975-1977, a period marked by the severe curtailment of civil liberties and by many forms of state violence. The narrative shifts among time periods, however, also encompassing the colonial childhoods of the Das siblings as well as their coming of age during Independence and Partition. Though the family story is anchored to these moments of national importance, the treatment of political crises is never explicit; instead, the action of the novel is always offstage. The characters’ lives and conflicts are contained by their house, garden, and the neighbourhood of the Civil Lines, a sheltered bourgeois enclave north of Old Delhi, built to house British colonial administrators. The relationship of the Das siblings to their nation is worked out at a distance, and the implications of large-scale events are explored.

\textsuperscript{95} Some critics do note the importance of nature in Desai’s writing, without engaging specifically with animal figures (see, for example, Jain \textit{Stairs} 2, 138-139). Christine Lorre discusses animals with reference to the \textit{Panchatantra} in \textit{In Custody}. 
in a personal context. As Ellen Dengel-Janic observes, this technique of producing “indirect” and “symptomatic” representations of political events is a hallmark of Desai’s fiction (71). The disintegration of the Das family does parallel the violence of Partition, as others have noted, but if the family’s dysfunction is intended to represent national conflicts then the allegory is quite a loose one. Instead, I argue, the parallel between the Das family’s personal struggles and the struggles of the nation is more aptly described as a problem of narrative, and the violence that Clear Light of Day is most concerned with is the violence of narrative exclusions. The novel is inhabited by the spectres of the dominant narrative of Indian Independence and nationhood and, at the same time, the narrative focalization through the Das sisters, Bim and Tara, creates its own set of similarly violent excisions. Clear Light of Day is thus an exploration of narrative, genre, and literariness, as these concepts apply in both private and public contexts. As such, it unsettles that very division between private and public, making a case for the political nature of the domestic novel.

From the beginning, the novel establishes its interest in literature and textuality with its two epigraphs from Emily Dickinson and T.S. Eliot. Like Gandhi and Chandra, discussed in my last chapter, Desai negotiates a literary form with deep roots in Western culture: in her case, the realist novel. The presence of the epigraphs announces the novel’s involvement with Western literary traditions, and allusions to canonical works of English literature are also peppered throughout the text. Bim compares herself to one of the speakers of The Waste Land (41), while Raja studies Byron, Swinburne, and

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96 Sharma (6), Mohan (49), and Panigrahi (76) discuss the parallel between domestic and national partitions in the novel.
Tennyson, and the novel incorporates lengthy quotations from these three poets (45-46). In addition to the references to English literature, the characters also often allude to Urdu poetry, and particularly to Iqbal. The tradition of Urdu poetry dates back to the thirteenth century, and Old Delhi, near the Das family home, was its geographical heart. The combination of English and Urdu literary allusions gives the Das family the stamp of their class: they are privileged in both the older (Mughal) and the old (colonial) worlds of India, but they are unprepared for life in the new nation. Raja exposes this unpreparedness when he scorns the study of Hindi, which would become the principal language of the independent state. The literary influences to which the Das siblings are exposed as children profoundly mark their psyches, and shape the way they perceive their own life stories. It is in the creation of these life stories — through their focalization — that the Das siblings themselves become textual. They move out of the realist mode and into a different genre that is marked by its attachment to the symbolic.

The textuality of the Das siblings’ self-representations can be seen in the novel’s engagement with Gothic tropes, which are deployed throughout the narrative. Repeatedly, the house is figured as a place of ghosts, where the distinction between living and dead is unstable. On her first day in the house after a long absence, Tara feels the presence of her dead parents in the library; she feels a “morbid, uncontrollable fear of [the door] opening and death stalking out in the form of a pair of dreadfully familiar ghosts that gave out a sound of paper and filled her nostrils with white insidious dust” (23). Such images of spectrality extend to many of the characters at different points in the novel, including Mira, who seems to haunt the garden both before and after her death, and Baba, whose
silence, pallor, and white clothing mark him as ghostly. David Punter and Glennis Byron, in their discussion of the “postcolonial Gothic,” argue for the importance of motifs of the spectral in this genre. They contend that “[t]he story of the postcolonial [...] is in the mouths of ghosts; the effect of empire has been the dematerialization of whole cultures, and the Gothic tropes of the ghost, the phantom, the revenant, gain curious new life” in postcolonial representations (58). For Punter and Byron, postcolonial nations and histories are haunted by other possible narratives (54), not only those of what might have been had colonialism never occurred, but also, I argue, alternative stories of the development of the independent state. This second kind of ghost narrative is what is invoked by the representation of spectrality in *Clear Light of Day*. The haunted house of the Das family is filled with the spectres of the independent nation —those beings whose presence is repressed by the nationalist narrative. This house and its inhabitants contest any teleological reading of India’s coming into nationhood by recasting the genre and the symbols of the dominant narrative of Independence and postcoloniality.

It is Bim and Raja who are the source of the greater part of the novel’s web of literary allusions, and they who especially conceptualize their identities, their situation, their emotions, and their relationships with reference to literature. Several analyses observe that the novel is “literary” in its intertextuality and in the concerns of its characters.97 It is my contention, however, that the source of this literariness is the Das siblings themselves. Two levels of representation are at work in the text: on one, we clearly see the attachment to ideas of textuality and narrative construction that manifests

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97 See Chakravarty (78), Bande (*Novels* 143), and Hashmi (70).
itself in the literary allusions, in the overdetermination of certain personal symbols, and in the deployment of Gothic tropes discussed above; on another level, however, this literariness that characterizes the perspectives of the human characters, most particularly Bim, is consistently unsettled by another kind of voice or presence that brings back into focus what the “literary” narrative wants to exclude or repress. The novel’s dominant mode of representation, as delimited by its focalization through the Das siblings, is thus contested from within its own structure. This position of contestation against the narratives constructed by the Das siblings is consistently occupied by nonhuman animals. The novel places nonhuman animals into this role in order to use them as agents of narrative disorder, and thus animals are used by both the characters and by the novel itself.

This internal tension is exposed in the way that the Das siblings attempt to use animals to fill communicative gaps; language, despite their love of it, often fails the human characters, and so they wilfully interpret animal voices and animal presences as compensating for that failure. At the end of the novel, after Tara and her family have left, Bim uses her cat to triangulate her first conversation with her brother Baba. She speaks to Baba while “staring directly into her [the cat’s] green glass eyes” (176); Baba responds, also while “gazing at the cat” (176). The cat resists her role as a conduit here, however; the narrative voice observes that “the cat grew irritated and jumped off Bim’s lap and twitched the tip of her tail angrily. They sat in silence, the three of them, for now there seemed no need to say another word” (176-177). Despite her action, the cat is drawn back into the circle of the human family; for Bim, the focalizer, the cat has fulfilled her
function as an affective link between herself and her brother, and the communication is complete. By signalling the cat’s irritation, however, the narrative voice reminds us that she is being instrumentalized as a connection in the human communicative circuit (and, in so doing, the novel itself instrumentalizes the cat as a figure of disruption). This use of animals by the Das siblings results in a cycle of instrumentalization and resistance that repeats itself throughout the lives of these characters, as they attempt to use animals as overdetermined figures for communicative gaps and failures.

This usage of nonhuman animals connects the personal and national contexts. The animal voices that open the novel — those of the koels in the garden — return to punctuate many of the conversations among the siblings that are doomed to falter and die. During the summer of Independence and Partition, the Das siblings are isolated from the violence in their affluent suburb. Raja is bedridden with tuberculosis, and Bim is trapped inside nursing both her brother and the alcoholic Mira. They do not encounter or even witness the violence occurring in the city; they can only sense the “unease [...] in the air like a swarm of germs” (62). While the siblings for the most part avoid speaking about the violence or the political situation, the narrator observes that “the koels [...] called frantically in the trees all day” (57). The birds give voice to the unspoken tensions of the human household. While the human characters repress their knowledge of the violence that is occurring, nonhuman voices address this silence, and it is through these voices that the novel evokes, from a distance, the violent turmoil of national politics.

This use of nonhuman animals as voices for the unvoiced violences of the novel
also suggests the silencing effect of narrative itself. The cat’s irritation, for example, is outside of the narrative that Bim constructs for her. Just as Bim has been silenced by the dominant narratives of the nation, so the narrative that she constructs, in turn, silences other voices — namely, those outside of her limited, class-bound, perspective — who experienced the bodily violence of Partition, and of the Emergency. At one point in the novel, Bim is criticizing the idealized version of contemporary India that Bakul, in his role as a diplomat, promotes. She argues that he is repressing the realities of life in the nation at a time of particular political importance. Tara, frustrated, says, “I don't see you queueing [sic] up for rations — or even for a bus!” (36). This moment signals that Bim — like the other members of her family — can choose whether or not to repress the violence of her context because, due to her class position, she is never actually forced to experience, or even to encounter, this violence. The constant and “frantic” cries of the koels that signal the upheavals of Partition (57) indicate that events are occurring that the Das family story does not need to include; in this way, nonhuman voices could be said to stand in for the subaltern beings that are excluded from both the narrative of nationhood and the narrative of the Das siblings. The text thus opens the possibility of subaltern alliances between human and nonhuman animals, but then uses the animals as representations of repressed human subalternity. As Bim’s story instrumentalizes nonhuman animals, so too does the novel itself. It may make room for nonhuman animal

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98 It is also possible to argue that remaining outside the narrative is a form of maintaining autonomy; that is, the novel’s unvoiced violences may suggest that the narrative has not been able to capture the other in a way that respects the other’s singularity. This reading would, perhaps, be more in line with Chakrabarty’s conception of multiple histories, and multiple narratives, existing at the same time. I think, however, that Clear Light of Day draws attention, rather, to the problematic attachment to singular narratives, and to the failure to attend to a multiplicity of narratives — a failure that, in the novel, has serious and concrete implications in the continued oppression of women.
voices, but the text in fact silences animals in turn by making use of them as figures of disturbance in the Das family’s narrative. The novel uses nonhuman animals both to facilitate and to undermine the narrativizing drive of the Das siblings, and so the animals who inhabit the novel are pulled in different directions by different sets of human aesthetic and representational priorities — those of the characters and those of the author.

The solipsistic narrative control of the Das siblings represses the large-scale violence that occurs during their lives. This is an indirect Partition novel that de facto comments on the narrativization of political histories, and what and whom they exclude — especially given the context of the new official narratives born of the Emergency period. On the subject of the literature of Partition, Desai has said, “There was a time when every Indian writer felt the need to write a Partition book […] and that I wasn’t interested in doing […]. Besides, wouldn’t it have been just too predictable? One must avoid clichés of that kind” (qtd. in Ball and Kanaganayakam 33-34). Clear Light of Day, instead, represents the insular, narcissistic, and solipsistic world of the Das siblings, whose response to national events is always to retreat into their sheltered enclosure, at the same time that they bemoan being trapped in that enclosure. When Gandhi is assassinated, for example, Bim is out in the city with her suitor Biswas. They hear the news first from a cobbler on the street, and then over the radio. Instead of staying in the city, with the crowd, to share the collective experience of shock and grief, Bim goes home, since “she thought only of rushing to Raja with the news” (93). She and Raja listen to the news on the radio through the night, and this action makes them distanced (auditory) witnesses rather than participants in the history of their nation. Raja says, “I
don’t know — at a time like this — it must be all chaos Bim, chaos” (94); he says it as if he isn’t there, in the city that is the epicentre of this “chaos.” The misdirection that the novel creates through the Das siblings’ focalization makes it a text of which Partition is not the subject, since the Das siblings don’t experience Partition in any meaningful way. But, if we place narrative itself at the centre of the novel’s concerns, then *Clear Light of Day* is very much a text about Partition and Independence; by structuring its narrative around what it excludes — the violence of Partition and the voices of direct experience — the novel takes as its subject the violence of narrative itself and the particular violence of the dominant narrative of Indian nationhood.

Partha Chatterjee, in his *The Nation and Its Fragments*, critiques the dominant narrative constructed by the Indian independence movement. Chatterjee argues that “the promise of national emancipation was fulfilled, if not fraudulently, then certainly by the forcible marginalization of many who were supposed to have shared in the fruits of liberation” (156). In Chatterjee’s model, elite nationalism constructed the home as the originary site of both nation and national culture (147), a construction that, in turn, severely circumscribed the political participation of women. This discourse confined and limited women at the same time that it pretended to celebrate them and promised to emancipate them. The protagonists of *Clear Light of Day* are those who have been excised from the narrative of nationhood; they are the spectres of that narrative whose presence cannot fully be repressed. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida argues that “[o]ne never inherits without coming to terms with some specter, and therefore with more than one specter” (24). Like Chandra’s *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, *Clear Light of Day* is a novel
about inheritances, and specifically about the inheritances of Independence. Published in the immediate aftermath of the Emergency period, it is a novel that attempts to come to terms with that extreme and total betrayal of the promises of nationhood, and one that takes into account all of the other, more routinized betrayals that attended those same promises. Specifically, Desai’s novel responds to the central position of women in the nationalist narrative, and to the erosion of that position in the independent state. It does so by presenting a narrative from the perspective of the excluded, which in turn produces its own exclusions. It unsettles its own generic position in order to connect the nation to the home (as Chatterjee suggests nationalism also did) in a way that inverts the emancipatory narrative of Independence. The Das family’s limitations and failures haunt the independent state, emerging, in the novel, at a time of instability of the state’s ideals: Indira Gandhi’s Emergency.\(^9^9\)

The novel critiques nationalist ideology primarily through its representation of motherhood as the only port of entry for women into the hegemonic narrative. Mira, the child widow, should be a heroine of the new Gandhian state, her freedom representing the reform of oppressive social structures; instead, she remains exploited under the new regime, haunting the bourgeois liberalism of the Das household and the Civil Lines. For Ellen Dengel-Janic, Mira is a “remnant” of the repressed question of gender in the

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\(^9^9\) Early in her stay at home (20), Tara is pictured reading Nehru’s *Letters to a Daughter* (the actual title of this text is *Letters from a Father to his Daughter*), which is a collection of 30 letters written by Nehru to his 10-year-old daughter Indira while they were separated by his political work in 1928. The presence of this text in the Das family library — it was published in 1929, and has been in the family’s possession since Tara’s childhood — evokes both national and domestic inheritances. It obviously signifies the connection between Partition and Emergency, with Nehru and Gandhi as the respective Father and Mother of the nation. It also suggests the kind of inheritance that is particularly lacking in Tara’s life, since it is full of the parental care and concern that has been conspicuously missing from the Das household. Additionally, this moment suggests that the political story of the nation is, like *Clear Light of Day*, essentially an elite domestic story.
postcolonial state (118). Similarly, Shirley Chew argues that Mira is representative of the “unredeemable” violence through which the nation is born (“Searching Voices” 52). Bim is a history teacher, and therefore, as a woman and as an educator, she is doubly a repository of cultural narratives; as Chatterjee argues, the nationalist narrative cast women as the guardians of culture (147). Despite this seemingly important function, Bim is nevertheless trapped by obligations to her family and the gender roles prescribed by her class and culture. While being held within this closed circle, Bim is also outside of the social world: as an unmarried, childless woman, she is also a remnant. The teacher of history is bound only to tell the histories of others, without having a sanctioned history of her own. Mira and Bim do not inhabit the position of the mother, which is the only role for women within the nationalist narrative. The novel critiques dominant conceptions of motherhood and the structure of the family in order to unmask the violence of the nationalist narrative and its excision of people like Mira and Bim from the life of the nation.

Motherhood, as a trope, unites both the space of the home and the space of the nation, and its importance in Clear Light of Day actually unsettles any reductive definition of the novel as “domestic fiction” by explicitly connecting the family narrative to the larger political discourse. As Usha Bande notes, the figure of the mother in Hindu-inflected national culture is a powerful one, “buttressed by myth, legend, religion, and tradition” (“Introduction” 1). Much of Desai’s work critiques this idealized mother

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100 I draw this reductive definition of domestic fiction from Ellen Dengel-Janic’s study, which aims, against this reduction, to recuperate the political importance of such narratives, including Clear Light of Day.
figure with the twin aims of demonstrating its repressive power and releasing its monologic hold on the heterogeneity of Indian women’s experience (Chakravarty 75-77). In *Clear Light of Day*, both motherhood and fatherhood fail, and the family is structured around the parasitism practiced upon the female body. This pattern of exploitation is always figured in nonhuman terms, and is signalled by the associative links among the “milking,” “leeching,” and “bleeding” of human and nonhuman females. Tara compares a litter of kittens to “leeches” that create an oppressive heat, their insatiable “open mouths” constantly demanding nourishment from their mother’s body (113). Mira envisions herself as an insect “drudge” whose only purpose is to feed “the fat white larvae” (89). Bim, bitterly reflecting on her position in the family, thinks that her relations have wanted “to torment her and, mosquito-like, sip her blood. All of them fed on her blood, at some time or the other had fed — it must have been good blood, sweet and nourishing. Now, when they were full, they rose in swarms, humming away, turning their backs on her” (153). These images signal in physical terms both the terrible burden of motherhood and the exploitative nature of the relationship between the mother and those whom she sustains — both the family and, in the nationalist narrative, the wider community.

Instances of parasitism, associated with motherhood, are counterpoised against images of injecting or stinging, which signify the destructive figure of the father. Two memories haunt Tara: first, witnessing her father give her mother what she would later learn was in insulin injection, and second, being unable to prevent Bim from being attacked by a swarm of bees. These incidents are aligned in Tara’s mind by her overpowering sense of guilt over her own incapacity to act. The Freudian resonance is clear: in Tara’s memory,
both incidents are dreamlike and uncanny, and both centre on the harmful, even fatal (in Tara’s mind) penetration of the female body by the phallic needle or sting, a violation that Tara cannot prevent. In her guilt, she allows herself to be violated also, hiding the bee sting that remains in her body, punishing herself. Both motherhood and fatherhood are dysfunctional in this novel, with the siblings’ obsessive return to the cow and the bees (exploited mother and penetrative father) signifying the breakdown of the Oedipal family structure. These images of motherhood and fatherhood are all nonhuman, and non-mammalian. The nurture provided by a mammalian mother’s milk is turned into the plasmic feast of an insect, concretizing the parasitic relationship that these characters perceive between child and mother. Clear Light of Day thus unsettles the ideal of the family upon which the nationalist myth of the Mother is premised; the nation, like the family, parasitizes the female body.\footnote{Bim, Tara, and Mira have ambivalent relationships to both mothers and motherhood, and to the patriarchal nationalist discourse that prescribes the role of “mother” for all women, thus circumscribing both their political participation and their personal freedoms. As a result, the parasitic nature of the mother-child relationship, and the penetrative violence of the male-female relationship, surface in the nonhuman inhabitants of the family’s Gothic imaginings. Throughout the novel, motherhood connects to death, rather than to life, as is clear in narrative trajectory of the most important nonhuman mother figure in the text: the Das family’s cow.}

The cow, both as a cow and as a mother, is a powerful nationalist symbol. As an

\footnote{Rajeshwari Mohan argues that the exploitation of female labour prevents any redemptive reading of the novel’s conclusion (56). She notes that, while the nationalist conception of “maternity as the signal expression of femininity” may have been strategically useful for anticolonial resistance, the example of Bim demonstrates its impoverishment of women’s roles both in the resistance movement itself and in the postcolonial state (57).}
image of Hindu precolonial identity, of the supposed purity of India’s agrarian foundations, and of a passive but nourishing femininity, the cow was central to the rhetoric of the Independence movement and to the construction of a cohesive Hindu identity during and following Partition. In Chapter Two, I discussed M.K. Gandhi’s focus on cow protection, and how, despite his advocacy against the instrumentalization of the animal as a symbol, the figure of the cow has become important to Hindu nationalist positions. The cow who appears in *Clear Light of Day* lives, for a time, as a companion animal to the Das family; she is also the most overburdened symbol in the self-constructed text of the Das children’s lives. Precisely in the middle of the book, the cow drowns in the well in the back of the Das’ garden.  

102 Her death comes to stand, in the minds of Mira and the Das siblings, for the many traumas caused by the failure of this home, and of this family, to nurture its inhabitants. In conceptualizing the death of the cow in this symbolic way, the human characters repress other aspects of the trauma of her death by attempting to impose a meaning on it that denies the fact of her life. It is also through the figure of the cow that the novel itself proposes connections between human women and nonhuman females, and between the space of the home as it is inhabited by women and the space of the nation in which women are denied habitation.  

The cow is envisioned, especially by Mira, as a source of nourishment for the family. Mira imagines that this animal’s milk will provide the embodied maternity that is missing from her emotional surrogate motherhood. For Mira, the children “get no nourishment” (107) from the milk bought from the milkman, not only because his greed  

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102 A cow also drowns in a well in Desai’s 1975 novel *Where Shall We Go This Summer*. The repetition of this image indicates its resonance, and also Desai’s exploration of its manifold symbolic possibilities.
leads him to dilute his product, but more importantly because he is simply an improper source of that nourishment which should come from within the home. But the cow’s milk, which is ultimately the reason for her presence in the household, is admired by the human characters as an image of nourishment, rather than as a real or embodied source of it. We never actually read about them consuming it; instead, they look at it and discuss it: “[h]er milk was the subject of ecstatic admiration: how it frothed into the pan, how thick the cream that rose on it” (107). The cow is thus worshipped by the household as a figure of the essential mother, and this symbolic use of the animal connects the dysfunction of the Das home to the dysfunction of the national narrative.

Mira’s construction of this animal as a figure for the maternal presence that the family lacks might seem to be supported by the narrative voice itself, were it not for the single sentence that describes the cow’s death; this terse description departs significantly from the symbolic, lyrical language with which she is otherwise treated. When the cow breaks her rope, she is “like a white ghost, her hooves silent in the grass” (107). Here, she is a spectral figure, rather than an actual body in motion. Next, however, “[s]he blundered her way through the carvanda hedge at the back of the house, and tumbled into the well and drowned in a welter of sounds that no one heard” (107). This sentence is the only reference to the cow that suggests actual bodily movement and vocalization; a ghost cannot “blunder,” and a symbol cannot “tumble” or produce “a welter of sounds.” The words “blunder” and “tumble” suggest a corporeal weight that the figure of a “white ghost” would not possess, and the “welter of sounds” contradicts the “silent” movements of the spectral figure in the previous sentence. This abrupt shift produces a jagged
disjuncture in the narrative that exposes the tension between the drive to interpret both beings and situations symbolically — a drive that is produced by the focalization through the Das siblings — and the counternarrative that resists those symbolic interpretations, insisting instead on realities and experiences that the Das narrative attempts to repress. What leads to the cow’s death is both a lack of recognition and a form of willful blindness: the entire discourse surrounding her, up to this point, has treated her as a symbol, rather than as a living being who could be injured or die. Her food, the “tenderest of grasses and newest of shoots” (107), has taken the form of offerings to an idol, rather than sustenance to a body. She stands in the garden, being showered with flowers “as at a wedding” (107), as if she is both a bride, meant to stand still, silent, and beautiful, and a religious icon, whose movement or physical safety need not be considered. The cow thus functions as an overdetermined symbol of the mother, the goddess, and the virgin bride, and as such she receives the adulation of the family, but not their care; the Das family’s blindness to her as an organic, biological being dematerializes her body in a way that makes her available to them as a symbol. Even as she is dying, her human companions fail to hear her. This kind of exploitation for symbolic purposes is something that M.K. Gandhi critiqued in his *Autobiography* — it denies the embodied life of the nonhuman animal while elevating her as a figure to be worshipped. In this way, the cow is also clearly aligned with the position of women in nationalist discourse: women were exploited as symbols of cultural purity, but limited in their political and

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103 This is similar to the idealization of the “primitive” that David Spurr observes in colonial texts. Spurr argues that these texts incorporate an idealized other as “one more term of Western culture’s dialogue with itself,” rather than to suggest that the West ought to “accept some alternative mode of being” (128). The other, in this discourse, is thus wilfully disembodied or dematerialized in order to create the ideal or symbol.
social participation by that very symbolic status. The cow appears as figure, rather than a living being. In the sentence that describes her death, however, the cow is finally cow-like: she moves as a living animal, confused, confined to a small area, in the dark of night, would move. This sentence exposes the fact that the cow *is* in fact a cow, for the text, and not simply a figure stuffed with cultural and personal meanings. It is the Das family who endow her with these meanings, and confine her to this symbolic status.

As Chelva Kanaganayakam observes, the cow exists in both a referential (or realist) frame, and in a figurative one. The figurative, he argues, takes precedence, given that the cow is an object of obsession for the human characters, who use her as a symbol of nourishment, maternal fecundity, and innocence (89). Their doting upon her is cut short, of course, by her death, after which she is quickly converted into a figure of terror, disease, and shocking disillusionment. Jasbir Jain argues that the death of the cow marks the end of childhood for the Das children (*Stairs* 140). I want to suggest, by contrast, that the disillusionment that the Das children experience after the death of the cow is in itself an illusion. It is not that the death of the cow strips away the children’s innocence and exposes them to the dark truth, but rather that the Romantic symbolization that consistently characterizes their ways of thinking begins anew after the drowning of the cow. They are thus disillusioned in one way — in that they can no longer see her as an essential mother — but at the same time the death of the cow allows them to create and perpetuate a new set of illusions about their relationship to their pasts, their family, and their nation. The well grows into a source of Gothic horror that persistently clouds the way that the family conceptualizes the space of the home and themselves within it. After
her death, the cow is returned, permanently, to the realm of the figurative; according to
the narrative voice, “[t]he well then contained death as it once had contained merely
water, frogs, and harmless floating things. The horror of that death by drowning lived in
the area behind the carvanda hedge like a mad relation, a family scandal or a hereditary
illness waiting to re-emerge. It was a blot, a black and stinking blot” (107-108). The fear
of “re-emergence” connects the cow as the Das siblings imagine her to Derrida’s
definition of the spectre as a revenant. That the well develops into a source of ultimate
horror for the Das family thus suggests that they fear a return of what they have repressed
— the embodied reality of her life and death, and the embodied realities of the many
other lives and deaths that their narratives exclude.

For the human family, drowning in the well is like a return to the womb, and this
womb, reconfigured as a place of death rather than life, maintains its hold on Mira and
the Das siblings precisely because of this reversal. This characterization of the well is
explicit in a passage that is focalized through Mira as she grows increasingly delirious:

Time for milk. The children must have their milk — and leave a little for
me, please, just a drop. But there was no milk, the cow had died, drowned
in the well. In that well, deep and stony and still, in which all must drown
to die. The navel of the world it was, secret and hidden in thick folds of
grass, from which they all emerged and to which they must all return,
crawling on their hands and knees. (90)

The presence of this inverse womb in the garden recasts the idea of the feminized space
of the home as something that is psychologically paralyzing and haunting, rather than
nurturing; to use Homi Bhabha’s term, it “unhomes” the space of the home. For Bhabha, the “unhomeliness” that emerges in the inexact mapping of the division between public and private onto that between male and female in the context of the postcolonial state allows the redrawing of the “domestic” as a political space. Anna Guttman, similarly, argues that the public/private division, so important to both colonial and Indian nationalist discourse, is symptomatic of “anxiety” about the very impossibility of this division (5). But, as Mohan points out, the way that the Das siblings aestheticize this unhomeliness — in the persistent use of the well as a Gothic symbol, for example — is a luxury of their bourgeois class position (56). The unhomeliness that radiates from the well is, I argue, not only a result of the anxiety about the political nature of the domestic space, but also a return of the political violence these characters have repressed in their detached relationship to the events of Partition. The Das siblings’ use of the cow as symbol — both national and personal — allows them to engage in a self-protecting disavowal of their political context and of the subaltern lives and deaths that support their elite and insular narrative.

The cow’s death renders her endlessly exploitable for the figurative imaginations of the Das family, and the well in which she died, and from which her body is never removed, becomes the repository for all of their fear and pain. They use her death as an ultimate symbol of horror, and they fashion her into the spectre that haunts their lives, continually forcing her to return in conversation and in thought. The cow is sacrificed to their need to view everything in their own past in terms of symbols, and their inability, or refusal, to conceptualize real bodies and real events. The text thus uses the cow’s death to
highlight the limitations of the Das siblings’ worldview. This representation involves a
doubling of sacrifices in the way that the novel itself utilizes nonhuman animals as
figures of generic disturbance. If the cow is sacrificed to the Das siblings’ Gothicization
of their home and their past, she is also sacrificed by the text’s need to interrupt that
Gothicization with moments of jarring realism that bring repressed subjects to the fore.
The tension between the Das family’s symbolic interpretation of the cow and her
emergence, in the moment of her death, as a figure of the “real” that the human family
represses points to the struggle that exists within the text between the focalization
through the Das siblings — particularly Bim — and the narrative voice. This struggle
often, as we have seen, takes place over the bodies of nonhuman animals. In its concern
with narrative exclusions, then, the novel itself partakes of the perhaps inevitable
production of its own exclusions. By using nonhuman animals to represent ideas of
disturbance and outsideness, it confines them to the realm of the figurative, and to the
signification, in particular, of human outsideness.

The human outcasts who populate the Das household are those who do not fit into
the “text” of the Indian nation: Baba, Bim, and Mira. Each of these characters exists in
spectral relation to the formation of the Indian state — they are excluded by the official
narrative, and yet they remain to haunt it. Each of them is also directly linked with the
nonhuman companions that share the space of the home. The character most closely
associated with companion animals is Bim, whose relationships with the dogs Badshah
and Begum and the unnamed cats are the most complex and lasting. It is Bim who invites
Begum, a refugee of Partition, into the home, and who is later the primary companion of
Begum’s son Badshah. Bim also cares for her cat, who, it can be inferred from certain physical similarities, is the daughter of Mira’s cat. To her students, Bim’s attachment to Badshah is indicative of her amusing eccentricity. They pamper Badshah because they know it will please her, all the while gently mocking her love for him. Tara also relates to Badshah and the cat in a way that she believes will please Bim; she calls the cat “fat” because “pet-owners generally liked such remarks” (9). Although Tara has had close relationships with these animals, she associates “pets” with an earlier stage of her development; for Tara, the unmarried woman is still a kind of child, who has not developed beyond the point of identification with animals. She has trouble recognizing the legitimacy of Bim’s relationships with the cat and Badshah because she “had lost the childhood habit of including animals in the family once she had married and begun the perpetual travels and moves that precluded the keeping of pets” (9). Although Bim is seen to care a great deal for her companion animals, she also challenges the assumption that they are, for her, Oedipal objects. Sensing Tara’s surprise at her effusive affection for the cat, Bim challenges her sister: “‘I know what you’re thinking,’ she said. ‘You’re thinking how old spinsters go ga-ga over their pets because they haven’t children. Children are the real thing, you think. You think animals take the place of babies for us love-starved spinsters. [...] But you’re wrong [...] You can’t possibly feel for them what I do about these wretched animals of mine’” (6-7). The association between the “spinster” and the “pet” is a strong one in Western culture, and the keeping of pets is one of many Western, bourgeois class markers that the Das family adopts. Bim does not deny that she is a “spinster,” nor does she disclaim her deep affection for her companion animals; rather,
she challenges Tara’s maternal love, that seemingly unassailable form of love, which, as we have seen, is consistently destabilized by the novel in its interrogation of motherhood. In this way, the novel offers a counterdiscursive representation of both the figure of the mother and that of the unmarried woman who is so often associated with companion animals.

The novel does, however, seem to rely on certain more conventional associations between nonhuman animals and humans who are marked by difference. Mira, widowed in childhood, is, like Bim, cast as a stunted woman by the other members of the family, despite the children’s love for her. Mira is strongly associated with animals, especially the cow and her cat. Her alcoholism and consequent mental instability bring her to a close identification with the cow, as she develops an obsessive desire to repeat the cow’s death. Baba, whose intellectual disability renders him, in the context of the novel, voiceless, dependent, and trapped inside the house (and, indeed, inside Mira’s former room), is devoted to Begum, and experiences profound and sometimes unsettling identification with certain animals. When Bim and Baba discover Begum, trapped and starving in their landlord Hyder Ali’s abandoned house, Baba immediately demonstrates his connection to the dog by “clasping her dribbling mouth to his chest in gentle protectiveness” (74). Baba also identifies with a horse whose violent death he witnesses when he attempts to leave the house. This graphic scene of unrelenting cruelty totally traumatizes him; on his return

104 Arun P. Mukherjee discusses this representation of “spinsterhood” in the context of the heteronormative Radha-Krishna narrative that is a motif in the novel, as well as the figure of the unmarried woman in popular Bengali film (by which representations Bim’s suitor Biswas is influenced). Mukherjee argues: “By creating a spinster heroine who refuses to be ‘read’ in the framework of these discourses and by refusing to render her, as they do, as the object of pity and guilt, Desai’s text engages in a discursive battle with the texts about sentimentalized femininity that continue to be churned out in great numbers in India” (200).
to the house, his eyes are “rolling in their sockets like a wild horse’s” (17). He identifies, physically, with the position of the horse, rather than that of the human killer. As when he meets Begum, it is the vulnerability of the nonhuman animal that invites him into this relationship. Baba and nonhuman animals are similarly subject to power, and this shared subjection is repeatedly the source of his identification. What goes unacknowledged by the Das family, and unrealized by Baba himself, is the protection that his class privilege allows him. Even among nonhuman animals, class is an important division in the novel. We see, for example, a marked difference between Hyder Ali’s white horse, who is the object of veneration and envy, and the carthorse whose death Baba witnesses, who is subject to the most extreme human violence. Both horses are instrumentalized and exploited, and both are labouring bodies at work in a human system of class that determines their place in the world. Though he is an outsider to the larger context of the nation, Baba will never experience this kind of objectification, and thus his position is to be carefully distinguished from that of similarly disabled people of a different economic status and from that of nonhuman animals.

Despite her adult disavowal of cross-species identification, as a child Tara too identifies with nonhuman animals. Her distress at the killing of the “mad dog” (127) on the school grounds dominates her memories of school as a whole, and is her formative experience of institutional violence. Although she does not witness the shooting, she is “aware that blood had been spilt and washed over her feet, warm and thick and living” (128). This moment teaches Tara about the necessity of obedience to power, and the lesson proves to be a lasting one; of all the siblings, it is Tara whose life follows the
expected narrative trajectory when she steps into the ill-fitting roles of wife and mother. Through her marriage and her children, Tara is absorbed into the systems of patriarchal power that govern life outside the Das home; by following the “correct” path for her gender and class, she gains a sanctioned place inside the nation. She represses the violence that she witnesses in order to assimilate herself into the power structures that enact this violence, and she represses her identification with the dog in order to uphold her favoured version of her life narrative, as well as the narrative of national power. The violence returns to her, however, when she is back in the Civil Lines house, and she feels again the vulnerability of the child, and the child’s helplessness in the face of institutional violence.

The intimacy that *Clear Light of Day* represents between disempowered women, disabled men, and nonhuman animals does not arise from what Tara perceives as a failure to develop mature human relationships. Rather, the text suggests that marginalized human beings are animalized under patriarchal structures of power.¹⁰⁵ The novel thus aligns unmarried women, married women dominated by their husbands, disabled men, and nonhuman animals as recipients of the effects of power; they do not participate in the politics of the nation, but they are all affected by it as much as, or, because of their vulnerability, more than the political actors themselves. It is also true, however, that while Bim imagines herself, Mira, and Baba as having been forced into this role of passivity that they share with nonhuman animals, the novel positions the animals in order to resist the idea that they are simply outsiders to or remnants of more important narratives —

¹⁰⁵ We have seen this alignment of disability, femininity, and animality before, in Anuradha Roy’s *The Folded Earth*. 
either the hegemonic narrative of national politics, or the Gothic narrative of the Das family. If nonhuman animals are aligned with the human characters in their marginalized position as remainders of the narrative of the nation, it is also true that their presence is designed to disrupt the representational drive of the Das siblings and their construction of their own marginalization.

The novel relies on nonhuman animals to suggest the subalternity of the Das siblings with respect to the narrative of nationhood but, as we know, the focalizers are at the same time privileged in a way that allows them to construct their own narratives and produce their own narrative exclusions. As Rajeshwari Mohan argues, the idea that Bim, Tara, Mira, and Baba represent the larger experience of oppression in the nation is “undercut by the periodic appearance of an outer circle of unacknowledged workers who make it possible for the novel’s main characters to spend time contemplating their suffering” (53). Moments of violence like the killing of the dog and the horse, both of which occur outside the home, remind us of the subaltern lives and deaths that are excised from the story of the Das family. The text thus evokes parallels between human and nonhuman subaltern experience, and suggests a shared human-nonhuman vulnerability. With this in mind, it is worth asking to what extent the animal companions only appear in service of exposing or reflecting the situation of the human characters. Are Desai’s animals simply figures for the abject leftovers of the political world? Do they only function to highlight the brutality of the power that governs the lives of Tara, Mira, Baba, and Bim, or to suggest subaltern lives that exist outside of their stories? For all of the family members, the dead cow is a figure of uncanny horror. For Tara, the cats and
dogs represent a state of perpetual childhood. For Bim, the “wretchedness” of Badshah and the cat demands her care, as does the wretchedness of Baba, Mira, and Raja when he is sick; the animals are thus figures of a vulnerability greater than her own, rather than autonomous individuals. All of the human characters thus demonstrate a tendency to conceptualize animal lives as reflections of human lives, or as images or symbols of human problems. The narrative voice, however, disrupts this tendency in the characters’ focalization with descriptions of animal voices and actions that suggest lives lived outside of the claustrophobic insularity of the Das family home and the Das family story. At one point, while Bim is talking with Bakul, who is soon to become Tara’s husband, she observes Mira’s cat moving through the garden:

Aunt Mira’s cat [was] stealing past the flowerpots, stalking something in the tall grass that edged the ill-kept lawn. A cloud of mosquitoes followed her, hovering over her flattened head and the two pointed ears, like a filmy parasol. […] She was the only thing that moved in the stiff, desiccated garden which, at that time, lay between two gardeners, in transition. Bakul had just said something that [Bim] failed to hear — the cat had at that instance pounced on a stalk of grass and a purple moth had fluttered up out of reach, exquisitely in time. (69-70)

If Bim, watching the cat at this moment, is making her into a symbol of life in the midst of “desiccation” and suffocating stasis (as is suggested by her distraction from the conversation while following the cat’s movements) the narrative perspective is also watching her, and providing, in a realist mode, the details of her actions. The realism of
these actions creates a contrast with the symbolic, anthropocentric, focalization through Bim. Chelva Kanaganayakam observes that the novel is structured in “layers of meaning that unsettle the narrative” (90). In representations like that of the cat in the garden, we can perceive the doubled function of nonhuman animals — as repositories of figurative weight and of realist disturbance — that is one of the tensions that produces the novel’s complex and heterogeneous representation.

In the case of the cow, it is clear that the death of the animal effectively transforms her into symbolic currency in the Das family narrative. That death is assimilable into their life text, even if the reality of the cow as an animal is not. But, towards the end of the novel, another encounter with animal death breaks through the cycle of repression through representation — the creation of symbols to repress embodied violence — that characterizes the Das siblings’ narrative compulsion. This encounter exposes the way that the novel itself instrumentalizes animal death, as opposed to the way that the Das siblings instrumentalize it. The moment occurs when Bim finds a smashed egg on the veranda. She happens upon it, “nearly stepp[ing]” on it, and she sees not only the remains of the shell, but also the “unsightly corpse of a baby bird” that had been inside it. She reacts with anger that, the narrative suggests, is excessive to her surprise, disgust, and the inconvenience of having to clean up the remains: “It was a piece of filth — Bim nearly sobbed — not sad, not pathetic, just filthy” (163). Bim has certainly not been someone to be bothered by “filth” in the literal sense; the house, after all, is in a state of total neglect and disrepair. What causes her almost to “sob,” then, must be another kind of filthiness, and her inability to make meaning out of it by connecting it to a human significance. This
irruptive “filth” is the abject: the body of the baby bird — rendered a “corpse” even before it has lived — is that which should be hidden that has been exposed. This abject thing resists Bim’s interpretation, her attempt to burden it with affective meaning. Her resistance to the bird as “filth” in this moment provides a way to read back into the story she, as a focalizer, has constructed. It suggests that, for Bim, narrativization is a form of sanitization; by assigning symbolic weight to encounters or events that resist such interpretation, narrative imposes a kind of hygiene on the uninterpretable filth of personal and political life. This encounter with the dead bird, however, marks a serious challenge to Bim’s literary approach to the world — even more so than the traumatic events of her past that, through endless revisitation, she has been able to render into textual terms. Her inability to translate this corpse into symbolic or affective terms heralds a change in Bim’s attachment to literary forms and archetypes that, the ending suggests, may lead her to relinquish her interpretive hold on the history of her family.

The effect of this incident on Bim is demonstrated in her next interaction with Baba. She asks him if he would like to move to Hyderabad to live with their brother Raja. She knows that such a move would be impossible for Baba, and she knows that her suggestion will hurt and confuse him; she confronts him on purpose, wanting to cause him pain, and, most importantly, wanting to force him to react to her. Afterwards, however, she compares herself to a hunter who shoots an albatross (in a reference to Coleridge) hoping to gain something of the bird’s beauty for himself, but instead finds that he is left with “a cold package of death. Like the smashed egg and the bird with a broken neck outside. Filth to be cleaned up” (164-165). These lines, again, show how the
abject resists Bim’s literary-conceptual urges; neither the dead bird, nor Baba’s pain, can be the symbolic figure of guilt — the albatross — that Bim desires. The dead bird is a primary stage in this change in Bim’s thinking because it is particularly difficult to assign any human affect to its death. The banality of its fall, due to a poorly constructed nest, will not allow Bim to attach any portentous meaning to it. Like the cow, the bird falls; unlike the cow, it does not find itself reinterpreted as a figure for all of the private and public horrors that haunt the Das family.

It is possible that the image of herself as a hunter, and the reference to Coleridge, suggest that Bim’s imagination is already at work to assimilate this animal death into her symbolic and narrative system — to clean up this filth in her typical figurative terms. On the other hand, it could also be true that this encounter is both destructive and constructive for Bim, shattering the fantasies to which she has been attached all her life, but at the same time opening up for her new avenues of living in the world and the possibility of forgiveness. The body of the animal is used by the novel to create this moment of interpretive tension, and to suggest Bim’s potential for change. The same effect could not be achieved if she had come upon a human corpse, which would be too immediately assimilable into her symbolic systems; it would be both “sad” and “pathetic,” horrible and Gothic. If the cow, who dies in the middle of the book, represents the Das siblings’ repression of violence through the symbolization of it, the bird who dies at the end of the book represents the way that the novel itself wants us to understand the limitations of Bim’s shaping perspective: it suggests the violence that Bim’s narrative can no longer repress, and with which she — and the nation — must come to terms. But in
using the dead bird as a figure that resists symbolization, the novel itself turns it into a symbol of resistance to narrative dominations. Although the novel diverges from the perspectives of its protagonists in that it is interested in representing nonhuman animals as embodied in their living and dying, it in fact uses those bodies as tools to disrupt the protagonists in their efforts at meaning-making. Stretched between these two narrative perspectives, nonhuman animals are excluded by both of them, and their deaths are only important inasmuch as they stand in for other deaths. They are part of the rich complexity of Desai’s negotiation of her genre, but their own complexity, as nonhuman animals, is denied.

While the ending of *Clear Light of Day* has been read by some critics as unequivocally redemptive (Khanna 87, Sharma 4), for others the conclusion is more unstable. Kanaganayakam insightfully suggests that, rather than a complete resolution, the endings of Desai’s novels offer “a sense of threshold” that is always uncertain and unsettled (90). The corpse of the bird that appears on the literal threshold of the Das home presents both Bim and the reader with multiple interpretive possibilities, and renders the ending of the novel enigmatic in a way that causes all of the narrative’s spectres to re-emerge. As Bim, Mira, and Baba are remainders of the national narrative that return to haunt the independent state, so the animal corpse in this novel is a remainder that renders all forms of narrative control — including the idea of closure — unstable, despite Bim’s ephiphanic experience.

R.K. Narayan’s *The Man-eater of Malgudi* is another ambiguous text that is on

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106 For Mohan, Chakravarty, and Chew, as already discussed, the unanswered questions of gender oppression and repressed violence are not encompassed by Bim’s seeming epiphany.
one hand deeply invested in a form of narrative control, and on the other introduces forces of chaos and textual instability that cannot quite be contained by the plot’s trajectory. In *The Man-eater of Malgudi* nonhuman animal death takes the fore; instead of animal companions, we have animal corpses. Rather than representing a resistance to meaning, as they do in *Clear Light of Day*, Narayan’s dead animals are made to signify in multiple and ambiguous ways. The presence of nonhuman corpses in the harmonious world of Malgudi creates a deeply unsettling negotiation of genre, politics, and the postcolonial subject position.

4.3. Textual Taxidermy in *The Man-eater of Malgudi*

If *Clear Light of Day* is a text that is characterized by generic tensions that produce an overall sense of antagonism within the form of the novel itself, R.K. Narayan’s 1961 novel *The Man-eater of Malgudi* seems to be marked, by contrast, by holism and harmony. We might reasonably expect, based on the title, that the *The Man-eater of Malgudi* is a “jungle story” (Hariprasanna 75), but, in fact, the “man-eater” in this text is human: the novel centres on the alarming arrival of the taxidermist Vasu in the protagonist Nataraj’s life and home, and on the strange hold that Vasu develops upon Nataraj’s psyche. This misdirection in the title indicates an interest in relationships between human and nonhuman animals that has been, for the most part, overlooked by
critics. While many comment on the brutality of Vasu’s profession as a reflection of his character, the real significance of taxidermy to the narrative has not yet been considered. But taxidermy is not incidental to the novel. Vasu’s profession is what makes him an “eater” of others, both human and nonhuman; his work is meticulously documented and discussed in scene after scene, and we see the process of taxidermic creation from the hunting of the animal through to the finished object. This is a much more thorough representation than we get of Nataraj’s professional life as a printer, let alone of that of any of the more minor characters. Taxidermy is, very explicitly, a subject of the novel rather than a contextual detail. By the time of the The Man-eater of Malgudi’s publication, however, taxidermy’s popularity had been in decline for decades (Poliquin 115), and it no longer had the cultural cachet that Vasu ascribes to it. Narayan’s focus on this outmoded “art” is therefore an anachronism that connects Vasu’s modernizing drive with the strong colonial resonance of taxidermy as a form. In what follows, I examine the role of taxidermy in Narayan’s novel, connecting it with both its history as a colonial form and with the place of the nonhuman animal in post-Independence India. I will outline the theory of taxidermy proposed by the taxidermist, Vasu, and demonstrate the ways that taxidermy in the novel escapes and exceeds his theorization of it. This excess in the novel functions as a critique of the form of capitalist modernity being nurtured in India by the post-Independence state. By positioning the state’s ideology of conservation

107 The deepest analysis of the presence of nonhuman animals in the novel is Raymond-Jean Frontain’s, which considers the animal figures in terms of their religious significance. Frontain defines the text as a “narrative of ahimsa” (51), which is interested both in questioning the “species chauvinism” that proposes a moral difference between human and nonhuman animals (43) and in the dangerous ambivalence that results from a total fluidity of the human-animal boundary (56). For Frontain, the question of species in the novel points to an underlying ambivalence about genre and the role of the sacred in contemporary life.
(something we have already encountered in Chapter One) and Vasu’s ideology of preservation as ideologically linked, the novel calls nonhuman animal bodies into service to represent the violence of the dominant drives of postcolonial modernity. At the same time, the animals exceed even this critique, and destabilize instead the narrative’s own project, exposing the novel itself as a taxidermic gesture intended to preserve, in lifelike detail, an imagined India. Why *The Man-eater of Malgudi*, a novel seemingly so invested in a holistic worldview, chooses to employ such a knotty concept as taxidermy is one of the central questions that Narayan’s reader must confront. The taxidermy animals stand out from the novel’s ontological certainty: they are fundamentally unstable presences, whose place, purpose, and very nature of being are uncertain.

From the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, the firm Van Ingen and Van Ingen was possibly the largest and most prolific taxidermy operation in the world. Located in Mysore, the Van Ingen brothers’ factory, at the height of its productivity, turned out between four hundred and five hundred taxidermy tigers a year (Sayeed) — a staggering, and indeed devastating number to anyone familiar with the tiger’s current state of endangerment. Van Ingen tigers not only lined the walls of Indian palaces, but also travelled to Britain as trophies of Empire. These animals served as personal and political artifacts in Britain — some over many generations of the same family. Today, among collectors, the Van Ingen name is a signal of lasting quality (as much as the taxidermy animal can “last”). It also evokes the height of taxidermic production — a time that coincides with the height of British imperial dominance. The killing and preserving

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108 In 1932, the Maharaja of Kotah ordered 20 tiger heads from Van Ingen with which he decorated his dining room (Edwards).
of the cadaverous remains of animals indigenous to the colonies was a project of scientific and economic domination and an important statement of power over the nonhuman inhabitants of colonial territories, a statement that resonated with human inhabitants as well. As Donna Haraway observes, taxidermy demonstrates in material form “the commerce of power and knowledge in white and male supremacist monopoly capitalism” ("Teddy Bear Patriarchy" 21), uniting the categorizing and containing drive of natural science with colonial commercial exploitation in the singularly weird object of the stuffed nonhuman corpse. Pauline Wakeham, similarly, argues that taxidermy appeals to “a fetishistic colonial gaze” (4) by rendering the exotic colonial body into inert matter that can be perpetually displayed to the colonizer’s gaze. In *The Breathless Zoo*, Rachel Poliquin offers a detailed exploration of the affective power of taxidermy in the European imagination, arguing that taxidermy, as a politics of representation, “created” the colonies in the minds of European viewers (81). For Poliquin, taxidermy animals — and in particular the bodies of large predators — “were metonymic of entire geographies, concentrating in animal form what made those distant landscapes so ferociously exciting, so exotic” (87 emphasis in original). The taxidermy animal is a figure that is so fraught with different and contradictory meanings, so multivalently implicated in the history of colonial domination, and so complex in both its physical presence and its psychological effect upon the human viewer, that it necessarily creates a node of interpretive tensions wherever it appears — in a natural history museum, in a home, in contemporary visual art, or in a literary text. Taxidermy offers the illusion of control over nonhuman animals and over interspecies encounters, but, as an inherently unstable form (in both its makeup
and its meanings), it can never be entirely successful in this control. In this way, taxidermy bears a resemblance to literature, as a form of representation that constantly escapes its creator to manifest new meanings, unpredictable possibilities, and unexpected resonances.

Mysore, in addition to being a hub of taxidermic production (Van Ingen’s rivals Theobald Brothers were also located in the city), was home to R.K. Narayan. The Van Ingen brothers and their operation held such local celebrity that Narayan would certainly have known about them, and it is perhaps because of this immediate context that taxidermy plays such a prominent role in *The Man-eater of Malgudi*. The novel takes place in the intimate, microcosmic space where all of Narayan’s best known works are set: the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. The Malgudi novels and short stories are often interpreted as reflections of the larger context of non-urban India; Malgudi is larger and more diverse in its population than a village or rural setting, but it is nonetheless represented as a fairly provincial community. As Kanaganayakam observes, Narayan has been widely celebrated as a “metonymist” who captures something authentic about Indian people and India itself (29); Keith Garebian, for instance, states that Narayan’s Malgudi is “profoundly Indian” (291). On the other hand, Narayan has been criticized for what his imagined India excludes, and most particularly for his lack of engagement with political or historical context. In this vein, Shashi Deshpande argues that Narayan writes as if “sending flat stones skimming over the surface of a still pond,” avoiding all of the “complexities” of contemporary Indian life (67). For his own part, Narayan claimed not to be concerned with representing the political struggles that marked the time period in
which he sets his novels: “Critics say that I don’t talk of the aspirations of the people, of the political agony we have gone through, and of all those plans for economic growth. I am not interested in that” (qtd. in Kanaganayakam 40). This assertion recalls Desai’s resistance to the “cliché” of the Partition novel; both authors, it seems, disavowed their interest in the political, concentrating instead on the creation of microcosmic textual worlds. Even more than in Clear Light of Day, the representation of the political, social, and historical context of Narayan’s novels is indirect; Narayan’s characters could not be further offstage from national events. The Man-eater of Malgudi may not be an overtly political novel, but its gentle comedy enfolds both the recent history of Partition and Independence, and a critique of the failures of the independent state. The choice to omit those “complexities” that Deshpande finds lacking in Narayan’s work is not an avoidance, but rather, in itself, a political choice, creating a politics that is structured around the absence of complexity and the repression of the entrenched conflicts that marked the post-Independence period and continue to reverberate in India today.

The novel is concerned with the idea of partitions in itself: both Nataraj’s printing press and his home are partitioned, and the partitioning of the press continues in the vain attempt to contain Vasu. Nataraj recalls for the reader the internecine conflict that drove his father to divide the family home. This domestic partition, done “in the interests of peace” (12), leads only to greater discord, and, finally, to a sadly “bare and empty” (12) house in Kabir Street, where Nataraj lives with his wife and son. Situated between references to the Nehru government (8, 13), it is obviously significant that Nataraj refers to this division of property as a “moment of partition” (11). The conflict in the home,
rendered in a satirical tone, reflects the Partition of the country, and Nataraj’s melancholy description of the quiet and the loneliness of his overlarge house expresses a view about the impoverishment of the nation as a whole as a result not just of Partition itself, but also of the political and economic modernization of the Nehru period.\textsuperscript{109} Partition is thus a spatial question that reverberates throughout the narrative, and points to the control of space as one of the novel’s main preoccupations.

Keith Garebian notes the inseparability of “geography and psychology” in Narayan’s work (291). In this novel, “geography” means not just India, or Malgudi, but also the spatial organization of the text’s intimate locations, and most particularly the space of the printing press. Nataraj’s press is comprised of three separate spaces: the public space of the front room, where friends gather, the private space of the press, where both actual work and the illusion of work take place, and the attic, which is both a dead space and one uncertainly living, which is both part of the press and apart from it, and which is both contained and uncontainable.\textsuperscript{110} Nataraj first decides to clean the attic because of the profusion of scrap paper; this paper multiplies, almost without Nataraj knowing how it has happened, until the entire room is stuffed with it, prefiguring the way that the room will later be stuffed with animal bodies that are themselves stuffed. Indeed, Nataraj claims to have had no relation at all with the room, even though the paper has

\textsuperscript{109} The only direct reference to Partition occurs when Nataraj explains that he owes the ownership of his press to it: “This was my own building, laboriously acquired through years of saving and scraping, and the place would not have come to me but for a good Moslem friend who migrated to Pakistan and gave me the first offer” (52). This assertion of ownership makes clear that the press itself is a remainder of Partition, and of the “migration” of Muslim people from India into Pakistan. While Partition in South India was not characterized by the violence that racked the North, it is still significant that Nataraj’s phrasing naturalizes the events of Partition and renders them totally benign.

\textsuperscript{110} Kanaganayakam notes that the public and private spaces of the press are analogous to those of a Hindu temple (14).
built up over time. He warns the waste-paper buyer that “[t]here may be snakes and scorpions up there. No human being has set foot in that attic for years” (22). The attic is thus established, even before Vasu installs himself there, as a wild, uncontrolled, overfull, and nonhuman space within the domesticated location of the press. As such, it is already dangerous.

As the narrative progresses, and Nataraj grows to be attracted by Vasu’s powerful charisma, it becomes even more difficult for him to assert his spatial control. All of Nataraj’s attempts to contain Vasu within the space of the attic fail. First, he blocks the passage between the press and the stairs with a “steel mesh,” so that Vasu can only enter the press from the front (54). This measure does not succeed, however, in extinguishing Nataraj’s obsessive thoughts about Vasu and the animals in the attic. Because of its perforated structure, the mesh also does not block visual contact between the worlds of attic and press. After the mesh, Nataraj attempts to obscure the view of the passage and stairs by hanging a “thickly-woven bamboo mat which screened us off from whatever might be on the other side of the grille” (101). He repeats that Vasu’s “dead animals” were “not going to affect us,” that the prostitutes who visit the attic were “not going to distract either me or [his assistant] Sastri,” and that the activity they can hear “didn’t distract our attention” (101). This triple assertion is belied, however, when Nataraj reveals that “if [he] felt too curious” he could “peer” through a hole in the matting, getting “a lovely circular vision of a hyena’s snout or the legs of some woman or the hefty feet of Vasu himself stumping upstairs” (101). It is Nataraj’s obsession with Vasu that prevents the containment of the attic space, since he cannot help but keep a portal
open between his world and Vasu’s. Nataraj’s gaze has, by this time, become predatory. Like Vasu, he sees the bodies of others in fragments, and aligns the objects of desire — animals, women, Vasu himself — with one another as things to be consumed by his surreptitious gaze; the press, previously so carefully guarded, becomes a “crisis heterotopia” (Thieme 115) through Vasu’s chaotic influence.

Nataraj and Vasu both have fluid understandings of space, and both are, in general, resistant to partitions. In Nataraj’s case, this resistance leaves his space open to exploitation; in Vasu’s, it allows him to be an exploiter. Though Nataraj is seen to try to enforce spatial boundaries (as between the public and private spaces of the press), his spatial imagination is actually rooted in his childhood experience of the home, before the trauma of the family “partition,” when the home was borderless and inclusive. This inclusivity also encompasses fluidity between human and nonhuman spaces. Nataraj describes learning to practice ahimsa as a child, welcoming all kinds of nonhuman animal companions — ants, squirrels, mice, and birds — into the house with gifts of food and access to grain stores (52). This vision of community is endorsed by the text, which attempts to figure Nataraj’s world, before Vasu, as idyllic. As Cronin argues, conflict arises when Nataraj’s ideal of “sociability” comes into contact with postcolonial modernity, as represented by Vasu’s “will to power” (28). Nataraj is ultimately punished for his attempt to loosen the rigidity of boundaries — between home and business, between nuclear families, and between nonhuman and human — when he falls prey to Vasu, who is a violator of all borders. The divisions Vasu unsettles are both spatial and conceptual: he disregards the boundary that marks protected land in Mempi Forest — the
boundary erected by state power; he challenges the sacred status of Nataraj’s press room — the boundary respected by religion and community; he does not divide work from home — the boundary between public and private; and, finally and most importantly, he attempts to challenge the border between life and death — the ultimate ontological boundary — through taxidermy. Vasu and Nataraj thus represent two different conceptions of the fluidity of boundaries: while Nataraj’s failure to respect the demarcation of space is based on an ideal of sociability and inclusivity, Vasu’s is based on exploitation and violence. Boundaries, borders, and divisions — and their breakdown — are thus preoccupations of the text as a whole. If Partition is a repressed subject of this novel, it re-emerges in this recurrent anxiety about the dangers of both absolute borders and total borderlessness.

In contrast to its oblique representation of Independence and Partition, *The Man-eater of Malgudi* offers a much more direct critique of its immediate political context, fourteen years into Jawaharlal Nehru’s tenure as Prime Minister. By representing a small community, far from the centres of national power, Narayan pointedly suggests that the Nehru government’s policies have had far-reaching and deleterious effects. Nicholas Grene observes that the initiatives of the Nehru government, as they appear in the novel, are rife with corruption and waste (74); similarly, Richard Cronin argues that Narayan offers a “virulent” critique of Nehru’s policies (28). The novel articulates this assessment of the Nehru government through a satire of that administration’s preoccupation with animals, using the bureaucratic control of the lives of nonhuman animals in post-Independence India to represent an entire culture of mismanagement. As we saw in
Chapter One, conservation was a major concern of the new postcolonial state; by the 1950s, species and land protection had become part of the government’s five-year plans, and by the 1970s conservation was one of the state’s flagship initiatives, one that placed India on the world stage. *The Man-eater of Malgudi* emerges from this period when the control and containment of nonhuman animals was becoming an important statement of ownership over the land and of the unity of the nation. The text documents the post-Independence interest in determining the place of animals in the new Indian state, particularly by satirizing the government’s conservation initiatives and the ineffectual bureaucracy that surrounds them. Vasu observes: “Every day our papers are full of speeches and meetings on the problem of preserving wild life, and most people don’t know what they are talking about” (98). The official anxiety over the status of nonhuman animals that is represented in the text is part of the negotiation of Indian identity, a negotiation at which the Nehru government, with its modernizing policies, is failing. What Vasu views as sentimentality, “running behind animals with cries of sympathy” (99), appears in fact as a paranoid desire to control animals through strategies of containment that, in turn, would cement India as a unified nation while also confirming its modernity. But the novel connects this drive for conservation with Vasu’s idea of preservation, in that conservation, like taxidermic preservation, attempts to create and enforce a separation between human and nonhuman animals. And, for the novel, both conservation and preservation disturb a preexisting harmony; both propose to manage and control what cannot and does not need to be managed. The representation of anxiety about animals on a national scale stands in contrast to the naturalized interspecies
relationships in Malgudi itself, where the position of nonhuman animals is both integral to the community, and also stable and understandable; there is no paranoia about the interactions between human and nonhuman animals until Vasu, a force of modernity, upsets this balance.

For Vasu, his profession represents the conjunction of science and art, and by conquering death this conjunction becomes the ultimate expression of human culture. He views taxidermy not merely as the replication of nature, but rather as the improvement of it. Vasu claims that when his teacher Suleiman produced a taxidermy lion, “he could make it look more terrifying than it would be in the jungle” (16). That a lion’s most important quality is his ability to “terrify” the human is an entirely anthropocentric idea, which suggests that the goal of taxidermy is to make the nonhuman animal embody most completely its figurative meaning for the human. What Vasu fails to see, however, is that this figurative meaning is both overdetermined and unstable. In human cultures the lion can equally represent terror, ego, monarchical or imperial power, courage, or nobility. The aim to make the lion “look [...] terrifying,” then, is an impossible simplification of just the human interpretation of the lion, to say nothing of the lion as a lion. Vasu’s reductive view suggests that, even at the figurative level, the “meaning” of the nonhuman animal eludes him. But Vasu also underestimates the taxidermy body. The physical fact of the lion means that the taxidermist, no matter how masterful, can only go so far in emphasizing a single quality possessed by the animal; some part(s) of that animal will

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111 Vasu refers to the Asiatic Lion, which, while still in crisis today, would have been near extinction in the 1960s. In addition to being contested between India and Pakistan during Partition, this reference reminds us that Jangadh, where Vasu trained as a taxidermist, was also — unevenly — contested space between humans and lions.
always escape the desire of the taxidermist to create the most “terrifying” lion. The gaps that appear between Vasu’s idea of a lion, all other possible figurative meanings of a lion, and the body of a lion, suggest the kind of disjuncture that arises in the death of the cow in Clear Light of Day. There is a poverty in Vasu’s attempt to construct a narrative of lionhood that excludes much of the life of the lion as there is in the Das siblings’ desire to narrativize the death of the cow. Both texts use animal bodies as figures of excess to human representational strategies — be they narrative, taxidermic, or both, in that taxidermy constructs narratives of animal life. In The Man-eater of Malgudi, Vasu’s paranoia makes clear that even after their deaths the animals upon whom he bases his livelihood are always escaping him. He cannot, in fact, prove himself superior to nature, nor can he culture his animals into perfect signs of human superiority.

Using the nonhuman animal corpse, and in particular the taxidermic preservation of that corpse, the novel stages its critique of the relationship between human and nonhuman animals in the contemporary nation. For Vasu, taxidermy provides a way for citizens of the independent Indian state to remain close to animals, especially those animals that have been co-opted as emblems of state or religious power, without sacrificing the hard-won modernity that is premised on the separation of human and nonhuman animal bodies. As Haraway represents them in When Species Meet and The Companion Species Manifesto, companionate relations between human and nonhuman animals are messy and unpredictable. Vasu imagines taxidermy as a way of containing this mess and instability — the disorder that attends multispecies living — by taking the animal body and consciousness and reconstructing them in an anthropocentric frame. He
wants to recast multispecies living as something that can be clean and hygienic, in keeping with the modernity of the independent state, and he believes that his goal of sanitizing the relationship between human and nonhuman animals is entirely possible. Vasu’s instrumental view of the animal body is totally outside Nataraj’s experience. The printer “shiver[s]” at “the way [Vasu’s] mind work[s]” (50) when the taxidermist suggests that stuffed eagles would be more appropriate for worship than living ones. The irreverence of this suggestion has been noted by several critics, because it places Vasu in obvious opposition to the Hindu belief system that informs the novel. The text further suggests that Vasu’s ideal of preservation is only the logical extension of the Nehru government’s preoccupation with conservation; both ideologies are concerned with placing animals, both spatially and ontologically, in order to best serve the human. In the novel, the horror of Vasu’s ideal companionate relationships — wherein the places of nonhuman animals are occupied by literal corpses — demonstrates the violence of modernization.

_The Man-eater of Malgudi_ uses Vasu to represent the evils of postcolonial modernity, and especially of the emergence of India as a nation into international flows of capital; in this role, he creates disturbance in the balanced composition of Malgudi as a community. Taxidermy, as a style of domination with colonial roots, connects colonial power to the power of contemporary capital that Vasu seeks to mobilize through his work. Like a colonizer, Vasu uses violence to exercise power over the natural world and, like a colonizer, he deploys various and often contradictory rationalizations to justify his

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112 See Thieme 116, Afzal-Khan 50, and Frontain 44.
actions. Vasu’s arguments point to a conception of modern Indian selfhood, and to emerging relationships between India and the rest of the world. In one scene, Vasu attempts to cut through Nataraj’s “sentimentality” by explaining his view of the temple elephant Kumar, an animal who is integral to Malgudi’s human community:

Has it occurred to you how much more an elephant is worth dead? [...] I can make ten thousand out of the parts of this elephant — the tusks, if my calculation is right, must weigh forty pounds, that’s eight hundred rupees. I have already an order for the legs, mounted as umbrella stands, and each hair on its tail can be sold for twelve annas for rings and bangles; most women fancy them and it’s not for us to question their taste. My first business will be to take out the hairs and keep them apart, while the blood is still hot; trunk, legs, even the nails — it’s a perfect animal in that way. Every bit of it is valuable. I’ve already had several inquiries from France and Germany and from Hong Kong. What more can a man want? I could retire for a year on the proceeds of one elephant. (126)

This passage contradicts Vasu’s claims to want to preserve nonhuman animals. Instead, a “perfect animal” for Vasu is one who can be torn apart, and whose various fragments can be sent across the globe for maximum profit. Vasu’s statement points viscerally to the alienation caused by global flows of consumer goods; the pieces of the elephant, arriving at their different destinations, will have lost their meaning as parts of Kumar. The catalogue of body parts exposes the foundation of the practice of taxidermy and the colonial appropriation of animal bodies: capital. Taxidermy became popular because of
collectors who wanted to display their wealth, and it developed because of empires that wanted to do the same. Vasu’s taxidermy negotiates a position for India in a post-Independence world economy, one controlled by Indian people, rather than European expatriates like the Van Ingen and Theobald brothers. Vasu’s claim to have had “inquiries” from Europe and Asia represents new global flows of consumer goods, and the fact that the goods in question are parts of dead bodies literalizes the violence of this capitalist expansion. Vasu’s summary of the profits he can make is interrupted, however, by his description of removing the hair, “while the blood is still hot.” This image reminds us that he is discussing a living animal, rather than an object, and produces the opposite effect from the one Vasu intends; rather than imagining the elephant as an impersonal collection of parts, the idea of blood (even if the phrase “while the blood is still hot” evokes an animal who is recently dead) returns us to the fact of Kumar’s embodiment and life, and resists the idea that he can be reduced to his rupees per unit price. Kumar is an animal whom we and the Malgudi community know; we are familiar with his place in the social world of the text. He functions as an embodiment of the traditional life of the town, and is harnessed to both religious and social structures. In this way, Kumar’s body is a parallel for the community. Its dismemberment, its being sold and sent to different parts of the world, comes to represent a new form of colonial appropriation in which citizens of independent India, like Vasu, actively participate. Vasu is selling an alienated and brutally obtained form of Indian cultural identity on the global market; he wants to instrumentalize the elephant in the most literal way, by rendering his body into capital. But the novel instrumentalizes Kumar as well, making him into an emblem of culture and
community so that it can, in turn, suggest that the intensification of capitalism — with Vasu as its engine — is the source of the threat to Kumar’s life and to Malgudi itself.

In the person of Vasu, the novel critiques not only the violence of capitalism, but also its irrationality. The overwhelming proliferation of animal bodies in Vasu’s attic contradicts his claims to be a coldly logical businessman. Nataraj observes that Vasu “brought in more and more dead creatures; there was no space for him in his room or on the terrace. [...] The narrow staircase [...] was getting filled up with his merchandise, which had now reached the last step — he had left just enough margin for himself to move up and down” (70). The animals cannot be contained in the attic; the room, like their bodies, is “stuffed.” Vasu’s obsessive pace of work encloses him and constricts his movements, a fact that contradicts his self-representation as someone unfettered by the kind of restrictions imposed by the traditional life of Malgudi. We can also see from the way that his animals languish in the stairway, growing dusty and tatty, that his motivation is more complicated than pure profit. Despite his confidence that a tiger cub he has killed and stuffed is a valuable commodity, for example, it is still present in the attic, unsold, after his death. It is clear that Vasu does not operate according to a conventional supply and demand formula; rather, he is driven to continue the cycle of killing and preserving, despite his work having outpaced both the demand for his merchandise and the capacity of his space. Although he speaks often of the importance of rationality and a “scientific outlook” (127), Vasu’s actions are, in fact, erratic, chaotic, and unnecessarily malevolent; they point to a passionate, all-consuming form of evil that belies his claims to be an astute entrepreneur and detached scientist. As Cronin argues, Vasu’s incessant drive to
kill exposes a “missionary zeal” that is excessive to his profit motive (29): his “mission” is to promote the modernization of the Indian state and of Indian people along the lines of pure capitalist exploitation. Modern capital, for the novel, is not coldly logical; rather, it is an all but un governable destructive force. This representation of modernization stands in contrast to Narayan’s ideal of community, which is resolutely anti-modern.

This ideal of community in the novel is supported by the cosmology that underlies the narrative. Like Desai, Narayan is interested in the tension between the form of the realist English language novel and his Indian subject matter. Unlike Clear Light of Day, however, The Man-eater of Malgudi to some extent resolves this internal tension through its mythic structure. The press assistant Sastri, whom Nataraj calls “an orthodox-minded Sanskrit semi-scholar” (72) believes that Vasu is a rakshasa — a demon — and indeed the narrative is based on the myth of Bhasmasura, a demon who betrayed the trust of Siva and created havoc in the world but who, in the end, was destroyed by his own power.113 Like Bhasmasura’s, Vasu’s own strength is ultimately what kills him.114 The resolution of the novel’s mythic structure thus sees the balance of the universe restored after what is, as Kanaganayakam suggests, merely a brief interruption in cosmic time (43). The sense of balance and harmony in the novel arises from this structure, and offers a generic counterpoint to Desai. Narayan can provide this comic representation of the postcolonial condition, in the wake of Independence and Partition, because Malgudi itself is built upon

113 D.S. Dewari provides an exhaustive account of the parallels between the Bhasmasura myth and the novel (44-63); Raymond-Jean Frontain comments, additionally, on the importance of The Ramayana to the text’s structure and themes (49-51).

114 It should be noted that an alternative scenario is also possible: the novel leaves open the idea that Vasu may have been poisoned by his lover Rangi.
a foundation of ontological certainty: evil cannot ultimately prevail in this novel.

Nataraj’s faith in this certainty, although it is tested, gives him a kind of security that is absent in *Clear Light of Day*. This difference also affects the representation of nonhuman animals. In Desai, the positions of the various animals are unstable in relation to the human world and human space, and are also — to a qualified extent — independent from human narratives. In Narayan, by contrast, the positions of the animals with respect to the community are stable and understood. Kumar the elephant, while he is the linchpin of the community and the plot, does not seem to have the individual agency of Badshah, Begum, or Bim’s cat. The same can be said of Desai and Narayan’s human characters. Each character in Narayan is defined more by her position in relation to the community and the overall structure of the text than by her individual characteristics, while, by contrast, the world of Desai’s text is atomistic, with each character representing a kind of world in herself. *Clear Light of Day* suggests that this atomism characterizes the human experience more broadly, and the contemporary Indian experience in particular. Each person creates a narrative, and each produces narrative exclusions. By contrast, *The Man-eater of Malgudi*, through the single perspective of Nataraj, presents the stability of the community as something that is innately Indian, and that is only under threat because of pernicious outside influences.

This representation of a stable and harmonious community raises one of the more problematic aspects of Narayan’s writing. For all that he is credited with capturing the textures of Indian life, the confident holism of Narayan’s works depends on a severely circumscribed representation. Kanaganayakam critiques the limitations of Narayan’s
vision, arguing that “[w]hat [Narayan] offers is an ideologically loaded, essentialist view that creates the illusion of the real” (31). As Prakash also notes, the sense of ultimate balance and harmony that underlies the novel is made possible only through significant exclusions (26): Narayan’s India is entirely Hindu and almost exclusively high-caste. The only human person who is outside of this idea of community is the temple dancer Rangi, and she is treated as a polluting influence, an object of both revulsion and desire about whom the text is “wildly ambivalent” (Hubel 15). Nataraj calls Rangi an “awful fleshy creature” (114), a phrase that animalizes her and aligns her with the “fleshy creatures” — the taxidermy bodies — in the attic. Neither Rangi’s sexuality nor her subalternity is easily assimilable into the novel’s worldview. Against Nataraj’s ideal of community, which is Hindu and Brahminical, with strictly defined social codes and relationships, the novel pits the chaotic influence of Vasu, whose origins and social status are uncertain, and who is aggressively individualistic. By creating this seemingly simple opposition, however, the text denies the exploitations and exclusions upon which Malgudi, as a community, is founded. While Nataraj thinks that it is “impossible to conceive of Kumar stuffed and dissected and serving as an umbrella-stand or waste-basket in some fashionable home in the Eastern or Western world” (151), he is not likewise horrified by the exploitation of Kumar that occurs in Malgudi itself. The committee that owns Kumar intends to rent him for processions in order to raise money to build a tower for the temple. Despite the fact that the committee’s control of Kumar almost leads to his death on two occasions, this abuse is treated with gentle satire. And yet the instrumentalization of subaltern bodies that are in one sense included in the community — Kumar and Rangi
— coupled with their precarity in that community as objects of exploitation, shortens the distance between Nataraj and Vasu. And this precarity signals the social realities that have been repressed by the novel in service of its holistic vision. The textual violence of cutting out swathes of the human population of India surfaces, I believe, in the strange presence of the taxidermy animals. As Vasu’s example of the lion suggests, taxidermy animals can never represent a single idea; what the taxidermy animal calls to the mind of the viewer is only partially in the control of the taxidermist. Similarly, the animals need not function only in the way the novel wants to utilize them. As taxidermy corpses, they are inscribed with the violence of their deaths even as they mimic life, and through this contradiction they necessarily call to mind other forms of violence, such as that which the novel performs on its own subject matter. Every act of taxidermic preservation is necessarily an act of both embodied and figurative brutality — it is an act of killing and of cutting away to preserve only what is privileged by the representation — but, as Vasu’s work shows, it can never be fully successful in excluding what it wants to hide. In this way the novel itself cannot contain the representational excess that taxidermy creates, and the text escapes Narayan as a taxidermist of India. Narayan is eager to demonstrate that Vasu’s project is a failure, but the text does not draw the obvious connection between Vasu’s taxidermy and the actions of representation and narrativization in themselves. Not

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115 By making this argument, I too am objectifying these animals. Part of the challenge and fascination of thinking about taxidermy bodies is their status as both animals and objects. They are animal, but not animal; they are once-living bodies, and pieces of furniture; they are organic, and manufactured; they are lifelike, and they are dead. As occurs with the animal bodies in Clear Light of Day, it is through the status of these corpses as “real” that The Man-eater of Malgudi is launching its critique, at the same time that it mobilizes them as figures for the dangers of modernity. In suggesting that the novel’s own critique is undercut by yet another layer of figurative significance, I grapple with the difficulty of resisting the instrumentalization of nonhuman animals while also wanting to consider the ways that they, as figures, create meaning in texts.
only does Vasu’s approach to representing the nonhuman animal in its own flesh parallel
the act of representing the animal in text, but it also coincides with the taxidermic nature
of this particular novel, and the idea of narrative exclusion as a form of violent repression
that surfaces in both Clear Light of Day and The Man-eater of Malgudi.

The most important way that the novel represents the failure of Vasu’s project —
and opens up the possibility of the failure of its own — is through its insistence on decay.
The fact that taxidermy does not stop the decay of the body, but merely delays it and
redirects its course, as evidenced by the growing “tattiness” of taxidermy animals as they
age, is a clear instance of the escape of the animal body from the control of the
taxidermist (Baker 60). As Steve Baker argues, “tattiness, imperfection and botched form
[...] render the animal abrasively visible” (62 emphasis in original). Such decay draws
attention to the failure of taxidermic preservation, pulling focus away from the liveliness
that the taxidermist has attempted to create and onto the organic fact of death. Taxidermy
invites the viewer to look but not to look too closely, because the close examination
reveals the impossibility of perfect preservation and the strangeness of the taxidermic
life-in-death. This kind of abrasive visibility appears in The Man-eater of Malgudi in the
body of a taxidermy hyena which, over the course of the novel, becomes an increasingly
unsettling presence in Nataraj’s printing press. It sits at the bottom of the stairs to the attic
where Vasu lives and works, fixing Nataraj and Sastri with its disconcerting gaze (71).
When, towards the end of the novel, Nataraj goes to the attic to confirm that Vasu is dead,
he sees “the hyena shoved aside and mouldering in a corner, its glassy stare fixing [him]
at the foot of the steps” (159). The hyena embodies the contradictions at the heart of
Vasu’s taxidermy. In human culture, and certainly in the cultures into which Vasu hopes to sell his animals, the hyena is broadly considered one of the least charismatic and appealing animals. When Vasu explains that taxidermists not only recreate, but in fact enhance the essential qualities of the animal, he does not mention the “cowardliness” or the low cunning of the scavenging hyena, nor does he praise its cacophonous laughter. By subverting ideas of the attractiveness of taxidermy animals and the fact that they arrest animal beauty for human contemplation, this hyena challenges us to consider the taxidermy animal as a figure of abjection. Its “mouldering” fur is physical proof that Vasu has not mastered nature, and its ugliness loosens the anthropomorphic attachment to the noble tragedy of the hunting trophy — the kind of nostalgia for nature’s magnificence that is embodied in a taxidermy tiger. Like the corpse of the baby bird in *Clear Light of Day*, the hyena signifies the point at which human figurative systems fail to encompass nonhuman life and death. This failure allows the rotting hyena to remind us even more strongly of the bodily nature of the taxidermy animal, and of the death of the living animal that is both denied and, at the same time, rendered ever-present by the taxidermic form; as Poliquin observes, “taxidermied animals carry their deaths with them” (10). But, unlike the dead bird that Bim encounters, the hyena also functions as a revenant in *The Man-eater of Malgudi* because of the taxidermic form’s imperfect attempt to create life in death. Over the course of Vasu’s residence in the attic, the hyena becomes a spectral figure for Nataraj that gives him a “thrill of fear” when he thinks of it (113). Haraway argues that “[t]o make an exact image is to insure against disappearance, to cannibalize life until it is safely and permanently a specular image, a ghost” (“Teddy Bear Patriarchy”
Whereas Desai employs forms of haunting in the ghostly figures of Mira and the cow, Narayan’s text physicalizes the haunting in the bodies of Vasu’s animals. By preserving the “lifelike” animal body, taxidermy multiplies these animal spectres, whose very form maintains the disavowal — the knowing and not-knowing — of their deaths. The horror of the dead animal shows how deeply unnatural Vasu’s work is in the world of the novel, but the same kind of disavowal is at work in the novel’s own project, and the novel’s own taxidermic composition multiplies its spectres in a similar, if not equivalent, way.

This uncanny multiplication is brought to the fore in a fascinating exchange between Nataraj and Vasu on the topic of animal eyes. Moved to pity when confronted with Vasu’s work, Nataraj comments on the “stare” of a taxidermy eagle. Vasu is amused because, in fact, the eyes are glass, “given it by me [Vasu], not by God” (50). Vasu then shows Nataraj his collection of eyes:

He opened a wooden chest and brought out a cardboard carton. “See these.” He scooped out a handful of eyes — big round ones, small ones, red ones in black circles. The ferocious, striking, killing glare of a tiger, the surprise and superciliousness of an owl, the large, black-filled softness of a deer — every category of gaze was there. He said, “All these are from Germany. We used to get them before the war. Now you cannot get them for love or money. [...] The first thing one does after killing an animal is to take out its eyes, for that’s the first part to rot, and then one gives it new eyes like an optician.” (50)
Nataraj initially feels uncomfortable because he thinks that the eagle is looking at him and, under the gaze of the animal, he feels shame for its death: he says, “[i]ts dilated black pupils [...] seemed to accuse us” (50). The source of Nataraj’s discomfort shifts, and turns into horror, when Vasu reveals that the “stare” is not real, and when he opens his carton of eyes. The particular strangeness of this moment arises not only from the revelation that Nataraj has mistaken artificial matter for organic matter (or a dead substance for a living substance); in the box of eyes, it is the repetition and replication of the animal gaze that render the moment uncanny for Nataraj and for the reader. Vasu’s handful of eyeballs is horrible in its randomness: he scoops them out indiscriminately, so that the eyes — normally seen in orderly pairs — are jumbled together. The eyes are first described by their physical properties — big, small, red, black — but Nataraj’s description quickly shifts into the intangible qualities that these glass eyes are seemingly able to replicate: ferociousness, superciliousness, softness. These qualities are those attributed to animals in human thought and representation. Are the glass eyes, then, doubles or replicas of the eyes of actual animals, or do they approximate instead the human desire for animals to fit into these “categories,” as Nataraj calls them? Nataraj constructs an affective taxonomy, based not on Linnaean physical observations, but rather on the supposed innate characteristics of animal personalities. Thus Nataraj’s reading of

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116 Steve Baker notes that shame has been identified, by some critics, as the defining affect of the taxidermic encounter, “whether the shame is attributed to the displayed animal or to the viewing human.” (61).

117 The proliferation of eyes recalls Freud’s discussion of Hoffmann’s “The Sand-Man,” which links the fear of being blinded with castration anxiety (938). Ideas of doubling, repression, and defamiliarization naturally connect the taxidermy animal to Freud’s essay. Poliquin, for example, observes that the animal’s gaze — “[t]he eyes may be glass, but the animal stares back” — is one source of its “uncanny animal-thingness” (41).
the eyes again produces an anthropomorphic interpretation, and suggests that these eyes are meant to be read in predictable ways. They don’t express singular personalities, but instead reflect the human gaze, and what the human desires in the nonhuman animal, back to the viewer. It is significant that, among the eyes, Nataraj does not notice those of a hyena, an animal that might challenge his affective readings.

The box of eyes is additionally chilling because it physicalizes the scale of Vasu’s slaughter. He has a surplus of eyes, despite their being difficult to obtain, and he intends to use them. One handful of loose eyes therefore represents so many animals killed, so many animals with their eyes taken out. For Pauline Wakeham, taxidermy actually “inscribe[s] the fatal sign of mortality upon the bodies it claims to revivify”; she argues that the animals thus preserved are “prophesying the future death of [the] bodies” of other animals (18), in much the same way that Vasu’s glass eyes concretize his intentions. These false eyes in a “real” animal body will never “rot,” as organic eyes are prone to do (Narayan 50); instead, the taxidermy corpse will, over time, “rot” around these eyes, so that only the replicated gaze of the animal remains. The gaze, that which should be most singular, is replicated and repeated in the glass eyes until the very idea of singularity is rendered uncertain. This scene points to the unstable nature of the taxidermy body: it is always undecidable as a being or a thing, organic or man-made, nature or art, living or dead. Nataraj knows that Vasu is a taxidermist, and he knows that Vasu has come to Malgudi to hunt and kill the animals of Mempi forest. What ultimately excites both Nataraj’s revulsion and his subconscious admiration in this confrontation, however, is the realization that Vasu is, as I have already discussed, attempting to bring these corpses
back to life in a manner that will not just replicate nature, but will actually surpass it. But
Nataraj’s encounters with Vasu also fulfill the important function of exposing where and
how the taxidermist fails in his mission.

Organic decay is signalled not only by the tattiness of taxidermy, but also by
smell, and the elimination of odours was, from the beginning, a preoccupation of
taxidermic technique (Poliquin 28). This preoccupation arises in part from the
disturbance to the visual field that smell can cause: taxidermy, as Poliquin observes, “has
always striven, simply and rather mundanely, to perpetuate the ability to look at
animals” (25), and smell interrupts the gaze by drawing attention to the fact that the
moment is not held static — that, in fact, decay is progressing in a way that the gaze does
not necessarily perceive. What Haraway calls the “visual penetration” of animal worlds
that taxidermy allows (“Teddy Bear Patriarchy” 25) depends on the fact that sensory
experience, in the taxidermic encounter, is distilled into the gaze. In The Man-eater of
Malgudi, the emergence of a “rotting smell” that is “pervasive and insistent” (48) marks
the fact that death can no longer be contained by the space of the attic. This smell, an
unmediated horror, signals the emergence of traumas that cannot be repressed; like the
sound of Poe’s tell-tale heart, it subverts the dominant power of the visual by exposing
that which is hidden from the eyes. Overpowering the gaze, the smell of death in The
Man-eater of Malgudi is subversive of Vasu’s aims, and of the modernizing impulse that
Vasu and his taxidermy represent.

It is this smell that forces Nataraj finally to confront Vasu by entering the space of
the attic, and the two men encounter each other in a scene that is full of the tension
between Vasu’s description of the process of taxidermy and the evidence of Nataraj’s senses. Vasu’s repeated claims of the “hygienic” nature of his process are undercut by Nataraj’s eyes and nose. After Vasu details his method of “[b]leeding, skinning, and cleaning” the animals so that no trace of their death remains — “so that the sentimentalists may not complain” — Nataraj points out that “[t]here are bits of flesh still there” on the skin of a tiger (49). Despite all of Vasu’s efforts to control the fleshliness of this animal flesh, it is insistently present. The flesh of the tiger refuses assimilation into hygienic death, as Vasu imagines it, and into Nataraj’s idyllically sociable worldview. These “bits of flesh” also escape the mythic structure of the text itself: the animal corpses are unsettling remainders in the narrative, quite literally, since we do not know what happens to them. And they render the ending — with the self-destruction of the “demon” — ambiguous. There is no way to account for the “bits of flesh” that are left out of the narrative — for its exclusions of the conflicts, differences, and antagonisms of Indian life in favour of a naturalized depiction of established caste, gender, and religious hierarchies, preserved in lifelike detail. The taxidermy animals appear as figures for the violence of modernization, but they stubbornly remain to unsettle and contest from within the novel’s own taxidermic composition.

This counterdiscursive effect stems from the fact that the taxidermy animals are uncertain things that Nataraj — and Nataraj’s worldview — cannot contain. He desires them, but they repulse him. They pollute him, but, on some level, he seems to embrace

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118 Vasu’s description of his methods is strongly reminiscent of pamphlets produced by Van Ingen in which the company details its process and, like the Van Ingens, Vasu also buys his glass eyes from Germany (“Van Ingen & Van Ingen”). These parallels are a further suggestion that Narayan had the Van Ingen operation in mind during the writing of the novel.
that pollution. This ambivalence signals that the novel’s conclusion is not as neat as the
mythic intertext would suggest, and that it should be read, rather, as dark and ambiguous.

When Nataraj first sees Vasu’s taxidermy tiger cub, he is horrified by “the thought of
anyone taking so young a life” (123). Vasu’s influence on the printer is clear, then, when
Nataraj steals the stuffed tiger cub from the attic after the taxidermist’s death and
attempts to give it to his friend the poet, citing its monetary value. The poet reacts as
Nataraj initially would have done, by rejecting the gift in horror: “He gazed back at me as
if noticing in my eyes for the first time unplumbed depths of lunacy” (171). His time with
Vasu has altered Nataraj’s view of the taxidermy animals as much as it has altered his
personality (a change that is evident in the “touch of aggression” that he, previously
gentle to a fault, has acquired [170]). Nataraj can now see the tiger cub as two thousand
rupees in hand, but he is blind to the fact that the cub is a corpse, one that would have
excited his pity when he was first exposed to Vasu’s work. As several critics observe, the
taxidermy tiger cub functions as a strange remainder, one that renders the neat mythic
conclusion unstable.119 For Cronin, the cub indicates a conscious awareness, on
Narayan’s part, of the imperfect mapping of a mythical structure onto a story of
contemporary India; he argues that “Nataraj is left with this odd, charming, unholy trophy
hidden away in his desk. It is a badge of the little bit of Vasu that has become a part of
him. But it is a sign too of Narayan’s uneasy sense that his own art includes aptitudes at
odds with the traditional sanctities that his novels seem to celebrate” (33). Indeed, even
though the police arrive, reinstating the spatial boundaries of the press by “[s]ealing up”

the attic (165), the space is irreparably polluted by Vasu’s influence.

As in Clear Light of Day, the ambiguity of the ending of The Man-eater of Malgudi hinges on the idea of narrative remainders. Even after Vasu’s death, Nataraj’s obsession with the taxidermist prevents the containment of the contagion he has brought into the community. And the taxidermy animals, who were always outside of this community, remain excessive to the narrative closure. Their fate is an open question; presumably they now belong to Nataraj, who is also the inheritor of Vasu’s dark reputation. Although Sastri, the representative of tradition, seems to take power at the end, the actual status of Nataraj, the press, the community, and the corpse-stuffed attic are all uncertain. The ambivalent ending of The Man-eater of Malgudi suggests that, despite the failure of Vasu’s individual project, the harmonious structure of Malgudi has been permanently unsettled by its contact with this man-eater; Malgudi is changing, even though the novel itself attempts to disavow this change. The representation of taxidermy in the novel thus functions not only as a critique of the modernizing and capitalist policies of the independent state, but also as a counterdiscursive representational mode that unsettles the stability that the novel is so eager to establish. Taxidermy, by virtue of its strangeness and ungovernability, splits the seams of the novel’s own taxidermic construction, showing the limitations of its representation as a preservation of an imagined India, exposing the violence of its exclusions, and suggesting the way that the nation’s bodies escape the urge to represent and to preserve.

4.4. Conclusion
On March 12, 2013, the last of the Van Ingen taxidermists, Edwin Joubert Van Ingen, died in his home in Mysore at the age of 101. After his death, a controversy worthy of an Agatha Christie plot — complete with secret adoptions and multiple wills — erupted over who would inherit his home and extensive property (Kushala, Edwards). While the courts attempted to sort out Van Ingen’s legacies, the legacy of his work went untended: in the locked-up Mysore house, his large collection of taxidermy animals sat mouldering through the monsoon season, despite the protests of the local Natural History Museum. These animal bodies bear witness to the history of colonial domination in India, as do their siblings for sale at auction houses and from niche companies across the world. Their German glass eyes and tatty Indian skins attest to the messy intimacies of postcoloniality, and to the exploitative weight — both economic and cultural — that such nonhuman animal bodies have borne throughout human history. And, in their new status as objects of legal and state interest, Van Ingen’s taxidermy remainders suggest the kind of continuities that occur in both Clear Light of Day and The Man-eater of Malgudi between the colonial and postcolonial, as both seek to control the place of the nonhuman animal in the human world. But, as the mould and microorganisms crept into the rain-soaked Van Ingen bungalow, the taxidermy animals were also there to demonstrate the impossibility of that control. Through the very changes in their bodies, Van Ingen’s collection of animal-objects resist human placement and confuse human understanding, bearing witness instead to the ultimate ungovernability of even the most exploited bodies, and to the failure of human representation perfectly to master the nonhuman both in life and in death.
Both *Clear Light of Day* and *The Man-eater of Malgudi* attempt to master nonhuman animals by deploying them as figures of “significant otherness” not as Haraway conceives of it — as an unhygienic entanglement of co-constituting lifeworlds — but as textual tools to enrich and complicate the representation of human narratives. In Desai’s novel, animal companions represent the “real” that is repressed by the narrative self-construction of her human protagonists. Their presence introduces the generic instability, the disjunctures between realism and literariness, where we can locate the novel’s interest in narrative itself. The two ways that the novel uses its animals — as realist beings, and as symbols in the Das siblings’ personal bestiary — demonstrate that each narrative produces spectres of its exclusions. In this way, Desai’s nonhuman animals are called into service to represent all subaltern experiences; unlike subaltern human beings, they are companions, admitted into the home and into the intimate narratives constructed by the Das family, so they are forced to stand in for the human lives and deaths that the Das siblings’ stories have repressed. It is the nonhuman animal companions that expose the political nature of this “domestic” novel.

In Narayan, by contrast, nonhuman animals in their taxidermied forms represent the “unreal”; they stand for the imposed and unnatural ideologies of modernization and capitalism that Vasu brings with him into the community. The narrative’s living nonhuman animals are, however, similarly taxidermic — like the taxidermy animals, with their replicated gazes, the living animals like Kumar are stable, predictable, and understandable in a human frame of reference. *The Man-eater of Malgudi* suggests that taxidermy is a kind of narrative representation — of the narrative of modernization —
that is deadening and violent, but a connection can be drawn between this work and the novel’s own project of creating lifelike diorama of a traditional South Indian town. In Desai, the counterpoint of the real that emerges from the animal companions is central to the work of the text; in Narayan, by contrast, it is excessive to the novel’s effort to construct an ideologically-charged and severely restricted vision of the nation as representing the “real” India.

In both cases, nonhuman animals connect the microcosmic spaces of these novels — both the literal spaces they describe, the home and the town, and the generic spaces they are forced to inhabit, the “domestic” and the “comic” — to the larger context of the narratives of nationhood. The political importance of these microcosms is recuperated by both the connections and the contrasts that are established between the intimate space of these novels and the hegemonic narrative of the birth and infancy of a new nation. Narratives of multispecies companionship ultimately reflect on ideas of belonging; these novels explore belonging in their microcosmic spaces, in their nation, and in narrative representation. Although companion animals may be familiar enough figures to go unremarked, turning a critical gaze upon them defamiliarizes their presence and, as a result, opens new avenues for interpreting these two canonical Indian English novels.

This chapter has considered relationships within intimate spaces, and how these spaces expand outward into the space of the nation, marking watershed moments in its postcolonial history. In the next chapter, I move into the geography of the postcolonial present, looking at multispecies living in the context of contemporary urban space. Also concerned with narrative exclusions — in this case, what is excluded from the narratives
of urban modernity and global capital — the next chapter negotiates textual and material
geographies in Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* and the lives of the leopards of
Mumbai’s Sanjay Gandhi National Park. In both cases, I am interested in the way that the
discourse of species is used to construct hierarchies of spatial legitimacy that exclude
human and nonhuman subalterns, and in the unexpected multispecies intimacies that can
emerge in the fissures of the shining Indian cityscape.
5. The City: Denizens of Modernity in Delhi and Mumbai

5.1. Introduction

In a photograph disseminated around the world, a man holds up a sign that says “I am not a slumdog. I am the future of India” (“The Real Roots of the Slumdog Protests”). The man pictured is participating in one of the mass protests that greeted the Indian release of Danny Boyle’s internationally-acclaimed film *Slumdog Millionaire*. Protesters across the country objected to the use of the word “dog” in the title. Tateshwar Vishwakarma, a community activist who helped to organize the protests and who also filed a lawsuit against the filmmakers, argued that “[r]eferring to people living in slums as dogs is a violation of human rights” (qtd. in Weaver). In part, this reaction stemmed from the screenwriter’s lack of familiarity with the context: *kuttā* has particularly derogatory connotations in Hindi, whereas other animal names may have been less inflammatory. At the same time, this perception that the alignment of animality with poverty is an insult to slum dwellers invites consideration, particularly given the film’s engagement with urban spaces most often inhabited by subaltern human beings and stray or feral dogs. Although they share living space with these dogs, the protesters resisted the inference that they in any way shared the status of these dogs, whereas the point of the title seemed to be that, to the world at large, human and nonhuman slum dwellers are much the same. The screenwriter who named the film, Simon Beaufoy, was surprised by the reaction to the title in India. He claimed that the term “slumdog” actually had very
little meaning, saying, “I just made up the word. I liked the idea. I didn’t mean to offend anyone” (qtd. in Weaver). In another account, however, he states that he came up with the name when he saw stray dogs watching him from the alleys as he walked through the slums of Mumbai doing research: “I thought it was a fantastic metaphor — of somebody who’s apparently not worth anything, is actually looking [sic], eyeing everything and knowing everything — just like the boy in the gameshow knows everything” (qtd. in Tharakan). In this version of the story, the alignment of the human with the animal is explicit. Although the intention may be benign, the naming of the film represents a discourse of animalization that regularly emerges in both class-based and racialized contexts. Beaufoy’s sudden inspiration actually arises from a long history of interpreting the other as nonhuman. The word “slumdog” thus depends on a previously existing discourse of species that is prevalent in representations of postcolonial cities, and of urban India in particular. Part of the purpose of the film was to challenge the narrative of India’s capitalist ascension by showing, in contrast, a more authentic state of the nation. The film’s title, which combines poverty, animality, and capitalist aspiration, establishes a counternarrative that is signalled by the already understood otherness of the animal.

Many iconic images of urban India, especially in the non-Indian imagination, are remarkable for the presence of nonhuman animals. From cows lounging in the medians of traffic-choked roads, to the “monkey thieves” made internationally famous by the

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120 Throughout this chapter, I use the term “animalization” to refer to the discourse that classifies a being, human or nonhuman, as being “animal,” especially in opposition to the category of the “human.” In employing this term, I am engaging with the cultural constructs of human and animal, rather than the actual characteristics of real nonhuman animals.
National Geographic Channel series of the same name, urban animals are a central part of the way the Indian city is imagined across the globe, and particularly of what makes the Indian city different from, and other to, the Western city. These images are, depending on what they depict, amusing, whimsical, shocking, heart-rending; what draws them together is that they never fail to be striking. This chapter examines this affective charge, looking at non-companion urban animals as “matter out of place” (Douglas 44); I consider the troubling presence of animals in the contemporary urban environment, from which animals are conceptually, if not physically, excluded.121 Despite the tendency to ignore or, more properly, to disavow the presence of animals in cities, there is clear evidence of the increasing enmeshment of human and nonhuman beings in urban environments. Chris Wilbert suggests, optimistically, that “at some point in the future, we may think of these emergent nonhumans as ‘companion species’ that accompany humans in their development in a slightly extended, wilder, though no less hybrid, form” (40). In the last chapter, I extended the definition of “companion animal” to include any animal with whom human beings share intimate living space. In this chapter, I want to reimagine the urban space as one that is constitutively multispecies. This reimagining requires a new orientation in the way the space of the city is conceptualized to accord with the material realities of modern urban life. It requires a new imaginative geography of the city.

As Chris Philo and Chris Wilbert argue, the “conceptual placing of animals” is central to the human “imaginative geography” (11). They draw this term from Edward Douglas defines dirt as “matter out of place,” suggesting that it is “the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements” (44). In this chapter, I will discuss the hygienic coding of animals in the urban environment, which makes Douglas’s definition of “dirt” particularly relevant.

121 Douglas defines dirt as “matter out of place,” suggesting that it is “the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements” (44). In this chapter, I will discuss the hygienic coding of animals in the urban environment, which makes Douglas’s definition of “dirt” particularly relevant.
Said’s *Orientalism*, in which Said uses “imaginative geography” to name the affective mapping through which a space (or time) is made sense of by the discourses that seek to define and demarcate it. Said argues that “space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process” through which figurative meaning is attached to it, despite any objective or material realities that might contradict that figurative meaning (55). It is significant that Philo and Wilbert turn to a postcolonial thinker to theorize the conceptual exclusion of the animal from urban space, since the imaginative geography of the city is also used to exclude postcolonial urban centres from the construct of modernity. But before turning to these exclusions, it is important to consider what the imaginative geography of the city seeks to include.

In the imaginative geography of the city, the urban space is reserved for human development, particularly in the context of global capital. Urban life is meant to distance the human not only from the nonhuman animal, but also from the animal-within-the-human, from basic subsistence, dirt, the body and its demands. The city should be an unnatural place, where the human is freed from the necessity of being natural (and therefore animal); working in tandem with this construction is the utopian idea of the city as an idealized space into which the subject must be freed in order to become human.\(^{122}\) This conception of the city is tied to discourses of modernity, most famously decoded by Bruno Latour and discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation. For Latour, the idea of the modern is based on the dichotomization of human and nonhuman animals, and the conceptual expunging of the nonhuman from the spaces of modernity. It is this

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\(^{122}\) The postcolonial pastoral, which imagines the city as a dystopian space, functions in opposition to this idealized view.
dichotomization that has led to the exclusion of animals from urban theory and design, and from urban culture more broadly (Wolch 726). While many animal geographers notice this “purification,” to use Latour’s word (11), in the context of the Western city,\footnote{These animal geographers include Wolch, Pincetl, and Pulido (379, 382), Jerolmack (73-74), Wilbert (85), Palmer (“Placing Animals” 64), and Wolch (722, 726). Johnson also offers a review of the development of animal geography that critiques the dominant idea that the city is a purely human space.} I argue that this exclusion of the animal from urban space is also in play in the way that the postcolonial urban centre is conceptualized; between West and East, or Global North and Global South, the animal-human binary provides the foundational division.

In the imaginative geography of the modern city, the postcolonial urban centre is configured as other to the global cities of the West; its challenges of environmental destruction, population growth, and poverty all define it as an object for development, rather than a modern urban centre. Urban theorist Ananya Roy argues that what she calls “the megacity” of the postcolonial world “is the ‘subaltern’ of urban studies,” in opposition to Western “global centers” (224). The problems of “underdevelopment,” Roy suggests, are the shifting foundation of the otherness of the postcolonial city (224). These problems are erased or expelled from the Western city and established as specifically “third world” concerns, which allows, in turn, the Western city to be conceived of as modern, “clean” urban space. The casting of the postcolonial city as an object for development works to shore up the hygienic modernity of the cities of the global north. As Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe argue, the “metanarrative” of modernization configures the challenges of cities as “diseases of the social body” (353). The postcolonial city, as defined by this discourse, is inherently contaminated.
The visible and insistent presence of nonhuman animals thus comes to represent, in the Western imagination, the otherness of the postcolonial city. Animals appear as a disease, to use Nuttall and Mbembe’s word; they are a corruption in the body of the city, and their presence introduces the uncomfortable idea that the space of the city is messy and ungovernable. But theorists in animal studies are now attempting to make room for nonhuman animals in their urban habitats in a way that would legitimize their presence. I draw the term “denizen” in the title of this chapter from Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka’s *Zoopolis*, a work of political theory that seeks to categorize nonhuman animals and place them into a variety of social contracts with human beings. Donaldson and Kymlicka work from the premise that contact, and indeed relationships, between human and nonhuman animals are unavoidable\(^{124}\); given this premise, they set out to determine how society might incorporate nonhuman animals in non-exploitative ways. Companion and farmed animals, in the zoopolis, would become citizens, and would demand the same duty of care and protection from society at large that human citizens do. Groups of so-called “wild” animals would constitute sovereign nations. Between these two categories of citizen and sovereign is the blurry domain of the “denizen.” The denizen is not a companion but not wild, is not integrated enough into human society to be incorporated into the institution of citizenship, but not independent enough to live entirely apart from human beings. This category includes such animals as pigeons, foxes, rats, and coyotes, who live as the disavowed, shadow populations of modern urban space.

\(^{124}\) This is contrary to what they call the Animal Rights perspective, which would seek total non-involvement of humans in the lives of other animals.
with; it acknowledges the sharing of space, without also requiring the sharing of lives (214). Their model suggests that, while denizen animals build their lives around human settlement and human activity, and are to a degree dependent on them, human beings and nonhuman denizens can and do live separately from one another. In this relationship, the human is not really touched by the nonhuman animal. This distancing is problematic, since it could be argued that the very fact of multispecies space requires a mutual entwinement of lives, and that such entwinement is in fact more ethically significant than separation. Because of their social justice aim, Donaldson and Kymlicka are working towards a “clean” way of conceptualizing urban animals, in the same way that they look to cleanly categorize wild and companion animals. Their work attempts to imagine a non-exploitative social organization in the most pragmatic way possible. But the word “denizen” means both an inhabitant and an alien (OED). Denizenship is thus the dark obverse of the concept of citizenship: a denizen is a resident without recognition, the shadow self of a citizen. This relationship of legitimate to illegitimate residency is obvious in the precarious status of human denizens such as illegal immigrants and migrant workers. The categories with which Donaldson and Kymlicka work are thus difficult to cleanly differentiate, since they are entangled in multiple and complex relationships. What a literary analysis can introduce is a messier way of understanding these entanglements among species in the urban context that takes into account both the messiness and the ungovernability of human-nonhuman contact, as well as the fact that

125 As Donaldson and Kymlicka acknowledge, when they state that their remarks can only be provisional, given the lack of consistency in the recognition of forms of human denizenship (215). Throughout Zoopolis, Donaldson and Kymlicka draw their categories from established human models; in this respect, the category of the denizen creates some difficulty for them.
animals in urban space, and the humans who cohabit with them, are often in themselves conceptualized as “mess.”

In wanting to conceive of a messier multispecies city, I am also seeking to animate the urban space with living beings. I want to examine the city as a site of transfection between human and nonhuman animals, in which multispecies encounters defy the hygienic dictates of modernity. These dictates, as Colin Jerolmack observes, express a “deeply felt need for a sanitized city” (73) that emerges in the way that ideas of spatial belonging are understood as having to do with degrees of cleanliness. Philo and Wilbert write about the “marginal spaces” of human society that are populated by both human and animal “outsiders.” These margins are transgressive spaces, and their inhabitants, human and animal, are “out of place.” As Philo and Wilbert argue, “marginal spaces such as sewers, as well as becoming associated with both animals such as rats and the more ‘animalistic’ aspects of human behaviour (urine, faeces and other dirt), also constitute some of the symbolic recesses of urban societies in the developed world” (21). The persistent association of nonhuman animals and subaltern human beings with the violation of sanctioned hygienic practices suggests that it might be more productive to dwell in that space of contagion rather than to attempt to clean up animals and subalterns for participation in the dominant discourse. What alliances might emerge out of this germ-ridden place? What transfective potential inhabits these margins?

Nicole Shukin analyzes neoliberal hygiene in the era of zoonotic pandemic threat by drawing on Donna Haraway’s use of the term “transfection.” Transfection, for Haraway and Shukin, is a process that challenges the hygienic codes that delimit the kind
of contact into which humans enter with nonhuman animals. Haraway’s example is the kiss that she shares with her dog, Cayenne Pepper. She writes, “There must be some molecular record of our touch in the codes of living that will leave traces in the world” (2). The transfective encounter between species is one that transforms both parties in an unhygienic mixing or hybridization, and thus challenges any construction of the human as either exceptional or uncontaminated by animality. Transfection, as Shukin observes, is “a term that keeps trans-species touch and affection resolutely enmeshed in the biological risk of microbial infection” (489); it thus demonstrates deep biological and affective multispecies connections that defy clean demarcations. In this way, it challenges the spatial dictates of modernity that I have been discussing throughout this dissertation, and also opens up possibilities for relation and alliance — possibilities that embrace the disorderly nature of multispecies living in the world. While denizenship, as the disavowed shadow of citizenship, may characterize the general status of urban animals, I want to complicate this idea by looking at the transfective potential of interspecies encounters in two cases: Aravind Adiga’s 2008 novel The White Tiger, and the journalistic accounts of Sanjay Gandhi National Park’s urban leopards.

In this chapter, I examine the connection between human and nonhuman subalterns in The White Tiger, one of the landmark novels of post-millennial urban India. Adiga’s novel aims to expose the ruthlessness at the foundation of contemporary India’s capitalist success, and it does so by representing two iconic urban spaces associated with

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126 Like both Haraway and Shukin, I am interested in both real and represented forms of transfection, since both offer different potentialities and challenges. I will discuss these differences in more detail in this chapter, as I shift from a textual representation — Adiga’s The White Tiger — to a form of lived experience in the case of Mumbai’s leopards.
that success, Delhi and Bangalore, as animalized spaces. The use of animality as a metaphor for human subalternity is a conventional strategy in texts of postcolonial humanism. At the same time, the animalization of space in the novel opens up a transfective habitat that makes possible the transformation of the protagonist. Though this contradiction is ultimately contained by the novel’s humanist discourse, it both establishes the contemporary city as a multispecies space, and suggests the multispecies alliances that might, in a less humanist representation or in an embodied encounter, emerge out of that space. Seeking to explore this transfective construction of the city further, I then turn to the case of the urban leopards of Mumbai’s Sanjay Gandhi National Park, and their sometimes violent incursions into the city. This problem is usually discussed in the sphere of science — focusing on leopard behaviour and conservation — or social science — focusing on the economic inequality that gives rise to informal settlements, and on the spatial demands of the growing metropolis. Reading space as text can bring to this problem a recognition of alliances that transcend the discipline-bounded concerns of interested groups. A literary analysis allows a consideration of the imaginative geography of these particular spatial relationships; as Said argues, imaginative geography is, more than anything, an act of poesis that gives meaning and definition to space (55). In my reading, the journalistic accounts of Mumbai’s leopards are no less figurative representations than Adiga’s novel. Like The White Tiger, they try to envelop the animal in a controlling and delimiting textuality, seeking to govern and place the animal in an established and understood conceptual framework. The way that Mumbai’s leopards are represented in the media demonstrates the extreme tenacity of this
effort, to the point of denying the animals any room in the space that they, in fact, already occupy.

Chris Wilbert argues that “the spatial orderings of modernization as ideal forms were always ‘leaky,’ incomplete, producing marginal or liminal spaces, and were impossible to effectively police, even, or perhaps especially, in cities” (35). This practical fact goes against what Wilbert calls the “processes of re-modernizations” that attempt, in ever more rigorous and violent ways, to control, master, and delimit the realm of nature (36). The leakiness of conceptual and material boundaries between human and nonhuman in the urban context offers opportunities for reconsidering subaltern alliances against the hegemony of global capital, at the same time that it requires new ways of dealing with a multispecies world. In The White Tiger, it is the leakiness of nature/culture and human/nonhuman divides that enables the protagonist’s rise to power; the novel offers, in some respects, a radical simplification of the porous borders that define urban life in India. What the case of Sanjay Gandhi National Park and its population of leopards shows, however, is that this leakiness is articulated and experienced in myriad complex configurations that confront us with the need to reimagine our understandings of space, species, and belonging in the urban habitat.

5.2. Subalternity and Species in The White Tiger

Aravind Adiga’s The White Tiger is one of the best-known novels to emerge from the context of post-millennial urban India, and the exploration and exposure of the realities of its context are two of its principal aims; the novel represents the “inhumanity”
of global capital’s influence on the urban space and its residents. It belongs to a tradition of urban writing that has existed at least since the industrial revolution and that seeks to explore the gaps in the imagined geography of the city, to restore what that imagined geography disavows, and to expose what it tries to ignore or exclude. The novel enters the iconic spaces through which contemporary India is understood across the world — the spaces of capitalist expansion, and the spaces of destitution — and conceptualizes them in terms of species divisions. Through an obsessive insistence on the proper distinction between human and animal, and human and animal spaces, Adiga’s novel positions the breakdown of this distinction as its central metaphor for the catastrophic inequities arising from India’s economic and urban growth.

In a critical review of the novel, Somak Ghoshal accuses Adiga of trying to “ape” the voice of the subaltern. The term that Ghoshal intends as a pejorative, however, unconsciously gestures toward the text’s fabular quality: Adiga’s protagonist and narrator, Balram Halwai, is after all a white tiger, and not a “real” (human) person. Balram is, in fact, a figure, an embodiment of the predatory power of contemporary Indian and global capitalism. This fable of the tiger economy demonstrates that the fate of the subaltern human being, as wealth and resources are concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, is ultimately to be animalized. The novel articulates this view repeatedly through statements of interspecies identification: Balram, as an impoverished and disenfranchised human being, perceives himself as being like — or being treated as — an animal. This is identification as rather than identification with, in that it does not involve an empathic connection; it is designed to suggest that, for the subaltern human being, being treated as
a nonhuman animal is unnatural and unethical. The effect of this figurative identification is thus, paradoxically, to strengthen rather than to destabilize the human identity, and to reinforce the idea that animal and human are properly discrete categories. If Balram is rendered animal-like by his subalternity, it is, the novel clearly suggests, at the expense of his essential humanity. *The White Tiger*’s reliance on this trope of animalization makes it a work of “postcolonial humanism,” in Pandian’s sense (140). Balram’s “whole philosophy” — “Let animals live like animals; let humans live like humans” (237) — exposes the novel’s attachment not only to a strict and proper division between animal and human, but also to the human as a sanctified category.

The discourse of animalization based on interspecies identification is one of the text’s key representational strategies, but it is in tension with a pivotal moment in the narrative: Balram’s encounter with a white tiger in the Delhi Zoo. What occurs in this scene is an interspecies connection of a different order, an encounter that is premised not so much on identification as on a total subjective dissolution into the other. This instance of mutual exposure transgresses the boundaries established by the discourse of animalization, and opens the world of the novel to transfective possibilities and a different ethical potential for postcolonial, and posthumanist, representation. The nature of the city is intimately related to the transfective encounter because, while the contrast between the imagined geography of the city and its reality is represented in the novel using the discourse of animalization, it is the “leakiness” of urban space that directly facilitates the human-nonhuman alliance beyond animalization and beyond identification.

127 This is the same kind of comparison made by Fanon, as discussed in my Introduction.
In the end, the novel’s humanist philosophy cannot fully disavow the urban space as it has represented it: that is, as a hybrid animal-human habitat. With Balram’s encounter with the tiger as its focal point, the novel presents an important meditation on the representation of “animal” spaces — when the animal is defined not necessarily by species, but by the condition of subalternity itself — and on the possibility of transgressive and powerful multispecies alliances.

I will read Balram’s encounter with the tiger in detail, but I would first like to discuss what the novel establishes, from the beginning, as its dominant mode of representing species difference — that is, through the discourse of animalization. The White Tiger is the narrative of a poor village boy who, by way of murdering his employer, eventually rises to the top of the capitalist hierarchy of the “new” India. Written in part to address the rhetoric of “India Shining”\(^\text{128}\) that was prevalent in popular media accounts at the beginning of the 21st century (Jeffries), the novel’s use of the discourse of animalization aligns subalternity with animality in a trope that will be familiar from many texts of postcolonial humanism, both theoretical and literary.\(^\text{129}\) As I noted in the Introduction, the politics of representing the subaltern have been widely debated since Spivak’s contention that the subaltern cannot speak, but subalternity has consistently been taken to include only human beings. The otherness of the nonhuman animal is understood as its natural state, whereas the otherness of the subaltern is an effect of power and, therefore, an ethical dilemma. Despite its obsession with nonhuman

\(^{128}\) A phrase coined by advertising agency Grey Global Group in a marketing strategy developed with the Indian government and transnational businesses (Nandita Ghosh 42), and used by the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party as a campaign slogan in the 2004 national elections (Joseph 74).

\(^{129}\) As discussed in my Introduction.
animals, both real and metaphorical, *The White Tiger* uncritically adopts this anthropocentric perspective that is premised on the abjection of the animal and the sanctity of the human. But the success of its representation of that human has been a subject of much debate.

The publication and rise to fame of *The White Tiger* was greeted with a critical response that focused largely on the authenticity — or lack thereof — of the novel as a depiction of “the reality of India’s economic miracle” (Higgins). When it won the 2008 Man Booker Prize, the chair of the judging committee, Michael Portillo, hailed *The White Tiger* as “cutting edge” (qtd. in Higgins); another reviewer suggests that Adiga’s debut “explodes the clichés” of the Indian novel (Mattin). On the other hand, some found the voice of Balram Halwai, and his depiction of the rural and urban poor of India, inauthentic or false (Ghoshal, Kapur, Kumar). None of these critics, however, considers the representation of species in the novel, or the fact that Adiga’s narrator is an “inauthentic” tiger; like most approaches to fictional representations of nonhuman animals, these evaluations treat them as transparent figures for human concerns.\(^{130}\) Balram’s positioning of himself as a figurative tiger, however, is not only crucial to the exploration of the human-animal boundaries in which the novel obsessively engages, but also goes some way towards justifying the perceived inauthenticity of his voice, in that the narrative of this “tiger” uses some of the formal strategies of the fable. This formal affiliation is indicated, in one instance, by Balram’s nicknames for the landlords of his village: their animal names represent the “peculiarities of appetite” (20) that each man

\(^{130}\) Huggan and Tiffin make a similar argument about critical readings of literary nonhuman animals in general (149).
displays. The Buffalo, the Stork, the Wild Boar, and the Raven act out a fable of postcolonial power; the complaint that these characters are “cartoonish” (Kumar) or that they display “an absence of human complexity” (Kapur) thus indicates a misreading of the novel’s genre.¹³¹ The landlords’ behavioural and physical animalities are part of the larger animalization of structures of power that is the governing conceit of Balram’s narrative; as a result, it can be argued that Balram’s entire narrative is a fable, a morality tale using “transparently false” (Loveridge 11) animal characters to allegorize human failings.¹³²

What the novel suggests is that, by virtue of his subalterity, Balram encounters the world in a way that is “animal.” From the beginning of his life, and of his narrative, Balram identifies strongly with animals; he explicitly and continually links his own experience with that of the nonhuman animals who inhabit the same spaces, both physical and ontological, within this new social organization. On the wall of Balram’s childhood classroom is “a faded mural of the Lord Buddha surrounded by deer and squirrels” (25). This mural represents a fantasy of multispecies living in which the Buddha lives in peace

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¹³¹ Nandita Ghosh discusses the landlords as an inversion of the beast fable, with human characters becoming “animalistic” (44). Ghosh’s analysis thus recognizes the discourse of animalization at work in the novel, while ignoring nonhuman animals.

¹³² These characters can, for example, be read as an allegory for the “Jungle Raj” of Bihari Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav, who is widely believed to be the novel's “Great Socialist.” This idea is supported by Balram's reference to the “jungle law” that governs the postcolonial nation, as opposed to the “zoo law” of colonialism (54).
with “the gentle animals” (25). Against this scene, Balram’s father kills a lizard that has frightened his son, and, in so doing, presents a key meditation on animalization in the context of poverty and disenfranchisement. Balram, caught by the gaze of the lizard, realizes, “It was no different from me; it was terrified” (25). This moment of connection allows the young Balram to recognize the multispecies community that occurs not in the unity of peace (as in the mural), but rather in the mutual conditions of oppression. The lizard’s fear allows Balram to see that this “monster” (25) also feels his smallness and terror in the face of power: he and the lizard share an experience of the world that is “animal” rather than human. This identification across the animal-human divide may seem to represent an anti-humanist position; through the sharing of the gaze, Balram and the lizard momentarily achieve a kind of alliance that could, given space and the absence of violence, expand into a mutual recognition. What follows, however, exposes the anthropocentrism of the scene. Balram’s enraged father brutally kills the lizard, and then offers this justification for his action: “My whole life, I have been treated like a donkey. All I want is that one son of mine — at least one — should live like a man” (26). He associates animality with abjection and powerlessness, and by contrast endows the human with the power of self-determination and with control over the body of the other. He aligns the animal with a human who has been robbed of his essential humanity, with a

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133 The novel satirizes the assumption that “traditional” Indian life — dominated by religious precepts — was characterized by peaceful multispecies existence. This critique is also evident in Balram’s derisive references to M.K. Gandhi (28, 30, 31). The point is an important one, since many contemporary animal advocates employ this rhetoric of a “traditional” Indian respect for animal life (Maneka Gandhi, Sen, Sinha, Thapar) in a way that could be interpreted as Brahminical and/or anti-Muslim. As Karlekar notes, it is obvious that religious traditions including Hinduism and Buddhism in fact “permitted the instrumental use of animals which bred its own logic of exclusion, domination, enslavement, violence and slaughter” (11).
human who has been “reduced” to a state of animality. This moment demonstrates that animalization is a strategy that, like the fable, uses the nonhuman animal as a representational tool to express human concerns; like the narrative exclusions I discussed in the previous chapter, the discourse of animalization is fundamentally interested in constructing a narrative of humanity that leaves out the nonhuman animal altogether. As happens in fables, Balram’s father’s identification serves not to respond to or to acknowledge the animal other, but rather to reflect upon the status of his own humanity. Animalization thus works to maintain animal and human as categories which do not touch one another. This technique of “fabulization” is not only a “taming” or a containment of the animal, as Derrida argues in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (37), but also a dangerous acceptance of a prior connection between animality and abjection. Balram’s continual deployment of the categorical difference between animal and human relies on this problematic representational politics.

In his extended letter to then-premier of China Wen Jiabao, Balram writes, “Never before in human history have so few owed so much to so many, Mr. Jiabao” (149). Though he is making reference to the deepening economic divisions in contemporary India, it is also true to say that, throughout the history of human-animal relations, “so few” have “owed so much to so many” *animals*; animal bodies have literally fuelled human development. That Balram compares India’s poor to animals is, for him, a testament to their abjection within the structures of human power. They have been pushed

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134 As Frank Palmieri argues, with notable exceptions, “the literal, ostensible subject” of the fable — the animal — “fades in importance in the process of reading and interpretation” (83). Fables and other anthropomorphic texts thus tend to avoid substantial engagement with nonhuman life, maintaining instead an anthropocentric focus (Fudge 70-78).
so low within these structures that they have been, finally, ejected from them. Their exclusion from humanity is premised on a previous, foundational, and understood exclusion of the animal; as Nicole Shukin observes in *Animal Capital*, the “power to animalize ‘the other’ [is] a power that applies in the first instance to the animal itself” (10 emphasis in original). This exclusion of the animal is what makes Balram’s language of species coherent to his reader; without the prior abjection of the animal, we could not understand the disenfranchisement that is signalled by the comparison of human poverty with a state of animality. In Lena Khor’s analysis, for example, the novel’s animal analogies automatically signify that the poor are constructed as “less evolved, less intelligent than human beings” (47). The way that Khor’s interpretation accepts this conventional hierarchy of species exposes the novel’s reliance on the animal as a shorthand for subalternity; it assumes that its alignment of animality with abjection will be intellectually comprehensible, and more importantly affectively moving, for its readers.

In service of this affective strategy, Balram persistently uses animal analogies to capture the experience of poverty. The “Rooster Coop” (147) is his central metaphor for the social organization of post-Independence India; the image of chickens kept in coops in the butcher shops of Old Delhi, chickens who “do not rebel” (147) despite the intolerable conditions in which they are trapped, conveys the physical and psychological discipline of the poor in a graphic, visceral manner, without recourse to extended polemic. This kind of animal-human identification frees Adiga’s narrator from the necessity of heavy-handed didactic description while still achieving the thematic aims of
the book. The suggestion is that what is natural for animals — a lack of control or agency in their own lives, the domination and exploitation of their bodies, the disregard of the powerful for even their basic wellbeing — is unnatural for human beings. The fact that Balram and his family are “animal” in The White Tiger indicates how the economic conditions attending the rise of India as a global capitalist power have created a fundamentally unnatural way of being for the majority of the nation’s human population.

Throughout the novel, however, the humanist trope of corruption is coupled with a kind of interspecies transfection that cannot easily be coopted to a humanist politics of representation. This troubling contagion occurs primarily because the text is invested in representing boundaries between animal and human, and animal and human space, as dangerously porous. Initially, this investment stems from its humanist project: it is the unnatural and ruthless influence of modern capital that has rendered the proper division between human and animal unstable. At the same time, the text requires this transfection of worlds to effect a transformation in the protagonist, from oppressed subaltern to empowered “white tiger.” The result is a counternarrative that operates within the text itself, and against the text’s dominant perspective. In the rural setting, the landlords’ animality is part of an understood, stable hierarchy that exists in the feudal context of the rural “Darkness” (12); in the city, the attachments between species and their allegorical qualities are less certain, and possibilities for transformation open up in the cracks of the cityscape. The urban environment in the novel is represented as a corrupted, hybrid, and unclean space that presents a serious challenge to the spatial dictates of capitalist modernity.
As I have suggested throughout this dissertation, the policing of a physical boundary between human and animal has been a dominant disciplinary strategy of discourses of modernization; it employs the paranoiac idea of cross-species contagion as a method of excluding racial or cultural others from membership in a global modernity. Such a discourse ignores the worldwide reality of multispecies living in order to assign non-Western populations to a pre-modern, and also an animal, ontological category. That the Halwai family shares their living space with a water buffalo defines them, absolutely, as non-modern, even for Balram himself. Balram’s narrative is transgressive of this logic in that it finds traces of the animal in putatively modern urban space. In the course of his journey from his village, Laxmangarh, to Delhi, from rural “Darkness” to urban “Light” (12), Balram documents the ways in which what he considers properly human spaces have become animal. Balram’s observations about animality, despite the way that they pollute purportedly clean dichotomies, in fact expose his deep attachment to binaries of all kinds; he documents this kind of pollution because it offends his own imagined geography, in which animal and human are clearly and cleanly separated. But Balram’s dichotomies — like the difference that he constructs between Darkness and Light — turn out to be false, since the substance of his urban narrative is devoted to exposing the darkness that lies behind the myth of the Light, of India Shining. His narrative repeatedly complicates spaces that signify the modernity and development of the new urban India by introducing the presence of animals as an irruptive and corruptive force. To find the trace

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135 The representation of the water buffalo is also related to questions of gender in the text, since she is the central female nonhuman animal, and the lives of the women in Laxmangarh seem to revolve around her. She thus recalls, in an ironic way, the symbolism of the cow in Desai’s Clear Light of Day, and the cow’s connection to the place of women in the nation.
of the non-domesticated animal in the space of the modern city, as Balram does many
times throughout his narrative, is truly transgressive of the hygienic dictates of modernity,
and corrupts from within the iconic urban space of the new India.

_The White Tiger_ presents marginal urban spaces not as peripheral to the
organization of the city, but rather as central to it. The animalization of the urban space, it
thus suggests, is at the very heart of the operation of modern capital. Balram is able to see
the city in a way that the people around him — on both sides of the class divide —
cannot, and this capacity makes him an ideal focalizer for the novel. He is able to
perceive the way that structures such as the closed shopping malls and the gated
apartment buildings express an imagined geography that excludes the subaltern. This
realization on Balram’s part is expressed particularly well in his representation of the car
he drives, the “Honda City,” which is a hermetically sealed environment. He says, “We
were like two separate cities — inside and outside the dark egg” (116), but he is aware of
the violent disavowal on which this separation depends. As expressed in its name, the
car is designed to embody the exclusions that aim to dominate and control the urban
space. Balram perceives the imaginative geography at work, but he is also able to see that
this geography is not real, and he delights in pointing out the gaps in it. Delhi, in
Balram’s representation, is a place in a dangerous state of flux; the development of the
city is haphazard and uneven. It is, as a result, a place where interspecies encounters often
escape regulation. As Balram explains, “Delhi is a city where civilization can appear and
disappear within five minutes” (241). The boundaries between wild and tame spaces in

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136 Literally violent, since the killing of subaltern human beings (and, it must be assumed, nonhuman
beings) by such cars is represented as a common occurrence in the novel.
this context are necessarily porous and un governable. Balram is particularly eager to
document the incomplete modernization of the urban space itself. He says: “Now Delhi,
Mr. Premier, is a big city, but there are wild places in it — big parks, protected forests,
stretches of wasteland — and things can suddenly come out of these wild places” (180).
When he makes this remark, Balram is remembering a peacock who emerged from some
wilderness while he waited for Ashok to bribe a government minister. The peacock is a
national symbol, and here its appearance signals the gap between the symbol or ideal, and
the corrupt reality. Again, Balram’s narrative is interested in debunking myths, and
prising open disjunctures between the symbolic, spatial, and embodied currencies of its
context. The hybridity of the urban space, as demonstrated throughout Balram’s
representation of it, creates the conditions for his transition from interspecies
identification, through which he is animalized, to the kind of alliance he achieves with the
white tiger.

Two juxtaposed encounters between Balram and pariah dogs exemplify the
interpenetration of animal and human spaces in the novel and suggest the transformation
that is possible for Balram in the urban setting. One hot day, he sees three dogs cooling
themselves in a pool of sewage that has leaked from a drainage pipe. Balram’s
identification with the dogs is immediate: upon seeing them, he “got down on [his]
haunches and watched them” (221). Balram uses conventionally animal language to
describe his own body — by referring to his “haunches — suggesting that his desire to
join the dogs in the “cool” and “tempting” puddle (221) is a transgression of the species
boundary. Like Balram’s previous interspecies meetings, this encounter occurs in the
register of figurative identification: Balram is like the dogs; because he is poor he is
forced to think of himself as if he were an animal. And, as readers, we are meant to be
disgusted by Balram’s temptation. His desire to cool himself in sewage is a direct
challenge to our hygienic codes. The association between nonhuman animals and filth is
clearly established, and the improper touch, in this instance, is not represented as a
positive possibility.\footnote{This representation of hygiene recalls the association between the abject animal corpse and “filth” in \textit{Clear Light of Day}, discussed in Chapter Three. In Desai’s novel, the abject resists appropriation into
human representational codes; here, however, “filth” is an integral part of the affective force of Adiga’s
engagement with poverty as an embodied experience.} Nevertheless, in this encounter Balram opens himself to the
potential of experiencing the world as an animal. The dogs indicate to him the shadow
populations of nonhuman animals that populate the urban landscape; Balram suddenly
sees the animal world that exists in the unhygienic interstices of the modern urban
edifice, and he demonstrates a desire to explore it.

Almost immediately after encountering the dogs at the puddle, Balram notices
some paw prints embedded in the pavement and begins to follow them, tracking the
animal through spaces — the areas around the new shopping malls — that are meant to
exclude both human and nonhuman subalterns. This animal has left its trace on the
ground of the city, infiltrating and polluting human space in a way that cannot be erased.
Balram is following the animal, both temporally and spatially.\footnote{This representation of following the nonhuman animal opens up a parallel with Derrida’s act of tracking
or “ferreting out” the animal in Western philosophy (\textit{The Animal That Therefore I Am} 14). Derrida finds
the traces of animals throughout the human spaces of philosophical discourse, as Balram finds the traces
of animals in the human space of the city. The image of “being after” the animal in Derrida (10) offers
an important form of power to the nonhuman animal in the places where it is disavowed, as in
philosophy or in the urban environment. And, for both Derrida and Balram, the act of following
involves the unfolding of a nonhuman world within the intimate spaces of human discourse.} By following the path
that the animal has left, Balram moves beyond the discourse of animalization. Here, he
cannot identify with the animal; he cannot be “like” the animal, because the animal itself is not present. Instead, Balram both follows and is the animal. Balram thus experiences urban space in a new way; the trace of the animal opens up the nonhuman world of the city to his perception. By leaving its mark on the fresh, clean, concrete of these constructions that want to render it invisible and permanently excluded, the animal whom Balram is following has broken up the smooth structure of the urban space, both literally and figuratively, and Balram senses in this defiant action a kind of power he desires.

Walking in these nonhuman footsteps suggests that by inhabiting the animal Balram could — as this animal has done — assert his own presence in the spaces that exclude him. For someone so disenfranchised, this assertion of presence is a seductive idea, and opens up a line of flight outside of the discourse of animalization. This potential is re-enfolded by the humanist perspective, however, when the prints lead Balram to the slum where construction workers and their families live; the tracks end just in front of a line of men defecating. Adiga employs this image to suggest that these men are animalized by their conditions — in Balram’s view, only those who are ashamed of what they are doing, or rather where they are doing it, are “still human beings” (223). His anger at this sight pulls him back into a discourse of animalization, and this animalization is explicitly associated with hygienic practices that, purportedly, separate human from animal. But, although Balram, in this instance, recoils from the transgressive possibility that the animal offers, his experience of walking in nonhuman footsteps cannot fully be accommodated by the model of interspecies identification on which the novel has thus far depended. Although it is quickly suppressed, the momentary exposure to an animal world
that opens up in Balram’s absorption while following the tracks is a significant departure from the dominant representational politics of the novel. Similarly, Balram’s encounter with the white tiger in the zoo cannot simply be read as an identification of an oppressed human being with a captive animal. He does not maintain his subjective coherence as a human being in this encounter, and so the transfective moment thus suggests the transformative power that might attend alliance, rather than division.

Balram’s transformation is set up by the play between the powerlessness and the power of animality throughout the novel. In the comparisons that structure its representation of animalization, the novel uses animals who are generally seen as powerless and exploitable, in particular domestic working or “food” animals such as cattle and chickens. By contrast, it uses the tiger — whose symbolic weight I have already discussed in Chapter One — to represent the empowering possibility of transformation. The novel thus plays on preexisting ideas of degrees of animality, and degrees of animal power, by placing the most exploitable and exploited nonhuman animals at the bottom of those hierarchies. Narrating retrospectively, Balram clearly sees himself as inhabiting his animality, as the white tiger, in a different way from those “chickens” who are trapped in the “coop.” What keeps the oppressed compliant, according to Balram, is their attachment to human social constructs. Kinship, community, religion: all are constitutively “human,” and yet all contribute to the animalization of the poor. What Balram comes to appreciate, however, is the way that the “animal” may also offer a powerfully transgressive identity that can free the subaltern from animalization. In the earlier stages of the narrative, it is not clear that interspecies identification can lead
Balram out of this condition of animalization. Instead, this kind of identification creates a fully-realized and static mode of being that imprisons the human; the discourse of animalization thus creates a state, rather than a process or movement. Inhabiting the animal in the transfective encounter, on the other hand, allows Balram to break the confinement of identification; it allows transformation, and this transformation provides the narrative development that is integral to the story. It is only through his momentary alliance with the tiger that Balram is able to reverse the power relations between himself and his employer, Ashok, and to become, fully, the white tiger of the title.

Though he first acquires the nickname “white tiger” in childhood, Balram only understands the power that he can appropriate from this identity when he meets the gaze of such a tiger:

> Then the thing behind the bamboo bars stopped moving. It turned its face to my face. The tiger’s eyes met my eyes, like my master’s have met mine so often in the mirror of the car. All at once, the tiger vanished. A tingling went from the base of my spine into my groin. My knees began to shake; I felt light. [...] My feet were slipping. The ground beneath me was shaking. Something was digging its way toward me, and then claws tore out of mud and dug into my flesh and pulled me down into the dark earth.

(237-238)

Before he actually sees the tiger, Balram notes that there is a sign asking the viewer to “imagine yourself in the cage,” something Balram suggests he can do “with no trouble at all” (150). This work of “imagining” is in the register of animalization — he thinks of
himself as being captive like a caged tiger. But in the moment when their gazes meet, Balram does not identify with the tiger; he does not compare his animalized condition with the animal. Rather, his fainting indicates that his entire consciousness is overwhelmed by the trauma of meeting this gaze, and he loses himself in the experience. The tiger, too, is lost in this encounter; it is no longer an individual, but a “thing.” Both Balram and the tiger disappear in the moment of interspecies transfection. This encounter is a disjuncture in the narrative, in that it breaks from the mode of representation that the novel employs both before and after it. It is thus both a kind of focal point for the novel and a disturbance that is not fully mastered by Balram’s return to his confident narrative voice. The transgressive nature of this moment is clear in the language Balram uses to describe it. The oblique sexuality, that references not only interspecies eroticism but also Balram’s sexual attraction to Ashok, the violence, the fact that Balram cannot stay upright and clean, but instead is pulled down into the mud — all of these aspects of the passage suggest that, in this particular encounter, Balram is overcome and incapacitated by animality. He relinquishes the power to observe that he is “like” the tiger. Instead, he and the tiger — at first separate beings whose division is signified by the fence through which they gaze at each other — are melded in a fleeting but powerful alliance in which they both “vanish.” Staging this moment of encounter permanently fissures the novel’s representation of species divisions, so that the rhetoric of animalization is undone from within.

Balram’s encounter with the tiger is limited, however, in ways that allow it to co-exist, if uncomfortably, with the overarching humanist perspective of the novel. Like his
brief connection with the lizard in childhood, Balram’s meeting with the white tiger relies largely on the gaze as an affective conduit between human and nonhuman animal. This use of the gaze avoids the sense of touch, which, Shukin argues, is the real domain of transfective interspecies encounters. Balram feels himself to have been touched (by the “claws” of the tiger), but this seems to be a psychological rather than a physical form of contact; he is figuratively but not physically wounded, and there is no indication that the tiger has also been touched in this meeting. What occurs between Balram and the tiger is thus more an *animalséance* than a transfection (Shukin “Transfections” 488), and the encounter is therefore not a mutual one. This meeting is, like the rest of the novel’s engagement with species, at base anthropocentric; certainly, Balram is transformed in this encounter, and his psyche is infiltrated by the power of the tiger in a way that allows him to break out of his own captivity. Conversely, however, there is no sense that the tiger’s captivity, or his state of emotional and psychological distress is at all changed by meeting the gaze of this human.¹³⁹ This representation thus has the appearance of a transfective encounter, but in reality it uses the power of the tiger as a tool to facilitate Balram’s epiphany. It remains a superficial and distanced form of contact that does not engage with the nonhuman animal, even as it represents a kind of encounter that could open up to engagement. Like the nonhuman companions in *Clear Light of Day* and *The Man-eater of Malgudi*, discussed in Chapter Three, the tiger is used in this moment as a technique of disturbance, a usage that instrumentalizes and to some extent contains the power of the nonhuman animal. But, by breaking the representation of animalization, this moment

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¹³⁹ His distress is indicated by his repetitive pacing, a documented sign of stress, boredom, and depression in captive nonhuman animals.
suggests that more is possible in this encounter, even as the novel tries to control its possibility. The meeting between Balram and the tiger briefly suggests a kind of alliance that can lead us to think outside of the novel’s humanism, toward other forms of relation.

Nevertheless, by using the gaze, which preserves the physical and ontological distance between Balram and the tiger and between human and nonhuman animals, *The White Tiger* is able to maintain its humanism, and to disavow the kind of alliances it has invoked by representing this encounter. Adiga’s novel shies away from interspecies touch, and touch more generally: Balram’s narrative is based on his keen observation, rather than his sensory immersion in the world. The almost total absence of touch and smell in the novel is striking, particularly because of its focus on the embodied experience of poverty; this experience is always rendered in an ocularcentric idiom, as when Balram repeatedly comments on the emaciation of his father and brother. The dominance of visuality, throughout the novel, limits the potential of the interspecies alliances it suggests, and allows this potential to be contained within the humanist discourse. Although Balram loses himself briefly when he encounters the gaze of the tiger, the focus on that gaze makes the tiger into an image, rather than a full being. As Shukin argues, the *animalséance* has “a strangely de-materializing effect” since it is a “human-animal encounter drained of biological touch” (488). The gaze maintains the positional superiority of the human, as Balram maintains his superiority over his fellow subalterns throughout the novel through the act of gazing at them. In an additional strategy of containment, the transfective potential of the encounter with the tiger is displaced onto the murder of Ashok. Balram uses the power that he gains from the
encounter with the tiger to kill his employer, so that it is Ashok whom he touches and not
the tiger. When he kills Ashok, the blood that sprays into Balram’s eyes is what
transforms him. In a striking overturning of the visuality of his narrative, Balram is
momentarily blinded by Ashok’s bodily fluid, his “lifeblood” (246). But this human-
human transfection is an abandonment of the nonhuman animals who have been the
props of this narrative’s humanism — through the fable of animalization — from the
beginning. The transfection is displaced onto the violent touch between Balram and
Ashok so that Balram can inhabit its power, and this displacement works to neutralize the
transgressive potential of the interspecies encounter that is so provocatively suggested by
Balram’s meeting with the tiger.

The containment of the potential of the novel’s key interspecies encounter
indicates that *The White Tiger* remains attached to the animal-human dichotomy, even as
it documents its oppressive effects, but the narrative cannot fully contain the nonhuman
figures on which it depends. Despite the evident desire to instrumentalize the otherness of
the nonhuman animal in the service of an affective exploration of human subalternity, the
otherness of the subaltern and the otherness of the animal are bound together through the
unhygienic sharing of spaces, both material and representational. This contagion between
two categories of otherness thus renders the categories themselves unstable, and suggests
a politics of alliance rather than division. Balram’s encounter with the white tiger is so
pivotal for the text because it forms an outside to the novel’s own, deep-rootedly
hierarchical, representational strategies. In so doing, it presents, at least for a moment, a
possibly productive union of the concerns of postcolonial writing and animal studies, in
which the classification “animal,” as it is applied to both nonhuman animals and human
subalerns, is thoroughly undermined; rather than an identification that ultimately mourns
the animalization of the subaltern, the transfective encounter suggests affiliations between
animal and subaltern. In the encounter with the tiger, Balram sees both empowerment and
disempowerment in their shared animality. This complexity is important in that it
indicates that Balram is not using the animal as a placeholder for something that is
“lesser” than the human, as he is in his metaphor of the Rooster Coop; when he meets the
gaze of the tiger, the animal is no longer just a metaphor for human suffering. Throughout
the narrative, Balram conlates real animals and metaphorical ones. Here, instead, his
capacity to contain the animal through metaphor is overcome, and although, as we have
discussed, this encounter is imbalanced and limited, its power is nevertheless suggestive
of a more mutual, responsive, and unpredictable kind of interspecies meeting. From this
unhygienic contact zone, it is momentarily possible that both Balram and the tiger could
find ground to resist the power structures created by capitalism in contemporary India,
those power structures that keep them both caged.140

This emancipatory potential is both important and exciting, but the novel does not
allow it to take hold of the narrative; in the end, the text uses animality to express
disillusionment rather than hope for the future of urban India. Balram is narrating his
story from Bangalore, where he has established a business driving call-centre employees
to and from their workplaces. As he says, Bangalore is, both nationally and globally,

140 Balram’s transformation into a “white tiger” can also be read allegorically, as an allusion to the
predatory capitalism of the “tiger economy.” This reading is also in line with the postcolonial humanism
of the novel, and its commentary on the animalization of the human that occurs in the context of
intensified capitalism.
perceived as the beating heart of the new India. He describes the kind of growth he witnesses with typical perceptive depth:

When I drive down Hosur Main Road, when I turn into Electronics City Phase 1 and see the companies go past, I can’t tell you how exciting it is to me. General Electric, Dell, Siemens — they’re all here in Bangalore. And so many more are on their way. There is construction everywhere. Piles of mud everywhere. Piles of stones. Piles of bricks. The entire city is masked in smoke, smog, powder, cement dust. It is under a veil. When the veil is lifted, what will Bangalore be like? Maybe it will be a disaster: slums, sewage, shopping malls, traffic jams, policemen. But you never know, it may turn out to be a decent city, where humans can live like humans and animals can live like animals. A new Bangalore for a new India. And then I can say that, in my own way, I helped to make New Bangalore. (273)

The developing city, for Balram, is a site of potential. He is inclined to think that the urban “disaster” that he has seen in Delhi will replicate itself, but there is also a faint possibility that the city will be “decent.” A decent city, for Balram, will adhere to the imaginative geography of the modern urban space that is captured in the separation not just of animals from humans, but also of animality from humanity. Balram’s narrative, however, has clearly demonstrated that this strict separation is not really possible. If Balram — the white tiger — is helping to build the city, we know that it is already compromised from within; we know that it is built on the corruption, exploitation, and violence signalled by his fabular animality, so that the project of building a “decent” city
under these conditions is actually impossible for the novel. As Adiga represents it, there is no outside to this system. Balram’s triumph represents, in the end, not the powerful subaltern alliances that the novel evokes and then dismisses, but the ultimate inevitability of animalization as a result of contemporary capitalism.

Transfective encounters like the one Balram experiences can, despite their limitations, suggest powerful posthuman alliances; it is this kind of emancipatory power that emerges in Haraway’s work, in the linkages she makes among biological, affective, and figurative encounters. Shukin’s analysis, on the other hand, points more to the way that transfective images express ambivalent feelings about the meeting of species — the transfective encounter is always a site of disease and dis-ease in the social imagination.\footnote{The image on which Shukin focuses is of a child licking the nose of a pig through a fence. The photograph of this affectionate, exploratory gesture appeared online at the height of the H1N1 panic, and therefore represents a node of intersecting anxieties about improper touch.}

Though Shukin convincingly analyzes the configurations of power involved in the production of these anxieties, both she and Haraway focus on affectionate gestures — what Haraway calls the “nasty developmental infection called love” (Companion Species Manifesto 3) — in order to challenge the limits of appropriate interspecies touch. This focus is productive, but is perhaps contextually limited, because the transfective encounter can also be violent. To bite the other, to eat the other — these are also transfective meetings, and they are always possibilities that attend the interspecies kiss. The gravity of the danger that inheres in the transfective encounter is thus not fully captured by Haraway’s use of the term, nor by Shukin’s expansion of it, nor is it really evident in Adiga’s distanced use of the tiger in The White Tiger. A textual moment like
Balram’s tiger encounter presents one way of meditating on multispecies spaces and meetings. The kind of space that writing creates — and that I have discussed throughout this dissertation — allows certain freedoms that are important to the conceptual exploration of multispecies living. In *The White Tiger*, for example, the nature of textuality allows a fluidity between “real” and figurative animals that in itself creates powerful transfections. By using metaphors as a mode of bearing meaning across the species boundary, even the humanist discourse of animalization creates instabilities that it cannot fully control. This metaphorical flow runs counter to both the humanism of the book and the flows of capital that the novel critiques to create alliances between human and nonhuman animals. Textuality is thus both something that instrumentalizes nonhuman animals, and something that releases them into new intimacies with the human; this power of text is expressed, in particular, in Haraway’s hybrid prose. In material, rather than textual space, a different kind of encounter occurs, with different implications. In life, transfective contacts between human and nonhuman animals can be both transformative and destructive. Looking at such a space presents another, if riskier, way of examining the implications of multispecies living; riskier because, if the novel always escapes the author, the complexities of any given space will always, perhaps even more so, escape the theorist. But the effort to grapple with this risk is an important one; it is, for one thing, a corrective to the use of multispecies living as a textual tool of disorder. Such representations of unhygienic space make emancipatory promises, but it is necessary to consider in what ways these promises bear out. A discussion of literature cannot abandon real nonhuman animals, even if the texts it considers choose — to
different degrees — to (attempt to) abandon them. Nonhuman animals are, like human subalterns, used as figures or tools in textual forms, but neither human nor nonhuman subalterns can be reduced to their figurative functions.\textsuperscript{142} The second section of this chapter leaps into real space, and encounters between real human and nonhuman subalterns, and looks at the way journalistic writing tries to textualize in reverse these lived and embodied meetings.

5.3. Placing the Leopards of Sanjay Gandhi National Park

The lack of engagement with the lives of nonhuman animals in \textit{The White Tiger} demonstrates the limitations of the figurative representation of animals for addressing the subalternity of nonhuman lives. The novel uses the interspecies encounter as a plot device, and the nonhuman animal as a figure for the subalternity of human beings, thus altogether overlooking the possibility of a nonhuman subaltern. Nevertheless, the text’s exploration of the multispecies nature of urban space is significant. It raises the question of what possibilities this reimagination of the city might create for human-nonhuman subaltern alliances. To explore these possibilities further in a different context, by attempting to step outside of representation into real spaces and real animals, I now turn to the case of Mumbai and its urbanized leopards.

Sanjay Gandhi National Park,\textsuperscript{143} 103 square kilometres in size, sits in the middle of Mumbai; or, rather, Mumbai has grown around it, making it the largest metropolitan

\textsuperscript{142} We saw this instrumentalization of the human subaltern in Ghosh’s \textit{The Hungry Tide}, discussed in Chapter One.

\textsuperscript{143} Hereafter, SGNP.
park in the world. The park’s lakes are an important source of drinking water for the city, and its forests absorb air pollution from an urban area that is lacking in green spaces. As a large undeveloped tract of land in the middle of an expanding city, however, its protected status is highly contested: conservationists, environmentalists, real estate developers, and social activists argue over its proper place in the urban environment. Central to these debates is the fact that SGNP is also thought to contain the world’s highest density of leopards (Grylls 45). From 2002-2004, and again in 2012 and 2013, fatal attacks on humans by leopards from the park focused media attention on SGNP as a problem space. I want to examine these reports on the sightings and attacks, paying attention to the theoretical implications of their rhetoric. My purpose is not to engage in detail with the environmental, sociological, and economic debates surrounding the park. Rather, I am interested in the way that journalism, as much as a novel, creates a figurative representation of the nonhuman animal. In my analysis, I use largely local online and broadsheet sources, as well as some interviews with local experts conducted by foreign journalists. I choose this focus in order to examine how the spatial contest for the park is constructed by the local media, and the way that two groups of subalterns — human and nonhuman — are contained and categorized by this discourse. Both The White Tiger and these media accounts claim to show the reality of the new India, constructing a narrative (and counternarrative) of what Ananya Roy calls the “Asian century” (230). Adiga’s engagement with a common journalistic trope — the capitalist ascension of India in the new millennium — helps to locate how this trope functions as a narrative construction,

144 At last count, an estimated 21-22 leopards lived in the park (Shalya).
rather than a lived reality. An analysis of the novel’s treatment of urban space exposes the textuality in the way that reportage commonly treats the same context. The journalistic rhetoric constructs Mumbai’s modernity and its status as a global centre. It works to re-place animals in relation to their human cohabitants, in order to reconstruct, from the messy entanglements of contemporary urban space, a clean and understandable map of the division between human culture and animal nature.

Biologist Ravi Chellam calls SGNP a “small island” (qtd. in Grylls 48), and indeed, on a map, an island is exactly what it appears to be: an isolated green space surrounded by grey metropolis. SGNP is not a city park, but a forest, much of which is inaccessible to the public. The park is commonly described as being on the “outskirts” of the city, but really it belongs to the inskirts; I use this term to convey both the desire to cover up, contain, and control this wild space,¹⁴⁵ as well as the intimacy of the relationship between city and park. The boundary of the park is not a border between the wild and the urban, between properly animal and properly human space; instead, the park is a rift or gulf within the city, that the city seeks both to expunge and to contain. In The Open, Giorgio Agamben argues that the division between animal and human occurs first within the human, as, through a constant and fluid dialectical action, the human constructs itself by negating its own animality. Spatially, we can see that the park is like this “intimate caesura” (Agamen 15) within the human city. By containing and mastering this animal space, the city asserts itself as a modern urban organism. But what both Agamen’s discussion of the human and the space of the park show us is that what is

¹⁴⁵ I am using the term “wild” in a discursive sense, as part of the imaginative geography of species, rather than as a simple categorization of the space or its nonhuman inhabitants.
called human is inextricable from what is called animal. Ananya Roy argues that the postcolonial “megacity,” as a subaltern space, “renders the very category of the global city impossible, revealing the limits, porosities and fragilities of all global centers” (224). In fact, the megacity destabilizes the very idea of modernity that Latour calls “the modern critical stance” (11) by demonstrating that urban space cannot be clean space. The leopards of SGNP resist the spatial restrictions imposed by Mumbai’s modernity; they burst the membranes that separate human and animal into discrete cells and create zones of transfection that challenge the metanarrative of Indian modernization and capitalist ascension.

The leopard almost stubbornly survives across the world because it is, as a species, highly adaptable, moving with relative ease between different kinds of habitat, including those populated by humans. This adaptability makes the leopard, in fact, a perfect liminal animal, well-suited to life on the margins of the city. But leopards cannot be liminal animal denizens, in Donaldson and Kymlicka’s sense, since, though they do adapt to human settlement, they do not exactly “thrive” in this context (219). According to the model of the zoopolis, leopards should be sovereigns and not denizens; Donaldson and Kymlicka’s formula demonstrates the tenacity of the human imaginative geography, and how it refuses to account for such categorical challenges as these citified cats. This same tenacity surfaces in the way that commentators resist classifying the leopard as an urban, rather than a wild animal. In a report on the death of a young boy, Saurabh Yadav, Lakshmi Narayan describes her visit to Mandikoh Leopard Rescue Centre, where
leopards classed as repeat offenders are kept in captivity. During her tour of the facility, she sees two of these “delinquent” caged leopards: “They are magnificent creatures with glossy golden fur that glows in the afternoon sun. As Jeeya [one of the leopards] paces up and down the length of the cage, her sleek muscles ripple under her skin. [...] These animals will never be allowed to roam freely again.” This melancholic piece, as its title — “Indian leopards caged for life as attacks spread” — indicates, focuses on mourning the loss of the wild leopard, and by extension the loss of wild space, while repressing the fact of the leopard’s urban adaptation. These leopards, Jaya and Jeeya, never existed as they appear in the reporter’s imagination. They never really “roamed freely,” since their movements were contained by the human-imposed borders of a park, and their now intensified captivity is the punishment for crossing those borders.

But for Narayan, an urban leopard is a category mistake: in her imaginative geography, the leopard inhabits a wilderness that no longer exists in the real world. In a similarly mournful piece, Dilip D’Souza refers to leopards as “lithe, sleek beasts” whose captivity is a crime against their wild natures. The leopards’ problem is thus multiply spatial: they cannot choose their own space because their corridors for movement have been barricaded by human settlement and management, nor can they, any longer, use their own cartographic traditions to define the territories in which they find themselves. The park is simply too small to fit the spatial needs of so many leopards, and the boundaries they

146 These leopards are not those who have killed human beings, but rather those who have repeatedly been found “straying” outside the park’s borders.

147 The idea of a nonhuman imaginative geography is something that many conservationists stress as important in the case of the leopards. They are described as “highly territorial” animals who “know their area very well” (“Living with Leopards”). This idea bears further exploration, since attention to this issue could be at the heart of a new form of multispecies urban design, as some animal geographers have suggested (Michelfelder 79-80, Palmer “Placing Animals” 71, Wolch 734).
are expected, arbitrarily, to obey are always shifting. At the same time, their human cohabitants render them invisible by refusing, quite wilfully and in the face of undeniable empirical evidence (namely their presence and its effects) to locate them where they actually live — in a multispecies urban environment.

The leopards of Mumbai embody a doubling of endangerments, in that they — and the space they inhabit — are both under threat and threatening. The leopard as a discursive figure comprised of wildness and precarity is thus ossified into an object for conservation. The improper emergence of these objects into the space of the city endangers human beings, certainly, but also endangers human conceptual constructs. The leopards of Mumbai have, to use Philo and Wilbert’s term, created their own “beastly place” through the violent assertion of their presence in the urban environment. By breaking through two layers of imaginative geography — that of the arbitrary border between park and city, and that of the equally imaginative border between animal and human — the movements of these leopards can be seen to contest the ways in which urban spatial legitimacy is established. The presence of leopards in Mumbai tells us that absolute separation is impossible, and that the strict division of animal body from human body, and animal space from human space, can only be an illusion that will always be undermined by the encounter that mixes and melds those bodies and spaces. This encounter can be loving, destructive, or both, but it always does violence to the rigid categorizations it defies, as Haraway’s transfective interspecies kiss demonstrates. I do not mean to discount the seriousness of these attacks or the loss of life, both leopard and human, by attempting to theorize them as transfective encounters. It is true, however, that
the “man-eating” leopard resists the spatialization imposed upon it in the most literally visceral way. Through their attacks, certainly, but also through their very presence as “matter out of place” (as, I have argued, all non-companion urban animals are), they perform a shocking transgression of the imaginative geography of modern urban life. Like most cats, leopards are stealthy animals who are adept at hiding themselves, and as a result their appearances in the city are surprising and unpredictable; they introduce a wildness into the human space of the city that, once they have been seen, is difficult to repress.\(^{148}\) The attacks, as a form of improper touch, demand that attention be focused on precisely the beings and spaces that are most insistently disavowed by urban modernity. Each attack creates a singular zone of horror that journalistic accounts attempt to recreate through description, eyewitness accounts, and photographs. These zones are troubling anomalies in the urban space, and the reports about them manifest the anxiety that arises from the transfection between animal and human. Through the attempt to recreate the space of the attacks, the reports also engage in an effort to contain that transfection within the textual and/or photographic image, and to return each party of the encounter — leopard or human — to their proper spatial spheres.

Reports about the leopards of SGNP consistently display anxiety about the unstable borders between human and animal space. One 2011 report states that, due to the encroachment of slums upon the park, “[t]here is no longer a border between the forest and the city, and hungry leopards looking for food are not afraid of humans” (Tovrov).

\(^{148}\) The importance of visuality indicated by the descriptions of the attacks and the victims’ wounds, as well as photographs of leopard appearances, recalls Jim Corbett’s construction of the man-eater as an animal who improperly intrudes into the human visual field, as discussed in Chapter One.
Another account argues that “the national park boundary is patchy and not continuous, making people living in Aarey [a residential area bordering the park] vulnerable” (Baliga). A community organization called Mumbaikers for SGNP, which aims to improve public opinion about the park, quite logically points out that leopards do not recognize park boundaries. At the same time, on their website, they say that the boundary between park and city has become “rather porous” due to human encroachment (Ghosal). The boundary is thus both something real, that can be breached, and a faulty construct. At times, the park itself is configured as an organism: conservationist Krishna Tiwari claims that the forested buffer between park and city has “fallen prey to construction” and that the edges of the park are “choked” (qtd. in Vasudeva). In each report, the spatial relationships are changeable and fluid, but this fluidity is, paradoxically, aimed at placing the leopards quite firmly in their proper habitat. In this habitat, the reserved land, the leopards possess spatial legitimacy due to their construction as both wild and endangered animals. Their presence is sanctioned, and the city has a long-established relationship to the wildlife reservation as a legitimate category of space. As G.T. Chowhan, the Assistant Conservator of Forests for the area, says, “[e]arlier, animals had their space and humans had their areas” (qtd. in Manve). His temporal idiom exposes an imaginative geography that hearkens back to a past idyllic relationship between city and park, in which two groups enjoying equal spatial legitimacy were able to coexist. Even if this relationship never existed in this form, its rhetorical pull is as powerful as it is in The White Tiger, when, despite Balram’s scepticism about an idealized past, he still imagines

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149 I discussed the reservation as a spatial category in Chapter One, in relation to discourses of conservation.
a former world of clean demarcations. What has happened in the intervening time
between “earlier” and now, for Chowhan, is the expansion of “grey” or informal spaces in
the urban landscape, sprouting in the fissures of legitimate spatial claims. Roy argues that
“informality” in the urban context describes not just the space of the slum (the way the
term is most often used), but that it is, rather, “an idiom of urbanization, a logic through
which differential spatial value is produced and managed” (233). This kind of spatial
informality is what we see at work in Mumbai, when grey spaces such as suburbs and
slums are produced and then legitimized or de-legitimized. The entrance of the leopards
into middle class suburbs raises anxieties about the fact that these spaces, illegally built
(due to zoning violations), are still informal. In the claims by the residents of these
housing developments that the government is obligated to protect them from the leopards,
we see the attempt to produce and solidify spatial legitimacy, and the extreme anxiety
about sharing informal status with the slums.

When reports do acknowledge that the wild leopards troublingly enter into the
human space of the middle class city, the cats become figures for the horrific dissolution
of the physical and affective boundaries between animals and humans. Photographs of a
leopard in a middle class garden are called “chilling” by the Mumbai Mirror (Virat Singh
“There’s a leopard on my balcony”). A resident who saw this leopard commented: “I was
chilled to my bones as I saw the cat walk by the tricycle that Annapurna [her daughter]
often rides out there” (qtd. in Virat Singh). Middle-class residents have not been the
victims of the attacks (Ratnam and Ajmera), but, as is evident in the image of the child’s
toy, the leopard violates what they see as human space with a threatening wildness. Later
in the same article, a resident argues that “it is the government that has sanctioned these houses and allowed us to stay here, so it is also their responsibility to ensure our safety” (qtd. in Virat Singh).\textsuperscript{150} Despite the fact that the houses encroach on park land, journalistic accounts and residents are eager to establish the middle-class housing developments as human spaces in the city’s imaginative geography. In this context, the human beings are innocent victims, and the leopards are dangerous intruders. The rhetoric that surrounds the leopards’ presence in subaltern human spaces is quite different, since the urban poor, like the leopards, are excluded from the imaginative geography of the city. Both leopards and slums are figured as encroaching onto the legitimate space of the middle class developments. Though both slums and housing developments are informal spaces, only the former are imagined as marginal. Philo and Wilbert argue that “[s]uch spaces and their occupants are commonly regarded as transgressive of settled human society,” but that their closeness gives rise to “distaste, fear and loathing.” The margins, according to Philo and Wilbert, are therefore “coded as ‘out of place’ in proximity to everyday houses, businesses and streets” (21). If the postcolonial megacity is subaltern in relation to the global centres of the West, these marginal spaces are the subaltern loci within the postcolonial urban. This spatial subalternity shows that the contest for SGNP stands at the intersection between class and species that is always signalled when, as in The White Tiger, the discourse of animalization is brought into play. At this intersection, the boundaries between legitimate and informal use of space is blurred. Here, in the marginal spaces of the urban

\textsuperscript{150} In fact, in these areas, forest officials have launched patrols and erected fences in order to shore up the park’s boundaries (Manve).
environment, the leopards take on a different status in relation to subaltern human beings.

Discussing the ejection of illegal settlers from the park, Marie-Hélène Zérah comments on the fact that “conflicting interests [in Mumbai] have spatial impacts that contribute to the delineation of what and whom should be inside or outside the city” (123). Here, Zérah is focusing on the imbalance between responses to the urban poor living in informal settlements, who can be expelled from the park, and the lucrative real estate developments that encroach on the protected land without encountering obvious legal or bureaucratic obstacles. She seeks to assert the presence (and the right to presence) of disenfranchised human populations in the context of contemporary urban capital. But, as Ananya Roy, drawing on Spivak, observes, it is problematic to try to insert subaltern voices into hegemonic discourses, such as those surrounding spatial legitimacy, or to advocate on behalf of subaltern positions, thereby ventriloquizing them. The subaltern is not a fixed category, but a state of otherness that occurs differentially and intersectionally. Zérah’s argument, that decisions about spatial belonging point to constructions of ontological belonging, can also apply to nonhuman residents, whose presence, in the case of non-domesticated animals, is always informal and grey; non-domesticated nonhuman animals are always liminal, always denizens rather than residents. The leopards, as one nonhuman group, have a spatial interest in the land under dispute. The debates about this land are also about what and who — animal or human — belong inside the urban space, and animal and human are not necessarily divided by biology, but, as is represented in *The White Tiger*, by privilege in the context of capital.

Roy argues that subaltern advocates in urban studies risk installing the slum as a
problematic metonymy for the cities and nations of the global South in a way that denies “the inevitable heterogeneity of Southern urbanism” (231). We see the danger of this metonymy in the writing of foreign commentators on Mumbai’s leopards. Daniel Tovrov, for example, writes that “[s]lum life has always been dangerous, [...] but in Mumbai, India, the threat of leopard attacks only adds to the hazard.” In Tovrov’s analysis, the slum is a space that is naturally marked by danger, and the presence of animals is part of the construction of this space as liminal and unclean. This sentence also suggests, by conflating Mumbai with the space of the slum, that all life in Mumbai is “slum life.” In another piece, Jason Overdorf describes Mumbai as a “teeming megalopolis,” a description that evokes both contagion and animality. For subaltern urban studies simply to reverse this construction and privilege the slum, as Roy argues it does, thus risks legitimizing these kinds of spatial categorizations. Both Adiga’s Delhi and the Mumbai that contains slums, parks, and luxury real estate developments are spatially heterogeneous and complex. Roy seeks to foreground undecidable spaces — such as the “peripheries,” “informalities,” and “gray” locations — of the postcolonial city in order to point out the ways that urban space eludes definition, decision, and “zoning” in multiple and diverse ways (231). The relevance of Roy’s subaltern urbanism to a discussion of urban animals is that she brings light to the way urban space confounds singular definitions, and to the processes through which “spatial value” is unevenly assigned (233). These processes account for the way that middle class housing developments, which, like the slums, illegally use park land, quickly acquire legitimacy, while slums remain liminal and grey. In an account of a leopard being seen in a factory, for example,
the slum simply disappears as a space; Vishal Shah writes that the leopard “did not attack anyone. Instead, he [...] darted off towards the compound wall and into the slum area. [...] [T]he leopard was gone.” There is no concern, in this account, with what might happen when the leopard enters the “slum area,” which is likely to be even more densely populated than the factory. Instead, the leopard seemingly evaporates into liminal space. This account uncritically endorses existing hierarchies of spatial legitimacy, and, even more troublingly, entirely misses the point of the most salient critiques: that the humans most likely to be attacked and killed are not those in the legitimate spaces of suburb, high-rise, film set, or factory, but those in precisely the spaces that this story chooses to disavow.

Residents of the slums are liminal, in Donaldson and Kymlicka’s sense: not wild and not domestic, not sovereigns and not citizens. In this context, they are the denizens, living between the sovereign wild leopards and the citizen middle and upper class humans. An exemplary piece from September 2011 claims, “The residents of Mumbai’s burgeoning slums were being warned Monday about the growing danger from leopards roaming their streets. Makeshift suburbs stemming from the [...] city are overshooting into the country’s biggest urban nature reserve, causing tension between residents and their bestial neighbours” (“Leopards Roam Streets, Terrorize Locals in Mumbai” my emphasis). In this articulation of the problem, the identity of the “residents” in the second sentence is unclear. People who live in Mumbai’s slums are not, properly, residents; are these people, then, the “bestial neighbours” that the article describes, in relation to wealthy suburbs and Film City? The slums are “overshooting” into the park, and the legal
“residents” of the park are the leopards, rather than the human “encroachers.” “Bestial” can mean savage, barbarous, inhuman, or subhuman (OED). It is therefore not strictly an animal term, but rather a word that can refer to both the animal and to the animalized; Balram’s fabular narration in The White Tiger suggests, for example, the landlords with their nonhuman nicknames are “bestial” rather than animal. And implicit in this term, in its evocation of the less-than-human, is the concept of hygiene. The way that hygiene and class are combined in this rhetoric casts the urban poor, rather than the leopards, as the dangerous transgressors; through their spatial trespasses, the urban poor become animal and invite into the city the dangerous animality that should be contained by the boundaries of the park. But the discourse of animalization cuts two ways. It can be used, as in The White Tiger, to sympathize with the poor, and to create an affective impression of their disenfranchisement and precarity; on the other hand, and more often in the usage of local media on the problems of SGNP, it can be used to lay blame on the poor, as if with their unhygienic presence they create an animal space from which a generalized threat radiates into the cleanly demarcated city and park. This rhetoric emerges in the focus on two particular topics: garbage and defecation.

In some representations, the leopard attacks appear as a kind of punishment for the excesses of the city — excess growth, excess population, excess capital, excess mess; they are a retribution, a return of what is repressed in the “tiger economy” narratives of Mumbai’s burgeoning prosperity and growth. Dilip D’Souza argues that the attacks are a result of the city being an “engine of growth” and a “magnet for unemployed people.” The people are a byproduct of the engine, and like most byproducts, they pollute. In
many accounts, the logic goes that unidentified people dump garbage in the areas around the park, thus attracting dogs and pigs, and, in turn, hungry leopards. Various organizations — police, the forest department, conservationists — urge residents to try to control their waste, and to put it into sanctioned locations. Nevertheless, scepticism about the likelihood of success in these efforts is widespread in the media. D’Souza writes, “given how openly garbage sits around everywhere in this city, I can’t quite believe in a solution that is founded on overnight cleanliness.” Who is responsible for this proliferating “garbage,” and what is it composed of? The inference is that it results from the bad hygiene of the urban poor — they violate both sanctioned spaces for the disposal of waste, and sanctioned boundaries between animal and human. In many accounts, the garbage dump is metonymic for both the urban poor and the space they inhabit. For example, when Sunil Limaye, the Chief Conservator of Forests, says, “[w]e tell people to ensure there is no garbage dump near their buildings as this attracts dogs and pigs which are easy prey for the leopards” (qtd. in Clara Lewis), the only source of the garbage can be the slum, where there is no garbage collection. The “people,” then, are only those who live in buildings, and the “garbage dump” could easily refer to the slum itself, with its residents figured as the garbage. There is a rhetorical naturalization of the relationship between slum, garbage, and animal that makes the terms interchangeable for one another. Krishna Tiwari remarks that “the areas have been turned into garbage dumps, which has given rise to rodents and pigs and leopards” (qtd. in Nelson). In a similar vein, Ratnam and Ajmera claim that “[h]uman habitation generates garbage.” The phrases “gives rise to” and “generates” suggest both a natural inevitability — if there are slums, garbage and
animals will arise — and a cycle of production in which slums, garbage, and animals continually regenerate one another in an unstoppable process that will inevitably contaminate greater and greater space. Philo and Wilbert observe that “[s]ometimes the very presence of certain animals seeking to live their lives in these spaces [...] can help to render [...] spaces marginal in the minds of many humans, as ones to be shunned by all ‘decent’ people” (21). Dogs and pigs, in these accounts, both represent and create the unhygienic status of the slums and the subaltern human beings who also inhabit them. This use of the discourse of animalization by both officials and journalists positions the urban poor as the carriers of this nonhuman contagion precisely in order to delegitimize their spatial claims.

In addition to the obsessive return to the issue of garbage, reports on the attacks also consistently focus on the act of defecation. Although one uniquely sympathetic report on the death of Saurabh Yadav claims that the boy was playing when he was attacked by the leopard who eventually killed him (“Leopard mauls eight-year-old in Mumbai”), most accounts claim that Yadav had gone into the brush to defecate: that he was, in fact, “attending nature’s call” (Baliga, Abidi, Lakshmi Narayan). This euphemism is common one, but its usage is significant when considered in light of the discourses of hygiene and animality that run through journalistic accounts of the attacks. Modern urban life ought to mean not having to answer nature’s call; to answer nature’s call implies giving in to one’s animality, an animality that has no place in this spatial context. Speaking about Yadav’s death, which occurred in January 2013, a forest department official complained, “[t]here is a cheap paid public toilet, but locals invite trouble by
squatting in the open. They also strew garbage around, which attracts pigs and dogs, easy prey for leopards” (qtd. in Baliga). In this statement, the lack of hygiene is a choice, a willful transgression. Subaltern people are thus deliberately contaminated and contaminating.

Also implied by this focus on defecation is a fear of being consumed. For a leopard, a human being is food — food that will eventually be excreted. In this way the leopards chase down the spatial borders of the human even to the most intimate locations, and render porous the entire category of the human. Part of the function of the city is to protect the human body from incursions.\footnote{This idea can be seen in the current panic around bedbug infestations in Toronto, New York, and other North American cities.} In December 2012, a story appeared in The DNA, a daily broadsheet, with the headline, “Leopard kills guard, devours private parts.” In the text, the author reiterates that the man’s genitals were “devoured.” Finally, a police inspector is quoted as saying that his “private parts had been gouged out and eaten by the animal.” This repetition suggest a particular fear of consumption, not just of the human body, but of the most “private,” and, in the patriarchal context, powerful part of that body. The leopard’s excessive appetite — indicated by verbs like “devoured,” and “gouged” — conjures a sense of the threat. The “private parts” of a human male have no particular significance to a leopard (I assume), but the article suggests that this was a deliberate choice, meant to encroach on one of the central sites of human power. The article thus evokes a terror of being consumed, and an idea of the leopard as a being uniquely able to destroy the integrity of the human as both a body and as a category. This fear of being consumed and excreted is connected to the fear of space being eaten up by subalterns. It
is the subaltern body, by engaging in improper touch between species, that disorders the space of the city and opens it to the violence of the leopards.

The commentators on the attacks suggest that, by squatting, a human being inhabits the status of a dog or pig, one of those garbage-dwelling species to which leopards are attracted. Speaking about one of the fatal attacks, Tiwari says that the leopard “probably thought the child, who was squatting, was an animal” (qtd. in Vasudeva). In both the discussion of garbage and that of defecation, we see the same discourse of animalization that Adiga employs in *The White Tiger* applied to a real-life situation, but to criticize, rather than to advocate for, the poor. The blame for the attacks settles on the poor themselves, and on the pigs and dogs that they are like — the pigs, dogs, and poor are the “animals,” to be distinguished from the leopards, who inhabit a different order of legitimacy. This distinction between different forms of animality is similar to the relationship between powerful and powerless animals — between chickens and white tigers — in *The White Tiger*. The animals with whom the poor are aligned are both figuratively, in the human imagination, and literally “lower”: Abidi cites experts who claim that leopards are attracted to prey that stands roughly three feet tall. Crouching to defecate, journalists and officials suggest, causes the human being to take on the stature of an animal; the act of crouching transforms the human into a pig or dog, making the human the natural prey of the leopard, and making, in fact, the human a lower order of being than the leopard. The physical transformation into an animal, through the action of squatting, results from the violation of sanctioned hygienic practices: if these people used toilets, they would not display their animality in this way. This scene, repeatedly
etched in the accounts of the attacks, recalls the moment in *The White Tiger* when Balram crouches by the puddle of sewage with the stray dogs. Balram’s adoption of an animal stature is cut off both by the animals’ resistance to him — they assert their ownership of the space — and by his resistance to his own animalization as a subaltern, particularly when he sees the row of men defecating in the open. The local accounts use this same discourse of animalization to position the victims of the attacks as nonhuman animals, shifting blame from the leopards, who are only stalking and killing their natural prey, to the human beings who transgress spatial and hygienic strictures.

One international account provides a contrast to the criticism of the urban poor in the national and local media. Jason Overdorf decries “India’s notorious civic failures,” and writes,

> There is no garbage pickup and no plans to provide it, so the villages and slums attract legions of stray dogs. Fat and boisterous, these dogs have replaced the fleet deer and shy wild pigs to become the leopards’ primary food source. There are no street lights, no sewers, and no toilets, so to relieve themselves children and women like Swetha Paghe [one of the attack victims] must squat in the dark near the rubbish heap — where leopards mistake them for their dogs, or settle for them, just the same.

This is the discourse of animalization used in sympathy; as in *The White Tiger*, the slum is a space of abjection, and human beings are animalized by virtue of their subalternity. Whereas local journalists generally either do not engage with gender or focus on masculinity (as in the story about the security guard), Overdorf evokes patriarchal
paternalism by stressing that “children and women” are most at risk.\textsuperscript{152} He asserts the essential humanity of these people, unevenly pitted against the heartlessness of a failed state, by placing them in a space that is contaminated by corruption that is again signalled by the presence of animals. Overdorf’s purpose is to critique the position — that is implicit in many local accounts — that these people are as expendable as liminal animals. But his description also obliquely asserts the superior cleanliness of the Western city. Because India contains these corrupted, animalized, spaces, it is contaminated as a nation and therefore is other to the nations of the West. Reading this account, Overdorf’s Western audience is cued to feel sympathy, but also self-affirmation.

For Overdorf, urban dogs are carriers of contagion — attacking, contaminating, “legions” — and “fat and boisterous” objects of disgust. Overdorf opposes these dogs to wild animals, who have more desirable qualities. The dogs are a manifestation of the failures of the postcolonial state; they appear in the urban space as an infection arising from poor hygiene. This is an image of both human and animal space being overtaken and contaminated by the liminal animal denizen, by the wrong kind of animal. As in \textit{The White Tiger}, the unitary category “animal” is unsettled by the fact that different nonhuman animals discursively inhabit different degrees of animality. Donaldson and Kymlicka argue that “[t]he invisibility of liminal animals does not just lead to indifference or neglect. Much worse, it often leads to a de-legitimization of their very presence” (211). Dogs, pigs, and subaltern human beings, who are usually invisible in the human imaginative geography, are rendered hyper-visible by the leopard attacks; because

\footnote{\textsuperscript{152} This idea that women are particularly vulnerable to the man-eating cat is reminiscent of Jim Corbett’s colonial paternalism, as discussed in Chapter One.}
it violates so many spatial precepts of modern urban life, this phenomenon commands
attention. In the rhetoric of journalists and officials, we see the de-legitimization of
liminal human and nonhuman animals’ spatial claims in the effort to re-place the leopards
as wild creatures, rather than urban denizens.153

In March of 2014, CCTV footage appeared on YouTube of a stray dog chasing a
leopard out of a housing complex near SGNP (“Caught on camera”). The story was
quickly picked up by many outlets both within India and internationally. One of the
building’s residents commented to the press, “We have three stray dogs in the building
and residents often feed them. It was shocking to see this one giving a chase [sic] to a
leopard. We hope none of them falls prey to the leopard” (qtd. in Virat Singh “Mumbai:
Stray dog chases away leopard”). Virat Singh writes that the dog became a “hero” for the
residents of the building. This story coopts the action of the dog, translating it into
comprehensible categories in order to engage human sympathies. Both the quoted
resident and the journalist understate the dog’s liminality, installing her instead as a type
of companion animal (by being fed and by having an affective relationship with the
building’s residents). This story and the video that sparked it are about a spatial contest
between two nonhuman urban denizens that does not involve humans at all, but the
language of companionship and the language of wildness establish dog and leopard as
resident and intruder in a way that maintains the spatial legitimacy of the building while
totally erasing both animals’ spatial claims. In the case of middle-class housing

153 Karlekar’s Savage Humans and Stray Dogs bears witness to the paranoia and anger that emerges when a
typically invisible population of animals suddenly becomes visible, exposing the already “corrupted”
nature of the urban landscape.
developments like this one, the space always, by default, belongs to the human, so the rhetoric around the conflict in these spaces banishes the leopards to their own proper wild space. In the case of the slums, by contrast, reports claim that space as properly wild, so that the spatial restrictions apply not so much to the leopards, who are after all entitled to be there, but to their prey, who are constitutively in the wrong place — the urban margins, at the wrong time — the non-modern temporality to which they are relegated.

5.4. Conclusion

The rhetoric used to discuss the case of the leopards of Mumbai demonstrates the tenacity of the discourse of animalization and its hold on the public imagination. Like Adiga, these journalists assume that the comparison between subaltern human beings and nonhuman animals will immediately be comprehensible to their readers. Because of this pre-existing association, their criticism of the urban poor and slum settlements is launched obliquely and with an economy of phrasing. Similarly, and as in The White Tiger, other journalists use the same discourse of animalization to advocate for the urban poor. But the easy shift between criticism and advocacy, and the instability of these positions, demonstrate the limitations of Adiga’s postcolonial humanism as a resistance strategy. The changeable status of Mumbai’s leopards shows that the categories of animal and human — and the degrees of animality within them that might privilege a tiger or a leopard over a chicken or a dog — are fluid, but that this seeming openness always maintains the positional superiority of the most privileged human beings, who in this context are those privileged by capital. It is in the interests of middle and upper-class
residents to combat spatial claims by both subaltern humans and nonhuman animals; it is in the interests of developers to expel the urban poor in order to keep park land for later exploitation. Environmentalists’ focus on the slums as the source of the problem thus plays into the hands of capitalist interests that will, eventually, co-opt the space of the park altogether, since the privileged position of the leopard in relation to the urban poor and the liminal animals who inhabit the slums can change as quickly as more privileged human beings claim a greater spatial legitimacy. Though D’Souza ascribes the crisis in the park to the incursions of the poor onto reserved land, he makes a telling point when he observes, “it isn’t wild animals who win when they run into mankind [sic].”

Configurations of privilege always render the nonhuman animal infinitely exploitable, both as a useful cover under which to smuggle capitalist interests, and as an image to garner sympathy for disenfranchised populations at the same time as it ossifies them into a state of abjection, thus affirming Western superiority. As long as the discourse of animalization remains powerful, which it certainly does, postcolonial writers and theorists cannot afford to abandon the nonhuman animal. Instead, the postcolonial world needs to be understood as a multispecies world, in which subaltern alliances can occur across conventional species lines.

But, the question remains, what would such alliances look like, particularly in the context of Mumbai, where leopard-human encounters have life and death stakes? The gravity of this kind of improper touch is something theorists working in animal studies must take into account; as much as the transgressive transfection is important and liberating, it carries with it dangers that are unevenly distributed, here along lines of class
privilege. The high risk of contracting rabies in India’s subaltern communities, for example, endows encounters between humans and dogs in the slums with a different set of meanings. The need for affiliations lies, however, in the fact that liminal animals, both nonhuman and human, are disavowed in the urban space. Where these groups can be seen to be allied is in the assertion of their presence, the demand to be recognized. This demand is a crucial one, because if we refuse to recognize that urban space is multispecies space, neither the threats facing humans — such as leopard attacks and rabies — nor those facing animals — like starvation, imprisonment, and extinction — will be addressed. In the disciplinary divisions that occur in the discussions about Mumbai’s leopards, we see conservationists placing blame on the urban poor, and social activists excoriating conservationists and, indeed, nonhuman animals. Instead, it might be useful for these two fields of advocacy to recognize their affiliation, while also recognizing that they both engage in problematic acts of ventriloquism. Both conservationists and social activists ought to focus more attention on the problems from which these conflicts arise, namely the narrative of India Shining that silences subalterns, and the intensification of the hold of global and national capital on urban space, which in turn disavows subaltern spatial legitimacy. Making the urban environment more species-inclusive (in a way that includes protecting the subaltern human population from predators) means reconfiguring space in an anti-capitalist way, and this is where the real
possibility, and the real threat to power, of the multispecies alliance lies. Haraway calls the transfective encounter a “forbidden conversation” (Companion Species Manifesto 2); in the case of Mumbai, it is important to ask who forbids the conversation between human subalterns and nonhuman animals, and to what end.

*My Dog is My Home*, the inaugural exhibition of the National Museum of Animals and Society in Los Angeles, presented the stories of “homeless interspecies families” in the voices of the “experts” — that is, of the families themselves (Kim). The exhibition focused on the way human and nonhuman subalterns find “homes” within the alliances they forge with one another, by sharing the intimate conditions of their living. In its redrawing of the boundaries of the family and of urban spatial legitimacy, this exhibition disordered the cleanliness of the modern city and the purity of the human as a category. It asked for the city to be reconfigured as multispecies space, so as to accommodate these interspecies alliances, and it made this demand in concrete terms (such as suggesting that more resources dedicated to alleviating the hardships and dangers of homelessness should be open to multispecies families). I draw attention to this exhibition in order to connect it with the story of a man known only as Lokesh who was, in January of 2015, featured on the Facebook page and the blog of Animal Aid Unlimited (“Slum-dweller in India shares food with street dogs”). He came to the attention of this

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154 Jennifer Wolch offers as a case study the revivification of the Los Angeles River and the creation of “an evolving green corridor” that invites nonhuman animals back into the urban space (737); this was an effort conducted in the face of large-scale capitalist opposition, in one of the most densely populated cities in North America. Another example of such a multispecies reconfiguration of space would be, as Clare Palmer suggests, to allow groups of feral cats and dogs to live in the city, rather than to confine them in shelters where they are often euthanized (“Killing Animals in Animal Shelters” 184). Such programs are already in place in many cities, including Toronto, although it must be noted that they do involve reproductive control.
organization when he called them to report an injured dog; when they investigated, they found that Lokesh and his family, who live in an informal settlement and make their living as rag-pickers, share not only their food, but also their small living space with a feral dog and her three puppies. These families pool their limited resources (food, shelter, warmth, companionship, and protection from danger) in a multispecies alliance that appears, in the blog’s video segment, to be characterized by mutually affectionate touch. At one moment, Lokesh puts his hand into the mouth of the mother dog, evoking the very real transfective threat of the rabid bite, while she looks at the camera and wags her tail. As in the title of the museum exhibition, these subaltern beings — human and nonhuman — make homes for one another. Their affection creates for them a kind of mutually recognized spatial legitimacy that, while fragile, manages to contest the domination of the urban environment by the privileged and powerful. Lokesh, who is totally marginalized by the structures of postcolonial power, offers a way of making space for nonhuman animals that, unlike many manifestations of animal advocacy in India, does not re-entrench existing hierarchies, and that does not slip easily into the discourses of capitalist expansion, Hindu nationalism, or charitable paternalism with which elite animal welfare initiatives are so imbricated.

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155 Lokesh does not speak to the camera during the video; it presents, rather, a series of images of the family interacting with one another.

156 Maneka Gandhi, for example, is one of India’s most outspoken animal rights advocates. As the widow of Sanjay Gandhi, and a long-time BJP member and current minister in the Modi government, she is highly privileged in the context of the political, cultural, and capitalist inheritances of postcolonial India. Gandhi is the founder of People for Animals, and the patron of the Sanjay Gandhi Animal Care Centre, which is a large sanctuary in an affluent area of Delhi, a multispecies space that makes room for all kinds of nonhuman animals within the urban space. In her advocacy for these causes, however, Gandhi mobilizes a kind of religious and cultural nationalism that plays on the cultural capital associated with kindness to animals in the Indian context (which I discussed particularly in Chapter Two).
Angeles, and the case of Lokesh and his family in Udaipur, represent a reversal of the protests with which I began this chapter, against the title of *Slumdog Millionaire*. These cases embrace the alliance between human and nonhuman subalterns, and create affective and physical webs of mutual care that are, in their own right, powerful. If Lokesh were to make a sign about himself, it may say “I am a slumdog. I am the future of India,” and this statement, so different from the postcolonial humanism of the original, may in fact hold greater promise as an emancipatory vision of Indian futurity.

Across the world, urban spaces present the most challenging, pressing, and theoretically interesting examples of disorderly multispecies living in our current context. And, in the case of India, the city has replaced the wild of the conservationist, the body of the satyagrahi, and the home of the village, the community, or the family, to become the iconic space of the contemporary nation. While the postcolonial identity of India has been tied to all of the spaces discussed in these chapters, it is now firmly harnessed to the metropolis. The city is thus the most fitting multispecies habitat with which to close these chapters. What continued interspecies contacts show is that it is necessary to rethink the basic premise that governs many of our categorizations of space: that animal and human spaces can be separated. As the leopards from SGNP increasingly move into the human space of Mumbai, it becomes clear that the bodily meeting of species is not a remnant of pre-modern life, but rather a constitutive part of the postcolonial modern. That it is disenfranchised people who inhabit the liminal space between park and city, and who themselves, by virtue of their disenfranchisement, are on the threshold of animal and human categories, highlights the urgency of the question of species to a postcolonial
politics. The questions of who can legitimately locate themselves inside the city, of who is the resident and who is the beast, have urgent implications not just for the humans and leopards of Mumbai, but also for similar contentious multispecies spaces across the globe.
6. The Zoo: Postscript

In September of 2014, an incident occurred at the National Zoological Park in Delhi that resonated with both kinds of encounter discussed in the last chapter: it took place in the specific location and involved the same species as Balram’s transformative meeting in *The White Tiger*, and it was marked by the same violence as the leopard-human encounters surrounding SGNP. A young man, named in all reports only as Maqsood, entered the enclosure of Vijay, the Delhi Zoo’s white tiger, and was killed by him. This incident was widely covered by local, national, and international media, in part because of its sensational nature, and in part because onlookers recorded graphic video of the full (approximately fifteen-minute) encounter.

In each of the chapters of this study, I have considered a space in which human and nonhuman animals come into contact in the context of Indian modernity; I have used the vocabulary and concepts evoked by these particular spaces to unfold ways of thinking about multispecies living in both material and metaphorical terms. Through the encounter between Maqsood and Vijay, I would like to conclude with a brief look at one more such space: the zoo. The zoo, like the conservation area, the body, the home, and the city, is a space that both invites and polices contact between human and nonhuman animals. It is also a space that is historically intertwined with the spatial imaginations of colonialism and modernity and, today, with conservation and capitalism. As such, it begs a fuller consideration than I will be able to give here, but it is also, as a point of intersection of

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157 For further reading, two important studies of the zoo as an institution are Randy Malamud’s *Reading Zoos: Representations of Animals and Captivity* and Nigel Rothfels’s *Savage Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (to which I refer below).
the discourses I have discussed throughout this study, an appropriate space with which to end. I have called this ending a postscript because the idea of disorderly multispecies living, as I have interpreted it, requires a tension and a lack of closure in order to function as a form of ethical relation; multispecies bonds thrive, instead, in radical openness. So, rather than to provide a definitive conclusion, I would like to use this postscript to investigate how the space of the zoo opens further directions for inquiry that complicate the question of relationships between human and nonhuman animals. The questions raised by the encounter between Maqsood and Vijay in the Delhi zoo suggest both the danger of appropriative reading and writing about nonhuman animals, and also ways in which writing and reading may strive to be non-appropriative.

Vijay’s killing of Maqsood is an interspecies encounter that confronts the would-be interpreter with several layers of opacity. Did Maqsood fall into the enclosure, or did he jump, and, in either case, what motivated him? Accounts are quick to ascribe his actions either to drunkenness (“Tiger kills man in Delhi zoo,” Malm) or to mental illness (“Tiger Tragedy,” Nandi and Bhattacharya). These rationalizations assert the spatial legitimacy of the tiger in his enclosure, and that of the human onlookers who stayed outside the barrier; they cast Maqsood, in his refusal to observe the spatial division between human and nonhuman animals, as an anomaly. In these readings, Maqsood is a transgressor, and in this respect the narrative of the incident constructed by the media echoes the disavowal of subaltern spatial claims discussed in the last chapter. This opacity is intensified by the fact that the story was a one-day sensation that the news media seemingly did not think worthy of deeper investigation or follow-up.

Neither explanation was fully verified.
narrative also relieves the zoo officials — and the zoo itself, which may be seen to be at fault for bringing these two species into such dangerous proximity — of any culpability. The media reports thus function to reproduce an official narrative that legitimizes both the management of this particular zoo and the institution of the zoological park as a spatial category.\footnote{In fact, however, the role of the officials in this encounter also raises questions. The white tiger enclosure is bounded by a knee-high fence and a low concrete wall, both easily crossed by a human being of average height. From the human side, then, there seems to be an assumption that no one will want to cross this boundary; it is symbolic, marking a line between human and nonhuman spaces. Onlookers suggested that Maqsood took some time approaching the enclosure (Mackay and Robson, Nandi and Bhattacharya, Malm). Faced with such transgression on Maqsood’s part, why did zoo officials not work harder to enforce the boundaries separating him from Vijay?}

In considering this encounter, we are also confronted by the opacity of the nonhuman animal’s perspective. Why did Vijay look closely at Maqsood for ten to fifteen minutes before touching him? What was Vijay thinking? How did he interpret this sudden and strange presence in his living space? Why did this captive-born tiger, who had spent his whole life on display for human entertainment and who was therefore relatively used to human presence, decide to kill this man? This incident opens, and refuses to close, such questions about the motivations and desires that underlie the encounter. What occurred between Maqsood and Vijay represents the kind of disorderly multispecies living that has been the focus of this dissertation, in that it undermines the spatial order that allows the zoo to function.\footnote{Although, in another respect, it is a logical extension of the spatial order of the zoo, since the zoo, by allowing interspecies proximity, also allows the human viewer to enjoy feeling endangered by the nonhuman animal. In this respect, the zoo attempts to replicate the experience of vulnerability that Jim Corbett, for example, sought in his tiger hunts.} Because of its particular resistance to interpretation, it also evokes the problems of reading such moments. The questions raised by the meeting between Maqsood and Vijay suggest that every encounter — inter- or intra-species —
may be characterized by an otherness that is uninterpretable by the outsider, and even by the participants themselves, and that both human and nonhuman animals evade interpretive closure. While I have, throughout this study, been eager to respect the responsiveness and the resistance of nonhuman animals in particular, this incident draws attention, rather, to the fact of otherness, and therefore to the ethical pitfalls — such as ventriloquization, instrumentalization, and appropriation — involved in the interpretation of moments, and spaces, of encounter.

Although it is, as a story, sensational and shocking, what occurred between Maqsood and Vijay replicates in dramatic form the kind of encounter that thousands seek by going to the zoo. A modern zoo stages interspecies encounters in a setting that simulates nature. Its displays emphasize visual access to the nonhuman animal, and their design betokens the human eagerness to be awed by nonhuman animal presence; these are encounters deeply inscribed with human desire. But, John Berger argues, the central question that comes to the mind of the human zoo patron is “[w]hy are these animals less than I believed?” (23); that is, why am I not overcome by their presence, as Balram is in *The White Tiger*? Berger suggests that the zoo must always “disappoint” because, although we humans may look at the nonhuman animal in the zoo, we cannot “encounter

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162 And perhaps, also, to recognize themselves through the nonhuman animal; as any visitor to a primate display will have overheard, the observation that nonhuman animals are “like us” is pervasive in the zoo setting.

163 For Berger, this question dominates the experience of the adult zoo visitor (23). This argument suggests that such zoo goers do not take into account the institutionalized space in which they encounter imprisoned nonhuman animals. There are signs, however, that this kind of cognitive blindness is being effectively challenged by advocacy and journalism; we see this particularly in the recent discussions of aquaria and their cetacean captives (see, for example, the “Marineland” section of thestar.com for The Toronto Star’s extensive exposé of that institution, or the recent film *Blackfish* which takes on SeaWorld).
the look of the animal” (28): we can gaze at the nonhuman animal, but the captive nonhuman animal cannot return the gaze. Thus zoos, in Berger’s estimation, only emphasize the profound and unredeemable isolation of the human (28). Berger writes, “[t]he zoo to which people go to meet animals, to observe them, to see them, is, in fact, a monument to the impossibility of such encounters” (21). This is perhaps one source of the fascination with the encounter between Maqsood and Vijay; by breaking a spatial boundary that is usually taken to be inviolate, Maqsood seems to provoke a different kind of interspecies meeting. He seems to call Vijay out of his “indifference” — the state that, according to Berger, dominates the daily lives of captive animals (26). Indeed, Maqsood holds Vijay’s gaze for long minutes, just as the encounter itself holds the gaze of the camera. That this encounter is fatal, however, perhaps underscores Berger’s point: in the context of modernity and its enforcement of the species boundary, the interspecies meeting is often inscribed with loss.

The zoo is also a space that is evocative of colonial power, as Berger and others note (Berger 21, Malamud 58, 61, Pick 105). This resonance adds another layer of complexity to the story of Maqsood and Vijay; in encountering one another, both the subaltern man (someone who is either a “drunk” or mentally ill) and the nonhuman animal are on display for the immediate and second-hand audiences (the viewers of the video recordings). The spectacle created by this meeting recalls the way that, in the early zoos, “exotic” nonhuman animals were displayed alongside colonized human beings, as Nigel Rothfels documents in his history of the zoological park (8-9). By encountering one another, Maqsood and Vijay both embody and perform — for the viewers — their own
marginalization. Rothfels argues, however, that “regardless of how much we may desire the animals in our collections to return our look […] it is precisely when they do look back that the edifice undergirding the zoological garden begins to collapse” (12). The disturbing encounter between Maqsood and Vijay can be seen as a form of “looking back”; it disrupts the imaginative geography of the zoo, which parallels the imaginative geographies of modernity that have been a focus of this dissertation. While I have tried to find, in such moments of disruption, subaltern alliances that might speak back to the forms of power expressed in such spatial constructions, the fatality of this particular encounter reminds us of the possible gravity of such meetings for subaltern human beings and nonhuman animals alike.

As Berger’s argument emphasizes, the zoo encounter is something that takes place at the expense of the nonhuman animal; zoos are spaces in which nonhuman animals are transformed, through boredom and dependence, into simulacra of themselves (26). The question that is opened by Berger’s observations on the zoo, when they are coupled with the encounter between Maqsood and Vijay that is so evocative of the textual encounters I have been discussing, is whether literary representations of nonhuman animals in fact function like zoological parks. Like zoos, the texts that this study has analyzed create staging grounds for interspecies encounters; this staging, I have argued, is central to the postcoloniality of these texts, in that it creates disorder in the spatial imagination of hegemonic modernity. But the consideration of the zoo raises the following questions: do these representations merely create nature-like “enclosures” for the simulacra of multispecies living? And, if it is the case that the literary spaces of disorderly
multispecies living function as a kind of textual zoo, do the kinds of encounter I have
discussed — like the meeting between Maqsood and Vijay — expose this
constructedness? Through this exposure, do they create lines of flight outside of textual
enclosures?

Anat Pick suggests that cinema has the power to function as what she calls a
“cine-zoo” — that is, “as a zoomorphic stage that transforms all living beings —
including humans — into creatures” (106). This cine-zoo is something like the way I
have been reading the literary encounters in this dissertation: as forms of representation
that, once on the page (or on the screen), to some degree escape textual enclosure in a
way that nonhuman animals kept in literal zoos in most cases cannot. The textual spaces I
discuss thus evoke an idea of multispecies literature, even as this idea is limited by the
fact that literature is a form of human expression. What this dissertation has proposed,
then, is similar to Pick’s conception of “vegan cinema”; vegan cinema is both a critical
method of reading cinematic texts that is “acutely aware of the instrumentalisation of
animals” and a filmmaking practice that would involve a “non-instrumentalising way of
looking at animals, what you might call a non-devouring gaze” (qtd. in “Interview” 2).
Throughout the preceding chapters, I have read texts in a way that is attentive to the use
they make of nonhuman animals, but I have also noted the instances when these texts
cannot fully instrumentalize the animals they represent. I have thus engaged in a non-
devouring reading practice, in that I have refused to accept the humanist closure of the
question of the nonhuman animal (in texts such as The Hungry Tide and The White Tiger,
for example). But these readings also suggest, I argue, a way that literature itself might be
seen as “non-devouring.” To devour can mean “to make a prey of, to prey upon” (OED), a definition that captures, with neat irony, the way these texts prey upon the figurative meanings of nonhuman animals. At the same time, to devour means “to swallow or eat up” (OED emphasis mine), which, as my analyses have shown, texts cannot do — this study has demonstrated that literary texts can never totally consume, or “eat up,” the subjects of their representations.

The idea that the multispecies literary spaces I have discussed might be non-devouring in this sense is, I argue, even more important to the ethical potential of these texts than the ways that they instrumentalize nonhuman animals as figures of political disturbance. A non-devouring literature would mean that, as I have been arguing throughout these chapters, even postcolonial humanist texts cannot totally harness the power of their nonhuman animal representations. These animals always represent themselves; they assert their presence even as their presence, as animals, is disavowed. Textual representations do instrumentalize both nonhuman animals and human subalterns for political purposes, but this usage fails to fully account for those lives. This failure, in itself, might be one place to locate the emancipatory potential of such representations — the failure creates disorder in the representations themselves, challenging the order that the texts attempt to establish.

The encounter between Maqsood and Vijay — in one of the paradigmatic spaces uniting the affects of colonial and species-based exploitations — and the response to it, demonstrate the complex nexus of desires that attend the interspecies encounter. As humans, we approach nonhuman animals with desiring and devouring gazes that are
usually, in some respect, exploitative, whether we want nonhuman animals to give up their bodies to our dinner plates, to our embraces, or to our constructions of ourselves (including to our constructions of ourselves as ethical, even nonharming, beings). As a human being who engages in multispecies living, as an advocate who works towards the protection of and respect for nonhuman animal lives, and as a theorist who interprets encounters between species as powerful forms of relation, I am faced with the difficulty of honouring otherness, while also honouring connection and communication. At the end of this study, I want to turn again to the possibilities of responsiveness, resistance, and alliance that belong to the idea of disorderly multispecies living. By opening questions about the encounter between Maqsood and Vijay, and by resisting the urge to close them, we perform a non-devouring reading that can both respect and respond to the otherness of the nonhuman animal, of the human subaltern, and of the multispecies encounter.


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