k@ta, Vol. 28, No. 1, June 2026, 69-84
ISSN 1411-2639 (Print) / 2302-6294 (Online)

DOI: https://doi.org/10.9744/kata.28.1.69-84

OPEN ACCESS
https://kata.petra.ac.id

Negotiating Species-Based Identity: Cultural Hybridity in Paru Itagaki's *Beastars*

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Article Info:
Received: 27 December 2025
Revised: 20 April 2026
Accepted: 31 May 2026
Published Online: 30 June 2026

Keywords:
Beastars,
Hybridity,
Ambivalence,
Mimicry,
Postcolonialism

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Paru Itagaki's manga series *Beastars* through Bhabha's (1994) postcolonial perspective. Utilizing Bhabha's (1994) concepts of hybridity, ambivalence, mimicry, and the Third Space of Enunciation, the study analyses the narrative and its visual elements. Close readings of panel composition, character archetypes, and visual reversals show how *Beastars* exposes the fragility of species-based cultural classifications and the psychic disorientation that follows when familiar categories collapse. The series initially presents carnivores and herbivores as two opposing groups, then unsettles this division through the actions of Louis and Legoshi. Louis, an herbivore who adopts carnivore-like authority, and Legoshi, a carnivore who uses his strength to protect herbivores, disrupt the meanings attached to their species. Both characters expose these boundaries as constructed categories that remain open to continual revision. Through them, *Beastars* shows how identity can emerge from unstable positions between established categories. The study argues that *Beastars* critiques species-based essentialism while illustrating the productive function of the Third Space, suggesting that cultural transformation arises through the hybrid subject's ability to unsettle authority and create new ways of being. *Beastars* thus presents Bhabha's (1994) ever-hybrid "international culture" as a site of ongoing negotiation rather than fixed identity.

INTRODUCTION

Comics is a narrative medium that uses images, words, and sequences to tell stories (Kukkonen, 2013). While comics may cover many different genres and appear in various formats, the comic book remains one of the medium's most familiar forms. The comic book emerged in the 1930s in the United States when publishers recognized that comic series previously published in newspapers could be repackaged as a new standalone product that compiled old and newly released issues. One well-known form of comics is Japanese manga, whose history dates to illustrated entertainment forms of the 18th and 19th centuries, namely *toba-e* and *Kibyōshi*.

Although manga has these earlier Japanese roots, modern manga was also influenced by early-20th-century United States comic books, particularly in its use of thought balloons, speech bubbles, guttered panels, and serialized publication. The consumption of manga is significantly higher than that of comic books in the West,

accounting for almost 40% of all publications in Japan in 1995. Manga magazines are also mostly monochrome, except for their covers and a few pages. This, along with other factors, allowed manga magazines to be significantly cheaper than their American counterparts, even though they often contained almost ten times as many pages as American comic books (Schodt, 1996).

Although superhero film adaptations from franchises such as the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* and the *DC Extended Universe* have brought more public attention to comics, the critical study of comics has historically been relatively limited. This is largely due to the public perception that comics, as mass media, are mainly aimed at juvenile audiences, thus making the general populace less inclined to understand more about the subject (Gardner, 2012). The same applies to anthropomorphic animal characters, as anthropomorphized animal characters are more commonly found in literary works or media intended for younger audiences (You, 2021). Literary works utilizing anthropomorphic animals as their characters are still very much capable of tackling mature themes, as these figures can function as allegories through which authors project human experience onto nonhuman characters and narratives (De Guzman, 2023). Thus, a critical reading of such texts is crucial to support comic studies and scholarship on anthropomorphic animals in literary works.

Paru Itagaki's *Beastars* is a Japanese comic series (or manga) serialized from September 2016 to October 2020. Throughout its four-year publication, the series comprised over 196 chapters across 22 volumes, and by 2021, the manga had sold over 7 million copies (Harding, 2021). The series gained popularity when *Netflix* adapted the manga into an animated TV series in 2019, followed by a second season in 2021 and a two-part third season, with the first part released in December 2024. The series is set in an alternate modern world, where anthropomorphic animals coexist alongside one another, and primarily follows the lives of the students at Cherryton Academy, specifically Legoshi, Louis, and Haru. As the plot progresses, however, it is revealed that there is a strong yet subtle cultural divide between the carnivores and the herbivores. Although the two sides have formed a civilized society, the predator-prey relationship between them remains present. In this setting, however, predation is taboo and is widely condemned, to the point that it is considered a crime.

Legoshi, the series' main character, is a gray wolf who belongs to the carnivore group and struggles with his identity and strong predatory instinct. The story is further complicated when Legoshi falls in love with a rabbit whom he once wanted to devour. Later in the story, Legoshi convinces himself that his physical strength is a tool to protect the herbivores. He sees herbivores as an oppressed group worthy of protection, and fellow carnivores as allies to this cause, but also as potential threats to the herbivores.

Louis, an herbivorous red deer, is envious of the physical strength that the carnivores possess, to the point where he despises his own physiology and often pushes his physical capabilities to the limit to match those of a carnivore. He is upset at how carnivores often conceal their strength and considers such concealment a disingenuous and patronizing attempt to make them appear less threatening to herbivores. Despite this, he wants to create a world where carnivores and herbivores can live on more equal terms.

Although Legoshi and Louis share a common goal of better unity and equality for all animals, the manga repeatedly presents its narrative through a metaphorical barrier that underlines the opposition between the carnivores and herbivores. It is as if the characters' actions, whether constructive or hostile, are continually shaped by the presence of the Other: they act in response to how the Other has affected their lives and to whether they wish to reject or accept that Other.

This research takes its point of departure from *Beastars*' portrayal of a world in which two different cultures meet, clash, and negotiate a flawed middle ground. This middle ground allows both cultures to remain present without being completely assimilated into a new, different culture. The series' recurring complications, which

often stem from characters holding mixed or even opposing views toward the same issue, also support the need for this research.

The series' portrayal of carnivore-herbivore relations, especially its focus on cultural clash, negotiation, and ambivalent identity, is closely related to Bhabha's (1994) theory of cultural interaction, especially the notions of Hybridity and The Third Space of Enunciation. Bhabha's account of the clash between the colonizer and the colonized provides a useful lens for reading the opposition between herbivores and carnivores in *Beastars*. This opposition creates sites of cultural contact where both sides accept, reject, and negotiate with one another in shaping their relations and ways of living. Within these sites of cultural contact, ambivalence refers to a split condition in which a subject appears both authentic and different at the same time (Kasih, 2018). Examining this ambivalence raises questions about the common outlook that perceives different cultures as fixed, authentic, separate, and pre-given entities (Ashcroft et al., 2013).

If being a carnivore is associated with consuming meat, then what happens to carnivores' cultural identity in a society where consuming meat is deemed a crime? How do they overcome this obstacle? Do they accept, reject, or negotiate? Rather than treating carnivore identity as fixed, Bhabha (1994) directs attention to how such categories are socially produced. He posits that cultural meaning emerges through interactions between different cultural signs and positions in a metaphorical space he calls "The Third Space of Enunciation." Within this space, differing values and identities meet, conflict, and negotiate with one another. From this perspective, carnivore identity is not defined solely by meat consumption but is reshaped through interaction with herbivores and with a society that condemns predation. Thus, cultural identity is fluid, changing, and interconnected; in other words, it is hybrid.

Several previous studies have discussed the *Netflix* series adaptation of *Beastars,* such as De Guzman's (2023) study, which used *Beastars* to highlight how bromance in media reinforces heteronormative norms and encodes queer same-sex intimacy. Meilantari et al., (2022) approached the adaptation with a Freudian psychoanalytic lens, highlighting Legoshi's superego, which dampens his carnivorous id. These studies show that *Beastars* has been examined through gender and psychoanalytic perspectives, but they focus on the animated adaptation rather than the manga as the source material. Moreover, they do not examine the series through Bhabha's notion of hybridity. Therefore, this study seeks to examine how Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity is portrayed through the anthropomorphic characters of Paru Itagaki's *Beastars*.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The main theoretical framework draws on Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, Third Space of Enunciation, and mimicry, as developed in his 1994 book *The Location of Culture*. Huddart (2005) explains that Bhabha's (1994) work examines cultural in-betweenness in postcolonial contexts and critiques colonial systems that construct hierarchical divisions between colonizer and colonized. In this framework, hybridity means that culture is perpetually evolving and inherently mixed - no culture is ever truly "pure," but rather a temporary point within an ongoing process of contact and exchange. It is within these interstitial spaces - what Bhabha (1994) calls the Third Space of Enunciation - that cultural production is most active, generating new meanings out of the encounter between cultures.

Colonial authority depends on presenting the colonizer and the colonized as fundamentally different and placing them within a rigid hierarchy. However, cultural contact makes this distinction unstable because the two groups inevitably influence one another. Similarly, Bhabha's (1994) notion of mimicry exposes another contradiction in the colonial mission. Colonial authority encourages the colonized to imitate the colonizer's

language, behavior, and values, but does not allow them to become fully equal. If the colonized become too similar to the colonizer, the difference that supports the colonial hierarchy begins to collapse. Together, these concepts show how "contact zones" produce ambivalence, destabilizing cultural binaries while producing new hybrid identities (Bhabha, 1994).

A recent study on Thai literature by Boonhok (2025) shows the relevance of using Bhabha's hybridity in reading literary works produced in the Global South, specifically in Southeast Asia. The study scrutinized the notion of "Thainess" as Thai identity, which has been reimagined through the contemporary genres of Thai fantasy and fanfiction. It highlighted how the works present Thainess as well as other representations, namely those drawn from classical Indian traditions and the contemporary Korean wave. Boonhok (2025) pointed out that not only do both genres depict selected forms of Thainess as closely related to the classical Indian traditions, but they also challenge those traditions by combining them with K-Pop aesthetics in the narratives. The study confirms that Bhabha's (1994) perspective remains relevant for examining contemporary postcolonial issues, including those examined in the present study.

Other prior works also support the present study by discussing related issues of postcolonial identity, gender, and power. Ghassani and Adipurwawidjana (2024) offer a postcolonial reading of *Blue Bayou*, analyzing how its formal contrasts - dreamlike sequences versus quasi-documentary realism - externalize the protagonist Antonio's identity crisis as a Korean-American adoptee facing deportation. Notably, the film's self-aware, fourth-wall-breaking moments reframe cinema as a mirror for reimagining American reality from a diasporic perspective. Antonio's "post-memory" imaginings of his biological mother resonate with this study's treatment of Legoshi and Louis' upbringings and their construction of reality.

De Guzman (2023) reads *Beastars* through the lens of gender and masculinity, arguing that its portrayal of male intimacy is double-edged: reinforcing heteronormativity while simultaneously encoding queer desire. The prey-predator dynamic compounds this tension, forcing characters into negotiated middle grounds that allow social relations to continue despite conflict. The study's discussion of bromance, which bridges queer and heteronormative readings, mirrors the Third Space logic this research adopts to interrogate binary power relations.

Kasih (2018) examines Francisco Jiménez's semi-autobiographical trilogy through postcolonial critique, tracing how U.S. cultural dominance shapes Francisco's hybrid Mexican-American identity across *The Circuit*, *Breaking Through*, and *Reaching Out*. Francisco is drawn to the promise of American prosperity but is rejected by both American and Mexican communities. As a result, he cannot identify fully with either group. This tension reflects Ashcroft et al.'s (2013) notion of cultural "pull and repulsion." A similar tension appears in *Beastars*, where characters are also positioned between conflicting cultural identities.

van Huyssteen (2023) scrutinizes *Beastars*' three most prevalent recurring themes: meat, sex, and power. It discusses the detailed qualities of such themes and uses several theories to explain their meaning. For example, the dissertation similarly discusses the herbivore-carnivore binary in relation to postcolonialism but focuses on understanding the building blocks of power relations within its cultures, à *la* Foucault, via Fanon, Memmi, and Mbembe. The study also notes parallels between Butler's gender performativity and how herbivores' and carnivores' traits are presented in the manga as, respectively, feminine and masculine. van Huyssteen's (2023) study is useful for the present research because it discusses *Beastars* in relation to postcolonialism, culture, gender, and identity.

METHOD

This study employed qualitative multimodal textual analysis to interpret the textual and visual elements of *Beastars*. The primary corpus comprised the 22-volume English-language VIZ Media edition of *Beastars* (Itagaki, 2019-2023). All quotations, page references, and panel excerpts used in this article are based on this edition. Although *Beastars* was originally published in Japanese, the original-language edition was not used as the basis for the close reading. References to the manga's Japanese publication history are included only to provide contextual background.

The analysis focused on the relationship between herbivores and carnivores across the series, particularly how characters negotiate species identity, power, and hybridity. Given the 22-volume corpus, purposive selection was used to identify scenes, pages, and panels that most clearly represented species conflict, reversals of species-based authority, and the hybrid positions of Louis and Legoshi.

The multimodal analysis drew on three elements of manga identified by Tagame Gengoroh (2007) namely *byōga* (the drawing of individual panels), *hyōgen* (language and expression), and *kōzō* (layout and structure) (as cited in Armour (2010)). These elements were considered alongside Kukkonen's (2013) discussion of comic-specific signs, including panel composition, speech and thought bubbles, sequencing, and page layout. This combination enabled the study to examine how verbal and visual elements work together to produce meaning in the manga.

The selected pages and panels were read as visual and textual data. Following Cohn's (2007) view of comics as a form of "visual language" (as cited in Kukkonen, 2013), the analysis considered the interaction among images, words, panel arrangement, and narrative sequence. Bhabha's (1994) concepts of hybridity, ambivalence, mimicry, the unhomely, and the Third Space of Enunciation were used to interpret how *Beastars* represents the instability and negotiation of species-based identity. Relevant scholarly literature was used to support the interpretation of the selected data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section is organized into three subsections that examine the carnivore-herbivore divide, the ambivalence of the drama club and Adler play, and the hybrid positions of Louis and Legoshi.

Disaster Apertura: A Divisive Opening

Beastars opens with a very bleak introduction to its world. The manga's first page opens with a grim image of a wounded alpaca (later revealed as Tem), with blood dripping from his left arm, as he flees through a shadowy hallway of a school. The alpaca bolts into the school's gymnasium only to find himself cornered in a dead end. Tem utters desperate pleas as his assailant catches up to him, and before he can finish speaking, the mysterious figure devours him.

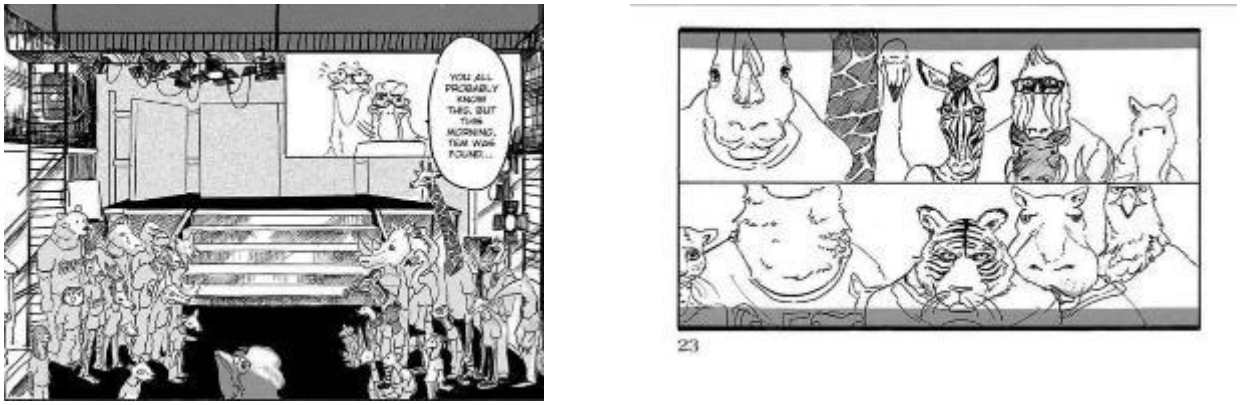
We are then introduced to Cherryton Academy and its students the next day, as they are shocked to discover what happened the previous night. As the assailant is revealed to be a carnivore, all the herbivore students quickly distance themselves from their carnivore friends for fear that they too might be devoured. This opening is important because the act of predation is not treated only as an individual crime. It immediately becomes a social event that reorganizes how the students see one another.

While this event brings to light the herbivores' trauma and their complex, fragile, and ambivalent relationship with the carnivores, this introduction also establishes the binary logic through which the characters understand their world. The murder immediately divides the students into two opposed groups: carnivores as possible predators and herbivores as possible victims. The school community therefore reads identity through a simplified opposition, in which species determines social meaning.

This binary view recalls a structuralist understanding of meaning, in which identity is formed through opposition. This approach to viewing culture is what Bhabha seeks to challenge by shifting the focus toward the in-between and beyond these binaries (Ashcroft et al., 2013; Bhabha, 1994). Bhabha's (1994) reading of Fanon acknowledges why such an outlook exists, especially in a postcolonial context; however, it also shows why an excessive attachment to one side of the binary can be dangerous. This is a recurring theme among both carnivores and herbivores throughout the series. It is, therefore, necessary to read the text sensitively, considering the cultural context of both carnivores and herbivores, rather than favouring one side of the binary over the other. In this sense, the opening does not simply present carnivores as threats and herbivores as victims. It also shows how quickly fear can turn social difference into a fixed category.

The series then introduces the drama club - a club to which Tem belongs. The distrust between the carnivores and the herbivores is explored further in this section.

Figure 1.
A Split in the Drama Club



Note. Panel excerpts from *Beastars* (Vol. 1, p. 23), by P. Itagaki, 2019, VIZ Media. Copyright © 2017 Paru Itagaki (Akitashoten).

As Kukkonen (2013) stresses, comic-specific affordances are ways through which comics and related media indirectly deliver narrative meaning. These affordances include images, text, and the composition of both, presented within the temporality and spatiality of a comic book page. The size and arrangement of visual elements, the use or omission of thought bubbles and speech bubbles, and the overall page composition are among the various aspects of comics to which a scholar needs to be sensitive (Kukkonen, 2013).

Figure 1 visually reinforces the division that Tem's death has produced. In the large panel on the left, the carnivores and herbivores are separated into two groups standing on opposite sides of the room, while the dark empty space in the middle creates a strong visual boundary between them. This arrangement shows not only their physical separation but also the loss of trust between the two groups. The drama club, which previously brought carnivores and herbivores together, has now become a divided space. The page layout therefore does not merely illustrate the conflict; it makes the carnivore-herbivore division visible to the reader.

This sense of division is strengthened by the facial expressions shown in the right panel. The close-up arrangement foregrounds the members' reactions and reveals a mixture of sadness, fear, anger, and suspicion. Rather than presenting the club as a unified community mourning Tem together, the figure emphasizes fragmentation. The members are no longer connected primarily by their shared role in the drama club, but by their position within the carnivore-herbivore divide.

Another significant detail is the position of Sanu, the pelican and current president of the drama club. He appears visually small in relation to the two larger groups surrounding him, which suggests how limited his authority is in the face of the tension that has overtaken the club. Although he is the one delivering the news of Tem's death, the composition places greater emphasis on the split between the members than on his announcement itself. In this way, the figure presents the division as the central consequence of the event.

Tem's devouring makes the taboo of predation visible to the drama club members. His death exposes the unstable space between the categories of "friend" and "foe," forcing the club members to reconsider how they understand their carnivore friends. Borrowing from Freud's *Unheimlich* or The Uncanny, Bhabha (1994) coined the term "unhomely," which refers to an estranging and disorienting experience born out of the displacement of the colonial subjects, blurring together their concept of "home" and the "world". In *Beastars*, this can be seen in the uncanniness of having "friend" and "foe" collapse into one another, as the herbivores may no longer see their carnivore friends in the same way. The unhomely, then, is not only a matter of fear. It appears when a familiar social space, such as the drama club, suddenly becomes strange because the members can no longer rely on their previous categories of trust.

A comparable sense of in-betweenness appears in Kasih's (2018) discussion of Francisco's experience in *Breaking Through*. Growing up as an immigrant from Mexico in the United States, Francisco is seen by both the Mexican and white American communities as a "blur" of both communities, an outsider; his in-betweenness is laughed off by his white friends when he says he wants to be like Elvis, and it is rejected by the Mexican community with a silent disapproval (Kasih, 2018). This, in turn, affects Francisco's upbringing and identity; not only does he have to endure segregation while working at a very young age, but he also has to navigate this cultural "maze" to find where he belongs in the world. This comparison clarifies the relevance of Bhabha's unhomely to *Beastars*: both Francisco and the students at Cherryton experience identity as unstable when familiar categories no longer provide a secure sense of belonging.

Quid pro quo: The Volatile Ambivalence

The problem within the drama club does not end there, as the members have been preparing to perform Adler, a play within the world of *Beastars*, since before the story of *Beastars* even begins. The play centres on Adler, a Grim Reaper who falls in love with someone whose soul he is expected to claim. Louis, a red deer, has been cast in the lead role of Adler, while Tem previously held a supporting role. After Tem's death, the drama club must choose another actor to take over his role. The two main characters of the manga, a gray wolf named Legoshi and a red deer named Louis, are introduced during the resulting dispute over Tem's replacement.

Starting from this point in the story, the attraction and tension between Legoshi and Louis begin to surface in the overarching narrative, presenting a juxtaposition between their points of view in perceiving and solving problems throughout the story. Kai's audition exemplifies this best. The audition scene is important because it first presents Louis and Legoshi through contrasting visual positions: Louis appears composed and authoritative, while Legoshi is associated with hesitation and restraint.

Kai, an aspiring mongoose from the actor's team, is determined to substitute for his late friend. However, his eagerness is quickly shattered when his clubmates inform him that Louis, the head of the drama club, has

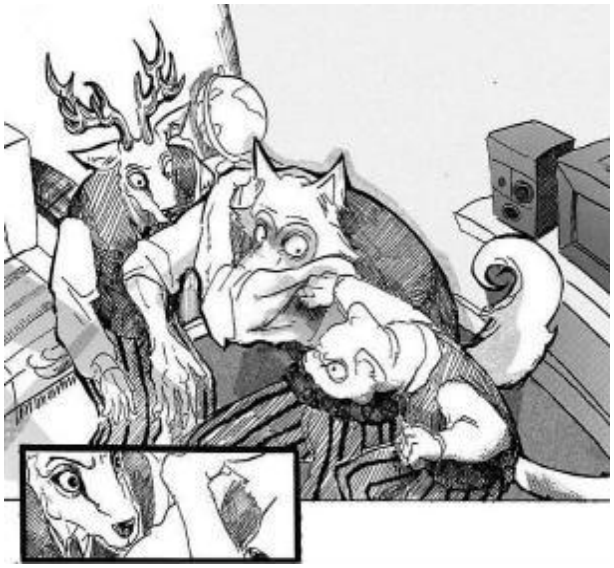
chosen someone else, denying Kai the opportunity to substitute for Tem. Kai bolts straight to the drama club and confronts Louis.

Figure 2.
Louis' Introduction

Note. Panel excerpt from *Beastars* (Vol. 1, p. 78), by P. Itagaki, 2019, VIZ Media. Copyright © 2017 Paru Itagaki (Akitashoten).

Louis' introduction in the panel above presents not only a juxtaposition between him and Legoshi but also a reversal of the two anthropomorphic archetypes discussed previously. In Figure 2, Louis is positioned as the visual and social center of the scene. He is placed in the centre, legs crossed, sitting calmly on a small throne-like sofa with a condescending gaze, unmoved by Kai, who has just burst into the room unprompted. Louis' relaxed posture, direct gaze, and central placement give him authority despite his status as an herbivore.

Figure 3.
Kai's Attack on Louis is Blocked by Legoshi



Note. Panel excerpt from *Beastars* (Vol. 1, p. 85), by P. Itagaki, 2019, VIZ Media. Copyright © 2017 Paru Itagaki (Akitashoten).

In contrast, the other characters are placed at the margins of the panel, either standing over him or appearing only partially within the frame. This arrangement directs the reader's attention to Louis and makes the surrounding characters appear secondary to his authority. The panel therefore reverses the expected prey-predator hierarchy: the herbivore is visually dominant, while the carnivore presence is pushed to the edge of the composition.

This presentation is quickly turned on its head when Louis reveals to Kai that he has been demoted from the acting team to a stagehand. Kai responds with violence, but Legoshi intervenes before the attack can reach Louis.

This change in the characters' dynamics can also be seen in the way the previous scene is conveyed in Figure 3 and in how it differs from Figure 2. The composition of the panel provided in Figure 3 is almost a reversal of the one in Figure 2. Legoshi takes the central position that Louis occupied in Figure 2, as he moves to the panel's center stage. His gigantic stature, especially in comparison to Louis' and Kai's, is used subtly to emphasize this fact.

Louis, on the other hand, is portrayed behind Legoshi and in a lowered position, with his body hunched and eyes open wide, indicating dismay rather than aimlessness. The details on Legoshi's elbow and the slight crease on Louis' vest indicate a collision between Louis and Legoshi; it is as if Legoshi is pushing Louis to the side, directing the attention away from Louis and towards Legoshi. The lack of thought and speech bubbles gives the impression of how sudden Kai's attack is, while the semi translucent, black vignette around Legoshi's head and back stresses Legoshi's presence on the panel.

This may signify either a lightning-fast knee-jerk reaction to block Kai's attack or the recoil he receives from taking a hefty blow to his arm. Either way, Figure 3 emphasizes how quickly the power relation between Legoshi and Louis is flipped. The same herbivore who appeared visually dominant in Figure 2 is now physically shielded by a carnivore. At the same time, Legoshi, who is usually cautious about his own carnivorous strength, becomes the figure whose body controls the scene. His carnivore body remains associated with physical power, but the meaning of that power changes: it is used for protection rather than predation.

The above exchange exemplifies the notion of the Third Space of Enunciation. Qualities commonly tied to certain character archetypes, or previously shown as inherent to particular groups of characters, are detached from their supposed naturalness, fixity, and purity. Louis' authority in Figure 2 and Legoshi's protective force in Figure 3 disturb the fixed association between herbivore and weakness, as well as between carnivore and aggression. The two figures do not simply exchange positions; rather, the scene creates an unstable space in which their identities become difficult to classify through the carnivore-herbivore binary alone.

A similar form of ambivalence can be seen in Imran et al.'s (2025) study of Monica Ali's 2022 novel *Love Marriage.* Through their lexico-grammatical analysis of the text, the authors identify the ambivalence of the British-Indian main character, Yasmin Ghorami. The Ghoramis expect their children to live traditional lives just as their parents did in Kolkata. However, unbeknownst to them, the inter-family dinner that the Ghoramis prepare for their daughter's wedding becomes a culture shock for them, as the groom's family does not conform to the Ghoramis' traditional view. The authors highlight Yasmin's behavior during the family dinner as an attempt at living an ambivalent dual self: someone who feigns conformity to her family and one who rebels against it (Imran et al., 2025). This example helps clarify Louis and Legoshi's ambivalence because both characters also occupy positions that are divided rather than stable: Louis performs authority associated with carnivores, while Legoshi uses carnivorous strength in a protective rather than predatory way. Like

Yasmin, they do not simply choose one of two opposing identities; they act from positions shaped by simultaneous conformity and resistance.

The position of the colonized within the imperial grasp of the colonizer is often contradictory, for one of the primary motivations of many colonial ideologies is to create "reformed" colonized subjects in the image of the colonizer while still refusing to elevate them beyond the status of mere subjects. This incongruity on the colonizers' part produced what Bhabha calls mimicry - something that is "almost the same, but not quite." For a mimicry to be effective, Bhabha (1994) notes that the mimetic act must produce a noticeable difference in its ambivalence to the point that it destabilizes the authoritative culture. In relation to *Beastars*, mimicry can be seen in the way Louis takes on forms of authority culturally associated with carnivores, while remaining visibly marked as an herbivore. His performance of power is therefore similar to carnivore authority, but never identical to it.

The production of Adler further develops the ambivalent relationship between carnivores and herbivores. Although Louis is an herbivore, he is cast as Adler, the play's central character, a role traditionally performed by carnivores. His casting challenges the assumption that authority and power naturally belong to carnivores and creates further tension within the drama club and the wider school community.

Across the chapters that cover the two performances of the play, Louis and Bill, a Bengal tiger, attach different meanings to the role of Adler. For Louis, playing Adler allows him, an herbivore, to occupy a role traditionally associated with carnivores and present himself as more powerful than the carnivores around him. By contrast, after Tem's death and the resulting prejudice against carnivores, Bill sees his own casting in the lead role as a way to repair the public image of carnivores, distinguish himself, and unite the carnivore students at the academy. Their different responses reflect two positions introduced earlier in the article: Louis negotiates the meaning of carnivore authority by appropriating it, whereas Bill attempts to preserve it as a distinct part of carnivore identity.

Fernández-Rodríguez (2020) notes that claims of cultural purity can be used to protect a group's authority by presenting certain practices as naturally belonging to that group. In *Beastars*, this idea can be seen in Bill's response to Louis' role as Adler. For Bill, the role becomes associated with carnivore strength and public representation, particularly after Tem's death has placed carnivores under suspicion. By treating a carnivore lead as the appropriate choice, Bill attempts to preserve Adler as a symbol of carnivore unity and to restore a positive image of carnivore identity. Louis' casting threatens this position because an herbivore performs the authority that Bill associates with carnivores.

Louis does not merely enter a carnivore space. He repeats a role associated with carnivore authority while remaining visibly an herbivore. As Bhabha (1994) states, "The menace behind mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial disclosure also disrupts its authority" (p. 88). In this sense, Louis' performance makes the association between Adler and carnivore authority appear constructed rather than natural. Bill's resistance therefore reveals an attempt to preserve a species-based boundary between carnivore power and herbivore identity. The scene shows that the claim that Adler belongs to carnivores depends on an unstable idea of cultural authenticity.

Lupus et cervus: Of Wolf and Fawn

Louis' mimicry extends beyond just appropriating a role from the carnivores; he has gone as far as violently insulting a fellow herbivore for being incompetent, refusing to be labelled as a "herbivore", and holding his carnivore peers to the expected standard of the Adler play. These actions show that Louis does not merely

admire carnivore authority from a distance. He actively performs that authority while remaining marked as an herbivore.

In a later chapter, it is revealed that young Louis was raised as livestock to be sold and fed to the carnivores in an illegal black market. He was saved by an older fellow red deer, Ogma, who adopted him as his son to continue his family line. This past explains why Louis' attraction to carnivore power is inseparable from trauma. The culture he imitates is also the culture that once objectified him as consumable flesh.

When the Shishigumi, an all-lion mafia-like criminal organization, kidnapped a student on the school grounds, Louis was one of the people who braved their headquarters to save her, alongside Legoshi and an omnivorous panda named Gohin. In his rescue attempt, Louis ended up killing the gang's leader, and instead of leaving, he took over the position for himself, gaining the authority he had long desired.

The overwhelming cultural scrutiny associated with carnivore power drives Louis to imitate the power that oppressed him, not to submit to it, but to appropriate the very image and identity imposed on him over time. He uses this image both to challenge carnivore domination by inverting the carnivore gaze toward the herbivore - weak, slow, and dependent - and to create a new image of the herbivore. Louis' leadership of the Shishigumi therefore reverses the expected direction of power: the former object of consumption becomes the figure who controls a carnivore organization.

Louis fits Bhabha's (1994) description of the mimic subject: a "colonised" subject, indoctrinated and influenced by the "colonizer's" immense control over knowledge and power, who inverts this domination by, in part, taking on the signs of the dominant culture. However, the origin of Louis' mimicry is quite different from what Bhabha (1994) discusses in many colonial subjects. In many of Bhabha's examples of mimicry in colonial settings, especially in the case of the colonized, the mimetic double vision is often an indirect product of the colonizer's conscious attempt to make its subjects despise and abandon their roots, then convert them into something closer to the colonizer's own image.

The noteworthy difference here is that, unlike Bhabha's examples, Louis' double vision and mimic tendencies seem to develop from trauma and defiance rather than from a direct attempt by carnivores to convert him. At no point in the story does any carnivore try to convert or persuade Louis to become more like the carnivores or to despise his herbivore roots. With this point in mind, the writer argues that Louis' attraction to carnivore culture represents a more distinctive form of mimicry. It is not imposed directly by carnivores; rather, it emerges from Louis' own attempt to master the very power that once degraded him.

Louis' attraction to carnivore power is ambivalent because he imitates the same group that caused his childhood trauma. His imitation is also intentional: by adopting the behavior and authority associated with carnivores, Louis challenges the stereotype of herbivores as timid, polite, and dependent. As Bhabha (1994) stresses, "Mimicry repeats rather than re-presents" (p. 88).

Louis' hostility toward his fellow herbivores and desire to be seen as a carnivore create a mirror image (repetition) of the same carnivores that wanted to sell him when he was a child. This challenges the common image or stereotype of herbivores being timid and courteous animals, but at the same time serves as a two-step projection of Louis' Othered version of the carnivore. The negative stereotype of the crass and ferocious carnivore is performed by a red deer, and that performance is grounded in Louis' lived experience of carnivore violence. This is why Louis' mimicry is not simple imitation. It is a repetition that exposes the violence behind the authority he imitates.

The apex of Louis' mimicry occurs following the Shishigumi kidnapping, when the public is stunned to learn of his new position in the syndicate. The organization in charge of the black market, where young Louis was sold, is now led by a red deer. His colleagues, criminals and schoolmates alike, are shocked to see their herbivore friend living in the black market, much less leading the organization that manages it.

The Shishigumi is now doubly feared by others, not because of its strength or numbers, but because of the utterly uncanny sight of its leader being the very "object" its members had tried to sell decades ago. Louis has become an ironic product of mimicry: a former victim who adopts the authority of the group that once oppressed him. His position is disturbing because it cannot be read through the usual herbivore-carnivore hierarchy: he is both the former prey and the current authority. The black market therefore becomes another contact zone in which the conventional direction of species-based power is disrupted. Louis does not merely replace a carnivore leader; his presence changes what leadership, prey, and authority can mean within that space.

On the other side, Legoshi's ambivalence is expressed both through his genealogy and through many relationships he has with his herbivore friends. Legoshi's friendships with many of the herbivores of Cherryton Academy (namely Tem and Louis) serve a fundamental role in building his carnivore-herbivore double vision. In the first volume, Legoshi is portrayed as almost apathetic toward Tem's death, not to say that he is unaffected by it, as there are moments where he shows remorse for the loss of a friend. However, he does not feel or believe that there is anything that can be done to prevent predation; Tem's death was just another unfortunate accident. His developing love for Haru, a rabbit he had tried to devour earlier, is the point at which his acts of ambivalence begin. Legoshi's love for her is initially mixed with his predatory instinct to devour her, but over time, this builds his double vision of her and herbivores in general. Legoshi hates his overwhelming physique especially after almost killing Haru. At the same time, however, he also sees it as a reason for carnivores to use their strength to protect herbivores.

Meilantari et al. (2022) interpret Legoshi's restraint through the psychoanalytic relationship among the id, ego, and superego. The present study extends this discussion by interpreting his restraint as a cultural negotiation: Legoshi is not only controlling an instinct but also reconsidering what it means to live as a carnivore in a society shared with herbivores.

In chapter 73, it is also revealed that Legoshi is part reptile, through his grandfather Gosha, a Komodo dragon. Legoshi's mother, who was implied early on in the series to have died at a young age, was revealed to have taken her own life as she could not accept the physiological changes caused by her hybrid nature. Legoshi's hybridity is therefore not only social but also genealogical. His body itself carries the instability of fixed species identity.

These ambivalences coalesce when Legoshi faces the antagonists of *Beastars*, particularly Riz the bear and Melon, a gazelle-leopard hybrid serial killer, who function as ideological contrasts to him. The perpetrator of Tem's devouring is none other than Riz, a fellow Cherryton student. Riz's outlook on the carnivore-herbivore relationship is a very devious distortion of the carnivore identity in the entire series. Riz does feel guilt when he realizes he has devoured his friend, but over time he moves beyond it, dismissing and transforming its meaning into a selfish and grotesque conclusion: that Tem's death was the ultimate carnivore-herbivore relationship, the paragon of cross-species intimacy and love. Unlike Legoshi, who attempts to separate carnivore strength from predation, Riz accepts predation and reconstructs it as an expression of intimacy.

In some sense, this act is ambivalent: Riz tries to give new meaning to his inter-species turmoil, unlike Legoshi. However, his attempt is not driven by the will to break the carnivore-herbivore cultural barrier, but rather by

an effort to ren of reinforcing the hegemonic gaze of the carnivore. Riz's narrative progression and, more importantly, his outlook towards the devouring are identical to Legoshi's, only backwards. Legoshi starts as almost apathetic towards Tem's death, then becomes ambivalent through his love for Haru and kinship with Louis. This produces his simultaneous hate for and attachment to his carnivore strength, which leads him to hone his body in a way that transcends the carnivore-herbivore binary before finally confronting Riz himself.

Unlike Legoshi, who attempts to separate carnivore strength from predation, Riz accepts predation and reconstructs it as an expression of intimacy. However, rather than trying to make amends by improving the herbivore-carnivore relationship, Riz chooses to see his murder as a thing of intimacy and compassion, which is also a common trend for characters that eat meat in the story. The contrast between Legoshi and Riz is therefore not that one is carnivorous and the other is not. Both are carnivores who confront the meaning of predation, but they assign opposite ethical meanings to it.

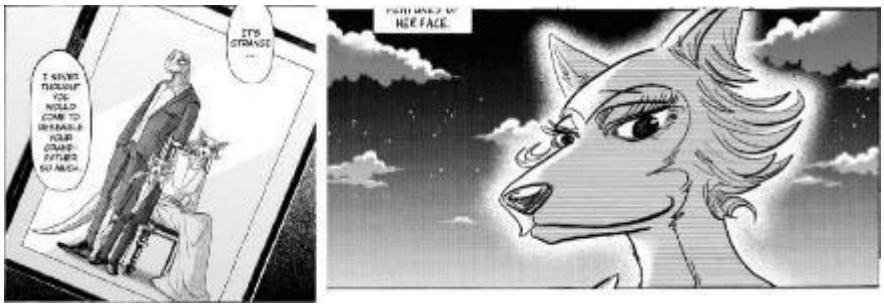
By the end, both Legoshi and Riz still share common ground: the two have eaten herbivores. Riz ate Tem, and Legoshi ate one of Louis' feet. The point of divergence between these two is that, unlike Riz, Legoshi eats Louis' foot with Louis' consent. On the surface, this might seem to be a failure on Legoshi's part, after his arduous effort to hone his body to become what van Huyssteen (2023, p. 84) dubs "a form of carnivore vegan," but it is perhaps the exact opposite. A carnivore who has renounced eating meat yet is urged by an herbivore who hates carnivores' predation to eat his foot to protect them from another carnivore is a better fit for "predation as the ultimate form of affection". Unlike Riz's claim that predation represents affection, this act is framed through Louis' consent. The scene also brings together the themes of meat and power identified by van Huyssteen (2023): eating meat produces physical power, but the meaning and ethical use of that power depend on the relationship in which the act occurs.

Legoshi and Louis achieve what Riz uses only as an alibi. Furthermore, this act of predation is the ultimate converging point of both Louis' and Legoshi's mimicry and a symbolic assertion of Bhabha's (1994) Third Space. Louis' marked foot symbolizes trauma caused by carnivores. Thus, seeing him push Legoshi, someone who has given up eating meat for herbivores' sake, to consume it is an act that distorts the line between the carnivore and herbivore binary, inscribing new meaning onto the world, as symbolized by the surge of power that Legoshi receives. This scene does not erase the violence of predation, but it changes its meaning by placing it within consent, sacrifice, and mutual recognition. The binary is therefore not simply reversed; it is reworked through an act that neither carnivore nor herbivore norms can fully contain. Riz's claim that predation can represent affection, but with the crucial addition of consent. The scene also brings together the themes of meat and power identified by van Huyssteen (2023): eating meat produces physical power, but the meaning and ethical use of that power depend on the relationship in which the act occurs.

Legoshi's confrontation with Melon is another highlight of his ambivalence. While the series does not focus extensively on this moment, the event that happens when Legoshi falls unconscious from one of Melon's assaults is noteworthy. In his dream, Legoshi is visited by his late mother, Leano, who comforts him during is distress.

Ghassani and Adipurwawidjana (2024), in their discussion of the 2021 film *Blue Bayou*, interpret such visions as depictions of post-memory. Hirsch (1993) defines post-memory as a form of personal memory belonging to "the child of the survivor whose life is dominated by memories of what preceded his/her birth" (p. 8). Ghassani and Adipurwawidjana (2024) argue that Antonio's vision reflects the mourning of a missing maternal figure. Drawing on this interpretation, the present study reads Legoshi's dream of Leano in a similar way: it reflects his encounter with familial loss and hybrid identity. This parallel highlights the unhomeliness experienced by both characters. Legoshi confronts the uncertainty of his interspecies identity, whereas Antonio faces the threat of deportation.

Figure 4.
Legoshi Dreams of His Late Mother, Leano



Note. Panels adapted from *Beastars* (Vol. 15, pp. 176, 178), by P. Itagaki, 2021, VIZ Media. Copyright © 2019 by Paru Itagaki.

Figure 4 also connects Legoshi's personal encounter with hybridity to the article's broader discussion of species-based identity. In Bhabha's (1994) terms, the efforts of Legoshi and Louis can be read as attempts to move toward an "international culture." Both seek to challenge the divide between carnivores and herbivores, although they pursue this aim in different ways. Louis negotiates the divide by appropriating carnivore authority and constructing a new image of herbivore power. Legoshi rejects predation but retains and redefines carnivore strength as a means of protection.

Legoshi's dream of Leano gives this negotiation a personal dimension. It shows that his relationship to carnivore strength is shaped not only by social conflict but also by inherited hybridity and family history. Louis and Legoshi therefore neither simply accept nor reject the cultural meanings assigned to their species. Instead, each character negotiates those meanings in response to trauma, power, and contact with the Other.

These different responses illustrate Bhabha's (1994) notions of hybridity and the Third Space of Enunciation. Their experiences do not make differences between carnivores and herbivores disappear. Rather, they show how contact, conflict, and negotiation can produce new forms of identity that neither side could create independently. In this sense, Bhabha's (1994) international culture is an ongoing process rather than a final state of harmony.

Taken together, the findings shows that *Beastars* first establishes the carnivore–herbivore divide as a seemingly fixed social binary and then progressively unsettles it. Tem's death turns species difference into fear and suspicion, while the visual arrangement of the drama club makes this division visible through spatial separation and fragmented reactions. The Adler performance further complicates this binary by placing Louis, an herbivore, in a role associated with carnivore authority. Through this reversal, the manga shows that power, leadership, and strength are not natural qualities attached to a particular species.

The hybrid positions of Louis and Legoshi develop this argument further. Louis appropriates carnivore authority in response to his earlier trauma and refuses the expected image of the passive herbivore. Legoshi, meanwhile, does not reject his carnivorous body but attempts to redefine its strength as protection rather than predation. Neither character simply accepts nor rejects the meanings assigned to his species. Instead, both negotiate these meanings through conflict, performance, trauma, and contact with the Other. In this sense, *Beastars* illustrates Bhabha's (1994) Third Space as a site in which fixed identities become unstable and new forms of cultural meaning emerge. The manga does not suggest that differences between carnivores and herbivores disappear; rather, it shows that those differences are continually reinterpreted and contested.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how *Beastars* represents cultural hybridity through the carnivore-herbivore divide. Through close readings of narrative events, character development, panel composition, and visual reversals, the analysis shows that the manga treats species identity not as a fixed essence but as a social category shaped by fear, power, trauma, and cultural expectation. The aftermath of Tem's death, the conflict surrounding the Adler production, and the changing positions of Louis and Legoshi reveal how apparently stable boundaries between predator and prey can be questioned and reworked.

Bhabha's (1994) concepts of ambivalence, mimicry, the unhomely, and the Third Space help explain this process. Louis unsettles herbivore identity by appropriating forms of carnivore authority, whereas Legoshi redefines carnivorous strength through restraint, protection, and negotiated relations with herbivores. Their positions do not simply reverse the existing hierarchy. Rather, they create unstable spaces in which the cultural meanings attached to species are challenged and revised. In this respect, *Beastars* presents hybridity as an ongoing process of negotiation rather than a final resolution of difference.

This study is limited to selected scenes, characters, and visual moments from the manga. Future studies may compare the manga with its animated adaptation or examine the text through other approaches, such as trauma theory, disability studies, or gender theory. Such work may further clarify how *Beastars* uses anthropomorphic animals to represent hierarchy, identity, and social division.

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