

A Bird's-Eye View over Sydney: Animal Imagery in *Amnesty* by Aravind Adiga

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Abstract:

The creative and meaningful use of animal imagery plays an important role in Aravind Adiga's novels. In his previous works, such as the 2008 Booker-prize-winning *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower* (published in 2011), animal references frequently feature in the narration, thus conveying multi-layered meanings. However, animal references become particularly noticeable in *Amnesty*, his latest novel published in 2020. The aim of this paper is to investigate the use of animal imagery in *Amnesty* and unravel some of its possible meanings. Starting from interpretations of animal metaphors related to humans, the paper will then put under scrutiny other interpretations of animal references which progressively enlarge their reach, thereby involving not only the city of Sydney, but the whole novel. By making reference to specific passages, I will explore the meanings of the animal imagery with respect to the illegal immigrants, their condition and to isolation, which acquires particular relevance, since the narrator is a Sri Lankan illegal immigrant who initially reached Australia thanks to a student visa. Furthermore, other interpretations of the animal references could revolve around the city of Sydney, its curious representation as a jungle and its representational use of animal imagery in the coat of arms and official contexts. Finally, light will be shed on the interesting role played by animals in pivotal scenes and their unexpected powerful revelations, which allow readers to better understand some episodes in the novel and interpret them from a different, enlightening perspective.

Keywords: Aravind Adiga; animal imagery; Australia; immigrants

1. Introduction

While reading Aravind Adiga's thought-provoking novels, one is struck by the surprising abundance and elaborate meaningfulness of animal references scattered through their plots. In the 2008 Booker-prize-winning *The White Tiger*, Balram—the main character and narrator—informs the reader about the rapacious behaviour of the four landlords who profit from different resources in his native village—the Stork, the Raven, the Buffalo and the Wild Boar—who “did not need to come out into the village except to feed” (Adiga 2009, 25). As Khor underlines, the animal-landlords could also embody primitive forms of capitalism, aside from the specific resources they control (2012, 56). As far as the reference to the tiger of the title is concerned, it does not merely allude to the nickname given to young Balram—the future callous murderer of his own employer who is sacrificed on the road to self-realization—but it also hints at India's rise as a tiger economy (Mendes 2010, 276). Aside from symbology, though, a real fur-and-blood white tiger features in the narration. In a pivotal scene, Balram finally comes face-to-face with a white tiger which walks to and fro in its cage at the zoo.

Almost archetypal in its exemplarity, the awe-inspiring image of the tiger already sparked William Blake's imagination, who portrayed the flaming predator as striped with a “fearful symmetry” (2017, 78). Nevertheless, the white tiger is more redolent of Ted Hughes's superb jaguar. After listing a series of uninspiring and far-from-sublime animals, Hughes writes: “But who runs like the rest past these arrives/ At a cage where the crowd stands, stares, mesmerized,/ As a child at a dream, at a dream, at a jaguar hurrying enraged/ Through prison darkness after the drills of his eyes (Hughes 1957).” In a similar vein, Balram is charmed by the fierce beauty of the white tiger and its mesmerising power: “Black stripes and sunlit white fur flashed through the slits in the dark bamboo; it was like watching the slowed-down reels of an old black-and-white film. He was walking in the same line, again and again [...]. He was hypnotizing himself by walking like this – that was the only way he could tolerate this cage” (Adiga 2009, 276). In his interesting paper on the animal imagery in Ted Hughes's poems, Piciuccio states that the power of the energy-seething jaguar “is not only a means of capturing the zoo visitors' attention but it is the living force enabling the animal to remain deaf in front of its state of imprisonment” (2016, 195-196). The white tiger has a similar power which hypnotizes the feline itself, in addition to the viewers. The sight of the fierce tiger triggers a violent emotional reaction in Balram, who loses his senses and then takes the resolution to slit his master's throat in order to tread the path to entrepreneurship. In Walther's opinion, the encounter between the tiger's and Balram's gazes unleashes the previously-

obedient servant's transformation into a figure of contemporary capitalist power and acts as an eye-opener on his own identity (2014, 589).

Last Man in Tower is another meaningful novel in which animal references loom large. In a sense reminiscent of *The Visit of the Old Lady* by Dürrenmatt and *The Devil and Miss Prym* by Coelho, the novel is centred on the generous offer made by Mr Shah, an ambitious builder, to the residents of a flat in Mumbai: he will bestow upon each of them a large sum of money, provided that they all abandon their apartments. Mr Shah depicts the residents of Vishram Society as "social animals" (Adiga 2011, 63) and unflinchingly witnesses the gory sight of two hawks fighting over a mouse outside the window, which may act as a sort of mirror for Shah's rapacious and predatory nature: "The dead mouse, left behind on the sill, was oozing blood and grease. Shah's mouth filled with saliva" (Adiga 2011, 51). Eventually, only one resident—called Masterji—firmly keeps refusing the offer, thereby stoking the throbbing hatred of his previously-friendly neighbours. While Masterji is not even considered a human being by the residents anymore (Adiga 2011, 274), other characters take on animal characteristics, such as Ajwani, a seemingly ruthless man, who has "gill-like lines" (Adiga 2011, 179) on his cheeks. In the end, the residents of Vishram Society slowly but progressively degenerate and become even worse than the most deadly and unpleasant creatures. As Masterji desperately wonders: "Pigeon, crow, hummingbird; spider, scorpion, silverfish, termite and red ant; bats, bees, stinging wasps, clouds of anopheles mosquitoes. Come, all of you: and protect me from human beings" (Adiga 2011, 345; italics in the original).

In terms of abundance of animal imagery, Adiga's latest novel, entitled *Amnesty*, is no exception. Danny, the main character, comes across innumerable animals such as rats, a white cat, a huntsman spider, a goat, grasshoppers, a pitbull terrier and two pugs. Yet, it must be recognized that the birds take the lion's (or rather the hawk's) share. Indeed, the plot is finely interwoven with countless references to birds perched in the streets of Sydney or recalled by Danny, such as a colourful lorikeet, white cockatoos, black cockatoos, a crow, jabirus, mynahs, a white egret, cormorants, eagles, pelicans, pigeons, a magpie, seagulls and other unspecified birds. Even Danny's sayings hinge upon winged beings: "the kingfisher shows off, and the eagle hovers all day over water, but the crow is the one who always gets the fish" (Adiga 2021, 89). In *The White Tiger*, references to tigers and animals are imbued with several layers of interpretation which do not reduce them to a single coherent tropology, while the image of the tiger becomes a key symbol (Anjaria 2015, 119), as evidenced by the very title of the novel. In light of the recurring animals in the Indian author's literary works and of their connection to multi-faceted interpretations, I would like to analyse some possible meanings of the animal imagery in *Amnesty*. Several possible

interpretations will be put forward and analysed for their meaningfulness and implications. After having brought to the foreground interpretations related to human beings, the paper will put forward interpretations of animal references involving the city of Sydney and parts of the novel itself.

This analysis attempts to situate itself in the body of work that deals with Adiga's novels in order to understand the characteristics of his works, analyse the ways he tackles topics and unveil the meanings of recurring themes in his literary production, of which animal references are a powerful example. While several scholarly papers have engaged with *The White Tiger*—some of them were cited before—, *Amnesty* does not seem to have been a focus of scholarly research. Therefore, it is hoped that the present analysis on animal references in *Amnesty* and their multi-layered meanings might spur other scholars to engage with Adiga's works so as to examine whether animal metaphors are tackled differently or are linked to other social themes.

2. The Illegal Immigrant as a Chased Animal

One of the most interesting meanings of the varied animal imagery in Adiga's novel is the depiction of illegal immigrants as chased animals. This association is reminiscent of Balram's animalization, which derives from his subaltern position (Wälther 2014, 580) and the stifling and ironic image of the rooster coop, whereby the poor and destitute are equated with passive poultry, whereas the rich wear the uniform of the butcher who crams roosters into a cage (Khor 2012, 47). In her ecocritical analysis of Ortese's *L' Iguana*, Iovino stresses the dehumanization of those ruthlessly oppressed and marginalized in the eyes of their oppressors (2020, 86). Yet, in *Amnesty*, Adiga further emphasizes the equation of oppressed groups of people with animals from the beginning of the novel: "I asked, [...] 'what *are* you?'" (Adiga 2021, 3; italics in the original). Although she is merely joking, the Australian passerby unwittingly marks out Danny's status not only as an outsider, but also as an animal or object, all indistinctly mingled in the pronoun 'what.' That Danny is rather seen as a fugitive animal, though, is evidenced by some revealing expressions, such as "the leash tugged again at him" (Adiga 2021, 209) or "Who's after me? They all are" (Adiga 2021, 183). This statement is far from hyperbolic, since Australian immigration policy allows every citizen to report potential illegal immigrants, thereby creating an Australian example of "hostile environment," a phrase employed by Theresa May in 2012 (Hill 2017). There is even a telephone number of which those citizens who want to report potential illegal immigrants can avail themselves. With respect to this, the novel presents a scene which resonates with Fanonian references. On a train, Danny's cover as a blond-streaked Australian is blown by the attentive gaze of a baby: "The woman in a white shirt and jeans

was reading a newspaper, but her blond child, his head on his mother's thighs, like a cat on a lap, was looking at Danny. [...] his eyes began sparkling. The highlights don't fool me, mate. I know what you are" (Adiga 2021, 38).

Paradoxically, though, the novel goes one step further and implies that illegals are inferior to animals. When Danny decides to remain in Sydney after his student visa expiration date, which immediately turns him into an illegal, his callous 'landlord' forces him to clean dog poo in front of his shop several times. Danny's changed condition and the silent exploitation he is going to be subjected to are therefore strongly highlighted by this event. Similarly, Abe—another illegal and Danny's friend—is run after by a stray, confused pitbull. The dog is eventually collected by a police officer who is concerned about its safety, while absolutely unaware that Abe and other immigrants are toiling in an orchard nearby, picking cherries: "Abe recognized the look in his [the police officer's] eyes: the look of a people losing their grip on a continent" (Adiga 2021, 224).

Interestingly, though, Danny and the illegal immigrants are not the only people to be associated with animal imagery, which ripples over Radha and Prakash as well. Defined as 'Oscar and Lucinda,' thereby evoking "*the* historical novel of colonial Australia" (Bertinetti 2010, 325-326; italics in the original) by Carey in a very tongue-in-cheek manner, the two compulsive gamblers are intertwined with ornithic references. They are "lovebirds" (Adiga 2021, 116) and "migrate" (Adiga 2021, 93) from one pub to another on the lookout for bets to place and garish slot-machines. While Radha's mind processes the unexpected information that Danny is illegally living in Sydney, she looks at him from a new perspective: "like a parrot going upside down with an odd fruit" (Adiga 2021, 166). Although Prakash has "feathery" (Adiga 2021, 139) black brows, he is rather compared to a dangerous, unpredictable animal. Readers are told that "This is just an animal inside him. An instinct is sitting here, not a man" (Adiga 2021, 141) and Radha herself indirectly compares him to a caged animal by telling him: "'Prakash, [...] a man in prison has a choice: either break out or make his cell as big as the world'" (Adiga 2021, 203). Undeterred by her love, though, Prakash "attacked Radha, the way a lion attacks its tamer" (Adiga 2021, 205). Notwithstanding these telling and already explicit hints, the animalization of both Prakash and Danny surfaces during their encounter at the pub. Firmly holding Danny's wrist, the murderer refuses to let him go. While the TV screens in the pub show the evocative (and telling) images of greyhounds ready to start racing, Danny recounts the story of the bump in his forearm and the torture he was subjected to in Sri Lanka due to a misunderstanding at the airport. In postcolonial literature, storytelling is frequently seen as an act of metaphorical and symbolical survival, such as in *By the Sea* by Abdulrazak Gurnah (Steiner 2014, 113). In this case, though, storytelling literally enables Danny to survive by distracting Prakash's attention and catching

him off balance. Exactly like the racing greyhounds, Danny rushes out of the pub after hitting Prakash with a small cactus.

As far as Prakash is concerned, animal imagery does not merely involve comparison or metaphors, but also an astonishing mesh-up. Wandering through Sydney with the awareness that Prakash has killed Radha, Danny suddenly sees a totem: “Topmost on the pole was a ferocious eagle with a yellow beak. A mop of silvery hair appeared on the eagle’s face, and black-rimmed spectacles now framed its giant hazelnut eyes” (Adiga 2021, 213). While *The White Tiger* brought to the fore opposed images such as man/animal (Gajjarawala 2009, 22-23), *Amnesty* relates a powerful example of partial metamorphosis. It is true that Radha is frequently compared to a bird, whereas a police officer is described as “whalishly blue” (Adiga 2021, 21) and Danny’s employer’s hands as “froggy-white” (Adiga 2021, 175). However, the statue of the eagle with Prakash’s specific features goes one step further and involves assimilation and mixture of both human and animal traits. The fact that Prakash is not compared to a meek bird (like many which Danny sees while strolling around the city) but rather to an eagle further indicates his dangerousness and could put forward the eagle as a mirror of his true self. The peculiar ability of animals to make revelations and show what would otherwise go unnoticed will be further analysed later.

Since in this section I aimed to support the hypothesis that animal imagery points to the animalization of illegals in Australia, it could seem contradictory that Prakash and Radha are compared to animals, given their legal status. Yet, it should be remembered that the narration hinges upon Danny’s account and his perspective. While the Australian society chases him—an honest and willing worker—as if he were an unwelcome animal, Danny implicitly but effectively demonstrates that the real animals are two fully-fledged citizens, who are free to harm themselves and others. Rather than being flawless role-models, Radha and Prakash are both obsessed with gambling and involved in adultery. Having stolen large sums of money from her office to gamble, Radha even has a criminal record, while Prakash concisely recounts that he had a car accident while he was driving with a woman. Given that the woman’s father is angry at Prakash, it might be surmised that it was his fault.

Among the references to animals which contribute to strengthening the distressed situation of illegal immigrants, one could list an unusual artwork. Indeed, Danny twice comes across a mural depicting various animals trussed up and laid on a butcher’s table, in a sense reminiscent of the rooster coop in *The White Tiger*. Rather than mere roosters, though, in this case different animals are represented, exactly like the numerous nationalities of the immigrants whom Danny meets: “A deer with curved horns, a heron, and a rabbit. Three animals, three corpses, trussed up by wires from the ceiling of a kitchen, and below them,

on the butcher's table, a ram lay, its mouth bound with ropes, its tongue sticking out. The heron in profile had one eye open wide, as if to say: *We didn't even scream when the world was stolen from us*" (Adiga 2021, 74; italics in the original). Aside from the pain experienced by the animals, this passage emphasizes the wires and ropes tying and paralyzing the creatures. With respect to this, Danny interestingly mentions a huge net falling from the sky of Sydney to envelop him and drag him into the blackness: "From high above Kings Cross, spreading and widening, Danny saw a dark net, [...] spreading wide and falling faster, threatening to snare and drag him [...] into blackness" (Adiga 2021, 186). The passage resonates with the ropes and wires that have mercilessly trapped the creatures in the mural. Indeed, the ties might be a reference to the Australian immigration policy, which not only deprives illegals of basic rights such as healthcare, but also condemns them to live in constant fear and voicelessness, which slowly but surely cripples them.

Back to the prevalent ornithic references, another interesting occurrence takes place during Danny and Sonja's first date. Absolutely in the dark about Danny's status as an illegal immigrant, Sonja asks Danny what prompted him to leave his country and its shimmering lagoon: "Now I'll have to start lying, Danny thought, when the Parramatta River saved him: a white feather came floating along its surface, and he pointed it out to her. 'That's because they've privatized everything in Sydney,' the vegan said" (Adiga 2021, 25). The feather flowing down the river could convey multi-faceted meanings. It could epitomize immigrants' isolation in Australia, their precarious and frail condition in society or even the fact that they are at the mercy of events, lost in the torrential stream of the motivations which spurred them to seek shelter in other countries. Further testifying to the immigrants' isolation, Sonja's misunderstanding of Danny's reference could exemplify the unbridgeable communication and comprehension gap between legals and illegals, the haves and the have-nots.

The image of the floating feather and Sonja's answer can smoothly introduce another possible reason explaining the numerous ornithic references which may also accentuate the contrast between animals and immigrants. In several occurrences, birds are presented in flocks or in groups, like the black and white cockatoos, the jabis, the pigeons, or the flock of unspecified birds which Danny sees while Sonja is driving. The fact that many of them are in groups highlights their tight community, whose members can rely on each other. On the contrary, illegal immigrants are utterly isolated and prevented from bonding by their very status of illegals. Purposefully unaware of each other's lodgings, the immigrants whom Danny meets in front of the public library do not share personal details, should they be arrested and asked to report the others. In the afterword to *Refugee Tales*, Herd writes that in the UK detained immigrants are likewise hindered from forging communities, insomuch as they are frequently

relocated to other detention centres, which forcefully shatters and fragments their newly-formed ties (2019, 173). As Herd maintains: “The government’s word for this is ‘dispersal’ [...] – a process which has the consequence of breaking up such communities as they might manage to form” (2019, 173). Rather than the detention policy, though, in *Amnesty* it is the very marginalization and chasing of immigrants that hampers their attempts at establishing tight bonds of friendship, in spite of their ostensible freedom. The relationship between illegal immigrants is fraught with suspicion and weakened by the scantness and fragmentary nature of their encounters. Although Danny is on good terms with an Indian legal immigrant, he informs readers that “That guy *was* legal, though. Friendship could only go so far” (Adiga 2021, 19; italics in the original).

The discrepancy between the solitude of the immigrant and the tight community of birds is further underlined by the beginning of the novel. When Danny steals a boat with a friend with the aim of finding the mermaids who supposedly inhabit the lagoon of Batticaloa, he is not scared—not even of his father’s anger which inevitably awaits him at home—because “He had a friend by his side” (Adiga 2021, 3). Meanwhile, “cormorants, red-breasted sea eagles, broad-winged pelicans circled over their heads” (Adiga 2021, 2), thereby possibly highlighting the harmony between the fear-dispersing bond between the two friends and the similarly-close-knit community of the flocks of birds. However, such harmony is pre-empted and shattered in Sydney.

3. Hacking One’s Way through the Jungle of Sydney

As previously highlighted, animal imagery focuses in particular on ornithic references, which pepper the narration and Danny’s meanderings through Sydney. However, references to other winged elements are not missing: airplanes are constantly landing or flying above the city in the plot. In the first part of the novel, Danny mentions an Emirates and a Qantas flight, while other occurrences include an unspecified plane, another plane which writes a marriage proposal in the sky and planes seen in the distance. Moreover, Danny’s first view of Sydney is framed by the window of the airplane he has taken in order to reach the country and Sonja’s much-yearned-for trip to Cairns involves taking an airplane, which is impossible for Danny, since he possesses no passport.

In my opinion, the references to birds and airplanes are tightly linked and might convey opposite meanings and associations of ideas. Freely soaring over Sydney’s sky, birds could represent liberty, in keeping with their traditional representation (an example from classical mythology is Daedalus’s decision to escape Minos’s labyrinth by shaping wax wings and flying away). This archetypal meaning could be evidenced by the following excerpt: “Up in the air, a seagull,

catching a cross-building current, glided over the carnal entertainments of the Cross without moving a feather, only opening and closing its beak and emitting a series of loud squawks. [...] Danny, assuming he was the subject of the seagull's gossip, winced. He's free, but that's all he's free for: gossiping up in the air" (Adiga 2021, 137). Almost mockingly, the seagull circling in the sky underlines Danny's different condition of social outcast.

By the same token, airplanes do not convey the canonical idea of liberty, albeit winged and mimicking the unique ability of birds. In a way akin to birds, airplanes in the novel are shrouded in an aura of negativity, exemplified by numerous clues. Aside from the fact that Danny was tortured in an airport due to misunderstandings related to his flight, the airplane is the means through which he reached Australia, which undermines the credibility of his threatened existence in Batticaloa and therefore weakens his potential asylum request: "He had *not* come here on a boat: he had flown into Australia on Malaysia Airlines, economy-class ticket, and that was the problem" (Adiga 2021, 167; italics in the original). Rather than opening up the possibility to travel around the world without borders, airplanes remind Danny of his status of illegal immigrant and his curtailed freedom, as evidenced by the trip to Cairns which he keeps delaying and will never be able to do with Sonja. Paradoxically, the freedom to cross other countries' borders is not denied to Prakash, a murderer who wishes to escape to South Africa by plane and would be absolutely unhindered, were his crime not revealed to the police.

The association between artificial means of transport like airplanes and animals like birds introduces another interesting correlation, namely the indirect comparison of Sydney to a jungle. Interestingly, such connection could justify the noticeable presence of birds in the novel. In fact, the city is frequently portrayed as a jungle, which acquires a profound meaning given that the Blue Mountains outside Sydney are ablaze because of widespread, raging wildfires. With its suburbs hemmed by "tropical plantains, begonia leaves [...] and frangipani trees" (Adiga 2021, 8), Sydney is fraught with potential dangers for Danny, inasmuch as with white people "all you have to do is start thinking [...]. Like in a jungle, when you find a tiger in your path, how you're supposed to hold your breath and stare back. They go away" (Adiga 2021, 4). Criss-crossed by zebra crossings, the roads become "the painted and tattooed war body of the hunter. Called the City of Sydney" (Adiga 2021, 34). Even without these explicit references, the city would still take on wild characteristics. Buttressing the vision of the city as a jungle, Danny is extremely reluctant to alter his routine and the streets he follows. There is a "black line" (Adiga 2021, 46) that he must not cross, but rather painstakingly toe. Indeed, infringing the black line would mean getting involved with Radha's murder and having to hack his way through a city that is hostile to immigrants, thereby straying from the known, safe path to

penetrate a jungle. In a way, this is reminiscent of the episode of the Minotaur's labyrinth and Arianna's thread in classical mythology.

Far from being dark and gloomy, though, Sydney is described as imbued with light by Radha, who cannot resolve to leave the city because of its brightness, in spite of the attractive job offers she has received in other countries. However, readers should keep in mind that this is Radha's viewpoint, namely the perspective of a citizen. Even if we admitted that Sydney is a city of light in Danny's point of view as well, this would not make it less hostile to him, as Radha acknowledges: "*But for you, [...] this must be a terrible city, right? Some mornings, it must be. A prison of light*" (Adiga 2021, 47; italics in the original). Indeed, light annihilates shadows where illegals seek shelter at the margins of society, carving themselves a niche to survive, albeit precarious. Upon exiting a pub, Danny says that he "vomited himself out of the door and into raw sunlight" (Adiga 2021, 109). In such a dazzling environment, everything is laid bare, exposed and inevitably brought into focus.

In this jungle of light, it comes as no surprise that "the blondest animal in Australia [is] [...] their Rule of Law" (Adiga 2021, 111). Even in this field, animal imagery plays a key role. Rather than simple birds or other common animals, the creatures related to the law are magnificent, exceptional and typically Australian. Indeed, the Australian coat of arms features a kangaroo and an emu, while the judge in the courthouse sits "beneath a wooden pulpit mounted by a golden lion and a silver unicorn" (Adiga 2021, 219). As Cheuse points out, Adiga's stories in *Between the Assassinations* remind readers of the "strange mixture of the strikingly beautiful and the filthy, which is the nature of every Indian village" (2009, 13). The same mingling can be found in Sydney as well, as *Amnesty* shows. As far as the magnificent animals representing Australia are concerned, it is as if Adiga parodied them by using the same or similar creatures in different contexts and seen from different perspectives, thus revealing the downsides of Australia's ostensible flawlessness and adamant perfection. As for the unicorn, there is a scene where Danny spots a curious creature in a street: "inside a wooden enclosure, tied to a post, a white goat, belly distended as if it were pregnant, a trapped *unicorn*, gazing back at him like the emblem of everything the West was meant to be" (Adiga 2021, 92; italics added). A clamorous reversal strikes the superb kangaroo as well, which maintains its form but is imbued with darker, sinister connotations in Prakash's account: "this was in the Kimberleys, in the mining days. You're out there at night, in a caravan or in a tent, and you hear them gnawing. They chew on bones all fucking night long, kangaroos" (Adiga 2021, 116-117). While the dejected condition of the goat is ripe with shortcomings, the voracious, bone-smashing kangaroos may evoke the hostile attitude of Australia towards illegals like Danny.

4. The Permanence of Animals and their Representational Power

Roaming around Sydney, Danny leads a phantom-like, evanescent and silent existence. The chasm between the insubstantiality of his life and the solidness of the birds' ones could be another plausible motivation for the numerous animal encounters he experiences. After quoting Berger's essay entitled "Why Look at Animals?," Cohn states that "Animals, in other words, become figural, and as figures, their enchanting, spectacular difference is appropriated or effaced precisely where it would seem to be most marked" (2015, 573). In this case, though, it is illegals' lives which disappear when compared to the animals which peacefully inhabit the Australian city. Lorikeets, cockatoos, jabirus, pigeons and many others glide past or swoop over the streets of Sydney with nobody inhibiting their stay in the city. Interestingly, the key to understanding the difference between the untroubled permanence of animals in Sydney and the precariousness of Danny's existence in the city is offered by a passage concerned with the sea. While Danny is pondering the eventuality of informing the police about Radha's murderer, he is addressed by the water: "*Are you going back to your country so easily? the blue water asked the man. Whether it's you or the white people here, it's all the same to me, the water told the man. I'll go on shining just like this*" (Adiga 2021, 127; italics in the original). In this passage, the stress seems to be placed on the terms 'man' and 'water,' thus highlighting their inherent difference and different conditions. Enlarging the discourse, the water underlines the precariousness of every human being and the fixedness or unflappability of natural phenomena, if compared to humans' insignificant rules or conflicts. Eventually, the water keeps shining, while Danny is arrested. In an interview, Adiga stated that Anglophone Indian fiction is too sentimental and that the "new dynamism and energy" of India ought to be reflected in its fiction (Derbyshire Interview 2001, 51). In line with this, *Amnesty's* ending is abrupt, sudden and heart-rending in its blunt depiction of Danny's silent arrest which is coldly and incidentally announced by the column of a newspaper.

Before concluding the analysis of the possible meanings of animal imagery, it should be pointed out that an important and interesting use of animal references pops up in pivotal scenes as if to mark their centrality and rippling consequences. At the beginning of his working day, Danny goes to the first house he has to clean, in which he finds a huntsman (a large but harmless Australian spider). Before killing it, Danny hears police officers going up the stairs of the building and is informed that a murder has been committed 'across the street.' Having killed the spider, he then goes to the window in order to dispose of the animal's lifeless body. While performing this action, he sees a police van below and looks at the building in front of the flat, which is Radha's house. It is at that moment that it dawns on Danny that the victim might be Radha, which he would have

never known or thought about, had he not killed the huntsman and gone to the window to throw it away. Indeed, the police officer told him that an incident had happened ‘across the road’ and not ‘behind the street,’ where the woman’s house is located: “*There’s been a murder across the road. Not behind the street.* So this, Danny told himself, can’t be the building—can’t. Just can’t” (Adiga 2021, 29; italics in the original). His worst fears are confirmed, though, when he spots a red-eyed man showing the view to a police officer from the window of Radha’s house, which he immediately recognizes because of the red tulips on it.

In a sense, the killing of the spider triggers a sort of “explosion of consequences” (McEwan 2006, 19), to use an expression featured in McEwan’s *Enduring Love*. The spider opens up a new dimension for Danny and forces him to step outside of his safe, hidden zone, due to his pricking conscience. Even the golden highlights in his hair that were supposed to facilitate his integration and invisibility in Sydney cannot protect him anymore. Indeed, the young Sri Lankan realizes that “he could feel the comic weight of all those gold-tinted, shampooed strands of hair on his scalp. It was a huntsman sitting on his head and he was carrying it around Sydney. Go back at once, said his shame, to the storeroom in Glebe and wait” (Adiga 2021, 47). Further touching on the relevance of the huntsman is the fact that the Australian spider features in the last conversation between Sonja and Danny. Unaware of Danny’s troubled day and of the fact that he has eventually called the police to prevent Prakash from committing a second murder, his girlfriend asks him: “‘Did you deal with that huntsman?’ [...] ‘Oh, you shouldn’t have, you really shouldn’t’” (Adiga 2021, 249), with all the unwitting weight and implications of her words. As a result, the figure of the spider circularly binds together the beginning, the middle and the heart-breaking ending of the novel.

In addition, animals have the interesting ability to reveal the actual appearance of specific situations, acting as a sort of mirror which provides clarification. Radha and Prakash are used to going to a creek and, after having hired Danny as a cleaner, they start bringing him with them as a sort of jester. On one of these occasions, Danny recalls that he saw two children with a black dog at the creek. The excerpt is worth quoting at length due to its meaningfulness: “It was a black dog, and it was shivering, uncertain of the edge between land and water; and in the creek, two white boys, stripped to the waist, buoying up and down, laughed and mimicked the animal each time it howled, raising their heads to the sky and letting loose long doggy noises—which confused or enraged the black thing that staggered about the rocks, adding its weak protests to theirs” (Adiga 2021, 120). Read as a possible indirect representation of Prakash, Radha and Danny, the image is enlightening and revealing: the couple of gamblers frequently displays childish and reckless behaviour, thus pointing to the two children. On the other hand, Danny is brought with them as a dog could be, an entertaining animal

which is not credited with the same status or agency as the two humans. If we add that Radha and Prakash are used to poking fun at Danny's observations and questions, the mimicked (or rather aped) black dog further dovetails with the young Sri Lankan. As Radha bluntly and insensitively says: "Say something. Make us laugh. That's why we bring you along and give you free food and drink, you know" (Adiga 2021, 116). Furthermore, at the creek Radha muses: "we really should adopt this cleaner as our baby, shouldn't we" (Adiga 2021, 117). From child to dog the step is soon done. Further revelations triggered by the sight of animals include Danny's realization of Prakash's true intentions, which happens while Danny gazes at a school of bats: "A brown-red smear of blood was illuminated in the bat's wing for just an instant, before it disappeared behind him. [...] Danny could see now that Prakash was certainly *not* on his way to the airport" (Adiga 2021, 240; italics in the original).

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the animal imagery scattered throughout *Amnesty* lends itself to numerous and compelling interpretations. It could epitomize the fearful condition of illegal immigrants, who can be reported by any Australian citizen who has suspicions about their status. Moreover, the clash between the community of birds and the isolation plaguing the immigrants is perfectly exemplified by the difference between various flocks of birds and Danny's loneliness. Given that Sydney is portrayed as a jungle, the animal references might underline its wilderness, in spite of its evolution and cutting-edge technology. Not to mention the fact that animals can continue to dwell in Australia with no risk of being deported, thus showing a stability which is denied to immigrants like Danny, whose stay is transient and constantly threatened. In addition to the situation of immigrants and the description of the city, animal imagery plays an important role at the narrative level as well, by influencing pivotal scenes and acting as a revealing power which shows unexpected meanings or clarifies situations. In the light of all these thought-provoking interpretations, *Amnesty* creatively displays a unique and multi-layered use of animal imagery, thereby also offering food for thought to readers.

Thanks to its rich variety of animal references and their varied interpretations, *Amnesty* can throw new insights into the field of analysis of Adiga's other novels which display interesting animal metaphors. Indeed, multifarious meanings of animal references could be traced in the author's literary production and enlarge the knowledge on recurring themes and literary characteristics of an important contemporary Indian writer. At a higher level, the analysis of *Amnesty* might offer an interesting contribution to the field of animal studies, since they recognize human evolution as a form of animality, albeit unique (Wolfe 2009, 572). Added

to this, the analysis of animal references in *Amnesty* could also be interesting to ecocriticism, which “questions the very categories of the human and of nature” (Westling 2014, 2). As a matter of fact, the novel employs several animal metaphors and, more importantly, applies them to contemporary times with a surprising variety of aims, which I have tried to bring to the foreground in this paper.

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