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CALLAHAN COUNTY

STAR SPOTLIGHT

WRITERS SHOWCASE

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**Poetry Media Service
INTO THE WILD**

The collective voice of children and beasts in Bhanu Kapil's poetry.

By Laynie Brown

Poetry Media Services

Humanimal: a Project for Future Children, by Bhanu Kapil. Kelsey Street Press. \$17.95

How does the voice of a writer enter one's being and create an intimate space where a reader may travel safely through the text? Bhanu Kapil, a poet raised in London who currently teaches at Naropa University and Goddard College, does so by writing from multiple perspectives. In her newest book, *Humanimal: a Project for Future Children*, Kapil explores liminal identity, turning to research and documentary to create a mosaic-like account based on the true story of two girls found living with wolves in the Bengal region of India in 1920. Kapil's source material for the text is the diary of the Indian missionary Reverend Joseph Singh, published in 1945. Kapil also traveled to Midnapure with the French filmmaking company Mona Lisa Production as part of a documentary on human-wolf contacts, and was filmed as she went about her research on the two wolf girls, Kamala and Amala.

In choosing this subject, she poses questions about female identity. What does it mean to be civilized? How is the body a culprit? What are the historical and narrative circumstances that create a feral existence? How is the story of the feral child a metaphor for violence and neglect of those who experience themselves as outside, primal, territorial?

The reader must continually ask of the voice of the narrator, "Is she of one form or another? Human or wolf?"

I want to stand up but I can't do that here. They would know I am a wolf by my sore hips, the look in my eyes. At the edge of the garden was a line of blue chalk. My mother was crouching there, waiting for me in her dark coat. In the dream I walk towards her and she stands up. She opens up her coat like two wings and I step into her cloth heart, her left of matted fur.

Her voices' sympathies are never singular, and they are spoken in a space between boundaries, localities known and unknown: the space of the unescorted. And yet, her voice escorts us. The poet-detective traces a line, and we are compelled to follow. In the jungle we learn that the notion that history moves in one direction is a myth. Culture is beyond time, a learned mechanism of being. We become caught within the questions of the *Humanimal*.

What is the opposite of feral? Feral: "Latin, from 'fera' a wild beast. Relating to, or having the nature of, a wild beast; uncultivated; undomesticated; barbarous; wild." The question is deliberately not answered. Would one say civilized? Hardly, considering that the violent treatment of the two feral girls by the "civilized" is not at all civil:

A girl is a dot arising in space, and then the girl after that, and the next. Viral, schizophrenic, the two girls shook in the garden, and then in their beds like photographs. In the first days of their captivity, they screamed for their mother, then stopped. Dehydrated, they sucked tea from rags. Accepting nourishment like this was a primary act of human culture. Hopeful, their Father brought them home. No. They were home and then they got sick, unable to tolerate the food they were given.

This book gives voice to "monsters"—to those who are unnamed, uncounted, unclothed, unemployed, uninsured, represented only in the margins—and provides another way to approach subjects often explored only under the guise of anonymity. Kapil searches out voices not often heard, because of either invisibility or the opposite—a type of gawking that is not seeing at all, as if at an animal. Of the feral girls she writes,

For a few minutes a day, Joseph's wife, the Home's Mother let them [spectators] in and they swarmed to the room where the youngest girl was failing. They watched her fade and jerk in her cot, the spittle coming down over her chin.

The girl is captured from the jungle and placed upon a cot in full view of the civilized. The civilized and domesticated have unintentionally made the feral child ill. The "civilized" cannot understand or aid but wish to watch her decline. A revelatory cruelty exists in the story of *Humanimal*. Through Kapil's deft interweaving of perspectives, we can almost hear the breath of the wolf-girl in protest. It is beyond language.

Submissions sought to:

Star

P.O. Box 29
Eastland, TX 76448

email: thebairdspotlight@att.net

S.A.S.E. for returns

--WANTED--

20 lines,

double spaced or less

Poetry

Fiction or Non

Each entry with brief biography notes. All must be family oriented; no smut, slander or libelable material.

**Words You
Can Use**

Dodecafid: Here is an adjective describing anything sectioned into twelve divisions, like the year. Try to describe it to your friends this way.

Gesso: In the art world you see this often, but rarely know what it is. It is gypsum prepared to cover a canvas. It is a watered down plaster of Paris, but often used in

London.

Haustorial: Something that has a proboscis that pulls fluid up through it, is this. Anything with a nose that sucks fluid, like that of an elephant or mosquito. Can a mosquito bite an elephant through its skin?

Ignivomous: This adjective is a beautiful word to describe a thing that spits out fire. Certainly a volcano, but maybe a dragon would be such things.

Cedar Hacker

O cedar hacker, cedar hacker, why do you hack
You have cedar pests aplenty, standing in your stack
Your flashy axe is shining, agleaming in the sun
Your choppers will be weary, afore the day is done.

Your fence posts and corner posts, are standing in a row
You cut them up much faster, than they can even grow
And then tow them away, in a big 'ole flat-bed truck
Aheading for the post-yard, to get the hard-earned buck.

O smell that cedar bark upon the air
And see it cover every foot of ground
It gets in all your clothes and in your hair
And it seems that the world is turning brown.

Will cedar-hacking get you down, and destroy your back
And will you still file the axe, to take another whack
The sands of time will tell you, that when your time is up
You must fine another way, to make that hard-earned buck.

- Weldon L. Smith
Eastland, Texas

Email your poem or short writing to: thebairdspotlight@att.net- Thank you!

Each of Kapil's books presents poetry as journey, social document and investigation. Her voice is a roadmap and an inquisitor revising the probable. Kapil elegantly and dramatically carves out a space for the unutterable. She writes beyond singular personhood, in an intimate voice rooted in a listening empathy.

Laynie Browne is the author of seven collections of poetry and one novel. Her most recent publications include *The Scented Fox* and *Daily Sonnets*. This article first appeared on www.poetryfoundation.org. Distributed by the Poetry Foundation at www.poetryfoundation.org.

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American Life In Poetry

Column 224

BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

When we're young, it seems there are endless possibilities for lives we might lead, and then as we grow older and the opportunities get fewer we begin to realize that the life we've been given is the only one we're likely to get. Here's Jean Nordhaus, of the Washington, D.C. area, exploring this process.

I Was Always Leaving

I was always leaving, I was about to get up and go, I was on my way, not sure where. Somewhere else. Not here. Nothing here was good enough.

It would be better there, where I was going. Not sure how or why. The dome I covered under would be raised, and I would be released into my true life. I would meet there

the ones I was destined to meet. They would make an opening for me among the flutes and boulders, and I would be taken up. That this might be a form of death

did not occur to me. I only know that something held me back, a doubt, a debt, a face I could not leave behind. When the door fell open, I did not go through.

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Rhymes To Use With Words To Use:

Cauliflower	Bloodhound
Bower	Abound
Empower	Mound
Shower	Pound
Wallflower	Dumfound

Saint John Baptist

The last and greatest Herald of Heavn's King,
Girt with rough skins, hies to the deserts wild,
Amoung that savage brood the woods forth bring,

Which he that man more harmless found and mild.

His food was locusts, and what young doth spring

With honey that from virgin hives distill'd;
Parch'd body, hollow eyes, some uncouth thing
Made him appear, long since from earth exiled.
There burst he forth: 'All ye, whose hopes rely
Oh God, with me amidst these deserts mourn;
Repent, Repent, and from old errors turn!'

- Who listen'd to his voice, obey'd his cry?

Only the echoes, which he made relent,
Rung from their marble caves "'Repent!
Repent!'

- William Drummond Hawthornden
1583-1649

Wanted: Writers & Poets