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## Akbar, My Heart: Caregiving for a Dog During Covid-19

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### Abstract

Covid-19 originates with humans' instrumentalization of other animals, an "inconvenient truth" elided by scientists procuring a vaccine while refusing to contend with the captivity, slaughter and encroachment on wild animals' habitats that brought the fatal disease upon us. The interlocking of homo sapiens' and other species' suffering is, of course, glaringly evidenced by disproportionate Black and brown death due to Covid-19 worldwide, itself intensifying the foundational pandemic of anti-Black violence.

"Akbar, My Heart" contemplates transpecies loss in a relational frame, attending to the entanglement of white supremacy with anthropocentrism at the same time that I reflect on caregiving for my canine companion, Akbar, during his decline from neurological disease. My elderly friend's worsening symptoms coincided with the pandemic's spread, the Summer's uproar against anti-Black violence and California's wildfires.

The vortex of these events is a point of departure for meditating about carceral logic, animalization and the seeming "end of days" together with another kind of ending, one centered on providing comfort and an honorable death. Mourning for Akbar through the preparation of this piece, I have called upon the wisdom of critical animal studies scholars as well as Sufi poets and even the texts of my dreams. Deciphering this bewildering time of transformation has been an invitation to imagine another world while abiding with Akbar in the threshold, attempting to see through the smoke, so to speak, to the other side of this scorched earth.

### Keywords

Caregiving, grief, anthropocentrism, white supremacy

### Cover Page Footnote

Article 225 of the 1988 Brazilian Constitution prohibits subjecting animals to cruelty (150). I explore this in depth in "Haunted Pigs, Swimming Jaguars." This idea is part of Gillespie's current research in progress. I changed the original "it" and "it's" to "their" in this poem.

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When we think about animals in relation to Covid-19, those we ordinarily call to mind are the domesticated and wild animals in wet markets and slaughterhouses, their bodily fluids releasing deadly pathogens into the air. We might also think about the mice, ferrets, macaques, marmosets and baboons subjected to scientific experimentation in the search for a vaccine – the pursuit of a ‘cure’ predicated on violence that perpetuates the anthropocentric nightmare: animal life extinguished to feed humans and extinguished again to cure humans of a disease born of animal slaughter. But for me, the animal most intensely on my mind in the context of Covid-19 is Akbar, the dog who died peacefully in my arms one sunny morning when the world was in lockdown.

The pages which follow are inspired by my ministrations to Akbar in the midst of the pandemic and states of emergency, both Covid-19 that was passed from murdered animals to humans as well as the pandemic of white supremacy. Framed by my reflections about Akbar’s decline in tandem with these apocalyptic times, I seek dialogue regarding the deadly nexus of other-than-human killability, anthropocentrism and criminalization. Part scholarly paper, part eulogy, this meditation affords me a precious opportunity to metabolize my grief, abiding within the parameters of my relationship to Akbar while exploring politics, literature, Sufi mysticism and even my dreams.

Akbar’s death signified the end of the world. Because I couldn’t fathom life without him, when he was diagnosed with cancer in 2018, I marked off time in three-month increments as a strategy for staying present and not getting mired in anticipatory grief. In Spring, 2019, it looked like the longest he could possibly survive was until June, so I affixed an index card to the refrigerator door announcing in bold magic marker, ‘A giant meteor will drop on June 1st, 2019’. Akbar would almost certainly die within that time frame; whatever days or weeks I was left without him would be bearable because they were finite. As each quarter passed, a new index card would go up: ‘An asteroid will strike on September 1st, 2019’; ‘The earth will shake us off on December 1st, 2019’; ‘Massive tornado March 1st, 2020’; ‘Apocalypse June 1st, 2020’. When Covid-19 brought the world to a halt in mid-March – during the period of time I had designated as ‘Apocalypse’ – a friend teased me about my prescience. With each twist and turn of the novel coronavirus, soon coalescing with a global uprising against the pandemic of

white supremacy, she asked me what would happen next. June 1st came and went and Akbar was still here, but with the arrival of Covid-19, I knew the practice I had devised had come to its conclusion. It felt like I had been called on my trick for warding off heartbreak: ‘You want a disaster? Well, here you go’. Covid-19 announced that Akbar’s passing was imminent. June 1st arrived and he was still with me, but the exercise was now redundant. I went through the motions of preparing a new index card – ‘Tsunami September 1st, 2020’. A gigantic wave seemed anticlimactic – even gentle in a way – on the heels of the apocalypse, but I had lost inspiration.

To speak publicly about Akbar’s life and death as mattering in the midst of a global pandemic is to articulate a grief that is socially unintelligible. At a moment when Covid-19 is shining a light on foundational anti-Blackness – along with the comorbidities, hyper-capitalism and climate catastrophe – what of a dog? In the words of seventeenth-century Hindu poet, Sant Tukaram, ‘I couldn’t lie anymore, so I started to call my dog God’ (333).

In 2005, an abandoned mongrel named Akbar, teetering on the edge of death with parvovirus, led me to Critical Animal Studies. In my essay, ‘Akbar Stole My Heart: Coming Out as An Animalist’, I describe the evolution of my animal liberationism as an embodied lesson learned from caregiving for him and the care he provided for me:

My experience of Akbar’s complex sociability, self-awareness and will to self-preservation was the catalyst for my turn to species inquiry. I had until recently disavowed my relationship to my dog to evade the charge of sentimentality – a once-positive attribute that eventually came to connote lack of reason, excessive feeling, and femininity, and was also deployed to undermine nineteenth-century anti-slavery campaigns. Faced with the unavoidable fact that, by virtue of his species, this complex individual with whom I cohabit could be subjected to legally and ethically condoned torture and death, I could not remain quiet about the dangers to which his biotic, or zoological type, place him. Meeting Akbar’s gaze meant that I could no longer dissimulate what Jacques Derrida qualifies as the ‘artificial, infernal, virtually interminable survival’ of the animalized.

In 'Akbar Stole My Heart', I also discuss how animal studies as a field frequently aestheticizes animals, treating them as objects of figurative curiosity rather than subjects of moral consideration, and my awkward encounters with colleagues in the arena of species studies and posthumanism when I articulate the need for praxis. In the final line, I state, 'Clearly, acknowledging a dog as the catalyst for one's political orientation continues to be far too risky an endeavor'. It remains to be determined which is the riskier endeavour: an animal-centric political project or my admission to you today that, with Tukaram, I started to call my dog God.

Akbar inspired me to probe the deceits concocted by so-called humans for confining and subjecting sentient beings to gratuitous harm. As a scholar of Brazilian literature and culture, I was drawn to the work of Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (1839-1908), Brazil's preeminent author. Machado is renowned for his satirical interpretations of the moral schizophrenia of the nation's nineteenth-century elite, at once slaveholders and fierce devotees of the French revolutionary ideals of fraternity, liberty and equality. In his short story, 'Alexandrian Tale' ('Conto Alexandrino'), he brings his sceptical eye to bear on the relationship of carceral logic to animalization. As such, his narrative speaks to the crux of our present crises, framed by slaughtering and experimenting upon other species and contempt for *Homo sapiens* cast as less than human. Machado's tale interrogates the objectification and quantification of life in the experimentation laboratory, wherein animality and criminality are enmeshed. Two pseudoscientists set out on a quest to determine the essence of the human, which they believe can be found in other species. They vivisection vast numbers of rats: 'very slowly, gradually inserting the scalpel until it touched the heart, for it was (Stroibus') opinion that instantaneous death would contaminate the blood, destroy the sought-after essence, and thus render it useless for experimental purposes' (22). In 'Alexandrian Tale', the zone of killability expands as the zone of the human contracts. The barring of certain creatures from the realm of moral consideration begins with rats and culminates with certain *Homo sapiens* who are deemed to be both criminals and non-citizens, including – ultimately – the two scientists who are themselves accused of thievery and imprisoned awaiting the day of their vivisection. Like the experimentation laboratory, the prison is a sphere wherein social and political power dictates who will die. On the day the two scientists are to be vivisected, 'the rats of the city celebrate,

though the few dogs, turtledoves, peacocks, and other animals they invite refuse to participate. As one dog puts it, “There will come a time when the same thing could happen to us”.<sup>1</sup>

Machado’s parody illuminates this apocalyptic moment. As in the US at the time of writing, Brazil’s hyper-capitalist regime is informed by an ideology interweaving white supremacism with contempt for the environment and other species. For instance, the Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro, proudly advocates drilling and deforestation of the Amazon in tandem with annihilating Indigenous tribes and *quilombolas* (the descendants of self-emancipated enslaved people). He vowed that ‘there will not be a centimeter of land demarcated as a reserve for Indigenous people or the descendants of quilombolas. Where there is Indigenous land, there is wealth beneath it’ (‘Nem um Centímetro’). Bolsonaro further stated that ‘the lightest *quilombola* weighed 7 *arrobas*. I don’t think they even serve as procreators any more. More than a billion *reais* is spent on them annually’ (‘Nem um Centímetro’). Instead of kilos, Bolsonaro employed the measure, *arroba*, which is used to weigh cows and was also used to weigh enslaved people. Like Indigenous Brazilians, Brazil’s *quilombolas* take up land from which precious oil could be extracted and where cows could be forcibly reproduced, confined and slaughtered for profit. Everything is property. Petrol is valuable whereas the Amazon is not; murdered cows are valuable whereas living Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian people are not. Given such animosity, it is no surprise that mortality rates due to Covid-19 within Brazil’s Indigenous and Black communities are grossly disproportionate.

The status of the human in Bolsonaro’s Brazil is enmeshed with questions of citizenship and criminality. Since the military dictatorship (1964-1988) ended, the rights of Afrodescendants, LGBTQs, the Indigenous and nonhuman animals were gradually expanded.<sup>2</sup> Overnight, with the 2016 coup and the ascension of Bolsonaro, those rights were diminished or annulled, and all of those persons were suddenly less than human: animal, criminal and non-citizens. As Bolsonaro affirmed, ‘people who disagree with me will either go to jail or leave the country. These marginal communists will be banned from our patria’ (‘Esses Marginais’). Like Trump’s use of ‘communist thugs’ to refer to Black Lives Matter protesters, the word Bolsonaro chose, ‘marginals’, denotes poor people who live in the suburbs but is also used in a manner comparable to ‘thug’, itself code for the n-word. Bolsonaro further stated that ‘criminals aren’t

normal human beings' ('Interview'); that 'police who don't kill aren't real police' ('Policial que Não Mata') and proudly supports a state of exception ('25 Frases'). The Brazilian regime epitomizes the necropolitical economy of Machado's narrative, particularly in the context of the pandemic.

Diagnosing the toxic convergence of environmental devastation, foundational white supremacy and hyper-capitalism, Arundhati Roy observes the neoliberal relation to the earth wherein value equals use. We devote our energies to extraction: how to take oil out of the land, how to take elephants out of the wild, how to maximize the production of animal life to be killed. She asks, 'Can we leave the bauxite in the mountain? Can we arrive at that intelligence?' ('Interview'). Machado might add, 'Can we apprehend the wisdom of intact bodies rather than vivisectioning them to extract scientific knowledge?'

Roy reflects that the present is an atemporal rupture – cut off from the past and future – that presents an opportunity for fundamental reorientation that could cure our psychotic relationship to living beings and the environment ('The Pandemic is a Portal'). For his part, Frank Wilderson suggests that a shattering transformation is required to give rise to a whole new way of being. He theorizes the social death of Africans during the Middle Passage, an ontological break that anchors the world as we know it. As he observes 'getting rid of social death doesn't mean on the other side having Black existence that is whole. On the other side, it means something more catastrophic and renewing, which is having no Black existence because there will be no Black people. And having no Human existence, because there will be no Humans. There will be sentient beings who are on the cusp of a new episteme' (Wilderson qtd. in Robertson).

On the one hand, the shrinking zone of the human in Bolsonaro's project signifies the shrinking zone of moral consideration, as in Machado's 'Alexandrian Tale' wherein the only remaining 'humans' are those of the royal court. On the other hand, there is another way of looking at this shrinking zone: humans disappear and sentient beings are left. In a short story by João Guimarães Rosa (1908-1967), 'My Uncle, the Jaguar' ('Meu Tio, o Iauaretê'), the narrator is a wildcat skinner who becomes remorseful about the suffering he inflicted on creatures he

now recognizes as kin. Rejecting his white father and embracing his Indigenous matrilineage, Rosa's hunter-turned-feline-avenger points to the possibility not merely of human remorse for violence against non-Europeans and animals but to the possibility of radical upheaval.<sup>3</sup> Can we arrive at that intelligence?

This question reverberates at a moment when humans have brought not only Covid-19 upon ourselves but the likely proliferation of one zoonotic disease after the other, transmitted to humans from pathogens in the bodily fluids of slaughtered pigs, cows, chickens and other species. The glaring public need to pivot from our brutal relationships with animals intersects with the pivot in my domestic sphere, for my time with Akbar was running out.

On March 1st, the index card I affixed to the refrigerator door stated, 'Apocalypse June 1st, 2020'. Shortly thereafter, we collectively woke up: the disease that seemed like a vague threat became a state of emergency in California. Los Angeles went on lockdown and Akbar's health took a turn for the worse. The world stayed home to avoid a deadly virus. I stayed home to attend to Akbar's decline. He had spirited episodes almost to the end, chasing his tattered ball, joining my other dog, Aziz, to charge the front door even as his bark became feeble and hoarse. With every week of lockdown, Akbar became more fragile and cognitively impaired. I steered him in the direction he had been headed when he froze in his tracks, extracted him when he got stuck walking under chairs, his body dysmorphia giving him the impression of being small enough to fit into tight spaces. Usually, I could quell Akbar's anxiety by holding him in my lap or swaddling him. When that didn't work, I accompanied him on his 4 a.m. forays, keeping stride with him as he confusedly wandered, redirecting him to keep him from colliding into furniture.

In December 2018, when Akbar returned home from the hospital after two major surgeries, with a prognosis of merely days or weeks to live, our bond intensified. The tapping of his claws against the floor behind me took on new meaning. He wanted to be near me, yet I wanted even more so to be near him. I stopped at every opportunity, kneeling down to hold his head in my hands: 'Are you following me? I'm following you, my love. Please know that. It is me who is following you'. I transformed my apartment into an incubator: literally my 24/7

presence, sound healing music, lavender oil diffuser, a nest by the fire and yoga mats lining the floors providing traction to keep his legs from splaying out. An obstacle course took up half the living room for days when he was up to doing physical therapy intended to slow muscle degeneration. A pyramid of five dog beds functioned as stairs he could climb onto my bed, which was itself encircled by a foam moat to soften potential falls.

Katie Gillespie discusses these ministrations in ‘A Multispecies Doula Approach to Death and Dying’. She advocates lovingly tending to dying animals, including holding space for them, conveying to them through our actions how meaningful they and the life we have shared together have been to us, our gratitude for the care they provided to us and all that they taught us about love, seeking to provide what would be most important to them at the ends of their lives and how to assist them in their death processes in accordance with their priorities (18). These ministrations constitute an oppositional praxis against humans’ mainstay relation to farmed animals, in her words, ‘living-but-already-dead’ commodities who do not have lives as such, brought forcibly into the world for slaughter.<sup>4</sup> Gillespie describes the death doula approach as ‘a political project of centering how animals’ lives matter to themselves and others and how their deaths are ones to be mourned and acknowledged as significant losses’ (3). For Gillespie, ‘This can begin with the animals with whom we live closely but this form of care at their end of life can model a radical shift in how it is possible to think about the lives and deaths of other animals beyond those closest to us’ (4).

Nurturing attendance to animal death is medicine for the economy of extraction. It captures the climate in my household from mid-March through the third week of July at the same time that the world outside exhibited symptoms of the end of days I adopted as a framework when Akbar was diagnosed with cancer. My index cards – announcing a successive chain of natural catastrophes – were a method for managing my dread about the mountain of grief to come. Simultaneously, they conveyed my wish for an end to the massive-scale suffering to which Akbar opened my eyes. Wilderson’s advocacy for the ‘scorched earth’ of a reality predicated on anthropocentrism – itself sutured on anti-Black solidarity – and an ‘other side’ without humans speaks precisely to this desire.

Covid-19 throws the pandemic of white supremacy into relief, not only via disproportionate Black and Brown contagion but also the viral policing of criminalized Black people ‘treated like animals’. It is impossible to ignore the synchronicity of a disease transmitted from murdered animals that literally takes our breath away and the massive uprising against anti-Black violence spurred by Derrick Chauvin brutally suffocating George Floyd.

Writing about Akbar in the context of Floyd’s murder is to approach what Claire Jean Kim calls a ‘dangerous crossing’ (*Dangerous Crossings*). Centring a dog’s life as mattering, I tread decidedly rocky terrain given canines’ instrumentalization in the name of white supremacy. Europeans and Euro-Americans have trained dogs to track, attack, torture and even eat peoples of colour at historical moments ranging from the conquest of the Americas, African enslavement, the Civil Rights Movement and at Abu Ghraib.<sup>5</sup> Yet Kim advocates a multi-frame approach wherein neither anti-Blackness nor speciesism is thrown under the bus in the interest of dismantling the other (‘Taxonomies of Power’). For Bénédicte Boisseron, it is imperative to ‘expose a system that compulsively conjures up blackness and animality together to measure the value of existence’ (*Afro-Dog* xx). In addition to the ethics of mutual avowal advocated by Kim, it is worth considering transspecies alliances that upset the trope of dogs’ use as vehicles for state-sanctioned violence. On the one hand, Trump relished Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi ‘dying like a dog’ after being hunted down by a Belgian Malinois trained by the US military.<sup>6</sup> On the other, the famed Negro Matapacos was one of dozens of free-roaming dogs who joined Chilean student protestors in clashes with riot police during the 2011 uprising for education reform. With his red bandana against black fur, Negro Matapacos’ image subsequently appeared as a symbol for anti-authoritarianism in locales across the globe, including the 2019 New York City subway protests ignited by police assaults on Black and Brown youth.<sup>7</sup> The dog in ‘Alexandrian Tale’ articulated the shared vulnerability of other-than-human animals and criminalized, animalized homo sapiens to state violence. As he put it: ‘There will come a time when the same thing could happen to us’. Had Akbar not been rescued, he would have likely met the same fate as the approximately 670,000 abandoned canines killed annually in the US alone.

In the case of my former stray, the convergence of losing Akbar with the outpouring of grief in the streets was visceral. The sounds and smells of the public sphere in the wake of George Floyd's murder – helicopters, fires, gun shots and squad cars – literally suffused the interior of my apartment for weeks. It was in the midst of this war-like zone that Akbar's gaze changed. He had a faraway look. The bones of his temples protruded against hollowed cheeks, his fur lost its sheen and he was seized by panic attacks the medications could not keep step with, frantically pacing, high-speed circling, veering into walls. When I asked him if he wanted me to help him out of his body, he softly closed his eyes. Now caring for him would mean orchestrating to make his heart stop. For nineteen months, I had been ministering to him in the hope of his making it to the other side of a succession of ailments. Now the only other side was the other world.

One Monday morning, I sang to Akbar, making up rhymes with his nicknames as I drove him home from the forest clearing where I had taken him for a final sniff and to have his favourite snacks, resting on a blanket under a canopy of trees. Like the robin's-egg-blue sky, it was disconcerting singing to him in a happy voice as I conveyed him to his merciful death. It was equally disconcerting to scoop him into my arms, for the first time ever carrying him up the incline from the garage rather than having him climb up on his own. There was no longer a reason to strengthen his atrophied thighs, also foregoing his injection and eye medication, senseless now that the decision had been made to end his life. Stopping treatment did not mean that Akbar stopped trying. Though he ceased taking water the day before, even on that last morning, he stepped into and out of his harness by himself, first one leg then the other, a manoeuvre he had always insisted on completing without help. The body wants to keep operating. Flickers of vitality and cheeky independence persist even when the organs are breaking down.

A few minutes after the vet administered the euthanasia medication to Akbar, curled against my chest, she placed the stethoscope to his sternum: 'There's still a very faint heartbeat,' she said, 'so I'm going to give him another injection'. I wasn't surprised. Akbar's primary vet had always remarked how incredible it was that he had the heart of a six- rather than sixteen-year-old, that it was his virtually unscathed heart that kept him chasing his ball despite cancer,

IBD, inflamed liver, neurological disease and pneumonia. What of that second injection, to stop a heart I wanted with every cell in my body to keep ticking?

The intersections of animalization with race and environmental collapse allow me to explore the question that has preoccupied me since I adopted Akbar and turned vegan, since the early days when I learned to articulate an anti-colonial, anti-racist animal liberationism to the present day when I risk publicly grieving for a dog in the midst of the catastrophic failure to redress anti-Black violence.

Yet I hesitate to theorize Akbar's death, not wanting to turn him into a concept or force a logical structure onto a phenomenon that defies logic. I find myself disoriented, seeking vocabulary to capture the otherworldly, unassimilable yet embodied knowledge of beloved kin dying in one's arms, the beautiful, holy, terrible moment of accompanying Akbar as he faded out of his earthly incarnation, conveying him to the threshold of another world. Preparing this article, I have pieced together impressions of the pandemic – and in what follows, mystical poetry and dreams – to convey what could be called an out-of-body experience. When I wrote that 'Akbar stole my heart', I should have known that he would take a piece of it with him.

When Akbar was diagnosed with cancer, I started praying to the god of dogs, then changed the phrasing to the dog of gods. I realized the name I had chosen – Akbar, which means 'the great' – to give confidence to a traumatized mutt was portentous. 'God is Great': 'Allahu Akbar', but also, by extension, 'Akbar is God'. I searched for echoes of my experience and found them in the story of the monk, Asanga, who cuts off the flesh of his own body to feed to a dying dog and is immediately visited by Buddha Maitreya, telling him he had been there all along, and that twelve years of meditation finally led him to see animal suffering (Rinpoche 196). The fourteenth-century Persian poet Hafiz writes:

Start seeing everything as God,  
 But keep it a secret...  
 Who can you tell in this world  
 That when a dog runs up to you  
 Wagging [their] ecstatic tail,

You lean down and whisper in [their] ear,  
 ‘Beloved,  
 I am so glad You are happy to see me.  
 Beloved,/ I am so glad,  
 So very glad You have come.’<sup>8</sup>  
 (‘I Am So Glad’)

At the beginning of this article, I referred to Sant Tukaram, who wrote ‘I could not lie anymore so I started to call my dog “God”’. In the same poem, he goes on to write of his dog, ‘First he looked confused, / then he started smiling, then he even danced’ (58).

Gillespie proposes caregiving for animals at the end of their lives as a model for societal transformation. There is a correspondence to this secular concept of affective activism in Islamic mysticism. In *The Masnavi*, Jalal al-Din Rumi’s thirteenth-century rhymed couplets, he commences with a prayer for a heart that is broken open, enabling union with god. Omid Safi notes that this oneness with god is expressed as tenderness in the personal or domestic sphere, and the pursuit of justice in the social and political sphere. Merging with the divine beloved yields wholeness, the dissolution of an individual, separated ‘I’ (‘The Heart of Rumi’s Poetry’).

Dissolving into divine presence unveils the fallacy of separation, a remedy for our homesickness for the departed. As Safi paraphrases Rumi, we yearn to return to the Beloved like a drop of water taken from the ocean and left in the desert. Becoming one with god, the drop returns to the ocean while the ocean is also in the drop. You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean in a drop. Rumi writes,

Let the drop of water that is you  
 become a hundred mighty seas.  
 But do not think that the drop alone  
 Becomes the Ocean –  
 the Ocean, too, becomes the drop!  
 (‘A Garden Beyond Paradise’)

I've referred to the juxtaposition of physical locales – the incubator of my apartment; the streets flooded with protestors and squad cars. Both are sites of grieving as well as advocacy for a new frame, the shift from an economy of extraction, wherein everything is property, to an economy of care. James Stanescu dialogues with Judith Butler's observation that 'grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters'.<sup>9</sup> He hypothesizes the experience of walking down a grocery store's meat aisle: 'suddenly, the scene in front of you shifts. No longer are you seeing normal products of everyday existence. In front of you is the violent reality of animal flesh on display: the bones, fat, muscles, and tissue of beings who were once alive but who have been slaughtered for the parts of their body.... This scene overtakes you, and suddenly you tear up' ('Species Trouble' 568).

Gillespie also engages with Butler's investigation of the vulnerability, yearning and identity crisis induced by grief: 'I think I have lost "you" only to discover that "I" have gone missing as well' (7).<sup>10</sup> Martha Whitmore Hickman observes that the bereaved attempts to follow a loved one "across the river", "through the gates of Heaven", "into the luminous world of spirit". After a while we realize the search is futile. We are lost in a wood, calling for them and they are not there' (July 20 entry). Like Orpheus, we seek to accompany the dead to Hades, eventually accepting that we must come back (Hickman). But perhaps to go missing is not a problem. I'm reminded of spinning round on my heels to speak to Akbar: 'Are you following me? I am following you'. To Butler's observation, 'I think I have lost "you" only to discover that "I" have gone missing as well', Rumi replies that we can be united with the one for whom we yearn in a new place – in this case, in a field – wherein there is neither 'you' nor 'I':

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,  
there is a field. I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,  
the world is too full to talk about.

Ideas, language, even the phrase each other  
doesn't make any sense.

('A Great Wagon')

Carol Adams writes about the temporality of tending to the dying: 'Caregiving opens up ineffable experiences of both immanence and transcendence... We were out of time' ('Towards a Philosophy of Care Through Caregiving' 786). When my mother died, I felt that we were not only out of time but outside of time. In my memoir about her, 'Weeping Arms', I describe the moment when the morticians attempted to wheel her body out of the room: '(They) note my hands fixed in place (upon her face), my dumb expression, and ask if I would like some more time with her, but I am defeated and we – she and I – are outside of time, in a place I have not yet located'. When Akbar was in his body, I experienced this temporality as jet lag. Now time feels peculiar in a new way. Today marks nineteen weeks since the tsunami was to arrive on September 1st. These feel like surplus days, the period since time stopped. Last August through October, the strangeness of this extra time blended with the unfamiliarity of my physical environment when massive fires caused the sky to change colour. California was up in flames and the sky was sepia in Los Angeles, while to the north it was blazing orange. Right after my mother died, I asked my father – who was a social scientist, an atheist, and had Alzheimer's – where she had gone. He replied uncannily: 'I don't know, but it would be arrogant to think that this is the only plane of reality'. Sufism instructs that this realm is a dream from which we can awaken to blissful unity with the beloved and that our dreamwork provides guidance. Pir Zia Inayat-Khan suggests that we behold this place as a curiosity: 'When you first wake up in the morning, look around and remind yourself, "Now I am here"' ('Developing a Daily Practice').

The ocean returns to the drop and the drop contains the ocean. Akbar left this realm in the middle of the three-month period designated as 'tsunami', with its undertow of grief. One night soon after he passed away, I dreamt he was a squirrel who went swimming in a stream. I lost sight of him and the stream merged into a vast, dark ocean. I knew it would be impossible to find him but I jumped in anyway. The sun was going down. The waves were mighty and high. I rode a large one, easily allowing myself to be drawn into and atop its power rather than getting pounded by it, but then I wondered if it had led me toward shore or further out into the ocean. I didn't care and it wasn't at all frightening, nor had Akbar the squirrel been struggling at any point. He had just gone for a swim. In another dream, a smiling whale was being lowered from a ship back into the water. The humans on the ship were helpers, not whalers. Her time away from the ocean had elapsed and it was the hour of her return.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is an abridged version of my analysis in ‘A Pale Shade of Violet: Animals and Race in Machado de Assis’.

<sup>2</sup> Article 225 of the 1988 Brazilian Constitution prohibits subjecting animals to cruelty (150).

<sup>3</sup> I explore this in depth in ‘Haunted Pigs, Swimming Jaguars’.

<sup>4</sup> This idea is part of Gillespie’s current research in progress.

<sup>5</sup> See Melissa Block, ‘Dog Handler in Abu Ghraib’; Sarah E. Johnson, ‘You Should Give Them Blacks to Eat’; Bartolomé de Las Casas, *The Devastation of the Indies*; and Tyler Parry and Charlton Yingling, ‘The Canine Terror’.

<sup>6</sup> See Isfahani-Hammond, ‘When Trump Calls Someone a Dog, He’s Tapping into Ugly History’.

<sup>7</sup> See Isfahani-Hammond, ‘How a Chilean Dog Ended Up as a Face of the New York City Subway Protests’.

<sup>8</sup> I changed the original ‘it’ and ‘it’s’ to ‘their’ in this poem.

<sup>9</sup> Stanescu refers to Butler’s discussion in *Frames of War* (14).

<sup>10</sup> Gillespie’s references are to Butler’s *Precarious Life* (22).

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