Chapter-IV

GRENDEL AND A TIGER FOR MALGUDI
THE CALL TO LIFE IN
MONSTER AND ANIMAL
Grendel (1971) is an interiorised novel that has as its protagonist a monster who is Beowulf's antagonist. Its startling perspective annihilates every human construct for it sees men not as being involved in any meaningful activity but as a diminished race of beings easily prone to mental and physical excesses. "... They were small, these creature, with dead-looking eyes and gray-white faces, and yet in some ways they were like us, except ridiculous and at the same time, mysteriously irritating, like rats ..."¹ Grendel's lifelong obsession is to understand who he is. His mental gyrations are an overwhelming reflection of the moral vacuum within which he is imprisoned. Isolated but adamant, he watches humans and preys upon them even as they perform what seems to him to be their ritual antics. In the figure of Grendel we have all the manifest contradictions of a world gone awry. He is an allegorical dimension of the stubborn heart caught within the "walls" of its own selfishness. As such, we notice a very thin line dividing Grendel from humans, something that Grendel himself notices:

I was safe in my tree, and the men who fought were nothing to me, except of course that they talked in something akin to my language which meant that we were, incredibly, related. I was sickened, if only at the waste of it: all they killed - cows, horses, men - they left to rot or burn. I sacked all I could and tried to store it, but my mother would growl and make faces because of the stink. (p.30)
He has been assigned a place outside society because as he tells us, "And I, Grendel, was the dark side ... the terrible race God cursed." (p.43) Gardner has succeeded in recreating human history, not from the epical point of view, but from the point of view of the sub-human, to scale it down to the dimensions of a monster in order to recast with uncanny truthfulness human behaviour and human roles. Grendel is thus the epicentre of a stark universe of violence and love.

Grendel has been compared to Satan of the early books of Paradise Lost, and to Shakespeare's Caliban in The Tempest. He has emotional and intellectual attributes that are distinctively human but he fails to be one because of a tragic incapacity for self-integration. In this respect, he also brings to mind the qualities attributable to the three Sarazin brothers in Book One of Spenser's Faerie Queene: faithlessness, joylessness and lawlessness. All three are caught in a vicious cycle of self-preservation, a psychological aspect of the morally barren psyche, which in actual fact points to the resemblance that they have with Grendel on the one hand, and on the other, with the men who are caught in the endless cycle of vicious meadhall politics. Unlike Satan, who has already had a foretaste of angelic glory and therefore knows what he wants, Grendel's struggles are fraught with preternatural blindness and misconceptions.
He allows himself to be caught in a paradoxical relationship with the humans whom he watches so earnestly and devours so shamelessly.

Grendel's life reflects the collapse of the supportive values of love, which mirrors what seems to have happened in the human world. His forays into the lighted world of humans, reveal to him a patchwork of human relationships that begin with the sovereignty of the king, Hrothgar, his tribal chieftains, his rivals, his family and his heirs. The Shaper or the poet-musician is a viable part of this "treacherous" (p.27) community, a "harpstring scratcher ... inspired by words "who would" sing the glory of Hrothgar's line and gild his wisdom and stir up his men to more daring deeds, for a price". (p.35) This is how the monster defines human life for himself. He lives in a world of nihilism and fragmentation.

In an article entitled "The Twelye Chapters of Grendel", Craig J. Stromme discusses the philosophical relevance of each chapter. He also shows how these philosophical ideas are deliberately irrelevant to helping Grendel find the "best way to live in the world". Gardner himself tells us in an earlier interview, that "In Grendel I wanted to go through the main ideas of western civilization - which seemed to me to be about ... twelve? - and go through them in the voice of the monster, with the story already taken care of, with the various philosophical attitudes ..."
so that the twelve chapters are accounted for as being
"hooked to astrological signs ...". Gardner admits to
"echoing people; borrowing from people" and stealing "lots
and lots of things all the time", for, as he says, "if my
stuff works at all, it's because there's one fusing vision".5
This is the vision underlying every fragmented experience
that Grendel has from the time that he emerges from his mere
in the zodiacal month of the ram until his final
confrontation with Beowulf under the zodiacal sign, Pisces,
which is a vision reaffirming the creative values of life
through Grendel's antagonist, Beowulf. In the intervening
chapters is spun the forgotten tale of a monster who inhabits
the nether regions of old English literature. Gardner
resurrects the monster from the mire of sloth and non-
identity to allow him to make the symbolic journey towards
fulfilment. Each step, however, is a travesty of that
fulfilment for, as Grendel tells us about himself, he is but
a "pointless, ridiculous monster crouched in the shadows,
stinking of dead men, murdered children, martyred cows".
(p.2) The story told from his point of view, is a strangely
lyrical portrayal of the self-defeating consciousness of the
anti-hero. In Gardner's words:

Grendel came about because I was teaching
an Anglo-saxon class, and I told the kids
that the three monsters in Beowulf are
very symbolic and Grendel is symbolic of
the rational soul gone perverse. Somebody
asked me in class if that was just old-
fashioned Christian talk, or was it possible in the modern world for the rational soul to go perverse. And I said "sure, Satre's Existentialism is perverse rationality." As soon as I said it I realized what I was going to do, and I began planning, Grendel.'

In as much as Grendel is trapped in "talking, talking. Spinning a web of words, pale walls of dreams", (p.4) between himself and all he sees, he resembles man trapped in an ordeal of doubt and faithlessness, a veritable victim of his limited constructs. Complete identification with the monster is, however, barred because of his natural inability to forge a meaningful connection with the universe around him.

What Grendel misses is the hidden affirmation of his vision. He is correct in thinking that we "create the whole universe, blink by blink"; he goes wrong, however, in ignoring the imaginative power of such a thought and act. Grendel's intellectual system is turned top-to-toe in that it makes of imagination a negative, not a positive force.

Terrestrial life as perceived from the perspective of a monster who is "crafty eyed, wicked as an elderly wolf" (p.13) is seen to be a jigsaw of inconstancy and doubt. In a novel that lacks the traditional framework of the Aristotelian plot, Gardner departs from tradition by way of "modern fabulation" which "... like the ancient fabling of Aesop, tends away from direct representation of the surface of reality but returns toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy ..." to effect a unique way of
reflecting back to society through a monster, the dubiousness of certain philosophic values by which society has set great store. He uses a half forgotten figure from old English literature to refocus the reader's attention upon hidden and unrevealed motives. Whilst adhering to its eighth-century Nordic setting, he transports the characters through a distance of time, to the psychic realities of a modern day world which seethes with all the challenges of a pluralistic society. Grendel is the self-conscious exponent of a variety of world views that are, however, inadequate to help him meet the ultimate challenge of his life when it comes in the form of Beowulf. The inner landscape of Grendel's mind is as bleak as the territory he inhabits, as bleak as Hrothgar's heart which resonates with the curse of his own existence, "violence and shame have lined the old man's face with mysterious calm. ... And so he waits like a man chained in a cave". (pp.105-106) There are no redemptive possibilities for Grendel, so locked is he within the self. He is indifferent to the natural universe. The inevitable scorn and ridicule that he displays are the natural outcome of a consciousness that has radically separated itself from the creative processes of life:

I make a face, uplift a defiant middle finger, and give an obscene little kick. The sky ignores me, forever unimpressed.
Him too I hate, the same as I hate these brainless budding trees, these brattling birds. (p.2)

He burns with controlled intensity except when he unleashes violence against his human neighbours, whom he feels are indefinably close to him.

So far, the novels that have been studied, explore the relationship between society and the self, thereby arriving at individual ways of perceiving what must hold true for all times. In *Grendel*, one finds instead, that, one is twice removed from reality because of the controlling vision of a monster who is not of this world, who misrepresents the familiar and cuts up reality into several unfamiliar pieces. In Gardner's incorporation of literary myth the reader already knows what to expect. The Beowulf legend, however, has neither been absorbed for the re-telling nor has it been satirised. Gardner uses it in much the same way as Golding uses the *Coral Island* myth to prove the truth about man's bestiality. Whereas Golding sets out to qualify through his fiction, an aspect of human nature experientially known to him, Gardner set out to perform what the epic poet once did, which was to repeatedly familiarise society with the undying virtues of heroism. The methods that he uses are, however, unorthodox. He characterises a monster who has human attributes and who has a special ability to express himself intelligently. Through him, the novelist forces the reader
to determine the truth for himself. Several times in the book the monster moves towards some kind of understanding of himself, but he is inevitably trapped in "an intense interior dialogue in which he listens to ... views, considers them carefully, and argues them vociferously, if only to himself".12 The monster's lifestyle evokes the kind of meaningless absurdity that is reflected in his monologues. Gardner defamiliarises the familiar through a monster in order to reconstruct the story of human civilization through Grendel's deconstructive ideologies. In many of the interviews conducted with him and in his writings, Gardner discusses the centrality of art to society. "The true artist's purpose ... is to show what is healthy, in other words sane, in human seeing, thinking and feeling, and to point out what is not".13 In an interview entitled "The Art of Fiction LXXIII" he goes on to say that "... good artists are the people who are, in one way or another, creating, out of deep and honest concern, a vision of life-in-the twentieth-century that is worth pursuing".14 The underlying vision is not a simplistic reconstruction of the past nor a fortuitous foretelling of the future. It lies in the artist's ability to pin-point the centre of life, which, in Grendel, lies neither in the absurdity of human endeavour as understood by Grendel, nor in the monster's solipsistic "I"; neither in the crass materialism of the Dragon nor in the
existentialism displayed by Grendel. It remains deliberately out of reach until the end because it is left to the reader to perceive for himself the inner value of things; of Hrothgar’s achievements, of Wealtheow’s sacrificial love, of the Dragon’s sophistry, of the true meaning of the Shaper’s song and of the true nature of Beowulf’s realities. The ultimate vision rests in Grendel’s acceptance of death, which is an acceptance of Beowulf as his ultimate antagonist, an acceptance of the human realities that he had scorned and a final debunking of all philosophical systems in the face of a death which paradoxically gives meaning to his existence:

... "Accident", I whisper. I will fall. I seem to desire the fall, and though I fight it with all my will I know in advance that I can’t win. Standing baffled, quaking with fear, three feet from the edge of a nightmare cliff, I find myself, incredibly, moving toward it. I look down, ... feeling the dark power moving in me ... moving me slowly to my voluntary tumble into death. ... I discover I no longer feel pain ... My heart booms terror ... Is it joy I feel? (p.152)

Grendel may not necessarily be fully conscious of the redemptive possibilities of death-in-faith, but the stirrings of joy that he is conscious of, is the most positive emotion in a creature riddled with doubt. This brings the discussion round to what Gardner feels must be the artist’s priorities, that his art be related to society in a truly moral way. In his book The Novels of John Gardner Making Life Art as a
Moral Process, Leonard Butts explains how the word *moral* has "supplanted artistic, critical, and philosophical usage to such an extent that the word is crippled when pressed into a literary context". His entire preface clarifies Gardner’s theory of art. Art, for Gardner “always in sworn opposition to chaos, discovers by its process what it can say”. That according to the writer, is "arts morality. Its full meaning is beyond paraphrase ...". It is "life-giving-moral in its process of creation and moral in what it says". Despite its over-worked meanings, it is a term that, for Gardner, honours the imagination of the true artist for it impels him to authenticate the truth through characters and situations that have a genuine relationship with life, using the uncompromising standards of artistic integrity. He has moved a long way from art as imitation. “Art leads, it doesn’t follow. Art doesn’t imitate life, art makes people do things.” Thus, "a truly moral book is one which is radically open to persuasion, but looks hard at a problem, and keeps looking for answers. It gives you an absolutely clear vision, as if the poet, the writer, had nothing to do with it, had just done everything in his power to imagine how things are". He taps latent meanings and explores the unexplored in order to map out the authentic regions of the soul. He follows “the drama where it goes; the potential of the characters in their given situation”. He lets them “go
where they have to go and analyze" as he is going along "what's involved, what the implications are". He thinks of ways of "dramatically setting up contrasts", so that his "position on a thing is clear" and then he "hounds the thing till it rolls over". This is the reason why he has been called a novelist of ideas. In Grendel, he recasts folk history from the point of view of the antagonist who passes on to the reader an inversely allegorical rendition of it.

Representative ideas of human civilization, recognisably embodied in Grendel's life are progressively reduced to nothing. The story of Hrothgar and the building up of his kingdom is also a substantive example of mankind's defeated endeavours to civilize himself. Nothing is overtly allegorical; but by virtue of the story, the novel questions the very ground on which humankind stands, by parodying the excesses of human reasoning through a monster who cannot even save himself. The message is clearly imprinted in the symbolic undertones that characterise the book. In view of Gardner's faith in the moralizing influences of art, Grendel does arrive at a moral stand that crystallises all the positive forces of love, of poetry and of human endeavour; forces that run counter to everything that has been associated with Grendel. Thus Beowulf justifies the visionary realities of faith and justice, and of courage in the face of death. In a despotic society such as the one
Hrothgar founded, ample room is provided for monsters like Grendel to wreak their own kind of havoc. Symbolically speaking, the monster within becomes the monster without, for which exorcism is near impossible because of man's propensity for evil and negativity. Behind Grendel stands an artist who manipulates a monstrous world order to reveal the hidden trauma of human civilization, set back by its inability to control itself. Hence, to go back to a point earlier stated, whilst the epic poet sings of Beowulf's virtues in the heroic language of all epics, Gardner tells of the underworld order of confusion and anarchy, to refer to the principle of annihilation that emanates directly from the human intellect. It is in this respect that Grendel most resembles man. As important as the epic poet was to society, so is Gardner to his times, because of the responsibility that he bears to his readers who form a significant part of society. "I really do believe Shelley's idea about the poet as the legislator of mankind." 21 One finds that the moral forces in Grendel work through a figurative understanding of the mental and physical combatants that Grendel faces. Grendel seethes with the conflicting issues of a civilization which has been represented and analyzed through characters who metaphorically inform the reader about the conditions for living in a complexly human universe. The aim is moral but the methods used unusual. One finds that as one reads the
book, one may identify characters and ideas that bear an inescapable connection with the lived reality. Through a monster, the novelist allegorically challenges the reader to face the "abyss" and to "hunt" through the fiction for "positive ways of surviving of living." The total effort of reading becomes one with the artist's effort to affirm what he discovers. This communicates itself in an allegoristic manner through a symbolic and metaphoric presentation of reality.

In the initial encounter with Grendel, one is struck as much by the adamantine "I" as by his cunning intelligence. He draws a fine distinction between the "old ram" and himself; between animal and monster: "Do not think my brains are squeezed shut, like the ram's by the roots of horns" (p.1) as if to enhance his personal worth, if only to himself. He inhabits a world which, darkened by the absurdity of a brute existence, echoes with the fury of non-meaning as in the season of the ram, Aries, he begins "the twelfth year" of his "idiotic war". (p.1) Grendel's accidental discovery of the world above brings him in touch with humans. They seem to bear a strange resemblance to him especially in their language. This is an unstable relationship, however, made all the more uncertain by Grendel's inability to understand their irreconcilable ways of living. His initial encounter with them, as a victim of accident, caught in the "crack of two
tree trunks”, places him in a position of powerless observer. Even as he observes their reaction to him, "The tall one said, ‘It’s a growth of some kind, that’s my opinion. Some beastlike fungus.’" (p.18) Grendel is fascinated by them. He follows their talk only to discover, as he always will discover, that "... suddenly I knew I was dealing with no dull mechanical bull but with thinking creatures, pattern makers, the most dangerous things I’d ever met". (p.21) The intimacy however brief, however brutal, shared with what could be called his human counterparts brings out the more human aspect of speech in Grendel. "I tried to speak, my mouth moved, but nothing would come out". (p.20) After the incident, Grendel is irrevocably hooked. His return to the cave after his mother’s rescue of him, only serves to intensify his isolation:

I tried to tell her all that had happened, all that I’d come to understand ... she’d forgotten all language long ago, or may be had never known any. ... But I talked on, trying to smash through the walls of her unconsciousness. (p.22)

At the end of Chapter Two, Grendel’s defiance becomes a self-willed attempt to establish identity in the face of what he perceives to be an unintelligible universe. "I exist, nothing else". (p.22) The unaccountable universe of man continues to haunt and to challenge him forever, goading him to make deeper inroads into an unlighted self.
Reference has already been made to Craig J. Stromme's article entitled, "The Twelve Chapters of Grendel", which analyses the "philosophical discussions" and "philosophical musings" in which Grendel is involved but which leads him nowhere. It traces Grendel's journey from "solipsist to sceptic to nihilist". Whilst some critics have discussed the philosophical ideologies that back up Grendel's attitude to himself and to life in general, Gardner has often been quoted on the parallelism that he deliberately draws between what he considers to be Sarte's useless philosophy of life and Grendel's philosophy. Grendel's weakness is for wasteful analyses of his own experiences. It wears him down and he becomes ill-equipped for a better making and a better sighting of his own future. So involved is he in the polemics of what he sees that it condemns him to a perpetual state of, spiritual blindness. His vision is obscured by the tyranny of an intellect which is always dissecting itself:

... I observe myself observing what I observe. It startles me. "Then I am not that which observes". I am jack. Alack! No thread, no frailest hair between myself and the universal clutter! I listen to the underground river. I have never seen it.

Talking, talking, spinning a skin, a skin ... (p.22)

Grendel chokes with emotions that remain perpetually untapped. It mars what could be his intuition of higher truths. His life becomes traumatised by a sense of self-
alienation which pursues him right up to the penultimate moments of his life. As he binds himself tighter and tighter within the "walls" of an ill-founded sophism unable to help himself, he is doomed to mere watching, "I would back away into the darkness, furious at my stupid need to spy on them, and I would glide to the next camp of men, and I'd hear the same", (p.28) inevitably drawn to the madness of Hrothgar's court. His link with them lies in their ceaseless carnage of everything that lives. "It was confusing and frightening, not in a way I could untangle. ... we were incredibly related", (p.30) an activity that even a monster like him finds distasteful in its wastage. "I was sickened, if only at the waste of it: all they killed - cows, horses, men - they left to burn". (p.30)

Within the novel, Grendel is the yardstick by which human achievement and human life is measured. Pitted against the monstrous world order of Grendel is the defective world of humans who impose chaotic divisions upon themselves and blight reality with their illusions. When he overhears the Shaper's song, Grendel is affected by it, "ridiculous hairy creature torn apart by poetry", (p.37) in the same way that Hrothgar is stirred to visions of greatness by it. Unwilling to believe and yet unable to forget, "It was a cold-blooded lie that a god had lovingly made the world ... It came to me with a fierce jolt that I wanted it", (p.47) we find Grendel
attempting to associate himself with men and being rejected by them. There is a split, however, in Grendel which is a result of the super-imposition of what is dimly to him, a desirable world order. Grendel is, accursed and doomed to the backwaters of a hellish existence. Nonetheless, he desires help and journeys to the Dragon’s cave to seek assistance from him. The Dragon is the "nihilist who denies the relationship between man and his universe". He encourages Grendel to become "an artist of darkness, antithesis of the Shaper." As he was stormed by the Shaper’s song into a sense of hopefulness, so is he subverted by the logistics of Dragon talk. "My advice to you, my violent friend, is to seek out gold and sit on it". (p.63) In chapter six, he takes stock of himself and realises that he is no longer what he was:

Futility, doom, became a smell in the air, pervasive and acrid as the dead smell after a forest fire - my scent and the world’s ...

... Now, invulnerable, I was as solitary as one live tree in a vast landscape of coal. (p.65)

He is reborn into a vindictive self, shorn of humanity’s dross: "I was Grendel, Ruiner of Meadhalls, Wrecker of Kings! But also, as never before, I was alone". (p.69) An intruder and an emotional misfit in Hrothgar’s Meadhalls, his is an unenviable position, that of always having to stand at the edge of society. He orchestrates within the novel a complex
view of the tangled human situation which resonates with life’s wretchedness and its incomparable splendour.

Borne on the tide of meaninglessness "... and I saw myself killing them, on and on and on, as if mechanically, without contest", (p.70) Grendel’s confrontation with Unferth comes as, what he calls a "crowning absurdity" (p.71) in the repetitive doom of brutish violence. Grendel verbally spars with him and spares him his life. This is the first time before he meets Beowulf, that Grendel actually converses with a human being. The monster’s raging perspective has been replaced by a bleak sense of humour. He deliberately spares Unferth in order to deny him a hero’s death. His association with men has gained him insight into their ways, to the extent that he can actually challenge them as he does Unferth, on the strength of their blind, heroic notions of living. Talking to himself, he says,

... My enemies define themselves (as the Dragon said) on me. As for myself, I could finish them off in a single night, ... yet I hold back. I am hardly blind to the absurdity. Form is function. What will we call the Hrothgar-Wrecker when Hrothgar has been wrecked? (p.79)

At this stage, Grendel is no longer what he was: as naive as his first encounter with men, as "transmuted" (p.36) as he was when he heard the Shaper’s song or as eager to comprehend life as when he listens to Dragon philosophy. He is adept at shifting perspectives to suit his own convenience. This is
how his "numberless blessings" are counted "one by one". (p.81) Monster logic has it that he is self sufficient. Yet the need to spy is compulsive. He observes the preparations for war and the ultimate negotiations that win Hrothgar a queen for himself. Grendel's response to Wealtheow is as instinctive as his response to the Shaper's song:

... But she was beautiful and she surrendered herself with the dignity of a sacrificial virgin. My chest was full of pain, my eyes smarted, and I was afraid — O monstrous trick against reason — I was afraid I was about to sob. (p.86)

He is torn apart by his vision of her as he once was by poetry. He holds on desperately to the Dragon's words in order to fight off her presence; "clenching" his mind on the "words of the dragon", but "helpless" (p.91) as always, drawn to observe unsolicited, that which he sees. He plays a hidden game of hide and seek with the antagonists in his life who also "tease" him toward "disbelief in the Dragon's truths". (p.31) He is locked as always within himself, unresolved, unable to communicate his feelings to anyone outside himself:

... He has attained a linguistic level of consciousness that permits him to pose questions about identity. It also enables him to comprehend the speech of humans and of a Dragon. He understands them, but they cannot or will not understand him ... thus he is trapped in a one-way communication ...
His assault on Wealthow is a vehement attempt to disbelieve what he sees. He is almost tamed by her in the classic Beauty and the Beast syndrome. But being the monster who must fight off the ideals of men as being deliberate lies, he is merely brought to the threshold of becoming more human. He stops short of it, for, as he tells himself, "I'd cured myself" by refraining from killing her. A few lines further, however, he honestly assesses his own feelings:

I hung balanced, a creature of two minds; and one of them said - unreasonable, stubborn as the mountains - that she was beautiful. I resolved, absolutely and finally, to kill myself, for love of the Baby Grendel that used to be. But the next instant, for no particular reason, I changed my mind. (p.94-95)

Grendel contradicts himself with every change of mood and breaks the monotony of his life, by this attitude of contrariness which bars him from achieving any kind of self-knowledge.

As Grendel’s vigilance continues unabated and as he is drawn deeper into the mire of human life, he throws up a picture of Hrothgar caught in a dilemma of his own making. Hrothgar’s life seems to resolve itself in the only way possible, through violence. Grendel understands the imminent collapse of Hrothgar’s world, yet sympathy for him is barred by his unreconciled hatred of Hrothgar, who in his eyes, is the epitome of everything detestably human. “How, if I knew all this, you may ask, could I hound him ... I have no
answer, except perhaps this: why should I not?" His conceited logic plumbs him deeper into a state of antipathy. "Ha! this nobility of his, this dignity: are they not my work? ... I made him what he is", (p.106) is the ultimate boast of a creature, blind to anyone outside himself. Frustration and anarchy are the principles underlying Grendel's life. His rhetoric confounds what he sees. His arguments reflect his fallacious notions "I made him what he is. Have I not a right to test my own creation? ... I'm a machine, like you. Like all of you. Blood lust and rage are my character". (p.106) He is hemmed in by darkness and myopically sees the one point of similarity that he shares with men — their common heritage of violence. He presupposes a false invincibility which trips him up eventually. The only reality close to him is the "learning, ordeal by ordeal" of his "undignity" as he grinds his teeth in his own "absurdity". Grendel's accurate sense of language is, however, morally and emotionally misplaced. He uses language to communicate ideas to himself, to attempt to understand what he superficially observes, to sing, however, sardonically of his own condition and to try for the ultimate communication, with man himself. However, "language is never neutral in Gardner. It either imprisons or liberates", it reflects the disintegration of Grendel, in its inability to decipher the "language of ... experience. The mental
language" which is Grendel's "thought, is clever and logical but inadequate because merely private and hence limited to his own small portion in the world." Grendel's subjectivity is a natural reflection of his egoism. He has a presentiment of death in the image of the hart, "the image clings to my mind like a growth. I sense some riddle in it", (p.111) but is too caught up in a facetious present to be able to comprehend its hidden significance. Thus the opportunity to play around with the priests becomes an irresistible urge for travestying human faith and reducing it to the farce that it actually is. One notices, however, a progressive change in Grendel. His game of cat and mouse with human beings, no longer satisfies him.

My heart moves slowly, like freezing water, and I cannot clearly recall the smell of blood. And yet I am restless. I would fall, if I could, through time and space to the Dragon. I cannot. (p.119)

The need to know remains still an important force of propulsion for him, but as he has already barred himself from further knowledge, "I was Grendel, Ruiner of Meadhalls, Wrecker of Kings!" (p.69) by his absolute commitment to an image of himself, he is unable to read the arrow marks of fate pointing to his own doom.

Vastly far away I see the sun, black but shining, and slowly revolving around it there are spiders. I pause in my tracks,
puzzled — though not stirred — by what I see. ... It is just some dream. I move on, uneasy, waiting. (p.119)

Chapter Ten is a sombre chapter dealing with death. Grendel's massacre of the horned goat anticipates his own end. "Death shakes his body the way high wind shakes trees". (p.123) The destruction that Grendel has been responsible for begins to take its toll on him for there are forces contrary to him gathering against him. He overhears an old woman telling of a "giant across the sea who has the strength of thirty thanes. 'Someday he will come here’, she tells the children". (p.124) In Chapter Ten Grendel begins to be affected in a strange way by forces that remain unidentified by him. The death of the Shaper comes to him, couched in the ambiguity of all human occurrences. For a monster who has chosen to inhabit a territory of moral negations the Shaper's death must necessarily leave him "unsatisfied". (p.127) He is drawn to the funeral in the same way that he was drawn to the Shaper's poetry; but as always, every emotion registered by him is drowned in an affectation of indifference: "A stupid business Nihil ex nihilo, I always say. (p.131) Meanwhile, it is in Chapter Ten that Grendel is most alone. The "pain" of "tedium" is the cross that he must absolutely bear. Grendel becomes almost human in his despairing vision of time,

... and because now the Shaper is dead, strange thoughts come over me. I think of the pastness of the past; how the moment I am alive in, prisoned in, moves like a
slowly tumbling form through darkness, the underground river. Not only ancient history ... but my own history one second ago has vanished utterly, dropped out of existence. (pp.127-128)

and in his shattering sense of grief and hopelessness that leaves him feeling overwhelmingly "abandoned". "End of an epoch. I could tell the king. We're on our own again. Abandoned". (p.130) There are signs of fear, "when I sleep I wake up in terror, with hands on my throat", (p.131) unrelieved, however, by any transcending vision of life. At the beginning of the next chapter, Grendel almost becomes himself again, capricious and unmindful of anything except the fifteen "glorious heroes ... fat as cows". Immediately after, however, he is "baffled by the strange sensation" once again. "I knew more surely than before that something was coming". (p.133) The "pain" of the "tedium" that hung over Grendel's life is about to be broken. We find him crouched in darkness, observing humans at talk, avidly desirous of action and reducing all the order that he perceives to a state of being "unreal". Beowulf's arrival, brings to Grendel a recognition of his ultimate antagonist. "I grew more and more afraid of him and at the same time — who can explain it? — more and more eager for the hour of our meeting". (p.144) Beowulf is the epitome of self-integration; integrated in word and deed, in thought and action, in body and soul. "The stranger ... believed every word he said. I
understood at last the look in his eyes. He was insane". 

(p.142) He is the ultimate principle of order that must hold.30 Grendel senses a conviction so strong that it defies him at the deepest level. Henceforward, he fatalistically gives himself up to the only reality discernible to him: the absurdity of all action.

It is the business of rams to be rams and of goats to be goats, the business of Shapers to sing and of kings to rule. The stranger waits on, as patient as a grave-mound. I too wait, whispering, whispering, mad like him. Time grows obeying its mechanics, like all of us. (p.144)

The final chapter literally enacts the inevitable. Seemingly unchanged in "bloodlust" and unfazed by Beowulf's presence, Grendel proceeds to his meadhall demolitions in like manner as before, this time with a table cloth tied as a napkin around his neck. He is caught unawares, defeated by the strength of Beowulf's unassuming heroics which challenges him to faith in life even as he is dealt the final blow.

As his rationality slips further out of control, further toward the existential absurdity, he allows his emotions to take rein, and acts upon pure and instinctive rage. ... He submits himself to the swift sweep of time moving toward a final darkness ...31

In the final meeting, Grendel sees Beowulf as a Dragon and tries to shake off the illusion without success. Nothing can help him now. He is ironically defeated by the one person who
sheds meaning on his world. Visibly ill-equipped, he is unable to deal with the charge of truth levelled against him.

His syllables lick at me, chilly fire.
His syllables lick at me, chilly fire.
His syllables lick at me, chilly fire.
His syllables lick ...

To Grendel, Beowulf becomes insanely inter-changeable with the Dragon, "Flames slip out at the corners of his mouth", (p.149) though his words are not.

... As you see it it is, while the seeing lasts, dark nightmare-history, time-as-coffin; but where the water was rigid there will be fish, and men will survive on their flesh till spring. It's coming, my brother. Believe it or not. Though you murder the world ... The world will burn green, sperm build again ...

Beowulf forces Grendel not only to the figurative "hearing" which has failed before, "I do not listen. I am sick at heart. I have been betrayed before by talk like that" (p.150) but also to "seeing" and to "feeling", to consolidate himself into a unity of song that must be sung at the cost of a transfiguring pain bought with his own life.

... you make the world by whispers, second by second. Are you blind to that? Whether you make it a grave or a garden of roses is not the point. Feel the wall; is it not hard? He smashes me against it, breaks open my forehead. Hard, yes! Observe the hardness, write it down in careful runes. Now sing of walls! sing!

(p.150)

Beowulf's destruction of Grendel is a destruction of Grendel's absurdist philosophy. He forces Grendel to...
recognise the transmogrifying pain that would make his end meaningful. Beowulf demands that Grendel commit himself completely to himself: to the authenticity of a perceiving imagination that orders reality. He splits him open, literally and figuratively, breaking up a personality that is deeply sunk in confusion. He forces him to the edge of the abyss and leaves him to rave or to sing:

... "Accident", I whisper. I will fall. I seem to desire the fall, and though I fight it with all my will I know in advance that I can't win. Standing baffled, quaking with fear, three feet from the edge of a nightmare cliff, I find myself, incredibly, moving toward it. I look down, down, into bottomless blackness, feeling the dark power moving in me ... moving me slowly to my voluntary tumble into death. (p.152)

Grendel is conquered by the principles of faith. He actually learns to make poetry out of his life, to do to himself what the Shaper was able to do to others. The accident of death becomes the fortuitous accident of life permitting him to "see". "Poor Grendel's had an accident," I whisper, "so may you all". (p.152) are the parting words of a monster who was immune to life.32

It could be said that as Faustus was representative of an age, so too is Grendel representative of a contradictory age, lost in the dark mazes of a godless universe. In as much as Faustus overreaches himself, thus preventing the reader's total identification with him, so too is the reader prevented...
from identifying himself with Grendel because he stands as a symbol of the incarnate darkness that threatens stability. The inverted myth of Beowulf shapes the story to give it its sombre perspective of death and destruction. The attempt so far, has been to follow the narrative through Grendel. Each perception of reality from his point of view, takes the reader deeper into a primordial darkness of wantonness and destruction. Leonard Butts calls it the "Dantean darkness" out of which Grendel never emerges because of his "physical and mental isolation." He apprehends the world through gut feelings of hatred and animosity. He has a propensity for partial sightings of the truth. He dissects and analyzes but remains impervious to the synthesising possibilities of the creative imagination. Grendel never perceives the possibilities of love and hope in Hrothgar's kingdom because he is barred from a vision of life that permits him an enduring role in the universe. He inhabits a universe of his own making. The Dragon's philosophy forms his only criterion for living. He has his moments of vulnerability. He is sincerely affected by the Shaper's song, which "told of an ancient feud between two brothers which split all the world between darkness and light" in which "Grendel, was the dark side .... The terrible race God cursed." (p.43) He actually acts an impulse to run begging for "mercy" for his condemnable part in the fable. When he is rejected he rages
with anger and expresses himself in the violent language that he has learnt from men.

I ran to the centre of the forest and fell down panting ... I wept — strong monster with teeth like a shark's — ... "Bastards!" I roared. "Sons of bitches. Fuckers!" words I'd picked up from men in their rages. I wasn't even sure what they meant, though I had an idea: defiance, rejection of the gods that, for my part, I'd known all along to be lifeless sticks. I roared with laughter, still sobbing. We, the accursed, didn't it even have words for swearing in! "AAARGH!" I whooped, then covered my ears and hushed. It sounded silly (p.44).

He is damned to an interminable sense of the absurdity of all life.

Above the monster's mere is a universe inhabited by men who are related to the monster through speech. They are shown to have succeeded in building their own personal "walls" against each other. Ruthlessness and greed for power make them even closer to the subterranean monster than they themselves are aware of. The gradual consolidation of Hrothgar's power is allegorically echoed in mankind's perennial attempt to colonise the world. Through Grendel, the reader is presented with a pageant of characters who are similar to him in more ways than one. In Grendel's understanding of human reality, the Shaper becomes an aberration of human nature because he has a capacity for visionary insight, which precludes the kind of metaphysical doubt that continually blinds Grendel to the positive aspects
of life. The Shaper has the ability to transmute the present and to anticipate the course of the future. Time for Grendel, however, is a conjunction of static states of existence which offer no meaning, locked as it is in a past immediately made dead by the present. "The future is as dark, as unreal, as the past. ... I will forget tomorrow, so her pain is a matter of indifference". (p.128) Grendel's inability to accept the hierarchical order of the universe sung by the Shaper which consigns him to a place outside history because he belongs to "darkness", distorts his perception of the world around him. According to him, the Shaper's song was "a cold-blooded lie".

... I knew what I knew, the mindless, mechanical bruteness of things of things, and when the harper's lure drew my mind away to hopeful dreams, the dark of what was and always was reached out and snatched my feet. (p.46)

Grendel stands self-condemned in his inability to understand the truth when told. He represents in all viciousness the limitations of the intellect which refuses to yield itself to the impulse of the imagination. Thus, even though Grendel is converted by the Shaper's song and even though he begs to be accepted by men, he cannot accept his ordained position in the universe. This is why he too must set up a bulwark of defence against the abyss that faces him. Human beings, according to the Dragon also try to defend themselves by mapping out "roads through Hell with their crackpot theories,
their here-to-the-moon-and-back lists of paltry facts". (p.55) He perceives them to be "thinking creatures, pattern makers" (p.21) similar to Grendel, the monster who is a prisoner of a demonic intelligence, grounded to false assumptions. The intelligence that guides Beowulf, however, is the polarised opposite of Grendel. Between the two, is metaphorically presented the pygmy race of men, bound hand and foot to their warring instincts, their vision dimmed by the kind of materialism that blights the Dragon's perspective.

Grendel's observation of men is not inaccurate. He remains the yardstick by which men are measured. With the arrival of Beowulf in the last chapters, however, the narrative provides for a possible view of man, already partially visible in the Shaper's creativity and in Wealtheow's innocence and femininity. This is a picture of man sustained by the integrity of an imagination which makes for possible salvation through the poetry that he must create out of his own life. Meanwhile, there is a narrow margin of difference between Grendel and the men that he feeds upon. Grendel's condition of being Lost is a condition matched in Hrothgar's subjects.

Men and women stood talking in the light of the meadhall door and on the narrow streets below; on the lower hillside boys and girls played near the sheep pens, shyly holding hands. ... They talked nothing, stupidities ... Then, circling
the clearing, I stepped on something fleshy ... It was a man. They'd cut his throat. His clothes had been stolen. I stared up at the hall, baffled, beginning to shake. (pp.42-43)

and in his progeny:

As a matter of fact, if the Shaper's vision of goodness and peace was a part of himself, not idle rhymes, then no one understood him at all, not even Hrothgar. And as for Hrothgar, if he was serious about his idea of glory — sons and sons' sons giving out treasure — I had news for him. If he had sons, they wouldn't hear his words. They would weigh his silver and gold in their minds. I've watched the generations. I've seen their weasel eyes. (p.45)

The microcosmic world of Grendel is a seething hotbed of rage and unresolved ideas and feelings. The larger macrocosmic world echoes with similar frustrations and persistent betrayals. The only difference lies in the human ability to form relationships and in Grendel's inability to do so. His lack of feeling for his mother has its own story to tell. He knows no filial respect for her and calls her, "my pale slightly glowing fat mother ... life bloated, baffled, long-suffering hag", (p.6) he does not define himself by her. His linguistic abilities take him away from her into the terrestrial world of humans." She'd forgotten all language long ago, or may be had never known any". (p.22) She has been described to be continually pacing their "dingy underground room". (p.6) She is a mass of feeling, an evolutionary rung lower than him in her excessive
subjectivity which prevents her from granting him an identity separate from her. "I was her creation. We were one thing, like the wall and the rock growing out from it". (p. 12)

In Chapter Two after his mother rescues him from death she swamps him in a fury of possessiveness. "She gets up on all fours ... she hurls herself across the void and buries me in her bristly fur and fat". (p. 22) She is a significant presence in Grendel's mind, a distasteful reminder of his origins. After Grendel's discovery of the world above, the underground cave identified with his mother, becomes a tedious prison for him one from which he is repeatedly compelled to escape. He is torn between monster gross-roots and the challenge of the unknown. However, the unknown, the human world has captured his mind so strongly that he must be both participant and spectator in it.

When confronted with the ideal of feminine virtue in the figure of Wealtheow, Grendel is nonplussed. He may have succeeded in identifying himself with the confused herd of men festering with violence, but he becomes nullified and short-circuited as it were by Wealtheow's suggestions of creativity and love. His responses to her are similar to his responses to the Shaper's song. He is "split" once again:

In my mind I watched her freckled hand move on the old man's arm as once I'd listened to the sigh of the Shaper's harp. Ah, woe, woe! How many times must a creature be dragged down the same
ridiculous road? The Shaper's lies, the hero's self-delusion, now this: the idea of a queen! My mother, breathing hard, scraping through her hair with her crooked nails, watched me and sometimes moaned. (p.93)

In his mind's eye he now juxtaposes his mother to Wealtheow; his own reality, to the inexpressible reality that is Wealtheow "in my cave, coughing from the smoke and clenching feet on fire with chilblains". (p.93) This conflict almost forces Grendel to commit another sacrilegious act. "I decided to kill her". However, he undergoes a demonic catharsis when he snatches at her, "her unqueenly shrieks were deafening, exactly like the squeals of a pig", and violates her privacy. He stops short of killing her. "It would be meaningless killing her. As meaningless as letting her live", (p.94) to establish somewhat superciliously and even more radically the absurdity of all action. The next lines belie everything that he says "I hung balanced, a creature of two minds; and one of them said — unreasonable, stubborn as the mountains — that she was beautiful". (p.95)

In Grendel's life, moments of epiphany come within tantalizing reach of him. The demand to yield humbly to the overriding truth of what is, to sustain a clarity of vision, and to discern order within disorder, are the pressurising factors that thwart what could be Grendel's moments of lucidity. "I clamped my palms to my ears and stretched up my lips and shrieked again: a stab at truth, a snatch at
apocalyptic glee. Then I ran on all fours, chest pounding, to the smoky mere." (p.38) The image of predator, expressive of confusion, always marks Grendel's responses to that which is not easily apprehended by him. In all respects he is closer to his mother than he would ever allow himself to believe.

As foreshadowings of doom darken his horizon, Grendel is more passionately driven to violence. Once again he hurls himself into a headlong confrontation with his chosen rivals, expecting as always, an easy victory for himself. He is ill-prepared, however, for the unexpected turn of events, which transform reality for him, and which drives him away from a lifetime of monstrous misconceptions. He reels under the impact of Beowulf's socket-wrenching handshake, his mind a whirlpool of thoughts, unvanquished by the pain, "My whole arm's on fire, incredible, soaring pain"; desperately searching for the reality that was; "the world is what is and always was"; convincing himself of his impenetrable "sanity". "He's only a man; I can escape him". (pp.148-149) but ironically slipping on his own blood. Even then he continues to fight off Beowulf's presence, but is inevitably forced to let go of himself in a paradoxical exchange of past for future. The ultimate vision forced upon him, is of the interconnectedness of all reality, of the eternal dynamics of time past, time present and time future. Beowulf is Grendel's ultimate redeemer. As if in recognition of this, Grendel
calls him "dear long-lost brother, kinsman-thane", (p.148) one to whom he must inevitably submit by token of his tangible superiority. His moment of death is a re-enactment of his violent past. The only difference lies in Beowulf's ability to draw out Grendel's soul, to strip it down to what it actually is, vacuous and naked; to force upon him a recognition of that climatic moment of pain and insight, of suffering and acceptance, of subjectivity and objectivity. Grendel's lifelong pastime of hypothesising the truth fails him at the most crucial moment of his life; that hour of reckoning which he had anticipated all these years.

The inevitable breakdown of Grendel's rationale may be detected in a language, that, until now, has mainly been used to propagate his own ideologies. It now bears the full brunt of pain, visibly felt, of confusion and deluded visualisations. The physical breaking in by Beowulf is described as a raw pain. Grendel finds himself succumbing to Beowulf's powerful auto-suggestions "spilling words like showers of sleet, his mouth three inches from my ear" (p.149) as he forces him to recognise the essential creativity of all life, commanding him to create even at the moment of death. Grendel retains his humour and his capacity for argument upto the last moments. But as the reality of death stares him in the face he calls out to his mother, which, unlike the earlier call of frustration, becomes an affirmation of death.
Acceptance of it hones his insight and brings him closer to the deeper human realities that have always eluded him. His final moments are paradoxical moments of joy, transmuted as he is by the implications of death-in-faith.

In Grendel’s mind, Beowulf is a potent threat to him, challenging his very existence. Beowulf on the other hand, personifies a cosmic force of creation which must contend against the very existence of a Grendel. Hence Grendel’s ultimate catharsis lies in the purging of his monster-emotions and a thorough purging of all monster realities. Shorn of his characterising brutality, Grendel reaches out to the reader in a conclusive song of acceptance, wishing upon all for a similar accidental fall into death, which is the metaphoric fall into faith. He takes that improbable step into the future through his own death.

At the end of the book, Grendel’s journey into understanding may not even have started but the impulse towards it implicates the reader in a soul-searching effort to unmake the “walls” that impede him, exorcising thus the monster within and resurrecting a vision of the future, such as the Shaper sang about. To be able to see beyond what Grendel saw, to be able to hear what was only partially audible to Grendel and to be able to restructure the dimensionless depths of reality, are the pre-requisites of visionary insight and of visionary foresight: attributes of
the Beowulf personality that tragically remains in short supply. Allegorically speaking, through the Grendel perspective, the book mirrors the tragic fall-out of the intellect and shows its inability to reconstruct itself on account of a self-imposed will for destruction. Grendel stands as a symbolically negative figure of unyielding doubt. Insight into the Grendel personality would involve the ability to see it as an allegorical dimension of man's potential for self-destruction. This would invariably lead one "to the rejection of that quintessentially human pride in man's remaking of the world according to his own limitations, and to the recognition that reason is finite, with spirituality alone offering a next step."35

The edification of Grendel, as well as that of the reader, works on the strength of Beowulf's commitment to the ideals of the spirit. Implicit meanings arise as Grendel is associated with a self-generated confusion which is also a reflection of the confused human reality. It is only at the end, when Beowulf is able to reinstate the cosmic pattern of life, that the allegory latent within the book begins to coalesce. The allegory functions at the level of symbol and metaphor, at the significant level of the Shaper's song and Wealtheow's beauty, at the ironic level of the narrative and at the dynamic level of Beowulf's integrity, suggestive as they are, of other significant realities, of hidden depths.
and of larger perspectives. The initial step taken into Grendel's mind is, allegorically, the initiatory step that one takes into chaos where the soul adrift in confusion is blighted by its own inability to "see". There is a progressive movement upwards and outwards, out of the monster's mere into a human world, itself darkened by confusion. However, images of light, of love and of faith, impress themselves upon the reader and upon Grendel even unto the final moments of his life.

In the novel the final call to life is the call to an integrated means of self-expression. For Grendel it becomes the call to order and to create, affirming himself through the moral process of art which "discovers by its process what it can say". In effect the actual process of reading the book becomes a vicarious artistic experience that leads one to perceptible clarity. For a suspended moment, reality is displaced by the supervention of Grendel's world which echoes with the currents and cross-currents of the real world. Gardner's novel, being moral and creative, works in order to reveal the unrevealed; to sing in a manner never sung before. Reality may thus be better apprehended in a figurative presentation of itself through the careful study of a monster who is close to man by virtue of his capacity for reason and emotion. The mode of narration is an inversely allegorical reflection of the surreal depths of human reality as
portrayed in Grendel. Grendel is the symbolic monster who inhabits the hidden depths of reality. He is deeply embroiled in the argumentative politics of self-seeking. His abysmal sense of hopelessness is, ironically, an allegorical aspect of the human world of violence and greed perpetuated in Hrothgar’s kingdom. The appearance of Beowulf restores the moral balance of a degraded world and challenges Grendel to embrace life in death. The conclusion looks forward to the redemptive possibilities of art and gives meaning to the integrity of Beowulf’s enduring vision, that there is hope after all, even for a monster.

A Tiger for Malgudi (1983) is as remote from Grendel as Malgudi is from Hrothgar’s Nordic meadhalls. As opposed in sensibility as one is to the other, they are, however, linked together through a common mode of perception which in all superficiality seems to be unrelated: the one deriving itself from a bleak underside perspective of man and the other, from a humane but comic view of the human situation altogether. One realises, however, after a reading of each book that both R.K. Narayan and John Gardner are arch fabulists who have harnessed their imaginations for a definite purpose: to edify and to entertain. This is a purpose as ancient as the myths that the novelists draw upon.

The archetype of the true artist for both novelists, lies in his ability to fashion the truth in a unique way,
using his potential for creativity to codify a world view that intimately arises from the artist’s perception of the ideal norm. For Gardner this becomes a passionate commitment to instill the moral value of art in society. His fiction embodies the struggle to articulate a process of moral discovery. For Narayan, who unlike Gardner, is more of a story-teller than a theorist in the sense that he has less to say about his own fiction, this manifests itself through a fictional mode that ironically displays the comic inconsequentiality of human pretension. Though Gardner discriminates between "moral" and "didactic", the former according to him being a dynamic appendage to all good art and the latter categorically decried because of the clumsy moralisms attributed to it, yet the didactic nature of his fiction is an important feature. This didacticism, however, has been transmuted by the artist’s poetic ability to clothe it in dramatic ways, thus allowing for the interpenetration of the larger moral vision. It would not be inappropriate at this level to seek corroboration from Narayan’s view of fiction, which allows for didacticism to work in a manner that diffuses itself through the story so as to elicit both the aesthetic and the moral in art. "Since didacticism was never shunned, every story has implicit in it a moral value, likened to the fragrance of a well-shaped flower."37 We find that in both, the truth is enhanced through a respective
dedication to the craft of fiction or to the art of storytelling. The story-teller or the fiction writer is an important voice of his community. Narayan's assessment of who the story-teller is, is an important aspect of his fiction, an important dimension of the narrative mode with which this thesis is concerned. He says, "he is part and parcel of the Indian village community, which is somewhat isolated from the mainstream of modern life." In an interview quoted earlier in the chapter, Gardner too perceives the artist's responsibility to his own society: "I really do believe Shelley's idea about the poet as the legislator of mankind." The moral "fragrance" of the "well-shaped flower" can never be contrived as is the moral vision of both Gardner and Narayan. It impels them towards a fictional formulation of values that need to be understood in the full context of the narrative mode adopted within their novels. Grendel is, allegorically speaking, the alienated voice that seeks to restore to itself a vision of the truth as it is cast in the terrestrial lives of some of the characters observable to him. In the attempt to discover inner meanings, he unearths the truth about his own monstrous self. He shows the reader through Grendel, an obduracy in human nature that cannot be vanquished by anyone except by the principle of order and of love embodied in Beowulf. The disintegrative view of life is an allegorical replay of the fragmented psyche that has been
disoriented by its commitment to wordy intellectualisms. Though *Grendel*, narratively considered, is an entire world away from *A Tiger for Malqudi*, the two novels arrive at individual verdicts on humankind. Both, however, display a fictional aptitude for making the usual unusual and for making fictional restatements of the truth through protagonists who do not belong to this world. Both writers step outside the ordinary in order to transpose in a different key altogether, an entire world view reconstructed from values that have normally remained hidden from life. Thus in both novels, the story has been manipulated for the special purpose of imparting a fresh moral perspective to the reader. Whereas Grendel’s inverted philosophy is a fantastic parable of the breakdown of the human intellect, Narayan’s tiger-protagonist Raja belongs to an artless but penetrating fable on the soul’s journey to freedom. In the course of the story Raja is discovered to be an allegorical dimension of the human soul. He is an unevolved aspect of it, forming a part of the cycle of human life to be carefully understood, but not to be isolated as Captain, in his bid for success, did so.

Both protagonists are hampered by linguistic disabilities. They are unable to speak. Although Grendel strings whole philosophies together and uses words to express himself, there is a lack of conception that springs from a
basic lack of self-communication. On the other hand, the tiger-protagonist who is ironically so ignorant at first, allowing himself to be a naive sounding board of the human talk that carries on within his hearing, gradually begins to understand the conceptual meaning of certain ideas, which in turn revolutionises selfhood for him and carries him higher up the spiritual ladder. In *Grendel*, the conflict of idea and emotion is brought to a decisive end by Beowulf's radical breaking in of the Grendel consciousness; breaking it in order to make it whole for it to be able to perceive a vision of death denied to it in life. In a similar manner, Raja, the tiger-protagonist, is broken in by the Tiger-Hermit who assigns him a role in life and attributes to him faculties that are distinctively human. Grendel and Raja are symbolic dimensions of the human psyche. The thematic core of each novel rises from each novelist's perception, the one tragic, and the other comic, of the obtuseness of human thought and behaviour at all levels. *A Tiger for Malgudi* thus finds its place in the study of the allegorical mode by virtue of a perceiving sensibility that discriminates between the actual and the ideal, between the lived reality and the ideal norm of life and behaviour. The comedy that arises hence is the singular one of Malgudian disenchantment with itself, related in the universally allegorical language of symbol and metaphor.

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In the introduction to his novel, Narayan traces his tiger’s lineage to that of an actual tiger reported to be accompanying a hermit at the Kumbh Mela festival, freely moving “about without hurting or scaring anyone”. Incredible but true, it provided him with the seminal idea for a novel which was in turn precipitated by a bookmark that he happened to come upon, “a four-inch-long strip of cardboard with the picture of a young tiger pleading, ‘I’d love to get into a good book’”. (p.7) In thus allowing himself to be persuaded by the “Muses” (p.7) to take a tiger as the subject of his novel, he crosses over into a realm of story-telling that has definite links with the animal fables of ancient India. C.D. Narasimhaiah has remarked upon Narayan’s return in A Tiger for Malgudi to the “motif of Panchtantra”, thus making the tiger-protagonist “credible” to the entire English speaking world. There is, however, none of that one to one correspondence between the animal and the human world that is to be found in the animal fable. Narayan adheres to a fictional pattern of story-telling that, although derived from Western literature, incorporates within it the story of an indigenous tiger whose personality has deep resonances of the human. The indigeneity of the tiger and his setting has been artfully manipulated by Narayan to find significance in a novel whose philosophic world view corroborates the universal quest for identity. Narayan adopts
a mode of narration that is deliberately allegorical in its closeness to the fable.

Raja, the tiger-protagonist, addresses himself directly to the reader, explaining his lack of the higher faculties of the spirit and generally taking the reader back to the Malgudian setting, but this time from a tiger’s perspective. The experiment with using a tiger-protagonist as persona was a challenge to Narayan as a fiction writer, for "humans" had always "monopolized the attention of fiction writers. Man in his smugness never imagines for a moment that other creatures may also possess ego, values, outlook, and the ability to communicate, though they may be incapable of audible speech". (pp.7-8) He is a perfect foil to the average Malgudian who makes a fool of himself all the time. The tiger-protagonist is endowed with the fiction writer’s facility for zooming in on the more telling incidents of his life so that the self-portraiture is not a simple one of chronological detail but of inner discoveries, of outer changes and of strange relationships with men. In his introduction, Narayan has already prepared the reader for the philosophical overtones to be found in his novel.

Raja has the ability to recollect his past. We meet him in his old age at a philosophic moment at the zoo, as he laments over a forbidding exterior that actually hides a "soul within". "You are not likely to understand that I am
different from the tiger next door, that I possess a soul within this forbidding exterior". (p.11) He displays an objectivity that emulates the Tiger-Hermit himself. As he comes under the increasing influence of his Master, the Tiger-Hermit, he learns to question: "'Who am I?'" (p.12) The answer lies in his ability to transcend a past heavily charged with violence. Recollections of it does not bring him immediately closer to an understanding of himself. But, as he sees himself in the elucidating light of his Master's words, he evinces a positive understanding of his own past. He records the linear progress of his life upto the moment when his Master, the Tiger-Hermit, takes charge of him, after which, the pattern changes altogether. Life now becomes a muted attempt to understand God.

... All day long I lay across the entrance of his shelter. It was enough for me that I was near him, while he sat with his eyes shut in prayer. ... More than once he mentioned God. ... 'You may not understand the word. But let it sink in your mind and ring on your ears, ...'. (p.136)

As action-packed as his earlier life was, so is his life now free of the senseless cravings of the flesh. "I suffered hunger for consecutive days before seeking food again, but felt nobler for it". (p.138) His perspective on life undergoes successive changes. "This phase of life I found elevating: the change churning internally was still felt by
me, but did not bother me now as it did at the beginning. (p.139) In an early paragraph he asks the reader to touch him so he would hold out his forepaw to shake the reader's hand, after retracting his claws. Literally and symbolically, his life now is one of soul searching withdrawal into non-violence and love.

There is a strange congruence between the human and the animal in A Tiger of Malgudi. Whereas animal fables abound with animal protagonists who have limited faculties and who play one-dimensional roles, the tiger-protagonist in A Tiger for Malgudi is both human and sub-human. Human in his sensitivity to matters relating to the spirit, sub-human in his inability to "shed the frightening physical encasement" (p.138) God had chosen for him. He is a mute observer of men, "I lack only the faculty of speech", (p.12) and is an uncanny combination of shrewd insight and confused naivety that continually plays upon the reader's responses to him and to the human drama discordantly evolving itself around him.

The tiger-protagonist is first and foremost a tiger true to the limited constructs of his own genius. He perceives of God as being a giant tiger. He never hides his bloody past. The reader is made to understand the necessary evil of jungle survival in the forests of Mempi. This is an early phase of his life marked by freedom and by urgent primal feelings. It ends abruptly with the savage murder of
his family which becomes a bitter launching as it were, into
the extravagant politics of human affairs. Raja describes his
anguish at the sight of his dead family stretched out on a
cart. What started off as a simple jungle tale, now appears
to take on a tragic dimension:

The sight of my family stretched out
there filled me with fury. In those days
I was still a tiger, an unmitigated
animal, and the only feeling that was
aroused in me was fury, rather than
grief, which I understand now. (p.22)

However, being a novelist whose penchant for the comic and
the ludicrous for outweighs that the tragic, Narayan never
allows his tiger-protagonist to dwell for too long upon his
losses. Events so speedily catch up with him that we find him
captured in a way of life as alien to him as the humans that he
first encounters outside the Mempi range.

Narayan’s whimsical selection of a tiger-protagonist
has its roots in the Indian imagination whose world view is
framed by a dormant sense of one’s past. In an interview,
Narayan affirms the significance of India’s prolific past
thus:

I have studied Indian mythology ... .
After all, for any story writer the
prototype still inevitably remains our
own epics and mythological stories,
though they might not be in a subtle
psychological manner but, symbolically
and allegorically. We cannot get away
from that tradition. 42
He, however, moves away from the simple construction of these tales, having inherited through a colonial past, the intricacies of Western literature and as he tells us in "The Fiction Writer in India":

The English language brought with it to India not only a new type of literature but all the world's literature in translation. Indian writers were exposed to new forms such as the novel and short story. These not only revealed new artistic possibilities for a writer but also stimulated his social awareness.43

He has successfully incorporated the traditional within the more complex form of the novel. The tiger-protagonist is thus a believable entity, rooted in the sociological and in the mythical ethos of Malgudi, a veritable part of the "story-teller's world". He represents an aspect of the Indian philosophical ideal of the transmigration of souls which presupposes the evolutionary potential of all creatures. At the level of the fable, the tiger-protagonist is a type and a variation of all its animal protagonists. At the metaphysical level, the tiger-protagonist is an allegorical figure of truth attempting to explore the Hindu way of life. The mode of narration consequently adopted is neither overtly serious nor overtly comic, both allegorical and ironical at the same time. The one evocative of the symbolic layers of meaning attached to a tiger set loose in the human jungle of Malgudi, and the other, humorously focussing upon human folly; a major set back to spiritual development in Malgudi. The narrative
is a "rare combination of comic sense and religious sensibility".\textsuperscript{44} Narayan never gives up his Indian sensibility which is "saturated with the Indian tradition and sensitive to the experience implicit in the Indian myth" to a greater talent for "candid reproduction of surfaces and manners and behaviour".\textsuperscript{45} The coalescence of the two strains within the book calls for a reading of it at once sensitive to and appreciative of Narayan's ability to symbolically provide Malgudi with its own tiger. A tiger, who is avowedly its most sane inhabitant and through whom much comedy and much philosophy has been solicited. To take Raja at his face value, however, as merely being a character who adds to the comic confusion of Malgudian life would be to miss out on the inner significance of all his experiences put together, especially the brief but important relationship that he eventually forges with the Tiger-Hermit. The Tiger-Hermit proves himself to be an authentic sannyasi judging by the itinerary that he follows which does not allow him to become permanently attached to person or place; even to someone as much in need of him as his Malgudian family or Raja. The allegorical significance of Raja clearly emerges in the latter part of the narrative where he winds up being more human than tiger, tragically conscious of being "encased" in a ferocious shell. On reviewing whatever Raja has garnered from his association with the Tiger-Hermit, the residual
feeling that the reader is left with is that the inner ill-matched with the outer, strives to free itself of physical fetters; that Raja is the ultimate focus of all spiritual possibilities in *A Tiger for Malgudi*; that in comprehending what he stands for, one takes a perceptive step closer to the principle of unity underlying all living creatures; that in accepting him as an animal possessive of a soul, one is able to bridge the gap that lies between all living creatures. It would also imply that the reader has been able to take that imaginative step with Narayan towards an intuitive understanding of the inner reality of all things, that "deep within the core of personality is the same in spite of differing appearances and categories and with the right approach you could expect the same response from a tiger as from any normal human being". (p.9)

There is a sense of anticipation on the part of the old Raja lying on the cool floor of the zoo, "madly" hoping that his "Master might suddenly appear out of a crowd, open the door" of his cage and "command, 'come out, let us go'". (p.11) The Tiger-Hermit has been an eye opener for the tiger-protagonist as well as for the reader. Raja has been the allegorical vehicle through which a higher life has been postulated. The possibility for this lies in the Tiger-Hermit's ability to extricate Raja from himself, unlocking the doors of perception for him. Having being launched on the
journey towards selfhood Raja must learn to free himself from his attachment to the material, become what the Tiger-Hermit himself aspires for. In all honesty, Raja is deeply Malgudian in his attachment to material power and to the ego. It would not be too far-fetched to see "Raja’s growth, traced through three phases in three symbolic locations — the jungle, the circus and the forest —“ as being an allegorical enactment of "the growth from thoughtless self-seeking to a thoughtful search for the self". 46 He is Narayan’s ideal choice for an allegorical character, partly human and partly sub-human, belonging entirely to the Hindu ethos which believes in the soul being present in every living creature.

_A Tiger for Malgudi_ is an imaginative reworking of an old theme. A theme that is consistently human and consistently allegorical in its quest for the spiritual realities that underlie the material. Raja is exploited as a fictional means to a spiritual end. However philosophical the issues are that are raised through him, the book, still preserves its characteristically Malgudian irony. The characters in it all contribute directly or indirectly towards the evolution of Raja’s soul. It is as a tiger that he enters human society through a Malgudian circus. It is as a tiger but as a different tiger altogether, that he retires from it. The intervening period is one of ironic descent into human society; a discovery of its human proponents and of its
peculiar values as it would reflect upon a tiger enslaved to its defendants. The comedy that arises is the characteristic one of Malgudian eccentricity as it sets out to domesticate a tiger, to make of it a circus performer for the sensational benefit of its Malgudian audience. What makes the book philosophical and allegorical is the unusual transpiration of events within it. The usual run of Narayan’s domestic Malgudian comedy is overlaid by a sequence of events that could have brought carnage to Malgudi — Raja’s bid for freedom at the cost of Captain’s life. Malgudi town runs amok with fear of an unidentified carnivore. The appearance of the Tiger-Hermit amidst the uproar, aggravates the other Malgudians contending for Raja’s blood. However, his enigmatic power over Raja saps Raja of all his strength and brings to the story a new dimension of experience utterly unknown to Raja, now well versed in the violence and volubility of Malgudian thinking. Narayan has already prepared the reader for the unusual and the extraordinary in his introduction to the novel. It comes as no real surprise, therefore, that the Tiger-Hermit breaks down all barriers of communication with Raja. In the context of the novel he is not a *deus ex machina*. He is what he is, a Tiger-Hermit, a sannyasi, who having "roused" his "supernatural powers" during "certain yogic practices", employs them to save Raja and to "transform" him "inwardly". (p.9) The metaphysics of
it being; all living creatures form a vital part of the cosmic principle of life. The novel follows the logic of Indian myths where realism is qualitatively displaced by figurative manifestations of psychic possibilities. Hence the accountability of the unusual and the extraordinary in the story and the identification that the reader may easily find with Raja’s struggle for selfhood. Allegorically speaking, the material canvas of human life, deplored by the Tiger-Hermit, must be fully experienced before the process of the sanctification of the soul begins to take place; or before "one renounces everything" (p.8) in order to become a sannyasi. The Tiger-Hermit transforms Raja and sets him on the road on which he himself is travelling. For a better understanding of the book one would have to seek assistance from "A Hindu Fable" once again.

We can enjoy it simply as a witty variant of a familiar form: the animal fable that inverts the assumption that men are superior to beasts. Or we can take it more seriously and use it, as Narayan does, to explore those spiritual concepts that belong to the nebulous part of our religious imagination. These two approaches are not absolute alternatives, for the story moves with ingenious consistency, and an complementary bases, along both these tracks.47

*A Tiger for Malqudi* ought not to be mistaken for a philosophical treatise. Its philosophy of self-renunciation imparted by the Tiger-Hermit and plausibly realized in Raja’s
earthly life has been factually dealt with as being a probable part of the dynamics of Malgudian life. After all, the Tiger-Hermit was once part of Malgudi. Yet he was able to step out of its orbit to orient himself to the higher, intangible values of the spirit.

Narayan unassumingly begins his story where it should, allowing his protagonist to commence his story with recollections of his "early days as a cave-dweller and jungle beast". (p.12) The novelty lies in the presence of a narrating tiger-protagonist who is almost human in his commitment to the ideals of non-violence. We follow his momentous journey back in time conscious all the while of an un-tiger-like conscientiousness in baring the facts of his past in an attempt to understand himself better. Narayan uses him as a perfect foil to the average Malgudian, figuratively lost in the histrionics of survival in a small town. Raja narrates incidents from his life which has to do with his human masters whom he as passive observer notices. The picture of humanity construed by him is of the undecipherable nature of men who always seem to be in constant activity. As noticeably observed by a number of critics Narayan's talent for sighting the comic incongruities of his characters finds ironic expression in depicting them in their situational roles. Distilled through a tiger's consciousness is the familiar goings on in the Malgudian circus. "Human talk in
different keys" is clearly audible to Raja who is bewildered and lost. "Captain and his yes-man would come off and on ... looking" at him, "say something between themselves, and then leave". His imprisonment leaves him no room at all for physical exercise. His one artless observation, "But no one cared" (p.41) brings into focus the indifference surrounding him. At a profound level, Narayan stands behind his tiger-protagonist enlisting his support in making observations on the "comedy of manners" around him. "Narayan's sense of the comic is sustained not by a Dickensian kind of exaggeration but rather "by" the irony of understatement practised by a Jane Austen". In The Swan and the Eagle, C.D. Narasimhaiah comments on Narayan's commitment to the "sense of comedy", his employment of it in his earlier fiction with special reference to The Guide, which, if quoted at length, would help the reader to understand the narrative mode also used in A Tiger for Malgudi. It is a mode that is ironical in its delineation of comic peculiarities and at the same time allegorical in its ability to merge the comic in the philosophic. It is a primarily Indian philosophical world view which bears universal corroboration in its advocacy of the principle of cosmic unity. Continuing with his critique, Narasimhaiah observes that

... It is the surpassing triumph of the art which makes the comic pursue the ends of the tragic, in the attempt to resolve the duality and perceive the hard core of
things. It has been rightly claimed that all prose fiction is a variation on the theme of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, of appearance and reality, love, beauty, money, prestige — those generations of illusion which mislead the individual and complicate human relationships and perpetually place him in a false position with man and God have to be broken through. The tragic muse who normally grapples with so serious an enterprise is here seen surrendering her privilege in favour of her rival, the muse of comedy, who accepts the opportunity with a daring and demonstrates her possibilities in the hands of a consummate practitioner of art. ...

Artistically speaking, may be, this calls for a greater degree of detachment and far subtler means on the part of the author than what is at the disposal of the tragic artist. But what it gains in detachment it loses in intensity and capacity for profound engagement — the strength of tragic art. But to penetrate areas clearly outside the bounds of tragedy and sensitize us to the possibilities of the commonplace for the apprehension of reality can only be the privilege of comic art. And it is a rare privilege of Narayan to use the comic mode to prove the highest kind of reality ...#99

Narayan is keenly observant of his tiger-protagonists reaction to humanity, and of humanity's unwitting revelation of itself as it seeks to make of the tiger-protagonist, a performing artist. "Stepping into human society was a thoughtless act" (p.26) for Raja, whose initiation into it comes by way of a trap cunningly laid out for him. Meanwhile, the reader is given an updated history of Captain and his inheritance, the "Dadhaji Grand Circus". Nothing in
Raja’s earlier life had never prepared him for the mental and physical isolation that is to follow. As Raja gets closer to men he finds possible links with them:

For one used to the grand silence of the jungle, the noisy nature of humanity was distressing. In due course, I got used to it. When I imbibed my Master’s lessons, I realized that deep within I was not different from human beings, and I got into their habit myself and never had a moment’s silence or stillness of mind — I was either talking (in my own way, inaudibly) or listening, and thus became fully qualified to enter human society. (p.39)

It becomes ironical that the pre-requisite for entering human society would be the verbal ability to expound at great length. This is an aspect of human nature that at first confuses Raja, whose world consists of the two-dimensional extremes of action and inaction. However, he soon realises that disorder and confusion are the hallmarks of life in Malgudi, reflected as it is in the madness surrounding his practice sessions with Captain, in which the ultimate act that he is forced to perform is, to alternatively drink milk from the same saucer with a goat. Captain is the quintessential achiever whose business acumen is as sound as his interest in the animals that bring profit to him:

The most strenuous part of their lives was during the training period. At that stage he was unsparing; and if they perished during the training, he took it as an inevitable risk of his trade. Once they were trained to perform, he viewed them as his assets to be protected, his
own prosperity depending on their welfare. (p.59)

Raja's perception of Captain is of a good manager and a dedicated professional. He has a flair for showmanship,

'... It's a sequence of precise acts, timed properly, which sense of time is displayed uncannily by Raja. He will go through the act with precision, and finish the sequence as befits a country dedicated to non-violence, with the sip of milk in the company of a goat. ...' (p.63)

which never stands in the way of any blunder that may be committed by his performers. When Raja nips off the goat's head, Captain clears up the mess with remarkable deftness and alacrity, never for a moment allowing the show to be held up. A "mixture of pleasure and shame" (p.12) inevitably accompanies every memorable recollection that Raja makes of his own past. As he is bent upon discovering himself, he remaps his past as accurately as possible. The sense of immediacy is never lost as Raja re-lives each incident and recreates each character as he appears to him. Captain becomes an important aspect of his past, an important influence upon him before his tutelage to the Tiger-Hermit. Captain is characteristically Malgudian in outlook, as close to Raja as is permissible in such a violent relationship.

... The ways of Captain were mysterious. Whatever he had in mind, he seemed to be able to express it only through violence. How I wished that he could speak my language or I his. There was no meeting ground between us, but still we had so
much to do with each other all the time. That was the irony of fate. Captain was convinced that if he bellowed deafeningly I'd understand, stupid fellow, although I had to admire him for several reasons. (p.55)

The Tiger-Hermit may be identified with Captain to the extent that he too was once engaged in the daily pursuit of a livelihood. Raja too may be identified with Captain through a past that is inextricably tied up with him. Captain is portrayed as a successful master acquiring an excellent reputation in the limited circles of Malgudi:

He had done something original and really creative in the annals of circus and no one could repeat or imitate his programme; the success was entirely due to Captain's genius. (p.64)

If the book were to end with death, the death of Captain, there would be no symbolic meaning attached to Raja's life. Since the spiritual topography of the novel lies in the depiction of the inner life of a tiger who is attempting to penetrate the perennial question "Who am I?", (p.12) Captain's tragic death is not the pivotal point in the book. Structurally and thematically, however, it is important in so far as it secures freedom for Raja and permits him a view of man denied to him in captivity:

... As he stooped down to caress me with its tip, I just raised a forepaw, taking care to retract my claws, and knocked the thing out of hand. The blow caught Captain under his chin, and tore off his head. It was surprising that such a flimsy creature, no better than a
membrane stretched over some thin framework, with so little stuff inside, should have held me in fear so long. (pp.99-100)

There is a degree of clinical detachment in the retelling which allows him to observe Captain's gradual "corruption through contact with the film world". (p.95) He becomes uncharacteristically "submissive" and takes orders from Madan and the Cameraman, "my Captain blindly carrying out ... orders, whipping, hitting and yelling" and losing his "grip over himself and his self-respect". (p.97) This is how Captain vents his frustration upon Raja who would have "spoken" to him if he could and given him timely warning. "But he was drunk with authority" and could not "save himself". (p.99) The confrontation is brief and decisive, ending Raja's enslavement forever. It has already been mentioned that Captain is characteristically Malgudian firmly rooted to its realities. At the allegorical level, this is a phase in the life of Raja depicting his bondage to the material world and the intransigency of all physical reality. As the tempo of Captain's slave driving tactics steps up, Raja becomes perversely affected by it, and, as violence begets violence in a natural way, it forces Captain to pay for it with his life. Captain's impingement upon Raja's freedom is a violation of all natural order, its natural culmination being disorder and strife at the microcosmic and the macrocosmic level. Raja, unperturbed by the senseless
destruction that he has brought about enters "Market Road" at a busy hour. This marks his allegorical entry into a new phase of life altogether. His soul, as yet unanchored to the truth seeks respite for a while and as he advances deeper into the city, he sends people scuttling away from him. This testifies to the irony of men trying to run away from the consequences of their own actions and turns the situation into the kind of comedy that has unobtrusively marked Narayan's depiction of Malgudian life. Raja continues his monologue within the narrative describing the collective fear that seizes them. In his typically detached observation of everything that happens, he has a dig at the humans who have always considered themselves superior to all other creatures:

... I'm not out to kill ... I'm too full

... Tigers attack only when they feel hungry, unlike human beings who slaughter one another without purpose or hunger ...

(pp.101-102)

With the entry of the Tiger-Hermit at this point in the narrative, it takes a different turn altogether. An assorted crowd gathers in the school where Raja has just sought shelter, discussing ways and means of getting rid of him, and of rescuing the Headmaster. The Tiger-Hermit is also in their midst and he answers the queries that are put before him in his own mysterious way. At first, this misleads the reader into categorising him as a "crazy beggar" as the others do:
'... Who are you?'
'You are asking a profound question. I've no idea who I am. All my life I have been trying to find the answer. Are you sure you know who you are?'
'Crazy beggar ... there is no time for useless talk ...'. (p.103)

The full import of his words may only be discovered later on in the narrative. From now onwards his presence more articulate than words, works upon the disorderly bunch that presumes to be able to bring order to an unusual situation. The Tiger-Hermit lacks the "normal or social identity" and appears at the "fringes of the social order". A recluse by choice he is one of those "marginal or liminal people" who inhabit Narayan's fiction. He is a stranger to others, but himself no stranger to the bourgeois values of Malgudi. He evidently understands each character's motive for action and passively remains in the background until such time as he is needed. The events preceding his rescue of Raja reflects Narayan's ability to exploit the comic and the ironic:

'We have no ladder in this school', he said timidly.
'Do you mean to say', Alphonse asked contemptuously, 'that you run a school like this without a ladder?'
'What is a ladder for in a teaching institution?' questioned the assistant headmaster in a foolhardy manner.
'Don't be impudent', said Alphonse, glaring at him, at which the assistant headmaster took fright and tried to mollify him by saying, 'Headmaster requisitioned for one last year but the D.P.I.'s office are holding up the
sanction. Unless they sanction the budget, we can't even buy a pin ...' (p.110)

Alphonse proves to be a serious deterrent to the Tiger-Hermit's plans for rescuing Raja. He is characterised by his voluble talk and drunken ways.

'If I had four arms like some of your gods', said Alphonse from the roof, 'I would not have needed the help of these young people. Two of my hands would have pulled the tiles out, while the other two might have been holding the gun and triggering off the shot. ... And then he proceeded to remove a few tiles and asked the boys to follow his example. They tore up the tiles with zest and threw them down recklessly, enjoying the sight of their elders dodging below. (p.113)

He is zealously egotistical in his mission, bribing the "Save Tiger Project" officials in order to be allowed to shoot Raja as he was "known to be engaged in a flourishing business exporting tiger skins". (p.118) At the ordinary level of daily transactions the comic and the ironic infuses the narrative with a pedestrian sense of life maintaining all the while a measure of deep tolerance for everything human. The Tiger-Hermit is no less human than Alphonse and the Captain. This we get to know later on in the story when isolated with Raja in the Mempi jungle, he is visited and identified by his wife of Malgudian days. When she questions him in an attempt to bring him back, his candid answer to her conclusively puts away all sense of a personal past and of personal attachments:
'Listen attentively, my past does not exist for me, nor a future. I live for the moment, and that awareness is enough for me. To attain this state, I have gone through much hardship. I don't have to explain all that now. I have erased from my mind my name and identity and all that it implies. It would be unthinkable to slide back. You must live your own life and leave me to live mine and end it my own way. (p.148)

Raja overhears them and begins to understand the struggle involved in that voluntary surrender of the personal self to the cosmic self. Since the Tiger-Hermit himself was once a veritable Malgudian he displays great compassion for Raja's servitude to the senses. Meanwhile, Raja's inner journey to real selfhood begins the moment he is in the vicinity of his Master, the Tiger-Hermit. "My Master's presence in the vicinity, though he had not come near me yet, must have begun to affect one". (p.118) The aura of his presence has already affected several others who have been confounded by him. Alphonse has had all his senses de-activated by the Tiger-Hermit's powers of auto-suggestion and his plans for killing Raja are completely foiled. The Tiger-Hermit has attained a degree of self-consciousness which has heightened his powers of perception giving him a spiritual edge over others. In the introduction Narayan explains how the genuine sannyasi attains certain powers:

... During certain yogic practices, eight kinds of supernatural powers may be roused ... But such magical powers are
considered to be stages in one's evolution, incidental powers acquired on the way, to be ignored and not exercised for profit or self-promotion, except to mitigate pain or suffering in others. (p.9)

It may be observed that the Tiger-Hermit has no personal gains whatsoever in his rescue of Raja, except for a disinterested commitment to the principles of non-violence, the spirit of which has been ironically travestied by Raja's annihilation of the goat and by Captain's pursuit of power at the cost of animal life. Into a confused world of circus masters, film-makers and self-styled educationists is brought the alien presence of an ascetic calmly interposing for the soul of a tiger. If one were to understand the significance of the Tiger-Hermit one would have to accept the transformation of Raja as an important manifestation of his powers. Raja is neither compelled to obey him nor restricted from pursuing his old way of life. In his new found freedom, however, he finds himself more disposed to listening to his Master talk, than to taking up his old life-style once again.

The latter part of the book is filled with the presence of the Tiger-Hermit. For the time being as he sojourns at the "foot of Mempi Range", Raja has the advantage of a companion who does not treat him "as an animal which sat before him in respectful silence trying to understand his words", but of one who is "trying to transform" him in "so many ways". (p.137) He is the exemplar of human equilibrium, as far away
from friction and conflict as Raja now is, from his old mercenary self. There is a symbolic change of setting and a symbolic change of environment in the backdrop of the Mempi Jungle where the Tiger-Hermit chooses his temporary abode beneath a "rock jutting over a ledge". (p.136) A sense of stillness and peace now seems to be within reach of Raja himself. Talk goes on as before, but it is not the ceaseless babble of words that was the norm in Captain’s circus and in Madan’s film-world. Conversation is marked by meaningful discourses on God and on life with sufficient time for meditation. The narrative takes on a deeply reflective tone suggestive of Raja’s figurative withdrawal from his old self.

... Nowadays the keeness of my hunger was also gone, and I slipped away into the jungle, not too often, only when I felt I could not stand hunger anymore ... I ... stalked the littlest game, just sufficient enough to satisfy my hunger of the moment and not my gluttony. (p.137-138)

There is within him a growing sense of responsibility for his own actions; a heightened awareness of, and an appreciation of his natural surroundings, which the Tiger-Hermit interprets as "poetic joy", the kind of which one would associate with a sensitive poet. "Looking back, I would say that in one of your previous births you might have been a poet, and your deeper personality retains that Vasana still". (p.143) Layer upon layer of his outer self is gradually being
stripped away for Raja's edification. Reality for him now consists of an apprehension of the cyclic pattern of change moving towards resolution. As the basics of Hindu philosophy is being imparted to him there is a visible sense of release for Raja. He no longer seeks to define himself by outward action but through a process of "realization" allows for the "growth" (p.138) of the inner self. His relationship with his Master, the Tiger-Hermit, bears superficial comparison with the Manolin-Santiago relationship in The Old Man and the Sea. It follows the pattern of the teacher-disciple relationship. Raja's Master is a guru in the real sense of the word, respectful of another's physical identity but with an intuitional understanding of the inner life of all creatures. Having himself achieved a level of consciousness higher than normal, he displays a disciplined tolerance for human folly of all kinds and uses his mental powers to serve the ends of his own faith; which is that of rehabilitating the soul of a physical tiger, helping him discover his inner spiritual element. He is able to establish an unseen rapport with him, thereby proving the authenticity of his yogic powers to the reader, especially as they have been harnessed for a greater good.

A true understanding of the meanings implicit in a tiger's quest for selfhood lies in apprehending the allegorical significance of the story. At its simplest level
it reads like an animal fable but one that is curiously alive with perception and observation. At the allegorical level, it relates to issues that are genuinely metaphysical. It opens up avenues of experience that requires the reader to be able to look beyond the surface reality of all things, to be able to see, as the Tiger-Hermit does into the soul of things. At the beginning Raja is hardly impressive. This may be the reason why Narayan allows him to spin the story of his life, an aesthetic means of recasting philosophy in the ordinary language of everyday life. Seemingly, Narayan takes a back seat view of his tiger-protagonist who relates everything that he observes in as simple and as deliberate a manner as possible. The characterising elements of Narayan’s comedy give momentum to the personal memoir of a tiger-protagonist who is but a fictional embodiment of the aspirant to the Hindu way of life. Allegorically, Raja’s initial “cave-dwelling” instincts are the equivalent of the primal instincts of the undeveloped soul. Gayatri Acharya and Anita Desai see his passage through the jungle, the circus, his ultimate apprenticeship to the Tiger-Hermit and his incarceration at the zoo, as allegorical stepping stones of the soul on its way to fulfilment. One cannot help interpreting Raja’s sojourns allegorically, of actually seeing him as an embodiment of the soul on its way to finding itself. However, one has to remind oneself of Narayan’s
critique of human egotism which always places man at the centre of the universe, "... Man assumes he is all-important, that all else in creation exists only for his sport, amusement, comfort or nourishment", (p.8) and which forbids him from recognising the essential validity of any other living creature. Contrary to popular fiction which bestows importance only on man, Narayan "wished to examine what the result would be if" he "made a tiger the central character in a novel". (p.8) Raja’s story might read like a fabulous tale, but it is grounded in Narayan’s talent for story telling. As the "story teller" himself, he owes it to his audience to entertain them with stories that are "fragrant" with the truth, using the utmost skill to make them interesting. His audience may be simple village folk who gather round the story-teller after a hard day’s work expectantly waiting for mental succour, or they may be educated folks of a modern world. The story succeeds in conveying its meaning at different levels. It is both an animal fable and a parable of the mystiques of Hindu philosophy, using common narrative forms that may be easily understood. It may also be read as an allegorical rendering of the pursuit of the Hindu way of life. Whichever way one may look at it, one must never however lose sight of Narayan’s original intention, of it being a story about a tiger. That the tiger should resemble man’s inner self, that
he should be made to recognise his potential for spiritual
growth is a feat of imagination achieved only through
Narayan's ability to characterise the Tiger-Hermit who gives
credibility to the tiger's soul, actually assisting it in
finding God through its own ways. He represents a culminating
point in Hindu metaphysics, humanised through his deliberate
intervention in the preservation of Raja's soul. Narayan does
not dwell too long on the Tiger-Hermit's antecedents but the
reader knows that he too had once lived "by the clock ... an anxious to be treated as a respectable man in society".
(p.139) Like Raja, but in a different sense, he too was once engaged in intense physical activity, until such time as the senselessness of such activities weighed him down; that became his moment of renunciation. The Tiger-Hermit trusts Raja with his own past. Others are kept wondering about him, "let us forget him and his tiger. Something uncanny about him ...". (p.133) Even his wife is sent away unacknowledged by him. These prove to be authentic facts of the Tiger-Hermit's detachment from life. Narayan builds up a legend of the Tiger-Hermit through conversation and hearsay, important vehicles of communication in Malgudi, which obliterates the truth about him. Only Raja knows who he is; an ironic comment on humanity itself, for it proves itself unable to accept the truth as spontaneously as Raja. In his adoption of a central animal figure, Narayan has had to go back to a

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literary past in order to incorporate a form for his narrative which in a universal sense speaks of the intractable heart of man. This he achieves by using an animal to measure the spiritual lack in man.

The tiger is indeed an important character in a Hindu milieu where "Narayan seems to be saying that not only is the universe basically one, but that animals too may attain spiritual growth and eventual release from the cycle of rebirths without assuming human form. To think that they must is merely one of man's more egotistical delusions." Raja's acceptability as an important dimension of the philosophy of life posited by the Tiger-Hermit, would also depend upon the reader's ability to allegorise his very existence. Despite his claims for writing a novel solely about a tiger, Narayan does work towards a consolidation of a specific world order manifested through the Tiger-Hermit, a character whose past has common links with Captain and Madan. In the final reckoning the identities of Master and Tiger anticipate a coalescence of values which will submerge all physical distinctions. Though their personalities are not completely integrated, Raja anticipates just that as he patiently waits for his Master at the zoo. The allegory of the soul waiting to be united with its Master is only just subtly hinted at in the end. "'Both of us will shed our forms soon and perhaps we could meet again, who knows?' ..."
It is a question that remains unanswered in Raja’s lifetime. It merely hints at a visionary sense of the future that Raja must learn to accept as he makes the final move from his natural habitat, the Mempi Jungle, to the zoo. Linear time has been replaced by a sense of cyclic time, and by a redefinition of roles and objectives. Ironically, his identity lies buried in a past which must be revived in order that wholeness of vision may be achieved by him. In his old age there is hope for new beginnings. Allegorically, the end portrays a complete withdrawal from, and a total renunciation of the physical. Though imprisoned within the zoo Raja’s mental horizon has increased considerably to the extent that the question "‘Who am I?’" (p.12) becomes the absorbing interest of his old age. No definitions are proffered but as the novel reaches its conclusion, identification with Raja becomes progressively easier. The reader too has had his values overhauled and his spiritual insight sharpened by the Tiger-Hermit’s systematic elucidation of “the profound Hindu conviction, or instinct for, the fundamental oneness of existence” which “operates in harmony with a quick feeling for the instantaneous present: an appreciation of the multiple and dispersed nature of existence.” Thus he bids the anticipatory “goodbye for the present” (p.152) to Raja, who must discover for himself the spiritual ideal which is based upon inner perception rather than outward form.
Symbolically and allegorically, his incarceration at the zoo is a necessary phase of introspection, an ultimate weaning away of Raja's soul from its physical attachment to the Tiger-Hermit, obligatory upon it before it is able to realize its own cosmic potential.

When one re-reads the book and meets Raja in the introductory paragraphs once again, one is distinctly aware of the criticality of Raja's position. He is still in search of a spiritual identity, the allegorical self searching for its soul as it were. This may not at first have been easily discernible to him, but as he moves through a steady process of inner growth he symbolically moves towards a stage where he will "shed" his outer "form" (p.152) and leave all appearances behind. The strength of the novel lies in its ability to suggest a way of life and a means of communication with one's inner self. Raja's spiritual diary begins where it should, from the outer to the inner, from society to self, from comedy to philosophy, from factual truth to psychic revelations. One finds oneself in disagreement with the critics who are of the view that

There seems to be a rush to finish, with the result that at the end we are deprived of witnessing the process by which Raja attains his insight, a process which should be the central part of the work. In fact it is not. This critical stance would mean a serious imposition of one's expectations on a novel whose primary aim is that of
entertainment first, out of which would follow the moral or philosophical elucidation. That Narayan has been able to adapt to his story a humanised version of the tiger's struggle to find itself, speaks much of his ability to render the comic into an allegory of the self-animal or human-journeying to the inner depths of its soul. Allegorically speaking, Raja communicating to the reader in his old age at the zoo, is more spirit than tiger, more supra-human than sub-human. The novel has led the reader through his discriminatory view of tigers and of animals on the whole, to an acceptance of the underlying unity of all living creatures. Tiger and man are hence indistinguishable.

However much Narayan might grumble against "graduate students writing theses on me" because they always "try to read meanings into my books, trace a theme relate this character to that ..."55, the fact is that his work, especially _A Tiger for Malgudi_ has that combination of myth and fiction that allures the perceptive reader to its hidden fount of creativity which in William Walsh's words explains everything about the way Narayan perceives his universe and how it influences the narrative mode that he adopts:

The truth is that the Hindu Myths and religious parables ... are important not as theological scaffolding to the fiction but in being part of a whole economy of feeling itself sunk deep into the constitution of the novelist. These things are present and influential not as
dogma or metaphysics but as part of a mode of perception and a habit of reaction. They flow in and out of the writer’s thought and touch. The religious sense of Indian myth is part of Narayan’s grip of reality, of his particular view of human life and his individual way of placing and ordering human feeling and experience.

In the Hindu pattern of existence, therefore, Raja must be viewed as both an important entity in himself and as an allegorical extension of the soul as it seeks to shed its physical dimensions. What is important in the novel is that Narayan has been able to merge his comedy into a philosophical framework represented by the Tiger-Hermit which actually takes into account all aspects of Raja’s life, both physical and spiritual. Raja’s quest for selfhood parallels the universal quest for unity. The passage through life is an important means of spiritual education for the answer to Raja’s question “Who am I?” lies hidden in life itself. Understanding of it, but detachment from it, would naturally elevate one’s perception of higher truths. Raja’s growth is an allegorical replay of the spiritual growth that defines the soul on its way to finding release from the world of appearances. The narrative strategy that Narayan uses to portray this quest is the candid one of self-confession and of graduated self-realization. It not only works on the simple level of the animal fable, but works at the level of allegory and has the allegorical and symbolic dimensions of a
complex fictional work which is deeply representative of Narayan's Indian imagination with its immense capacity for perceiving hidden realities.
END NOTES


3. Ibid., p.49. Ref. also to: "Beowulf's Beast Grendel" (Review), *Times Literary Supplement* (July 14, 1972), p.793.


19. Ibid., p.53.

21. Ibid., p.178.
29. Ibid. p.117. Ref. also: John Gardner, p.35.
31. Ibid., p.68.
33. Ibid., p.88.
34. Ibid., p.94.
38. Ibid., p.3.


47. Ibid., p.137.


