Ecology and Animal Performativity in Jon Favreau's *The Jungle Book*

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Abstract:
This paper considers Jon Favreau's adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894) as a neo-Victorian text that reinterprets and revises Kipling's imperialist ideologies and transitions Mowgli's story to one where he feels included in a community. The film asks Mowgli to 'perform' as an animal, adding Mowgli's use of tools and inventions to help him perform the same tasks as his wolf brothers or animal guardians. The animals in the film reject Mowgli's attempts to act in ways that go against how they believe he should behave; however, at the end of the movie, the animals come to accept Mowgli's differences and he stays in the jungle living peacefully with the animals. I argue that Favreau's ending creates a story that espouses acceptance of identity within 'Nature', while also exemplifying the difficulty of depicting an inclusive environment within a text historically associated with empire.

Keywords: animal studies, anthropocentrism, anthropomorphism, children's literature, ecological thought, Jon Favreau, *The Jungle Book*, Rudyard Kipling, postcolonial, Wolfgang Reitherman.

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Jon Favreau's 2016 version of *The Jungle Book* begins ominously with a young Mowgli running with his wolf brothers from a growling creature pursuing them. Mowgli, unable to keep up with his wolf siblings, climbs into the trees, gaining higher ground to escape. However, one of the tree branches breaks, resulting in Bagheera, the panther, capturing Mowgli when he falls, declaring, "You must be one of the very worst wolves I have ever seen" (Favreau 2016: 02:25). The audience soon learns that Mowgli and the young wolves were learning to escape predators, and Bagheera scolds Mowgli for his choice to climb rather than run like the others:

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> BAGHEERA. Crossing upwind, breaking from your numbers. If you can't learn to run with the pack one of these days, you'll be someone's dinner.
> MOWGLI. It was higher ground.
> BAGHEERA. Wolves don't hide in trees.
> MOWGLI. I can't keep up with them, Bagheera. I tried. I just picked the wrong tree.
> BAGHEERA. It was a dead tree.
> MOWGLI. How was I supposed to know it was dead?
> BAGHEERA. It had a fig vine. Any tree girdled by a creeper is either dead or close to it. These are things a wolf must know.
> MOWGLI. Yeah. But if the branch didn't break, I would've made it.
> BAGHEERA. I realize you weren't born a wolf, but couldn't you at least act like one?
> (Favreau 2016: 2:25-3:15)

Within this scene and throughout Favreau's adaptation, Mowgli attempts to make accommodations for himself, to perform the actions expected from him as a wolf. However, his tools and abilities often provoke anger from his guardians, who would prefer him to behave and perform actions as an animal would. Favreau focuses on Mowgli's attempts, and ultimate success, in being included in the jungle for his use of synthetic materials. I argue that by placing the inclusion of Mowgli (and his tools) at the centre of the film, Favreau attempts to break away from oppressive cultural frameworks of human dominance and superiority. He does so by creating a narrative that focuses on the connection between humans, animals, and Nature[1] as Mowgli is accepted into the jungle for who he is rather than what he pretends to be. Yet, Favreau's text does not fully eradicate the hierarchy between man and animal. While the jungle eventually accepts Mowgli and his human characteristics, the animals do not do so without an anthropocentric worldview of humans, thus repeating some of the same imperial practices as Kipling's 1894 source text.

1. Favreau's Neo-Victorian Adaptive Practice

In Wolfgang Reitherman's 1967 *Jungle Book,* the story begins with an animated version of Kipling's text that opens to show the jungle situating the text as an adaptation of Kipling's work. However, Favreau's adaptation of

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The Jungle Book opens with a realistic jungle growing out from Disney's infamous Cinderella's castle opening credits into the scene just described. Arguably, this emphasises the film as an adaptation of Wolfgang Reitherman's original 1967 Disney animation, as well as an adaptation of Kipling's work. It is not until the end of the film that the main characters turn into pages within Kipling's book, situating the text as a neo-Victorian children's film that adapts and revises both Kipling and Reitherman's work for a twenty-first-century audience. Perhaps this is why *The New Yorker'*s Anthony Lane claims that

> [t]here is a residual sadness, too, in Favreau's movie, because of an opportunity missed. Whether he chose not to revisit Kipling, or was discouraged from doing so, the original book (which is actually two books, published in 1894 and 1895) has yet again been ignored. (Lane 2016: 1)

However, I argue that Favreau does not ignore Kipling's work – rather, it forms an intricate part of the film's framework in addition to intertextual connections with other *Jungle Book* adaptations. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn highlight this multi-adaptive quality as one of the most interesting aspects of neo-Victorian adaptation: "what comes into play is not only the dialogue between the new text and old but also the intertexts and interplays between different adaptations in their own right" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 212). As Helen Davies argues, the term neo-Victorian "implies a genre of writing that is *doing something* with the Victorian era; critically engaging with nineteenth century fiction, culture, and society as opposed to *just* repeating or harking back to a past era" (Davies 2012: 2, original emphasis). Therefore, one cannot ignore the interconnections between Kipling, Reitherman, and Favreau's texts since they create a dialogue between what different generations *do* with a nineteenth-century story on the connection between human and animal.

Favreau does not forget the original text; rather he adapts his predecessor's story to include additional themes for a postmodern audience. Particularly, the film incorporates a posthumanist stance on the connection between human and animal. Just as Bagheera does above, the film asks Mowgli to 'perform' as an animal, but Mowgli's performance of animal tasks in his own human way angers his guardians who insist that humans, and thus

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their behaviours, do not belong in the jungle. Mowgli, therefore, becomes a character that represents the Other, by not fitting into animal practices his fellow creatures expect him to employ. In his contemporary children's film, Favreau advocates for acceptance of diversity (in behaviour and identity), using the relationship between Mowgli and his animal guardians as a call for a kind of posthuman multicultural society, more inclusive and tolerant, wherein all are accepted without reference to bodily or environmental constraints. However, inadvertently and ironically, the animals' acceptance of Mowgli endorses an anthropocentric worldview that situates humankind as distinct and apart from the rest of the natural world.

In Mowgli's attempt to conform and perform like the animals around him, the audience can discern the protagonist's difficulty finding his proper place among the animals, which adhere to strict codes of 'normality'. While the 1967 version also focuses on imitation, it does so comedically, depicting Mowgli mimicking a dancing bear or militant elephant, until he eventually finds his own 'people' who behave as he does. This emphasises a 'natural', but actually anthropocentric order, which conceives of humans and animals as separate, in effect denying humankind's own animal nature. Crucially, Kipling's original text does not grant Mowgli this type of 'home': instead, Mowgli remains in a position of liminality between the animals and the humans, belonging wholly to neither community as he grows into adulthood.

As a colonial Indian subject, Mowgli's subject position is also highly racialised. Kipling depicts Mowgli as a non-European unable to find a home in 'civilised' society. Favreau changes both Kipling's and Reitherman's endings, instead having the animals come to accept Mowgli's differences with Mowgli staying in the jungle to live peacefully among them. This change reinterprets and revises Kipling's imperialist ideologies and the liminality of Mowgli's subject position. Unlike Kipling's text, in which Mowgli is condemned to a state of permanent unbelonging due to his unconventional upbringing, or Reitherman's film that sends Mowgli to the man village where Bagheera claims he belongs, the 2016 film suggests that animals and humans *can* live in harmony – even with Mowgli's manmade technologies.

Favreau's adaptation, I contend, transitions Mowgli's story from one of liminality to one of identity acceptance. Using Timothy Morton's *The Ecological Thought* (2010), I argue that Favreau's ending espouses acceptance of humans and manufactured objects *as part of* Nature, in line with Morton's notion that Nature cannot exist as a separate entity from

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synthetic elements, such as Mowgli's inventions or 'tricks'. According to Morton, ecological thought is the "practice and process of becoming fully aware of how human beings are connected with other beings—animal, vegetable, or mineral" (Morton 2010: 7); indeed, many such 'connections' are arguably only made through the use of tools and machines that enable human access to remote 'wild' locations. Favreau's neo-Victorian work adapts Kipling's text for a twenty-first-century audience, stressing the acceptance of difference and the inevitable incorporation of synthetic materials, man, and animal within conceptions of Nature. However, this posthumanist refiguration of society does not come without its difficulties. As Favreau's text attempts to create a place for man within Nature, it inadvertently preserves and replicates some of the Eurocentric and colonial elements of Kipling's source text. This emphasises the difficulty of depicting a truly inclusive environment within a narrative historically associated with empire and a hierarchical social order that assigns 'Others' to their supposedly 'proper' places and environments where they 'belong'.

2. Children, Animals, and the Colonised

Talking, anthropomorphised animals in literature are certainly not a new concept, nor are they just for children's literature. Aesop's fables, for one, originated for adult audiences, and it was not until the mid-eighteenth century with the rise of children's literature that talking animals became associated with children's stories in popular culture (Cosslett 2016: 1). From Victorian texts such as Kipling's *Jungle Books* and Charles Kingsley's *Water Babies* (1863), to early twentieth-century and contemporary popular television shows and media like *Mickey Mouse* (1928) or *Peppa Pig* (2004, talking animals are prevalent in popular culture due to their perceived educational value. In children's literature and media, animals can be used to help young children understand what it means to be human. The National Council of Teachers of English scholars Carolyn L. Burke and Joby G. Copenhaver claim that "books that use animals as people can add emotional distance for the reader when the story message is powerful or painful", or in other words, these stories allow child readers to experience adult social and political concerns from a distance (Burke and Copenhaver 2004: 205). For example, anthropomorphism in Victorian texts such as *Black Beauty* (1877) help children understand animal rights and issues of Victorian social reform. Current popular children's television shows and films similarly teach children about current concerns

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such as global warming; one need only consider the anthropomorphism of 'creatures' such as the Whos in *The Lorax* (1971) or the robots in *WALL-E* (2008*)*. Yet, these eco-conscious stories also create their own problems, particularly as they give animals human characteristics that situate humans as superior to animals.

Anthropomorphism lends itself to discussions of anthropocentrism, with many ecological scholars concerned with the role that "select works play in reflecting, maintaining, or disrupting the human/animal divide" (Cadman 2016: 165). As Sam Cadman contends in 'Reflections on Anthropocentrism, Anthropomorphism, and Impossible Fiction' (2016), anthropomorphism inevitably involves fictional representations of animals; however, these range from cases of

> 'worse' anthropomorphism – which buttresses an anthropocentric world view – to 'better' anthropomorphism – which disrupts anthropocentricism by recognising individual animal subjectivity, thereby promoting post-anthropocentric species equivalence and plurality. (Cadman 2016: 178)

While Favreau's text attempts to emphasise species equality, ultimately the anthropomorphism creates a divide between animals and humans. Whether the talking non-human object is animal or machine, it is important to consider how the origins of such anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism derive from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century distinctions concerning the divide between animals and humans, particularly our disconnection from Nature, a view which is also highly connected to imperialist ideologies.

In Western thought, the animal traditionally has been perceived as the opposite to the human. In the nineteenth century, control over Nature and animals often supported imperialist ideologies, with European settlers using non-Europeans' 'inability' to cultivate and control land and animals to support their claims that the Indigenes were less civilised, and thus less human than them (Borkfelt 2010: 125). In this way, animals and Nature are viewed as Other and as "being external to human needs, and thus effectively dispensable, or as being in permanent service to [the colonisers], and thus an endlessly replenishable resource (Huggan and Tiffin 2015: 4-5). In the same vein, children were also considered less cultivated, and thus more related to animals than to humans in their early stages of life. Many adults turned to

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animals in children's literature in the early eighteenth century because "[a]dults were more and more seen as rational and cultured, while children were [deemed] imaginative and primitive" (Cosslett 2016*:* 1). In her article, 'Child's Place in Nature: Talking Animals in Victorian Children's Fiction' (2002), Cosslett explains that the "adult becomes a person who is divorced from Nature, rational, logical, and scientific", while "[t]he child, by contrast, has still to learn these markers and rules, and exists in a space of play in which boundaries could potentially be transgressed" (Cosslett 2002: 476). Thus, in works such as Kipling's, animals were an effective way to help children learn adult behaviours, particularly those that centre human needs over animals and Nature.

The power dynamics between adults and children in children's literature has been debated throughout children's literature studies. In *The Impossibility of Children's Literature* (1994), Jacqueline Rose argues that children's literature 'Others' children by asking them to identify with a version of childhood that matches the needs and desires of the author's nostalgia for their own childhood, instead of reflecting the child's own experiences. Other critics, such as Robert McGillis in *Voices of the Other: Children's Literature and the Postcolonial Context* (1999), claim that "[t]he culturally invisible or diminished have something in common with women and children in that they, too, have been powerless to take part in the conversations of cultural and other forms of political activity" (McGillis 1999: xxi). Peter Nodelman has notably used Edward Said's work to analyse the power dynamics of children's literature, and while theorists have pointed out that connecting children to the colonised might ignore vital racial components, postcolonial and children's literature are highly connected, given that many contemporary works evince an impulse to "critique and dismantle the structures which constitute ongoing discourses of domination and repression" (Horrell 2016: 48).

It is interesting to consider how the dynamics between animals and children change in an adaptation of a Victorian novel, which represents animals and children as less cultivated and civilized, to a contemporary text that works to confront "directly the forces of domination and racial intolerance" (McGillis 2000: xxiii). Through Mowgli's 'Othered' position via his tools in Favreau's work, the movie displays a distinct self-reflexivity as it attempts to show the difficulty of non-acceptance by the 'dominant' group. However, whether this sense of inclusion and the embodiment of an ecology

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of man, Nature, and animal living together can subvert hegemony is still in doubt. In many ways, Favreau's work still falls into more of a neo-colonial view of race and Other. While Mowgli may fit in with the animals at the end of the film, there are still undertones of human superiority in the text, particularly as Mowgli saves the animals from Sher Kahn with a fire of his own making. As such, while the film certainly leans towards inclusion and an ecological way of thinking about the connection between man and Nature, it still "manifests itself as […] a depiction of minority cultures as inadvertently other and inferior in some ways to the dominant European or Eurocentric culture" (McGillis 2000: xxiv). That is, Mowgli becomes culturally superior to his wolf siblings the more he accepts his position as man. While the text focuses on inclusion by showing Mowgli's attempts to 'fit in' with his animal guardians, Mowgli's success creates its own implications. By the end of the Favreau's adaptation, the animals – not Mowgli – function as stand-ins for those historically deemed 'inferior' races by imperialists. By placing Mowgli at the top of this social hierarchy, the text reaffirms rather than denies that the animals are Other and thus, inferior, to Mowgli.

3. Kipling and Imperialism

Kipling wrote *The Jungle Book* in 1894, during a period in which Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) raised questions about what it meant to be human. Deborah Morse and Martin A. Danahay claim that "the effect of Darwin's ideas was both to make the human more animal and the animal more human, destabilizing the boundaries in both directions" (Morse and Danahay 2007: 2). Reflecting the anxiety that humans were more closely related to animals than what imperialist ideology would allow, Kipling sets Mowgli apart from his animal guardians by placing him at the top of the social hierarchy developed in the novel. For example, Kipling maintains Mowgli's dominance through his superior gaze – no matter how many times Mowgli attempts to 'act' like an animal, he remains at the top of the metaphorical food chain because his guardians are never able to look him in the eye. Even one of Mowgli's favourite companions, Bagheera, states,

> [‘] Not even I can look thee between the eyes, and I was born among men, and I love thee, Little Brother. The others they hate thee because their eyes cannot meet thine; because thou

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> art wise; because thou hast pulled out thorns from their feet – because thou art a man'. (Kipling 2013:16)

Kipling situates Mowgli as a child who, via his *bildungsroman* status within the text, develops into a man who can control Nature and clearly has a certain power over the animals around him due to his position as a man. Throughout Kipling's novel, Mowgli's control over the animals around him suggests colonialist superiority – he always remains dominant even within his imitations of animal behaviour, particularly his ability to imitate their speech. As Cosslett argues, in *The Jungle Book*,

> [h]uman and animal are related, but knowing the [Master Words of the Jungle] is also a kind of trick, by which Mowgli compels the animals to do his will. The stories chart not only Mowgli's painful division between his animal and his human natures […] but also his gradual rise to dominance in the jungle. (Cosslett 2002: 487)

Similarly, Nandita Batra contends that Kipling's *Jungle Books* replicate anthropocentric ideologies that "give centrality to Man's role in the jungle" (Batra 2001: 167). As a result of this ideology, throughout *The Jungle Book*, Mowgli remains in a liminal space – never fully belonging with the animals because of his dominance and never belonging in the man village due to his 'primitive' nature.

However, the 2016 live adaptation attempts to change this dynamic by emphasising Mowgli's connection to the animals in the jungle and making the jungle his home. While it is easy just to see Favreau's text as an adaptation of Reitherman's original *Disney* film, particularly considering its musical numbers, Favreau's film also serves as a neo-Victorian text that reinterprets Kipling's work. Heilmann and Llewellyn define neo-Victorian texts as those that are "*more than* historical fiction set in the nineteenth century"; such texts "must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 4, original emphasis). In their work on neo-Victorian children's literature, Sonya Sawyer Fritz and Sara K. Day argue that neo-Victorian adaptations of period children's and young adult literatures allows children to understand more complex issues than the ones engaged in

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the original source texts (Fritz and Day 2018: 6). I specifically argue for Favreau's text as a neo-Victorian adaptation committed to "*(re)interpretation*" and "*(re)vision*" because it attempts to move away from a colonial perspective to one that allows children to better understand modes of inclusion, both the inclusion of Others and the inclusion of humans and animals within constructions of Nature.

Yet Favreau's text also shows the difficulty of overcoming nineteenth-century imperialist ideologies in a neo-Victorian adaptation – particularly of Victorian work with such a connection to empire. As Elizabeth Ho argues, "the nineteenth-century British past cannot be thought of as separate from neo-imperial presents and futures"; rather, the only way to recover from an imperial past is to develop "a powerful conceptual and aesthetic vocabulary for exploring the past – which, in turn, offers ways of coping with the temporal palimpsests of the present" (Ho 2014: 6). While Favreau offers a powerful way of looking at the past via imagining a more inclusive environment, there still remain "remnants of empire(s)" that exist in the "supposedly decolonized present" (Ho 2014: 11).

Unlike Reitherman's film, which is loosely based on Kipling's text, Favreau incorporates many of the same elements as the original work, including the laws of the jungle, with the animals, similar to human society, having to follow collective codes so as to live in harmony. I argue that Favreau revises Kipling's work to include less of the imperialist hierarchy and focus more on the ways in which animals and humans can work together in a constructed version of Nature, demonstrating Morton's ideas on ecological thought via Mowgli's forced animal performance throughout the text. In *Ecology without Nature* (2007), Morton argues that

> [s]ince the romantic period, nature has been used to support the capitalist theory of value and to undermine it, to point out what is intrinsically human and to exclude the human; to inspire kindness and compassion and to justify competition and cruelty. (Morton 2007: 19)

In other words, Morton condemns the Victorian ideologies that allow for the dominance of man over animal and the distinctions present in our assumptions about what is or is not human. However, while a more inclusive

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and ecological view of Nature is present in the text, the harmony between man and animal still conveys undertones of human superiority.

4. Anthropomorphism and the Quest for Belonging

Throughout *The Jungle Book,* Favreau adapts scenes to focus on Mowgli's performativity rather than the imperialist ideologies present in the original text. The first of these scenes is one excluded from Reitherman's film and adapted from a chapter in Kipling's *The Second Jungle Book* (1895), in which the animals enter a water truce. The chapter 'How Fear Came' focuses on jungle law, which forbids killing one another during a drought. In this scene, one of the wise elephants tells a fable that explains why men are the most feared animals. His story recounts how

> in the beginning of the Jungle, and none know when that was, we of the Jungle walked together, having no fear of one another. In those days there was no drought, and leaves and flowers and fruit grew on the same tree, and we ate nothing at all except leaves and flowers and grass and fruit and bark. (Kipling 2013: 152)

However, the First Tiger brought fear and death to their paradise by killing both a buck and a "hairless one" (Kipling 2013: 154). This resulted in "the hairless one", or man, learning how to kill; consequently, humans became the most feared in the Jungle and animals now had to kill for their food (and self-defence). This origin story exemplifies imperialist ideologies wherein men are at the top of the hierarchy in Kipling's work. The story explains how men came to be in the jungle and why animals should fear them, because they possess "the noose, and the pitfall, and the hidden trap, and the flying stick and the stinging fly that comes out of white smoke (Haithi meant the rifle), and the Red Flower that drives [animals] into the open" (Kipling 2013: 157). Thus, 'How Fear Came' illustrates that while once there was a utopia, men now control the jungle with their superior tools and gaze that make animals look away from them. Much like the Christian creation story, this chapter envisions a lost utopia without death and fear, where animals and humans lived side by side together in Nature. Once 'Fear' and 'Death' entered the jungle, there was no longer room for all animals and man to work together peaceably.

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Favreau adapts this scene, focusing on performativity rather than dominance in his version of the events, leading to a storyline that emphasises how man and Nature can work together rather than being ideologically apart and opposed. As in the original text, the animals in Favreau's adaptation initiate a water truce. This scene, which also introduces Favreau's far more sinister and omnipresent Sher Khan, begins with animals gathering around the water and seeing Mowgli, some for the first time. To get water, Mowgli creates a device with a bowl connected to ropes he has made of vines – the animals whisper how weird the device is and act shocked, even growl, as Mowgli throws it into the water to get himself a drink. This results in the wolf pack leader, Akela asking Mowgli, "What was the rule about your tricks?" – to which Mowgli responds, "It's not the wolf way"; Akela then scolds Mowgli: "No more tricks. Chin up little one, we'll make you a fine wolf yet" (Favreau 2016: 8:25-8:38). Within the scene, Mowgli is noted for his differences, with animals staring at him and remarking that they do not know what he is or why he walks on two legs. The animals mark Mowgli's human behaviours, and, just as Bagheera does at the opening of the film, ask Mowgli to stop being human and to act like an animal. Unlike Reitherman's version, in which Mowgli claims he is a wolf or a bear as he imitates the behaviours of the animals surrounding him, Favreau's Mowgli is firm about belonging to the wolf pack, while knowing he is a man-cub. Like compulsory heterosexuality or compulsory able-bodiedness that "reinforces or naturalizes ideologies of gender and race" and allows able-bodiedness to "masquerade as a non-identity, as the natural order of things" (McRuer 2006: 1), the jungle assumes animal behaviours as part of the natural order. To fit into this ideology, Mowgli is repeatedly encouraged by his animal guardians to perform in ways that match behaviours accepted in the jungle rather than to use man's tools.

While performance is certainly an aspect of Reitherman's *Jungle Book,* with Mowgli often performing animal behaviours as he fights with Baloo or when he pretends to be an elephant marching in line, it is important to note that Mowgli is not being forced into behaving like an animal – he is rather comedically imitating anthropomorphised animals who are already behaving like humans. David Whitley argues that Mowgli's imitations in the Reitherman film are "overwhelmingly human", adding, however, that

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> the dividing line between human and animal behaviours is neither as clear, nor as absolute as it might at first appear. The desire to see animals behaving like humans is surely the mirror image of the human desire to be more attuned to the natural world of animals. (Whitley 2016: 105)

Yet, I would disagree that this anthropomorphism allows for a deeper connection to animals; rather it asks animals to perform human behaviour just as Favreau's Mowgli is forced to perform animal behaviour. In both films, the directors use performativity to show Mowgli's relationship to Nature. But Reitherman focuses on a child's wish to play like an animal, which does not completely remove the imperialistic idea of controlling an animal. In fact, many post-humanist theorists, including Cary Wolfe, believe that anthropomorphism promotes a disconnection from Nature (see Wolfe 2010: xix). As Michael Newton argues in ''Til I'm Grown: Reading Children's Films: Reading Walt Disney's *The Jungle Book*' (2006), "[i]mitation becomes the means to possess another's power and difference. Imitation is likewise a form of repetition, the doubling of another's actions, or essence, in the self" (Newton 2006: 24). In other words, imitating the animals as a form of play still suggests that as a man Mowgli has superiority over the animals surrounding him – their lifestyles become a game. However, Favreau's text transitions these imperialistic ideologies into conversations about inclusion and discrimination. While Bagheera may mock Mowgli's insistence that he is a wolf or a bear in Reitherman's film, the animated version works as a comedy, with laughable moments as Mowgli playfully mocks the animals he encounters while trying to find a place to belong. Favreau's film, however, shows Mowgli already performing in ways that Mowgli finds comfortable; yet no one will accept him for his differences. Thus, the live adaptation creates a relatable scenario for the child audience who can see and acknowledge the discrimination Mowgli experiences because he performs in ways unfamiliar to them.

The only animal who does not ask Mowgli to perform as an animal is Baloo. In Favreau's adaptation, rather than being a teacher who explains the laws of the jungle to the wolves, as he is in Kipling's work, or a bear that attempts to teach Mowgli how to fight, talk, and hunt like a bear, as he does in Reitherman's film, Baloo is a lazy sloth bear who attempts to use Mowgli to benefit from the boy's useful inventions. More of a trickster figure in

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Favreau's film, Baloo asks Mowgli to get honey from a high ridge by claiming that he himself is unable to climb. After agreeing to help Baloo, Mowgli, Baloo, and the animals in Baloo's area create an intricate pulley system that expedites the honey retrieval process. When Bagheera finds Baloo and Mowgli's camp, Mowgli excitedly shows him the lifestyle that they have developed there, and Bagheera's response is to growl and yell at Mowgli.

> MOWGLI. Don't be mad, okay?
> BAGHEERA. Why would I be mad?
> MOWGLI. Because you're always mad when I do stuff. You gotta promise not to be mad this time.
> BAGHEERA. Show me; then I will decide.
> MOWGLI. Come on, check it out! These are the vines I use on the cliff. I twirl them together to make them longer and stronger. See how strong they are? You wanna see the really cool part? It's inside. Come on, let's go! Come on! It's the honey stash for winter!
> BAGHEERA. Have you lost your mind?
> MOWGLI. You said you wouldn't get mad.
> BAGEERHA. Did you listen to anything Akela taught you? There's no place in the jungle for these tricks! You want to do this, you do this in the man village!
> (Favreau 2016: 51:42-52:42).

Within this conversation, Mowgli again finds himself in a position where his guardians scold him for being himself and for behaving in ways that are not animal. However, within this speech, Bagheera specifically claims that tools do not belong in the jungle – that what Mowgli is doing belongs in areas where man has cultivated Nature. This reaction suggests that one of Bagheera's hesitancies about Mowgli using tools and "tricks" is that when Mowgli invents materials, he cultivates Nature to meet his needs, as man does. Favreau's film, then, suggests that animals do fear humans just as in Kipling's work, but rather than directly focusing on their superiority based on their ability to kill animals, the film focuses on how humans dominate and exploit Nature for their personal gain. Instead of a narrative in which Mowgli cannot find a home in the jungle due to his superior gaze and inevitable

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growth into a man, the film suggests that he cannot be a man with tools and live in Nature – i.e., that Nature does not include manmade objects – thus perpetuating ideologies that Nature needs to be pure and idealised and, above all, *segregated* from man's colonising influence.

Crucially, however, an earlier scene pre-empts and contests Bagheera's concerns. Baloo praises Mowgli for his initiative in procuring the honey and dismisses the boy's guilt when Mowgli describes his "tricks" as "not the wolf way":

> "Who cares? The wolf way. That's the Mowgli way. That's the Baloo way. That's our way. That's how we get things done. I can't even imagine what kind of potential you'd have if you had somebody like me helping you out. You say you want to go to the man village. I say, you could be a man right here." (Favreau 2016: 44:51-45:08)

Baloo thus provides Mowgli with the acceptance that the boy has been searching for all along.

5. Imperialist Hierarchies of Power

I am not the first person to examine Mowgli's performative behaviours in the *Jungle Books.* Due to the colonialist ideology in Kipling's work, many critics have examined Mowgli's masculinity. For example, Wynn Yarbrough argues that the form of masculinity that Mowgli's guardians teach him "reflects colonizing attitudes as well as gender blurring performance" (Yarbrough 2009: 218). Yarbrough contends that "Kipling uses animals to convey a sense of freedom in identity" – as long as you are in the club and know the Law of the Jungle – but "then uses other animals as examples of how to reign in freedom or license in self-exploration", as in Raksha's case, "or how to remove threats to order if reining in those free characters proves difficult", as in the case of the monkeys (Yarbrough 2009: 227). Like the liminality between man and animal, Yarbrough believes that Kipling also creates a liminal masculinity, which simultaneously upholds colonialist male performance while subverting it. In many ways, Kipling's Mowgli represents violent behaviours and colonialist attitudes towards the animals, and arguably Mowgli in Favreau's adaptation still performs what could be considered such dominant 'male' behaviour. Primarily, Mowgli's actions in the 2016 film are

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concerned with the differences between performing 'animal' actions, such as doing things the wolf way, or performing frowned-upon human behaviours. Throughout, the adaptation shifts the tension from whether Mowgli is more 'at home' in the jungle or at the man village to the tension concerning whether he will be accepted for who he is and whether 'man' can be included in Nature. Therefore, the film starts to consider ideological concepts relevant for our time – the inclusion of the 'Other' and-our changing definition of Nature in a world of synthetic materials.

This ecological focus undermines man's superiority; however, Mowgli becomes more of an exception of the general power structure than a representation of all humans. The film successfully advocates for inclusion and understanding of difference but does not manage to do so without keeping remnants of colonial superiority intact. The focus on discrimination against Mowgli successfully-flags up issues of inclusion, but it also adheres to an anthropocentric worldview. At the end of the film, Mowgli is not just included, but oversees the animals around him. The film presents Mowgli as a benevolent force who understands the ways in which each animal is valued in their ecosystem. Some critics including Madhuraka Goswami, would claim that this creates a storyline that advocates for humans to be "more protective, meaningful, responsible, and careful" in preserving "nature for future generations" (Goswami 2017: 790). However, I argue that this position makes Mowgli superior to the animals who have historically been associated with the Other in *Jungle Book.*

One of the biggest changes Favreau makes to *The Jungle Book* is his choice of ending. In Kipling's work, Mowgli leaves the jungle, then ultimately returns and leaves several further times, never to truly feel like he belongs with men or animals, while in Reitherman's film, Mowgli sees a young girl his age and, lovestruck, follows her into the village. In contrast, Favreau's Mowgli happily remains with the animals in the jungle at the end of the 2016 film. In Favreau's adaptation, Mowgli learns that Sher Khan has killed his father figure, Akela, and angrily runs to the man village to retrieve fire to fight the tiger. Grabbing a torch and running back into the forest, Mowgli's actions accidently start a forest fire, scaring all the animals, with several of them claiming that man has come into the jungle. As a *bildungsroman*, this is where Mowgli transitions from man-cub to man:

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> MOWGLI. I am not afraid of you! No one has to be afraid of you anymore!
> SHER KHAN. I think they're afraid of something else now. The man-cub is now a man. Always a proud day when they come of age!
> (Favreau 2016: 1:20:47-1:21:33).

In this interaction, Sher Khan invites Mowgli to use fire against him, and Mowgli, in response, throws the fire into the water shouting, "I'm Mowgli of the Seeonee and this is my home" (Favreau 2016: 1:22:09). The animals follow him, all reciting the law of the jungle, the wolves' mantra, and rising against Sher Khan to protect Mowgli. However, while this action may seem to suggest that Mowgli belongs with the Seeonee pack, Mowgli soon learns his mistake. Amid the fight, Mowgli sees that the animals are losing the battle, and Bagheera stops him from running to Sher Khan with the rest of the wolves. Mowgli shouts, "But I wanna fight with the wolves!" and Bagheera replies, "You can't fight him like a wolf. You're not a wolf. Fight him like a man" (Favreau 20161:22:33-1:23:40). As a result, Mowgli races into the jungle to get fire and leads Sher Khan into a trap, using one of the pulley systems to save himself while Sher Kahn falls into the jungle fire to be consumed. Thus, Mowgli's tools save him and the animals from Sher Khan's wrath, and his actions effect a change of heart from his animal guardians.

As a result of this battle, Bagheera claims that "[i]n my years, I've seen a lot in this jungle. But that night, I saw something I'll never forget. I saw a little boy without a people bring all the jungle together" (Favreau 2016: 1:33:03-1:33:19). The scene then re-enacts the competitive race from the beginning of the film, with Mowgli racing the wolves and going high into the trees, only this time winning. The wolves attempt to go high as well and break from one another, resulting in their loss. Mowgli tells them they should not have mimicked him, and when they claim that he went high he responds, "Maybe, but I am not a wolf. Next time stay together" (Favreau 2016: 1:34:17). This repetition with a difference shows a remarkable shift in the ending – rather than feeling different or returning to live with humankind, Mowgli has found a place in the jungle and the animals have accepted him, manmade objects and all. Had Favreau chosen to force Mowgli into the man-village, after foregrounding the animals' discrimination against Mowgli for his human behaviours, the film would have confirmed the animals' singling

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out of Mowgli's differences as acceptable behaviour. This ending allows for the inclusivity of Others and for a relationship between man and animals that relies on them living together peacefully.

However, the system still evokes hierarchies of power which place man/Mowgli on top. Some critics like Palak Arora, Manshim Yadav, and Sunil Kumar Mishra argue that Favreau's film is a "perfect amalgamation of human with Nature and animal world as one entity with distinctive traits" (Arora, Yadev and Mishra 2020; 2). Yet I would argue that while progressive in its views of inclusion, the film does not fully create equality amongst the animals. The film transitions Mowgli from boy to man with his actions against Sher Khan and from student to teacher as Mowgli, rather than Bagheera, teaches the wolves proper etiquette. By going 'high' in this instance and through his use of fire to save the animals in the first place, the film still relies on power differentials that reconfirm man's place at the top of the social hierarchy. The animals view Mowgli as their superior in their conception of him once he becomes a full man. As Leslie Hawkes argues, "young Mowgli is always using his human intelligence to make tools to become a better hunter" and near the end of the film Mowgli remains master of the jungle through the use of these tools as "the elephants put out the red flower [fire] but only under the direction of Mowgli" (Hawkes 2017: 6). By placing Mowgli as teacher of the cubs, he has taken on Akela and Bagheera's role of enforcing what is or is not correct behaviour in the jungle. While the film certainly relies on themes of inclusion and an understanding of discrimination, by the end man – not animal —has the upper hand in the jungle. As such, Favreau's film shows the difficulty of depicting a truly inclusive environment within a text that is historically associated with empire.

Throughout various adaptations of *The Jungle Book,* and in the original text the animals have historically been associated with the Other. In 'Kaa's Hunting' in Kipling's original text, the Bandar-log kidnap Mowgli in the hopes of learning how to build protection from inclement weather. However, when Mowgli attempts to teach them, "the monkeys tried to imitate; but in a very few minutes they lost interest and began to pull their friends' tails or jump up and down on all fours, coughing" (Kipling 2013: 39). Unable to learn to care for themselves, the monkeys characterise the imperial subject – they are unable to learn or become civilised on their own. The Bandar-log represent the coloniser's view of imperial subjects, unable to use given resources without guidance and too 'savage' to listen to or remember

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direction. Kaori Nagai argues that "seen in the colonial context, [the monkeys] symbolize the subversive and untameable side of colonial subjectivity" (Nagai 2013: xxxvii-xxxviii[check, as quote cut]). Unlike humans, the Bandar-log cannot create language, build their own society, protect themselves from the cold weather, or adhere to laws. Just as Mowgli's gaze controls the animals showing human dominance, *The Jungle Book* specifically places humans as the dominant species over the Bander-log because of their inability to become a civilized society. In a culture that feared what the implications of evolution for the traditional Christian creation story, *The Jungle Book* places humans at the top of the social hierarchy and places the Bandar-log, and thus the imperial Indian subject, as incapable of human intellect.

This ideology continues in both Disney adaptations, in which King Louie sings 'I Wanna Be Like You', a song that discusses how much the monkeys want to be human. The monkeys in Reitherman and Favreau's films desire the ability to use fire like men, so that they can claim the same power that humans have over Nature. Therefore, the films perpetuate anthropocentrism, relying on the same colonialist–precepts as Kipling's original text.[2]

While Favreau attempts to step away from such racist depictions by focusing on discrimination and inclusion, the animals, in effect, revert to a similar inferior subject position as in the Disney films. Given the legacies of Kipling's text, the film is unable to wholly escape from its colonial past. As Clare Bradford argues, "contemporary texts are not immune from a tendency to fall back on the racialized hierarchies they ostensibly protest" (Bradford 2010: 41). While Favreau's text attempts to show an inclusive environment, it inadvertently falls back into an anthropocentric view replete with racial and imperial connotations, which ends up reiterating the divide between human and animal.

5. Conclusion: The Limits of Revision

Neo-Victorian texts and multicultural children's literature employ similar metaphors for their respective agendas, particularly the mirror. Many scholars use the rear-view mirror to think about how neo-Victorian works ask us to look forward at a distorted mirror image of the past. In *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror*, for instance, Simon Joyce argues that

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> we never really encounter "the Victorians" themselves but instead a mediated image like the one that we get when we glance into our rearview mirrors while driving. The image usefully condenses the paradoxical sense of looking forward to see what is behind us, which is the opposite of what we do when we read history in order to figure out the future (Joyce 2007: 4)

Neo-Victorian texts like Favreau's adaptation employ this mediated way of reencountering the past as a way of engaging not just with the future but also with present-day concerns, such as diversity and inclusivity, changing approaches to which will help determine our future.

In similar vein, multicultural children's literature uses "the metaphor of mirrors, windows, and doors" in order to "invite self-contemplation and affirmation of identity" as children gain knowledge that otherwise might be inaccessible to them (Botelho and Kabakow Rudman 2009: xii), especially if they do not come from marginalised ethnic and economic communities. Favreau's choice to show the ways in which Mowgli is pressured to fit into animal society – even when physically unable to do so – allows the audience a glimpse of what it looks like to be excluded and forced to perform based on dominant culture expectations.

Yet while this mirror allows for self-contemplation about the difficulty of being Othered, it crucially does so without the inclusion of race – with Favreau's film still based on imperialist and racial ideas included in Kipling's work. Put differently, the exclusive focus on species difference occludes the racial politics operating in the source text. Mowgli remains at the top of the social hierarchy because he is a man, and the connection between man and animal is still one of domination even with Favreau's attempts to depict a posthumanist society. The film displays evident posthumanist thinking, aligning with Morton's *Ecological Thought* in its promotion of the "practice and […] process of becoming fully aware of how human beings are connected with other beings—animal, vegetable, or mineral" and illustrating a politics of "interconnectedness" rather than separation (Morton 2010*:* 7). Morton explains that part of ecological thinking involves "confronting the fact that all beings are related to each other negatively and differentially, in an open system without center or edge" (Morton 2010: 39), which precipitates conflict as well as potential

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cooperation. To maximise the latter, Morton believes, requires that "we […] explore the paradoxes and fissures of identity within 'human' and 'animal'" (Morton 2010: 41), being prepared to interrogate our categories of difference and acknowledging these as culturally constructed and contingent rather than essentialist and immutable. Morton's analysis suggests that rather than saying that animals should perform like us, such as what we do when we anthropomorphise, or saying that humans should act like animals, as Mowgli is forced to do throughout most of the film, we should embrace the complex differences between us while recognising our interconnectedness with and equality to one another. I would argue that Favreau adopts this ideology to demonstrate the possibility of creating a society of inclusion that, in line with today's environmentalist concerns, rejects anthropocentrism. Such a stance contests Victorian ideologies that suggest that man and Nature should remain separate and that, as Lord Alfred Tennyson famously put it in *In Memoriam* (1850), "Nature [is] red in tooth and claw" (Tennyson 1908: n.p., Canto LVII, l. 15), ferociously competitive and violent rather than collaborative and tolerant of difference. Yet Favreau's adaptation does not completely repel the type of colonialist beliefs that Kipling advocates in his work even within film's attempts to do so.

In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon compares adaptations to Darwinism, claiming that some stories survive more readily than others:

> Stories do get retold in different ways in new material and cultural environments; like genes, they adapt to those new environments by virtue of mutation – in their "offspring" or their adaptations. And the fittest do more than survive; they flourish. (Hutcheon 2012: 32).

Hutcheon's Darwinian analogy is peculiarly appropriate to Favreau's retelling of Kipling's tale, seeing how evolutionary discourse reclassified man as the descendant of animal ancestors, thus breaching the inviolate distinction between human and nonhuman and replacing it with the idea of ancestral interconnectedness. In many ways, Disney is entering into another era of adaptation and retelling, given new CGI technology that allows for the creation of live adaptations of their previously animated stories. While many may call this surge of adaptation a capitalistic enterprise, I am tempted to follow Hutcheon, who claims that part of the pleasure of adapting known

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stories comes "simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise. Recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure (and risk) of experiencing an adaptation; so too is change" (Hutcheon 2012: 4). It is important to consider the ways in which – and the "variation[s]" with which – film directors choose to adapt our childhood stories, particularly those that both adapt a Victorian text and an animated children's film, because the changes they make often represent anxieties present in the twenty-first century as much as the ones present in their source texts' original conceptions. While Favreau's adaptation of *The Jungle Book* engages with the original Reitherman film-text to create nostalgia, it also reinterprets Kipling's original work to remove the implication that man and animal should remain separate and advocates for the inclusion of man in Nature. Favreau's work not only creates a platform where children can learn from depictions of individuals being discriminated against for their differences, but also portrays a society in which man and animal can live together productively rather than only exist in antagonism with one another. However, Favreau also shows how difficult it is to represent a wholly decolonised present and the different type of ecology championed by Morton when engaging with Nature and a history in which humans have overshadowed and dominated their nonhuman counterparts. Favreau's adaptation certainly speaks to other adaptations by allowing Mowgli a place where he feels at home and accepted and where he can be himself. Yet it remains unclear if these posthuman and ecological additions to Kipling's story can truly create the type of equality Favreau hopes for in a text that once again places Mowgli and his tools at the top of the social hierarchy in the jungle.

Notes

1. Here and throughout, I capitalise 'Nature' in line with Timothy Morton, who for the most part uses upper case to indicate the "unnatural qualities, namely, (but not limited to), hierarchy, authority, harmony, purity, neutrality, and mystery" associated with Nature as an always already human construct (Morton 3: 2010).
2. Colonisation and racist components are particularly relevant in the 1967 version, in which King Louie is supposed to represent Louis Armstrong and the

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monkeys appear as cartoon versions of African Americans, depicted with over-exaggerated lips, dark skin, and goofy behaviour, seeking equal representation to whites (see Metcalf 1991).

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