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Bull's Eye: Jim Corbett's Quintessential Dramatic Narrative

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Abstract : Jim Corbett's powerful dramatic narrative in his matchless trilogy comprising *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag* and *The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon* evokes the readers' strong feelings of pity and fear. The violent depredations of the ruthless man-eaters are presented visually. Then Corbett depicts the spine-chilling feeling of terror that shrouds a territory under the shadow of a man-eater. And finally, the climactic section deals with the heart-stopping pursuit and hunt of the villain of each episode--the man-eater, while the constant undercurrent of humour provides the much needed comic relief to the readers from time to time.

***IndexTerms*:** amphitheatre of the hills, dramatic narrative, feelings of pity and fear

The dramatic narrative which constitutes the core of Jim Corbett's remarkable books on man-eater hunting-- *Man-Eaters of Kumaon, The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag* and *The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon*--comprises three powerful and moving sections which evoke the readers' strong feelings of pity, fear, and satisfaction at the eventual dispensation of justice and restoration of order. These three sections begin with the one which visually presents the violent depredations of the ruthless man-eaters; then there are the passages wherein Corbett depicts the spine-chilling feeling of terror that dogs a territory under the shadow of a man-eater; and finally, the climactic section which deals with the heart-stopping pursuit and hunt of the villain of each episode--the man-eater.

The dramatic effect of the narrative is intensified manifold in the scenes wherein the daredevil hunter becomes the hunted as circumstances turn against him. The complications in the plot often lead to a dramatic reversal of roles between the hunter and the hunted which subjects the readers to a severe shock, making them deeply anxious about the well-being of the messianic hero. Everyone heaves a sigh of relief as, finally, each malefactor is accounted for. Thus, through his powerful dramatic narrative Corbett succeeds in achieving something similar to the sublimating effect of the Greek tragedy, postulated by Aristotle as *catharsis* in the *Poetics*. Aristotle suggests that the pity and fear aroused in the audience by the action are purged or released and the audience experiences a cleansing of those emotions and a sense of relief that the action is over. In case of Corbett's dramatic narrative, the basic emotions of pity and fear are supplemented by a wide range of other responses including compassion, admiration, foreboding, dread, awe, and terror.

Further, the sustained current of humour which runs through Corbett's trilogy is an integral part of his narrative scheme—in addition to being a strong and clear manifestation of his optimistic persona, it also carries out the important function of providing the much-needed comic relief to the readers from the relentless and excruciating tension of the dramatic narrative. Part of the pleasure of reading the comic interludes in Corbett's dramatic narrative comes from witnessing the eventual triumph of normative behaviour, Spartan integrity of character, and noble ideas over a life-threatening menace from the abnormal. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren point out in *Theory of Literature* the magical sublimation of unpalatable material by art (of which phenomenon Jim Corbett's trilogy is a notable example), "art ennobles…life… by giving aesthetic distance, by shaping and articulating, [it] makes that pleasant to contemplate which would be painful to experience or even, in life, to witness" (213).

Pointing out the life-like quality of theatre in his book *The Essential Theatre* Oscar G. Brockett writes, "…theatre can be said to resemble life because of the complexity of its means, for like a scene from life itself it is made up of intermingled sound, movement, place, dress, lighting and so on" (9). Corbett's dramatic narrative liberally partakes of all of these attributes of theatre except lighting as he makes use of the various shades and hues of natural light of the sun and the moon rather than electrical lights. The only exceptions are the traditional torches made of pinewood used in the frightening nocturnal hunt of the charging Panar man-eater, and the little torch strapped to his gun while shooting down the Rudraprayag leopard on a pitch-dark night, from his position high up on the branches of a tree. Corbett integrates various components of dramatic art into his dramatic narrative including the size and form of the stage itself (the vast forest), the set (varying natural settings for individual episodes), and lighting (shades of natural light as well as absolute darkness). By doing so, Corbett succeeds in enacting the dramatic action in his very own "amphitheatre of the hills"—a suggestive coinage employed by him in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* (21).

Rene Wellek and Austin Warren make a significant observation about the polemical relationship between narrative and drama in *Theory of Literature*:

> A word should be said about the word 'narrative', which, as applied to fiction, should imply the contrast of enacted fiction, i.e. drama. A story, or fable, can be represented by mimes, or it can be narrated by a single teller, who will be the epic teller, or one of his successors….But the chief pattern of narrative is its inclusiveness: it intersperses scenes in dialogue (which might be acted) with summary accounts of what is happening. (215-16)

Wellek and Warren cite an example of this blending of the elements of drama and fiction by novelists, "The first two chapters of *Pride and Prejudice* are almost exlusively dialogue, while the third chapter opens with narrative summary, then returns to the 'scenic' mode" (304). In his dramatic narrative, Corbett also liberally blends the stylistic elements of drama and fiction.

Wellek and Warren further establish an important relationship between description and narration as they observe:

> Attention to setting—the literary element of description as distinguished from narration—would at first thought seem to differentiate 'fiction' from drama; our second thought, however, would rather make it matter of period. Detailed attention to setting, whether in drama or the novel, is Romantic or Realistic….Romantic description aims at establishing and maintaining a mood: plot and characterization are … dominated by tone… Naturalistic description is a seeming … documentation …. (220-21)

Jim Corbett blends Romantic and Naturalistic descriptions in his dramatic narrative in order to create the dramatic nuances of the mood, setting and the overall spectacle; and to describe and establish factually the all-important setting where the absorbing dramatic action would unfold before our eyes.

Mansfred Pfister identifies the multimedial nature of dramatic text presentation as a criterion which distinguishes between drama and other literary forms in his book *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*. He points out, "As a 'performed' text, drama, in contrast to purely literary texts, makes use not only of verbal, but also of acoustic and visual codes. It is a synaesthetic text" (7). Truly, the most powerful feature of dramatic literature is its three-dimensional visibility and audibility. Dramatic performance and live enactment of scenes play a significant role in conveying the meaning and total emotional impact of a play to the audience. In this context Marjorie Boulton observes in her book *The Anatomy of Drama*:

> A play is not really a piece of literature for reading. A true play is three-dimensional; it is literature that walks and talks before our eyes. It is not intended that the eye shall perceive marks on paper and the imagination turn them into sights, sound and action; the text of the play is meant to be translated into sights, sound and actions which occur literally and physically on a stage. (3)

It is a major achievement of Jim Corbett that through his dramatic narrative he succeeds in imaginatively connecting the reader to the scene of action and almost 'showing' him the events through a three-dimensional, live enactment.

Pfister laments the failure on part of critics to give due importance to the composite multimedial nature of dramatic texts, leading to a fractured appreciation of these texts:

> First, the multimedial unity of the dramatic text was disrupted by the institutionalized separation of research into literary and theatre studies. The consequence of this was a strong bias towards either the printed page or its presentation on stage. Secondly, important new developments in literary analysis, such as Russian Formalism and New Criticism, with their preoccupation with language theory, have neglected a genre whose expressive qualities are not exclusively verbal—namely drama. (2)

Pfister further points out that dramatic texts may be distinguished from epic or narrative texts in that they are consistently restricted to the representative mode, the author never allowing himself to speak directly. Consequently, "whilst the receiver of a dramatic text feels directly confronted with the characters represented, in narrative texts they are mediated by a more or less concrete narrator figure" (3). Pfister then makes a remarkable observation which provides a valuable insight into the discourse of Jim Corbett's dramatic narrative, "the modern form of personal narrative reflects a reduction of the mediating communication system and thus an approximation of narrative to drama" (4). In his dramatic narrative Corbett deliberately pushes his overtly discursive narrative persona into the background and projects the mood, setting, and action into the foreground in order to step up the pace and enhance the effect of the narrative. Through this technique, Corbett builds up a powerful sense of immediacy in the action. Pfister highlights the value of such real-time like immediacy of action in drama as he observes, "This temporal immediacy of dramatic presentation is one of the prerequisites for its physical enactment on stage" (5). On the other hand, in narrative texts the time-scale of the narrative is eclipsed by the time-scale of the process of narration, which distances the narrative into the past.

Drama often employs the techniques of prose narrative while effecting exposition in the beginning of the play. Carl H. Claus points out in *Elements of Literature* that dramatic action always takes place within a specific context–a background in time and place without which it cannot be properly understood. In order to bring about this understanding, drama turns to the narrative techniques of the short story. Thus he writes, "The most obvious form of this storytelling occurs at the beginning of plays, and is appropriately called exposition because it sets forth and explains in a manner typical of narrative" (780). Exposition in Corbett's dramatic narrative establishes the mood, alongside providing information about the world of action. Corbett's exposition in each episode reveals crucial information about the public state of affairs which prepares the necessary background for understanding the breath-taking action that the exposition sets forth in motion.

Carl H. Claus further points out that drama often employs yet another element of narration—retrospection—as he writes:

> Related to exposition is another narrative device, called retrospection. Often, during the process of action, characters look back and survey significant events that took place well before the time of the play; and when this happens, drama is again using an element of narration. Sometimes retrospection may lead to major revelations about the characters and the motivations for the behavior….(780)

A notable example of retrospection in Jim Corbett's trilogy is the "Author's Note" to *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* in which he presents a sympathetic but logical insight into the unfortunate phenomenon of predators turning man-eaters. This highly valuable piece of retrospective writing provides the ideological basis to Jim Corbett's dual identity as hunter-conservationist.

Speaking about the etymology of the word "drama", Carl H. Klaus points out that it comes from a Greek word meaning "thing done" (773). Oscar G. Brockett also observes in his book *The Essential Theatre* that a play is a representation of "man in action" (16). Thus, action is the soul of drama. This quintessential dynamic attribute of drama characterises Jim Corbett's dramatic narrative as well. Brokett highlights the desirable qualities of action, "Dramatic action should engage and maintain interest. The characters must excite the audience's curiosity; the situation must be compelling enough to arouse interest, the issues

vital enough to provoke concern, the visual or sound effects novel enough to attract attention" (17). The action of Corbett's trilogy fulfills all of these conditions.

Brockett further identifies two main methods of organizing dramatic action as he writes:

> Traditionally, the main organizational principle has been the *cause to effect arrangement of incidents*. Using this method, the playwright sets up in the opening scenes all of the necessary conditions—the situation, the desires and motivations of the characters—out of which later events develop. The goals of one character come into conflict with those of another, or two conflicting desires within the same character may lead to a crisis. Attempts to surmount the obstacles make up the substance of the play, each scene growing logically out of preceding ones.
>
> Less often, a dramatist uses a *character* as the principal source of unity. Such a play may dramatize the life of a historical figure or a purely fictional one. (17)

Corbett blends these two methods for controlling and developing the action of his dramatic narrative.

Corbett employs dramatic methods and conventions to strengthen his dramatic narrative. As already mentioned, the beginning of each episode involves exposition, or the setting forth of information about earlier events, the identity of the characters (including the titular antagonist of each episode), and the present situation. Corbett presents the previous events in a condensed form for the readers' benefit, and actually "shows" only the final parts of his stories. Corbett's beginnings also include an inciting incident, an occurrence that sets the main action in motion. The inciting incident invariably leads to the central dramatic question around which the entire narrative is organised. The middle of Corbett's dramatic narrative is always composed of a series of complications, again in the manner of a play. Brockett observes, "A complication is any new element which changes the direction of the action—the discovery of new information… or the arrival of a character" (19). It may also be caused due to an unexpected move on the part of the antagonist or an unforeseen change of circumstances at the scene of action, for instance, an unexpected downpour or a storm. The series of complications culminates in the crisis, or turning point of the action. The end or the final portion of a play, often called the resolution or denouement, extends from the crisis to the final curtain. Jim Corbett's resolutions bring the situation back to a state of normalcy which fully satisfies the expectations of the readers.

Perhaps the central requirement of dramatic technique is to achieve concentration of emotion which generates intense excitement among the audience. As observed by Marjorie Boulton, the unities of Place and Time may contribute to the concentration of emotion (13), while concentration of action "is achieved through the essential Unity of the Action and the speed with which it moves" (16). The Unity of Action is necessary if the play is to hold the audience continuously. The compact unity of Time, Place and Action in Corbett's dramatic narrative provides it with an outstanding appeal which continues to charm modern generations of readers.

Writing about drama as a literary genre, Robert Di Yanni makes a significant observation in *Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and the Essay*, "Like fiction, drama possesses a narrative dimension: a play often narrates a story in the form of a plot" (843). Plot is the structure of a play's action. Corbett controls our expectations about what is happening through his episodic plots. He decides when to present action and information, what to reveal and what to conceal. By a strategic arrangement of incidents, he creates suspense, evokes laughter, causes anxiety, or elicits surprise. One of our main sources of pleasure in Corbett's plots is surprise, whether we are shown something we did not expect or whether we see how something will happen even when we may know what will happen. Frequently surprise follows suspense—fulfilling our need to find out what will happen as we wait for the resolution of each episode's action. The real challenge of Corbett's dramatic narrative is that it has to deeply arouse, engage and continuously sustain the interest of the readers. He meets this challenge through his plots which are built around events that quickly develop complication and suspense, and lead in turn to a climax and resolution.

Thus Corbett's dramatic narrative is fortified by his compact plots in which the action unfolds in a very short time and, as it were, before the eyes of an audience. As Marjorie Boulton points out, "Any good plot is closely constructed; that is, no time is wasted and the events follow one another in credible sequence" (42). Corbett's plots work out in a pattern of cause and effect. They have an organic unity, that is, all the actions, speeches, thoughts, and observations are inextricably linked to make up an entirety. The essence of this unity of plot is the development and resolution of the conflict, in which the protagonist is engaged in a death-defying struggle against a fearsome antagonist—a crafty man-eater at large. The adventurous huntings, each an episode, which is an independent tale, are further unified by the figure of the hero. As a result, Corbett's dramatic narrative creates a powerful, single and lasting impression on the reader.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one of the major sources of the unique power of drama is spectacle comprising the audio-visual elements. In this context, Carl H. Claus makes some insightful observations in *Elements of Literature*:

> The magic of theater, its ability to conjure up even such incredible characters as the Ghost in *Hamlet*, or the Witches in *Macbeth*, or Death in *Everyman*, depends on the power of spectacle. And by spectacle we mean all the sights and sounds of performance—the slightest twitch or the boldest thrust of a sword, the faintest whisper or the loudest cry. Spectacle, in short, is the means by which the fictional world of a play is brought to life in the theater. When we witness a play, our thoughts and feelings are provoked as much by the spectacle as by the words themselves. (774)

In his dramatic narrative Corbett evokes the power of spectacle in a masterly fashion as he invests sights and sounds with dramatic connotations—the brutalized bodies of the victims of the man-eaters, the gory corpses of the man-eaters themselves, the calls of the "jungle folk"—each of these adds up to the overall effect of the narrative in a dramatic manner. Corbett skilfully interlaces the various components that make up the total spectacle: setting, blocking (here the relative positions of the hunter and the man-eater in each encounter), movement, gestures, intonation, and pace of the tempo of action. Through these dramatic devices, Corbett succeeds in imparting the feel of enactment to his dramatic narrative with the result that the readers imaginatively enter the world of action and by doing so they not only understand, but also experience, its meaning.

Highlighting the importance of dialogue in plays, Robert Di Yanni observes, "dialogue in plays typically has three major functions—to advance the plot, to establish setting (the time and place of the action), and to reveal character" (872). Interestingly, in Corbett's dramatic narrative, dialogue is innovatively substituted by the meaningful calls of the "jungle folk" as well as other sounds of the jungle such as breaking of a twig under a man-eater's paw or a hoax call by the hunter to entice and trap the

antagonist. Corbett punctuates his dramatic narrative with sounds involving human beings, animals as well as wind and other elements of nature. These sound and sights are introduced and employed by Corbett at strategic points in the narrative in order to perform the various functions of dialogue.

Dramatic texts have the potential to activate all channels of the human senses. A vast majority of dramatic texts exhibit a clear preference for the visual and acoustic channels, but Corbett makes a unique and crucial use of the lack of the sense of smell in tigers and leopards by making his strategic moves with the help of wind-direction, as also mentioned in the foregoing chapter. Thus while reading Corbett's dramatic narrative the readers have to activate their visual as well as aural imagination. An increased imaginative alertness to the sights and sounds of the narrative enhances the experience of the reading as it helps the reader to grasp the subtle nuances of the world of the narrative.

Playwrights reveal character in many ways including descriptions in stage directions, prefaces, or other explanatory material not part of the dialogue; through what the character says; and most importantly, through what he does. Corbett makes use of most of these dramatic techniques to characterise the protagonist and the bestial antagonists of his trilogy. Brockett opines, "The best dramatic characters are usually easily recognizable types with some unusual or complex qualities" (20). Jim Corbett, the protagonist of the trilogy, is a remarkable example of this category of characters. He is an "easily recognizable" type of character of colonial India—a white sahib who is also a *shikari* (hunter). His "unusual or complex qualities" include his unparalleled love and concern for the poor natives as well as his profound insight into the indigenous cultural values of India. Corbett's rare and endearing qualities of character are quietly but clearly revealed as the momentous action unfolds in each episode.

Costumes often reveal the characters beneath them. For instance, in G.B. Shaw's *Arms and the Man* Sergius's elaborate uniform, weighted with decorations, hints at his self-importance and dubious heroism. Jim Corbett's simple and unassuming attire contrasts dramatically with Sergius's ornate costume; it clearly suggests his naturalness, simplicity and lack of pretension inspite of being a much-decorated hero of the two world wars.

Sometimes physical objects that appear in a play have the potential to become important dramatic symbols. Such objects evoke the dramatic aura of the play, serving as forms of visual shorthand for dramatic realities. Two simple but potent dramatic symbols used by Corbett in his dramatic narrative are his tent and gun. The tent suggests the man who occupies it to be a brave and simple man on the move, leading an ascetic-like life with a Spartan fortitude. The gun, far from being a symbol of imperial exploitation becomes an almost divine tool of retribution against the tormentors of the masses.

Creditably, Corbett does not resort to any kind of sensationalism in his dramatic narrative involving his conflict with dreaded man-eaters. Although his subject matter may appear to be extraordinary, exceptional or fantastic, his commitment to presenting truth imparts a gripping realism to the narrative. Feodore Dostoevsky's ideas about realism, recorded by Miriam Allot in her book *Novelists on the Novel* may be cited here to support Corbett's cause and how he avoids the dangerous pitfall of sensationalism in his trilogy:

> Arid observation of everyday trivialities I have long since ceased to regard as realism—it is quite the reverse. In any newspaper one takes up, one comes across reports of wholly authentic facts, which nevertheless strike one as extraordinary. Our writers regard them as fantastic, and take no account of them; and yet they are the truth, for they are facts. But who troubles to observe, record, describe them? (68)

Not only does Corbett take the trouble "to observe, record, describe" his extraordinary experiences, he also dramatizes them powerfully and vividly for the reader with full commitment to truth. Corbett's dramatic narrative steers clear of the libel of sensationalism as he meets the demands made by Anthony Trollope from the novelist, as recorded by Miriam Allot, "Let an author so tell his tale as to touch his reader's heart….Truth let there be—truth of description, truth of character…. If there be such truth, I do not know that a novel can be too sensational" (68).

The brutal suffering of the people in a man-eater country jolts the sensibilities of both the humanitarian narrator as well as the cosy arm-chair reader. After providing exposition by relating the woeful tale of one of the man-eater's victims in *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag*, Corbett adds somberly, "I could go on, for there were many kills, and each one has its own tragic story" (13). Often, a tragic poignancy springs from the narrator's painful awareness of his helplessness to save the victims of the depredations of a tiger or a leopard. For instance, he writes in *The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, "I very sincerely hope that no one who reads this story will ever be condemned to seeing and hearing the sufferings of a human being, or of any animal, that has had the misfortune of being caught by the throat by either a leopard or a tiger and not having the means—other than a bullet of alleviating or of ending the suffering" (68).

Corbett arouses the reader's feelings of pity by creating some powerful visual images of heart-breaking violent excesses of the antagonist of each episode. For instance, in *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag* There is a bizarre and scary word-picture of a victim—an elderly woman, "Lying huddled up between the steep bank and the rose-bush, with her head against the bank, with every vestige of clothing stripped from her, and with her naked body flecked with white rose-petals that had fallen from above was the kill—an old grey-haired lady, seventy years of age" (100). And there is yet another moving description of the severed leg of a young woman in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* which generates a powerful feeling of pathos in the reader's heart:

> … at the edge of the pool was an object which had puzzled me as I came down the watercourse, and which I now found was part of a human leg. In all the subsequent years I have hunted man-eaters, I have not seen anything as pitiful as that young comely leg – bitten off a little below the knee as clean as though severed by the stroke of an axe – out of which warm blood was trickling. (18)

In his "Author's Note" to *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* when Corbett mentions the sights "which would have caused a stone to weep" (xii), he is undoubtedly speaking of sights like these.

However, it is difficult for the modern urban reader to imagine the full extent of the fear and suffering of the victims of a man-eater. In *The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, a brave young man pulled his wife away from the jaws of an intruding man-eater and closed the door. Corbett reports, "For the rest of the night the man and his wife cowered in a corner of the room, while the leopard tried to tear down the door" (67). Corbett conveys the magnitude of terror that swept across the beautiful landscape of Garhwal through a strikingly dramatic juxtaposition in *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag*:

> Beyond the hills were rugged rock cliffs, down which avalanches roar in winter and early spring, and beyond and above the cliffs were the eternal snows, showing up against the intense blue sky as clear as if cut out of white cardboard. No more beautiful or peaceful scene could be imagined, and yet when the sun, now shining on the back of my head, set on the far side of the snow mountains terror which it is not possible to imagine until experienced—would grip, as it had done for eight long years, the area I was now overlooking. (121)

The superbly "beautiful or peaceful scene" is completely submerged under the ominous cover of terror as the sun descends behind the mountains. The "eternal snows…beyond and above the cliffs" seem to represent a cold and heartless fate.

In *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* Corbett paints an extremely dramatic picture of tangible fear:

> Few of us, I imagine, have escaped that worst of all nightmares in which, while our limbs and vocal cords are paralysed with fear, some terrible beast in a monstrous form approaches to destroy us; the nightmare from which, sweating fear in every pore, we waken with a cry of thankfulness to Heaven that it was only a dream. There was no such happy awakening from the nightmare of that unfortunate girl, and little imagination is needed to picture the scene. A rock cliff with a narrow ledge running partly across it and ending in a little depression in which an injured woman is lying; a young girl frozen with terror, squatting on the ledge, and a tiger slowly creeping towards her; retreat in every direction cut off, and no help at hand. (113-14)

The terrifying images of "some terrible beast in a monstrous form" and "a tiger slowly creeping towards her" bring to mind one of W.B. Yeats' best-known poems, "The Second Coming" which concludes with the horrifying vision of a "rough beast" that "Slouches towards Bethlehem..." (56). It is not only the brave but unfortunate girl who is "frozen with terror" but the reader as well. While W.B. Yeats' poem overwhelms the reader through a macrocosmic apocalyptic vision, Corbett achieves a similar effect at the microcosmic level: death in the form of a tiger slouching towards the defenceless girl with "retreat in every direction cut off, and no help at hand".

The final and most absorbing phase of Corbett's dramatic narrative comprising the tracking, pursuit and hunt of the man-eaters encompasses a wide gamut of emotions. It includes a generous offering of thrill, suspense and excitement which emanates from Corbett's forensic study of pugmarks; sounds and calls of birds and animals; the importance of wind factor in the jungle; the art of tracking the quarry; reconstruction of events; delete and the highly dramatic ruse of imitating the call of a tiger or a leopard in order to ambush the crafty a man-eater deceptively. The quotient of suspense, thrill and excitement is heightened to an unparalleled level as the narrative steers through unimaginable risks taken by the maverick hunter, and each exploit peaks to a maddening climax. As a contrasting variation to this pattern, there is a grim comedy of errors in *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag* which results in a chain of extraordinary escapes for the titular predator until its luck runs out.

As a keen naturalist and legendary hunter Corbett developed a very reliable and highly scientific method of studying the jungle along with the multitudes of its inhabitants as already discussed in Chapter 3. A careful study of the pugmarks left behind by an animal can lead to exciting clues about it. In almost all the exploits involving the man-eaters, the gripping chain of dramatic events ensues from a minute study of the predators' pugmarks and the forensic evidence gathered through it. Thus in *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag*, Corbett observes, "A lot can be learnt from the pug-marks of carnivora, as for instance the sex, age, and size of the animal. I had examined the pug-marks of the man-eater very carefully the first time I had seen them, and I knew he was an out-sized male leopard, long past his prime" (14).

Similarly, in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* also Corbett highlights the importance of studying the pugmarks, "Tigers also leave their pugmarks on the roads they use and these pugmarks, can provide one with quite a lot of useful information, as for instance the direction and speed at which the animal was travelling, its sex and age, whether all four limbs are sound, and if not sound, which particular limb is defective" (126). Here is an illustration from *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag*, "…on the soft clay the pugmarks of the leopard showed up clearly, and from them it was possible to see that the leopard's encounter with the gin-trap had not resulted in injury to any of his limbs" (116). The pugmarks of a man-eater provide nearly as much information about it as a police-record does about a notorious criminal. Hence, speaking of the Champawat man-eater, Corbett writes in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, "That the man-eater was a tiger was an established fact, but it was not known whether the animal was young or old, a male or a female, and this information, which I believed would help me to get in touch with it, I could only ascertain by examining its pugmarks" (6-7).

When Corbett makes such outrageously intriguing inferences about the elusive man-eaters based on the study of their pugmarks, it has quite a dramatic effect on the reader who gets to know some very suggestive details concerning these notorious beasts much before having a glimpse of them through the eyes of the narrator. On such occasions, Corbett appears to don the cloak of a first-rate sleuth like Sherlock Holmes. The reader's curiosity and interest are aroused when Corbett writes about the pugmarks of the Chowgarh man-eater in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, "They were the first pugmarks I had seen of the man-eater ….They showed the tigress to be a very old animal, whose feet had splayed out with age" (81). In *The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon* also, Corbett writes, "These pugmarks showed that the killer of the buffalo was a big male tiger" (98).

The sights of the jungle may deceive even the seasoned hunter, hence the eye-sight has to be sharpened and widened to a very high degree. While tracking the Mohan man-eater in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, Corbett was struck by the sight of a red object as he writes, "when one is looking for a tiger in a dense jungle, everything red that catches the eye is immediately taken for the tiger, and here, not only could I see the red of the tiger, but I could also see his stripes" (134). However, on looking intently at the object he realized that it was the kill (a buffalo), and not the tiger and, "the red was blood where he had recently been eating, and the stripes were the ribs from which he had torn away the skin" (134)! The optical illusion caused by the chimeras of the jungle could deceive, albeit momentarily, even the sagacious hunter blessed with a "second sight" (123).

Animals and birds including *sambhar*, *kakar*, *langur*, magpies, pheasants, thrushes, babblers, jays etc. play a significant role in each episode as all of them dramatically announce the advent of a member of the cat family by calling distinctly. Speaking of some birds, Corbett writes in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* , "Crows, vultures, and magpies always interest me in the jungle, and many are the kills I have found both in India and in Africa with the help of these birds. On the present occasion the crow led me to the scene of an overnight tragedy" (165).

So intimate was Corbett's association with the birds and animals mentioned in the foregoing lines that he often addresses them endearingly as "jungle folk," as in the following lines from *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, "The sun was near rising, and at that

early hour of the morning all the jungle folk were on the move, and it would be advisable to hear what they had to say on the subject of the wounded animal before going further" (35). The word "advisable" here clearly indicates the high esteem in which the "jungle folk" were held by him for their timely and unfailing assistance in tracking his quarry. Thus, acknowledging the service rendered by a herd of *chital*, Corbett writes in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, "up to this point, the *chital* had been of great help to us; they had told us the leopard was lying out in the open and that it was alive, and they had now given us the direction" (36).

The difficult and demanding proposition of surviving as well as outwitting the man-eater, lends a unique element of drama to the narrative. As mentioned in the foregoing chapter, the wind-factor plays a decisive role in this precarious contest. Thus Corbett observes in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*:

> Tigers do not know that human beings have no [sharp] sense of smell, and when a tiger becomes a man-eater it treats human beings exactly as it treats wild animals, that is, it approaches its victims up-wind, or lies up in wait for them down-wind.
>
> The significance of this will be apparent when it is realized that while the sportsman is trying to spot the tiger, the tiger is in all probability trying to stalk the sportsman, or is lying up in wait for him. This contest, owing to the tiger's height, colouring, and ability to move without making a sound, would be very unequal were it not for the wind-factor operating in favour of the sportsman. (48)

Here Corbett conveys in no uncertain terms that the outcome of the mortal combat between the sportsman and the tiger is greatly influenced by effective use of the wind factor by each contestant.

Being a seasoned hunter, Corbett concludes this valuable and dramatic section in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* with crucial advice to the aspiring sportsman advocating a high degree of alertness regarding the setting of the action:

> When one is moving in an area in which a man-eating tiger is operating …every obstruction in one's line of walk, be it a bush, a tree, a rock, or an inequality in the ground capable of concealing death, has to be cautiously approached, while at the same time, if a wind is not blowing… a careful and constant lookout has to be maintained behind and on either side. (126-27)

Thus, the importance of interpreting correctly the spectacle comprising sights and sounds of the jungle, as well as a host of other tell-tale signs can never be over-emphasised. The following words of Corbett in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* provide ample testimony to this fact :

> To walk with safety through forests or along deserted roads in an area in which a man-eater is operating, calls for the utmost caution and the strict observance of many rules. It is only when the hunter has repeatedly been the hunted that the senses can be attuned to the required pitch, and those rules be strictly adhered to, the breaking of which would provide the man-eater with an easy victim. (152)

Corbett recorded elaborately the "rules" and methods of attuning the senses "to the required pitch" in his book titled *Jungle Lore* which was published in 1953.

Tracking the elusive man-eaters is an integral component of the dramatic narrative in Corbett's trilogy. As observed earlier in this chapter, Corbett's advanced and skillful method of tracking is analogous to the ingenious techniques employed by celebrated fictional sleuths like Sherlock Holmes and James Bond to nab the crafty and elusive criminals. Hence tracking is a source of abundant thrill of adventure, suspense and excitement typical of a detective masterpiece, with hair-raising dramatic action. Corbett describes his precarious experience of tracking the Champawat man-eater in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*:

> Her tracks now—as she carried away the girl—led into the wilderness of rocks, some acres in extent, where the going was both difficult and dangerous. The cracks and chasms between the rocks were masked with ferns and blackberry vines, and a false step, which might easily have resulted in a broken limb, would have been fatal. Progress under these conditions was of necessity slow, and the tigress was taking advantage of it to continue her meal. A dozen times I found where she had rested and after each of these rests the blood trail became more distinct. (19)

The dramatic irony here lies in the scary prospect of the hunter becoming the hunted. There is indeed a very thin line between life and death as just one "false step" could have fatal consequences for the gritty hunter.

At times Corbett was assisted by Robin, his trusted gun-dog, in tracking the quarry. A notable example from *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* is the tracking of the huge Bachelor of Powalgarh, "the most sought-after big game trophy in the province" (97), though not a man-eater. Corbett delineates the scene:

> Robin put down his head and very carefully smelt the stones, and on receiving a signal from me to carry on he turned and started down the track, keeping a yard ahead of me; I could tell from his behaviour that he was on the scent of a tiger, and that the scent was hot … here I saw the pugmarks of a tiger, and a glance at them satisfied me we were on the heels of the Bachelor and that he was only a minute or two ahead of us. (100)

The narrative here is fast-paced and the reader feels the excitement and sense of urgency as the matchless team of Corbett and Robin pursues the hot scent of the tiger who was "only a minute or two ahead of" them.

Corbett's remarkably exact reconstruction of events on the basis of evidence and tell-tale signs also enriches the dramatic narrative in a significant manner as it is an important tool of advancing the plot besides being a source of wonder and excitement for the readers. By far the most vivid and dramatic reconstruction is the one made during Corbett's pursuit of the Talla Des man-eater in *The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon*. This incredible reconstruction needs to be quoted at length in order to appreciate the nearly supernatural ability of the narrator to read and interpret the bits of evidence, as well as the remarkable dramatic pace and intensity of the narrative:

> … I found the pugmarks of the tigress, and a spot of dry blood. Quite evidently, after disappearing from my view over the ridge the previous evening, the tigress had gone straight down the grassy slope….For half a mile I

> followed her pugmarks to where the shale scree narrowed to about fifteen yards. Here the tigress attempted to go down the scree, evidently with the intention of gaining the shelter of the jungle on the far side of the ravine. Whether her injured leg failed her or whether dizziness overcame her, I do not know; anyway, after falling forward and sliding head-foremost for a few yards she turned round and with legs widespread clawed the ground in a desperate but vain effort to avoid going over the sheer drop into the ravine below….
>
> …I noted that the rock cliff below the shale scree was from sixty to eighty feet high. No animal, I was convinced, could fall that distance on to rocks without being killed…there was a small patch of loose sand. On this the tigress had landed without doing herself any harm beyond tearing open the wound in her shoulder …the tigress crossed the ravine, leaving a well-defined blood trail. The bank on the right-hand side of the ravine was only a few feet high, and several times the tigress tried but failed to climb it. I knew now that I would find her in the first bit of cover she could reach. (149-151)

After going through this most extraordinary reconstruction, it is not difficult to guess why Corbett was credited with having a "second sight" by the local people. Here Corbett brings alive every minute detail with such precision that probably an eye-witness account of the actual events would not be more vivid and dramatic.

At times, Corbett employed the manipulative and highly dramatic device of imitating the call of a predator in order to deceive him. This exercise involves considerable theatrical and histrionic skill as he tells the readers in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*:

> …I put my back to the tree and called.
>
> You, who have spent as many years in the jungle as I have, need no description of the call of a tigress in search of a mate, and to you less fortunate ones I can only say that the call, to acquire which necessitates close observation and the liberal use of throat salve, cannot be described in words….
>
> …. I was immediately answered from a distance of about five hundred yards, and for half an hour thereafter… the call was tossed back and forth. On the one side the urgent summons of the king and on the other, the subdued and coaxing answer of his handmaiden…. (172)

The unflattering phrase "you less fortunate ones" here obviously refers to the sedentary arm-chair readers who have not been initiated into the fascinating and action-packed world of jungles. Not only does Corbett imitate the call of a tigress to perfection but he also captures the subtle nuances of the two calls mentioned here—"the urgent summons of the king" and "the subdued and coaxing answer of his handmaiden". The role of a coy tigress that Corbett essays here in a live performance is a unique and unparalleled theatrical presentation for the readers. Corbett's deceptive call, and the tiger's prompt reply come closest to dialogue in a language not known to human beings. This dramatic episode culminates into the shooting of the Pipal Pani tiger. The technique of calling up was employed to good effect by Corbett to summon up the Thak man-eater also in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, "November is the mating season for tigers and it was evident that for the past forty-eight hours she had been rampaging through the jungles in search of a mate, and that now, on hearing what she thought was a tiger answering her mating call, she would lose no time in joining him" (216).

Corbett could imitate the calls of a tiger, a leopard, a number of birds, as well as the call of a *langur*. In a somewhat comic incident in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, Corbett hoodwinks the Mohan man-eater by emitting the call of a *langur* as he could no longer control the irritation in his throat because of a recent attack of laryngitis from which he had not recovered completely. According to Corbett this impromptu manipulation had two positive effects, "this tiger had probably heard the call [of a *langur*] every day of his life … [and] he would not pay the slightest attention" (135); and "it had the desired effect of removing the irritation from my throat" (135). Corbett was indeed gifted with the theatrical art of improvisation as letting out the ubiquitous simian call was not planned beforehand. And there were occasions when Corbett was required to improvise as a shooter. He recounts in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* that he had no choice but to take a shot at the invisible Muktesar man-eater in a pitch-dark night, relying on his ears only to pin-point the spot from where the sound of chewing the bones was emanating. Quite remarkably, he "missed the tiger's head by only a few inches" (54).

In the course of narrating the crucial events of a man-eater hunt, Corbett often creates some powerfully dramatic and evocative visual images, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. These images are so vivid that the readers need little imagination to "see" them three-dimensionally. Here is a striking example from *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* where the action involves the Thak man-eater:

> Our primary object was to try to stalk the tigress and shoot her on kill: to achieve this end I was to follow the trail and at the same time keep a lookout in front, with Tewari—who was unarmed—a yard behind me keeping a sharp lookout to right and left, and Ibbotson a yard behind Tewari to safeguard us against an attack from the rear. In the event of either Ibbotson or I seeing so much as a hair of the tigress, we were to risk a shot. (180)

The strategic straight line formation of the three men with the unarmed one being in the middle, is a remarkable word-painting which powerfully conveys the feel of the war-like situation. Corbett integrates such images beautifully into the narrative to create the dramatic effect visually while making them a vehicle of narrating the action. The beauty of such suggestive word portrayals can be appreciated fully in the light of the humble remark made by Corbett after the shooting of the Chuka man-eater in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, "I will not attempt to describe the welcome my men and I received, or the scenes I witnessed at Chuka that night, for having lived the greater part of my life in the jungles I have not the ability to paint word-pictures" (222). The Socratic irony of this remark heightens the reader's awareness of Corbett's unique artistic acumen.

In order to get in touch with the Chowgarh man-eater, Corbett had also tried a theatrical ruse exposing himself to considerable risk as on several occasions he, "had disguised myself as a woman and cut grass in places where no local inhabitant dared to go. During this period the Chowgarh man-eater had quite possibly, missed many opportunities of adding me to her bag" (72). The tigress's first chance of "bagging" (86) him had been spoilt by the call of a *kakar*. Corbett's subtle manoeuvres involve reading the mind of the adversary as he points out, "I knew the ground as well as she did, and while she had no reason to suspect my intention towards her, I had the advantage of knowing, very clearly, her intentions towards me" (86).

To intensify further the multifarious dramatic narrative here, Corbett introduces the mysterious operation of the sixth sense at this point:

> I have made mention elsewhere of the sense that warns us of impending danger… this sense is a very real one and … I do not know, and therefore cannot explain, what brings it into operation. On this occasion I had neither heard nor seen the [Chowgarh] tigress, nor had I received any indication from bird or beast of her presence and yet I knew, without any shadow of doubt, that she was lying up for me among the rocks… on cresting the ridge, and coming in sight of the rocks, I knew they held danger for me, and this knowledge was confirmed a few minutes later by the *kakar's* warning call to the jungle folk, and by my finding the man-earter's pugmarks superimposed on my footprints (87).

The sight of a dreaded man-eater's pugmarks superimposed on one's footprints (implying that one had been hotly stalked by the man-eater) triggers a massive visual shock. The reader feels immensely relieved that at the end of the day Corbett left the jungle on his own feet.

Yet, far from being rattled by the situation, Corbett writes with characteristic humour that the tigress "had selected me for her dinner" (91). Walking ahead a few steps as he looked behind him over his right shoulder, he "looked straight into the tigress' face" (92). The tigress was lying just eight feet from him, "and on her face was a smile" (92). Corbett started swinging round "hardly perceptibly" (92) while the tigress "had not once taken her eyes off mine" (93). He pressed the trigger "as soon as the rifle was pointing at the tigress' body" (93). At last, the Chowgarh tigress was accounted for, "For a perceptible fraction of time the tigress remained perfectly still, and then, very slowly, her head sank on to her outstretched paws, while at the same time a jet of blood issued from the bullet-hole. The bullet had injured her spine and shattered the upper portion of her heart" (93). It was indeed a close encounter and it is difficult to imagine a more absorbing climax to the dramatic events that culminate into it.

Quite often, the pressing circumstances prompted Corbett to take some madly desperate measures to secure a chance of bringing down a man-eater. On such occasions, his heroism breaks all bonds of sanity and reveals him as a maverick humanitarian, heroic to the brim. In case of the Thak man-eater, Corbett writes in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* that he had no choice but to call up the tigress in the fading light as it would be his best chance of shooting it. The tigress located his call "with great accuracy, but had misjudged the distance, and not finding her prospective mate…she was now working herself up into a perfect fury" (219). Corbett had only a "few seconds, ten or fifteen at the most" (219) left of fading light and thereafter he and his companions would have been "at the mercy of a man-eater, plus a tigress wanting a mate" (219). So he called again. The tigress walked a few steps and looked into his face. He had taken his position behind a small rock on a stretch of open land, "By great and unexpected good luck the half-dozen steps the tigress took to her right front carried her almost to the exact spot at which my rifle was pointing. Had she continued in the direction in which she was coming before her last call, my story—if written—would have had a different ending" (229).

Here also, the narrator acknowledges the providential assistance through the phrase "great and unexpected good luck". The black humour underlying the second sentence here intensifies the dramatic tension. The readers feel grateful for their own good luck that the great story got written, and thankfully there is no deviation from its present, satisfactory ending. Corbett's first bullet hit the tigress under the right eye and "the second, fired more by accident than with intent" (220) struck her in the throat, "and she came to rest with her nose against the rock" (220). A completely unexpected and somewhat ludicrous comic scene relieves this grim climax as Corbett is hurled "head over heels" (220) into the air by the mighty recoil of the heavy rifle but is deftly caught mid-air by his brave and unarmed companions preventing any injury to him.

In *The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon* Corbett scandalized his companions by choosing a small holly tree to sit up for the Muktesar man-eater. His three companions protested vehemently as he would be sitting only eight feet above the ground. The reasoning behind his decision to sit on "a stunted tree, smothered over by a wild rose" (48) seems to border on madness, but he always knew what he was doing, "This was the only tree within a reasonable distance of the kill on which I could sit with any hope of bagging the tiger, for there was no moon, and if the tiger came after dark—as I felt sure it would—the nearer I was to the kill the better would be my chance of killing the tiger" (48). Evidently his confidence in his abilities as a hunter was supreme. As the night was "pitch black" (51), he "took careful aim at the sound the tiger was making" (52) and pressed the trigger. His shot narrowly missed the tiger who went up the twenty-foot bank in two bounds. Now the hunter was exposed to extreme danger as "the rose bush had sagged under my weight and I was now possibly no more than eight feet above ground, with my dangling feet considerably lower. And a little above and some twenty feet from me a tiger that I had every reason to believe was a man-eater was growling deep down in his throat" (52). Corbett here refers to the Muktesar tigress as a 'tiger', somewhat inconsistently.

The following morning, a beat was organised which "miscarried" (57). Luckily, as the tigress was spotted a little later, a hot pursuit ensues:

> The hill was steep and as I ran along the contour I came to a wild rose bush….Through the middle of the bush there was a low tunnel, and as I bent down to run through it my hat was knocked off, and raising my head too soon at the end of the tunnel I was nearly dragged off my feet by the thorns that entered my head. The thorns of these wild roses are curved and very strong and as I was not able to stop myself some embedded themselves and broke off in my head… while others tore through the flesh. With little trickles of blood running down my face I continued to run….(60)

The image of the messianic hunter wearing a Christ-like crown of thorns, pursuing the man-eater with "little trickles of blood running down" his face is highly evocative and leaves a lasting visual impression on the reader's memory. Here the courageous hunter seems to be pitted against some malevolent power that drags him back but fails to deter him from his determined pursuit of the man-eater. Eventually Corbett succeeds in shooting the charging Muktesar man-eater from a very close range of " two yards…with great good luck" (61-62). Quite appropriately, Corbett calls the tigress "a very worthy antagonist" (63).

The magnitude of risks incurred in Corbett's exploits involving the man-eaters is made conspicuous in the following lines from *The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon*:

> As I had not previously visited the vast area over which this leopard was operating, I went via Almora to learn all I could about the leopard from Stiffe, the Deputy Commissioner of Almora. He kindly invited me to lunch,

> provided me with maps, and then gave me a bit of a jolt when wishing me goodbye by asking me if I had considered all the risks and prepared for them by making my will. (65)

Stiffe's sheer pragmatic suggestion is enough to give "a bit of a jolt" to the 'missionary' hunter who was propelled by his humanitarian concerns to risk his own life in order to protect the people. He comes up with yet another death-defying decision when he decides to sit in the open for the Panar man-eater in *The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon*:

> I could sit with my back to the wall. Night was now closing in, so… I settled down in my corner and told the man to go up to his wife and keep the door of the room open. As he climbed the steps the man said, 'The leopard will surely kill you, Sahib, and then what will I do?' 'Close the door,' I answered, 'and wait for morning'. (68-69)

Corbett is not unmanned here by the prospect of his impending death but calmly tells the petrified young man to ensure his own safety in the event of his (Corbett) falling a victim to the leopard. On a subsequent occasion, he decides "to risk" a branch for sitting which "offered a very uncomfortable and a very unsafe seat for it was hollow and rotten" (81). His reasoning is simple as always, "…there were no other trees within a radius of several hundred yards (81)". The Panar leopard gave him a harrowing time during the night, "Several times he had nearly unseated me by pulling on the shoots vigorously and then suddenly letting them go, and now that it was dark and I had nothing stable to hold on to, I felt sure that if he sprang up he would only need to touch me to send me crashing to the ground" (83).

While pursuing the Chuka man-eater also, Corbett's seat on the ficus tree is none too comfortable as he writes in *The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon*:

> The seat I had selected sloped forward and was cushioned with rotten wood and dead leaves and, fearing that if I brushed them off the sound and movement might be detected by the tiger, I left them as they were and sat down on them, hoping devoutly that there were no snakes in the hollow trunk below me or scorpions in the dead leaves. (109-10)

Even Corbett admits here readily that the prospect of scorpions or snakes crawling under one's seat is not a happy one. Incidentally, it may be pertinent to mention here that Corbett found snakes repulsive.

Unfavourable circumstances forced Corbett to take a very risky decision of sitting on the ground for the Talla Des man-eater as he tells the reader in *The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon*:

> The only trees in this part of the valley were enormous pines which, as they had no braches for thirty or forty feet, it would be quite impossible to climb. So of necessity I would have to sit on the ground. This would be all right during day light, but if the tigress delayed her return until nightfall, and preferred human flesh to mutton, I would need a lot of luck to carry me through the hour or two of darkness before the moon rose. (171)

Similarly in *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag*, he spent nearly twenty nights on a narrow tower on the left bank of the Rudraprayag bridge. In this context Corbett writes, "The tower was built on a projecting rock and was twenty feet high, and the platform on the top of it, which had been worn smooth by the wind was about four feet wide and eight feet long" (46). And further, "There was no handhold on the platform and even when lying flat on my stomach to increase friction and reduce wind pressure, there was imminent risk of being blown off on to the rocks sixty feet below, off which one would have bounced into the ice-cold Alaknanda…"(47). And as if that were not enough, there was another very painful source of trouble, "Added to the discomfort of the wind, I suffered torment from a multitude of small ants, which entered my clothes and ate away patches of skin" (47).

Chapter 13 in *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag* has a shockingly suggestive title—"The Hunters Hunted". Corbett and his friend Ibbotson had a gruelling time against the man-eater. While returning after an unsuccessful watch for the man-eater, Ibbotson slipped and broke the mantle of the lamp which gave only a streak of blue flame on a dark night:

> Ibbotson was of the opinion that he could carry the lamp for three minutes before it burst. Three minutes, in which to do a stiff climb of half a mile, over ground on which it was necessary to change direction every few steps to avoid huge rocks and thornbushes, and possibly followed and actually followed as we found later—by a man-eater, was a terrifying prospect.(67)

The prospect was extremely terrifying as Corbett confesses, "I had been convinced that one, and possibly both, of us would not live to reach the village" (68). Corbett and Ibbotson had a lucky escape that night as "the leopard, after failing to bag one of us, had secured a victim farther up the mountain side" (92).

Corbett takes another outrageously bold decision to sit on the ground near a kill in *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag* as he tells the reader, as if it were a natural choice, "…there were a few small trees, none of which was big enough to sit in. Under the trees, and about thirty yards from the kill, there was a rock with a little hollow at the base of it, so in the hollow I decided to sit" (133). Both Madho Singh and the villager "objected very strongly" (134) to his sitting on the ground. But he "overruled their objections" as he "felt that in this secluded spot my chances of killing the leopard were better than any I had as yet" (134). As it got dark, Corbett sat up in readiness to receive the leopard, "…with thumb on the button of the torch and finger on trigger I was prepared to shoot in any direction in which I heard the slightest sound " (134).

At this point, a series of complications ensued as it started pouring heavily. This unexpected change in conditions worked against Corbett who was forced to take some desperate measures to protect himself:

> The rifle was now useless but might help to cause a diversion, so transferring it to my left hand I unsheathed my knife and got a good grip of it with my right hand. The knife was what is called an Afridi stabbing knife and I devoutly hoped it would serve me as well as it had served its late owner, for when buying it from the Government store at Hangu on the North-West Frontier, the Deputy Commissioner had drawn my attention to a label attached to it and to three notches on the handle, and said it had figured in three murders. Admittedly a gruesome relic, but I was glad to have it in my hand, and I clutched it tight while the rain lashed down.(135)

This is indeed a matchless scene for dramatic intensity as the lion-hearted hunter is cornered and pushed to the wall, armed with a "now useless" rifle, and a murderer's dagger, with rain lashing at him, and a hungry man-eater lurking in the vicinity. It was an extraordinarily heroic feat for Corbett to reach the nearest village under the extremely trying and terrifying conditions, "Afraid to use the torch for fear of attracting the man-eater, and with one hand occupied with the rifle and the other with the knife, my body made as many contacts with the ground as my rubber-shod feet " (136).

Corbett sums up his experiences of that night through a lucid and honest confession, "When I look back on that night, I look back on it as my night of terror. I have been frightened times without number, but never have I been frightened as I was that night when the unexpected rain came down and robbed me of all my defences, and left me for protection a murderer's knife" (136). This episode acquires indeed a unique dramatic intensity resulting from the mad risks taken by Corbett, the complications in the plot consequent upon the sudden advent of rain, and the superhuman courage shown by Corbett in the face of circumstances which were completely against him.

Eventually, Corbett did account for the notorious man-eating leopard of Rudraprayag by taking a difficult but accurate shot at him in near darkness:

> My rifle, to which I had a small electric torch attached, was pointing in the direction of the goat, and I was just beginning to think that the leopard—assuming it was the man-eater—had reached the shelter and was selecting a human victim, when there was a rush from the foot of the tree, and the goat's bell tinkled sharply. Pressing the button of the torch I saw that the sights of the rifle were aligned on the shoulder of a leopard, and without having to move the rifle a fraction of an inch I pressed the trigger, and as I did so the torch went out. (156)

The shades of light and darkness play a significant role in this highly dramatic and fateful scene. The little torch attached to Corbett's rifle, adds to the dramatic effect of the scene by going out as soon as Corbett pressed the trigger, leaving him with no option but to wait for the whole night to find out the outcome of his shot.

Corbett's hazardous jungle expeditions reach one notch higher in *The Temple Tiger and More Man-Eaters of Kumaon* as now he has to grapple with an altogether unfamiliar kind of complications caused by some bodily handicaps and bouts of sickness, besides dealing with the fierce predators. He mentions that he is very proud of "Pin-pointing, that is fixing the exact direction and distance of all sound heard… a jungle accomplishment which I have reduced to a fine art" (157). But then he records ruefully that owing to the accidental shots fired by his careless companions on two occasions, the ear drums in both his ears had been considerably damaged. In spite of this debilitating limitation, Corbett was not the one to capitulate as he writes, "Well, there was nothing that could be done about it now, and handicapped though I was I was not going to admit at this stage of the proceedings that any tiger, man-eater or other, had any advantage over me when we were competing for each other's lives under conditions that favoured neither side" (157). Now he is forced to track and dispatch the wounded Talla Des man-eater depending on his "eyes only" (157). To make things worse, he is severely tormented by an abscess that had formed inside one of his ears:

> Had my condition been normal I would have followed on her footsteps and possibly been able to catch up with her, but unfortunately I was far from normal. The swelling on my head, face, and neck had now increased to such proportions that I was no longer able to move my head up or down or from side to side, and my left eye was closed. However, I still had one good eye, fortunately my right one, and I could still hear a little. (162)

His difficulties multiply further because he was not familiar with this part of the terrain as he admits, "Not knowing the ground was a very great handicap, for not only did it necessitate walking more miles than I need have done, but it also prevented my anticipating the movements of the tigress and ambushing her" (162).

As he returns to his camp, he has to fight a pitched battle against the sickness raging inside him and quite appropriately he seeks to get over this crisis by engaging himself in what he does best—going after a man-eater:

> Back in camp I realized that the 'bad time' I had foreseen and dreaded was approaching. Electric shocks were stabbing through the enormous abscess, and the hammer blows were increasing in intensity….There was…an account to be settled between the tigress and myself, and that night was as suitable a time to settle it….
>
> …when therefore I left my camp on the night of 11 April…to try conclusions with the Talla Des man-eating tigress, I did not set out with any feeling of inferiority on what might appear to have been a suicidal quest. (162-63)

The sagacious and stoical hunter who never lost his composure under extremely trying conditions, seems to be somewhat rattled by his sickly physical condition here. His assertion that he "did not set out with any feeling of inferiority" on the seemingly "suicidal quest" originates from his fierce sense of self-respect and dignity rather than his customary objective, rational analysis of ground reality.

Corbett is overcome by an attack of vertigo as he runs bending his head low in order to catch up with the tigress. For the first time during all his hunting exploits, the gritty and stoical hunter exposes his vulnerable and tender side here:

> Near me were two oak saplings, a few feet apart and with inter-laced branches. Laying down my rifle I climbed up the saplings to a height of ten or twelve feet. Here I found a branch to sit on, another for my feet, and yet other small branches for me to rest against. Crossing my arms on the branches, in front of me, I laid my head on them, and at that moment the abscess burst, not into my brain as I feared it would, but through my nose and left ear. (167)

Corbett is severely sick bodily, but his loneliness and deep craving to be loved also surface here as he seeks solace in an intimate contact with the only love in his life—nature. He literally engulfs his body and his inner being with branches all round him. The word 'branch' or 'branches' is repeated four times in these lines. The image of the lonely hunter crossing his arms on the branches and laying his head on them comes closest, albeit symbolically, to an intimate love-scene in all of Corbett's writings. As the abscess bursts through his nose and left ear, he is suddenly cured of his painful disorder, "The great swelling on my head, face, and neck had gone and with it had gone the pain. I could now move my head as I liked, my left eye was open, and I could swallow without discomfort" (167). In this passage when Corbett says that "Realisation was not long in coming", and "I was over

my bad time", he symbolically refers to his triumph over the devastating sense of a void within him through a close, intimate and therapeutically healing contact with nature. Thus, it is his moment of self-realisation in the comforting embrace of nature.

Soon, the Talla Des man-eater is brought down in yet another close encounter:

> …when I was within three yards of the bracken I saw a movement a yard from the path on the right. It was the tigress gathering herself together for a spring. Wounded and starving though she was, she was game to fight it out. Her spring, however, was never launched, for, as she rose, my first bullet raked her from end to end, and the second bullet broke her neck. (177-78)

It is difficult here to choose between the hunter and the hunted for courage as both of them were starving, yet both were "game to fight it out".

The monumental risks taken frequently by Corbett during his daring expeditions, highlighted in the numerous passages cited in the foregoing pages in this chapter help to make the climax of each episode a befitting dramatic finale in addition to revealing his nerves of steel. Corbett always improvised his strategies and methods of final assault on the man-eater, keeping in mind the ground conditions. He invests the climax of each episode with an element of surprise and novelty which leaves the readers out of breath due to sheer excitement. For instance, the technique employed by Corbett to crawl perilously close to the Mohan man-eater and the Bachelor of Powalgarh in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* is very similar to modern day commando action. This is how he finally got the Mohan man-eater:

> The tip of the tail was twenty feet from me …his head would be twelve feet away. But I should have to approach much nearer before I should be able to see enough of his body to get in a crippling shot, and a crippling shot it would have to be if I wanted to leave on my feet. And now, for the first time in my life, I regretted my habit of carrying an uncocked rifle. The safety-catch of my .450/400 makes a very distinct click when thrown off.…
>
> Inch by inch I again started to creep forward ….Another foot forward and his belly came into view, and from the regular way in which it was heaving up and down I knew that he was asleep. Less slowly now I moved forward, until his shoulder, and then his whole length, was exposed to my view.…
>
> Aligning the sights of the rifle on his forehead I pressed the trigger and, while maintaining a steady pressure on it, pushed up the safety-catch. I had no idea how this reversal of the usual method of discharging a rifle would work, but it did work; and when the heavy bullet at that short range crashed into his forehead not so much as a quiver went through his body.…(138-39)

The climax of the Bachelor of Powalgarh episode in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* is even more exciting as Corbett had an eye contact with "the most dangerous animal in the world—a freshly wounded tiger" (105) just before shooting it from a very close range. This climax is also replete with blood-congealing commando-like action:

> …getting down on my hands and knees I started to crawl in the direction from which the sound had come.
>
> The bushes here were from six to eight feet high… I could see through them for a distance of ten to fifteen feet. I had covered thirty yards, hoping fervently that if the tiger charged he would come from in front (for in no other direction could I have fired), when I caught sight of something red… I could get a better view of this object from two yards to the right, so lowering my head until my chin touched the ground, I crawled this distance with belly to ground, and on raising my head saw the tiger in front of me. He was crouching down looking at me, with the sun shining on his left shoulder, and on receiving my two bullets he rolled over on his side without making a sound. (109-10)

During the Kanda man-eater hunt Corbett receives a warning signal from the mysterious sixth sense one more time in *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*. Here he writes, "The premonition of impending danger is too well-known and established a fact to need any comment" (153) as he suddenly became aware that the Kanda man-eater was looking at him "at a very short range" (153). Corbett was sitting only eight feet above the ground and there was no need for the tiger to spring, "for by standing on his hind legs he could easily reach me" (157). Luckily, the tiger kept growling and went to the kill. Corbett got his opportunity early next morning as he saw the tiger walking at a fast canter:

> In the uncertain light and with my nightlong-strained eyes the shot was a very difficult one, but I took it, and had the satisfaction of seeing the bullet going home. Turning with a great roar, he came straight for my tree, and as he was in the act of springing the second bullet, with great good fortune, crashed into his chest. Diverted in his spring by the impact of the heavy bullet, the tiger struck the tree just short of me, and ricochetting off it went headlong into the valley below….(157)

"The uncertain light" here highlights in a theatrical idiom the physical problem of spotting the quarry, while suggesting the clouding of his mind as a result of his strenuous nightlong watch. The shooting of the Kanda man-eater entailed considerable expertise as a shooter, with boundless courage to go with it, but again Corbett refuses to take credit for the extraordinary feat and attributes the second bullet hitting the target to "great good fortune" with his customary self-effacing point of view.

The grim dramatic narrative of the trilogy is complemented by a sequence of what may be described as tragicomic events in *The Man-Eating Leopard of Rudraprayag*. Referring to the three incidents wherein the leopard could have been killed but managed to escape owing either to human errors or sheer good luck, Corbett grimly observes, "These incidents took place shortly after the leopard had become a man-eater, and had the leopard been killed on the bridge, shot in the trap, or sealed up in the cave, several hundred people need not have died, and Garhwal would have been saved many years of suffering" (21). Nearly a hundred pages later and after travelling hundreds of miles on foot across the jungles, Corbett comments on the failure on his part as well as his friend Ibbotson's to get that one accurate shot which would have put the leopard with a "fiendish cunning" to rest:

> Our failure to bag the man-eater up to that date was not due to our having done anything we should not have done, or left undone anything we should have done. It could only be attributed to sheer bad luck. Bad luck that had prevented my receiving the electric light in time; that had given Ibbotson cramps in both legs; that had

made the leopard eat an overdose of cyanide; and, finally, that had made the men drop the gin-trap and break the one tooth that mattered. (113)

Eventually when success crowns the tireless hunter, it is made that much more sweet and creditable because of the foregoing complications in the plot resulting from these tragicomic events. Thus, the ingenious manoeurvres of the hunter and the man-eater to outwit each other, culminating into the decisive encounter between them, constitute the climactic phase of the dramatic narrative in the trilogy. During the course of these events, the hunter risked his life on numerous occasions because ensuring the safety of the people was unquestionably his first priority.

Corbett's mastery over narrative technique makes him a master story-teller alongside being the main reason behind the phenomenal appeal and universal popularity of his trilogy even after half a century of his death in 1955.

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