You have talked so often of going to the dogs—and well, here are the dogs, and you have reached them…¹

George Orwell

Who Let the Dogs Out?

Dogs, like humans, are products both of culture and nature. For the past twelve thousand years they have been entangled with human societies. Dogs connect the wild with the tame. They occupy an ambiguous position, straddling the opposing spheres of nature and culture.² They occupy warm stoeps, follow their masters at night, track insurgents, patrol borders, sniff out strangers, hunt game, protect homesteads and leave their pawprints all over the archives. Yet, equally, they are often scavengers, liminal creatures in only loose association with human society, foraging at the peripheries of homesteads and nomadic groups, spreading disease and polluting civilized streets.

This suite of essays is a first step in recovering Canis familiaris’ ubiquitous yet invisible presence in southern African history and, because of its relationship with humans, some of our own species’s past as well. What is revealed is in many respects familiar territory, albeit illuminated in an unfamiliar light, but in others it is a terra incognita mapped here for the first time. The use of the dog to think about human society has a long scholarly pedigree and the recent animal turn in the humanities

has sparked a florescence of canine studies. These have emphasised the relentless persecution of wild and feral canines and the concomitant reconstitution of their domesticated cousins in accordance with the human demands of utility and aesthetics.

The two themes of extermination and domestication also animate the dog history of southern Africa, part of a broader process of ‘bringing in the wild’ first under the superintendence of Africans and, from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, European settlers. Each epoch of human-canine interaction produced its own peculiar animal, literally a pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial dog, as well as its dark doppelgänger, the wild, ‘Kaffir’ or stray dog. The following essays show that the cynological world is invested with emotional, intellectual, financial, and political narratives, and that equally the human world can usefully be observed through canine eyes.

Pre-Colonial Dog

It is now generally accepted that the principal ancestor of the domestic dog (*Canis familiaris*) is the wolf (*Canis lupus*). The first primitive or ur-dogs appeared in present-day Germany 14,000 years BP. Dogs appear...