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Mysteries and Manifestations of Tiger in Literature Across the World: Interpretations

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ABSTRACT

Since time immemorial, tiger is an inseparable entity from the human world. Apart from mythological, historical, religious and tribal cultural perspectives, tiger is a plaything as well as a protagonist in folktales, fantasies and graphic novels bearing unique personality synonymous to kings and monarchs. Slowly, tiger becomes a metaphor for the humans having bravery and strength. In this context, the present paper critically focuses on the multiperspective interpretations of tiger as a construct for writers across the world. It includes the aesthetics reflected in the poetry of William Blake, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Leslie Norris, Hilaire Belloc and hideous experience of The Lu. While critically deliberating on the zoophilistic sense, it is found that the contents of the poems range from the state of the wonderful and majestic ethereal presence of tiger as the burning beauty to captive and powerless zoo animal that becomes ironical. Similarly, the hunting narratives of Jim Corbett and John Vaillant tends to nostalgic reminiscences of the pastime of wildlife professionals. Moreover, the tiger takes a metaphorical transit from its gloomy wild abode to the modern society where human beings become symbolic and make a satiric presence of tiger connotatively. In this context, *The White Tiger* by Arvind Adiga is a burning example. Thus, the study of tiger literature makes us interpret it as a cosmopolitan context.

Keywords: *tiger, historical, religious, and cultural, aesthetic, zoophilist*

FULL PAPER

1. Introduction

All the way, tiger is a matter of hot debate among children; sometimes, it acts as a ferocious being, and takes a central role in the discussions of hunters and tribal people. Even now, the elderly villagers living life near the dense forests make it a story out of their experience and adventure with the background of tiger. It has captivated the people since time immemorial, feared and revered at the same time. This holy union of man, nature and the spiritual world forms an underlying theme through many of the beliefs surrounding tigers. In some cultures, tiger is associated with the god of wealth, and it is thought to bring good fortune to those who possess its image. In some legends, tiger is a symbol of loyalty and courage, and it is often depicted as a faithful companion to some of the kings. Tiger is a recurrent motif and an unavoidable character both history and literature. This magnificent beast has been given positions of the pet animal meant to work as a conveyance for goddess Durga, and a protector of the tribal. Also, the animal is associated with lots of tribal and folktales of different tribes, and at times it is being deified. In Vietnamese and Korean culture, tiger is considered the lord of the forest. In Taoism, the white tiger is one of the guardians of the Four Directions, representing the west. In Feng Shui, it is associated with the metal element, autumn, and strength. The White Tiger's presence in these spiritual practices emphasizes its connection with power, bravery, and protection.

2. Tiger in Poetry

The most anthologized poem by William Blake (1757-1827) "The Tyger" in fact makes tiger a bejeweled wild creature having eternal aesthetic value. Blake says:

"Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" (1st Stanza, "The Tyger")

The poem expresses wonder, and a sense of thrill pervades about the perfection in creation of the tiger. There is a duality between beauty and ferocity, through which the poet suggests that understanding one requires an understanding of the other. Being a herald of the Romantic Movement, Blake transcends the physique of a tiger to a philosophical height and thus through it, he greatly praises its creator as well. Ben Okri's *Tiger Work* is named after the tiger, which is a symbol of divine energy.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850-1919) in her "The Tiger" brilliantly writes with an underlying meaning between the hunter and the tiger as the tiger gets awoken from sound sleep to see the hunter shooting arrow which makes the 'calm' and 'splendid creature' ferocious to attack him uncontrollably with glowing eyeballs dilate as the poet says:

"Once having tasted human flesh, ah! then,

Woe, woe unto the whole rash world of men,
The wakened tiger will not sleep again.” (Lines 7-9, “The Tiger”)

The poem speaks of the violent spirit that wakes up to bring about a reformation which is suggestive of a revolutionary uprising.

Another interesting poem, “A Tiger in the Zoo” by Leslie Norris (1921-2006) contrasts a tiger in the zoo with the tiger in its natural habitat. The poem moves from the zoo to the jungle, and back again to the zoo focusing not on the picturesque movement but on the change of perspectives which could be zoocentric.

“He should be snarling around houses
At the jungle’s edge,
Baring his white fangs, his claws,
Terrorising the village!
But he’s locked in a concrete cell,
His strength behind bars,” (Lines 11-16, “A Tiger in the Zoo”)

The poet says that cage life has changed the personality of the tiger. He further elaborates that the tiger was a powerful and brave animal in the jungle, and villagers were terrified by his power. However, now the tiger has been confined in the cage and has turned into a helpless and powerless animal. The last lines are thought provoking as he says:

“He hears the last voice at night,
The patrolling cars,
And stares with his brilliant
brilliant eyes
At the brilliant stars.” (Lines 21-25, “A Tiger in the Zoo”)

The ironical situation coincidentally can bear multiple interpretations as the ferocious can be tamed and seized to become the powerless although gifted with brilliancy and power.

“The Tiger” by Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953) is a poem that presents an ironic portrayal of the animal. Contrasting common perception, the speaker depicts it as “kittenish” and “mild,” suitable even for children. This humorous subversion challenges the expected depiction of tigers in literature, and reflects the Victorian era’s fascination with the exotic, particularly its tendency to romanticize dangerous animals.

In his poem, “Remembering the Jungle: The Words of the Tiger in the Zoo,” by The Lu (1907-1989) advocates the unspeakable plight of the tigers in the zoo.

“Gnawing upon our resentment, we stretch out in the iron cage
Watching the slow passage of days and months.
How we despise the insolent crowd outside,
Standing there foolishly, with tiny eyes bulging,
As they mock the stately spirit of the deep jungle.
Here by misfortune, shamelessly caged,
We are no more than a novel sight to amuse them, some plaything.

Forced to endure exhibition, just like the oafish bears,
Put next to a peened pair of panthers, carefree in their captivity.” (Lines 21-29, “Remembering the Jungle”)

Once the king of the forest is now in a plaything of the visitors in the zoo, where the world is squeezed into the iron railings challenging their might, ferocity and bravery. This is quite ironical and thought-provoking.

3. Tiger in Popular Hunting Narratives

Man-Eater of Kumaon is a book in 1944 by hunter-naturalist Jim Corbett (1875-1955). It details the experiences that Corbett had in the Kumaon region of India from the 1900s to the 1930s, while hunting man-eating Bengal tigers and Indian leopards. One tiger, for example, was responsible for over 400 human deaths. It is the best known of Corbett's books which contains ten stories of tracking and shooting man-eaters in the Indian Himalayas during the early years of the twentieth century. Each of the stories carry first-hand thrilling and skilling steps of hunters and the villagers chronicling the real accounts to stories.

John Vaillant's *The Tiger: A True Story of Vengeance and Survival* tells a sensational story of tiger. A man-eating tiger was on the stalk outside a remote village in Russia's far East. The tiger was not only killing people but also it was routing them. Thus, a team of men and their dogs hunt it on foot through the forest in the brutal cold. As the trackers scrutinize through the ghastly remains of the victims, they discover that these attacks are not random. The tiger is seemingly engaged in a crusade, although injured and starving. Beautifully written and deeply informative, *The Tiger* circles around three main characters: Vladimir Markov, a poacher killed by the tiger; Yuri Trush, the lead tracker; and the tiger himself. It is an absolutely gripping tale of man and nature that leads inescapably to a final faceoff in a clearing deep in the taiga.

4. Tiger in Fictional Narratives

“Big Cat” by Emma Lazell is a very funny look at what happens when Grandma loses her spectacles. She finds a very large cat and decides to look after it, but what everyone else can see is that this is no ordinary Cat. Eventually some visitors, who are out searching for their son, find the glasses and everything becomes very clear!! There is a real sense of playfulness with this story and I detect a certain ‘homage’ to The Tiger who came to Tea. Definitely one to keep and keep re-reading.

Takdir, the Tiger Cub by Latika Nath Rana is a Bengali story about a tiger cub in who lives in the thick jungle of the Bandhavgarh National Park. One day, when his mother, Sita, is away and his sisters are asleep, Takdir decides to go off on his own.

Tigers appear frequently in Chinese literature and folk stories, with many idioms. Perhaps the most widely known story about a tiger in China, this tale comes from the classic 14th-century novel *Outlaws of the Marsh* in which Wu Song is a heroic warrior. In the story, Wu is praised by the local government for slaying the tiger, and his reputation as a tiger-fighting hero spreads far and wide. Though he gets into many other adventures in the book, whenever people nowadays hear Wu Song's

name, they nearly always recall him as the hero who killed a tiger with his bare hands. The tale of Yang Xiang is meant to carry moral teachings. The tale is from the *The Twenty-four Filial Exemplars* reflects on the notion of a young girl defeating a tiger in combat with her bare hands may be far-fetched, the story is meant to teach children to sacrifice themselves for their parents.

Tigers are featured in Thai literature in a number of ways, including Suea Saming, a weretiger that can change shape between a tiger and a human. The belief in Suea Saming is a part of Thai society, and is portrayed in the novels Phut Payak (1983) and Sai Phan Payak (2008) by Tri Apirum. Similarly, "Sue-ko Kham Chan" is a poem about a friendship between a tiger cub and a calf. The poem is based on a story from the Paññāsa Jātaka, or Apocryphal Birth-Stories of the Buddha.

Rudyard Kipling's fictional tiger Shere Khan is an immortal character in *The Jungle Book* and is the main antagonist in two of the stories. Shere Khan is a Bengal tiger who lives near the Waingunga River. His name translates to "tiger ruler" and is a reference to Afghan Emperor Sher Shah Suri. Shere Khan is lazy and prefers to have other animals do his work. He believes Mowgli is human and tries to convince the other animals to reject him. Shere Khan's goal is to kill and eat Mowgli. In the short story "Tiger! Tiger!", Mowgli and Grey Brother stampede Shere Khan to death between them. Mowgli then skins the tiger and promises to put the skin on the wolf pack's Council Rock.

“Shere Khan: [finds himself on the branch of a dead tree that starts to crack under his weight] Did you think I would let you grow old?

[sees the flames below the tree]

Shere Khan: Either I'll devour you or the red flower will. It's just a matter of time. How long did you really think you'd survive against me? Longer than your father did? Longer than... Akela?

Mowgli: I'm not afraid of you! Do you hear me? I'm done running from you!

[Shere Khan roars and leaps at the end of the branch to tackle Mowgli, but the boy manages to jump onto a vine. The branch snaps and Shere Khan falls to his death] Shere Khan: NOOO!" ("The Jungle Book")

Adorably, in the fictional world of R.K. Narayan, tiger reigns supreme. His *A Tiger for Malgudi* shows us Raja the tiger as the novel's narrator and protagonist. From his reflections on his youth, readers can see that he was once a violent and domineering animal who used his physical size and strength to frighten other animals. He is mortified by the death of his mate and cubs at the hands of hunters and then by a continuous period of bondage at the hands of Captain, a cruel circus master. His violent tendencies emerge once more in his murder of Captain and in his charge throughout the town of Malgudi, but by this point, he is tired of violence and desires only peace. He finds this peace in the company of the Master and later in his retirement to Malgudi's Zoo.

“You are not likely to understand that I am different from the tiger next door, that I possess a soul within this forbidding exterior. I can think, analyse, judge, remember and do everything that you can do, perhaps with greater subtlety and sense. I lack only the faculty of speech. But...” (p.65)

Raja's mate is a powerful female tiger who is the first animal to show him defiance, refusing his order to step aside. They fight a battle which is almost fatal to both of them, but after they recover, they become friends and start a family. Raja learns from his mate the limitations of power as a means for finding fulfillment, though her murder by hunters causes him to relapse into his old ways for a time; he attacks the hunters' livestock and is subsequently captured by the villagers. Raja says finally:

“Before we drove off my Master thrust his hand through the bars and whispered to me, 'Both of us will shed our forms soon and perhaps we could meet again, who knows? So goodbye for the present.'” (*A Tiger for Malgudi*, p.154)

The human like portrayal of tiger and the sensibilities altogether carry a great fanciful yet profound literary protraction both in *The Jungle Book* and *A Tiger for Malgudi*.

In “The Tiger Who Came to Tea” by Judith Kerr is a short children's story that was first published in 1968. The book concerns a girl called Sophie, her mother, and an anthropomorphized tiger who invites himself to their afternoon tea and consumes all the food and drink they have. The book remains extremely popular more than fifty years after it was first published, and a theatrical adaptation of the story has been produced. The little girl Sophie has tea with her mother in their kitchen, when she hears the doorbell ring. Soon, Sophie and her mother join for tea by a tiger who eats all of the food on the table and drinks all the tea, before consuming all of the food and drink in the house, and even drinking the taps dry. After the tiger leaves, Sophie's father comes home from work and suggests that they all go out and have a lovely meal in a café. The following day, Sophie and her mother go out to buy some more food, including a big tin of tiger food. However, the tiger never returns.

Tigger is a fictional character in A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* books and their adaptations. An anthropomorphic toy tiger, he was originally introduced in the 1928-story collection *The House at Pooh Corner*, the sequel to the 1926 book *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Like other Pooh characters, Tigger is based on one of Christopher Robin Milne's stuffed toy animals. He is known for his distinctive orange colour with black stripes, large eyes, a long chin, a springy tail, and his love of bouncing. As he says himself, “Bouncing is what Tiggers do best.” Tigger never refers to himself as a tiger, but as a “Tigger”. The tiger is introduced in Chapter II of “House at Pooh Corner,” when he arrives at Winnie-the-Pooh's doorstep in the middle of the night, announcing himself with a stylized roar.

Tigger resides with Kanga and Roo in their house in the part of the Hundred Acre Wood near the Sandy Pit. He becomes great friends with Roo, and Kanga treats him in much the same way she does her own son. Tigger also interacts enthusiastically with all the other characters, sometimes too enthusiastically for the likes of Rabbit,

who is sometimes exasperated by Tigger's constant bouncing, Eeyore, who is once bounced into the river by Tigger, and Piglet, who always seems a little nervous about the new, large, bouncy animal in the Forest. Nonetheless, the animals are all shown to be friends.

The Night Guest (2013) by Fiona McFarlane is talks about Ruth who is an aged widow living on a secluded section of the Australian coast with only her cats for company. Her sons call her occasionally. Mostly, she spends her days listening only to the sounds of the nearby ocean and her own voice. One night, though, something unusual happens. When she wakes in the darkness, she had a feeling that there was a tiger in the house. She knows there cannot really be a tiger, but she sensed it there. She tells about it to one of her companions named Frida, but Frida's reaction to the news is perhaps more disturbing than the possibility of a jungle cat prowling occasionally in the lounge room.

In a celebrated novel of Manoj Das' titled *A Tiger at Twilight*, the tiger is a prominent feature where it is a man-eating beast that the former King of Samargarh must kill. The tiger is a mysterious force that appears to have a strange connection with the King's sister, Heera. As the hunt for the tiger intensifies, strange events occur that suggest the supernatural is at play. The former king of Samargarh returns to his abandoned palace with his sick daughter, and Heera, who he believes is his half-sister. He assumes responsibility for killing the tiger, and is assisted by a few men from the valley, including Dev, the owner of a resort. Dev realizes that things are not as they seem when he discovers Heera's power over the men in the hunting party as they realize that "Indeed, Pundit, to scare a tiger away was no joke!" she spoke through clenched teeth." (*A Tiger at Twilight*, <http://www.worldofmanojdas.in/a-tiger-at-twilight.php>)

Ruskin Bond wrote about tigers in several of his works, including "A Tiger in the House" which is a fictional short story about a grandfather who adopts a tiger cub named Timothy. Timothy is initially friendly with the grandfather's other pets, a monkey named Toto and a puppy, but becomes dangerous as he grows up. The grandfather eventually takes Timothy to a zoo in Lucknow, where he learns that Timothy has died from pneumonia. His "The Last Tiger" is a collection of including "The Call of the Leopard" which is about a clever tiger who survives many attempts on his life. Then in "Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright," Bond describes a tiger in this story with the words, "His muscles rippled beneath the golden yellow of his coat and he walked through the long grass with the confidence of one who knew that he was still a king".

Also, in his popular novel, *The Hungry Tide*, Amitav Ghosh (1956-) presents tiger as a symbol of the natural world's power and the need to respect the landscape. In the Sundarbans, tigers are a symbol of the natural world's power and the need to respect the landscape. The locals are aware of the tigers' power and are hesitant to even say the word "tiger". The novel details the past and present of the Sundarbans, including the interactions between the locals and the tigers.

In the second part of the novel *Life of Pi* (2001) by Yann Martel, a tiger is seen hiding under the boat's tarpaulin. It is named Richard Parker, who had boarded the lifeboat with ambivalent assistance from Pi himself sometime before the hyena attack. Suddenly emerging from his hideaway, Richard Parker kills and eats the hyena. Frightened, Pi constructs a small raft out of rescue flotation devices, tethers it to the bow of the boat, and makes it his place of retirement. He begins conditioning Richard Parker to take a submissive role by using food as a positive reinforcer, and seasickness as a punishment mechanism, while using a whistle for signals. Soon, Pi asserts himself as the alpha animal and is eventually able to share the boat with his feline companion, admitting in the end that Richard Parker is the one who helped him survive his ordeal.

The Tiger's Wife (2011) is the debut novel of American writer Téa Obreht (1985-). Set in mid-20th-century to early 21st century Balkans, it explores inter-generational dynamics between members of a medical family, and how they were involved in several wars throughout the timeframe. It is set in an unnamed country in the Balkans, spanning the mid-20th-century to the early 21st century. It features a young doctor's relationship with her grandfather and the stories he tells her. Her grandfather retells stories about the "deathless man" who meets him several times in different places and who doesn't die, regardless of the danger he faces; and a deaf-mute girl from his childhood village who befriends a tiger that has escaped from a nearby zoo.

5. Critical Discussion and Conclusion

Historically as well as stylistically, the narratives have taken tiger as a metaphor representing multiple dimensions. For example, *Tiger of Mysore* by Samuel Strandberg is a biography of Tipu Sultan, which speaks of the bravery of the incredible Sultan until his death. Focus shifts from historical, fictional and cultural constructs with the publication of Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* in 2008. A white tiger is, scientifically speaking, a tiger with a genetic mutation, so it has the same scientific name as other tigers, *Panthera tigris*. In Adiga's novel, this rare creature has been metaphorically portrayed symbolizing the protagonist Balram's unique qualities and exceptional intelligence. *Tiger in an African Palace*, and *Other Thoughts about Identification* by Richard Fardon is a collection of essays about kinship and belonging. The essays explore the relationship between comparison and historical reconstruction, and the fit between personal, ethnic, and cosmopolitan identities in contemporary West African nations. *Tigers in Africa: Stalking the Past at the Cape of Good Hope* by Carmel Schrire interweaves themes such as colonial slavery and apartheid, human and carnivore evolution, and science and romance. This is how tiger has become a multiperspective construct for many in the human world ranging from a wild animal and an entertainer to the being carrying anthropomorphic, aesthetic and spiritual value.

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