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1) *Introduction*

As a child, I used to watch the tigers in the Schönbrunn zoo with an almost reverent fascination: their soft and shiny orange coats with beautiful patterns of black stripes, their penetrating emerald eyes, their needle-sharp canines that



Fig. 1: Tiger cub in Schönbrunn

it.

were larger than my index finger, their awe-inspiring paws that could swat a boy like me like a fly – everything about the animals' appearance testifies to a deadly elegance and dignity. The tiger is a creature that has continued to amaze me to this day, which is why I chose to dedicate my diploma thesis to

In the following, the role of the tiger in Anglophone literature will be examined on the basis of texts from authors from all over the world writing in English. I specifically chose the term “Anglophone” instead of “English” to put emphasis on the global perspective, since this thesis will examine the role of the tiger in the broad range of English-language literature. From the research conducted so far it has become evident that the tiger has left a lasting mark on many civilisations, their beliefs and traditions throughout the ages. This thesis aims at finding out whether the tiger's considerable cultural influence also has had a bearing on the literary production of the Anglophone world. Moreover, it can be assumed that such an animal – a dangerous predator that, at the same time, is one of the world's most endangered species – has found its way into literature in the form of quite contradictory depictions. Therefore, it is a further goal of the thesis to trace the various ways in which the tiger has been represented in literature.

Before actually immersing myself in the discussion of individual works of fiction, the thesis offers some introductory chapters that will familiarise the reader with the tiger and its place in the world. Some initial zoological remarks about the tiger will be succeeded by an examination of the cultural and religious relationship between man and tiger. An overview of the tiger in Asian and Western literatures will be provided thereafter. What follows is the actual core chapter of the whole thesis, the in-depth analysis of works of Anglophone tiger

literature: the focus of the thesis will be on William Blake's poem "The Tyger" (1796), Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Books* (1894/95), Saki's short story "Mrs. Packletide's Tiger" (1911), Angela Carter's short story "The Tiger's Bride" (1979), R. K. Narayan's novel *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983) and Yann Martel's novel *Life of Pi* (2001). Moreover, the tiger in children's and young adult literature will be examined. I selected these texts because they seem to be the most important to my topic, since the tiger in these works is always given a major role or, in some instances even the part of the main protagonist. While novels such as *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Gosh (2004) also feature tigers, the big cats are merely minor story elements; the parts they are given in these works would add only very little to an overall interpretation of the function of the tiger in Anglophone literature. The works of fiction are analysed chronologically, so that in the end two hundred years of Anglophone tiger literature will be covered. In this way, it is possible to find out whether or not there has been a linear development in the literary depiction of the tiger. Finally, a conclusive comparison of all the works discussed will reveal in what way the questions that this thesis poses can be answered.

2) *Tigers: a zoological introduction*

The tiger (*panthera tigris*) is a cat of prey native to areas in southern and eastern Asia.¹ The Siberian or Amur tiger can reach a length of up to 3 meters and a maximum weight of 300 kilograms, which makes it the largest member of the family of the *felidae* (cats) and superior in physical power to the other three members of the genus *panthera* (big cats), lions, leopards and jaguars. In the wild, the life span ranges from 20 to 25 years. All subspecies of tigers live in woods, ranging from tropical to boreal climate zones. The stripes on the their coats camouflage them in the forests' undergrowth. Lakes or rivers are common in a tiger habitat, since the animals are fond of bathing.

Unlike other big cats, such as lions, tigers generally do not tend to form packs; they are solitary and territorial animals. Males and females only meet for mating: the father does not play any part in raising the litter (typically three to four cubs); like many big cats, male tigers commonly kill their own offspring. Tigresses are usually seen in company of young tigers, since the cubs stay with the mother for up to three years. Another difference lies in the preying behaviour: among lions, the lioness is usually the greater hunter. Yet among tigers, males show a similar affinity to hunting as females. As cats of prey, tigers hunt medium sized to larger animals, but there have been reports of tigers slaying adult rhinoceroses and elephants. In general, tigers do not kill their prey by hunting it down over extensive distances (like cheetahs); instead, they sneak up from behind, jump at their prey and kill it by biting into its throat or by breaking its neck. Like many cats, tigers are nocturnal animals that usually hunt at night and rest during the day.

In the Sundurbans region in India, home to about 500 Bengal tigers, attacks on fishermen and farmers are unusually frequent (some figures speak from up to 250 kills per year) – therefore, one can conclude that a small part of the Sundurbans tigers' diet also consists of man. The danger these animals present to humans, however, is greatly exaggerated (for more detail on the coexistence of tigers and humans, see chapter 3.1.) Nevertheless, especially the Sundurbans tigers have given rise to the myth of the man-eater. It should be

¹ All information in this chapter: Meiner, "Tiger" (Encyclopedia Britannica), „Tigers“, and *Save The Tiger Fund*.

said, though, that usually only old and weak specimens or those with broken teeth become man-eaters, since humans are an easy prey on which a tiger can feed for a long time. An adult Bengal tiger needs about 9 kg of meat per day.

There are six subspecies of tigers still alive today: the Siberian tiger, the largest of all tigers; the Bengal tiger; the Indochinese Tiger; the Malayan tiger; the Sumatran tiger; and the South China tiger. Three more subspecies were eradicated in the course of the last 70 years. The famous white tiger is an albino form that appears among Bengal tigers only. Zoos and circuses have been breeding these animals since the 1950s; in the wild, there are almost no white tigers since these animals are seriously disadvantaged when hunting due to their peculiar colour. Many zoos have also interbred various big cats, which resulted in the creation of ligers (a breed between a male tiger and a lioness) and tigons (offspring of a male lion and a tigress).

Due to excessive hunting and poaching, the number of free-living tigers has seriously diminished over the last 150 years, with the result that today there are more tigers living in zoos than in the wild. Another reason for the shrinking numbers is the loss of habitat: over the last 150 years, 93% of the tigers' original habitat has been lost. Especially in those countries where tigers live, the rate at which human settlements expand is enormous; at the same time, an adult male tiger needs a territory of up to 300 km² (in comparison: Vienna covers an area of 415 km²)² – therefore, conflicts are pre-programmed. The WWF estimates the number of wild tigers at 4,000. The animal has been on the Red List of Threatened Species since 1986; the World Conservation Union gave it the status of Endangered to Critically Endangered.³ India harbours the biggest number of wild tigers. In reaction to rapidly falling population numbers, the Indian government launched Project Tiger in 1973. On its website⁴, it is stated that the project's objective is

to ensure a viable population of tiger in India for scientific, economic, aesthetic, cultural and ecological values and to preserve for all time areas of biological importance as a natural heritage for the benefit, education and enjoyment of the people. („Project Tiger“)

² See „Landwirtschaft in Wien“.

³ See „Species fact sheet: Tiger“.

⁴ See *Project Tiger*.

A noble goal, and while Project Tiger has become one of the most successful animal protection schemes in the world, a census of Bengal tigers has revealed that in 2008, the tiger population was diminished severely due to poaching.⁵ Nowadays, tigers can be found mainly in India, China, Siberia, and several countries of Southeast Asia.

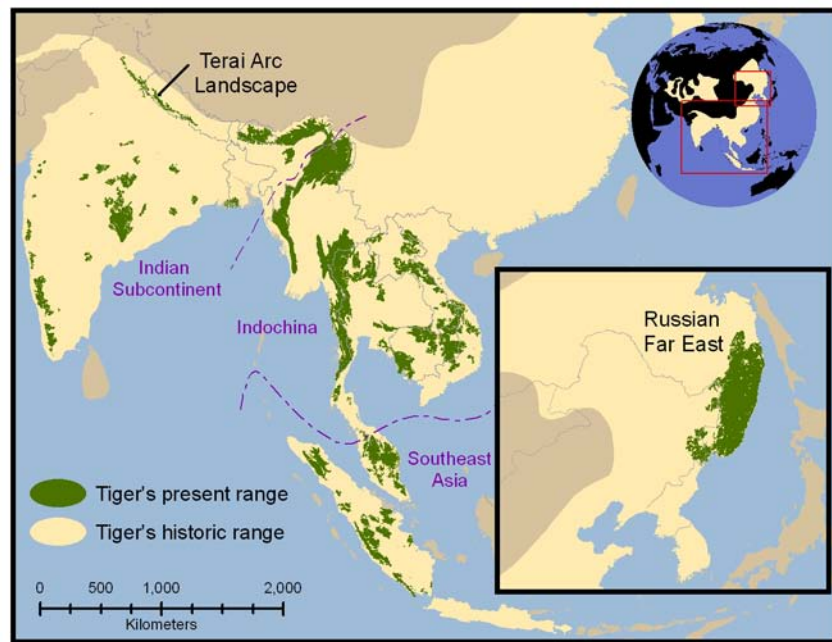


Fig. 2: Illustration of the tiger's historic (beige) and present range (green)

⁵ See Thiagarajan.

3) *The relationship between tiger and man*

The tiger has always played an important role in the myths and beliefs of numerous peoples of Asia. However, Western civilisation has adapted the tiger into their cultural history as well. Apart from that, the coexistence of man and tiger has not always worked well, bringing the animal to the brink of extinction. In the following, an overview of the often-troubled relationship between the tiger and man is given.

The cultural significance of the tiger

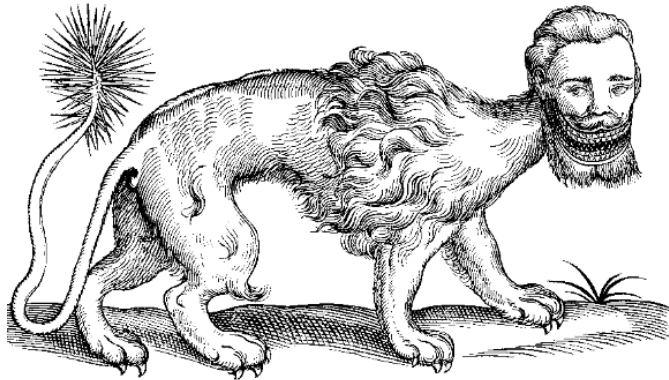
In the Western World

The first European to report about tigers was the Greek poet Ctesias of Cnidus, who lived around 400 BC: he heard of frightening stories about a dangerous beast called “Martichoras” (from Old Persian “martijaqâra”, “man-slayer”) from informants in the Middle East. Although his descriptions were greatly exaggerated and distorted, they were later taken up by Pliny and Aelian.⁶ In his famous *Description of Greece* (app. 170 AD), the Greek scholar and geographer Pausanias commented on the infamous beast:

With respect to that wild beast which Ctesias [...] says, is called by [the Indians] the *mantiora*, but by the Greeks *androphagus*, or the *devourer of man*, I am persuaded that it is no other than the tiger. This animal [...] has a triple row of teeth in one of his jaws, and stings in the extremity of its tail, with which it defends itself when attacked near, and hurls them like arrows at its enemies at a distance. For my own part, I do not believe that this account of the animal is true, but that the Indians have been induced to fabricate it, through vehement dread of the beast.
(Pausanias 41)

⁶ See Lach 172

Ctesias' designation of the beast as well as its extraordinary description entered European mythology in form of the mantichore, a monster with a man's head, a lion's body and a dragon's or scorpion's tail. Interestingly enough, folk etymology even transformed the mantichore into



a “mantiger”, thus closing the circle to Ctesias' twisted description.⁷

Fig. 3: English Manticore illustration from 1607

The first tiger to step on European soil came to Athens as a gift to the people, sent by Alexander the Great's successor Seleucus. The word “tiger” itself stems from the Greek word *tigris*, which, in turn, is adopted from an oriental language, probably Iranian (*tighra*-, “pointed”).⁸ Medieval sources like the Aberdeen Bestiary or Isidor of Seville claim that the word comes from the Persian word for “arrow”, thus referring to the tiger's speed.⁹

In early Christian times, tigers became a common sight in Roman arenas, where Caspian tigers (today extinct) fought against other animals, such as lions or aurochs, or against gladiators. The first tiger to come to the Roman Empire was a gift by the Indian ambassador to Augustus in 19 BC. Already in these times, the tiger was credited with indomitable fierceness and sheer physical strength – attributes that would lead to the tiger's downfall: the Roman emperor Elagabalus reportedly had 51 tigers killed in an arena simply as a display of the empire's – and of his own – superiority.¹⁰ Soon, for lack of real tigers that could serve as study objects, romantically transfigured stories about the animals began to spread: for instance, if a hunter wants to steal a tigress's cubs, he just needs to place a mirror in front of the animal – it is such a vain creature that it will admire itself, while the hunter can take the litter away.¹¹

⁷ See „Manticore“.

⁸ See „Tiger“ (Merriam Webster Online)

⁹ See „The Medieval Bestiary“

¹⁰ See Lach 172.

¹¹ See Lach 172.



Fig. 4: Roman mosaic from Sousse (in today's Tunisia)

Apart from these stories, people soon began to associate the tiger with the gods of wine and love, predominantly with Bacchus.¹² A mosaic from the third century (see figure 2) shows four tigers pulling the god's chariot. It should be noted that these animals can be clearly recognised as tigers and can be

distinguished from the other felines, lions and cheetahs, in the mosaic. It is not quite clear why the tiger was related to Bacchus, but it may well be that the image the animal had in Asia, where folk belief credited it with legendary sexual power, spilled over to the Greeks. The cults that were established around Bacchus should now be considered: according to Euripides' tragedy *The Bacchae*, young women who followed the god's cult – the Bacchae – supposedly underwent orgiastic trances in which they hunted wild game, tore it apart and devoured it raw; at one point in the play, the ecstatic women even mauled a man.¹³ In light of these aspects, a link between Bacchus and the tiger, sensual and dangerous at the same time, can quickly be established.

In medieval times, however, there was so little knowledge “about the nature of the tiger that it was classified in certain bestiaries as a serpent and in others as a bird” (Lach 173). It is interesting that the Roman stories about the tiger's vanity seem to have survived well into the Middle Ages, since many bestiaries include this story (or a variant thereof): while in classical antiquity, a hunter planning to steal a tigress's cubs has to throw down a mirror so that the animal is distracted by its own beauty, many medieval sources replace the mirror with a glass sphere.¹⁴ In contrast to antiquity, there is no evidence that there ever was a living tiger in Europe, which further added to the mystification of the cat. At the end of the fifteenth century, though, there are records of several specimens that were sold to courts of nobility and royalty via Constantinople's animal market: in Early Modern Times, tigers were found in

¹² See Green 60.

¹³ See „Dionysus“

¹⁴ See the illustrations in f.i. the Aberdeen Bestiary, the Morgan Bestiary or the bestiary called Royal MS 12 C.xix in “The Medieval Bestiary”

the menageries of Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II. as well as in the animal collections of the nobility of Ferrara, Turin, Tuscany and Spain, where tigers reportedly were let loose in arenas to fight against bulls.¹⁵



Fig. 5: Annibale Carracci, *The Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne* (1600)

It is this period that marks the beginning of the tiger as a popular subject in the fine arts: the felines are depicted in paintings of Roelant Savery, Giulio Romano (1528) or Annibale Carracci, who, in his 1600 fresco *The Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne*, picked up the old idea of

tigers pulling the god's chariot. Apart from painters, the tiger also was a favourite among emblem

makers such as Valeriano or Camerarius.

In the 18th century, natural history and biology became rather fashionable and popular; in 1758, the tiger received its scientific name under which it is still known today among academic circles: *panthera tigris* – a name given by the Swedish biologist Carl Linnaeus in his monumental work *Systema Naturae*. This book is considered the basis of zoological nomenclature, making Linnaeus the father of modern taxonomy.¹⁶ This new academic interest gave rise to the publication of a number of books on zoology; however, the validity of the information on tigers in these books left much to be desired: Thomas Bewick's *A General History of Quadrupeds*, first published in 1790, wrote about the tiger as "the most rapacious and destructive of all carnivorous animals", which is "fierce without provocation, and cruel without necessity, its thirst for blood is insatiable." (Bewick, quoted in Borowsky), or *Buffon's Natural History* (1791) claimed that tigers are "perpetually thirsting for blood" and "delight in blood, and glut themselves with it till they are intoxicated" (Buffon quoted in Parsons). All

¹⁵ See Lach 173.

¹⁶ See "Carolus Linnaeus".

editions of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* of the 18th century give the following description of the tiger:

The tiger seems to have no other instinct but a constant thirst for blood, a blind fury which knows no bounds or distinction, and which often stimulates him to devour his own young, and to tear the mother to pieces for endeavouring to defend them (quoted in Phillips 68).

Notwithstanding, the fashion of keeping large collections of exotic animals as pets reached a new climax in the 18th century: August II the Strong (1670-1733) even “commissioned a life-size menagerie in Meissen porcelain copied from the creatures in his flesh and blood zoo” (Green 127) as a symbol of his wealth and power; for this purpose, eight tigers were created – not exactly lifelike, but highly skilfully executed. The menagerie can be seen in the Japanisches Palais in Dresden. A living tiger, though, was a favourite pet of Louis XIV of France (1638-1715): given to him by the Moroccan ambassador, it was “stroked, adored and caressed by the queen and her ladies and was paraded around St Germain on a leash” (Green 119). However, while it was treated like a cuddly tomcat, it was employed in various animal fights, which were then at the height of their popularity. An especially well-liked site for hosting these fights was the Tower of London, where big cats of all sorts were kept in tiny cells. Then they were agitated and, when they were aggressive enough, let loose against each other or against dogs, similar to the gruesome spectacle of bear- and bull-baiting, with the difference that while the latter were open for the public, the animal fights in the Tower were an exclusive amusement for the royal court.¹⁷ In the 19th century, though, tigers were imported from Asia much more frequently, thus making the felines accessible to the masses via zoos and travelling menageries.

However, the 19th century brought about much more severe obstacles to the tiger than menageries and zoos: it was nearly driven to the brink of extinction. The tiger hunt was a fashionable “sport” for the English invaders in India, especially for young, aspiring men who came to the subcontinent hoping to make quick money – a mad obsession which is portrayed in the biting satirical short story “Mrs. Packletide’s Tiger” by Hector Hugh Munro. The

¹⁷ See Green 121, 122.

practice of shooting tigers became a rite of passage that led to the almost obligatory inclusion of the description of tiger kills in the memoirs of many Englishmen in India (see chapter 4.2). The hunts were usually not restricted to one tiger alone – Schell quotes some contemporary tiger hunters:

Percy Wyndham [...] had “seen about five hundred shot”, while the death toll witness by Sir John Hewett was a more modest 247 tigers. Frederick Hicks, author of *Forty Years among the Wild Animals of India* [...] [claimed]: “I kept count up to 200, then stopped. ... It may be 400, or more ore les, I don’t know.” (Schell 230)

Green (21) even claims that “lifetime tallies of over 1,000 were common”. The number of tigers that were seriously wounded by badly aimed shots, condemning them to a slow and painful death in the jungle, is not included in these figures. Moreover, the hunts gave the tigers few chances of survival: large companies on elephants – Green (20) quotes a contemporary source who talks of “a small hunting expedition comprising a mere 260 camp followers and 20 elephants” – set out to systematically scour for tigers in the jungle. From the security of their howdahs, they would shoot the animals from a safe distance.

Accompanying the physical crusade against the feline, there was a campaign of destroying the tiger’s image in Indian culture. The animal was said to be extremely fond of human flesh; the hunter Jim Corbett spread horrific tales of man-eating tigers that belong more to the genre of fantasy than to naturalist descriptions. However, he accomplished his goal; the tiger became degraded and considered a pest to be exterminated. This imperialist view of the animal is mirrored in Rudyard Kipling’s depiction of Shere Khan (see chapter 5.2).

The effects of this smear campaign, combined with the already negative and distorted image of the tiger’s nature, can be recognised nicely in the classic reference book *Brehms Tierleben* by the German zoologist Alfred Brehm (first published in 1863). In the entry about the tiger, the reader is confronted with the following statement:

Man hat seine Mordlust und seinen Blutdurst vielfach übertrieben oder wenigstens mit sehr grellen Farben geschildert; wir dürfen uns jedoch hierüber nicht wundern: denn für diejenigen, welche ihn schildern konnten, ist er allerdings der Inbegriff aller Grausamkeit. Noch heutigen Tages bewohnen Indien eine furchterregende Anzahl von Tigern, und noch gegenwärtig müssen

dort tausende von Menschen aufgeboten werden, um eine Gegend, welche sonst der Verödung anheimfallen würde, zeitweilig von dieser schlimmsten aller Landplagen zu befreien. (Brehm 389-390)

How can this mad obsession with exterminating the tiger be explained? Mukherjee (1987) offers several ideas: when the British arrived in India, they were confronted with this exotic but dangerous animal. Because of this menace, stories soon began to circulate among the colonisers that portrayed the tiger in the worst possible light; therefore, an attitude developed that Mukherjee describes in the following, perhaps a bit exaggerated way: “With almost Christian indignation, it seems, the European set about his humanitarian task in India of exterminating a wicked and dangerous animal” (5). In view of this mind-set, which is exactly of the same nature as in *Brehms Thierleben*, a campaign against the big cat set in. Mukherjee claimed that even in the 1930s, the British told themselves that they had to protect their Indian subjects from the dangerous man-eating cats from the jungle (7).

Moreover, there was a difference in attitude: while the Indians were not bothered by the unruly jungles surrounding them, the British struggled hard to control and rule nature, which also included its wildlife. A third reason was the need for privacy and leisure time. By roaming the jungles in search of a tiger to shoot, the colonisers found a way of “escap[ing] from the duties and obligations of being an Englishman of the Raj” (Mukherjee, 6).



Fig. 6: Salvador Dalí, *Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee ...* (1944)

Whatever the reasons for the obsessive tiger hunt were, the animal was now mainly valued as a precious hunting trophy and therefore lost much of its noble appeal that people had attributed it to over the centuries. However, the tiger continued to make some (rare) appearances in art, as for example in Franz Marc's *Der Tiger* (1912) or in Salvador Dalí's 1944 masterpiece *Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate a Second before Awakening*. In this painting, the

Catalan surrealist was inspired by the ancient topos of the tiger as a symbol of sexual power. It is an artistic depiction of a dream Dalí's wife Gala had. He stated that

the fish represented masculine potency, the rifle with its piercing bayonet, the penis, the pomegranate feminine fecundity and fertility, and the powerful overwhelming tigers emerging from the fish nothing less than Gala's subconscious urges for sexual union given form.
(Green, 63)

This sexual connotation goes back to early Asian beliefs (see chapter 3.1.2). It was adopted by the British during colonial times and gave the tiger's pelt an air of lasciviousness and sensuality. For this reason, the demand for tiger furs became increasingly high in the west: in the 1950s and 60s, tiger pelts became a status symbol in society and a must-have in fashion; especially celebrities and actresses posed with tiger skins to further underline their sex appeal.¹⁸



Fig. 7: Marilyn Monroe (1957) and Jayne Mansfield posing with tiger skins

Logically, this development further fuelled the slaughter of the tiger. Within the first decades of the 20th century, three subspecies of the feline were irrevocably eradicated. When India became independent in 1947, the British hunters were chased away – but the Indian population took over their habit of butchering the tiger as an expression of their newly gained freedom: when killing tigers was formerly a privilege of the colonisers, “[t]his once exclusive activity was now seized on by the Indian people as a democratizing one, and wholesale extermination began” (Green 21).

¹⁸ See Green 63.

Over the last few decades, though, rethinking set in. Ecology and animal protection slowly made their way into people's consciousness. Within the scopes of this new mind-set, the public once more began to show interest in the tiger and its fate. Today, it is one of the flagship animals of the environmental movement and enjoys great popularity: in a poll conducted by the Animal Planet Channel in 2004 with 50,000 participants in 73 countries, the tiger claimed the first rank as the world's most beloved animal, narrowly beating the dog and the dolphin.¹⁹

It is one of the animals that have entered popular culture: Tony the Tiger is recognised by every child who has ever eaten Kellogg's Frosted Flakes – a cartoon tiger is smiling from its cover – and car-owners all over the world are familiar with oil company Esso's publicity campaign, which advertises the power of its petrol with the strength of the big feline. The slogan "Put a tiger in your

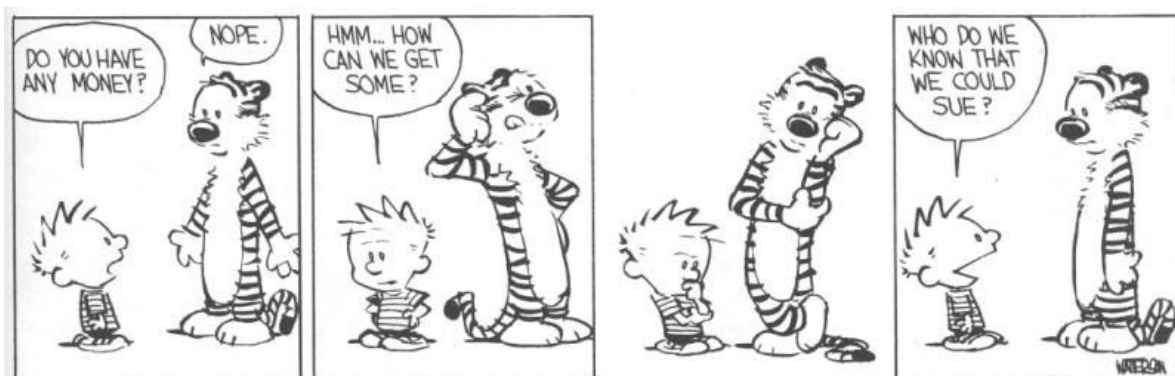


Fig. 8: "Calvin and Hobbes" comic strips often humorously touch upon socio-critical and philosophical topics

tank" has become common property.

Moreover, newspaper readers value the daily short comic strips of "Calvin and Hobbes", treating the adventures of a boy and its speaking stuffed tiger. At the peak of their popularity, "Calvin and Hobbes" were printed in over 2,400 newspapers around the world.²⁰

Film industry has also brought forth a number of motion pictures in which tigers play a prominent role: apart from Disney's *Jungle Book*, which will be discussed later, there is the 1981 adventure film *Roar*, in which not Tippi Hedren and Melanie Griffith, but an overwhelming number of seemingly tame

¹⁹ See "Tiger 'is our favourite animal'".

²⁰ See "The Complete Calvin and Hobbes Press Release".

lions and tigers are the real stars.²¹ Jean-Jacques Annaud was the director of *Two Brothers* (2004), which focuses on the youth of two tiger cubs that are separated at birth and reunited years later only to be forced to fight each other for the amusement of their human captors.²² The film harshly criticises the ruthless exploitation of nature and the senseless killing of tigers by the hands of poachers, which nowadays is the gravest problem for tigers all over the world. Another popular tiger is featured in the animation film *Ice Age* (2002)²³: Diego is a sabre-toothed tiger who is sent by his pack to steal a human baby from its protectors, a woolly mammoth named Manfred and a clumsy sloth by the name of Sid. However, Diego forms a friendship with the strange pair; in the end, he opts for his friends and leaves the pack. Unsurprisingly, the film presents the viewer with the stereotypical evil tiger; this depiction shows strong similarities to Shere Khan from Kipling's *Jungle Books*: in *Ice Age*, the tigers kill the baby's parents, but miss to slay the infant; it is now Diego's job to get the boy back to the tiger pack so that they can devour it. Shere Khan likewise kills Mowgli's parents and accidentally loses sight of the baby; in consequence, he considers the boy his rightful prey and does everything to kill him. However, since Diego ultimately decides in favour of his companions, it can be said that the portrayal of the big cat in *Ice Age* at least partially departs from long-standing cliché of the ferocious man-eater. The film's commercial success resulted in the production of two sequels, in which Diego returns as a major character: *Ice Age: The Meltdown* (2006), and *Ice Age 3: Dawn of the Dinosaurs*, which will be released in mid-2009.

²¹ See „Roar“.

²² See “Deux frères”.

²³ See „Ice Age“.

In Asia



Fig. 9: Mohenjo-daro tiger seal

The tiger has played a role in many Asian civilisations for millennia. The very first depiction of the feline is a petroglyph discovered in the 1930s near the southern Siberian Amur river.²⁴ In the beliefs of the Amur people – responsible for the stone etchings – the tiger ruled the forests, while the black dragon reigned over the rivers. Other early

artefacts are seals that portray tigers from the city of Mohenjo-daro (in the Indus Valley of today's Pakistan), dating back to about 4,500 BC.²⁵ All of the findings, no matter from which region of the world, suggest that the tiger's role in ancient religions should not be underestimated. This implied a deep respect for the animal, with the consequence that it could live in Asia quite peacefully – until the arrival of the Europeans in the time of colonialism.

Even in China, where the tiger is as good as extinct these days, it has been an integral part of culture from the earliest times onwards. To examine the religious significance of the feline, one should turn to the still-existing Naxi people: they live in the south-western Yunan province and are said to have Tibetan origin. The Naxi (or Nakhi) “practise Bon, the ancient pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet [...] [which] also has elements of Chinese shamanism” (Thapar 23), which implies that its roots go back to ancient times. In the beliefs of the Naxi, tiger worship takes on a central part. The most famous tiger myth is the pre-historic poem “The Origin of the Tiger”.²⁶ This work conveys the Naxi people's belief that they are the tiger's progeny (totemism); it states that “the constituent parts of the tiger's fleshy [sic] body are sacred [...] [and] all granted by nature” (Gengsheng 244). The theme of the tiger ancestor can be found, too, in the culture of the Tungusic people of Siberia, who referred to the cat as “Grandfather” or “Old Man”.²⁷

²⁴ See Thapar 9.

²⁵ See Shrestha 154.

²⁶ See Gengsheng 241-3.

²⁷ See Matthiessen 20.

Apart from totemism, another area where the lives of human beings and tigers are believed to interweave is the idea of therianthropy, the transformation of a human being into an animal. It is a belief similar to the European werewolf myths. There are two kinds of these so-called were-tigers: tigers that change into humans and vice versa²⁸ (while in European mythology, only a human being can, by the powers of black magic or with the help of Satan, transform himself into the animal²⁹). The shape-shifting process is usually caused by donning a tiger skin, but also by being bewitched or as a divine punishment³⁰. These tiger demons in Chinese mythology are usually evil and bloodthirsty beasts - although there are some exceptions: for example, “deceased fathers could change into ‘good tigers’ to help their sons” (Thapar 24). The myth of shape-shifting also appears in the founding legend of the Han dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD): the ancestor of the house, Lin-chün, allegedly transformed into a white tiger when he died.³¹ Here, too, the idea of the tiger as a people’s forefather emerges.

Popular belief attributed to the tiger as such – that is to say, not in its form as a demonic human-tiger chimera – consistently positive powers. For example, it was the tiger that protected the people by devouring evil spirits. Tiger emblems, carvings or images can frequently be found on doorposts – a habit that supposedly came into being in the first century AD and that has survived until today.³² Moreover, the tiger is

traditionally regarded as the ruler of the animal kingdom. This goes back to an ancient belief, which sees a similarity between the fur marking on the forehead of the big cat and the Chinese character for the word “king”.³³



Fig. 10: The fur marking on the tiger's brow

The tiger even made an impact in the most traditional of all Chinese sports, shadow-boxing: in the third century AD, its inventor based the slow and

²⁸ See Naumann 115

²⁹ See “Werewolf”

³⁰ See Naumann, 116.

³¹ See Naumann 114.

³² See Naumann 117.

³³ See Green 39,

deliberate motions of the sport on the movement of five creatures: deer, monkey, bear, crane and tiger.³⁴

The tiger as a prominent figure in Chinese astrology is rather well-known in Western societies, since it forms one of the twelve zodiac signs: contrary to the our Gregorian calendar, China uses a lunar calendar. This system is composed of five twelve-year cycles, which together form a grand 60-year cycle – each of these twelve lunar years has an animal as its symbol. The legend claims that “when Buddha summoned the creatures of the earth to bid him farewell, only 12 attended. To commemorate their devotion, he named a lunar year after each of them, in the order in which they had arrived” (Green 46). The next Year of the Tiger will start on the Chinese New Year’s Day in 2010.³⁵

In Taoism, Chinas prevalent religion, the feline is one of the most important animals in several aspects: first of all, Taoist belief says that the universe is divided into the “two opposing yet complementary forces of energy, Yin and Yang, forces that are often wind and water or the tiger and the dragon” (Thapar 28). Traditionally, the tiger is associated with the principle of yin, which stands for “everything dark, moist, receptive, earthy, and female”, while the dragon is the animal of yang, which is “bright, dry, heavenly, active, and male” (“Yin and Yang”).



Fig. 11: the taijitu, symbol for yin and yang

Furthermore, Taoism divided the sky into four equal parts; an animal reigns over each of these quarters: the South is governed by the vermilion bird, the North by the black tortoise, the East by the azure dragon³⁶ and the West by the white tiger.³⁷ The pairs South-North and East-West oppose and, at the same time, complement each other – again, the principle of yin and yang comes into play. It is believes that the dualistic forces of tiger and dragon can be represented on earth; wherever their energies are well balanced out, there is the ideal place for humans to live: from this belief, the principle of feng shui was developed – a practice recently taken over by allegedly trendy Westerners, but

³⁴ See Green 89.

³⁵ See „The Chinese Zodiac“.

³⁶ Cf. Thapar 28: he does not speak of an azure but of a green dragon

³⁷ See Green 39.

it is obviously more than just an esoteric lifestyle tool: feng shui was used to determine the ideal burial places for emperors or the perfect design for towns.³⁸



Fig. 12: Cold storage room in a tiger farm

Another attribute given to the tiger which closely ties in to its association with yin – the female, dark and sensual force – is that of enormous sexual potency. Since male tigers are known to be able to copulate many times a day in mating season, body parts such as the penis or testicles became a popular aphrodisiac in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). In fact, almost every part of the tiger has its purpose in TCM: bones, fat, blood, eyeballs, teeth, whiskers, etc.³⁹ Even today, the black market for tiger parts

is an enormous problem, since the old beliefs have subsisted until this day. Not only does poaching present an immense threat to the few tigers that have survived in the wild, but there are even tiger farms that breed the animals under dismal conditions to satisfy the demand for its body parts.

Today, there are very few Chinese tigers left that live in the wild – if any. Apart from TCM and poaching, it was Mao Zedong who sounded the death knell for tigers by “encourag[ing] farmers to kill them, which [...] effectively degraded one of China’s most ancient and revered spiritual images” (Green 82).

When turning to China’s southern neighbour India, it can be observed that the tiger has always had a similar impact on the country’s culture and religion. The earliest cultural depictions of the animals are found on seals excavated in Harappa in today’s Pakistan – similar to those dug up in Mohenjo-Daro – from 2500 BC. Even then, the animal was linked with fertility and femininity: one seal, for example, shows “a nude female, upside down with thighs held wide apart, with two tigers standing on one side” (Thapar 78).

³⁸ See Bruun 65,66.

³⁹ See Thapar 31.

On the whole Indian subcontinent, and especially in Bengal, various tiger gods were worshipped throughout the ages by numerous tribes and forest communities, either known by the animal's totemic name Bagh (literally meaning "tiger") or by proper names, such as Bagheshwar.⁴⁰ The most important tiger deity, however, was Dakshin Raye, who was acknowledged by Hindus and Muslims alike.⁴¹ In most cases, this deity was associated with power, potency and fecundity – in this context, it is intriguing to note that the Sanskrit word for "tiger" is "vyaghra", a homophone to Pfizer's potency drug Viagra.⁴² The tiger, however, was not only associated with fertility in its bodily connotation, but also in connection with agrarian culture: rituals were held in honour of the Tiger God in order to beg for a rich harvest.⁴³ Similar to Chinese



Fig. 13: Durga and her tigress fighting

culture, most of these tribes also believed in were-tigers, and tiger parts were a fixture in traditional medicine.

Still, the perhaps best-known and most important religious role of the animal is the tiger as the vehicle of the ten-armed Hindu goddess Durga, who still is an extremely important deity in the religion in her various incarnations (another one being, for example, the fierce deity Kali). Created as a warrior goddess, she and her tigress are the supreme fighters against evil in the Hindu pantheon.⁴⁴

Her consort, Lord Shiva – Hinduism's supreme god – is usually depicted either wearing a loincloth made from tiger skin or sitting upon one. Carpets with tiger stripes are still used in both Hinduism and Buddhism as prayer rugs; sleeping on such a carpet brings about protection from evil spirits.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ See Russell 248, 320, 331. Interestingly enough, the word "bagh" was taken up by Rudyard Kipling in his *Jungle Books* for the name of the black panther Bagheera, which is a diminutive form for a tiger.

⁴¹ See Mukherjee, 3

⁴² See Green 50, 51: however, she says that „according to Pfizer, [...] this [...] is just a striking coincidence.”

⁴³ See Thapar 85.

⁴⁴ See Thapar 93, Green 86, Jackson 50.

⁴⁵ See Green 93.

A rather curious symbiosis between religious devotion and animal protection can be found in the Wat Pa Luangta Pua Temple in Thailand – better known as the Tiger Temple. In 1999, the abbot of the Buddhist monastery brought in a tiger cub that was saved from a taxidermist – since then, the temple has developed into a sanctuary for 16 tigers that share the space with 12 monks. They care for the animals, take them for walks on leashes and revere them, since they could be reincarnated relatives; moreover, the tiger is among the five most important animals in Buddhism, which can even find enlightenment. The temple has become a popular tourist attraction – for a small fee, tourists can stroke the tigers and pose for photos with the big cats.⁴⁶

All in all, the tiger was given far more attention in East Asia than on the Indian subcontinent. Mukherjee (1987) says that it “did not gain much respectability until after the Mughals came to India” (2). Only in the 16th century was the cat considered a “worthy hunting objects for kings and princes” (3). A noteworthy exception to that notion, however, was Tipu Sultan, ruler of the mighty Indian state of Mysore from 1782 to 1799. He was a fierce opponent of the English invaders and died fighting them. He was obsessed with tigers, which began with his name: “Tipu” is the Canarese word for “tiger”, and



Fig. 14: Tippoo's Tiger (1793)

everything in his court was adorned with symbols of the cat: the uniforms of his guards and soldiers, their weapons, etc. Even his throne stood on wooden tiger paws.⁴⁷ He is most famous, though, for a wooden automaton, today known as “Tippoo's Tiger”: it shows a life-size tiger standing upon an English soldier, tearing his throat out. At the same time, it is a

musical instrument:

It contains a pipe and bellows mechanism, operated by turning a handle on the tiger's left side. Air is pumped into the bellows within its body and expelled as a wailing shriek and a loud roar. The victim's hand moves up and down and tunes

⁴⁶ All information from the TV documentary *Der Tiger und der Mönch*.

⁴⁷ See Green 102, 103.

may be played on the button keys in the tiger's side. ("The Tiger and The Thistle")

Today, this curiosity is on display in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, where it is one of the most popular exhibits.

Apart from China and India, the tiger cult has also been thriving in Siberia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Java, Bali, Burma and even Japan, where there have not been any tigers for centuries. It even reached the Caspian, thus coming relatively close to Europe. Apart from Hinduism, Buddhism and various smaller religions, the feline also appears in Islam: Muslim textiles and ornaments frequently depict the animal, and in Sumatra, for example, it is believed that tiger attacks on people are a form of Allah's revenge on those who have committed sins.⁴⁸

The metaphorical and symbolic significance of the tiger

The previous subchapters outlined how the tiger has left its mark on human cultures; therefore, it is not surprising that the animal is also commonly used in a metaphorical or symbolic way in politics, economy and sports.

The tiger makes frequent appearances in heraldry. The big cat is depicted in the coat of arms of many predominantly Asian countries and cities; however, tigers as heraldic charges are rarely seen in Europe, where the lion is the most frequent animal on coats of arms. Tigers on European crests or coats of arms look more like lions or wolves; only "[w]hen the real tiger became known to heraldry, it was described as a Bengal tiger" ("Heraldry"). Like the lion, it stands for power and prowess.

The tiger is also loaded with much symbolic valour on the island of Sri Lanka: over the course of the last decades, Sri Lanka has frequently been in the spotlight of international events due to the conflicts between governmental troops and a separatist terrorist group that calls itself the Tamil Tigers. Their official name is LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) and their aim is to make the North and East of the island, inhabited predominantly by Tamil

⁴⁸ See Thapar 68.

people, independent from the South and West, with its mainly Sinhalese population.⁴⁹ The Black Tigers, a subdivision of the LTTE, are the global leader in the number of suicide bombings.⁵⁰

The group's name alludes to the tiger's legendary physical strength; moreover, it implies that the LTTE will eventually conquer their victims just as



Fig. 15: Flag of the LTTE

the tiger, the world's largest predator, is superior to any of its prey animals. The LTTE's official flag shows a ferocious tiger emerging from a red background; the animal is in the centre of two crossed rifles. The weapons obviously symbolise the LTTE's readiness to fight with iron resolve, and the

tiger that is emerging from the flag probably alludes to Sri Lanka's national flag, on which there is a lion. This animal has been the symbol of the Sinhalese people for centuries.⁵¹ Therefore, the Tamil tiger can be seen as the counterpart to the Sinhalese lion. Both animals are regarded as "Kings of Beasts", and they roughly equal each other when it comes to physical force. Therefore, the tiger is symbolic of the LTTE's goal of creating an independent Tamil state, which could coexist with a Sinhalese state on the other part of the island.

The juxtaposition of tiger and lion is also of importance when we now turn towards the famous Celtic Tiger. It is commonly believed that the term was created in the mid-1990s, but actually, the term is much older. A pamphlet from the 1880s, which can be found in the British Library, reveals that the term originates from the Anglo-Irish conflict: the idea was to create a symbolic animal – the Celtic Tiger – that stands a chance against the British Lion.⁵²

However, the term in its modern meaning was coined by the economist Kevin Gardiner in 1994 in analogy to the Asian Tiger economies.⁵³ In consequence, it was picked up by the media; the Celtic Tiger soon became a household term for the rapid growth of Irish economy in the 1990s. The Celtic

⁴⁹ See Zastiral.

⁵⁰ See „Sri Lanka – Living With Terror“.

⁵¹ See Aloysius.

⁵² Information provided by Univ.-Prof. Dr. Werner Huber on Nov 27, 2008.

⁵³ See Higgins Wyndham 16.

Tiger's precursors are the so-called East Asian Tigers (or tiger economies), an umbrella term that initially covered South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. The term was introduced in the 1980s to describe the extraordinary economic growth of these countries; later, several other smaller countries with similarly soaring economies were also counted among the Asian Tigers. The name alludes to a traditional denomination of China, the Big Tiger.⁵⁴ Apart from the Celtic and the Asian Tigers, newspapers have recently adapted the terminology for other countries and regions as well, as for example the Tatra Tiger (Slovakia) or the Baltic Tiger.⁵⁵ By calling these economies like the big cat, it is made clear that these countries have become strong and powerful forces on the global market; it may also allude to the rapidity of the economic growth that is equalled to the tiger's speed.

Finally, the tiger is a common guest in the field of sports. It appears in the name of innumerable ball game teams (as f.i. the famous Baseball team Detroit Tigers) or as a sports mascot. The idea behind this probably goes back to the ancient belief that by using someone's or something's name, one gains control over that person or creature. In Western culture, this idea is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, which "regularly makes a connection between knowing someone's name and having power over that person. The first human being is instructed to assert his authority over all the beasts [...] by giving them names" (Sawyer 119). Therefore, a sports team that calls itself "tigers" wants to adopt the tiger's legendary strength and energy as their own.

This chapter revealed the widespread influence that the tiger has always exerted on people. Feared and worshipped, killed and revered – this animal has taken on a variety of roles throughout the ages, be it in folklore, religion or politics. This demonstrates that the tiger is an animal that cannot be ignored: it seems to captivate our imagination.

⁵⁴ See „Asiatische Tigerstaaten“.

⁵⁵ Used f.i. in Vilpišauskas or in „Slovakia – Unleashing the Tatra Tiger“.

4) *The tiger in literatures around the world*

Asian literature

Although the tiger is the biggest and most feared predator in Asia, it has never quite managed to rise to literary fame: while the animal certainly has its place in the continent's literature, it is never given any major roles.

One of the perhaps most famous Chinese tales is “the story of Wu Song and his battle with a man-eating tiger [which] has been popular in China since the Yuan Period (1279-1368)” (Bordahl 142) and has since been modelled into various literary forms: dramas, poems and novels – the most famous of which is probably *Water Margin* from the 13th century. The story line, though, is always the same: the heroic Wu Song sets out into the mountains, where a ferocious tiger dwells. Wu Song tracks the beast down and manages to kill it with his bare hands. While in none of the literary treatments of the story the reader identifies with the tiger – it is always portrayed as the villain – , the animal is still described with respect, which is also evident in its denomination as the “King of the Beasts”⁵⁶. Moreover, some adaptations of the tale have provided the tiger with human qualities: the tiger's life is illustrated from its own point of view and its necessity to kill in order to survive is explained; another human touch comes from the description of a sad love story the tiger had to go through. In this version of the story, the tiger “has two sides, its imposing outward appearance and its inward troubled existence, forever hungry and lovelorn” (Bordahl 151).

Apart from the Wu Song legend, the big cat is especially prominent in the fairy tales and myths of China, where it appears over and over again in the same function: that of a villain. In Korean literature, the tiger was frequently portrayed as a foolish, jovial animal that can be outsmarted easily; it was often utilised as comic relief⁵⁷. These Asian depictions find a surprisingly close counterpart in Europe: in a way, the character of the tiger is rather similar to that of the wolf in European storytelling – both are evil and clever, but ultimately failures. In Europe's medieval and modern fairy tale literature, there are many

⁵⁶ Bordahl 146.

⁵⁷ See Green 147.

stories in which the wolf, although malevolent and physically powerful, does not succeed and is frequently outwitted by the tricky fox, for instance in the 17th century fables of Jean de La Fontaine, or in Goethe's epic *Reineke Fuchs*. Contrary to Asia, however, the animals are anthropomorphised: in medieval Europe; basically all animals are portrayed as rather human characters, depicting and satirising contemporary society. Each animal has its name, e.g. Isengrim the Wolf, Reynard the Fox or Bruin the Bear⁵⁸, whereas the tiger in the Asian fable remains nameless (even the tiger in the Wu Song legend is not given a name, although it appears as a major – and in some versions even talking – character).

However, parallels between tiger and wolf go beyond shared characteristics and attributes – in Asia, there are whole fairy tales that are almost identical to their European counterparts, with the tiger playing the wolf's role. One of China's most famous fairy tales tells of a woman who leaves home to see her mother. She reminds her children not to let anyone in until she comes back. However, she is eaten by a tiger, which then slips into her clothes and returns home. It knocks at the door and claims that it is the mother. The children let it in, but they soon find out that the creature is not their mother. So they climb a tree and pretend to see something marvellous from its top. They tell the tiger, which wants to eat them next, to sit in a basket; they will pull him up to the treetop. But when the basket is high enough, the children drop it and the tiger breaks its neck.⁵⁹

The European reader will recognise several components of the story which also appear in the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm: the woman who is off to see her mother is a plotline from "Red Riding Hood" (where we follow a girl that wants to see her grandmother); later in the tale, a wolf eats the grandmother, puts on her clothes and pretends that it is the granny – exactly the same thing happens in the Chinese version, where the wolf is replaced with a tiger which wants to make the children believe that it is their mother. When the tiger, just having killed the mother, wants the children to open the door, it disguises its voice – an element identical to the plot of "The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids": here, the wolf eats chalk to soften its voice to sound like the kids'

⁵⁸ See „Reynard the Fox“.

⁵⁹ Adapted from Naumann 112.

mother. Moreover, at the beginning of both fairy tales the mother warns her children not to let anyone in until her return.

Another Chinese legend with striking parallels to European mythology and which lets the tiger appear in a good light can be found in a pre-Christian historical work: a man and a woman from the nobility fell in love with each other, but they had to keep it a secret. However, she became pregnant and gave birth to a baby, whom she abandoned in the woods. A tigress attended to the child and suckled it. As an adult, the boy became an important figure in Chinese history.⁶⁰

This legend makes Westerners think of the founding legend of Rome, in which it is claimed that the two abandoned twins Romulus and Remus were suckled by a wolf. Once more, the role taken on by the tiger in Chinese mythology is the same part the wolf plays in Europe.

The question arises how is it possible that two cultures which are separated by thousands of kilometres and which had practically nothing to do with each other virtually share the same legends and fairy tales. There is no universal answer to that issue, since there are several theories, and each is worth considering. One of the most important figures in the field of fairy tale research, Jack Zipes, claims that every fairy tale is deeply rooted in the oral storytelling tradition which exists all over the world; these tales “‘contaminated’ one another historically through cross-cultural exchange that has produced fruitful and multiple versions of similar social and personal experiences” (Zipes 846). So it is possible that through this exchange, Chinese tales entered Europe at some point? Zipes says that “the motifs, characters, topoi, and magical properties of the literary tradition can be traced back to tale collection from the Orient that predate Christianity. They are apparent in Indian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman myths” (851). It is historically validated that the Chinese entered into contact with several European civilisations well before the advent of Christianity, so Zipes’ explanation may very well be true. Elements foreign to the European fairy tale recipient were replaced by local components, so the tiger was replaced by the wolf – at the time, both were the most feared beasts of prey on their native continents.

⁶⁰ See Naumann 114.

However, if fairy tales predominantly disseminate through cultural contact, how can Zipes' theory explain the existence of a pre-Columbian version of "Cinderella"?⁶¹ Therefore, other attempts at an explanation focus less on socio-historical factors, but on psychological aspects. In the 19th century, Adolf Bastian, the father of the polygenesis theory, claimed that all peoples of the world share the same basic "elementary ideas" ("Elementargedanke"); therefore, the same tales can come to life in completely different areas of the world⁶². Bastian's theories heavily influenced the formation of C.G. Jung's idea of the archetype, that is to say, universal myths that are innate to every human being. A notion that built upon Jung's work was popularised in the second half of the 20th century by Joseph Campbell's work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). The notion of archetypal plots triggered the compilation of fairy tale catalogues, in which the individual stories are collected under one representative motif, f.i. the Aarne-Thompson catalogue puts fairy tales in several categories; each category, in turn, has several subdivisions: animal tales are divided into stories with wild animals, domestic animals, animals and objects, etc. Another system of classification does not focus on the plots, but on the functions of story elements: each fairy tale consists of a number of elements that all have the same functions. This system was proposed by the Russian structuralist Vladimir Propp.⁶³

A completely different approach is the concept of monogenesis, which claims that every fairy tale stems from a specific country of origin, from which it begins to spread to other areas. However, the aforementioned Indian Cinderella proves that the same storyline can appear in several regions of the world independently; therefore, the monogenesis theory should be taken with a grain of salt.

⁶¹ See „Indian Cinderella“.

⁶² See „Märchen“.

⁶³ See Rubala 25.

Western literature

The tiger has also made its way into European fables. In classical antiquity, it appeared as a character in the Roman writer Aelianus' work *De natura animalium*, a collection of 17 short fables, and in the fables of the Greek Aesop (for example "The Fox and the Tiger").⁶⁴ In these stories, the tiger is usually an extremely strong, self-assured animal, which, as the reader learns, has its weaknesses nevertheless, just like Achilles had his: even the greatest and most powerful beings can be defeated.

Not surprisingly, the big cat has not made such an impact on European literature as in Asia. However, it still left a few traces in literary history. As already pointed out in chapter 3.1.1, the peoples of Europe knew of the existence of tigers, but there were extremely few live specimens on the continent, which explains why the tiger did not permeate writers' imaginations to the same extent as in Asia. It remained on the periphery in European literature – apart from a few interesting references to the animal that generally make use of the negative stereotypical view of the animal:

In the poetic and artistic tradition of the Western World the tiger has consistently symbolized bloodthirsty cruelty. Although occasionally poets like Shakespeare or Milton utilized the beast to suggest only untamable fierceness, the generally used him to suggest savage cruelty, never to connote such noble qualities as the lion often symbolized. For Shakespeare the tiger was a favorite symbol of human depravity. [...] In *Paradise Lost* as Satan descends from archangel to serpent, he briefly assumes the guise of a lion, but then quickly degenerates to the bloodthirsty tiger and the venomous toad. (Baine 565).

Perhaps the first writer to focus on the tiger as a literary character with a deeper meaning was Aphra Behn, one of the first female authors in English literature. As a young woman, she travelled to Surinam (then an English colony), where she met an African slave of royal descent. The experiences she made in South America formed the basis for her most famous novel, *Oroonoko* (1688). The main character is the West African prince Oroonoko, who is enslaved and carried off to Surinam together with Imoinda, with whom he is deeply in love. In South America, he is given the name of Caesar. After

⁶⁴ See Lessing.

organising a failed slave revolt, Oroonoko is punished; in a plan to restore his honour, he decides to kill the governor of Surinam, but only after decapitating the pregnant Imoinda in order to protect her and their baby from revenge and humiliation. However, afterwards Caesar is too physically shattered to go after the governor; in the end, he is caught and publicly executed.

Oroonoko features two scenes where tigers play a prominent role: Oroonoko accompanies his slave master on a hunting expedition in order to steal tiger cubs and to kill their mother. Caesar grabs his master's sword and kills the enraged tigress himself. At another point, he slays a tiger that has stolen cattle from a farm. These two relatively short scenes nevertheless are important for the novel as a whole: since "classical motifs were especially fashionable, and therefore saleable, in the 1680s" (Miller 48), Behn aimed to create an air of antiquity in the New World, which becomes most obvious in the rechristening of the hero: he loses his African name (or African-American name, since Oroonoko is not a typically West African name, but rather an old spelling for the South American river Orinoco – Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* mentions the river in this spelling variant twice⁶⁵) to be given the name of Caesar. Other elements that "play with the Graeco-Roman heritage" (Miller 47) include the tiger cub hunt, which was – according to Pliny the Elder's descriptions – a "sport" in the Roman Empire, and, of course, the inclusion of tigers themselves. As already mentioned, tigers were a common sight in Roman arenas and frequently appeared in Roman and Greek mosaic art (see chapter 3.1.1): in ancient Rome, slaves that were forced to fight in the Colosseum had to kill the attacking cats in order to stay alive – which is just the situation that Oroonoko/Caesar is in, with the Surinamese jungle replacing the amphitheatre.

However, perhaps more important than the recreation of an atmosphere of classical antiquity is the metaphorical meaning of the tigers. There are evident parallels between the cats and Caesar: firstly, both are obviously in the wrong environment. There have never been tigers in South America⁶⁶, which makes the jungles of Surinam an unnatural habitat for them – the same holds true for Caesar. He was caught and wrested away from his homeland in Ghana

⁶⁵ See Defoe 170.

⁶⁶ However, it may very well be that Behn either simply did not know about the non-existence of tigers in the Americas, or that she used the word „tiger“ in an equation with the word „puma“ or „cougar“, as it was possible at the time (Miller 54).

only to be put into an environment completely unfamiliar to him. Moreover, the tiger's association with royalty and nobility – as pointed out earlier, tigers were kept as pets by some Roman emperors and also held in several European courts at the time – draws a further parallel to Caesar's own royal descent. In that way, the slaughter of the cats at the hands of a dominator forecasts Caesar's own fate: in the end, he himself is put to death by those who are more powerful.

Miller (60, 61) sees another analogy: Caesar's murder of Imoinda and their unborn son can be seen as a self-destructing act of defence against the English slave masters. He wants to spare his family a life of dishonour and therefore puts an end to their lives in a dignified way. This act of defence is mirrored in the behaviour of the tigress that defends her cubs: in the same way, which eventually also leads to her death, she tries to protect her litter.

Apart from Aphra Behn and the works discussed later in this thesis, there are no noteworthy literary appearances of tigers for a very long time. It is the 19th and 20th centuries that bring forth some works that ought to be discussed here: in 1882, the American Frank R. Stockton penned the short story "The Lady, or the Tiger?". It takes place in an ancient kingdom, whose king puts criminals not to an ordinary trial: instead, they are put into an arena with two doors: behind one door, there is a beautiful woman – if the offender chooses this door, all charges are withdrawn and he has to marry the woman. The other door, however, separates the criminal from a fierce tiger. If choosing this door, the wrongdoer is found guilty and has to face the tiger. When the king's daughter is discovered to have a lover far below her own social status, the lover is arrested and finds himself in the amphitheatre. The princess knows behind which door there is the tiger, which means that she could secretly point at the door that would lead to freedom. However, while the man would survive by such help, he then would have to marry the woman behind the door. Finally, she points at one of the doors – but it is not revealed what was behind it. Instead, Stockton asks the reader: "And so I leave it with all of you: Which came out of the opened door – the lady, or the tiger?" (Stockton). Once more, the story presents the tiger as the embodiment of mortal danger, as a "man-eater". It creates the juxtaposition between lady and tiger, between beauty and ferocity, between civilisation and untameable wildness. However, the phrase could just

as well be seen as an equation of two evils: from the point of view of the princess, the lady is in no way less dangerous than the tiger. Indeed, the idea of women as a mortal danger is reproduced in colloquial language: a not too respectable woman with a long list of ex lovers is frequently referred to as a “man-eater”.⁶⁷ Stockton’s story made such an impact that the title of the story entered the English language as a catchphrase for any difficult decision.⁶⁸

Accounts of tiger hunts enjoyed great popularity in the second half of the 19th century. As pointed out earlier, no travelogue written by an Englishman about his experience India was complete without the inclusion of tiger hunt scenes. Schell (229) said that there was “at least one incident or even chapter entitled “My First Tiger”” in “almost every memoir on Indian hunting”. However, most of these memoirs describe the death of a single, but of innumerable tigers that were slaughtered for no other reason than diversion. In his autobiographical account *Thirteen Years among the Wild Beast of India* (1882), George Sanderson wrote that in his leisure time he “amused [him]self by shooting a few of the tigers in the neighborhood” (Sanderson). In another chapter, he even compares the advantages and disadvantages of elephant versus tiger shooting. Descriptions of tiger hunts were so numerous “that the tiger-hunter himself became somewhat of a stock-type by the end of the century” (Schell 229). However, the 20th century did not bring the publication of hunting memoirs to an abrupt end: Arthur Locke’s *The Tigers of Trengganu* was first published as late as 1954.⁶⁹ George Orwell satirised the cliché of the English tiger hunter in the 1934 novel *Burmese Days* by asking, “did not the proverbial Anglo Indian bore always talk about tiger shooting?” (209).

In 1902, Rainer Maria Rilke wrote the famous poem “Der Panther”⁷⁰, which, though not focusing on a tiger, is still of importance to the topic. Rilke was inspired by a panther he saw in a Paris zoo; the poem’s focus lies on the unnaturalness of the animal’s surroundings. How can such a magnificent creature that is born to roam about the jungles exist in such a confined space behind iron bars? The poem rose to fame quickly, and there are several poems and prose texts that were obviously motivated by the “Panther”.

⁶⁷ As an example, see Feimster.

⁶⁸ See „The Lady, or the Tiger?“

⁶⁹ See Schell 229.

⁷⁰ See Rilke.

A contemporary of Rilke, Alfred Wolfenstein, penned a poem called “Tiger” at some point between 1920 and 1940⁷¹, which concentrated on exactly the same subject matter: a wild animal that cannot escape its man-made prison. Wolfenstein himself was a close friend of Rilke’s and regarded him as a role model for his poetry.⁷² As in Rilke’s poem, the animal obviously stands for the cry for freedom; there is a stark contrast between the proud, powerful cat and its dull, miserable state of captivity. The poem underlines the importance of individuality and self-determination – two basic needs for any being, of which the caged tiger, however, is deprived.

In the 1930s, two more texts centred on the life of tigers in zoos: the Frenchman Paul Valéry (1871-1945) composed two short prose texts about a tiger in a London zoo – “Tiger” and “Le même”⁷³. While the former is written in the hasty style of a telegram, the latter is a fully written out, carefully arranged version of its precursor. “Tiger” is written from the point of view of a zoo visitor and illustrates his observation of a caged tiger. The poem leads “from the appreciation of the customary qualities of the tiger [...] into the consideration of what the tiger’s attributes mean in the human mind” (Loubère 310). The tiger is idealised; it is considered the epitome of perfect organisation and “absolute mastery” of its body (311). However, similar to Rilke’s idea, the sheer strength and physical superiority are of no avail in the small iron cage, and when the tiger yawns, this becomes “the ultimate scorn of unemployed power” (312). Valéry’s “Le même” basically follows the same trail of thought, only in the form of a fully fleshed out prose text.

Two South American authors that concerned themselves with the tiger are the celebrated Argentinian writers Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) and Julio Cortázar (1914-1984). The latter published a short story collection called *Bestiario* (“Bestiary”) in 1951⁷⁴, which is also the name of the last story in the book. It is about a country house through which a tiger roams freely and about the family that has to live with it. They have to follow a code of respect and honesty if they do not want to be killed by the animal. It never comes out quite clearly whether or not that tiger actually exists; however, there is one lethal

⁷¹ Wolfenstein 287.

⁷² Wolfenstein 441.

⁷³ See Loubère 310.

⁷⁴ See Schmidt-Cruz xi

accident that suggests that it does live in the house: the arrogant character of Kid does not respect the code and marches right into the room where the tiger rests and he is killed.

Jorge Luis Borges penned two texts that treat tigers, a prose text called “Dreamtigers” and the poem “El otro tigre”. Again, like in Cortázar, the tiger itself is not a physical, bodily being, but more something of an image – it symbolises a writer’s inability to accurately capture reality⁷⁵.

There is not much more to be said on the role of the tiger in Western literatures. It continued to make brief appearances as the stereotypical ferocious man-killer in exoticist novels like *Das indische Grabmal* by the German Thea von Harbou (which was brought to the big screen twice, once by the famous director Fritz Lang in 1959)⁷⁶, *Harry Black* by David Walker (1956) or *Shadow of the Monsoon* by William Manchester (1956)⁷⁷, but all in all, the cat of prey has never risen to a level of fame comparable to that in Asia.

⁷⁵ Loubère 313.

⁷⁶ See “Thea von Harbou”.

⁷⁷ See Mukherjee 1, 8.

5) *The tiger in Anglophone literature*

William Blake, „The Tyger“

About the author

From his early childhood, William Blake (1757-1827) received a strict religious schooling.⁷⁸ He soon discovered his talent for drawing and consequently enrolled for the Royal Academy; however, frictions between the school's and



Fig. 16: Plate of „The Tyger“

Blake's own religious views soon made him quit the academy. Instead, he became an engraver. Soon after marrying Catherine Boucher, he opened his own printing business, which enabled him to publish the poetry collection *Songs of Innocence* (1789) under his complete control. In 1794, it was republished in junction with its complementary counterpart *Songs of Experience* under the title *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* with a total of 54 illustrated poems.⁷⁹ Although it was not

Blake's first literary work, it was the first to combine etchings with text, thus forming a multi-medial work of art.

About the poem

In the collection *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul*, Blake opposed the world as it ought to be (*Innocence*) to the world as he knew it (*Experience*). London's society heavily influenced the writing of the author, who has lived in the town all his life.

Six of the poems found in *Innocence* have a direct counterpart in *Experience*.⁸⁰ The first poem of *Innocence* is called "The Lamb"; its complement

⁷⁸ See Moss, Valestuk 435.

⁷⁹ Gardner VIII.

⁸⁰ See Moss, Valestuk 438.

is the famous “The Tyger” in *Experience*. With *Experience*, Blake initially intended to write a volume of parodies on the poems in *Innocence*, and “The Tyger” also started out as a satire of “The Lamb”. However, penning parodies was not as promising as Blake had planned, and so he abandoned his project after composing nine parodies.⁸¹

The parody of “Tyger” lies mainly in the first stanza: similar to “The Lamb”, “The Tyger” “begins with a questions about the Creator” (Hirsch 244). But while the questions in “Lamb” appear childish and not too sophisticated, “Tyger” chooses a more mature, complex tone, and contrary to “Lamb”, the questions posed in “Tyger” remain unanswered. It was Blake’s intention to satirise the one-sided, naïve world-view he has propagated some years earlier in “Lamb”, where there is only love and tenderness: in the world described in “Tyger”, there *is* a place for wild predators, for danger and fear – it is a realistic world, radically opposed to the pipe dream in “Lamb”. The God of love and mercy propagated in “Lamb” is the same God that brings terror and death to the world.⁸² In line 20, Blake quotes “The Lamb” almost verbatim, when he asks incredulously: “Did he who made the Lamb make thee?”, thus suggesting that both ferociousness and kindness are merely aspects of the same creative force. Another likely interpretation says that while the state of innocence allows for acting like a blameless and inoffensive lamb, experience, which comes with the years, inevitably turns every lamb into a tiger, an animal which is forced to be wild and ferocious by its grim surroundings: over time, no one can escape being influenced for the worse by a corrupted world.

A religious reading sees the lamb obviously standing for Jesus Christ (the Lamb of God); its opposing force may be interpreted as Satan himself. Indeed, in an earlier draft of the poem, Blake alluded to hell as the birthplace of the tyger: “Burnt in distant deeps or skies / The cruel fire of thine eyes”. It may be that these cruel fires are the fires of hell, and considering the proverb which claims that the eyes are the mirror of the soul (which was already known in Blake’s times), it is very likely that Blake wanted his readers to associate the

⁸¹ See Hirsch 100.

⁸² See Hirsch 245.

tiger with the devil. Anyhow, the stanza was later revised and did not appear in the final version of the poem.⁸³

The dualistic powers of good and evil come from a God that combines the animal's ferocity with its beauty – an element which is typical for the sublime. The poem clearly conveys a feeling of admiration for the big cat: the combination of dread and flawless proportions in the phrase “fearful symmetry” puts it in a nutshell. God is described like a blacksmith, forging a new powerful tool: the fourth stanza, with words like “hammer”, “chain”, “anvil” or “furnace”, makes the creation of the tiger appear “as an act of fiery craftsmanship in a fantastic smithy” (Hirsch 249). When in line 11 there is a description of the tiger's heart-beat, a cleverly designed line 12 makes it audible: every syllable is stressed (except the “&”), with the result that “virtually every sound hits hard. In between, in two rhythmic iambic lines, the tyger's great heart begins to beat.” (Marsh 84) The idea of God as a blacksmith may be inspired by the upcoming Industrial Revolution, which had its roots in England and which Blake witnessed.

However, is the suggestion that the tiger was created in a divine smithy compatible with the aforementioned interpretation that the tiger, with its cruel eyes, in which the fires of hell are blazing, is an allegory of Satan? These two readings, seemingly contradicting at first glance, can indeed come together, when we consider the actual story of Satan: once an angel in God's service by the name of Lucifer – “the light-bringer” –, he defied God and therefore was banished from Heaven; he became the antagonist of God and the personification of ultimate evil. The myth was versified by John Milton in his epic poem “Paradise Lost”; Blake was a great admirer of Milton and created an illustrated version of the poem. In this reading, it is likely that Blake was influenced by this retelling of the Satan legend and modelled his tiger after Milton's antihero. The wings that are mentioned in line 7 could be a hint that the tiger stands for Satan; however, they might also allude to the classical story of Icarus, who dared to confront the gods by flying too close to the sun with waxen wings – they melted and Icarus fell to his death. With this reference to Greek

⁸³ See Phillips 64.

mythology, Blake maybe wanted to indicate that those who challenge the divine will be inevitably defeated.

Accompanying the poem, there is an illustration of a tiger standing next to a tree. According to some scholars, this animal looks rather inoffensive and absolutely not like the wild beast described in the text: the reader imagines a beast that is radiating energy, vigour and sheer physical superiority. Eaves (207) relates the harmless depiction of the tiger to the overwhelming amount of highly philosophical questions that remain unanswered, making the “nonplussed tiger appear more than a little anxious under such demanding language and the responding desire for answers”. The Blake biographer Gerald Eades Bentley even states that the mighty predator looks “like a stuffed toy forgotten at the bottom of a tree” (147). Nevertheless, this was Blake’s intention: as an avid illustrator and engraver, he “was perfectly capable of depicting terrors [...]. The image in “The Tyger” is an antidote to the terrors of the text” (147).

However, while it is certainly true that Blake’s etching is not exactly a lifelike portrait, one has to bear in mind that there are several plates of the poem illustrated by Blake, and while in some, the tiger is smiling, which



Fig. 17: Two variants of the tiger

arguably makes it appear like a tame kitten, it is shown with a more hideous face in others. Blake probably even saw live tigers that could have served as models for his etchings, since there were two specimens at the Tower of London and one was exhibited near his home in Leicester House.⁸⁴

Blake followed the long-standing tradition of depicting the tiger as a ferocious beast. Interestingly enough, while the literary world in general ignored the animal, Blake seemed to have been fascinated by it: there are no less than 36 appearances of tigers in all of Blake’s writings; while generally used to symbolise cruelty and evil, they sometimes also stand for passion and energy, as for example in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.⁸⁵ It is quite clear that Blake was heavily influenced by contemporary descriptions of the tiger, such as the

⁸⁴ Ackroyd 147.

⁸⁵ Baine 566.

encyclopaedia entry of the *Britannica* quoted in chapter 3.1.1. Nevertheless, a closer scrutiny of the poem reveals further inspirations: the famous first lines “Tyger, Tyger, burning bright / in the forests of the night” (1-2) may go back to the ancient belief that climate conditions determine an animal’s nature: the entry on lions in the *Historia Animalium*, published in the mid-1550s, says that “the degree of fierceness in these animals depends on the degree of heat” (Parsons 575). The tiger was also believed to live in hot and dry places only (at the time, some scholars even shifted the tiger’s habitat to Africa), which would make him an extremely ferocious animal. However, Blake seems to have done better research, since he located his tyger in its natural territory, in “the forests of the night”. But still, this legend explains why Blake’s contemporaries always attributed the tiger with an insatiable thirst for blood: the heat, combined with the big cat’s alleged fierceness, drives it almost mad in its desire for fresh blood – therefore, when it has hunted down its prey, the tiger “plunges his head into the body of the slaughtered animal, and sucks the blood, before he devours the carcase, as if delighting in ferocious slaughter” (Linnaeus, quoted by Parsons). This mindset makes it all too understandable why Blake chose to symbolise evil with this animal.

Some scholars believe that Blake was not so much inspired by an actual live tiger, but by contemporary reports on the French Revolution, which was at its height at the time that Blake penned the poem, and of which Blake was a glowing supporter. In these days the tiger established itself as a popular image for the murderous French revolutionaries: after more than 1,000 anti-revolutionary prison inmates were slaughtered in the September Massacres of 1792, Samuel Romilly wrote: “One might as well think of establishing a republic of tigers in some forest in Africa, as of maintaining a free government among such monsters” (quoted in Phillips 68), and several years later, Williams Wordsworth described “post-revolutionary Paris [...] as a place where Robespierre's enemies were as "defenceless as a wood where tigers roam"” (Wordsworth quoted in Borowsky). The revolutionary leader Jean-Paul Marat, supporter of extreme political violence against counterrevolutionaries, was described to have eyes resembling “those of the tyger cat” (Pedley quoted in Ackroyd 149). This may be another possible explanation for the description of the tiger’s eyes in Blake’s poem.

Conclusively, it can be said that William Blake purposefully chose an animal that, at the time of the publication of *Experience*, ranked among the most feared and hated of all beasts – bringing such a monstrous creature in connection with God and the wonders of Creation surely must have left his contemporaries dumbstruck. Indeed, the impression that Blake's poem made was so big that over the course of the decades following the release of the *Songs*, Blake was remembered almost exclusively as the author of the "Tyger": in fact, Blake would probably have been forgotten completely if it were not for his famous poem. Only in 1863, when Alexander Gilchrist published a biography of Blake, was the poet brought back to a wider audience.⁸⁶ Especially in the second half of the 20th century, literary criticism dealt with the poem to such an extent that some scholars speak of specific "Tyger studies".⁸⁷ Since its publication, the poem has been included in poetry collections so often that it has become the most anthologised poem in the English language.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ See Borowsky.

⁸⁷ See Borowsky.

⁸⁸ See Eaves 207.

Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Books*

About the author

Rudyard Kipling was born in 1865 in Bombay to English parents.⁸⁹ His father, John Lockwood Kipling, was an art teacher and soon introduced young Rudyard to Indian art and mythology. However, when he was six, the boy was sent to England, where he went through an unhappy childhood and youth: first he stayed at a foster home for five years before attending United Services College, a boarding school where bullying and fighting were a daily occurrence. In 1882, he returned to India, worked as a journalist and began writing prose and verse texts. Back in England, he rapidly rose to fame and became the most celebrated author of his time. The two volumes of *The Jungle Books* were published in 1894 and 1895, the novel *Kim* in 1901. In 1907, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature – he was the first Englishman to receive this honour. He died in 1936 as a rather isolated figure: his glowing support for colonialism and his rigid imperialist world-view was no longer fashionable in a more liberal age. His literary star was also quick to sink, and today he is not remembered as a Nobel Prize winner, but as a second-rate children's books author: this is partly due to the permission he gave Robert Baden-Powell to adopt elements and names from Kipling's *Jungle Books* into the Scout Movement in order to achieve didactic goals, but the crucial factor was Disney's film version of Kipling's classics, which had a good share in distorting the public image of Rudyard Kipling.

About the books

Already before the publication of the *Jungle Books*, the character of Mowgli was known to Kipling's readership: the story collection *Many Inventions*, published in 1893, brought together fourteen tales, ten of which had already been published before: one of these stories, "In the Rukh", presents an Indian forest ranger by

⁸⁹ See „Rudyard Kipling“.

the name of Mowgli who claims to have been raised by a pack of wolves in the jungle.⁹⁰

This story was one of the elements that led Kipling to the creation of the jungle stories. One major influence was his own childhood in India: even though he was in Vermont while writing the *Jungle Book* stories, his imagination led him back to his youth on the subcontinent and the stories, myths and legends he had heard about the continent. Other incentives were books about the Indian wilderness, above all his father's *Beast and Man in India* (1891) and Robert Armitage Sterndale's *Natural History of the Mammalia in India and Ceylon* (1884), and novels such as *Nada the Lily* (1892) by H. Rider Haggard, in which anthropomorphised animals appear.⁹¹ The author himself "cited the ancient *Jataka* tales of India [as sources], in which the Buddha appears in different animal forms" (Mallett 82). However, his own personal experience was the basis for the character of Mowgli: the boy had to grow up without parents in a hostile environment – a striking parallel to Kipling's own childhood, who was left by his parents in early childhood and had to endure violence and a clearly established pecking order in his school and college years.⁹²

Writing the stories obviously came easy to Kipling: in his autobiography *Something of Myself* (1937), he describes the writing process:

After blocking out the main idea in my head, the pen took charge, and I watched it begin to write stories about Mowgli and animals, which later grew into the *Jungle Books*. (Kipling, *Something* 126).

The stories that were published as *The Jungle Book* in May 1894 had already appeared in magazines from 1892 onwards. The volume contains seven stories; each story is followed by a song in verse form. A second instalment, simply called *The Second Jungle Book*, was published one year later. It is a collection of eight stories, in five of which Mowgli reappears. Out of these 15 tales, eight loosely follow Mowgli's childhood and adolescence in a non-chronological order: when his parents are killed in an attack by the tiger Shere Khan, baby Mowgli is brought up by a pack of wolves. He is

⁹⁰ See Karlin.

⁹¹ See Karlin.

⁹² See Mallett 82.

instructed in the Law of the Jungle, a strict code that every living being in the jungle has to obey, by his friends Bagheera the Panther and Baloo the Bear. However, Shere Khan considers him his rightful prey and makes the jungle a dangerous place for Mowgli. As an adolescent, Mowgli sets out to find his own people, but he cannot adapt to human life and is driven out of the village; he returns to the jungle, but not before disposing of his archenemy once and for all. Mowgli manages to kill Shere Khan by setting a trap; the boy returns to the wolf pack with the tiger skin.

In 1899, Kipling also wrote an adaptation of the Mowgli stories for the stage, called *The Jungle Play*. It was never staged, though, and was lost in the author's inheritance. The play was not found until 1999; it was first published in 2000.

Rudyard Kipling is one of the first Anglophone authors to employ animals as main characters. While in the Mowgli stories, the “man cub” is the protagonist most of the time, animals take the lead in other stories, for example a heroic mongoose in “Rikki Tikki Tavi” or a desperate seal on the run from trappers in “The White Seal”. Kipling uses the animals and their surroundings to display human shortcomings; he establishes stark contrasts between peaceful, idyllic nature (as long as there is no Shere Khan) where the Law of the Jungle keeps up order and discipline, and the corrupted human world⁹³. In “Tiger! Tiger!”, Mowgli comes to a village, where he is taken in by Messua. However, the villagers, driven by superstition, soon believe that he is a shape shifter and set out to kill him. Disgusted, Mowgli flees and returns to the “wilderness”. In “Letting in the Jungle”, his foster parents are to be executed for taking in Mowgli – he rescues them, and with the help of his animal friends completely destroys the village. At last, the jungle is purified, and several months later, the last traces of human life are swallowed by the growing jungle.

⁹³ See Harrison 78.

Shere Khan

The Bengal tiger Shere Khan is the major antagonist in the *Jungle Books*. He claims that he is the lord of the jungle, but his only – more or less – loyal subject is the gutless jackal Taboqui. His belief that he is superior is already mirrored in his name: in the “Author’s Notes on the Names in the Jungle Books”, Kipling says about Shere Khan: “‘Shere’ = ‘tiger’ in some Indian dialects. ‘Khan’ a title, to show that he was a chief among tigers” (Kipling, *Jungle Books* 353).

However, the other animals of the jungle do not care much for him. He is not exactly well respected, and not even much feared, which may also have to do with his crippled appearance: Shere Khan was born with a lame hind leg, which is why his mother nicknamed him “Lungri”, the Lame One⁹⁴. The contempt that the other jungle animals have for the tiger is made clear from the very beginning: when Mother Wolf takes in the infant Mowgli, Shere Khan demands that the baby be given to him, but the she-wolf replies with harsh tones:

The man’s cub is mine, Lungri – mine to me! He shall not be killed. He shall live to run with the Pack and to hunt with the Pack; and in the end, look you, hunter of little naked cubs – frog-eater – fish-killer – he shall hunt *thee*! Now get hence, or by the Sambhur that I killed (*I eat no starved cattle*), back thou goest to thy mother, burned beast of the jungle, lamer than ever thou camest into the world! Go! (Kipling, *Jungle Books*, 5).

In the story “Tiger! Tiger!”, the people of the village tell Mowgli that the animal is in fact the reincarnation of a limping, mean money lender, which is why Shere Khan also limps.⁹⁵ It is interesting to note that this is stated in a story that, in its title, makes reference to William Blake’s poem, though Shere Khan actually lacks the “fearful symmetry” of Blake’s tiger. Moreover, Shere Khan is not only crippled, but also a rather cowardly, weak-minded character, and, worst of all, he does not always respect the Law of the Jungle, a set of unwritten rules which all animals of the jungle have to obey. One of these rules states that men must never be killed, but instead of hunting prey, Shere Khan kills the villagers’ cattle – and sometimes even the villagers themselves: at the very beginning of

⁹⁴ See Kipling, *Jungle Books* 2

⁹⁵ See Kipling, *Jungle Books* 52, 53.

the *Jungle Books*, he attacks a camp harbouring defenceless humans that do not pose any danger to him. However, a baby – Mowgli – escapes and takes refuge with the wolf pack. Feeling that he is being deprived of his rightful prey, the tiger seeks revenge. However, he never manages to kill the small boy – a fully-grown tiger unable of getting rid of a child, which is a further proof of Kipling's unflattering portrayal of a weak and ineffective animal.

While Shere Khan certainly is the stories' major villain, his appearances are rather rare, and they are never presented in an especially awe-inspiring way. A particularly unsatisfying scene is the description of his death: after only a couple of appearances, he falls victim to Mowgli's trap: the boy and his wolf brothers locate the tiger in a narrow ravine and stampede a herd of cattle, which tramples the tiger to death. The passage reads somewhat dry and unemotional, and Kipling even deprives his antagonist of any significant last words. When the deed is accomplished, Mowgli comments rather unceremoniously and matter-of-factly on his arch-enemy's passing:

Shere Khan needed no more trampling. He was dead, and the kites were coming for him already.

“Brothers, that was a dog's death,” said Mowgli, feeling for the knife he always carried in a sheath round his neck [...]. “But he would never have shown fight. His hide will look well on the Council Rock. We must get to work swiftly.”
(*Jungle Books* 59)

Are these the words of a boy who feels relief beyond words at the death of a mortal enemy who has been ambushing him for all his life? Instead, the reader is given to understand that Mowgli never really felt much fear of – let alone respect for – Shere Khan. He is simply glad that he got rid of a minor nuisance.

However, in defence of Shere Khan, it should be said that even though he is a coward with a lame hind leg who is not really the fear-inducing killing machine that Kipling's contemporaries claimed the tiger was, he is at least clever and knows how to manipulate others. When Akela, the leader of the wolf pack and a friend and supporter of Mowgli, shows first signs of old age, Shere Khan mingles with the young ones and subtly makes mischief. He agitates the young wolves that are susceptible to his seductive words and his suave, purring voice. However, his plan to have the wolves expel Mowgli eventually fails.

Shere Khan's skills with words are interesting, since traditionally, be it in Asian or in European literature, the tiger was depicted in an completely reverse way, as a ferocious beast whose mind did not match its physical superiority. In Chinese fairy tales, as already mentioned, the tiger was often portrayed as a dim creature that is easily outwitted by the fox, and in India it was the clever jackal that usually got the better of the big cat.

Nevertheless, Shere Khan is branded as the villain of the story from the very beginning. As soon as it becomes evident that, as a man-eater, he does not respect the Law, he has become a threat to the well-established jungle order, a threat that is to be exterminated. Kipling himself was a glowing supporter of British colonialism, and Shere Khan's behaviour should be interpreted in this light: when we follow Nyman's suggestion, the Law can be equalled with the British rules and ideals that the colonisers have brought to India in order to bring culture and security to the subcontinent (in Kipling's eyes). Only by obeying the Law can society flourish. Shere Khan's disrespect for the Law can be seen as "anti-colonial native resistance deserving punishment" (209). If one follows that trail of thought, it means that Shere Khan stands for the bad, disobedient native Indian who does not conform to the British rules. It was a clever move by Kipling to represent the anti-British population as a tiger, since, as already stated above, the tiger at the time had to fight against its seriously damaged image as a bloodthirsty, man-slaughtering monster. Moreover, according to Mukherjee (5), the British colonial forces felt a need to exterminate and to subjugate the tiger, *the* emblematic flagship animal of the Indian subcontinent.

Another reading, proposed by Don Randall, does not regard Shere Khan as the disobedient native, but as the founder of a great Indian empire who has become old and lame: the tiger's namesake, an Afghan commander from the sixteenth century known as Sher Khan (or also as Sher Shah), is regarded by many historians as "the virtual founder of the future Mughal empire"; therefore, "the tiger's name associates him with the conquest and consolidation of empires" (Randall). In challenging and defeating Shere Khan, Mowgli – an outsider, just like the British in India – brought his rule to an end and became the lord of the jungle himself. This interpretation once more reveals Kipling's own imperialist views. Shere Khan is seen as an allegory of an aged, outdated

India and Mowgli as the courageous and dynamic British Empire that brings a fresh breath to the subcontinent.

Randall offers another similar reading that places Shere Khan in a concrete historical context: in 1857, insurgent sepoys – soldiers who fought for the British East India Company but who were native Indians – turned against their European authorities in the so-called Indian Mutiny. The rebels gathered round Bahadur Shah as their leader. However, the rebellion was put down with extreme violence. There was bloodshed on both sides, and when the British finally overthrew Bahadur Shah, the quickly installed Mughal emperor, one year later, the East India Company was dissolved and merged into the British Raj.⁹⁶ Randall finds parallels between the mutiny and Shere Khan's fate:

As the rebel Sepoys of 1857 looked to Bahadur Shah for leadership, so, during a troubled period of interregnum within the Seeonee pack, restless young wolves rally around Shere Khan and turn against Mowgli. Just as the British, in 1858, put an end to the symbolic kingship of Bahadur Shah, so Mowgli puts an end to the lame tiger's pretensions to power.

Moreover, Mowgli used the tiger's pelt as a symbol for his new position of ruler of the jungle just like the British employed old Mughal symbols to consolidate their own power.

Shere Khan in film adaptations



Fig. 18: Disney's Shere Khan and Kaa

There have been numerous cinematic adaptations of Kipling's Mowgli stories, the most famous of which is Walt Disney's *Jungle Book* (1967). While the film certainly deserves being fondly remembered as a classic in its own right, it must be said that it contributed a great deal to the defamation of Rudyard

⁹⁶ See Randall and „Indian Mutiny“.

Kipling as a mediocre would-be poet. In his introduction to Kipling's *Jungle Books*, W.W. Robson even dismissed the film as "harmless entertainment and nothing to do with Kipling, but marred even as that by Disney's awful cuteness" (xxiv-xxv). Even though these criticisms are surely appropriate, I would argue that the animated Shere Khan actually works better as a villain than in the original stories. He is introduced into the film after about two thirds, but even before, he is omnipresent. The animals of the jungle talk of him in fearful tones, and the viewer has the feeling that this tiger must surely be a deadly enemy to be terrified of. He is no longer Lungri, the Lamé One: this Shere Khan is a mighty predator in full control of his physical force. Besides, he is a charismatic character and knows how to best make use of his seductive voice. The tiger is feared and respected by every animal in the jungle: even Kaa, the python, submits to him, when in Kipling's stories, the constrictor snake with its muscle-packed body and its hypnotic powers – to which Disney's tiger is obviously immune – is no less deathly than the cat. Even the wolf pack (which only makes a short appearance in the film) feels that it does not stand a chance against Shere Khan and sends young Mowgli away in fear of an attack by the furious tiger. What Kipling's and Disney's tiger have in common is that both are petrified of fire. In "Mowgli's Brothers", the boy intrepidly wields the "Red Flower", as Kipling's Bagheera calls the fire, and subjugates Shere Khan:

[Mowgli] kicked the fire with his foot, and the sparks flew up. [...] He strode forward to where Shere Khan sat blinking stupidly at the flames, and caught him by the tuft of his chin. [...] "Up, dog!" Mowgli cried. "Up, when a man speaks, or I will set that coat ablaze!" Shere Khan's ears lay flat back on his head, and he shut his eyes, for the blazing branch was very near. (Kipling, *Jungle Books* 18-19)

Once more, it becomes obvious that Mowgli is no longer afraid of his archenemy; he is the master to which the animals must obey. In Disney's version, though, Mowgli does not use the advantage that fire would give him to dominate the tiger; instead, he defeats Shere Khan with the help of fire out of sheer necessity: when the tiger attacks his friend Baloo the bear, Mowgli ties a burning branch to the tiger's tail – the cat of prey panics and runs off. Mowgli obviously did not know what power fire could give him, and he apparently does not care, as long as he can save his friend. This is a clear difference to the

book, where the element of fire is evidently a symbol of human civilisation and culture and hence a symbol for the dividing line between man and beast.

Stephen Sommers' real-action adaptation, called *Rudyard Kipling's The Jungle Book* pretends being closer to Kipling's vision already in its title, when, in reality, it is more of a remake of the Disney version: for example, the ruler of the monkeys, King Louie, was invented for the cartoon, but it appears again in Sommers' film. Apart from the story line, which sometimes is not recognizable as a Kipling adaptation, the characters are also rather changed: Shere Khan is now no longer the archenemy of Mowgli; instead, he is just one of numerous dangers that the jungle harbours. He can be seen as a guardian of the Law of the Jungle: whoever does not abide by it, is moribund. The beginning of the film shows a hunting expedition, led by Mowgli's father – killing for the fun of it would be strictly against the Law; therefore Shere Khan ambushes the camp and mauls the expedition leader.

One element from Kipling, though, makes a nice appearance in this film version: in the original stories, only the humans can bear long stares of others; even the strongest animals, such as Bagheera the panther, do not endure Mowgli staring at them:

“But why – but why should any wish to kill me?” said Mowgli.
 “Look at me,” said Bagheera; and Mowgli looked at him steadily between the eyes. The big panther turned his head away in half a minute.
 “*That* is why,” he said [...]. “Not even I can look the between the eyes, and I was born among men, and I love thee, Little Brother. The others they hate thee because their eyes cannot meet thine; because thou art wise; because thou hast pulled out thorns from their feet – because thou art a man.” (Kipling, *Jungle Books* 13).

The ability of tolerating stares, thus, is exclusive to humans – a symbol for human nature and, like the fire, a reminder that men and animals stand on different steps.

Sommers' film ends with a showdown between Mowgli and Shere Khan, but this time, it does not come to an open confrontation; instead, they look at each other for a long time, and the boy finally stares the tiger down; the animal accepts Mowgli and no longer wishes to kill him.

H. H. Munro, "Mrs. Packletide's Tiger"

About the author

Hector Hugh Munro was born in Burma in 1870, when the British Empire was at its peak. After his mother's early death, he was sent to England, where he was brought up by "his two overbearing Scottish spinster aunts" (Freitag 8). His childhood and adolescence were marked by his love of animals, a character trait that would later flow into his literary work. As a young man, he served as a mounted policeman in Burma, which opened his eyes to the stark contrast between the real life in the Empire's colonies and the triviality of the Victorian bourgeoisie. Later, he became a journalist. Munro was a skilled observer, who used his notices as the basis for his black-humour satirical short stories that severely attacked the superficialities of Edwardian high society. His interest in the Orient becomes apparent in his penname: "Saki" is a character from one of his favourite books, *Rubayiat of Omar Khayyam*, Edward FitzGerald's translations of a selection of the Persian poet's poems.⁹⁷

Munro was killed in battle in France in 1918. He never quite rose to literary fame; four short story collections were published during his lifetime, and many more remained unpublished, until a complete collection of his works appeared as late as 1976. Even today, he is a rather neglected author who "has never been acknowledged by critics as a major writer of fiction" (Lerner 9).

About the short story

"Mrs. Packletide's Tiger" appeared in the short story collection *The Chronicles of Clovis*, published in 1911. It has become one of Saki's best-known stories, since it is among those that have appeared in general anthologies quite frequently.⁹⁸

The story is a classic Saki satire; its humour lies in the persiflage of the stereotypical Edwardian socialite. The story begins with Mrs. Packletide's desire

⁹⁷ See Freitag 13.

⁹⁸ See Lerner 8.

to shoot a tiger, since she thinks that this is the only way to make her rival, Loona Bimberton, look small, who “recently had been carried eleven miles in an aeroplane by an Algerian aviator, and [...] only a personally procured tiger-skin and a heavy harvest of Press photographs could successfully counter that sort of thing” (“Mrs. Packletide’s Tiger”⁹⁹). So she pays a thousand rupees to shoot an old, lame tiger near an Indian village – the villagers, however, fear that the tiger might die of old age before the lady arrives, so they take all kinds of precautions not to upset the precious animal, for example mothers “hushed their singing lest they might curtail the restful sleep of the venerable herd-robber”.

Finally, the big day comes, and Mrs. Packletide, accompanied by her aide Louisa Mebbin, goes to the jungle near the village. They use a goat as bait, and sure enough, the tiger turns up. Mrs. Packletide shoots, and the tiger drops dead! However, it turns out that she actually shot the goat and the tiger died of a heart attack at the loud gunshot. However, money flattens the matter and Mrs. Packletide triumphantly takes her own tiger skin rug back to England, where Loona Bimberton’s aviation tale is immediately forgotten in light of her own adventure. At the end of the story, though, she is blackmailed by Louisa Mebbin, who threatens to come out with the truth, if she does not buy her a nice cottage. So Mrs. Packletide willingly pays for the house, but gives up on big game hunting since “[t]he incidental expenses are so heavy”.

Saki may have derived the plot from the French writer Alphonse Daudet’s novel *Tartarin de Tarascon* (1869), in which the hero goes to Africa to shoot lions in order to save his honour – however, at first he shoots a donkey, and at a second try, he kills a blind, tame lion; nevertheless, upon his return home with the lion skin, he is celebrated as a valiant hero. Moreover, some details that are identical in both plots seem to confirm that Saki basically rewrote Daudet’s story.¹⁰⁰

Another inspiration probably came from the memoirs of Isabel Savory, a big-game huntress in India; in her book *A Sportswoman in India*, published in 1900, there is a chapter on “Tiger Shooting”.¹⁰¹ While Savory on the one hand gleefully reports about her tiger kills, she also laments the loss of India’s wildlife:

⁹⁹ The following quotes, if not otherwise noted, all come from the short story itself.

¹⁰⁰ See Freitag 144, 145.

¹⁰¹ See Elahipanah.

“It is only in the last forty or fifty years that the jungles of Central India have been practically denuded of game, and it is a thousand pities.” (Savory, quoted in Elahipanah). Similarly, in Saki’s story, the only tiger left in the region where Mrs. Packletide travels to is a lame, inoffensive specimen so old that it already has one paw in the grave – and even such an animal has to be shot for the sake of self-display and self-adulation.

In Saki’s story, Edwardian society ladies are exposed as being dead jealous of each other; their belief that money can sort out everything is likewise satirised. As regards the tiger, the story makes fun of the conviction that the tiger in India has to be exterminated, which is so typical for the British colonial forces on the subcontinent: when Mrs. Packletide’s motives for wanting to kill a tiger are explained, Saki writes the following:

Not that the lust to kill had suddenly descended on her, or that she felt she would leave India safer and more wholesome than she had found it, with one fraction less of wild beast per million of inhabitants.

This already mocking phrasing is carried to extremes when it becomes clear that Mrs. Packletide does not in the least pursue her fellow countrymen’s noble goals, but that her motivation is simply spurred by jealousy, by not allowing to let anyone else appear better than herself.

The realisation of the tiger hunt is also satirised: as mentioned earlier, the British in India regarded the tiger hunt as a sport, although they did not



Fig. 19: British tiger hunt in Nepal

exactly behave in a sportsmanlike manner – resting in the safety of a lavishly decorated howdah on the back of an elephant or waiting on hidden platforms in trees for a tiger to appear, the hunter was never in any danger, but still

considered the shoot an act of honour and bravery. The story makes fun of this hypocrisy, when it is described how Mrs. Packletide is sitting in the platform “constructed in a comfortable and conveniently placed tree”, and “[w]ith an accurately sighted rifle and a thumbnail pack of patience cards the

sportswoman awaited the coming of the quarry". The fact that the hunters are by far more dangerous than the old tiger is biting shown in the character of Louisa Mebbin, Mrs. Packletide's aide, who "was not actually nervous about the wild beast, but she had a morbid dread of performing an atom more service than she had been paid for".

Summing up, it can be said that in Saki's story, the tiger hunt is picked out as the central theme to poke fun at the false and hypocritical British high society at the turn of the century. It may be the first Anglophone story in which there is a turning away from the classical depiction of the tiger as the epitome of the dreadful beast with an alarming liking for human flesh. Instead, it is presented as a victim of British colonisation, in the course of which it fell prey to the colonisers' showmanship and their pathological addiction to absolute dominance. Saki's critical view of the British Empire is mirrored in his relation to Rudyard Kipling: the author is mentioned derisively several times throughout Saki's literary work¹⁰², which suggests that Saki did not hold the author of the *Jungle Books* in high esteem.

¹⁰² See Lerner 106, 107.

Angela Carter, “The Tiger’s Bride”

About the author

Angela Carter (1940 – 1992) was an English author best known for her short story collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979).¹⁰³ However, she had made a name for herself as an acclaimed writer of fiction already before the publication of the collection. After working as a journalist and studying medieval literature, she turned to writing novels in her late twenties; her novel *Several Perceptions* won her the Somerset Maugham Award in 1969. She used the prize money to live in Tokyo for two years, where Carter developed strongly feminist ideas. Feminism remained a formative current in her subsequent writings. Apart from her fiction (she wrote nine novels and four short story collections), she also published three works of non-fiction. Furthermore, she is the author of several radio plays, screenplays, children’s books and even an opera, *Lulu*. Despite her status as a critically acknowledged author, she enjoyed writing articles and comments on fashion, cinema, etc. in magazines like *Vogue*. Angela Carter died of lung cancer in 1992.

About the short story

“The Tiger’s Bride” is a story in Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber*. This collection consists of ten re-writings of fairy tales and folk stories: there are new versions of classical Grimm tales such as “Snow White” or “Puss-in-Boots” and re-workings of folk myths such as the legend of the Erlking. “The Tiger’s Bride” is based on the French fairy tale “Beauty and the Beast”.

The story is set in Italy in an unspecified past. A man loses his daughter – the first-person narrator – to the wealthy Beast at gambling; he is called like that throughout the story: rumours say that he is half man, half tiger, but no one really knows The Beast’s secret. The heroine, who remains nameless, is furious at her father, but nevertheless goes with The Beast to his château. To her surprise, The Beast does not want to keep her in the castle at all costs: if she

¹⁰³ See „Angela Carter“.

lets him see her naked just once, she could return home immediately with expensive gifts. However, the strong-willed girl gets infuriated; she insults The Beast and hurts his feelings repeatedly; she wants to get away from him and that ghastly place, but not at that cost. She has to live in a cell, her only companion a life-sized windup automaton.

Over time, her attitude begins to change. One day, when she is riding out with The Beast and the valet, she begins to realise that The Beast is actually interested in her and that he sees more in her than a mere object that can be gambled away. When the valet tells the heroine that The Beast has changed the conditions – if she does not want to undress in front of him, she will have to see him naked – she consents, and when The Beast takes his clothes off, she sees that he actually is a tiger. Moved by his gesture, she also strips and thus fulfils his wish.

Back in the castle, the girl is free to return home; however, she does not want to go anymore. On her way to The Beast's room, she meets the valet, now in his real shape as a big, grey ape. The girl enters the tiger's chamber – a room filled with half-rotten bones and a strong smell of urine; the animal is restless and anxious. However, she approaches The Beast gently and in order to show him that she trusts him, she strips off her clothes. The tiger accepts the girl and begins to lick off her bare skin; when it is falling off, a tiger's pelt is revealed.

It is clear to the heroine from the very beginning of the story that The Beast is not an ordinary man. At their first encounter, she notices that

only from a distance would you think The Beast not much different from any other man, although he wears a mask with a man's face painted most beautifully on it. [...] He wears a wig, too, false hair tied at the nape with a bow [...]. A chaste silk stock stuck with a pearl hides his throat. And gloves of blond kid that are yet so huge and clumsy they do not seem to cover hands. He is a carnival figure made of papier mâché and crêpe hair [...]. (Carter 54).

She also notes that no one can understand him, since "he has such a growling impediment in his speech that only his valet, who understands him, can interpret for him, as if his master were the clumsy dull and he the ventriloquist" (Carter 55). The reader is given to understand that the narrator, while acknowledging his higher social position, feels scorn and disdain for The

Beast; her description of the creature makes it clear that she obviously considers him a freak of nature.

Only in the scene when The Beast reveals his true nature does her attitude towards him change:

A great, feline, tawny shape whose pelt was barred with a savage geometry of bars the colour of burned wood. His domed, heavy head, so terrible he must hide it. How subtle the muscles, how profound the tread. The annihilating vehemence of his eyes, like twin suns. [...] Nothing about him reminded me of humanity. (Carter 64).

Her sudden reversal of opinion may come from realising that her master actually is not human, which makes him a sort of fellow sufferer: the girl contemplates that she herself has been treated like an object all of her life, “bought and sold, passed from hand to hand”; she summarises that she had “been allotted only the same kind of imitative life amongst men that the doll-maker had given [the windup doll]” (Carter 63). Therefore she feels a surge of empathy for that tiger and fraternises with him: both the tiger and the girl are coerced into acting as if they were someone different. Despite being such a magnificent creature, the tiger has had to hide its identity behind the carefully crafted mask of a human being all of its life. In fact, in medieval times people who went hunting would put on masks of animals: they believed that the more they resembled the creatures they wanted to prey on, the closer they would get to them.¹⁰⁴ Angela Carter reversed this tradition: now the tiger wears a human mask to get closer to human society. The Beast and the girl basically share the same, miserable fate: they are both forced to hold back their true self in a world ruled by men in order to protect themselves: tigers that live just like they are supposed to live are almost wiped out (by predominantly male hunters), and a woman who insisted on equality between both sexes was considered a mere nuisance not so long ago (and women even bring themselves into mortal danger by doing so in some parts of today’s world, f.i. in radical Islamist countries). Indeed, The Beast becomes a real tiger again only after shedding his human disguise: he gives up human habits like riding or playing cards, and shows natural animal behaviour instead. When the heroine enters his room at

¹⁰⁴ See Rubala 28.

the end of the story, “[h]e was pacing backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, the tip of his heavy tail twitching as he paced out the length and breadth of his imprisonment between the gnawed and bloody bones” (Carter 66). There is no longer the cultivated, albeit rather strange, landlord that was described in the beginning; instead, there is a tiger displaying the sort of anxious and strained behaviour that zoo visitors will find in any tiger locked up in too small a den.

The fact that The Beast is a tiger in Carter’s story (while it is an unspecified monstrosity in the actual fairy tale “La Belle et la Bête”) is not a random choice: the tiger is commonly regarded as the embodiment of sheer physical power, of unrestrained energy, and, of course, of danger. Carter, having written the story some years after her turn towards feminism, may have wanted to tell her female readership that they should no longer accept being treated like a mechanical doll, but that they should free themselves of these age-old social constructs and reveal their real power. In the story, this is symbolised by The Beast licking off the heroine’s human skin and exposing the tiger pelt underneath, which means that she has always been this powerful, charismatic creature, but up till then, social constraints have forced her to hide her inner tiger. Only when she finally throws conventions overboard and follows her own desires does she find back to her true self. This is a sharp parody of the original ending of the fairy tale, in which the cursed Beast transforms back into his human form as a beautiful prince: now the girl, cursed by a chauvinist society to be the passive Beauty, turns into her true animalistic self; for once the beasts can live happily ever after.

A main theme in Carter’s story is the awakening of sexuality. From the moment that the narrator leaves behind her old life to enter The Beast’s castle, there is a sensual tension between animal and girl. When the heroine parts from her father, he “wants a rose to show that I forgive him. When I break off a stem, I prick my finger and so he gets his rose all smeared with blood”. The blood stands for the loss of innocence and foreshadows the events that are yet to come in the castle. Blood as an indicator of sexuality is a frequent element in fairy tales. Rubala (27) says that “[t]he sign of [a woman’s] sexual maturity was of course, menstruation – and blood in connection to women appears frequently enough in fairy tales; just think of *Sleeping Beauty* and her pricked finger”. The

theme of the girl's surging sexuality becomes obvious after her host revealed his true nature to her. When undressing in front of the tiger, the girl felt "at liberty for the first time in [her] life" (Carter 64). The climax, of course, takes place in the ending of the story. When the tiger is licking her skin off, it can be understood as a metaphor for sexual union; the tiger pelt that is revealed underneath the heroine's skin stands for her own passion and her carnal desires that have so long been suppressed and that now finally are allowed to spring to life. There is no evidence as to whether Angela Carter was aware of the sexual connotations the peoples of Asia attributed to the tiger, but since she spent some time in Japan prior to writing *The Bloody Chamber*, the possibility cannot be ruled out. Moreover, as pointed out earlier, the tiger as a symbol of sensuousness was also known in Western cultures in the 20th century.

Of all the works discussed in this thesis, "The Tiger's Bride" is certainly the story in which a tiger plays the most fantastic role. There is neither room nor need for accurate zoological descriptions in Carter's story; instead she focuses on the symbolic dimensions of the big cat. The tiger, embodiment of freedom and autonomy, is representative of every man's and woman's innate need to develop freely without being constricted by social corsets. Secondly, the animal, with its strong ties to eroticism, is employed as a symbol for the sexual liberation of women, a topic that was a major concern to Angela Carter ever since the 1960s.

R. K. Narayan, *A Tiger for Malgudi*

About the author

One of the best-known Indian authors, R. K. Narayan, was born in Madras in 1906.¹⁰⁵ He was raised by his grandparents, but was later reunited with his parents and siblings; all in all, he spent a happy childhood and adolescence. Although born as a Hindu, he went to a Christian school, where his teachers constantly tried to prove their own God's superiority over the various Hindu deities.¹⁰⁶

He shortly worked as a teacher before turning to writing. Already his first novel, *Swami and Friends* (1935), is set in the imaginary town of Malgudi in Southern India. Many more of his novels and stories take place in this small town, which has led critics to compare Narayan to the American author William Faulkner, who frequently let his stories play in the fictitious Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi.¹⁰⁷ In the Malgudi novels, Narayan's main concern was to display the complex web of human relations and to portray the diversity of human ways of life.

Despite his several nominations for the Nobel Prize, literary criticism never quite acknowledged the author. However, he enjoyed great commercial success and remained a popular figure in India until his death in 2001.

About the novel

A Tiger for Malgudi was published in 1983; it is one of the last novels in the Malgudi cycle. The sleepy small town in Southern India is probably based on the real city of Lalgudi, likewise "a town of modest size" (Singh 7). Narayan let the majority of his fourteen novels take place in Malgudi, so that over time, it became a multifaceted literary universe and a character in its own right. It may be a reflection of Narayan's memories of Madras, where he spent his childhood. Malgudi and its people are (stereo-)typically Indian: the Malgudians are simple

¹⁰⁵ See „R. K. Narayan“.

¹⁰⁶ See Pousse 5, 6.

¹⁰⁷ F.i. in „R. K. Narayan“ or French.

people not yet too far removed from rural life; they are a bit superstitious and deeply “rooted in age-old local traditions” (Singh 9); however, as time went by for Narayan, so it did for Malgudi: over the decades, it developed from a “small sized agricultural town to a semi-industrialized city” (Mukherjee, N. quoted in Singh 9). Narayan’s writing focus also shifted: as the writer grew older, he became more religious and interested in philosophical matters. In *A Tiger for Malgudi*, he “leaves behind the mundane issues of love, marriage, money-making, occupations, social bullying and the like. [...] Now is the time to [...] look into the problems of physical and spiritual existence as also man’s relation to other creatures around” (Suresh 164). Therefore, this novel is not the typical Malgudi story that focuses on Indian life or on Indian people, but instead the novel has a Bengal tiger as its protagonist. Narayan got the inspiration for this move when he read about a religious festival attended by innumerable people, in the course of which a hermit turned up – accompanied by a tiger, which trotted peacefully at his side without a leash. The man claimed that “they were brothers in previous lives” (Narayan 7).

This, basically, is the idea the novel is based upon; Narayan felt that there are already too many novels with humans as main characters. As a profound critique of anthropocentric literature, he chose to build a story around a tiger, with the hermit only as a secondary character. In the introduction, he states that

[m]an in his smugness never imagines for a moment that other creatures may also possess ego, values, outlook, and the ability to communicate [...]. Man assumes he is all-important, that all else in creation exists only for his sport, amusement, comfort, or nourishment. [...] I wished to examine what the result would be if I made a tiger the central character in a novel. (Narayan 7,8)

His determination to use an animal of whatever species as a protagonist is nicely demonstrated in the following anecdote: when asked by a reporter why the protagonist was a tiger and not a mouse, Narayan replied, “So that the chief character may not be trampled upon or lost sight of in a hole” (Narayan 8).

Especially the first part of the novel, though, suggests that apart from the religious festival, Narayan also had another source of inspiration: the passages about the tiger’s youth in the jungle display some obvious similarities to Kipling’s

description of the jungle and its creatures in the *Jungle Books*. First of all, Raja (the name of Narayan's tiger) regards himself as the "Supreme Lord of the Jungle" (Narayan 13), his name literally means "king" or "sovereign", while Shere Khan's name can roughly be translated as "Lord Tiger". Moreover, both tigers are not well-liked in the jungle, but the jackals try to bootlick the big cats. While in Kipling, the jackal Tabaqui serves as Shere Khan's herald, Narayan's tiger claims that "if a jackal happened to be in my path, he put his ears back, lowered his tail, rolled his eyes in humility, and cried softly: "Here comes our Lord and Master. Keep his path clear..." (Narayan 13). Finally, the role that both authors intended for the monkeys is strikingly similar: in the *Jungle Books*, Bagheera claims that the monkeys are "evil, dirty, shameless"; they "are outcasts" and "have no law" (Kipling 26); nearly 80 years later, the monkeys still "moved and ran about as they pleased, and thought they were above the normal rules and laws of the jungle, a mischievous tribe" (Narayan 15).

However similar these aspects may be to a prior work of fiction, the novel's premise is fresh and unique: the book makes it clear from the very beginning that the narrator is, in fact, a tiger by the name of Raja. The frame narrative introduces the reader to an already aged Raja who spends his last years in a zoo. When he reminisces about his life and relates it to the reader, the proper story begins: he was born in the jungles and grew up just like any ordinary tiger; eventually he became the ruler of the jungle and brought terror and fear to the weaker animals. He found a tigress and mated, but eventually hunters killed his entire family. Raja revenged himself by preying on the cattle herds of the nearby village; the villagers, though, set out to capture him. He fell into the hands of an English ringmaster called Captain, who decided to make Raja the circus's big attraction. Raja underwent a severe and strict training and had to endure cruelties, beatings and humiliations if he did not do what Captain wanted.

Over the course of time, the circus and its well-trained tiger became very popular, and a director booked Raja to star in a feature film. A terrible accident during which Raja killed Captain brought the tiger's life as a celebrity to an abrupt end.

In the confusion following Captain's death, Raja escaped from the film set and roamed about Malgudi, not intending to harm anyone. He found refuge

in a school where he took a rest in the headmaster's office. However, some brave Malgudians wanted to kill him, but Raja found help in the character of the Master. A frail old man, but at the same time a wise sanyasi (a Hindu ascetic), he simply walked into the chamber and took Raja with him, who instantly felt safe with the man. Together, they lived a life of harmony outside Malgudi, and under the Master's guidance, he learned to control his mind and experience a sort of enlightenment. When the old Master felt that he would die soon, Raja already was a rather aged tiger himself, so the Master decided that he would bring him to the zoo, where he would be cared for and looked after for the rest of his life.

Raja

Critics commonly dismiss *A Tiger for Malgudi* as a fantastical story that must be taken with a big grain of salt – a tiger as the protagonist? And above all, a tiger as the first person narrator? Some scholars argue that Narayan failed to criticise anthropocentrism exactly because he anthropomorphised his protagonist. Kar argues that already the act of naming the tiger is a step towards humanising it, and even more so the fact that “he is made to behave and think like a human.” Furthermore, the tiger displays a sense of shame when he does not want to stand on two legs because he feels that he is “too exposed” (Narayan 97), and it is an acknowledged fact among the scientific community that the sense of shame is an emotion exclusive to humans. Finally, Kar criticises that the Master did not release Raja to the jungle but that “he is taught the art of meditation”, and that he becomes a “meek, repentant sanyasi”.

Be it as it may, it is all too easy to write the novel off as a typical fable in which anthropomorphised beasts stand for certain human characters. Raja is not merely a tiger – he is a fully fleshed-out character. While he is engaging in undoubtedly human ways of thinking, Raja still should not be considered an anthropomorphised animal like, for example, Shere Khan. He neither talks, nor is he known by a name by birth, but he is given a name only when he is adopted by the Master, so Kar's argument is not really valid. Concerning his claim that Raja feels shame and is therefore anthropomorphised, it should be

said that the passage leaves it open as to whether he really feels shame or whether he simply feels unprotected: “[standing on two legs is] not only difficult but a degradation for a quadruped – you are too exposed; no wonder humans have to cover their waists.” (Narayan 97, 98). It can just as well be interpreted as a typical animal reaction: no animal likes to expose its underbelly or its genitals, since these are the body parts where it is most easily hurt – in fact, they only do it when they voluntarily submit to a stronger opponent. In this situation, Raja was forced to display his most vulnerable parts in a moment of great distress, which means he had to act against his deepest instincts – no wonder he felt “too exposed”. Therefore, this passage neither shows humanised emotions nor shame in a tiger, but instead alludes to animal body language and proves that Raja, despite his human thoughts, is still a wild animal.

The criticism that the Master basically re-educated the tiger instead of releasing him into the wild may be partly appropriate, but then again it should be kept in mind that the story is not told in a pamphlet of an environmental organisation but instead in the form of a novel. Bringing the tiger back into the jungle would probably have been the better choice if the Malgudi universe were real, but the way the novel is written serves Narayan’s purpose of displaying the wisdoms of Hindu philosophy and of showing “the oneness of the soul of all creatures” (Swain 10). Therefore, it can be argued that this last part does not have so much to do with the anthropomorphism of an animal, but with the author’s utilisation of an animal to bring across his message to the reader. Furthermore, it should be said that while Raja obviously thinks in human



Fig. 20: Raja and the Master? A scene from the Tiger Temple

language, he never thinks like a human mind: if the story was not narrated from the tiger’s point of view, but if Raja’s life was instead described by a third person human narrator – that is, if nothing but the point of view was changed –, the reader would have no reason to doubt the credibility and reliability of the narration. He or she would take the story of the circus tiger at face value; admittedly, the third part of the story – Raja living in harmony with the hermit – would be

harder to accept than the rest, but considering that there *are* monks that share

their homes with tigers (as mentioned in chapter 3.1.2), even this story element is believable.

However, there is logical problem to the novel's premise: it pretends being written as if the tiger penned his memoirs – how, then, can it be explained that Raja also narrates events that he did not witness? (as, for example, the several page long passage about how Captain comes to be the owner of the Grand Malgudi Circus, or the events going on outside the Headmaster's office while Raja is sleeping)

As a literary character, though, Raja works perfectly well on two levels: one the one hand, he experiences human emotions, but on the other hand, he never lets the reader forget that he is a real tiger. He maintains his “tigerishness” even when he is articulating sophisticated thoughts. R. K. Narayan successfully constructed a character through whose eyes we can have an outlook on human nature from a different perspective, the Other's perspective, without being bothered by the strangeness of the Other.

In the course of the novel, Raja undergoes a remarkable development. In the first stage, as the “Supreme Lord of the Jungle” (Narayan 13), the reader observes the tiger in its natural habitat – it is a cat of prey that delights in inflicting damage or fear on the other animals of the forest. He is purely driven by instincts and lust:

It was, naturally, a time of utter wildness, violence, and unthinking cruelty inflicted on weaker creatures. Everyone I encountered proved weaker and submissive, but that submissiveness did not count – I delivered the fatal blow in any case when I wished and strode about as the King of the Forest. (Narayan 13)

Raja enters the second stage when he came into contact with humans. In captivity, he experiences the cruelty that he used to inflict on others at first hand; he learns what it means to be dominated. However, there is still a constant trial of strength between Raja and Captain, between nature and civilisation. The tiger learns that it is not physical strength alone that leads to dominance. On the film set, when Raja does not want to perform a silly trick, an infuriated Captain intends to discipline the tiger with an electroshock gun:

As he stooped down to caress me with its tip, I just raised a forepaw, taking care to retract my claws, and knocked the thing out of his hand. The blow caught Captain under his chin, and tore off his head. It was surprising that such a flimsy creature, no better than a membrane stretched over some thin framework, with so little stuff inside, should have held me in fear so long. (Narayan 100).

Apart from Raja's surprise that his dominator turned out to be such a feeble, delicate weakling, this passage shows that Raja has respect, and possibly even feels some affection, for Captain, since he retracts his claws in order not to hurt him. In Raja's eyes, Captain is just as energetic and powerful as the tiger himself, an alpha male. Otherwise Raja, once the self-proclaimed ruler over all jungle life, would never have accepted anyone having command over him.

When he meets the ascetic Master, Raja enters the third and highest stage: the Master teaches him to open his mind and to collect his thoughts. He becomes aware of his own being, of his conscience. He begins to feel remorse for his rampant life as a young tiger in the jungle, but he was at a lesser stage of existence back then. He had no idea of morality and could not tell right from wrong. Now that he is living with the master he even reduces his consumption of meat in order to become a better being. The "idea of purification possible only by means of adopting vegetarianism" (Karmarkar 99) is widespread in Hinduism. In short, the Master tried to lead Raja to enlightenment. Narayan, being a Brahmin himself – the Brahmins are members of the highest Indian caste that traditionally have religious duties – was familiar with the philosophy of Hinduism and asceticism. At the time that the novel was written, Narayan "reached a philosophical peak" (Pousse 50) and intended to weave the traditions and teachings of Hinduism into his works. By celebrating the peaceful practices of the yogis, Narayan possibly sought to refute his own teachers' Eurocentric lessons that aimed at convincing the schoolchildren of the supremacy of Christianity. The juxtaposition of East and West is also apparent when contrasting the Master with Captain. One is an Indian yogi, the embodiment of serenity and peacefulness with a deep understanding of Raja's personality, while the other is an English ringmaster characterised by violent emotional releases and a feeling of having to impose his own doctrines on Raja at all costs. Narayan successfully transports the notion that the Westerners are

morally inferior to his own people – possibly another sharp retort to his schoolteachers' one-sided tuition?

The transformation that is exemplified by Raja's own conversion – the violent aggressor that ultimately becomes an illuminated being at peace with the world and himself – should serve as a role model for every human being. Almost all characters in the novel are inferior to Raja, meaning that they have not yet undergone the spiritual and ethical transformation. The story's protagonists are morally corrupted and full of typically human faults. Already in the beginning of the novel, the aggressive potential of men is shown when hunters slaughter Raja's mate and his offspring. When he comes to the village in search of his family, he gets caught and makes a narrow escape:

I had never seen humans in such a frenzy of shouting. I never knew that human beings could be so devilish. They were all armed, aimed spears at me and hit me with arrows while I was desperately trying to find a way out. [...] A human being may look small [...], but he is endowed with some strange power, which can manoeuvre a tiger or an elephant as if they were toys. (Narayan 26)

Passages as these, says Kar, "unambiguously bring out how the animal world is trampled on by the greed, insensitivity and callousness of the human world."

Some pages later, the villagers complain about the tiger to a policeman – he writes down all their protests but does not lift a finger to help them: an open criticism of India's oftentimes malfunctioning and corrupt bureaucracy. The part where Raja is held captive by Captain plainly show man's desire to dominate nature instead of finding a way of coexisting peacefully. Raja is made to perform all sorts of tricks that range from stupid acts – such as jumping through a hoop – to sheer perversions against a tiger's nature: he is forced to sit at a table and lick milk from a bowl, which "look[s] like poison" to him" and is "evil tasting" (Narayan 51, 52) – while opposite him there sits a goat, likewise drinking milk.

A goat sitting up with a tiger as an equal – what a crazy situation! [...] Sitting on my haunches was irksome and painful: the sight of the pan of milk was offensive and the goat was appetizing. But what was happening was beyond my understanding. What perversity that I should consume what I hated and leave what I would relish! (Narayan 55)

Considering how Captain spurns nature and its creatures it is understandable that the reader should enjoy a little malicious glee when Raja finally disposes of him once and for all.

When Raja is asleep in the headmaster's office, the chairman of the "Tiger Save Committee" (an obvious parody of Project Tiger, the Indian government's tiger rescue scheme) is bribed by Alphonso, a brute eager to kill the animal. Once more, it is made clear how money and material goods have a stranglehold over weak-minded human beings. In the final part of the novel, Narayan criticises overly religious people "when he denounces the worshippers who behave in front of the hermit-Master as if he were God himself" (Pousse 49). To sum it up, the reader is confronted with human protagonists who are characterised by corruption, greed, bloodlust and blind religious fanaticism, whereas the tiger manages to rise from this primitive level to a stage of serenity and peacefulness. A tiger, of all animals! Considering the role that people all over the world had attached to this predator over the course of the centuries, the contrapuntal effect that Narayan creates – a tiger's mental growth beyond the level of most humans – is even greater. In this respect, Narayan's aim could have been to arouse the reader, to tell him: if a tiger can achieve this noble goal, so can you! The author himself stated that "the core of personality is the same in spite of differing appearances and categories" (Narayan 9).

Yann Martel, *Life of Pi*

About the author

Yann Martel is a true cosmopolitan: born to French Canadian parents in 1963 in Salamanca, Spain, his childhood and adolescence was characterised by frequent moves throughout the whole world. His father's job as a diplomat required the family to shift their home from one country to the other – including “Costa Rica, France, India, Iran, Mexico, Turkey, Canada, and the United States” (“Yann Martel”) – before the Martels finally settled in Montreal. After graduating from university with a degree in philosophy, he got by with casual labour; at this time, he turned his mind to writing. His first published work was *The Facts behind the Helsinki Roccamatios and Other Stories* (1993), a short volume of four short stories. Martel's first novel was *Self* (1996), in which he addresses his own childhood and youth, combining autobiographical with fictional elements. The writer made an international breakthrough with the phenomenally successful *Life of Pi* (2001). With his latest, hitherto unpublished novel, Martel will stay true to his style that allows for wide interpretation and gives extensive space to parables and symbolism. He describes it as “an allegory of the Holocaust featuring a monkey and a donkey. [...] I want to create a portable metaphor for the Holocaust that we might apply in other circumstances, such as Rwanda.” (“An interview with the author”)

About the novel

The frame narrative of *Life of Pi* presents the reader with Yann Martel, who is in India in search of a spark of inspiration for his next novel, after his debut feature, *Self*, flopped catastrophically. In a bar, a man promises him a “story that will make [him] believe in God” (Martel, *Pi* ix), but he will have to find the man in his home town in Toronto. Back in Canada, the curious Martel seeks out a certain Mr. Piscine Patel, who tells him the story Martel has been after. Martel claims to have written out Patel's story as it was told; therefore he felt it would be only fair to reproduce it in first person.

Patel's story is divided into three parts; the first begins in the southern Indian town of Pondicherry. Piscine, called "Pi", is the sixteen-year-old son of the town's zoo director and spends a happy childhood among the various animals. He also displays an unusual interest in religion, and in following Mahatma Gandhi's dictum, "All religions are true" (Martel, *Pi* 87), he embraces Hinduism as well as Islam and Christianity.

However, his faith is put to a true test in the second part of the novel,

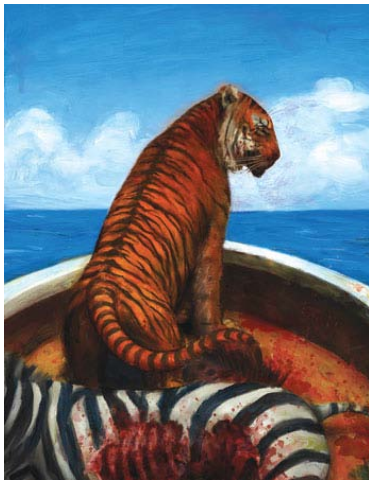


Fig. 21: The tiger in the novel's illustrated edition

which is the longest by far. The family wants to move to Canada together with all their zoo animals; they embark on a Japanese freighter – however, in a raging storm, the ship sinks, but Pi can escape into a lifeboat. He soon finds out that he is the sole survivor of the disaster, that is, the only *human* survivor. The lifeboat also rescued the lives of a zebra with a broken leg, a hyena, an orang-utan and a Bengal tiger by the name of Richard Parker. After a short time, only the tiger and the boy are left; this is the beginning of a 227-day odyssey, during which

both Pi and Richard Parker learn how to come to terms with each other.

In the end, Pi runs ashore in Mexico, where the tiger is quick to leave the boat and vanishes in the jungles. Pi is taken to a hospital, where he is interrogated by Japanese officials of the shipping company who want to find out about the sinking of the cargo ship. This interview basically forms the third part of the novel. Since they do not believe his fantastic tale, Pi presents them with a more realistic story, in which there were not animals, but human survivors aboard the lifeboat. However, this is where the real horror begins: in the following events, the abysmal depths of human nature are revealed; the only person who eventually survived the horrifying scenes full of carnage and cannibalism was Pi.

The autobiographical elements in the story – the travels of Yann Martel through India – are a typical element of the author's writing, which becomes evident once more in his debut novel *Self*. In an essay written for the online bookshop powells.com, though, Martel gave a less romanticised and more factual account of how he got the inspiration for the novel. It began with a book

review Martel had read years ago about *Max e os Felinos* (*Max and the Cats*) by the Brazilian Moacyr Scliar: the book is about a German Jewish family planning to emigrate to America in 1933; however, “the ship sinks and one lone Jew ends up in a lifeboat with a black panther” (Martel, “How I Wrote”). Martel found the premise brilliant, but forgot about the novel.

When he was in India to collect inspirations for a follow-up novel to *Self*, he suddenly remembered that book review. After this, everything went together like the parts of a jigsaw puzzle. India, “where there are so many animals and religions, lent itself to such a story” (Martel, “How I Wrote”). After doing much research on zoology and the three main religions that are picked as central themes in the novel, writing came easy.

However, the essay on powells.com was published only after a plagiarism debate had broken loose. The celebrated new author, a plagiarist? The matter was settled in private between Martel and Scliar, who chose not to take legal measures since he felt that, with the exception of the premise, both books do not have much to do with each other. In how far the plagiarism debate was justified is doubtful, since Martel even included the Brazilian in his acknowledgements in *Life of Pi*: “Also, I am indebted to Mr. Moacyr Scliar, for the spark of life” (Martel, *Pi* xi).

Martel’s novel was a worldwide success; it became especially popular after winning the prestigious Man Booker prize in 2002.¹⁰⁸ The novel has so far been translated into 40 languages; an illustrated edition was published in 2007, and future projects will have a share in further increasing its popularity: the novel is to be made into a film. Oscar-winning director Ang Lee (who already brought Annie Proulx’s short story *Brokeback Mountain* to the big screen) supposedly will adapt the novel for cinema.¹⁰⁹

Richard Parker

Martel claims that there is no specific reason why he chose to replace Scliar’s panther with a tiger: initially, he wanted to have an Indian elephant as Pi’s companion, but the effect would have been too laughable. A rhinoceros

¹⁰⁸ See „Life of Pi“.

¹⁰⁹ See „Ang Lee plant ‚Schiffbruch mit Tiger‘“ and Singh.

would have been implausible for reasons of diet – on what could a rhinoceros feed in the middle of the Pacific Ocean? –, so he finally settled for the tiger. Whatever Martel claimed, it can surely be doubted that there were no deeper thoughts behind making the leading animal of the story a tiger. He said that all the animals on the lifeboat stand for specific traits of the human character: “the hyena [embodies] cowardliness, the orang-utan maternal instincts and the zebra exoticism” (Martel, “How I Wrote”). Therefore, he needed another animal to bring an allegory for danger into the boat. Moreover, considering that Martel spent half a year in India before writing the novel, he surely must have come across the importance of the tiger – India’s flagship animal – in the subcontinent’s culture.

The name of the tiger is also worth having a closer look at. The name “Richard Parker” has several marine connections, and all of them are bloody and rather cruel.¹¹⁰ First of all, Richard Parker was a young sailor aboard the “Mignonette” in 1884; the ship sank and “after surviving 16 days in a dingy, the captain and his two mates sliced Richard Parker up and ate him” (“On Tigers, Cannibalism, and Poe”). Secondly, Edgar Allan Poe penned a novel called *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, in which the protagonist, Pym, suffers shipwreck; in order to survive, he and friend kill the third survivor and eat him – the poor victim’s name is Richard Parker. This is an astonishing coincidence, since Poe’s novel was written in 1838, more than forty years before the “Mignonette” disaster. A third Richard Parker died during the sinking of the “Francis Speight” in 1846, and the fourth mariner by the name of Richard Parker was the leader of the 1797 Nore mutiny; he was later hanged for his role in the mutiny. After learning of the fates of these namesakes, Martel concluded that “[s]o many Richard Parkers had to mean something” (“On Tigers, Cannibalism, and Poe”).

Without doubt, these stories about cannibalism were the inspiration for the passages with the Frenchman whom Pi found to be in similarly dismal circumstances as himself: the half-starved man is likewise trapped in a lifeboat, but when he encounters an extremely weakened Pi who is already blind of

¹¹⁰ See Martel, „On Tigers, Cannibalism, and Poe“.

hunger, he tries to enter the boat to kill the boy. Pi tries to stop him from stepping onto the boat, but in vain.

I could feel him [...] bringing a foot down to the floor of the boat. “No, no, my brother! Don’t! We’re not–“ [...] Before I could say the word *alone*, I was alone again. [...] [Richard Parker] ripped the flesh off the man’s frame and cracked his bones. The smell of blood filled my nose. Something in me died then that has never come back to life. (Martel, *Pi* 321).

It is interesting that Richard Parker should devour a man, when in reality, Richard Parker himself was eaten by desperate fellow seamen in the “Mignonette” incident.

When we now bear in mind that in the story Richard Parker is a tiger, an alleged “man-eater”, there is a somewhat morbid irony to this reversal of roles. The tiger’s namesake, the real Richard Parker was the victim of a maritime disaster and got killed by his comrades in the end. However, in the novel, it is completely the other way round: the boy trapped in a boat who fell prey to cannibalistic men is now an animal trapped in a boat with its potential prey, a boy, in front of its nose. If one follows that trail of thought, one will come to the conclusion that, in order for that reversed analogy to be perfect, Richard Parker has to slay his companion, Pi, just as the historical Parker’s comrades killed him in the lifeboat of the “Mignonette”. However, Martel chose not to follow the analogy completely: the tiger Richard Parker and Pi come to a frail agreement that, in the end, saves both their lives. In this way, Martel may want to show the reader that however desperate the circumstances are, there is always a better way than resorting to violence and crime, even if it is the more cumbersome way.

It should also be said that even if the reader does not know the story behind the name Richard Parker (which is very likely), he or she will still enjoy the irony that comes with it. It is an absolutely random name, a combination of two of the most common first and last names. When the name is first mentioned, the reader tends to think that the name belongs to just another crew member of the cargo ship who survived its sinking. Indeed, the first sentences of the novel’s second part play with the reader’s expectations:

The ship sank. It made a sound like a monstrous metallic burp. Things bubbled at the surface and then vanished. [...] From the lifeboat I saw something in the water. I cried, "Richard Parker, is that you? It's so hard to see. [...] Richard Parker? Yes, it is you!" I could see his head. He was struggling to stay at the surface of the water. [...] He had seen me. He looked panic-stricken. He started swimming my way. [...] He looked small and helpless. (Martel, *Pi* 121).

In consequence, Pi even throws out a lifebuoy to Richard Parker when he is nearly giving up. Only when Pi is pulling him in, he realises what he is doing and tries to fend off the prospective "comrade", and at the end of the chapter the true nature of the ominous Richard Parker is finally revealed:

I had a wet, trembling, half-drowned, heaving and coughing three-year-old adult Bengal tiger in my lifeboat. Richard Parker rose unsteadily to his feet on the tarpaulin, eyes blazing at they met mine, ears laid tight to his head, all weapons drawn. His head was the size and colour of the lifebuoy, with teeth. (Martel, *Pi* 124).

The contrast between the boring-sounding name and the carrier of this name is large; the reader is surely surprised at learning that this Richard Parker is actually not a sailor at all, but a grown-up tiger. Playing with reader expectations is obviously to Martel's liking: some time later, another chapter beginning reads as follows:

She came floating on an island of bananas in a halo of light, as lovely as the Virgin Mary. The rising sun was behind her. Her flaming hair looked stunning. I cried, "Oh blessed Great Mother, Pondicherry fertility goddess, provider of milk and love [...]" (Martel, *Pi* 139).

The reader is relieved to find out that at least the poor boy's mother has survived the shipwreck! However, the truth comes out right after Pi's laudation when he says that "[i]t was Orange Juice – so called because she tended to drool – our prize Borneo orang-utan matriarch, zoo star and mother of two fine boys" (Martel, *Pi* 140).

These are two instances where Martel ridicules the literary tradition of humanising animals; his persiflage of anthropomorphism becomes rather shocking when he shows in an unadorned way what the animals behind these human names are capable of. Martel displays the cruelty and violence that is a substantial part of the animal kingdom: the weakest animal aboard, the

wounded zebra, becomes the hyena's first victim; then the hyena slays the orang-utan, and finally, the tiger kills the hyena. The author does not shy away from drastic descriptions: skin is ripped off bodies "like gift wrap paper comes off a gift" (157), animals are „being eaten alive from the inside“ (157), the heads of apes are torn off (165), and when Richard Parker kills the hyena, „[t]here [is] a noise of organic crunching as windpipe and spinal cord [are] crushed“ (189). There is a lot of carnage going on aboard the lifeboat, and although the hyena could just as well have killed Pi, the supreme danger to the boy is still the tiger with the human name. This stark contrast and all the blood-soaked passages help to demolish the reader's romantically transfigured conceptions he may have about animals, and especially zoo animals. The author said in an interview that this was one of his major concerns, since "[m]ost of us don't see animals. We see something that we project unto" ("Transcript"). Pi himself says that he "may have anthropomorphized the animals till they spoke fluent English, the pheasants complaining in uppity British accents of their tea being cold" (Martel, *Pi* 42), and this is exactly the attitude that humans usually have towards animals. When Pi's father forces his sons to watch a tiger – it should be noted that this tiger is not given a human name – slaying and devouring a goat, it becomes clear to Pi that these beings, after all, are still a part of untamed nature. The representation of the wild in contrast to humanity is important for Martel. He explicitly stated that Richard Parker "is a real tiger. It's not out of Walt Disney. It's a real, fierce, wild Bengal tiger". This ties in to the prominent role that zoos play in the novel. For the author, zoos are "like embassies from the wild", with each animal being "a diplomat representing its species" ("Transcript"). Therefore, zoos should be preserved as places where people can make contact with the wild in order to understand it better and to build up respect for nature. In this context, the name of the tiger once more comes into play: while it is evident that by giving the poor sailor's name to the tiger, Martel achieves a morbidly ironical effect, it should be doubted that this was Martel's only motivation. It can be supposed that he also called his animal protagonist like the cannibalism victim to satirise the tiger's public image. In this reading, the author wants to turn the readership's attention to the fact that tigers today are no longer hunters, but that they are hunted and slaughtered themselves. For

Martel, zoos are like refuges where these animals can find a safe haven until conditions for them and their habitat have changed for the better.

Moreover, the zoo background makes it easier for the reader to believe Pi's story. While the tiger was born in the jungles, he was captured as a cub and brought to Pondicherry zoo with his mother.¹¹¹ While wild tigers claim territorial spaces of innumerable square kilometres, he grew up in the confined space of his enclosure; therefore, he quickly is accustomed to the small lifeboat. In the zoo, he grew accustomed to human companionship and learned that humans gave him food; therefore, he does not immediately lunge at Pi when he sees the boy for the first time. He is also familiar with animal training, which explains why Pi manages to subdue the tiger by the use of simple tricks like rocking the boat or blowing a whistle. Therefore, having the tiger grow up in a zoo simply is a tool used by Martel to make his story more plausible.

As a last note on the humanisation of animals, it should also be mentioned that even Pi did not manage to fully accept Richard Parker as an animal. Until the end, he reads human traits into the tiger. After running ashore in Mexico, the tiger jumps off the boat and, without a further glance at the boy, vanishes into the jungle.

I wept like a child. It was not because I was overcome at having survived my ordeal [...]. I was weeping because Richard Parker had left me so unceremoniously. [...] That bungled goodbye hurts me to this day. (Martel, *Pi* 360).

A final thought on the name of Richard Parker leads to the third part of the novel, the interview between Pi and the Japanese officials. In the realistic version of his adventures at sea, Pi narrates that there were four survivors of the catastrophe. Beside himself, there was his mother, who "held on to some bananas and made it to the lifeboat" (therefore, the mother in this version is the orang-utan in the other), a young sailor with a broken leg (the zebra), and the appalling ship's cook (the hyena). Within short time, the cook butchered the sailor and ate him; then, he killed Pi's mother by cutting off her head, and finally, Pi stabbed the cook. This means that in this moment, Pi took on the role of Richard Parker, the tiger. The gentle, peaceful boy with a deep interest in

¹¹¹ See Martel, *Pi* 168, 169.

religion and philosophy symbolises the tiger? Yes, because when Pi was in the lifeboat, feral instincts sprang to life that pushed him towards survival at all costs. There was no longer room for questions of morality. A critic said that “he doesn’t reflect much on [...] his progressive loss of humanity” (Misrha), and this puts it in a nutshell: in a situation where every wrong step could cost one’s life, one has no choice but to become a tiger. He is forced to abandon his vegetarianism and feeds on raw fish, turtle and bird meat. His diet is the same as Richard Parker’s. This dichotomy between ancient primary instincts and the craving for civilisation that exists in every human being was something Martel put a main focus on. He found that

the idea of a religious boy in a lifeboat with a wild animal [is] the perfect metaphor for the human condition. Humans aspire to really high things [...] like religion, justice, democracy. At the same time, we’re rooted in our human, animal conditions. And so, all of those brought together in a lifeboat struck me as [...] a perfect metaphor. (“Conversation”)

Of course, a pragmatic, more psychological reading of what is means that Pi becomes Richard Parker could be that he made up the story with the animals as a coping strategy. At an earlier point in the novel, Pi’s father shows his son the terrible hunting skills of a tiger, and he says that on this day, he saw bloodshed for the first time. It has left a deep impression in the boy. Later, in the lifeboat, Pi kills the cook, or rather slaughters him like in a ritual:

I stabbed him repeatedly. His blood soothed my chapped hands. His heart was a struggle – all those tubes that connected it. I managed to get it out. It tasted delicious, far better than turtle. I ate his liver. I cut off great pieces of his flesh. He was such an evil man. Worse still, he met evil in me – selfishness, anger, ruthlessness. I must live with that. (Martel, *Pi* 391).

In order to come to terms with this terrible deed, which must have been extremely traumatic to the sensitive, peace-loving boy, he invents a new story in which animals replace the actual survivors. He remembers the image of the blood-smeared tiger and projects the murder he committed onto an imaginary tiger. In this way, Pi turns from a murderer into an innocent bystander. However, the fact that the tiger had a human name – while the other tiger in Pondicherry zoo had a typical animal name – still reveals that the tiger, in fact, is a boy.

The author does not offer any clue as to whether the first or the second story is true. It is up to the reader to decide: does he only accept the rational, factual account as true? Or is he able to do the “leap of faith” that it requires to believe Pi’s story with the animals? This is what it all boils down to: when Pi asks the Japanese officials which story was the better one, they reply that they prefer the variant with the animals. And Pi replies: “Thank you. And so it goes with God” (Martel, *Pi* 399). This is basically the essence of the whole novel: one can see the world as a place where everything can be explained logically and analytically, but then it would be a place devoid of any excitement or wonder. However, if one brings a certain willingness to simply believe in what seems to be incomprehensible – which would be called “suspension of disbelief” in literature –, the world becomes multi-faceted and more colourful.

Another hint that Pi’s journey across the Pacific Ocean is more or less a religious metaphor is hidden in the name of the cargo ship, the “Tsimtsum”. To the reader, it may seem a typically Japanese name, but in fact, “tzimtzum” is a concept in Jewish Kabbalah mysticism. Incidentally, the adult Pi says that he is an expert on Isaac Luria, the inventor of the tzimtzum concept.¹¹² Basically, it means that the infinite God contracted himself in order to create a finite world. The process of contraction is called tzimtzum.¹¹³ By contracting himself, God left space for the humans to develop, but at the same time, he was no longer present in this space. In order to reconnect with God, humans must live an ethical life and free themselves of all evil. In the lifeboat, Pi repeatedly says that he feels that God left him, and he also has to commit evil in order to survive. Richard Parker helps him go through this extremely difficult time; in this way, the tiger is seen as a gift sent by God that prevents Pi from losing his faith.¹¹⁴ Indeed, shortly after the sinking of the ship, Pi says the following:

A part of me did not want Richard Parker to die at all, because if he died I would be left alone with despair, a foe even more formidable than a tiger. If I still had a will to live, it was thanks to Richard Parker. He kept me from thinking too much about my family and my tragic circumstances. He pushed me to go on living. [...] It’s the plain truth: without Richard Parker, I wouldn’t be alive today to tell you my story. (Martel, *Pi* 207).

¹¹² See Martel, *Pi* 3.

¹¹³ See „Tzimtzum“

¹¹⁴ See Innes.

Reincarnation of a murdered sailor, ambassador of the wild, representative of a hunted species at the brink of extinction, symbol of murder and rage, consort and godsend: it can be said that *Life of Pi* is a novel that gives extensive room for interpretations, each one giving the tiger another role to slip into. Yann Martel does not make it clear which of these interpretations are valid, but the reader should bear in mind that this is not his intention. The author wants his readers to find out what the novel means for themselves; he wants them to contemplate its message, and the same is true for Richard Parker: he may only be a tiger, but he is also a lively literary character that makes us think about timeless topics like the importance of faith, the meaning of truth or the eternal struggle between man and nature.

Tigers in children's literature and young adult fiction

Alan Alexander Milne's Pooh stories

Perhaps one of the most famous literary tiger characters stems from A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* books. The British humorist (1882-1956) first introduced the character of Tigger in *The House at Pooh Corner*. The stories take place in Hundred Acre Wood, which was inspired by Ashdown Forest near Milne's own home in East Sussex. The protagonists of the stories are a small boy called Christopher Robin – also the name of Milne's own son – and the animal inhabitants of the enchanted forest. Milne based the characters on his son's stuffed toys, even giving them the same names.¹¹⁵

Tigger is a very emotional character with a usually cheerful and merry nature. He is very childlike in his behaviour: when he feels like doing something, he simply does it; he is also a rather reckless character, not thinking about the risks of what he is doing. He is known for his peculiar way of moving through the forest: he does not really walk; instead, he prefers bouncing. Tigger never refers to himself as a tiger, despite his orange coat with the black stripes. Instead, he says that he is a Tigger, as if it were a species – although no other Tiggers ever appeared in Milne's stories.

Walt Disney adapted the Pooh stories in the 1960s; they started a unparalleled marketing campaign with the franchise: films, TV shows, comics, and especially innumerable merchandising articles have coined the public's image of the toy bear and his friends to such an extent that the original stories have long been eclipsed. The appearance of the original Tigger in the illustrations of Ernest Shepard differs considerably from the Disney version¹¹⁶: in the company's version, Tigger assumes an even more anthropomorphised form – he gives up walking on four legs like a real tiger; instead, Disney portrays him standing on his hind legs.



Fig. 22: Shepard's Tigger

¹¹⁵ See „Ashdown Forest“.

¹¹⁶ Hollis, Ehrbar 89.

Apart from using his son's toys as inspirations for his characters, Milne may have wanted to bring a touch of exoticism to the Pooh stories: set in an Essex forest with his son's toy bear as a protagonist, unusual and seemingly out-of-place animals like tigers or kangaroos (in the characters of Kanga and Roo) add to the diversity and appeal of the enchanted woods. Nevertheless, apart from his appearance and his name, Tigger does not have anything to do with the actual animal he is based on. Tigger even is no longer a carnivore; instead, he has an obsessive fondness for malt extract. The decision to remodel one of the world's most feared animals into a hyperactive cuddly toy was motivated by the wish of creating a peaceful "parallel universe", Hundred Acre Wood, in which there is neither violence nor fear. The protagonists in the Pooh stories live in perfect harmony with nature; however, it is a totally unreal and romanticised picture of nature; its unpleasant aspects – and the tiger's need to kill prey is certainly among them – are completely excluded.

L. Frank Baum's Oz stories

The American writer Lyman Frank Baum (1856-1919) is best known as the creator of the Oz universe.¹¹⁷ His phenomenally successful *Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (published in 1900) about the little girl Dorothy, who is swept from Kansas to Oz by a tornado, was made into an equally triumphant film with Judie Garland in 1939. Due to the first book's success, Baum wrote 13 more novels set in the world of Oz; other authors took up his legacy and continued adding another 26 novels to the already large Oz myth.¹¹⁸ They all wrote the stories as if they were chroniclers of the fictitious realm.

The third book in the Oz series, *Ozma of Oz* (1907), introduced the character of the Hungry Tiger. He is a friend of the Cowardly Lion – one of the original book's major characters – and, despite his intimidating appearance, a good-hearted animal. Both cats of prey pull the chariot of Ozma, the daughter of the king of Oz; they also serve as her guardians. When Dorothy gets to know

¹¹⁷ See „L. Frank Baum“

¹¹⁸ See preface of Baum, *Wizard*

the Hungry Tiger, she inquires about his name, and he then explains about his dietary preferences:

For my part, I'm a savage beast, and have an appetite for all sorts of poor little living creatures, from a chipmunk to fat babies. [...] Fat babies! Don't they sound delicious? But I've never eaten any, because my conscience tells me it is wrong. If I had no conscience I would probably eat the babies and then get hungry again, which would mean that I had sacrificed the poor babies for nothing. No; hungry I was born, and hungry I shall die. But I'll not have any cruel deeds on my conscience to be sorry for. (Baum, *Ozma*)

A tiger with pangs of conscience is surely the ideal friend for a fainthearted lion, who gets scared at literally everything. Indeed, just as the lion feels that he cannot live up to his role as the “King of Beasts” (Baum, *Wizard* 46) in the original novel, the tiger in the sequel has similar feelings of not being able to satisfy everyone’s expectations:

I am a good beast, perhaps, but a disgracefully bad tiger. For it is the nature of tigers to be cruel and ferocious, and in refusing to eat harmless living creatures I am acting as no good tiger has ever before acted. That is why I left the forest and joined my friend the Cowardly Lion. (Baum, *Ozma*).

Both the Cowardly Lion and the Hungry Tiger feel that they are in some respect caricatures of real lions and tigers; that is why in the short story “The Cowardly Lion and the Hungry Tiger” (published in Baum’s collection *Little Wizard Stories of Oz*) they finally want to prove to the inhabitants of Oz that they are essentially wild beasts, not made for the boring job of protecting Princess Ozma. The tiger thinks that if he ate some fat babies, “the people of Oz would fear [him] and

[he]’d become more important” (Baum, “Cowardly Lion”). So they roam through the streets in search of victims, but ultimately neither the Lion nor the Tiger have the heart to harm anyone. At the end of the story, the Tiger has learned his lesson: “It’s better to go hungry, seems to me, than to be cruel to a little child” (Baum, “Cowardly Lion”).

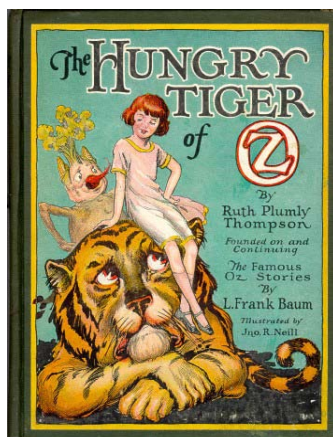


Fig. 23: "The Hungry Tiger of Oz" book cover

Another book made this character the central protagonist, *The Hungry Tiger of Oz*; however, it was not written by Baum, but by Ruth Plumly Thompson in

1926, seven years after Baum's death.

In comparison to Milne's Tigger, Baum's vision of a tiger suitable for a children's book is much eerier and more ambivalent. Although the Hungry Tiger would never be able to actually devour a baby, the reader is given to understand that this is basically what he longs for. There is an immanent feeling of danger that surrounds the otherwise friendly beast. Already the Tiger's dimensions are definitively awe-inspiring: the cover of Thompson's novel shows a small girl sitting on the animal's head – and only the head is almost the girl's size. This would make the Hungry Tiger significantly larger than any real tiger: an indicator of Baum's (and the other Oz writers') intention of not making this character just another cuddly feline, but instead creating an enormous, potentially dangerous predator – who just happens to be plagued by its all too human conscience. It can be said that the existence and inclusion of themes like death and actual danger to the protagonists are characteristic of the Oz stories: for example, the tornado that carries away Dorothy also picks up her Kansas home, and after the cyclone has swept them to Oz, the falling farmhouse kills the Wicked Witch of the East; the only visible parts of the corpse are "two feet [...] sticking out" from "under the corner of the great beam the house rested on" (Baum, *Wizard* 9). Such morbidly comical scenes would be unthinkable in Milne's Pooh stories (which, of course, are intended for a younger audience), in which there is only peace and happiness. This explains the two radically different approaches to the inclusion of tiger-like characters.

Other children's books and Young Adult Fiction

While Tigger and the Hungry Tiger are surely the most famous tigers in Anglophone children's literature, some more of these big cats roam through books for younger readers. In 1956, the Irish writer Elizabeth Bowen wrote *The Good Tiger*, a story about a zoo tiger that leaves its enclosure because it is invited for tea by two children.¹¹⁹ Another tiger fond of tea is described in Judith Kerr's *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* (1968). A not so friendly tiger is the hero –

¹¹⁹ The following examples, if not noted otherwise, are taken from the Children's Picture Book Database, keyword „tiger“.

or anti-hero – of Jack Prelutsky's *The Terrible Tiger* (1970): a tiger devours four people, but to the animal's misfortune, the last victim was a tailor: he cuts himself out of the tiger's belly and frees the two others. The story finds a happy ending, though, since the tailor sews the tiger up again.¹²⁰ One more picture book for children is Kate Canning's *A Painted Tale* (1979); its premise is Henri Rousseau's painting *Exotic Landscape with Tiger and Hunters*; fleeing from the hunters, the tiger jumps from the painting and wanders about the museum. Within the context of the German-speaking world, Janosch and his children's books classic *Oh, wie schön ist Panama* (1978) should be mentioned. It introduces the reader to two unusual friends, a bear and a tiger; the tiger's favourite toy has become especially popular: a yellow and black striped wooden duck on wheels, the "tiger-duck".

However, especially in more recent times, there have also been children's books that do not by any means make the tiger suitable for children by omitting the more gruesome aspects of its nature. Helen Cowcher's *Tigress* (1991), for example, does not shy away from showing an Indian tigress and her cubs killing cattle for food, whereupon the herdsmen initially want to poison the big cats. It is a picture book that presents the most acute problem there is in tiger preservation: how can a balance between animal protection and the expansion of the anthroposphere be found? Jan Wahl's *Tiger Watch* (1982) goes into a similar direction: a tiger threatens a small Indian village, and a young man is sent out to hunt it down; however, after witnessing the tiger's death, his attitude towards hunting changes.

It is interesting to examine why this animal, which had to suffer from its bad image for centuries, has become a favourite among children's books authors since the second half of the 20th century. The first and most obvious reason is the change of the public's attitude towards the animal that set in at this time. With the slow emergence of animal protection and animal rights, the public perception of the tiger changed from bloodthirsty hunter to persecuted victim. This development is mirrored in children's books which employ tigers as protagonists who act in amiable ways that are understandable for small children. Such books pursue the didactic goal of opening the children's minds to

¹²⁰ See „The Terrible Tiger (Paperback)“.

the wonders of nature and the animal kingdom. Young readers are familiarised with endangered species like tigers from their earliest age, and through the simple, friendly stories that are accompanied by equally endearing illustrations, a positive attitude towards these animals is developed over the years. As soon as they understand that tigers are animals that cannot really be invited for tea, stories like those by Helen Cowcher or Jan Wahl help to highlight the problems that endangered species have to face in today's world in a way that is particularly suitable for children.

Apart from the authors' eco-pedagogic messages, tigers are common guests in children's books because these animals quite simply fascinate young readers. In a way, the attraction of tigers or other potentially dangerous animals can be compared to that of dinosaurs, and every museum that has dinosaur fossils on display will find that a substantial percentage of their visitors are children. The palaeontologist Alan Grant in Michael Crichton's novel *Jurassic Park* has an explanation for this fascination:

Grant used to watch kids in museums as they stared open-mouthed at the big skeletons rising above them. He wondered what their fascination really represented. He finally decided that children liked dinosaurs because these giant creatures personified the uncontrollable force of looming authority. They were symbolic parents. Fascinating and frightening, like parents. And kids loved them, as they loved their parents (Crichton 115)

The same holds true for tigers, though perhaps not to the same extent. These animals are equally uncontrollable – probably the reason why people of all ages watch in awe when circus animal trainers command over tigers and other big cats: a puny human being imposing his will on a beast twice his own weight and designed by nature to kill prey swiftly and efficiently? Essentially, this is the formula that catapulted the magicians Siegfried and Roy with their white tigers to worldwide fame. The public feels that there is always a moment of uncertainty, of not being able to hold up control over the animal, and this is why watching such shows gives us thrills. Indeed, when Roy was critically injured by one of their tigers during a performance in Las Vegas in October 2003¹²¹, this was surely shocking, but not really surprising. Deep down, everyone knows that

¹²¹ See „Why did tiger attack Roy Horn?“.

a tiger in fact is an “uncontrollable force”, like Grant’s dinosaurs. This dichotomy between fear and fascination is what appeals to people in general, and children in particular.

The tiger makes some interesting appearances in Young Adult Fiction, too; to be more exact, it is a recurring character in romance books that feature paranormal elements. Bestselling author Charlaine Harris is the creator of the wildly popular *Southern Vampire Mysteries*. Eight books have been published so far; number nine is due in May 2009.¹²² A frequently recurring character in these books is the were-tiger Quinn, who, in his tiger shape, is an extremely powerful and skilled fighter. In the series, were-tigers are now very rare due to poaching – normal humans cannot distinguish between shape-shifters and actual tigers.¹²³ Sherrilyn Kenyon’s best-selling *Dark-Hunter* series, which already has more than 20 novels, also focuses on a were-tiger as the protagonist of the 2005 book *Unleash The Night*.¹²⁴ Another shape-shifter who can take on the form of a tiger appears in Marjorie M. Liu’s *Tiger Eye*; however, this novel is more or less pure romance fiction and not aimed at a juvenile audience. Nevertheless, it is remarkable how commonly tigers appear in modern youth literature in connection with the age-old shape-shifting myths. This is probably due to the appeal of ancient and mysterious rituals. There is a vast amount of novels or TV shows that focus on paranormal activities; there is no specific target audience: book series such as the above-mentioned are aimed at younger readers, while TV shows like “The X-Files” focus on adults. In any case, a cleverly marketed paranormal mystery series is more or less guaranteed to become a runaway success. The writers of these Young Adult Fiction novels are surely aware of this fact; therefore, the inclusion of a shape-shifter is just a logical consequence of the urge to further fuel the appeal – and the sales figures – of a series. The most common animal in shape-shifting is the wolf: werewolves have long since become part of the standard equipment of the horror/mystery genre. By replacing the wolf with a tiger the result is a relatively fresh character that is still rooted in old folk beliefs, which are ever so fashionable in contemporary popular culture. Moreover, the Western world

¹²² See *Charlaine Harris Official Website*.

¹²³ See „Quinn“.

¹²⁴ See *Sherrilyn Kenyon’s Cyberhome*.

regards the tiger as a far more exotic, alien – and therefore more interesting – animal than the wolf. When we take into account that tigers, as mentioned earlier, are also emblematic of sensuality, the appearance of were-tigers in Young Adult Fiction also adds a subtle layer of sexual tension to the texts (especially when, as in Harris's novels, the were-tiger Quinn is the love interest of the main protagonist). In this respect, it is hardly surprising that these were-tigers usually appear in conjunction with vampires, who have always been linked to sexuality. The blossoming of sexuality and its varieties are a major theme in modern Young Adult Fiction regardless of which genre.

When we compare the modern were-tiger to its precursors in ancient Far Eastern folklore, it becomes evident that contemporary authors completely reinterpret these creatures. As pointed out earlier, the were-tiger was usually seen as a demon-possessed or bewitched man who was a danger to livestock or to other people. Although there are some exceptions, the figure of the were-tiger is traditionally malicious and evil. Now, however, the shape-shifters are portrayed as somewhat heroic creatures that the reader can identify with, even if they have their flaws. This may have to do with the authors' attempt of transporting a didactic message: they create characters who are outsiders because of their lifestyle and their appearance, but who are essentially good at heart. This can teach the young readership that they should not judge a book by its cover; outward appearances are less important than inner principles.

A factor that may also play a part in the rather frequent appearance of tigers in modern children's and adolescent literature is globalisation. Today, almost every child in the Western world has seen a live tiger in a zoo or watched films about the animals on TV. On the other hand, some 150 years ago, tigers were not yet so well known in this part of the world. The big cats were the symbols for the wilderness of India, but the public eye did not really focus on them to the same extent as today. When television brings even the remotest corners of the world to our living rooms and the opportunities of studying tigers in zoos, museums or the Internet are basically unlimited, the logical consequence is that the tiger has become almost more familiar to Westerners than local fauna: it is highly likely that a ten-year-old today knows more about tigers or elephants than about lynxes or badgers.

6) *Comparative analysis*

Now that each work has been analysed individually, this final chapter will offer an overall comparison to elaborate on similarities and differences in the depiction of the tiger, and to shed light on the development of this depiction as well as on the various ways of representation of the animal in Anglophone literature.

Now that we have explored English tiger literature from the late 18th to the early 21st century, it is interesting to examine whether a linear development has become apparent over the course of these two hundred years. When we start with William Blake, we are confronted with a tiger that is used by the author to symbolise the dark sides of life. It stands for violence and, in some readings, for satanic power. Nevertheless, it is important not to forget that this creature is also a creation of God and is therefore equal to any other being. One hundred years later, Rudyard Kipling omits the religious dimension, but basically follows the long-standing tradition and portrays Shere Khan as the typical villain. Saki, perhaps, can be seen as a precursor of a change of trend in tiger representation: his tiger is not an aggressor, but the victim of the British hunting frenzy. In fact, the reader pities the old tiger – a tendency that is strengthened in Narayan's *Malgudi* novel, in which the reader actually can identify with the tiger protagonist. It can also be observed that Raja (apart from his capacity of articulating his thoughts) acts like a real tiger; he does not feel like a literary construct, but like an actual animal. Yann Martel brings this trend to a climax: Richard Parker is a cat of prey without ifs and buts. There are no extenuations: while in *Malgudi*, some aspects of tiger life are whitewashed (for example when Raja refrains from eating meat by the end of the novel), Martel's tiger is portrayed as the uncontrolled force of nature that it really is. It is also important to stress that *Life of Pi* leaves it to the reader to form an opinion about Richard Parker. He is neither presented as a villain nor as a hero; instead, he is just described rather realistically as an animal, to which the categories of good and evil do not apply.

Summing up, it can be said that a constant development can definitely be seen: two centuries of tiger literature have slowly brought about a change from the traditionally negative view of the big cat to a more neutral, realistic portrayal

of the tiger's nature. The development that modern children's literature with tiger characters has gone through more or less confirms this observation. While tigers were never portrayed as villains, many children's books from the earlier 20th century show the animals in a totally anthropomorphised way (as for example the tea-drinking tiger), while the second half of the century has produced children's books that follow the same trend as Narayan or Martel: tigers were now shown as actual wild animals (although, obviously, in a way that is still suitable for children).

Of course, there are exceptions to the rule, such as Aphra Behn, for whom the tigers were noble creatures that symbolised unrestricted freedom, while her contemporaries condemned the animals as bloodthirsty monsters. Angela Carter's short story does not fit easily into this scheme, since she put a completely different focus on her tiger. While all the other authors that have been discussed more or less concentrated on the same aspects when it comes to portraying tigers – that is, danger, power or themes like civilisation versus nature –, Carter did not centre on these facets to the same extent; instead, she turned the reader's attention to the sensual, erotic attributes of the big cat.

The similarities that have just been mentioned should now be scrutinised more closely. What the stories of Kipling, Saki, Narayan and Martel have in common is that they are all set in India, although only R. K. Narayan was of Indian nationality. The subcontinent plays a major role in the works of Saki and Kipling due to their first-hand experience of Indian life and British colonialism, which makes Martel the sole author with no ties at all to the country. However, India and its culture has enjoyed extreme popularity in the West for a number of years now (for instance, Bollywood films are booming in Europe and the USA), so having the story taking place in India was a clever move by Martel, which surely had its share in catapulting *Life of Pi* to the top of the bestseller lists. For the Western reader, India is still an epitome of exoticism, and the tiger is one of its symbols. I seriously doubt that many people, when hearing the word "tiger", think of the snow-covered coniferous forests of Siberia instead of the tropical jungles of India. The animal is so closely linked to the country that it has become something of a stock character in people's image of the country. Therefore, when Angela Carter sets her story in Italy instead of the prototypical tiger country, the fact the *The Beast* is a tiger adds even more to the short

story's fairy tale character. If it were set in India, the effect might have been different, and it probably would have felt more like a conventional retelling of a popular story.

Another, perhaps not too surprising parallel between most of the works discussed is that the tiger's physical attributes come to the fore. This is carried to extremes in Blake's poem, which comments exclusively on the outward appearance of the tiger. Its individual body parts form a perfectly designed, yet fearsome whole, which is brought into context with God's awe-inspiring creation process. In the *Jungle Books*, the tiger's legendary strength is also central to the depiction of Shere Khan: he lacks this physical power and he is not granted Blake's "fearful symmetry" due to his lame hind leg, which is why the other animals of the jungle do not pay him respect. In a way, he is an imperfect tiger because of his handicap. This idea is further developed by Saki: in his short story, the tiger is even further removed from the image of the stereotypical big cat in full possession of its deadly powers. This juxtaposition of cliché and the tiger's actual condition is one of the sources of Saki's humour. In "The Tiger's Bride", the animal's physical attributes are not in the centre of the author's attention; nevertheless, the tiger's appearance plays a major role when it comes to putting the awakening of sexuality in the focus of the story – its pelt has always been a symbol of sensuality, and TCM finds use for its body parts as aphrodisiacs. Narayan and especially Martel once more stress the animal's physical superiority over humans. These are the only stories of all that have been discussed in which people are killed in tiger attacks (although Shere Khan presumably slew Mowgli's parents, but this is never stated explicitly). In a way, it is surprising that the only two authors that aim at portraying the tiger's character and behaviour in an accurate, realistic way (even though Narayan puts human thoughts into his protagonist's mouth) include scenes in which the stereotypical man-eater myth comes to life again: Raja accidentally kills Captain after he stubbornly refused to understand the tiger's needs, and Richard Parker puts an end to the life of the Frenchman who tried to enter the animal's territory without any second thoughts. The circumstances of these kills suggest that the authors wanted to direct the reader's attention to the fact that tigers, however tame and cuddly they may seem in a zoo, essentially remain wild predators,

and that it is man who is to blame for any casualties that may arise when people come into contact with these animals.

Closely connected to this is that all authors include the themes of danger and fear in their portrayal of the tiger, even Angela Carter, whose story obviously differs in most respects from the other works discussed. It can therefore be deduced that the tiger, however open-mindedly and liberally we approach it, evokes an innate feeling of fear in us. It may be a relict from ancient times, when humans were still on the menu of prehistoric predators like the sabre-toothed tiger. Nevertheless, people seem to enjoy this fear when they are presented with it in a controlled environment – be it in a zoo, in the cinema or, in our case, in literature.

When I wondered in the introduction to this thesis whether the cultural significance of the tiger was big enough to leave some major traces in Anglophone literature, it can now be ascertained that it definitely left its mark on the literary production of many English-speaking countries, especially India. Over the centuries, the big cat has fuelled the imagination of many writers – for there surely are more works of fiction in which the tiger is a major character than merely the six that have been discussed here. The variety of roles that people have attributed to the tiger over the course of time is undeniably mirrored in Anglophone literature, be it in the form of an exoticist call to Westerners, as the embodiment of intense sexuality, or as a postcolonial echo of a culture of which the tiger has always been an important part.

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Pictures:

Fig. 1:
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Fig. 2:
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DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Repräsentation des Tigers in der englischsprachigen Literatur. Der Tiger hinterließ im Laufe der Jahrhunderte in etlichen Staaten Asiens und Europas (vor allem aber in China und Indien), beträchtliche Spuren in den Gebieten Kunst, Kultur und Religion. Die Zielsetzung dieser Arbeit war es, herauszufinden, ob und in welchem Ausmaß dieser kulturelle Einfluss auf die englischsprachige Literatur eingewirkt hat. Darüber hinaus wurde erforscht, in welcher Weise der Tiger in der englischsprachigen Literatur repräsentiert wird, da gerade ein solches Tier – von den einen als Menschenfresser verteufelt und von den anderen mit allen Mitteln vor der endgültigen Ausrottung bewahrt –, sicherlich zu kontroversen Darstellungen anregt.

Nach einer kurzen zoologischen Einführung erfolgt ein Kapitel über den kulturellen Einfluss des Tigers in Asien sowie in der westlichen Welt. Die Arbeit zeigt, dass der Tiger auch in unseren Breiten erstaunlich viel Einfluss auf Kunst und (Populär-)kultur hat. Das nächste Kapitel beschäftigt sich mit dem Tiger in der Weltliteratur: hier wird schon der Pfad bemerkbar, der auch in der englischsprachigen Literatur zu erkennen ist: im Allgemeinen wurde der Tiger in früheren Jahrhunderten als abscheuliches Untier mit einer Vorliebe für Menschenfleisch abgetan; erst mit dem Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts und dem langsamen Aufkommen des Naturschutzgedankens beginnt sich eine Trendwende abzuzeichnen, im Laufe derer der Tiger als das dargestellt wird, was er tatsächlich ist: eine Raubkatze, und nicht ein bössartige Bestie.

Der eigentliche Kernteil der Arbeit befasst sich mit den Werken von sechs Autoren, die in chronologischer Folge präsentiert werden: William Blakes Gedicht „The Tyger“ (1796), Rudyard Kiplings *Jungle Books* (1894/95), Sakis Kurzgeschichte „Mrs. Packletide’s Tiger“ (1911), Angela Carters Kurzgeschichte „The Tiger’s Bride“ (1979), R. K. Narayans Roman *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983), Yann Martels Roman *Life of Pi* (2001) sowie einige Bücher der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Die Analyse dieser Werke zeigt eine kontinuierliche Veränderung in der Art, wie der Tiger dargestellt wird: während das Tier bei Blake und Kipling noch die Verkörperung des Bösen im Tierreich war, so drehte Saki erstmals den Spieß um und zeigte anhand der Tigerjagd die

Verkommenheit und Dekadenz der (britischen) Gesellschaft war, der der Tiger zum Opfer gefallen ist. Bei Narayan ist der Tiger Protagonist des Romans und erzählt seine Lebens- und Leidensgeschichte aus eigener Perspektive; abermals erkennt der Leser, dass nicht der Tiger, sondern der Mensch die eigentliche Bestie ist, wenn er z.B. im Zirkus zum Vergnügen anderer wilde Tiere durch sinnlose und aufreibende Kunststücke jagt. Yann Martels internationaler Bestseller *Life of Pi* verzichtet schlussendlich gänzlich auf eine Vermenschlichung des Tigers und stellt ungeschönt die Urgewalt der Natur dar, die im Tiger zum Vorschein kommt. Martel erreicht so eine vollkommen objektive Grundhaltung, in der der Menschenjunge Pi und der Tiger ebenbürtige Protagonisten sind. Bei Martel ist der Tiger weder Bösewicht noch Held, sondern einfach nur Tier.

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