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A Zoocritical Reading of Mungo Park's *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (1799)

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Abstract: Thinking about how animals are categorised in Mungo Park's journey into the interior of Africa provides a deeper understanding of their significance in the early exploration experiences of Africa by Europeans during this era. As it stands, there certainly exists a small but growing body of animal criticism in literary studies, and what can be suitably described as the animal turn is certainly gaining momentum more broadly within twenty-first century literary criticism and debate. However, there has been scant scholarly research on this theme of animals within eighteenth-century travelling practices. In recent times, the scholarship on Park's journey has been highly particular; new understandings of Park's trip are still being reached. Considering such specificity, an examination of Park's narration of nonhuman animals during his trip will not only provide original insight into this aspect of his African experience but also interpret the ways that his narrative differentiates and categorises the various animal experiences he had whilst in Africa.

Keywords: enlightenment; travel writing; animal studies; zoocriticism; categorisation; West Africa

1. Introduction

This article examines how animals are categorised in Mungo Park's *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (Park 2000). It will explore the ways in which animals shape Park's journey and consider how Park's narration of them provides a deeper understanding of their significance in the early exploration experiences of Africa by Europeans during this era. Park's sociocultural positioning in Africa will also be considered against some of the different and, at times, unfamiliar ways that he saw some of the local indigenous populations interact with animals throughout his journey.

As zoocriticism has gained traction, it has begun to examine the various ways that animals are represented in different literary texts and contexts (Soper 2005; Senior 2007; Derrida 2008; Woodward 2008; Heymans 2012; Kenyon-Jones 2015; Allmark-Kent 2015). Furthermore, zoocriticism, in conjunction with postcolonial studies, has emerged as a significant area of academic interest (Kete 2007; Huggan and Tiffin 2010; Vadde 2011; Jones 2017; Struthers Montford and Taylor 2020; Thakur 2020). In travel-writing studies, and especially within the field of eighteenth-century travel writing, the role and representation of animals require more nuanced critical attention. Tim Youngs' *Beastly Journeys* (Youngs 2013a) provides a thorough appreciation of animals in literary texts from the fin de siècle, marking a significant contribution to the study of this theme in the late nineteenth-century literature. While Youngs focuses on themes of change, becoming, and even mutation, other researchers explore the concept of difference concerning animals during this era. For instance, Anna Feurenstein's critique of Victorian animals stimulates discussion about the

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representation of animals as differentiated subjects (Feurenstein 2019a). Recently, Feuerstein has proposed alternate political models for human relationships with animals, particularly within the context of empire. Through her analysis of Olive Schreiner's depiction of the ostrich, meerkats, and birds, Feuerstein encourages readers to reconsider their negative views of animality and the liberal imperial discourses that often operate within a speciesist framework (Feurenstein 2019b). In her work, Candice Allmark-Kent (2015) explores this concept in 'The Wild Animal's Story', highlighting how our understanding of animals is shaped by their representations. According to Allmark-Kent (2015), there are three main modes of representation: the 'fantasy' of knowing the animal; the 'failure' to truly know it; and the 'acceptance' of our limitations in knowing it. While some research has already been carried out on how animals are depicted in the Romantic-era literature (Kenyon-Jones 2015), there has been limited focus on this theme in the context of European explorers from that period.

Park's experiences with animals raise important issues regarding cultural perspectives, particularly through the concept of the gaze. This concept emphasises how the eyes of European travellers can influence the reception and interpretation of images. Park's act of observing animals during his journey reveals various symbolic and political dynamics at play. According to Parry (2013, p. 190), "the condition of 'the animal' as 'the human gaze' increasingly circumscribes and re-packages the physical reality of animals for human visual consumption". As an outsider lacking local cultural knowledge, Park's experiences with the animals he encountered often differed significantly from those of the local inhabitants. This form of cultural displacement resulted in a wide range of interpretations. Generally, these interpretations revolved around the animals he observed, experienced, and understood, as well as how they were utilised in practical or symbolic ways. Park's journey to map the Niger River involved observing animals in their natural environments and documenting these observations in his notes. This engagement places Park within a context that highlights the growing understanding of the relationships between humans and nonhuman animals during the period of European global expansion through travel and exploration. Kete (2007, p. 26) observes that 'the act of seeing became crucial in forming the modern person—who you were as a human being was determined by where you were, what you saw, and how you interpreted it. Animals, too, were positioned within this visual moral compass. The act of seeing played a key role in shaping our understanding of the modern animal'. Park's observations of animals not only go some way towards shaping our understanding of them within this timeframe, and especially how European readers received them, but also illustrate the impact that they have on the pace and progress of a particular journey.

In Park's narrative, the focus is not solely on his observations of animals but also on his interactions with them. Notably, he describes his experiences with nonhuman animals in a way that reveals distinct patterns of representation. Throughout Park's journey, there are ritualistic 'arrival scenes' at each town or village (Pratt 1992, p. 78). Similarly, there is a routine in Park's representations that reflects the various roles that animals play, whether for food, warmth, entertainment, travel, or companionship. This theme of animal representation warrants further critical exploration. Park's narrative establishes several modes of animal representation, providing a cultural commentary on the indigenous populations that he encountered. The animals he describes tell different stories that reflect both his movements and his state of mind. As Kate Soper asserts, one must 'quickly come to appreciate the diversity and complexity of the ways in which [animals] are registered or represented' (Soper 2005, p. 3). In response to these ideas, this paper will explore Park's narrative through the three definable types of animal representation proposed by Soper: the 'naturalistic'; the 'allegorical'; and the 'compassionate' (Soper 2005). I argue that Park's

Travels is a significant example of late eighteenth-century travel writing, categorising and differentiating animals in this manner, and further embedding the practice of zoocriticism within the twenty-first century literary discourse.

Mungo Park was born near the banks of the River Yarrow on 10 September 1771, in Foulshiels, a small village near Selkirk in southeastern Scotland. Quiet and reserved, Park spent his early years working as an apprentice to local surgeon Dr. Thomas Anderson in Selkirk. After completing his medical studies at the University of Edinburgh, his first job was as a surgeon's assistant on the East India ship Worcester in 1793 (Duffill 1999, pp. 7, 13–14, 22). During his journey to Sumatra, he documented some of the local flora and fauna and later presented an academic paper to the Linnaean Society, describing eight previously unknown fish (Park 1797). This experience of travel and discovery likely inspired him to apply to the African Association and put himself forward as a candidate to successfully map the Niger River. After being impressed with Park's watercolours and anatomical descriptions of fish, alongside the plant specimens that he returned with from Sumatra, Sir Joseph Banks 'quickly saw in Park a possible African Traveller' (Lupton 1977, p. 18).

On 21 June 1795, Park travelled over 200 miles up the Gambia River before embarking eastward into the unknown interior of West Africa. His goal was to map the Niger River. However, just a few months into his quest, Park was captured, imprisoned, and periodically tortured. After escaping with only a few possessions, he eventually 'at last sighted' the banks of the Niger River on 21 July 1796 (Pratt 1992, p. 71). Despite his difficult circumstances, Park persevered and followed the river eastward for several weeks. Realising that his situation was far worse than he had previously considered, he returned to the Gambia. After a transatlantic journey home through the West Indies, Park arrived in Falmouth on 22 December 1797 'having been absent from England two years and seven months' (Lupton 1977, p. 96). Although determined, Park's decision to turn back and return home arguably saved his life. Park's second and final trip to the Gambia, beginning on 31 January 1805, was doomed from the start. Accompanied by over 35 soldiers, seamen, and guides, Park's attempt to complete the quest he began nearly a decade earlier resulted in most of the company succumbing to dysentery or fever within weeks of arriving in Africa. Park's journal documenting the second journey tells a grim tale (Park 2015). It is believed that Park drowned at 'the Bubaru rapids, ten miles below Bussa' in Nigeria (Brent 1977, p. 160).

As one of the first European men to explore inland Africa at the end of the eighteenth century, the written account of Mungo Park's experiences marks a significant moment in late enlightenment travel literature. Park's *Travels* is one of the earliest European literary impressions of this interior part of what was often referred to as the dark continent: a previously unknown and entirely unfamiliar world to European readers. Several other notable expeditions also reflect this emerging genre, which often involved quests into the heart of Africa. For instance, James Bruce (Bruce 1790) sought the source of the Nile, James Tuckey (Tuckey 1818) explored the Congo, François Le Vaillant (Le Vaillant 1796) journeyed inland from the south via the Cape of Good Hope, and John Barrow (Barrow 1806) documented his accounts of the southern regions. These examples highlight a collective effort extending beyond traditional Linnaean flora and fauna classifications. In many ways, these quests illustrate what Douglas Porter describes as the growing relationship between 'Enlightenment Europe and Its Globe' (Porter 1991, p. 24). In Park's *Travels*, the emphasis on entertaining, incident-filled adventures rather than exclusively scientific descriptions of people, places, and events is arguably one of the main reasons his narrative stands out within this genre. It became accessible and exciting, particularly for a burgeoning audience of interested readers during that era. Today, the idea of Park surfacing 'unexpectedly at Pisania on the coast of West Africa, alone, destitute, and rather the worse for wear' provides

insight into why his work was not only 'one of the most popular travel books of his time', but also remains well-received (Pratt 1992, p. 69).

2. The Naturalistic

To categorise some of the animal descriptions in Park's narrative, the most straightforward form of the description lies in the concept of the naturalistic. As Soper (2005, p. 3) writes: 'In speaking of a 'naturalistic' register, I refer to that mode of writing in which animals are described in a fairly straightforward way and figure as part of the narrative situation and environmental context'. At first glance, this is the most basic form of animal representation: a simple description. Considering Park's narrative with this idea in mind, certain instances that connect to this type of naturalistic register stand out. During an early stage of Park's journey, this type of description allows a lot of information about the local wildlife to be passed on to the reader in a short and simple fashion. For example, as Park waits for the high tides, strong currents, and local flooding of the Gambia River to subside, his interest in observing the local wildlife becomes clear to see:

> The Gambia abounds with fish, some species of which are excellent food; but none of them that I recollect are known in Europe. At the entrance from the sea, sharks are found in great abundance; and, higher up, alligators, and the hippopotamus (or river-horse) are very numerous. The latter might with more propriety be called the river-elephant, being of enormous and unwieldly bulk, and his teeth furnish good ivory. This animal is amphibious, with short and thick legs, and cloven hoofs; it feeds on grass, and such shrubs as the banks of the river afford, boughs of trees, &c. seldom venturing far from the water, in which it seeks refuge on hearing the approach of man. I have seen many, and always found them of a timid and inoffensive disposition.
>
> (Park 2000, p. 70)

Park's description invites readers to explore the region alongside him and provides a glimpse into the appearance, sounds, and potential uses of the animals in these unfamiliar landscapes. When he describes the hippopotamus, it becomes evident that this inhabitant of the African riverbank is difficult to categorise. However, in his attempt to characterise it, he draws on familiar concepts and comparisons from other animals known to him and his readers.

Many of Park's naturalistic descriptions of animals go some way toward confirming a literary approach of this nature, which 'begins by colourfully describing the ecology of the [. . .] African world in terms accessible to a lay international readership' (Huggan and Tiffin 2010, p. 246). Park's narrative brings forth a vision of Africa that relays aspects of the exotic as well as the familiar; he is keen to record the 'zoological knowledge about Africa in the late-eighteenth century' (Brent 1977, p. 46). As Park begins his journey, his observations on wolves and hyenas state an interest in the local fauna that continues throughout:

> [. . .] as soon as the people of the village were gone to sleep (the moon shining bright) we set out. The stillness of the air, the howling of the wild beasts, and the deep solitude of the forest, made the scene solemn and impressive. Not a word was uttered by any of us, but a whisper; all were attentive, and every one anxious to shew his sagacity, by pointing out to me the wolves and hyaenas as they glided, like shadows, from one thicket to another.
>
> (Park 2000, p. 104)

Many short passages illustrate how animals often lie at the centre of Park's traveling experiences. Their presence frequently creates moments of subtle tension and excitement. In many cases, human elements take a secondary role in the animals being described. For

instance, the 'wolves and hyenas' that 'glided like shadows' through the African bush become the focal point. The cool, 'solemn' night evokes a sense of sublime unfamiliarity—a blend of scenic grandeur and an underlying feeling of unknown horror that lurks unseen, or barely glimpsed, in the dark African undergrowth.

In one instance, Park's observations on locusts go beyond the idea of a 'naturalistic' register that deals with simple description:

> On the road we observed immense quantities of locusts: the trees were quite black with them. These insects devour every vegetable that comes in their way, and in a short time completely strip a tree of its leaves. The noise of their excrement falling upon the leaves and withered grass, very much resembles a shower of rain. When a tree is shaken or struck, it is astonishing to see what a cloud of them will fly off. In their flight they yield to the current of the wind, which at this season of the year is always from the N.E. Should the wind shift, it is difficult to conceive where they could collect food, as the whole of their course was marked with desolation.
>
> (Park 2000, p. 143)

In this passage, Park emphasises the relationship between animals and their habitats. He is particularly captivated by the new sights and sounds created by a swarm of locusts, expressing his astonishment at the scene. His use of vivid imagery, such as describing the locusts as a 'cloud' and their droppings falling 'like rain', along with the 'desolation' they cause him, creates a striking picture for the reader. Christa Jones argues that travel writers need to delve deeper into memorable human–animal encounters, sometimes even obsessively, as illustrated by Théophile Gautier's descriptions of locust attacks. Park's account fits within this broader thematic framework, echoing Jones's perspective (Jones 2017, p. 279). At first glance, this peculiar connection might seem like a mere coincidence. However, for an early nineteenth-century European audience, who had likely only encountered locusts through biblical references, experiences like Park's would have been completely foreign to their daily lives. For Park, this 'astonishing' observation was one of many moments during his travels that highlighted unusual animals—an aspect he was eager to document.

3. The Allegorical Animal

In one aspect, Park's journey is enriched by his experiences and descriptions of animals. Regarding allegory, several scenes align with Simona Cohen's observation that, in some cases, animals in the literature serve as 'disguised symbols' representing broader political causes or movements (Cohen 2000). In zoocriticism, it is well established that animals inherently possess symbolic significance. For Soper, the analysis of animals in literary texts has opened new avenues of academic discussion that directly engage with the concept of allegory in the expanding field of animal studies. By exploring this type of descriptive register, where symbolic weight or meaning is intentionally or unintentionally assigned to the representation of animals in texts, Soper emphasises that in certain contexts, animals carry a 'symbolic/allegorical charge' within the narrative as a whole. Animals that initially appear to be merely decorative may play a more significant role than they seem (Soper 2005, p. 306). Park's narrative depicts moments where wildlife operates as 'active agents, influencing the formation and dynamics of heterogeneous social networks' (Whatmore 2002, p. 36). As Park assumes the role of a European traveller seeking knowledge about the Niger River, his discussions about animals with the local cultures he encounters reveal how the role and representation of animals take on a more meaningful significance.

One early example of animal representation that corresponds to an allegorical mode of animal description occurs when Park attempts to differentiate between the wild and domesticated animals of West Africa. The indigenous and non-indigenous gaze are cast

simultaneously. It is in how each party sees and understands the function and role of the elephant, in their respective societies and mindsets, that the cultural differences between the Scottish explorer and the local cultures are explicit:

> Their domestic animals are nearly the same as in Europe. Swine are found in the woods, but their flesh is not esteemed [...]. Poultry of all kinds (the turkey excepted) is everywhere to be had. The Guinea fowl and red partridge, abound in the fields; and the woods furnish a small species of antelope, of which the venison is highly and deservedly prized. Of the other wild animals in the Mandingo countries, the most common are the hyaena, the panther, and the elephant. Considering the use that is made of the latter in the East Indies, it may be thought extraordinary, that the natives of Africa have not, in any part of this immense continent, acquired the skill of taming this powerful and docile creature, and applying his strength and faculties to the service of man. When I told some of the natives that this was actually done in the countries of the East, my auditors laughed me to scorn, and exclaimed, *Tobaubo fonnio!* (a white man's lie.) The Negroes frequently find means to destroy the elephant by firearms; they hunt it principally for the sake of the teeth, which they transfer in barter to those who sell them again to the Europeans. The flesh they eat, and consider it as a great delicacy. The usual animal of burthen in all the Negro territories, is the ass.
>
> (Park 2000, p. 74)

This scene presents a variety of animal descriptions. Whether referring to the elephant, donkey, bird, or antelope, Park's focus is wholly on animals and human–animal relationships. When it comes to elephants, there is a noticeable cultural divide in understanding between Park's observations and those of the locals. His comments often seem incredulous to those around him and are ultimately beyond their comprehension. A zoocritical approach to such a description reads the allegorical significance here, with the animals serving as symbols through which cultural difference is articulated, but also re-evaluated. In this light, zoocriticism provides opportunities to examine allegorical animals within a political, global framework, which goes towards conveying ideas that are larger and more complex than just the animal itself.

Understandably, there is a clear differentiation between wild and domesticated animals. For example, whilst travelling through the kingdom of Kassa, Park describes an attack on a local settlement by wolves and hyenas and provides a fascinating example of how animals are differentiated and categorised:

> I observed a number of large holes in the crevices and fissures of the rocks, where the wolves and hyaenas take refuge during the day. Some of these animals paid us a visit on the evening of the 27th; their approach was discovered by the dogs of the village; and on this occasion it is remarkable, that the dogs did not bark, but howl in the most dismal manner. The inhabitants of the village no sooner heard them than, knowing the cause, they armed themselves; and providing bunches of dry grass, went in a body to the enclosure in the middle of the village where the cattle were kept. Here they lighted the bunches of grass, and, waving them to and fro, ran whooping and hallooing towards the hills. This manoeuvre had the desired effect of frightening the wolves away from the village; but on examination, we found that they had killed five of the cattle, and torn and wounded many others.
>
> (Park 2000, p. 124)

The contrast between the dark holes and cracks in the rocky landscape, where wild hyenas and wolves hide, and the relative safety of the cattle enclosure in the centre of the village,

highlights the differing perceptions of these animal subcategories by the local human populations, as well as by Park himself. Domesticated cattle are viewed as a valuable resource, symbolising something that must be protected at all costs. This is evident in the lengths locals go to to save the cattle from attacks. For instance, the 'bunches of grass' that are set alight, along with the 'whooping and hollering', serve as basic deterrents against further assaults by wild animals. Additionally, this dependency influences certain architectural choices; the cattle enclosures situated at the centre of settlements illustrate just how valuable the cattle are.

Certain scenes illustrate how several of Park's encounters with animals profoundly change his experience throughout the process of acculturation. Robert Young describes acculturation as 'the process whereby groups are modified through intercultural exchange and socialization with other groups. . . the coloniser and colonised, self and other' (Young 1995, p. 5). For Park, this process extended beyond his interactions with humans; at times, his acclimatisation to Africa was influenced by the wild animals he encountered. What was once a frightening cry or wail in the unfamiliar darkness of the wild transforms into something entirely different as he becomes more accustomed to his new surroundings. For example, Park's initial reaction to the wildlife when he first arrives in Africa undergoes significant development later in his narrative. At first, his unease is palpable: 'and when the night is spent by the terrified traveller in listening to the croaking of frogs, (of which the numbers are beyond imagination), the shrill cry of the jackal, and the deep howling of the hyaena; a dismal concert, interrupted only by the roar of such tremendous thunder as no persons can from a conception of but those who have heard it' (Park 2000, p. 72). Park's explicit focus on the animal noises he hears is revealing. He is the 'terrified traveller', new to a foreign land and unfamiliar with the wildlife within it. His description emphasises the 'croaking' of frogs, the 'shrill' cries of jackals, and the 'deep howling' of nearby hyenas. At this stage, the 'dismal concert' created by these unsettling sounds adds an extra layer of unfamiliarity for Park, who is visibly unsettled. However, after spending some time in Africa, his reactions to such sounds and noises change considerably.

After escaping further imprisonment by the tribes of King Ali, Park finds himself lost, alone, and dying of thirst in the hot, dry African landscape. He often waits for the cooler, darker evening hours to move more safely, as he does not want to get captured again. In this instance, Park's reaction to hearing once unfamiliar and unsettling sounds changes significantly. With his horse also succumbing to the unbearable heat, a more resourceful Park searches for a nearby water source and, at one point, hears and approaches a colony of frogs. On this occasion, Park is no longer the 'terrified traveller'; in this instance, his reaction is markedly different:

> About a mile from this place, I heard a loud and confused noise somewhere to the right of my course, and in a short time was happy to find it was the croaking of frogs, which was heavenly music to my ears. I followed the sound, and at daybreak arrived at some shallow muddy pools, so full of frogs, that it was difficult to discern the water. The noise they made frightened my horse, and I was obliged to keep them quiet, by beating the water with a branch until he had drank.
>
> (Park 2000, p. 185)

Park's change here is significant. What was once, only a few months earlier, a 'dismal concert', is now 'heavenly music' to his ears: a dramatic shift. Here, Park's reaction to the noise of the frogs regarding his horse is also noteworthy; after experiencing extreme temperatures with little food or water, his priority is the welfare of his animal companion rather than himself.

In the shift from examining cases of acculturation to exploring those that resemble allegory, we can find a compelling example in the experience of Park, who was held captive by a local Muslim tribe for several months, from March to May 1796. During this period of intense anxiety and imprisonment, Park encountered a hog on several occasions, which symbolised the diverse and, at times, malevolent practices that he observed. At this point in the narrative, Park's dim view of this religious group is best explained by way of how the tribe uses the animal as a type of crude religious test:

> Ali was about to present me with something to eat; and looking round, I observed some boys bringing a wild hog, which they tied to one of the tent-strings, and Ali made signs to me to kill and dress it for supper. Though I was very hungry, I did not think it prudent to eat any part of an animal so much detested by the Moors, and therefore told them I never ate such food. They then untied the hog, in hopes that it would run immediately at me; for they believe that a great enmity subsists between hogs and Christians.
>
> (Park 2000, p. 147)

Park's miserable experience at the hands of his captors did not end there. After being led to a prison hut, where he remained for a great deal of his incarceration, the animal was tormented and whipped into a frenzy and then introduced back into the hut: 'This animal had certainly been placed there by Ali's order, out of derision to a Christian; and I found it a very disagreeable inmate, as it drew together a number of boys who amused themselves by beating it with sticks, until they had so irritated the hog that it ran and bit at every person within its reach. [. . .] With the returning day commenced the same round of insult and irritation' (Park 2000, p. 149). While incarcerated, Park's experience reveals a different kind of story. He is tormented and tortured, making this period of imprisonment in the Benowm region one of the unhappiest times of his life in Africa. Park does not merely observe and describe the animal, he identifies with it, as they are both abused prisoners, suffering for the amusement of others. The hog is used as a weapon to disrupt Park's mind and body. In this context, the European white man becomes the victimised entity, perceived as a threat that cannot be trusted—an outside force that needs to be contained and controlled. Park was fortunate to escape with his life.

Lions emerge as one of the most significant threats to life throughout his journey. Whether it is the danger of a surprise attack while wandering alone through the savannah or the imagined threat that exists solely in his mind, the possibility of a lion attack is a constant and very real concern for him. Outside of Park's narrative, but within the realm of European exploration of Africa more generally, David Livingstone's lion encounter and savage attack, crunching his bones 'into splinters', is one notable example that is difficult to forget (Livingstone [1857] 1982, p. 12). In Park's *Travels*, Lions are also frequently mentioned, forever haunting his travel experiences. Furthermore, they carry a certain cultural weight, embodying both mythic and symbolic significance. This is particularly evident when, early in his journey through the Gambia, Park recounts a local legend about an indigenous man who 'caught a live lion.' He acknowledges that this tale bears some resemblance to the stories found in the Arabian Nights (Park 2000, p. 87). In analysing the literary representations of lions in Park's work, it becomes clear that these animals had a profound impact on his movements through West Africa.

The portrayal of lions in Park's narrative is nuanced and multi-dimensional. His experiences with lions are complex; at times, they are deeply personal and individual, while in other situations, encounters with lions serve to unite different cultures. The passages that discuss the fear of a lion attack introduce a significant element of tension and excitement. However, what might be thrilling for a reader in Europe evokes anxiety and

fear for Park, especially when he is alone and exposed to such dangers in the savannah grassland.

When set against his treatment at the hands of his captors, many of the benevolent groups that Park met display a distinct compassion and kindness towards the lone individual. As he moved further westwards in the summer months of 1796 towards the town of Sego, a town on the banks of the Niger River, the friendly locals often go out of their way to support and assist Park's mission. Concerning the threat of lions, some of the locals are only too aware of how at risk the lone traveller is: 'my horse was so much fatigued that I could not keep up with my companions; I therefore dismounted, and desired them to ride on, telling them, that I would follow as soon as my horse had rested a little. But I found them unwilling to leave me: the lions, they said, were very numerous in those parts, and though they might not so readily attack a body of people, they would soon find out an individual' (Park 2000, p. 190). On another occasion, as Park reaches the Niger River, the dangers associated with the sheer number of lions inhabiting the local vicinity have a dramatic effect on Park's behaviour, as well as the locals; at nightfall, nobody is allowed outside of the village boundaries: 'The lions here are very numerous: the gates are shut a little after sunset, and nobody is allowed to go out. The thoughts of seeing the Niger in the morning, and the troublesome buzzing of the musketoes, prevented me from shutting my eyes during the night; [. . .] on account of the wild beasts, we were obliged to wait until the people were stirring and the gates opened' (Park 2000, p. 193). Park's arrival at the fabled water on 21 July 1796 is overshadowed by his ongoing preoccupations with lions. However, this particular arrival scene also mentions animals that are much smaller than lions but, in one sense, equally as dangerous: mosquitoes.

> [. . .] amazing swarms of Musketoes, which rose from the swamps and creeks, in such numbers as to harass even the most torpid of the natives; and as my clothes were now almost worn to rags, I was but ill prepared to resist their attack. I usually passed the night, without shutting my eyes, walking backwards and forwards, fanning myself with my hat; their stings raised numerous blisters on my legs and arms; which, together with the want of the rest, made me very feverish and uneasy.
>
> (Park 2000, p. 205)

Be it in the form of wild lions inhabiting the broad grasslands of the savannah or the 'amazing swarms' of mosquitoes, Park's success lay in both the physical and mental attributes he possessed in overcoming such dangers. In this instance, Park's robust physicality meant that, although the 'stings raised numerous blisters on [his] arms and legs', which 'made him very feverish and uneasy', he was physically capable of surviving the ordeal and journeying onwards. Understandably, the threat from wildlife, regardless of their size, was constant. In broader terms, Europeans were not physically adapted to deal with the dangers posed by animals such as mosquitoes, which facilitated the spread of malaria. This deadly combination significantly hindered early European expansion into West Africa and the continent as a whole. It would take another century before the scientific connection between mosquitoes and malaria, and the 'link between bite and fever' was established (Harrison 1978, p. 106). In the literature, the movement toward a clearer understanding of this connection is illustrated in several ways: 'Victorian transatlantic fiction contributed to the nineteenth-century process of rescripting malaria from a domestic illness to one that occurred abroad. In contrast, later colonial fiction explores the struggles with chronic malaria as an impediment to long-term tropical settlement' (Howell 2018, p. 30).

Park's ongoing anxiety about the constant threat posed by lions intensifies as he journeys deeper into the African landscape. In a particularly significant part of *Travels*, Park encounters both a giraffe and a lion within a matter of moments, highlighting how

animals are categorised based on the danger they represent to humans. Initially, Park's description of the giraffe underscores his desire to document the wildlife around him; in this instance, his efforts to capture the essence of these animals go beyond simply outlining their behaviour. The description of the giraffe's 'mouse colour', 'short black horns', and 'very long' 'neck and fore-legs' stands out (Park 2000, p. 204). Park conveys the appearance of a creature that he had little contact with and, in reference to Soper, is conventionally naturalistic in representation. Moreover, this instance also shows that not all the wild animals that Park encountered were directly life-threatening to humans. The giraffe 'trotted', 'in a very sluggish manner', and exits the scene 'moving its head from side to side to see if we were pursuing it' (Park 2000, p. 204). Although it is classified as a wild animal, the giraffe poses little threat. In many ways, it seems to be assessing whether Park might be a danger. Here, the giraffe is recognised as wild, untamed, and, to that extent, not domesticated.

There is, understandably, a noticeable difference in tone when Park chances upon a lion some moments shortly after his encounter with the giraffe. As Park states:

> *Wara billi billi*, a very large lion, said he; and made signs for me to ride away. But my horse was much too fatigued: so we rode slowly past the bush, from which the animal had given us the alarm. Not seeing any thing myself, however, I thought my guide had been mistaken, when the Foulah suddenly put his hand to his mouth, exclaiming, *Soubah an allahi*, (God preserve us!) and to my great surprise, I then perceived a large red lion, at a short distance from the bush, with his head couched between his fore-paws. I expected he would instantly spring upon me, and instinctively pulled my feet from my stirrups, to throw myself on the ground, that my horse might become the victim, rather than myself. But it is probable the lion was not hungry; for he quietly suffered us to pass, though we were fairly in his reach. My eyes were so riveted upon this sovereign of the beasts that I found it impossible to remove them, until we were at a considerable distance.
>
> (Park 2000, p. 204)

One of the highlights of animal representation in Park's narrative is his encounter with the lion, which is truly remarkable. At this moment, Park comes face to face with the concept of the African other represented by the non-human animal. The sight of the large red lion with its head resting between its forepaws, combined with Park's anticipation of what might happen next, makes it evident that the European traveller was just as vulnerable to attack as his local guide.

What makes this scene particularly striking is the style in which Park narrates the experience. His comments suggest something more profound than just a chance encounter with a very large wild animal while traveling through the savannah. From one perspective, the meeting encompasses several themes related to early European exploration in Africa: venturing into a remote area with the potential for contact; bravely facing the unknown dangers presented by an encounter with a non-human animal; interpreting a hierarchy of power; and confronting the unfamiliar exotic. All these elements culminate in Park's meeting with an animal that embodies the wildness and danger he would encounter throughout his journey. His surprise and awe are evident in the moment when he 'found it impossible' to look away from the lion's gaze. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Park's protective instinct regarding his horse is abandoned in his moment of panic as he prepares for the possibility of sacrificing it. This stark contrast highlights a key moment in Park's narrative. This encounter, particularly with the large red lion, encapsulates a significant aspect of Park's explorations in Africa at the end of the eighteenth century. Beyond his quest for the Niger River and his desire to observe 'the manners and customs of the natives', this moment with the lion reveals the true essence of his explorations. In this instance, it is

not the rhythm of another arrival scene or his arrival at the Niger River that draw interest; rather, it is the moment when Park broke free from the hypnotic gaze of the *Warra billi billi*.

In Derrida's work, *The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)* (Derrida 2008), he describes an encounter where he observes the relationship between himself and his cat. This idea of the animal gaze is further explored in Wendy Woodward's *The Animal Gaze: Animal Subjectivities in Southern African Narratives* (Woodward 2008), in which she connects this concept to a space where 'the human acknowledges subjective kinship with animals' (Woodward 2008, p. 8). Similarly, Park's experience with a lion reflects this connection; however, in this case, the hierarchy between them is established through Park's language. He identifies the lion as the most 'sovereign' of animals, which evokes the idea of monarchy. In every regard, the 'large red lion at a short distance from the bush, with his head couched between his forepaws' embodies the role of king. Its power and strength are only matched by its striking colour, fearless demeanour, and dominant presence in the scene as depicted. Park's meeting with the large red lion stands out as a key moment of tension. With his eyes 'so riveted' upon the threat, it is Park who is caught deep within the contact zone, trance-like and impotent to the perilous situation unfolding before him; it places any sense of power or authority firmly within the realm of the animal.

4. Categorising the Compassionate

Soper identifies a third type of literary representation of animals—compassionate representation. This concept is illustrated by Park's close, almost familial bond with his horse. Throughout his journey through the dry, sandy areas of northern Ludamar, en route to the Niger River, Park consistently expresses concern for his horse, particularly during the moment when he contemplates sacrificing it to confront a large red lion. Soper remarks that the compassionate portrayal of animals in the literature serves as a 'powerful way to reflect on our treatment of them' (Soper 2005, p. 307). Park provides numerous descriptions of horses, but Soper's definition is especially relevant when considering Park's horse, which accompanied him for most of his journey.

When it comes to the representation of horses more generally, one fleeting example that illustrates Park's particular style of commentary on this subject occurs when he approaches the township of Jarra. Here, Park's gaze focuses on a pack of wild horses running free: 'About four miles to the north of Simbing, we came to a small stream of water, where we observed a number of wild horses: they were all of one colour, and galloped away from us at an easy rate, frequently stopping and looking back. The Negroes hunt them for food, and their flesh is much esteemed' (Park 2000, p. 135). In contrast to this seemingly brief account is Park's horse, the only figure that accompanies him for most of his perilous journey. This strength of relationship is even noted by William Wordsworth. In what ended up being an unused passage in book XIII of 'The Prelude', Wordsworth's reference to Park's troublesome journey is as explicit as his acknowledgment of Park's relationship with his horse:

> Doth that Land Traveller living yet appear
> To the mind's eye when, from the Moors ecap'd
> Alone and in the heart of Africa
> And having sunk to earth worn out with pain
> And weariness at length took pain away
> The sense of life, he found when he awaked
> His horse in quiet standing at his side
> His arm within the bridle & the Sun

> Setting upon the desart.
>
> (Wordsworth in Fulford 2004, p. 100)

Wordsworth's recognition of Park's horse 'in quiet standing by his side' is a striking image: it paints a picture of a distressed and dishevelled traveller wandering deep into the 'heart of Africa', with only his steed accompanying him through this time of anguish and despair. For Youngs, this is a commemorative process where 'images and motifs from earlier voyages and travels were incorporated by Romantic poets' (Youngs 2013b, p. 40). For Carl Thompson, it is emblematic of the plight of the suffering explorer on a pilgrimage of self, as well as a geographical, discovery (Thompson 2007). What is clear is that Park's horse never abandoned him. However, soon after reaching the banks of the Niger River, his horse is simply too exhausted to continue, and it was with great sadness that Park finds himself having to leave it. In one, albeit practical sense, its usefulness had come to an abrupt and sombre end; its function had essentially ceased to exist. Nevertheless, Park's compassion towards his animal companion is clear:

> But though I was littler able to walk, my horse was still less able to carry me, and about six miles to the east of Modiboo, in crossing some rough clayey ground, he fell, and the united strength of the guide and myself could not place him again upon his legs. I sat down for some time beside this worn-out associate of my adventures; but finding him still unable to rise, I took off the saddle and bridle, and placed a quantity of grass before him. I surveyed the poor animal, as he lay panting on the ground, with sympathetic emotion; for I could not suppress the sad apprehension that I should myself in a short time lie down and perish in the same manner of fatigue and hunger. With this foreboding I left my poor horse, and with great reluctance followed my guide on foot along the bank of the river until about noon.
>
> (Park 2000, p. 205)

In this passage, Park's compassion is evident in several ways. For instance, his choice of language, such as the term 'worn-out associate', suggests that he is speaking about a close friend or acquaintance; they are familiar with each other. Additionally, he demonstrates his concern for the animal by placing 'a quantity of grass before him' to help it recover. Park even dismounts to give the horse a chance to revive, although this effort proves ineffective. In a poignant moment of reflection, Park recognises his future struggles in the suffering of his steed; he too feels worn out, reluctant to continue, and is too fatigued and hungry to travel further into the western interior. The text provides evidence of a deep bond or connection between Park and his horse, suggesting that the animal represents more than just a means of transportation. At this moment, Park sees his horse as part of a shared experience that only they fully understand. His feelings of 'sympathetic emotion', 'foreboding', and 'reluctance' extend beyond his journey; they also reflect his concern about leaving his weary, hungry, and solitary companion in the vast African landscape. Throughout his journey through the dry, sandy areas of northern Ludamar, en route to the Niger River, Park frequently expresses concern for his horse, despite the ultimate instinct for the preservation of self, rather than of his animal companion, exposed in the encounter with the red lion.

This is not the end of Park's journey. After several days of travel, he decides to return to the coast and coincidentally reunites with the horse he had reluctantly abandoned. This moment is significant, as it reignites Park's hope of successfully making it home. When Park left his horse, he lost all hope of finding another and made a bold statement of intent by removing the stirrups and girths, and then throwing the saddle into the Niger River (Park 2000, p. 212). He continued on foot for several miles until he reached the town of

Modiboo. Feeling distraught and frustrated by his ongoing misfortunes, Park's situation begins to improve slightly from this point onward. In being reunited with his longstanding travel companion sometime later, the chances of making it back to the coast are greatly improved: 'I heard a horse neigh in one of the huts; and the Dooty inquired, with a smile, if I knew who was speaking to me? He explained himself, by telling me that the horse was still alive, and somewhat recovered from his fatigue; but he insisted that I should take him along with me; adding, that he had once kept a Moor's horse for four months' (Park 2000, p. 212). The way the Dooty refers to Park's horse, questioning whether 'he knew who was speaking to me', places Park's relationship with the animal in a compassionate light. It also considers Fayaz Chagani's question about whether animals can communicate, or rather speak (Chagani 2016). Park's horse recognises and responds to him with a 'neigh in one of the huts', even without seeing him. This anthropomorphic familiarity attributed to the horse becomes even more significant when contrasted with the Dooty's remarks about another horse that belonged to someone else. In this context, it seems that at least some locals shared compassion that was comparable with Park's. It is Park's horse, his companion, his 'associate'. To anyone else, it is merely another domesticated animal. However, the simple sounds made by the horse are not just literal; they symbolise the bond between man and beast, and its enduring nature gives this relationship a figurative voice within Park's narrative.

5. Conclusions

Park's commitment to commenting on and including animals in his narrative stands out. Animals do not merely serve a scenic or background function in the text: they are crucial constituents that influence and inform the ways that both Park and his readers understand and experience Africa. Animals significantly influence and ultimately shape Park's journey and travel experience, such that, in many cases, the success or failure of returning home alive depends on the creatures he encounters, interacts with, or simply observes. Many animals certainly made an impact on his movements and progress and, in some instances, determined the very route Park chose to take in searching for the Niger River. At times, he is unable to travel at all because of the risk to his life from wild animals; in other instances, they help him move quickly and without capture. Without his horse companion, his return westwards would also have been decidedly different; there is an argument to suggest that he may not have survived the trip back home if it were not for his horse: animals play a key role in the pace and progress of the exploration of the African interior by European travellers throughout this period. Further research is required into this subject within the travel writing of this era of exploration and travel.

Soper's concept of a naturalistic style of representation is valuable as it embodies the most common method of depicting animals: the straightforward description of their appearance and behaviour. While the naturalistic style may seem limited to merely reporting the looks and behaviours of animals in the literature, Park's narrative reveals that these straightforward descriptions serve as significant moments in his journey. They provide a contrast to other forms of animal representation, particularly the allegorical and compassionate styles discussed earlier. Thus, the naturalistic style is an essential component in any zoocritical analysis. However, in the context of Park's *Travels*, it falls short of delivering deeper or more meaningful insights beyond potentially simplistic and subjective animal descriptions. François Le Vaillant's accounts of birds may offer further clarity regarding this naturalistic mode. His reluctance to adhere to the Linnaean classification system presents an intriguing alternative within this specific category of animal categorisation.

A zoocritical approach reveals the significance of allegorical animals in Park's *Travels*. This shift can be better understood in the broader historical context of explorations into the

interior of Africa during the late eighteenth century. In this way, zoocriticism transforms our understanding of allegorical animals. It is a concept that is becoming increasingly vital for comprehending travel writing from this period. Allegorical animals serve as stories within stories, exemplified by Park's commentary on how he and some locals see the same elephant, but through different eyes and mindsets; the recounting of the indigenous tale of 'catching a live lion' is another example (Park 2000, p. 87). These stories all uniquely contribute to *Travels*. Park's encounters with unfamiliar or untamed animals offer a crucial perspective, illustrating his process of learning and exchanging knowledge about these creatures with the various local cultures he encounters. Essentially, these stories revolve around animal representation. Park's own story, namely his encounter with the large red lion, highlights how explorers of this period met the animal other, often within contact zones that present opportunities for narrators, like Park, to document significant interactions with animals that European audiences may not be acquainted with. Park's meeting with the red lion suggests that this allegorical animal represents something much more significant than just his brief encounter: it symbolises the power and influences that some animals held over the European exploration of the African interior at the end of the eighteenth century. This theme of the allegorical animal remains an under-explored aspect of eighteenth-century travel writing, and more narratives in this genre deserve scrutiny with this perspective in mind.

Certain animals hold greater significance for Park than others, with a particular emphasis on the bond he shares with his horse. Within Soper's framework of compassion, Park's challenges and concerns are closely tied to this specific animal companion. Park's thoughts about his horse's welfare and safety consistently overshadow his own needs: when he feels thirsty or exhausted, he prioritises finding water for his horse; if he is hungry, he ensures that his horse has oats to eat as well. It is only in moments of extreme danger that he entertains the idea of leaving or sacrificing his equine companion, and even then, the thought leaves him feeling despondent. The joy that Park experiences during moments of reunion with his horse further underscores this deep connection. Instances in which Park's horse appears to converse with him add a unique layer of familiarity that is not often observed in narratives of this kind. The compassionate animal plays a vital role in Park's journey, making this relationship an essential aspect of *Travels*. Beyond Park's narrative, the concept of the compassionate animal is intriguing. While the kinship between humans and animals is not a new idea, other travel narratives from this period may support the notion that the compassionate mode allows the *travelling animal* to express itself in a variety of novel and interesting ways.

Zoocriticism holds significant potential for offering new interpretations and insights into the ways animals shape travel narratives from this era. In *Travels*, the interactions between Park and animals form a central element that not only enhances our understanding of this important work but also introduces an intriguing new perspective within the field of eighteenth-century travel writing.

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