

REWILDING WELFARE  
SARAH HALL AND THE STATE OF NATURE

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The Birth of Welfare

*Haweswater*, Sarah Hall's debut novel, begins with a birth scene. Ella Lightburn gives birth to Janet, the novel's heroine, and she does so alone. As Ella screams, curses, and fights 'with her own body, with God, with nature, unmaking herself' (Hall, 2002: 3), her husband stands by. He had, we learn, 'been present for the birthing of many animals' before, and was even 'accustomed to intervention [ ... ] reaching inside the hot, rough canal of an animal himself with a bare greased arm' (Hall, 2002: 4). Yet this time is different, and Samuel is finally convinced of his own uselessness and leaves to rejoin 'the men of the village' in the kitchen downstairs, 'sitting, standing, smoking' (Hall, 2002: 5). The women of the village stay around, but they can do no more than instruct Ella 'to be calm and breathe' and 'to control her pain. She could not' (Hall, 2002: 4). Nor is there a doctor to assist, as 'Dr Saul Firth was absent, and, surely by now, unreachable' (Hall, 2002: 4). Ella's act of self-unmaking, a process in which 'slowly

she came apart' (Hall, 2002: 3), is then also a momentous demonstration of self-reliance.

In *The Wolf Border*, Hall's fifth novel, we see Rachel Caine, that novel's heroine, signing into a hospital to give birth in her turn. Thirteen years separate the two novels, and there is a remarkable change in the way the process of giving birth is described. In the 2015 novel, it is rendered less as a process of coming apart, but rather as one of carefully being 'opened [ ... ] up' (Hall, 2015: 251). Unlike Ella, Rachel is duly surrounded, supported, and sedated, even if the father is not in the picture (he is on the other side of the Atlantic, ignorant of his fatherhood). Instead, representatives of the welfare state competently assume the role of caretakers: there is a nurse, a midwife, an anaesthetist, a consultant, surgeons, and painkillers (Hall, 2015: 250–3). The process does not leave Rachel unmade: the next chapter finds her a few months later, inside her house, being taken care of: 'The last few months,' we read, 'the world has come to her: deliveries of food and equipment, the midwife and healthcare work, the men in her life, work' (Hall, 2015: 257).

If giving birth was, in Sarah Hall's fiction, still a heroic confrontation with the wildness of nature in 2002, in *The Wolf Border*, it is an experience in which the institutions of the welfare state play their part.<sup>1</sup> Of course, this shift can partly be explained by pointing to the different historical settings of the novels: *Haweswater* covers the first few decades of the twentieth century, when there were no robust and universal welfare provisions in place in the UK (the Beveridge Report, which inaugurated the shift to state-provided and legally-mandated welfare in which I am interested in this chapter, was drafted in 1942), while *The Wolf Border* is set in the present (or, given the far-reaching deprivatization schemes it situates in Scotland, in an only slightly speculative near future). *The Wolf Border* organizes its geography around a somewhat schematic opposition between a society without any social safety net (the USA) and one that has adequate and generous welfare provisions in place (the novel's unravelling UK). This opposition was not yet in place in the *Electric Michelangelo*, another novel that traffics between these two sites: New York here 'contain[s] all the indistinct chaos and divergence and eccentric myth of the

old world' (Hall, 2004: 172), while Coney Island is the 'richer, zany American relative' to Morecambe, the town from where the protagonist hails (Hall, 2004: 182). The centrality of this opposition – on which Rachel reflects at different moments in the novel, and which features in the plot by her move from the USA to the UK – shows how crucially concerned Hall's work is with the relation between human flourishing and state institutions. Nor is it merely anachronistic to look for the missing traces of the welfare state in *Haweswater*. As Bruce Robbins has shown, many nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels feature stand-ins for the welfare state that remind readers that human (and, most notably, protagonists') thriving depends on mediators and patrons. For Robbins (2007: 72), such novels do the cultural work of legitimizing the welfare state, that 'politically ambiguous mode of social organization' that at the same time regulates and preserves corporate capitalism.

It is significant, then, that in the birth scene that opens *Haweswater*, neither the husband, the doctor, nor the women of the village are made to assume the role of midwifing such a welfare state imaginary. In a reading of Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Robbins (2007: 42) remarks that 'the role of benefactor might be an endpoint of upward mobility as well as its proximate cause'. In *The Wolf Border*, Rachel is not only aided by the beneficial ministrations of the welfare state, as we have seen, but she is also herself employed as a benefactor for the wellbeing of a group of wolves. The novel more confidently repeats a pattern already intimated in *The Electric Michelangelo*, where the protagonist begins his trajectory as a tattoo-artist as an apprentice only to end the novel himself as the mentor of a young artist. Rachel is a highly-skilled and well-paid professional (and the novel makes clear that career advancement is an important concern for her [Hall, 2015: 32, 329]), yet she is also a carer; she embodies the insight that the market and the welfare state depend on one another – that welfare-state institutions are complementary with 'the enlarged market for professional service and expertise that the welfare state has always implied' (Robbins, 2007: 7).

The elaborate and remarkably consistent welfare state imaginary of *The Wolf Border* and the conspicuous lack of it in *Haweswater* can-

not simply be reduced to elements of the novels' historical veracity. If the contrast between the 'chilly' room where Ella Lightburn gives birth, whose 'walls [are] glowing with cold' (Hall, 2002: 3), and the comfortable room where Rachel Caine and her baby are 'wrapped up warm by the fire' (Hall, 2015: 257) reflects an historical difference between two moments in British history, the two novels' divergent imaginings of welfare do more than that: they signal a key development in Hall's oeuvre. This development, I argue in this chapter, reorganizes the central coordinates of her novelistic work: the issue of female self-assertion and freedom, the ambivalent attractions of motherhood, and the call of the wild. By putting the novel in dialogue with recent developments in the environmental humanities and in the interdisciplinary study of neoliberalism (the governmental logic that has been dismantling the welfare state over the last few decades), I show how *The Wolf Border's* hesitant appreciation of the beneficial role of state institutions develops in tandem with its revised understanding of the wilderness. This shift, I argue, is less an achieved insight than an abiding concern for the novel – a concern for which the wolves serve as flexible and fungible figures. *Haweswater* still sees the entanglement of state and capital as a bad thing: in this novel, an organic community which persists in 'an intricate union' with nature and in which 'bonds [a]re strong and necessary and abundantly understood' (Hall, 2002: 112, 6) finds itself flooded by the combined evil forces of industry, the military, and the state. In *The Wolf Border*, life – including natural life, including the wolves – operates *within* the confines of the state, a state that first cares for Rachel's dying mother and later for her infant son, and a state of which Rachel's employer – a quaint aristocratic Liberal Democrat – is very much a pillar.

*The Wolf Border's* shift toward a reluctant acceptance of the institutions of the welfare state has few precedents in Hall's novels. For the first time, freedom implies a negotiation with institutions and a willingness to dwell within their confines rather than a resolute resistance to them. Such a position is emphatically missing in novels like *The Electric Michelangelo* and *How to Paint a Dead Man*, for instance. The story of the former novel begins at the time of the First World War in a privately-run guest house for consumptives, in which

the protagonist's mother acts 'as both bed-nurse and hostess' (Hall, 2004: 11); soon, the institution dies with her. When the story moves its protagonist to the USA, it enters a world similarly bereft of stable and secure institutions: the care for premature infants is paid for by displaying them in a baby incubator exhibition, and the psychiatric hospital where an assailant is put up cannot protect him from a revenge attack. In the four narrative strands of *How to Paint a Dead Man*, state institutions offer no help for the novel's two main thematic interests: art and what we could call the calamities of life. Susan, the artist who is recovering from the loss of her twin brother, opens the novel by recalling painful and woefully ineffective doctor visits from her youth, an ordeal for which her mother later apologizes. Her father Peter, a landscape artist, with cheerful cynicism, emphasizes he made a name for himself without public commission: 'I have worked,' he says, 'despite every establishment and have known obstacles and ridicule before any favour' (Hall, 2009: 74). (In a comparable way, *The Electric Michelangelo's* fascination with tattooing is linked to its status as an industry that is 'wholly self-sufficient and home-skilled' [Hall, 2004: 98].) Annette, the blind Italian girl, is simply dismissed from a school that is unable to cater for her caring needs. The only person living through state support is Susan's friend Nicki, who is in an irreversible coma after the emergency services failed to show in time when she collapsed in an asthma attack on the moor (Hall, 2009: 64). The novel's representation of the state's support system, then, is at the same time a stark reminder of its inability to foster a more valuable life for Nicki. Real life, it seems, in *How to Paint a Dead Man*, as in *Haweswater*, is lived outside the state: in the wild, in nature. And if the ordeal of Peter, who gets stuck amid the rocks that he has earlier so successfully converted into landscape paintings, underlines that life amid the elements can be brute and nasty, the novel still implies such unbuffered exposure to danger is what makes life worth living in the first place.

The anti-statism of *The Carhullan Army* is at least as pronounced. Set in a near-future dystopian Britain, this novel is organized around the opposition between, on the one hand, hyperregulated areas in which women are 'fitted' with contraceptive devices that they must

at all times be ready to display 'to the monitors in the backs of cruisers' (Hall, 2007: 27) and, on the other, a 'serious' and 'honest' life on the woman-only farm that persists 'off record' and beyond regulation (Hall, 2007: 103, 15, 17). For Deborah Lilley (2016: 61, 65), the Carhullan farm serves as a 'transformative retreat' and affords a 'sense of pastoral restoration' in a landscape that stands out from an environment marked by the debris of the industrial future past. When the novel's main character (known only under the name of 'Sister') is fitted with a 'regulator,' there is a medical professional at hand, but her request to be seen by a female doctor is ignored; there are also painkillers, but there is no one who cares enough to remind her to take them (Hall, 2007: 28). Although the contraptions of welfare are in place in 'the official zones' (Hall, 2007: 7), then, the novel can only imagine them as apparatuses of control and inflictors of humiliation and pain. Life, as in *How to Paint a Dead Man*, as in *Haweswater*, is elsewhere – in what the novel calls 'the other half of the landscape, the other half of Britain' (Hall, 2007: 15). This other half is imagined as untainted by the compromises of social institutions: Sister here believes herself to be 'no longer complicit in a wrecked and regulated existence' (Hall, 2007: 41), as '[t]here [a]re no regulations out here. There [is] no human mess, no chaos, poorly managed, and barely liveable' (Hall, 2007: 17).

As in the other novels, the point is not that the farm serves as a site of utopian bliss; it is rather that even the violence and mishaps here have an aura of authenticity and freedom that institutions, in these novels' imaginary, serve to stifle. Remarkably, Sister describes her transition from an intrusive, violent, and humiliating state to the more generous life on the farm as a process of becoming 'an unmade person' (Hall, 2007: 94), using the same phrase that describes Ella Lightburn's limit experience at the beginning of *Haweswater*. In these novels, nature and the wild, it seems, reliably serve as restorative sites in which the intrusions by the state can be undone. It is this dispensation, I argue, that *The Wolf Border* will begin to revise.

### Wolves, Wilderness, Welfare

*The Wolf Border* by no means unambiguously embraces the institutions that Hall's earlier novels shun. One sign of its lingering ambiguity about boring, unglamorous limitations is that Rachel's mother quasi-deliberately ends her life in her care-home apartment, as if administered life is not enough; another is an offhand remark about a midwife, who is described as 'past retirement age but not, it seems, retiring anytime soon' (Hall, 2015: 206), as if there is a certain allure in relentlessly pursuing a vocation and declining the option of state-assisted old age. For all these and other signs of hesitation, *The Wolf Border* at least entertains the possibility that the operations of the state can be anything more than destructive and diminishing, and that there is such a thing as a *beneficial* state, a state that fosters the lives of its citizens without diminishing the dignity of these lives by robbing them of their (illusory) self-reliance. The novel explores this possibility by entangling the confusions of early motherhood with the attempt to reintroduce wolves into northern England. If the former theme features Rachel as both a provider and a beneficiary of care (for her son and by the welfare state respectively), the latter more resolutely sees her emerge as a benefactor for the welfare of the wolves.

In Rachel's first conversation with her doctor, who is provided for her through the UK's state-run National Health Service, the care presented is anything but the degrading and intrusive intervention from *The Carhullan Army*: the doctor notes that she will be contacted for 'possible screening. But I'm not going to push you. You're on our system, which is good' (Hall, 2015: 106). Later on, the midwife is always reliably on call: 'I've got NHS enhanced reception,' she notes, 'so you can get me anytime' (Hall, 2015: 206). Such unobtrusive reliability looks a lot like the way Rachel and her team go on to monitor the wolves: the wolves are tracked and fed, but in a self-effacing way that avoids direct confrontation with human carers. The novel's descriptions of institutional care are remarkable for conveying a sense of tact and tenderness – as when a nurse apologizes that the ultrasound gel 'will be a little cold' (Hall, 2015: 136) – which is not very different

from the way the wolves' territory is described: walking along the fence, Rachel notes '[t]here are no barbs and it is not electric,' which surprises her, as 'she had expected something more industrial-looking – penal even' (Hall, 2015: 131–2). If these examples may suggest that the novel is organized around an analogy between Rachel and the wolves – both get offspring, both physically escape their habitat – such a reading obscures a slightly different and more relevant analogy: that between Rachel's care for the lives of the wolves and the way the welfare state quietly facilitates her life as a working mother. For Rachel, in other words, her developing relation to the wolves is a way for her to work through her own reliance on state institutions – the awareness that life necessarily takes place *within* the confines of the state, and not outside of it in some putative untouched wilderness.

This revised understanding of the wilderness finds itself in tune with developments in the fields of ecocriticism and of the environmental humanities, fields in which the wilderness is no longer what it used to be. In early environmental writing, especially in a US context, wilderness was conceived as society's other; it was seen as 'nature in a state uncontaminated by civilization' (Garrard, 2004: 59), an easily idealized realm divorced from technological and industrial pollution and corruption. As the field of ecocriticism cast a more self-critical eye on environmentalist discourse, it soon discovered this outright separation between human action and wild nature to be untenable. Environmental historian William Cronon's classic essay 'The Trouble with Wilderness' not only unsettles this distinction on conceptual grounds, it also points to the considerable social and political costs incurred by maintaining it. Cronon (1996) observes that the very opposition between wilderness and civilization is a construction that emerges *from within* civilization, and thus starts from a position of alienation from nature. The celebration of wilderness, Cronon (1996: 17) notes, 'has been an activity mainly for well-to-do city folks' cast out from an intimate participation in the rhythms of the natural world. Glorifications of the wilderness, Cronon (1996: 17) continues, 'embod[y] a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural,' avoiding the difficult issue of how to construct viable ways to live together and to design a sustainable relation to nature.



As 'our working and domestic lives are [considered] effectively irredeemable alongside this ideal' (Garrard, 2004: 71), the idea of wilderness demoralizes all efforts at social and environmental change. And designing a nurturing and sustainable relationship to nature is a crucial challenge: 'To the extent that biological diversity [...] is likely to survive in the future only by the most vigilant and self-conscious management of the ecosystems that sustain it, the ideology of wilderness,' Cronon (1996: 18) notes, 'is potentially in direct conflict with the very thing it encourages us to protect.'

Cronon's essay makes it possible to see that the opposition between wilderness and civilization is only one of three templates for understanding the human impact on the natural world: first, there is a premodern human life magically in sync with the rhythms of nature; second, there is modern civilization's glamorization of an undebased wilderness it knows itself to be irrevocably divorced from; and third, there is the option of a more vigilant and careful management of nature, driven by an awareness of reciprocal dependence rather than fantasies of purity and authenticity. This third option is the one Cronon prefers, and it is the one *The Wolf Border*, on my reading, works to accommodate. Hall's earlier novels did not decisively move from the first and second to the third template. *Haweswater*, for instance, hovers between the first and third templates as it offers an elegiac exercise in coming to terms with the loss of a primal unity and with the inevitability of an irrevocably humanized world. *The Carhullan Army*, in turn, adopts the second frame as it imagines Britain as split in two halves – one wild, one micromanaged – with one half somehow escaping all contamination by the other. It is only in *The Wolf Border* that the question of how to manage nature in a less destructive way takes centre stage.

We can assess the difference between *Haweswater* and *The Wolf Border* by comparing the ways they process the fantasy of reciprocal attunement between human and natural life. *Haweswater*, as I noted, is organized around the opposition between an organic community in which people's 'knowledge of the place is as unconscious and simple as the mechanisms of breathing' (Hall, 2002: 112) on the one hand and the aligned forces of modernity on the other. For peo-

ple belonging to the 'intricate union' of landscape and community, the opposition between wilderness and culture makes no sense and appears as an affectation of city folk. Jack, the representative of the Waterworks who comes to reside in the village and begins an affair with Janet, is seen as '[o]ne of those classless types who believes that this place is about scenery and escape, and getting' something out that hasn't bin put in!' (Hall, 2002: 180) – as someone, in other words, sufficiently alienated from natural life to believe in a separation between civilization and the wilderness. Jack believes such alienation can be overcome, yet the novel does not share this belief: it sends him to his death during an absurd excursion because of his lack of intimacy with the landscape, and his death inspires Janet to become a kind of proto-suicide bomber at the end of the novel. Only death reconnects Jack to the landscape, as '[a] ghost in the elements' that is 'shouting through the soil [ ... ] faintly' (Hall, 2002: 229). The novel's formal choices further underline its inability to imagine a productive encounter between Jack and Janet: the start of their affair is narrated in the subjunctive mode as a matter of speculation, not fact (Hall, 2002: 113–15). This hesitation permeates the whole novel through the intermittent and often surprising tense shifts, which evoke an omniscient narrator, shuttling between past and present tense, who finds herself unable to find her temporal footing in recounting a world that, even if she knows it to be lost, continues to haunt her. Indeed, if the novel is convinced that alienation cannot be undone, this does not mean that it quite knows what to believe instead. In *Haweswater*, the loss of rural connectedness is not compensated for by a different vision of the common good; the unity with nature is only something to be lamented, which is reflected in the novel's elegiac tone. When one of the characters asks in exasperation 'What of us after dam?' (Hall, 2002: 111), the novel has not imagined an answer. And if the character is consoled by the assurance 'Give it a while [ ... ] Summet'll cum' (Hall, 2002: 111), this 'summet' has failed to materialize by the point in time the novel is narrated from – that is, the present.

This lack of a vision of the common good is most apparent when we look at the nature of the Manchester City Waterworks that is tasked with organizing the controlled flooding of the village. The

Waterworks is emphatically no private company, but rather combines the interests of government and industry. The Haweswater Reservoir is deemed necessary because Manchester needs water 'for its thirsty people, for its industries which had tripled in size since the start of the century' (Hall, 2002: 49). It is because the 'country' needs more water supplies that the organic way of life in the village is undone. It is the Waterworks and its terraforming powers, then, that stand in for the compromised alliance of industrial capitalism (which brings the 'thirsty people' to Manchester in the first place) and the state that would, after the Second World War, enable the elaboration of universal welfare institutions. *Haweswater* is unable to imagine the difference between beneficial – if inevitably compromised – state action and the rampant capitalist exploitation the welfare state is supposed to constrain: the improvised town for the workers is compared to 'one of the Western gold-rush towns of the previous mid-century, born [...] out of the desire for profit' (Hall, 2002: 168); the project is described as an enterprise that relentlessly converts individuals into indistinct biomass when we read that '[t]he hundreds of men working on the project suffered thousands of fingers broken, re-broken, toes fractured' (Hall, 2002: 166). The aggressiveness of these formulations shows *Haweswater* acting out its dismay over the displacement of a more intimate relation with nature. While it pointedly refuses the compensatory fantasy of an untainted wilderness it diagnoses the character of Jack with, it nevertheless fails to imagine a reciprocally sustaining relation between nature and civilization.

*The Wolf Border*, like *Haweswater*, officially refuses the division between wilderness and civilization, dismissing it *not*, this time, as the product of city life, but as a mark of immaturity. Thinking back to her youth in the Lake District, Rachel notes that '[s]he did not know it then, but in reality [the moors were] a kempt place, cultivated, even the high grassland covering the fells was manmade' (Hall, 2002: 29). Later in the novel, she wonders whether Sylvia, the earl's daughter who takes on the wolves as a pet project, is naïve enough to consider the wolves' habitat 'a boil-in-the-bag Eden, with no human interface' (Hall, 2002: 339). If Sylvia resists the wolves' invasive sterilization, it is because it serves as '[a] reminder that the enclosure is governed,

that it still requires management' (Hall, 2002: 339). Rachel accepts the thorough entanglement of human and nonhuman worlds and is committed to the challenge of finding a sustainable form of nature management that actively shapes rather than passively conserves the wild. Her commitment, the novel notes, is to the belief that 'the country as a whole will one day re-wild,' that one day, 'there will be a place, again, where the streetlights end and wilderness begins' (Hall, 2002: 234). It is this place the novel explicitly calls 'the wolf border.' Wilderness, in this dispensation, is not a pristine state in which a 'self-willed' nature is left alone, but a domain that, in the words of environmental writer Emma Marris (2015), is 'managed as wilderness,' that is, 'managed as if [it] were wilderness'. The border between the wild and the domesticated is not pre-given but rather instituted by human intervention.

This shift is in keeping with contemporary conservation practices, which increasingly recognize the ineluctability of human intervention because, as Marris (2015) writes, '[t]oday we can't withdraw without blood on our hands'. Human action has an impact upon the life-world of plants and animals to such an extent that preventing species from going extinct now requires further active intervention. As Jamie Lorimer (2015: 5) has remarked, this places conservation at the heart of contemporary environmental challenges, as it is an issue that engages with concerns over human impact and responsibility that are customarily grouped under the rubric of the Anthropocene. Marris' insights in her successful book *Rambunctious Garden: Saving Nature in a Post-Wild World* (2011) resonate with those of so-called New Conservationists like Peter Kareiva and Joseph Mascaro and move beyond the 'Old Conservationist' emphasis on keeping wilderness intact and restoring decaying ecosystems – an emphasis phrased most memorably, perhaps, by American president Theodore Roosevelt, when he noted, in relation to the Grand Canyon, 'leave it as it is. You cannot improve on it. The ages have been at work on it, and man can only mar it' (cited in Marris, 2015). As Jamie Lorimer (2015: 5) notes, such traditional conservation is 'reactive' as '[i]t seeks to preserve a fixed Nature from modern, urban, and industrial Society by enclosing it in National Parks'. In an English context, it

also misrecognizes how thoroughly human cultivation has shaped the land for thousands of years.

For New Conservationists, the preservation and restoration of pre-human worlds have become obsolete projects in a post-wild world thoroughly shaped by human action; saving nature now requires removing or resettling species, deploying non-native species, or supporting new ecosystems in humanized environments. A preservationist ethic insisting on purity and non-intervention merely puts a brake on adequate action. For New Conservationists, non-intervention is neither a goal nor a virtue, as the relevant choice is between good interventions and bad interventions – between effective and destructive wildlife management. Nature cannot be left to its own devices as if it persisted apart from civilization; what is needed, instead, is ways to accommodate ‘wildness at the heart of contemporary life’ as part of a settlement that sustains rather than alienates life (Lorimer, 2015: 11). *The Wolf Border* suggests that such a dispensation not only requires an altered relation to nature, but also different conceptions of welfare and of the market.

### The Market and the State of Nature

*The Wolf Border*’s engagement with the distinction between good and bad nature management resonates with its exploration of beneficial state intervention. If New Conservationist practices can be described as ‘modes of biopolitics shaping future world through the operations of assemblages of scientific knowledge, administration, and practice’ (Lorimer, 2015: 6), their proximity to the very life-shaping apparatuses that the welfare state unleashes on human populations is clear. *The Wolf Border* explores the distinctions between a form of life management that sustains human flourishing and one that depletes life – between, say, a welfare state in which the NHS quietly supports single mothers and a neoliberal state in which citizens are forced to buy health insurance provided by the market. Rachel’s decision to move back to the UK is triggered by the realization, when she discovers she is pregnant, that ‘there is no additional rider to her policy; she is not

covered [ ... ] She'll have to find a doctor and pay for it herself' (Hall, 2015: 72–3). Rachel does not want such exposure to the contingencies of the market, and the next scene in the novel finds her accepting the job offer in the UK and the protection by the NHS that comes with it.

It is the figure of the wolf that keeps the novel's sociopolitical and environmental lines of enquiry together. If wolves have recently served as the charismatic poster animals for rewilding programs, they also circulate in the contemporary imagination as symbols of the predatory nature of neoliberalism (understood as a mode of life management in the service of capital rather human flourishing). The most famous instance of the wolf as the 'newly returned symbol of all things wild' (Marris, 2017) is no doubt the case of the Yellowstone National Park, in which the reintroduction of wolves has allegedly led to a stabilization of the ecosystem. As Emma Marris (2017) underlines, these wolves now inhabit thoroughly human-inflected life-worlds rather than pristine habitats: they have not simply 'restored a lost component to western ecosystems,' but have in fact 'returned to a place much changed.'

But if wolves in Hall's novel and in conservationist practice are elements in the management of the biosphere, they still figure in the popular imagination as icons of unadulterated wildness. The iconography of neoliberalism is one site where such images circulate. In discussions of neoliberalism's gradual erosion of life-worlds and its 'stealth revolution' (to deploy Wendy Brown's [2015] term), the image of neoliberal power players like the International Monetary Fund or the infamous 'Troika' devastating the Greek economy as wolves in sheep's clothing is prevalent. A title like *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2014) – a film based on the life of stockbroker Jordan Belford – exemplifies an imaginary that sees the world of global finance as an unforgiving food chain in which the apex predators destroy lesser life forms lest they be eaten themselves. In another film about the 2008 financial crisis, *Margin Call* (2012), which chronicles the fall of Lehman Brothers, the moment when Sam Rogers (played by Kevin Spacey) realizes that his bank is fatally overleveraged is scored with Phosphorescent's 'Wolves.' This song's plaintive lyrics – 'Mama,

there's wolves in the house/ Mama, they won't let me out' – hints at the inherent instability of this food chain: financial predators are, in the world of contemporary finance, also always potentially the prey of other predators. Man, in this neoliberal dispensation, is imagined as a wolf to other men.

But what does this mean, exactly? The phrase *homo homini lupus* (man is a wolf to man) is a classic of political theory: originating in Thomas Hobbes' *De Cive*, but with antecedents dating back to the Roman playwright Plautus, the phrase expresses the 'brutish, anarchical, and violent condition of man in the natural state' (Rossello, 2012: 255). While the phrase is often taken as a mere metaphor (man is *like* a wolf) in what Diego Rossello (2012: 257) has called the 'humanist consensus' around Hobbes' state of nature, it involves a much more conflicted trafficking between animal and human (animal) realms: human life is never definitely separated from the animal realm, and the imposition of human civilization to secure human life from the threat of other lives (Hobbes' famous Leviathan) is beset by a persistent lycanthropy. *The Wolf Border's* sustained exploration of the analogies between (caring for) wolves and (caring for) human lives, then, draws attention to the conflicts, anxieties, and desires that continue to haunt the division between the wildness of wolves and the civilization of humans. It shows that the state of nature does not so much name an illusory state *before* civilization but is an illusion of wildness cultivated as an illusory alternative *to* social life – as the site of experiences that are supposedly truer and more authentic than the comfort and dullness of administered life.

Under neoliberalism, such a state of nature that transforms humans into wolves is not called the wilderness; it is called the market. Like the wilderness, the market serves as a carefully curated but purportedly spontaneous site of asociality; like the wilderness, it is supposed to provide experiences that are more redemptive, authentic, and truthful than the convenience and indulgences provided by social institutions. The state of nature 'renders self-preservation the primary impulse of human being', a situation that 'leads to an intolerable state of insecurity' (Elliot, 2018: 70, 71). This precarity sanctions all kinds of aggressive and pre-emptive self-defence as, Jane Elliott (2018: 72)

writes, ‘threat to survival necessarily releases Man from normative strictures’. In neoliberal thought, this release from social norms and this exposure to risk, chaos, and danger is precisely what makes the market a privileged source of value and truth. This glorification of exposure to market forces is most visibly reflected in the lionization of the figure of the entrepreneur. The entrepreneur, in the work of neoliberal precursors like Ludwig von Mises and Wilhelm Röpke, is someone who is brave enough to expose himself to the only available source of economic information – that is, the price signals that make up the market. If, as neoliberalism assumes in the wake of Friedrich Hayek, it is impossible to acquire all necessary information to understand (let alone plan) the economy, the willingness to surrender to the market, as ‘the most advanced epistemological system available to humans’ (Beaumont and Kelly, 2018), signifies a purer and more intense mode of existence (Davies, 2018: 149–75; Stedman Jones, 2012: 49–73). Neoliberalism, in other words, codifies an opposition between entrepreneurial ‘risk-taking thrill seekers’ on the one hand and ‘dull drones’ participating in the welfare state on the other (Mirowski, 2014: 119). Entrepreneurs, in this worldview, ‘bask in the unknowable risk of a chaotic future, prostrating [themselves] before the inscrutable market with its Delphic valuations’ (Mirowski, 2019: 9).

The analogy between the wilderness and the market also helps us understand why neoliberalism insists on maintaining this site of illusory wildness. In the previous section, we saw how the wilderness operates as the illusory other of social life that, because it appears as unassailable, demoralizes efforts to imagine more sustainable ways of living. For neoliberalism, the exaltation of the market makes it possible to extend the model of entrepreneurship and force citizens to become, in Michel Foucault’s (2008: 226) famous phrase, ‘entrepreneurs of [the] self’ and to accustom them to dwindling welfare provisions. In environmental thought, an awareness of the constructedness of the wilderness can open up avenues towards an imagining of a more sustainable management of life; in a comparable way, recent scholarship on neoliberalism has emphasized the untenability of the separation between the market and the social. The idea of such a sep-



aration is customarily traced back to Karl Polanyi's notion of a 'double movement' in which market forces tend to disembed themselves from social institutions, which then invites a countermovement by social forces to re-embed market dynamics. Recent scholarship has explicitly taken issue with the idea of the 'growing externality of economy and sociality' (Konings, 2015: 2), and has emphasized that social and economic developments are part of the same dynamic. What looks like the emergence of an autonomous and rigorously nontransparent market is in fact part of a coordinated effort to reorganize society in a way that also recodes family relations, gender roles, and private morality in conservative ways (Cooper, 2017: 7–24; Kotsko, 2018: 69–79).

In *The Wolf Border*, Rachel's discovery that she is not covered by her insurance is a reminder that contemporary neoliberalism has wilfully reinstated something very much like a state of nature – a carefully cultivated state of precarity and exposure to the sovereign force of the market. But if Hobbes' fictional state of nature *predates* the institution of the state, neoliberalism's market-building *deliberately designs* the institutions of the state in such a way that it exposes individuals to the contingencies of the market. Neoliberal markets are the result of something very much like a rewilding project: if markets look sublime and overwhelming and ineffable, they do so by design – a design that supports the demands of capital at the expense of the security and sovereignty of citizens. *The Wolf Border's* sustained analogy between natural and human life-management, then, leverages Hall's long-standing fascination with the attractions of the wild for a shift from an anti-statist position to a novel appreciation of the welfare state.

### Wolves of Welfare

The insight that there is nothing natural about markets is a potentially useful one. The awareness that 'creating the conditions for a worldwide, self-regulating market' requires careful planning, legislating, and institution-building (Kotsko, 2018: 69) makes clear that such in-

stitutions are subject to change – that, in other words, the neoliberal entrepreneur of the self can transform into a different kind of human animal that maintains a more nurturing and caring relationship to the institutions that sustain it. In *The Wolf Border*, it is the analogous insight – unavailable, I argue, in Hall's earlier novels – that there is nothing pristine about the lives of wolves that makes it possible for the novel to imagine a regime of care for them. If there is no such thing as an un-instituted, spontaneous market, and if there is no market that is not encased by national and global institutions, it is a small step to the realization that *different* institutions can be designed. A proper understanding of neoliberalism's institution-building lifts the old liberal taboo on state intervention – very much like New Conservationist practices lift the taboo on wildlife management.

One of the most curious moments in *Haweswater* comes when the debris of Janet's terrorist attack – 'pieces of sodden dress, a candle, the ruptured detonation device' (Hall, 2005: 243) – is gathered by an unnamed navvy and buried between the 'earth-receding roots' of an oak tree, '[a]s if the ground had never been opened or disturbed at all' (Hall, 2005: 244). 'Janet Tree' ends the novel as part of local folklore: it is the name of a witch bringing death to car drivers, and especially to tourists (Hall, 2005: 258–9). Janet, in other words, survives the novel's historical setting as a monument to the irreconcilability of nature and modernity. Yet the novel leaves room for a different imaginary through the way the navvy walks out of the story: he first walks to Langwathby, and then all the way to Scotland, where, we read, 'law and language blur and at some point separate as different smoky elements under the same crown' (Hall, 2005: 244). Scotland, in other words, figures as an as yet unspecified ambition to imagine a semi-autonomous political realm – a realm that sets its own law (the etymological meaning of 'autonomy') through its variation on the English language. Here, Hall's early work at least considers the option of a different dispensation 'under the same crown' (a reference, it seems, to the 1603 Union of the Crowns, which left Scotland separate and distinct *within* the Union); of a different arrangement of nature and society that is more welcoming to a mode of human flourishing in dialogue with both.

At the end of *The Wolf Border*, the wolves escape their enclosure and flee to Scotland. The novel's geography consistently opposes England as a fully enclosed space – the enclosure is situated on 'the largest private estate in England' (Hall, 2015: 13); the estate is 'essentially feudal' (Hall, 2005: 281) – to Scotland, where, in the world of the novel, 'great swathes of foreign-owned land is being recovered,' resources are being recalibrated, and taxes are increased (Hall, 2005: 281, also 25). But if Scotland allows the novel to push its exploration of the welfare state one step further, it crucially remains a compromise with the forces of the market rather than a post-capitalist utopia. Indeed, the suspicion that the earl has masterminded the wolves' escape and the insistence that there is no clear physical border between England and Scotland, only 'intermediate lands,' 'debatable lands,' 'just a smattering of whin and rowan, barren slopes and cuttings' (Hall, 2005: 418), underline the essential continuities between the two realms. In Scotland, the wolves will continue to be discretely monitored, 'sedated and transferred' if necessary (Hall, 2005: 420), and will be sending out telemetry signals captured by transmitters, facilitating intervention if necessary (Hall, 2005: 431). By the end of the novel, then, Scotland does not simply serve as a vanishing point for the novel's uncertain politics, as it does in *Haweswater*: it serves as an occasion to upscale the confined English experiment to the scale of a whole country. The original project had 'pre-existing limits,' and while within the estate, '[t]he landscape will become healthier and more diverse,' 'outside the enclosure barren fells will remain' (Hall, 2005: 329). In the novel's Scotland, the wild is no longer a mystified and carefully circumscribed site of authenticity and intensity, but is scaled up to, in Jamie Lorimer's (2015: 11) words, a form of 'commons, the everyday affective site of human-nonhuman entanglement'. In the novel's Scotland, the wolf border is no longer a geographical marker, but has become a territorial condition, in which the market and the state operate in the service of human and animal flourishing. The novel makes it clear that this Scotland is no utopia, but a project inevitably compromised by its entanglement with the market: the wolves herald '[a] new era for Scottish ecology' (Hall, 2005: 421), an opportunity for 'eco-tourism [ ... ] demonstrating high-revenue

potential' (Hall, 2005: 420). It is not ideal, but it might be the best available option.

It is a testimony to the novel's sustained ambivalence about the attractions of the welfare state that it ends on a flight between the UK (the precise place of departure is not mentioned) and the USA. On the aeroplane, Rachel wonders whether she should 'dope' her son to help him avoid the boredom of transcontinental air travel. Perhaps, she thinks, 'it's cruel to subject a fourteen-month-old to such physical discomforts and tedium [ ... ] but the same might be said of the terms of existence' (Hall, 2005: 426). She ultimately decides to expose him to the contingencies of airborne existence, but not without having the dope at hand, just in case. The word 'dope' recurs once more in the last pages of the book, when Rachel recognizes her dependence on her brother, who himself overcame his drug addiction in the course of the novel through her support and solidarity (Hall, 2005: 429). The caring gesture of *not* interfering in her son's exposure to boredom, in its turn, is echoed once more as the novel recounts how, right before Rachel's American trip, 'the [wolf] pack seemed to be veering too far east,' yet she ultimately decided against 'tranquilisation and transporting them' and 'hoped instinct would prevail' (Hall, 2005: 430). In this case, instinct could be trusted; yet unlike Hall's earlier novels, *The Wolf Border* no longer believes that instinct will unfailingly prevail in the encounter with 'the terms of existence,' and that provisions against such failure diminish life. If the terms of existence condemn us to live like 'wolves to man,' perhaps, there is consolation in the fact that the wildness of wolves, as the novel has taught us, is as much a labour of love as a condition of abandonment.

#### Note

- 1 Throughout this chapter, I distinguish between 'wildness,' which refers to an unruly and savage dimension of human and nonhuman lives, and 'wilderness,' which refers to particular locations untouched by human intervention; see Buell (2005: 148–9) and Huggan (2016: 152–7).

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