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Wild Child, Feral Text: Reading the Human-Animal Borderland

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INTRODUCTION

Reading the Wild Child: Pawing at the Human/Animal Boundary.

A study of the wild child is necessarily a hybrid beast: a convergence of fact and fiction; human and non-human animals; different texts, terminology, and theories; none of which are simple or clear-cut in their demarcation from one another. In examining a variety of fictions about wild children I have discerned two interrelated strands of inquiry. First, how can such children, generally lacking in many if not all verbal and written language skills, be adequately represented, or their perspective portrayed, in textual form? Secondly, how has the human/animal boundary been constructed in and through literature, and how might it be deconstructed, through the specific framework of the wild-child narrative?

An array of classic and obscure narratives could be examined to discover the different approaches to writing about, or as, a wild child. These texts include: obvious examples such as Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894) and Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes* (1914); boys' adventure novels like Jack London's *White Fang* (1906) and *The Call of the Wild* (1903); classic fairytales, like "Hansel and Gretel" and "Little Red Riding Hood," and J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1911), that deal with themes of lost children; children's books such as Maurice Sendak's *Where The Wild Things Are* (1963), and *The Savage* (2008) by David Almond and Dave McKean, that channel the wild-child character to portray the psychological and emotion turmoil of otherwise "normal" modern-day children; the debunked "memoir" of

a Holocaust wolf-girl, *Surviving With Wolves* (2005) by Misha Defonseca; contemporary classics like David Malouf's poetic novel *An Imaginary Life* (1978); and novels such as Donald Harington's *With* (2004) and Jill Paton Walsh's *Knowledge of Angels* (1995), which take an allegorical (and Biblical) approach to the wild-child theme. In "pawing" at the human/animal boundary one can also find a wealth of metamorphosis or transmogrification stories from Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915) to Will Self's *The Great Apes* (1997).

As this list indicates, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a comprehensive study of all wild children in literature. Rather my aim is to bring a new approach to a selected group of texts. Previous scholarship that deals with wild children in a general or theoretical sense is mostly interested in them as historical anomalies, and psychological or sociological studies.¹ In terms of literary analysis, most critical work on wild children in fiction has focused on the postcolonial aspects of the genre—particularly in regards to texts such as *The Jungle Book*, *An Imaginary Life*, Keri Hulme's *The Bone People* and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*. This is unsurprising, given that many wild-child narratives are set in times and places that are defined by colonialism and the postcolonial. Gender Studies also provides another

¹ Texts such Michael Newton's *Savage Girls and Wild Boys: A History of Feral Children*, Adriana S. Benzaquen's *Encounters with Wild Children: Temptation and Disappointment in the Study of Human Nature*, Burger and Gardner's *Children of the Wild*, Lucien Malson's *Wolf Children and the Problem of Human Nature*, and Douglas Keith Candland's *Feral Children and Clever Animals* all offer historical information and philosophical analysis of factual wild-child cases.

theoretical dimension that could be used to interpret the wild-child narratives. There are significantly more male wild-child characters in fiction than female, and a large portion of wild-child narratives are stories intended for boys. To undertake such a study, however, would comprise a whole separate thesis. Here, my methodology is to bring a specifically Animal Studies framework to the wild-child story. I am interested in examining how language can be used in different, sometimes unconventional, ways to not only tell a story about a wild-child, but to give a sense of their interiority and their perceptions—to create a portrait of a wild child that is not dependent upon the scaffolding of such anthropocentric concepts as the subject, the individual, or the “I.” This approach has guided my choice of texts.

My thesis examines three pairs of contemporary novels. In the first chapter I look at two novels based upon the true case of Victor of Aveyron, a wild boy captured from the woods of France at the dawn of the Enlightenment: Mordicai Gerstein’s *Victor: A Novel Based on the Life of the Savage of Aveyron* (1998), and Jill Dawson’s *Wild Boy* (2003). The two texts examined in the second chapter—Eva Hornung’s *Dog Boy* (2009) and Indra Sinha’s *Animal’s People* (2007)—use details derived from contemporary feral-child encounters. Urban-dwelling, homeless, and with the charisma and nonchalance of Dickensian street urchins, these children have more in common, perhaps, with stray dogs than with the mythical figures of Romulus and Remus, or even Victor of Aveyron. In the final chapter, I demonstrate the versatility of the wild-child category by applying it to two characters who do not ostensibly seem to fit within it: Simon in Keri Hulme’s *The Bone People*

(1986) and the eponymous gorilla in Peter Goldsworthy's *Wish* (1995). These examples of wild children, I argue, work to further worry the edges of the human/animal divide.

These three sets of texts and child characters have prompted different questions and concerns for this thesis, but in each case and each chapter the two main critical questions are addressed: how does the language work (both thematically and through the literary style and devices used by the author) to evoke, or create, the perspective of the child, and in what way does this language challenge or reinforce the human/animal boundary in its various manifestations and constructions—sometimes rigid and fastidiously maintained, sometimes porous or categorically denied.

The Terminological Wilderness

The term “wild child” is at once quite specific and diverse, covering a variety of states of being and relationships to non-human animals. The classic model of the “wild child” is the human child raised by wild animals. The term is also applied, however, to a child who has grown up in isolation from any kind of human socialisation, either in the wild or locked up in captivity, or even a human child raised amongst domesticated animals, purposefully cordoned off from the human family. Other labels used interchangeably with “wild child” are “feral child” or “wolf child,” although each term has its own connotations and mythologies. For example, the term “wolf child” often acts as an umbrella term even when no wolves were involved in the particular case. This may

simply be attributed to the “original” wild-child case of Romulus and Remus, and to the most famous fictional wild child, Mowgli, of Kipling’s *The Jungle Book*.

While the terms “wild,” “feral,” and “wolf” are used indiscriminately, each connotes a varying degree of animality and relationship to humanity. A wolf child is clearly associated with an animal that is at once wild and dangerous to humanity, and yet shares a close, symbiotic history with the human animal, as wolves have been bred into dogs of different types in terms of their utility to human beings. Similarly, the term “wild” exists in a relationship of opposition with the human animal. The *Oxford English Dictionary* states that the primary usage of “wild” refers to “an animal: Living in a state of nature, not tame, not domesticated.” Other definitions refer to places that are “uncultivated or uninhabited,” and to people who are “uncivilized, savage; uncultured, rude.” In each case the “wild” is defined as antithetical to the human ideals and concepts of culture, civilization, and domesticity. That is, whether referring to an animal, plant, place, or human person, the term “wild” suggests the elision or absence of human control and regulation. It is this very notion of the anti-cultural outsidedness of the “wild” that establishes its status within the binary framework, maintaining the anthropocentric hierarchy. The “wild” both challenges and frightens with its presence—or, at times, its absences—and stabilizes and bolsters human identities by providing an outside “other” that defines what is *not* human.

The terms “wild” and “wolf” are used in early medical, philosophical, and popular accounts of such real and mythical children. Texts such as Jean-

Marc-Gaspard Itard's report, "The Wild Boy of Aveyron," M. Hecquet's *The History of a Savage Girl, Caught Wild in the Woods of Champagne*, and the Reverend J.A.L. Singh's diary published in *Wolf Children and Feral Man*, all offer first-hand accounts of "wild" or "wolf" children who have been taken straight from nature, or from the absolute wild, and are treated, in the tradition of Linnaeus's *Homo ferus*, at times like another species of human. The term "wild child," and to a lesser degree "wolf-child," are still used in such historical and sociological studies of these true cases. Newton, Benzaquen, and Burger and Gardner all use the term as a classification and to evoke the sense of mythology and mystery that surrounds the origins of wild children. Also appearing in these aforementioned later studies, the term "feral child" emerged more recently, perhaps due to the lack of places in which these children might become "wild," or because of the expansion of the category to encompass neglected and runaway children closer to home.

"Feral" has a more complicated meaning. Being a feral animal, human or otherwise, is not a clear-cut issue. In a footnote to his book *Feral Children and Clever Animals*, Douglas Keith Candland calls attention to the ambiguous meaning of feral: "The earlier meaning of the word 'feral' refers to the release of a domesticated or socialized being into the wild. The word has come to be used to describe any animal taken from the wild into captivity—a definition just the reverse of its earlier meaning" (371). This ambiguity relates to the liminal state and meaning of the feral being: a wild "animal" is only deemed "feral" in juxtaposition with its potential domestication. The human animal becomes feral when exposed to the wild—its supposedly

“unnatural” habitat—but is considered all the more feral when reintroduced to civilization or taken into captivity. The feral animal, like the feral child, is a creature taken out of its “proper” context and classification. The feral child inhabits this liminal space, transgressing the dichotomy established by the classification of the “wild” in opposition to the “civil” or “domestic,” or the “animal” as opposed to the “human.” In a foreword to J.A.L. Singh’s and Robert M. Zingg’s famous study of Amala and Kamala (the wolf girls of Midnapore, India), Francis N. Maxfield writes, “in speaking of human beings we usually use some term like ‘civilized,’ or ‘socialized,’ rather than ‘domesticated.’ This process of civilization is so gradual that we forgot that a child is born feral, so to speak” (xx). The wild-child figure embodies this “precultural” and “unruly” corporeality and its re-acculturation makes explicit the underlying feralness, or animality, of all human beings.

The danger of using terms such as “wild” or “feral” child to encompass such a wide variety of conditions is that they cease to be meaningful. In this thesis I make use of both “wild” and “feral” to indicate how different child characters have been understood and depicted. However, as I proceed it becomes clear that a more useful term to describe the type of beings—and type of being-in-the-world—that such children represent is “borderland” children. Christine Wilkie-Stibbs introduces the term “borderland children” in her analysis of abjection in five children’s novels (316). Wilkie-Stibbs’s article is not concerned with “wild-child” characters so much as children who have been abused, marginalised, or neglected—who have “been made interstitial by being caught up in a cycle of power and subjection to the various institutional

or state apparatuses by the adults who are its agents” (316). The silent borderland-child character demonstrates this semantic collapse: where both the “subject” and “language” cease to function co-determinately. Whether s/he is understood in the context Wilkie-Stibbs establishes or my own examination of “wild” or animalised children, the “borderland child” is a marginal human—not just because of where he/she is positioned in society but because the processes of his/her marginalisation strips the child of the necessary attributes to be considered fully human. The primary effect of the child’s marginalisation or abandonment is a loss of language and a becoming unnamed. In this regard, both the physical and the linguistic condition are interrelated, demonstrating the provisional status of the child’s human identity.

The borderland Wilkie-Stibbs refers to is the child’s position as “paradoxically ‘both/and’ subject and object” (325). The child is both a real being and a literary artefact created by adults, according to their desires and beliefs about childhood. Using *Peter Pan* as her point of reference, Jacqueline Rose has argued that children’s literature is an “impossibility” as the child is at once the object of the text itself and the subject intended to consume, and be consumed by, it (1-2). Rather than simply creating stories for children’s amusement and education what is actually being constructed through such literature is “childhood” itself. Rose speaks of the “rupture . . . between the writer and the addressee” (2), caused by the production of this literature and its subject/object, where the child is “inside” the text as its subject/object and yet always remains outside the text as a construct produced by such texts.

Rose's argument is concerned with literature written with children as its intended audience, and while a large portion of wild-child narratives are promoted as children's texts, what is particularly relevant to my thesis, and what Rose's work contextualises, is literature written *about* children: beings who, like non-human animals, cannot themselves participate in the literary economy and can only be the referent and not the referee. The borderland child inhabits the precarious interstice between human and non-human where the usual absolute distinction between beings with language and those without is blurred. Many (though not all) borderland-child characters are without language skills, written or verbal, but cannot be relegated to pure animality because of the potential that they might acquire these language skills. The subject is constituted in and through language, as an effect of language, as opposed to existing prior to language; therefore, the (seeming) absence of language delegitimizes the personhood of the unspeaking being.

Towards a Theory of the Wild Child

The theoretical approach I bring to this analysis of the literary wild child is drawn predominantly from the emerging discipline of Animal Studies. Animal Studies, a relatively new and unformalised discipline, or convergence of disciplines, has its roots in the animal rights movement of the 1970s. Historically, advocates for animal rights—typified by Peter Singer, author of *Animal Liberation* (1975), although he argues against the use of the term “rights”—critique the legal and political standing of non-human animals,

arguing that animals should be treated ethically or humanely. While these debates are still very much alive and ongoing the field of Animal Studies has expanded its purview across a multitude of disciplines and concerns. In an article featured in a special Animal Studies issue of *PMLA*, Cary Wolfe offers a brief overview of the history and origins of Animal Studies, emphasising the discipline's Cultural Studies focus (566). As vague and inclusive as the moniker "Cultural Studies" is, it embraces a range of frameworks and methodologies for analysing human and (now) non-human animals that are borrowed from or shared with the other "studies" suffixed subjects, including: Women or Gender Studies, Queer theory, Postcolonial theory, and Disability Studies. While these should not be treated as identical or inter-changeable in their political or activist concerns, leading scholars in all of these areas utilise post-structuralist and Derridean deconstruction to dissect how categories have been constructed, how they work and are maintained, and how they evolve.

Wolfe identifies two defining aspects of the broad and diverse field of Animal Studies that need reiteration here: firstly, "that it studies both a material entity (nonhuman beings) and a discourse of species difference that need not be limited to its application to nonhumans alone" (567); and, secondly, that this presence of the material "nonhuman" entity poses a challenge to Cultural Studies and the Humanities as these systems of thought are not traditionally designed to accommodate the animal as more than an auxiliary to the human (568). On the other hand, there is also the danger that the nonhuman animal of study will be subsumed and humanised

through the process of Cultural Studies. These are some of the concerns and potential traps involved in my own project of studying the human-animal in literature.

The cumulative sum of academic, popular, and fictional literature about real and imagined wild children is, to a large degree, a desperate search for human traces and traits, which identify and distinguish the children from non-human animals. Barbara Noske argues in *Beyond Boundaries: Humans and Animals* that “blatant anthropocentrism (a human-centeredness underpinned by a preconceived notion of humanness)” (162) characterises much of the writing about feral children so that any signs of communication, emotion, or intelligence are immediately attributed to human nature. In the absence of such signs of humanity the child/beast is considered an empty vessel or a blank slate.

One of the assumptions sustaining this human/animal, language/unlanguage dichotomy is that the categories of “animal” and “language” are singular, unified entities, thus erasing the differences and peculiarities that exist within the spectrum of “animal” or “language.” In the oft-cited article “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” Jacques Derrida shines a light on this reductionist tendency: “Beyond the edge of the *so-called* human, beyond it but by no means on a single opposing side, rather than ‘the Animal’ or ‘Animal Life,’ there is already a heterogeneous multiplicity of the living” (399). The issue is not simply that the “human” and the “animal” are positioned in opposition to one another; there is further

problem of who has constructed this binary, and in whose interest. Derrida continues:

Animal is a word that men have given themselves the right to give. . . . They have given themselves the word in order to corral a large number of living beings within a single concept: 'the Animal,' they say. And they have given themselves this word, at the same time according themselves, reserving for them, for humans, the right to the word, the name, the verb, the attribute, to a language of words, in short to the very thing that the others in question would be deprived of, those that are corralled within the grand territory of the beasts: the Animal. (400)

The association of the "human" with language and the "animal" with the lack thereof not only reduces the diversity of animal beings into one generalised category but also diminishes our understanding of "language" and who can use it. Being the "rational" or "speaking" animals, human beings decide the limits of what language is and to whom it may be attributed.

The human/animal divide is thus established through the notion that humans are the sole proprietors of complex language, that we are the only beings with the necessary consciousness and self-awareness to master the symbolic. It is a myth, however, that full consciousness of intention and a full grasp of language (if either such thing can be said to exist) can result in an absolute or complete transference of meaning. Cary Wolfe describes as a "fantasy" the idea that human language "is sovereign in its mastery of the multiplicity and contingency of the world," that it is possible to present an

objective “nondeconstructable” viewpoint, or that meaning can pass wholly between subjects without alteration or misinterpretation (43). Derrida argues that:

It is less a matter of asking whether one has the right to refuse the animal such and such a power (speech, reason, experience of death, mourning, culture, institution, technics, clothing, lie, pretense of pretense, covering of tracks, gift, laughing, tears, respect, and so on—the list is necessarily without limit, and the most powerful philosophical tradition within which we live has refused the ‘animal’ all those things) than of asking whether what calls itself human has the right to rigorously attribute to man, which means therefore to attribute to himself, what he refuses the animal, and whether he can ever possess the *pure, rigorous, indivisible* concept, as such, of that attribution. (“And Say the Animal Responded?” 137-8)

Human beings are constantly examining the limits of other species’ understanding and ability to use language, usually in reference to their own understanding of language and its uses, but in constructing themselves as the languaged animal humans make the assumption that their knowledge and use of language is complete. What is thought of as a comprehensive correspondence between the world and our frame of reference is in fact only partial and speaks only to the human perception of the world.

On the one hand, then, non-human animals are excluded from the linguistic domain because of their perceived lack of aptitude for language. On

the other hand, however, there is the tendency, in everyday life, objective science, fictional literature, and other mediums, to use human language, as the dominant discourse, to speak for the unspeakable; that is, to incorporate the lives and being of other species into the symbolic order of humanity's own. Erica Fudge argues that "our language creates and gives meaning to our world, and animals become subsumed into that world because we lack another language with which to represent them" (159). Anthropomorphism, in which the experiences of other species are subsumed under the familiar terms and phrasing of human language, is a well-worn subject within Animal and literary studies. I suggest that the wild-child figure in fiction can be used to make explicit the limits of the ability of human language to represent both the experience of other non-human species and areas of our heterogeneous human existences.

The texts I investigate in this thesis reveal many of the holes in human language—holes that manifest themselves as silences, occlusions, disruptions, and break-downs of language and narrative. It does not follow, however, that these holes demonstrate the failure of language per se; rather, it suggests that language may have to be understood, and used, differently to accommodate other experiences and ways of viewing the world. The majority of the wild-child, feral-child, and borderland-child characters in these texts are not written in the first-person and, therefore, their identity cannot be established through their direct speech or internal monologues (the exception is *Animal's People*, in which Animal tells his narrative in his own idiosyncratic terms and cadence). The various themes and techniques that

are used to depict the wild-child characters I discuss here include the use and detailed descriptions of Sign and other gestural languages; animal imagery and metaphor; and the reading/writing of the body as both a conduit of communication and an encoded text containing the silent child's history.

In order to interpret the embodied language and “speaking-otherwise” of the fictional wild-child character, I will utilize, and adapt to articulate with an Animal Studies reading, the philosophies about (human) bodies that have stemmed from the feminist theories of *l'écriture féminine*. There are many contributors to this oeuvre of philosophy and practice, and so for concision I will primarily employ the work of Elizabeth Grosz: both her revision of *l'écriture féminine* and her incorporation of contemporary philosophies of the body. The different responses within *l'écriture féminine* are defined by their objective to challenge the inherent phallogocentrism of language and society; the supposition of *l'écriture féminine* is that women's bodies and women's experiences are erased at the site of the word within the binary logic of language. Ann Rosalind Jones describes the process of this silencing:

To speak and especially to write from such a [male] position is to appropriate the world, to dominate it through verbal mastery. Symbolic discourse (language, in various contexts) is another means through which man objectifies the world, reduces it to his terms, and speaks in place of everything and everyone else—including women. (248)

The androcentrism that characterizes this speaking body could be applied more generally to human language (and this is not a neutral term but

includes a hierarchical scale of languages more “humane,” more evolved, or beautiful, than others): for it is the anthropocentric voice that “speaks in place of” all other species and their bodily variations.² The human male body is the standard that excludes other embodied experiences and this standard imbues every aspect of social life and its organizing principles. In order to challenge a homogenised depiction and language of the human body it is necessary to consider other physical experiences and languages that have evolved and are structured upon different bodily knowledges; to write the silences in the script; to challenge the humanist bias that isolates the human animal body from the human mind and from non-human bodies and minds.

In *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* Grosz questions the often contradictory philosophical and scientific assumptions about human bodies that have informed, and been informed by, the conceptual division of mind and body. In this dichotomy it is the mind that is considered the seat of language and, therefore, the seat of the self. Grosz writes:

[The body] has generally remained mired in presumptions regarding its naturalness, its fundamentally biological and precultural status, its immunity to cultural, social, and historical factors, its brute status as given, unchangeable, inert, and passive, manipulable under scientifically regulated conditions. (x)

² Using a feminist theory to illustrate an Animal Studies point runs the inherent risk of subsuming the original context. What I am proposing here is not the replacement of a theory of phallogocentrism with that of an anthro-logocentrism, but a reading—otherwise of *l’écriture féminine*—to expand its usage, not controvert it.

The human body is not regarded in terms of its own life (or animality) but, rather, merely as the raw material of the human self that must be refined and disciplined into correct human form and behaviour. Ironically, the idea of the human body as an inert and purely natural entity only underscores the necessity of acculturation and adornment, hence demonstrating that the biological is inseparable from socio-cultural forces. Grosz goes on to argue that the body is “defined as unruly, disruptive, in need of direction and judgment, merely incidental to the defining characteristics of mind, reason, or personal identity through its opposition to consciousness, to the psyche and other privileged terms within philosophical thought” (3). In spite, or because of, its solidity and the fact that it is merely matter, the body is subordinated to the mind. In the Cartesian sense, the human body is simply a tool that requires the determination of the mind/soul to activate its senses and furnish it with meaning.

A related concept of the human body positions it as the channel between the world and the self; the intermediary, rather than the source of experience. In this case the body is still only the base material that must be colonised by the mind:

. . . the body is commonly considered a signifying medium, a vehicle of expression, a mode of rendering public and communicable what is essentially private (ideas, thoughts, beliefs, feelings, affects). As such, it is a two-way conduit: on one hand, it is a circuit for the transmission of information from outside the organism, conveyed through the sensory apparatus; on the other hand, it is a vehicle for the expression of an

otherwise sealed and self-contained, incommunicable psyche. (Grosz, *Volatile* 9)

This description challenges to some extent the passive flesh of the previous depiction of the human body, as it recognises the body's importance in the person's experience of the exterior world, and their involvement with it.

However, this pea-in-a-shell model does not consider the body's potential to influence the ingoing and outgoing "transmissions"—the idea that the body can be the message and the medium.

There is no language without bodies, as Gross³ argues in "The Body of Signification": "The interlocking of bodies and signifying systems is the precondition both of an ordered, relatively stable identity for the subject and of the smooth, regulated production of discourses and stable meanings" (82). However, bodies are also a potential site for the "disruption and breakdown of the subject's, and discourses', symbolic registration" (82). The instability of language is determined by the specific bodies and bodily experiences of those engaged in every language act. The body, or more specifically the abject, can undermine and muddy the seemingly stable subject, creating a vacuum where language falters, and meaning bleeds at the edges. The abject, as theorised by Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, is the condition of the interstitial, the contaminated, and the undefinable: "... an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (1). The

³ Elizabeth Grosz has previously published under the name Gross. It is the same author in each case.

abject is that which is “radically excluded” (2) from the body, and the self, but which cannot be entirely separated from the body (waste and fluids for example). The result of this is the creation of a state of ambiguity between what is and what is not the subject. Gross explains:

Abjection is the underside of the symbolic. It is what the symbolic must reject, cover over and contain. . . . It is an insistence on the subject’s necessary relation to death, to animality, and to materiality, being the subject’s recognition and refusal of its corporeality. (“The Body” 89)

The abject, then, is both the body and what is excluded from it; it is contained by the symbolic, and yet is always in excess of, and a potential disruption to, language.

According to Grosz, the body is both the conduit for communication and the vehicle for its expression and the means by which language may be disrupted or fail altogether; the body, then, should be taken into consideration in the interpretation of the full range of human articulations. She discriminates two potential approaches to analysing the bodily component of communication acts (whether written, spoken, or gestural): one investigates the phenomenology of the “lived body,” the internal bodily experiences, and the other is the “inscriptive” theory, which “conceives of the body as a surface” which is “marked, scarred, transformed, and written upon or constructed by the various regimes of institutional, discursive, and nondiscursive power as a particular kind of body” (*Space* 33). Grosz doubts that these two theoretical approaches can be unified into one schema, but it may be useful to use them

transversely, to refrain from relying on any single or essential concept of the body.

A related area of literary and cultural research is the emerging field of Disability Studies, in which the theories and methodology of *l'écriture féminine* have also been applied to reading the body—its formal and informal languages. Disability Studies is also preoccupied with the production of a semiotics of the body, and challenging the phono/logocentrism of “normal” bodies and thought. In *The Disability Studies Reader*, Lennard J. Davis makes the case that, like other poststructuralist theories of identity, the focus of Disability Studies should be “not so much on the construction of disability as on the construction of normalcy” (9). Most of the child characters in the novels I discuss experience some form of “disability” or “abnormality”: the suspected autism of Victor; the crippling deformity of Animal’s back; and Simon’s muteness in *The Bone People*. Although Romochka of *Dog Boy* and Wish the gorilla cannot be described as “disabled,” they are certainly marked as outside the norm for human bodies and communication.

As Dirksen L. Bauman points out (319), the association of the disabled with non-human animals has already been made in their historical treatment and status, and typically this association has been used to devalue the former. In spite of this controversial linking, Wolfe has made the case, using the example of Temple Grandin—an autistic woman who believes her “disability,” including the proclivity to “think in pictures” helps her understand how non-human animals experience the world (111)—that when animals and the disabled are aligned in contemporary theory, it is not necessarily to categorize

them as subalterns or victims of society, but to make explicit the “powerful and unique form of abled-ness” that underscores what the norm considers a “disability” (117). My intention is not to reiterate the association between disabled humans and non-human animals, to imply that the non-normative bodies of these wild-child characters make them less-than-human, but to consider how the different sense of embodiment in these literary reconstructions effects the way that language is used and understood.

In the broad literary history of wild children—the historical, philosophic, scientific, and, even more so, the popular and fictional accounts—the wild-child character is in danger of becoming purely symbolic. That is, the signification of any given wild child depends on what his/her body has come to mean in the specific context and medium of the social discourse. But it is important not to let the inscription of the body’s surface be confused with the language of the body itself. The cartographic outline of the body’s history—its scars and markings—offers only one perspective, and a fairly static representation at that. To achieve a richer portrait of the embodied being the surface reading needs to be triangulated with attempts to represent the lived reality of the animal self.

One of the techniques used in understanding or representing a sense of the lived reality and embodiment of the wild-child characters discussed in this thesis is the textual evocation of kinaesthetic empathy. Empathy is a well-known term for experiencing what another person (or being) is feeling, or, as Jaana Parviainen describes it, “a re-living or a placing of ourselves ‘inside’ the another’s experience” (151). The concept of empathy has a

decidedly emotional, or mental, connotation, and both emotional and mental processes are understood as faculties of the human self that are comprehensible and experienced through language. In the OED the definition of “kinaesthesia” is cited as: “The sense of muscular effort that accompanies a voluntary motion of the body. Also, the sense or faculty by which such sensations are perceived.” While I would argue that any act of empathy should entail the physical projection or sensation of another’s being, kinaesthetic empathy is a useful concept, and exercise, for understanding the experiences of a un-linguaged, or differently linguaged, being. Parviainen defines kinaesthetic empathy thus:

We may grasp another’s living, moving body as another center orientation of the world through our own kinaesthetic sense and body topography. Kinaesthetic empathy seems to have a partial capacity to make sense of others’ experiential movements and reciprocally our own bodily movements. It makes it possible to understand the non-verbal kinetic experiences through which we may acquire knowledge of the other’s bodily movements on the basis of our own body topography. (151)

Parviainen expands on the idea of a shared knowledge of “lived” bodies to argue that the potential for kinaesthetic empathy lies in one’s “body topography,” which encompasses the body image as well as the structures of a body’s possible movements. “Topography implies not merely form or pattern but something much more dynamic: a basic way of doing something, a manner of proceeding, a mode of acting” (158); that is, body topography does not consist of inert matter but, rather, is an evolving landscape that combines

the inherent logic of the body as it is with the specificities of the environment with which it must negotiate. It is not simply that a body's topography changes as it meets new circumstances, but that it can be consciously changed through acquiring new skills, exploring "unnatural" ways of being for a human, and by adopting a different kinaesthetic attitude, or comportment, to the world.

This conception of kinaesthetic empathy and body topography can be linked back to Grosz's two approaches to reading the body: the "inscriptive" theory, and the "lived body" theory. In fact, it is one possible method for reconciling these two theories into a multi-dimensional depiction of human bodies. The inscriptive approach to reading bodies involves producing a cartographic image of the body surface and, thereby, reconstructing a history of the subject. This may be a useful approach in determining the past of a mute wild child, but will remain a static interpretation. On the other hand, Parviainen's suggestion of charting the body "topography" also encompasses the experiential aspect of the body: its sensations, motions, comportment, and habits. Clearly the "lived body" approach to a theory of the body is more difficult to measure, which is why empathy (especially kinaesthetic empathy) is one way of connecting the body map to the lived reality. Implicit in the idea of kinaesthetic empathy is a sense of the bodily experience that is transmissible between different people and other beings: an unspoken shared knowledge. Kinaesthetic empathy can take the form of a purely instinctual reaction to seeing another animal hurt with a phantom sensation in one's own corresponding body schema. If this sense is acknowledged and developed

between two or more beings then a form of non-verbal communication may be established.

Unlike an emotional or psychological based empathy, kinaesthetic empathy would seem to be a particularly difficult sensation to provoke through literature—a medium connected to language and, therefore, the intellect. However, it would be a simplistic interpretation of empathy, a reinforcement of the Cartesian separation of mind and flesh, to suggest that what we experience through thought and text we do not translate to our bodies and their sensations. Like the elusive wild-child figure, kinaesthetic empathy may not be something that can be “captured” or objectively described in language but, as my discussion of several wild, feral, and borderland-child texts will elucidate, it may be evoked for the reader. This will require that I not only look at the external descriptions of the wild-child characters (the inscriptive), but to also examine the method by which their internal and physical life are portrayed in print (the lived body).

Two by Two—An Over-Arking Thesis

The chapters of this thesis are structured around the three terms I introduced earlier: the “wild child,” the “feral child,” and the “borderland child.” Not only does each term connote a different history or type of real or fictional character, but each also implies a different ontology and relationship between the human and non-human animal world. The first chapter examines the “wild child” by concentrating specifically on the real documented case study of

a famous wild child (Victor of Aveyron) and two fictional re-imaginings of the historical account in Gerstein's *Victor: A Novel Based on the Life of the Savage of Aveyron*, and Dawson's *Wild Boy*. I use the term "wild child" to indicate specifically the classic or quintessential figure associated with "wolf children" and such myths and legends. My goal is to trace the literary transformation of this one famous and paradigmatic wild-child figure, from the initial construction of the boy "Victor" in scientific reports, to the mythology that developed about the famous child, to his contemporary interpretation in fiction. In both the factual accounts and fictional renderings of Victor's story what dominates the narrative are the educational systems and processes that the boy undergoes to become humanised. In many ways the various retellings of the Wild Boy of Aveyron provide a template of how a child is made into a human adult—and at the same time, indicate where the education fails and the "wild" erupts.

Chapter Two progresses chronologically and etymologically from Chapter One, as it travels from the emblematic wild child of the Enlightenment, who encapsulated such notions as pure nature and pre-lapsarian innocence, to stories inspired by contemporary cases of feral children. Hornung's *Dog Boy* and Sinha's *Animal's People* are also derived from actual cases of recent "wild child" encounters; however, these narratives are not centred upon the authentic portrayal of the historical subject as in the case of the Victor novels. In this sense, the narratives as well as the child characters can be deemed "feral," as they have both grown out of one context to take on life in another form. I have also positioned these texts and these

child characters as “feral” because their cases, and their use of language, are not so “pure” or “uncontaminated” by human contact. “Feral” implies a closer proximity to civilisation; an interbreeding of the domestic and the wild. The children in question in this chapter inhabit the urban fringe, living amongst stray dogs and the detritus of civilization’s waste, and have some language skills that they have adapted to their needs and circumstances.

In my final chapter I not only look to the fringes of humanity—to examine child figures that do not fit neatly into any classification, let alone the seemingly simple human/animal divide—but also the fringes of the definition of “wild” or “feral” children. Chapter Three examines the fuzzy borderland between human and (other) animals, where the “child” who is not so radically excluded from human cohabitation and socialisation inhabits the overlapping of these supposedly separate worlds. In this chapter I perform a parallel reading of *The Bone People* and *Wish*, as presenting two dissimilar types of borderland children, both of whom undergo institutional (“cultural”) and physical (“natural”) experiences that challenge any stable identity formation or solid standing in human (or animal) society.

Each of these chapters discusses a different pairing of novels, each with its own set of definitions and performances of the wild-child figure, and each child character demands a different process of reading literary representations of their body—as both a text containing that child’s history and as a conduit for the child’s communications. In examining how language works as a theme, a device, and the foundation for evoking the wild-child character, my aim is to identify the ways in which language is used to

demarcate, and elevate, humanity from the rest of animal kind. Conversely, and perhaps more importantly, my thesis also seeks to demonstrate the ways by which fictional imaginings and constructions of wild-child characters can work to undermine the human/animal boundary.

CHAPTER ONE

Reading Victor: The Wild-Child Text.

This chapter examines fictions based on the documented case studies of a real-life wild child: Victor, the “Savage of Aveyron.” The wild boy was captured in Aveyron, France, in 1800, less than a decade after the Revolution and the establishment of the French Republic. The official case study of Victor was conducted by Dr Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard and was recorded as two reports to the Society of Observers of Man—the contents of which have since been republished, translated, and paraphrased in many different anthologies, and psychological and sociological texts concerned with wild children.⁴ This wild-child case study reflects the philosophical, psychological and educational theories of the time— they are scientifically-minded documents that are nonetheless infused with mythology and folklore. Itard’s theories and techniques in the case of Victor have become a model of education (the Montessori method of self-directed learning) and of developmental psychology, and contributed to the establishment of the “child” as a category and an object of knowledge. However, despite the vast amount of literature on the subject, the detailed description of Victor’s education at the hand of Itard, and the subsequent cementing of Victor in history as

⁴ Lucien Malson, Harlan Lane, Douglas Keith Candland, Michael Newton, and Adriana Benzaquen provide histories of Itard’s and Victor’s case, providing scientific, psychological, sociological, and popular interpretations. My own understanding of the case and history of Victor is informed by these texts.

prototypical “Child of Nature,” very little is known about the boy himself—his pre-civilized life, his experiences, feelings, and mental acuity.

Writers who creatively re-imagine characters like Victor have the opportunity to explore and understand the wild child, to envision an interiority that is informed by but not limited by scientific objectivity. The fictionalisation of the wild child not only means developing a narrative for the child beyond the documented processes and results of his education; the techniques the literary text can employ are also better suited to creating a sense of the child and his experiences. The two fictional texts I will be analysing in this respect are Mordicai Gerstein’s 1998 young-adult fiction, *Victor: A Novel Based on the Life of the Savage of Aveyron*, and Jill Dawson’s 2003 novel *Wild Boy*. Other Victor narratives include Francois Truffaut’s 1970 film *L’enfant sauvage*, and T.C. Boyle’s short-story “*Wild Child*” (2010). In addition, the known details of Victor’s life are used to flesh out and lend credence to other fictional wild-child characters.⁵

A balancing act is involved for the author of these texts in representing the “voiceless” wild child, between the imposition of an authorial voice onto his/her apparent silence, and using language as a tool in representing the child’s language-less experience. Whether the “text” in question is an actual wild child, a factual case study, or a fictional narrative based on these accounts, an act of interpretation—and, often times, of

⁵ Novels such as David Malouf’s *An Imaginary Life* and Eva Hornung’s *Dog Boy* do not make Victor their subject but use the details and descriptions from Itard’s reports to aid them in their constructions of their own wild-child characters.

translation—is required. The usually speechless wild children of history cannot represent themselves in “human” terms (literally) and, therefore, the mysteries of their past, their origins and nature, must be pieced together from sketchy observations and sightings of the child in the wild, and from the bodies of such children: the markings, scars, and colouring of their skin, their gait and comportment, their eating habits, the noises they make and their responses to human language and other sounds.

The “truth” about such real children is an amalgam of physical traces, observations of behaviour, and the prevailing myths and philosophies of the time. Similarly, the fictional retellings of the case studies are an assemblage of historical data, scientific and general first-hand reports and the various analyses that have followed, and the literary tropes of fairytales and mythology. The textual traces of these reports, studies, and histories amount to the illusion of a real child, a simulacrum of an (almost) human child, which the actual wild child notably exceeds. To flesh out the empty shell of the wild-child character, and to fill in the gaps of the child’s history, requires the narrativization of both the child’s pre-capture history and their internal experiences and perspective. Most of the supposedly objective first-hand reports do indeed supplement their clinical observations with elements of the fictional to explicate and translate the signs of the silent child’s body and to fill the gaps in the child’s unknown history. Itard’s report is generally concerned with Victor’s observable behaviour and responses, but Itard also speculates on the boy’s emotions and internal state. In a section of Itard’s second report, entitled “Development of the Emotional Faculties” (168-79), he

expands upon his customary cold clinicism to interpret not just the cause of Victor's responses, but the nature of those responses. For instance, Itard attempts to reconcile Victor's burgeoning puberty and signs of sexual arousal with "that universal emotion that stirs and stimulates all creatures" (175), expecting that the boy would find an object for his "love" or a natural direction for his desires.

The distinction between fact and fiction is thus blurred in both the "true" case studies and the novels they inspired; the case studies require a story to make sense of the facts, and the fictions depend upon a scaffolding of fact to add verisimilitude to the strange and rare stories of wild children. In attempting to imagine and represent the wild child's experience, the fictional accounts not only describe what his/her internal state may be but attempt to stylistically create the effect of the child's experience. This chapter examines the fictional reconstruction of Itard's case study of Victor, and of the wild child himself, with particular scrutiny of the role language plays in both Itard's (the character's) attempts to humanise the boy and in Gerstein's and Dawson's effort to portray his illiterate and unspeaking wildness.

The Wild Child in History: Victor as Fact.

Naked, filthy, and speechless, the wild boy of Aveyron, once captured, was thought to be a deaf-mute and/or an idiot. Almost certainly destined for a life's incarceration in the infamous lunatic asylum Bicêtre, the "savage" was temporarily installed at the Institute for Deaf-Mutes in Paris where the

newly employed resident physician, Dr Itard, took special interest in the boy. In his first report, Itard describes the reception of the wild boy by the doctors and philosophers who studied him, and the curious sightseers of Paris:

. . . what did they see?—a disgusting, slovenly boy, affected with spasmodic, and frequently with convulsive motions, continually balancing himself like some of the animals in the menagerie, biting and scratching those who contradicted him, expressing no kind of affection for those who attended upon him; and, in short, indifferent to every body, and paying no regard to anything. (96)

It is unclear whether Victor's perceived muteness and early diagnosis of idiocy was due to this bestial behaviour, or if his animality was established by his apparent incommunicability. Either way he was read as not-human. In the above passage Victor is described as a non-human beast; he falls into the slippage between reality and metaphor. Despite this initial reaction to the filthy child, Itard's diagnosis of Victor's condition differed greatly from the established opinion of the then-expert in psychiatric care, Citizen Pinel, that Victor was an incurable idiot and was born defective (Itard 97-8). Itard's theory was that "Man" is a product of socialisation and education, and that even the most degraded of the species might be taught to become human.

Itard was assisted in caring for and educating Victor by Madame Guérin, the housekeeper and cook at the Institute. Guérin is mentioned in all the histories and case studies as a maternal figure for the wild child. Itard states that Guérin "acquitted herself, and still discharges this arduous task,

with all the patience of a mother, and the intelligence of an enlightened instructor” (103). He also recounts Victor’s reaction after a separation from Guérin: “He offered to the eyes of all not so much a fugitive forcibly returned to his keeper as an affectionate son gladly running to the open arms of the one who had given him birth” (170). The suitable and understandable human roles of the parent and child are reinforced for both parties. Despite Guérin’s significant participation, very little is written about her contributions to Victor’s education and socialisation or her life.⁶ The only significant personal details that are reported about Guérin are that her husband died during her time as Victor’s carer at the Institute, and that she had a daughter, Julie, who did not live at the Institute but whose name, it is speculated, Victor was trying to call when he made the sound “*li*” (Itard 123). By 1806 Itard had made some progress in humanising Victor but had decided to abandon his project, believing that Victor had been irreparably damaged by his time in the wild. No longer an object of study, Victor lived out the rest of his life in the care of Madame Guérin until his death in 1828.

The case of the wild boy of Aveyron not only introduced the famous child figure of “Victor” but was influential in developing new theories and mythologies about childhood and education. In his history of Victor and of

⁶ Itard also notes that Guérin and Victor shared a gestural short-hand by which Victor demonstrated his hunger with an empty wooden bowl and Guérin indicated that she would like Victor to fetch her water by showing him an empty pitcher (124-5). Newton refers to Guérin taking Victor for walks (118) and the fact that her repetition of the phrase, “Oh Dieu!” led Victor to mimic her (121). Benzequen mentions Victor’s apparent affection for Guérin (173, 181), as does Malson (75-7). Lane acknowledges that Guérin was responsible for much of Victor’s care and progress (154).

Itard's study, Harlan Lane argues that "[f]rom the encounter between Itard and the wild boy has come a legend, a tale of epic proportions in which the protagonists play highly stylized roles" (163). The pedagogue is by necessity a character in these "stories," as the narrator or the filter that defines the wild child as such. Throughout history the figure of the wild child has functioned as the mirror that will reflect the truth of human nature and this reflection is dependent upon the philosophy of the time and the expectations of the observer. Itard was particularly influenced by the philosophies on human nature of Condillac, who believed that "Man" was nothing but—if not inferior to—a beast without socialization and civilization through language (138). The preface to Itard's first report begins thus:

Cast on this globe, without physical powers, and without innate ideas; unable by himself to obey the constitutional laws of his organization, which call him to the first rank in the system of being; MAN can find only in the bosom of society the eminent station that was destined for him in nature, and would be, without the aid of civilization, one of the most feeble and least intelligent animals. (91)

This differed fundamentally from the Rousseauist concept of the "noble savage," in which civilization was regarded as a contaminant of Man's true and ideal nature (Newton 100, 106). Michael Newton writes of the initial evaluation of Victor: "The boy had come from a wild loneliness, a blanked-out space, an invisible world from which nothing would ever be discerned" (105). The Itard of history, according to Newton's analysis, believed that Victor, as

an unsocialized being, was a “Blank Slate” in the tradition of Locke’s philosophy.

Condillac’s writings not only provided the paradigm through which Itard understood and attempted to educate Victor, they also created an image of uncivilized Man that has set the framework for thinking about wild children and language acquisition, while at the same time offering a suitable metaphor for the textual reconstruction of the wild child. Newton writes, “Imagining the natural man as a statue waiting to be called to life, Condillac had unwittingly provided a template for Itard: the young doctor would be that Pygmalion, putting words and thoughts into the blank space that was the Aveyron savage” (108). Similarly, it is the task of any writer to “bring to life the characters they invent, by turning the marble abstraction of ideas, thoughts and propositions into living bodies” (Steedman 19). The case of the once-real wild child requires a dual process in which the “living” animal body is first turned into a statue—is shaped and inscribed in non-fiction text—and then reanimated in literature. It was not simply the education process that was to achieve this transformation from object to subject; rather, it was through the transcription and inscription of the wild child that Victor was born into the world.

The Wild Child in Theory: Victor as Text.

The profusion of writings about Victor—that, all together, make up the corpus of this wild boy in history—mirror the treatment, examination, and

interpretation of the boy himself whose own body presented as a text to be read. In fact, the only way information could be ascertained about the real wild boy was by deciphering the marks on his body (Itard 100). Where access to the wild-child character is limited due to their languagelessness and inscrutability it may be necessary for authors of both fact and fiction to create a story based upon these textual renderings of the child's body. There are many ways that a body may be read. In the Victor narratives it becomes apparent that there are multiple layers of inscription on the wild child's body—from the scars and traces of his natural history, his tics and other various bodily rhythms and reflexes which speak to his psychosomatic response to the world, to the socio-cultural sense in which a wild human boy, thought to be trapped in a primitive animal shell, comes to be the embodiment of a burgeoning philosophical movement.

In both the literal and symbolic sense, then, Victor's body is marked, inscribed, a text to decipher: "Victor presented the scientists who examined him with a history quite literally drawn by the natural world" (Yousef 252). In this interpretation, Nature is the author of the real Victor's life and, considering the learned doctors who examined Victor were not fluent in the tongue of the Wild, these bodily engravings had to be pieced together in a legible order and translated. The scratches made by trees and rocks, and the bite marks made by beasts, are letters and words marking Victor as something other than human.

In *Volatile Bodies* Grosz describes the different processes by which a body comes to be marked:

Every body is marked by the history and specificity of its existence. It is possible to construct a biography, a history of the body, for each individual and social body. This history would include not only all the contingencies that befall a body, impinging on it from the outside—a history of the accidents, illnesses, misadventures that mark the body and its functioning; such a history would also have to include the ‘raw ingredients’ out of which the body is produced—its internal conditions of possibility, the history of its particular tastes, predilections, movements, habits, postures, gait, and comportment. (142)

Grosz argues that the body as text is not just a metaphor that illustrates the manner by which human beings use visual signs of appearance and adornment to classify and make judgements about fellow human beings, but that even the most naked, savage, unadorned, and seemingly un-augmented, of human bodies (like Victor’s) provide a complex manuscript that carries the entire story of their lived being. The body is a living text, the meaning of which changes with the interaction between the lived body’s experience, the person “reading” the text, and the ideology of the time and place. The “inscriptive” theory of the body, as explained by Grosz in *Space, Time and Perversion*, conceives of the body as “inscribed” by the values, laws, and disciplines of society (33). She posits the body as a “threshold” between surface and depth: “it is placed between a psychic or lived interiority and a more socio-political exteriority that produces interiority through the *inscription* of the body’s outer surface” (33). Writers of both fact and fiction about wild children can use the textual script of the child’s body to trace the

history of the child, to reconstruct their experiences and sensations, and to establish a cogent narrative that will explain the existence and survival of such an anomalous creature. As my discussion of two fictional accounts of Victor's narrative will show, the inscribed body of the silent wild child provides a provisional map of the boy's life that can be further explored and fleshed out in imagined detail.

The Wild Child Reanimated: Victor as Fiction.

Mordicai Gerstein's *Victor* and Jill Dawson's *Wild Boy* are similar not only in their faithfulness to Itard's original report, but also in that both are structured around a triad of alternating narrative points-of-view. The single voice of the case study is thus splintered in both texts: into the third-person perspectives of *Victor*, and the first-person narration (except for Victor himself) of *Wild Boy*. The first-person, diagnostic voice of Itard, whose judgements and philosophies dominate the original report, is counterpointed by the resurrection of the voices of the silent players in Victor's history and the indirect perspective of Victor himself. Dawson and Gerstein each identify and emphasise different aspects of the original reports, which are reflected in the way each author structures the narrative voices and which characters from history they choose to tell the story. Besides the voice of Itard, Dawson utilises the first-person counter-perspective of the Institute's cook and housekeeper, Madame Guérin, and imagines how she may have regarded and influenced Victor's education. Likewise, Gerstein takes up the viewpoint of

Madame Guérin's daughter, Julie. Gerstein posits Julie to be a similar age to Victor and gives this character her own struggles with education. Gerstein's novel is written in a sparser prose than *Wild Boy* due partly to the former's young-adult intended readership but, as this chapter will demonstrate, both texts engage similar imagery and literary techniques to breathe life into and fill in the gaps of the case study—as is particularly evident in the manner in which they create Victor's "voice."

The difficulty which the historical Dr Itard and Madame Guérin encountered in creating and discovering Victor's voice foreshadows the quandary of how an author might go about creating or discovering a voice for Victor in fiction. This difficulty is reflected in both Gerstein's and Dawson's attempts to write Victor's "voice" and a sense of his interior experience through free indirect discourse. In both texts Victor's point-of-view is written in the third-person present-tense, and while his "voice" is never written in the first-person singular, there is the sense of his presence, or immanence, in the world through the use of free indirect discourse. In both novels the fictional Victor has no sense of self, no "I," but perceives the world as a great continuum of being from which he is not separate.

Victor: A Novel Based on the Life of the Savage of Aveyron

Gerstein's *Victor* is preoccupied with how the wild-child figure relates to, and illustrates, the experience of childhood and the processes of education and its institutions. As Gerstein's target audience consists of adolescents of a similar

age to Victor (estimated to be between twelve- and fifteen-years-old), reviews of the text have focused on the educational aspects of the narrative: Kathryn Harrison mentions that Itard's methods have shaped current teaching practices; and Salina Shrofel, an educator herself, considers how the text might educate young readers about literacy and language acquisition. The novel juxtaposes the figure of Victor with those of other outsider children: the deaf and mute boys of the Institute who are situated in parallel to him, being perceived as animal-like in their seeming lack of language, and Julie Guérin, who acts as one of the primary focalizers of the narrative (36).

Barely mentioned in the history books, the Julie of *Victor* is an illiterate girl of approximately the same age as the wild boy who is receiving so much of her mother's care and the educational attention she (as a girl) is denied. Julie, though at first resentful of Victor and the other boys, becomes something of a translator, learning to read the body and the strange, animalistic languages of the deaf boys and Victor:

When Julie first visited here, the deaf boys seemed grotesque and frightening. They would stare at her silently, or grunt and squeal, making elaborate gyrations. They seemed barely human. But now she sees how their fingers, bodies, and faces weave words and pictures—words she can almost hear and pictures she can almost see.
(36)

Just as the real Itard never learnt to understand the signs of the deaf-mute children he treated, the historical Victor's use of a deliberate gestural

language along with his more primitive body language was never fully explored or utilized due to the emphasis given to the written and spoken word. In Gerstein's novel, the character of Julie fills this neglected aspect of Victor's story.

The Itard of Gerstein's novel demonstrates a failure to acknowledge the eloquence of signing that contrasts with his sensory and physical approach to teaching Victor language. In *Victor* language is very much a thing; it is literally a tactile object to be ordered and manipulated. Itard creates for Victor a set of letters crafted from metal: "This is the alphabet. It's yours" (145). Language is thenceforth something that belongs to Victor, it is something he physically *has*, but it does not follow that he will use these letters or attach meaning to them in the way intended. Julie, who is teaching herself to read while Victor receives his education, creates her own alphabet of cut-out shapes like those Itard had made for Victor. These arbitrary symbols hold a special power for Julie and she views them as her access to the world beyond her gender, class, and prospects: "All the words in the world were somewhere in her alphabet" (157). The ability to manipulate language requires a conformity and containment to a restricted system of representation, but it also allows the user to create meaning, and its use can transform both the self and the world.

In *Victor*, Itard clings to language, to the artefacts of writing, his "teaching machines" (247). His steadfast allegiance to his pre-established theories of animal and child learning and behaviour prevent him from ever being able to understand Victor *as he is*, as opposed to what he might become.

Itard is always looking beyond Victor and rarely at him. Gerstein's Itard is focused on the textual Victor, the map for/of the boy: "Again and again he re-examines the stained, ragged pages of the pencilled outline he devised at the beginning. Throughout these months he has held to it—a makeshift raft on a stormy sea" (152). This written corpus of Victor turns into something like Frankenstein's monster, a palimpsest of theories and observations: "He looks down at the scrawled papers that cover his desk like fallen leaves: words, lines—whole paragraphs—scratched out and rewritten in margins, between lines, and on scraps pinned to the original" (154). The wild boy, then, becomes a mass of data, a collection of measured responses to Itard's experiments in education. Gerstein thus suggests what is perhaps the most suitable method and metaphor for writing the hybrid animal of the wild child: in the margins, between the lines, in fragments and scratches.

The accumulation of writing on actual wild children exists in traces on documents, letters, reports, and sketches that have been paraphrased, re-edited and reprinted over the years. From this collage of data and description the live wild child slips away—disappearing into the edges of the script. One method of "finding" Victor in these texts is to trace the inscriptions on his body which, like the body of knowledge about Victor, are also a palimpsest of traces. Gerstein's Itard reads "Victor's body as a catalogue of scars" (111); a list rather than a narrative. He is a set of facts that can be revealed. Victor is at once literally and symbolically a text. In *Victor* this "text" is unearthed by Madame Guérin: "One by one, layers of grime dissolve—a kind of archaeology—and the scars are revealed: hieroglyphics that tell of disasters

and triumphs. Cuts, burns, gashes, tears, bites; as each is uncovered, Beatrice clucks or makes little grunts of pain” (Gerstein 22). Victor’s scars are not just visual signs but a kind of Braille to be read with the hands, a language of touch and feeling. This is a language that Itard is unskilled in, just as he devalues and does not bother to learn either the complex sign language of the Institute boys or the primitive gestural language that Victor uses to make known his needs and wishes. Because of his privileging and focus on the written and spoken word Itard is unable to “read” Victor with as much dexterity as Madame Guérin, with her “hands-on” approach. The vernacular of touch engenders empathy, and empathy is perhaps the swiftest form of communication between two people, or a person and a non-human animal.

In the sections portraying Victor’s experience Gerstein uses relatively short, non-reflexive sentences that do not remove the landscape to an observable distance but, rather, draw the world in until it is a series of fleeting sensations and immediate needs. For instance, when Victor is immersed in water he becomes water and must follow its patterns and motion: “He is in motion. . . . Icy water splashes his face, his tongue. He slides into it, under it. It surrounds him, roaring and shouting, and he swallows again and again and again. He is water” (235). When Victor runs, he is movement:

He can move. Now he is moving. Trees and leaves and rocks fly past and under. The world is in motion. His nose points the way.

Now he runs and the warm soft wind carries him faster and higher and no one hears his laugh. Not even him. What he hears is water. It

mimics his laughter. He hears it with his tongue and throat. His nostrils inhale its smell in huge watery gulps. Roots and rocks and mossy stones blur underfoot. He slips and tumbles, rolling and splashing into water.

Water pours over his body and down his throat; he melts into water. (13)

Victor's motion is tied to his senses. In this passage and the larger section it was taken from, Gerstein attempts to recreate this sense of movement through the sequencing of Victor's sensory perceptions. We move, as does Victor, through sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch, each one in focus bringing the whole textured landscape into relief. The sentences are simple, in the grammatical sense, with an absence of abstract terms. The syntax is fragmented, alternating between short, rapid sentences of only a few words, and longer phrases made up of series of verbs—he "slips," "tumbles," "rolling," "splashing"—or nouns—"Trees and leaves and rocks," "Roots and rocks and mossy stones." Words and images are repeated, reflecting that the movement of the human or animal body is never singular or discrete but requires perpetuation, and that meaning is perceived and created through chains of objects and observations. The result is a textual collage made up of single sensate words, and scattered sentences that shift and switch like random movement in the forest. Gerstein also tries to simulate the movement of Victor through the forest and the city, not just through the words themselves but through the alternately rolling and halting rhythm of the versing. The overall result is impressionistic, giving a sense of the child's own experience, rather than simply describing the child from a completely external perspective.

The processes of language, of generating words and naming things, splinter the oneness that Gerstein's Victor felt with the world before his capture, the absence of a self. This begins when the wild boy is given a name; he is no longer animal, water, light or tree, he is "Victor." The lessons that Itard takes Victor through every day repeat the separation and containment of naming and the estrangement of life through language:

Every day the world starts whole, everything in its place, and then the doctor comes. He brings strange things with no homes. The world becomes a jumble. Pieces. Awfulness . . . he closes his eyes and sees leaves falling, all the different leaves—like the scissors, like the brush, like the knife, like the key—all falling into pieces. (134)

Victor's life and knowledge is reduced to a series of lists, the meaning of which to the boy is completely abstract and opaque. Gerstein reprints these lists vertically on the page, creating a ladder of words that will lead Victor nowhere. These motifs of water, motion, and fragmentation not only serve as the imagery of Victor's existence, but to provide a pattern, or patterns, for a style of writing this almost unimaginable existence. The fragments of words and of the wild boy are not drawn together, ultimately, to create a cohesive portrait of Victor; rather, these scattered and fleeting glimpses of Victor's external behaviour and reactions, at most, indicate a sense of his emotional and embodied sensations.

Wild Boy

Like Gerstein, Dawson is also concerned with what the figure of Victor can demonstrate about other children, and childhood. Whereas Gerstein attempts to understand Victor from the perspective of another child, Dawson's approach is to counter-balance the clinical observations of Itard with the "maternal" voice of Madame Guérin. The character of Guérin in *Wild Boy* works as both a mother-figure for Victor (and, to an extent, for Itard) and a co-educator and integral participant in the wild boy's re-humanisation. Dawson, however, fabricates a more detailed history for Guérin that includes a deceased infant son who, we learn, was like Victor in that he was unresponsive to affection, would not play, and would never learn to speak. Most readers of *Wild Boy* would recognise the symptoms of autism in the description of Guérin's son and Victor's behaviour (though, of course, there was no name or diagnosis for the condition in the early 1800s). Most reviewers of the novel correspondingly read the text as both a history and a fable about autism. Dawson has explained that she was inspired to write a fictional account of Victor's story because, as a mother of a boy with Asperger's Syndrome, she was intrigued by speculation that Victor may have been the first documented case of autism (Crewe). By re-contextualizing Victor's condition using modern medical discourses, Dawson brings the anomalous and alienating wild child into the spectrum of contemporary constructions of childhood. Victor is made less strange and incomprehensible, while those children who struggle with language acquisition, who do not

behave according to “normal” standards of human childhood, become implicated in a history of “wild” children.

In *Wild Boy* the case of Victor becomes a microcosm for the education of children in general. The paradigm of education and human construction which Dawson portrays draws upon the model introduced by Condillac of Pygmalion’s statue, the “drawing” to life of the unformed child, the sculpting of humanity. Victor’s father rejects the boy because “The child is like a slab of marble, nothing can dent him. He learns no lessons from experience” (68), and so Itard must perform the “magic” that will draw the boy from out of the rock: the magic found in words and symbols. The image of a statue brought to life is only one among a set of animation myths, including the aforementioned Frankenstein analogy, relevant to the wild child. These myths also arise within the realm of fairytale, in which an inanimate object is brought to life through human craft and intervention. The most obvious example is that of Pinocchio the puppet boy and his creator the woodcarver—a story Dawson uses to illustrate the relationship between Itard and Victor the wooden boy: “*I will never be able to use my warm hands to soften and shape you, never watch you raise your wooden arms and your silent wooden tongue become flesh*” (281). All these narratives involve a teacher and student relationship in which the instructor is also the creator of the once-elemental child. Education becomes a program of constructing the student, through the sculpting effects of schooling, of learning language and receiving a name; although there is no guarantee that the education will be successful and the marionette turned into a “real” boy.

One of the powerful and transformative tools of language is the ability to name both objects and people, and in Dawson's novel, as in Gerstein's, naming is linked to both creation and proprietorship. It is creative in that giving something or someone a name goes toward formulating an identity, a personhood for the individual. Names are often symbolic gestures, suggesting the hopes held for the child; perhaps in this case, the hope that Victor would be "victorious" in his education. The naming of the wild child is also a way of solidifying his human status, of carving a place for him in human society. Itard reasons in *Wild Boy*, "The child has a name, I wrote, and with it has surely entered human society" (59). The name "Victor" is the wild boy's anchor in the civilized world, and it ties the boy to the man who named him. The boy is named as a way to be called; his name is a verbal string that will prevent him from being lost in his wildness again. However, in spite of the civilizing intentions of naming the child, the title "Victor" is primarily chosen because he responded to the prominent "O" sound, much like he reacted to the sound of a nut cracking (58-9). This great humanizing gesture is thus ironically motivated by the wild boy's instinctual reaction to a noise.

The authority to name other species reinforces the idea that human beings are objectively, or morally, the dominant species. This capacity to name ties into the theory that humans are the only species that use language and, therefore, the acquisition of language makes one a human being. The Itard of *Wild Boy* finds that language and the mere label of Human can change an object: "His words had the miraculous effect of adjusting my perception and, as I looked, the dog transformed himself. In front of my eyes

emerged a crouching, dark, filthy creature, but a human creature none the less" (4). The black shape before him gains distinct human features once he is actually called a "human boy." If he had been labelled a wolf, perhaps he might have continued to be seen as a beast.

For Dawson's Itard, language is the key that will transform Victor from beast to boy and unlock the wild child's secrets, and the wild child is the key that will reveal the truth about human nature. As a master of language and science, Itard expects to be able to manipulate and use this key, but he is continually thwarted in his attempts to find the human locked inside the child. Rather than filling the "void" with language, the Itard of *Wild Boy* actually comes to recognise a similar wordlessness within himself, and senses the inadequacy of language to express Victor's experience: "conjuring up again my first sensations on catching his eyes, I found that my attempts to capture it in my journal were worthless. Words eluded me" (11). Victor brings Itard to the border of himself, of his humanity, to "the very edge of what I can possibly understand" (Dawson 275), but the doctor fails to go further, to empathetically enter into Victor's mind-space. The real Itard's primary technique for capturing Victor's attention, so he could be taught, was to fully engage his senses (Itard 105). One by one, Itard made Victor exercise and refine his sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell (starting with the most "human" faculty of sight before moving on to the "baser," tactile sense). What Itard does not do, in either the factual reports of history, or within Dawson's text, is to follow his own advice and take the prescription he recommends to Victor; that is, to engage his own senses, stretch them to the limits of their

capacity, to embody his own mental processes. His understanding of Victor, therefore, could only be incomplete.

Dawson's Itard believes that Victor will yield valuable information, like an unopened book only he can unlock. In this instance, Victor serves as both a metaphor of a surface waiting to be written upon and an already encoded text. Victor is "Something new, clean. A blank slate. A pure white envelope, unsealed, holding a letter written in invisible ink, in a language that no one else can read. *A language that I alone will come to understand*" (24). In this sense, language is something that already exists in the boy, it is something inherently human, and yet it is distinct from the languages familiar to Itard. This text is something which has form and yet is still malleable, rather like the human body itself. The Itard of *Wild Boy* recognises the same treatment in his own childhood and schooling: "Uncle would educate me, make something of me. They spoke as if I was candle-wax. Blank paper" (244). In Dawson's text a channel of empathy between the tutor and his pupil is opened through Itard's memories of his own childhood experiences in relation to Victor's progress. It is not just the eerily "empty" wild children who are moulded and inscribed into human form; rather, it is a process by which every socialized human being is made.

Locating Victor's voice is Itard's constant pursuit in *Wild Boy*. Despite the belief that he will have to teach Victor language as one would teach an infant, Itard is constantly searching for the "place" inside Victor from which this voice might eventually spring, testing different sensory avenues. Madame Guérin also seeks out any trace of humanity, a sign that Victor is

secretly squirreling away words, memories, and knowledge of the world: “I have watched that boy for the last few hours the way an owl watches a mouse, seeking the tiniest twitch to betray its whereabouts” (250-1). Paradoxically, considering that both Madame Guérin and Dr Itard are searching for evidence of Victor’s humanity, Dawson uses animal imagery to evoke this humanity. Madame Guérin is a bird of prey searching the wilderness for signs of Victor’s intelligence. Earlier in the novel Victor’s words are a caught animal that Itard is struggling to set free: “I could almost see the word itself, trapped there; a bird in a cage, a spider held tight in a fist” (131). The “word” is something alive, trapped behind the speaker’s teeth like an animal in a trap; it is not part of the body but it cannot be separated from it either.

Patterns are an important part of any attempt to write Victor; not just thematically, but stylistically and structurally. Like Gerstein, Dawson addresses the problems involved in writing from the perspective of the wild child, in using language to represent the mind of an unlanguage being, by concentrating on form and syntax as much as semantics. Dawson is preoccupied with the patterns that are created by the trajectory of Victor’s movements and attention, by the sensory map and symbolic landmarks of his narrative. Like Gerstein, Dawson uses the image and movement of water as a way to illustrate Victor’s internal state. Throughout the text water is the main element that “speaks” to Victor: “The river can be heard even from here: he follows the water’s voice” (257). Water, like light, is one part of Nature that works its way into the walls of the Institute; it is a window to escape through. This is true of Victor’s religious observance of drinking water, where the

world is transformed and magnified through the glass; his bathwater which mimics his laughter with every splash; and the crystallization of snow and the fragmentation of ice. It is the “keyhole” pond in the Institute grounds, however, that acts as the greatest mirror to Victor. Dawson writes:

He touches the water again, touches a twig, watches the lines on the water wobbling, shaking, moving, living: their pattern is trying to reach him. He can see circles, infinite circles, his eyes rest happily on these, but only if he stares and taps, stares and taps, he must not be interrupted, he will *not* be interrupted, he needs the circles, they are trembling and fading, always coming towards him but never reaching. He too trembles and fades just like the circles of water. He trembles and dissolves and reappears again, over and over. (110)

Shapes, patterns, and repetition regulate Victor’s “wild” life. The rhythm and movement that the water makes as Victor touches it reflects the ebb and flow of his own life; his past and future are reabsorbed into the landscape leaving only the tremulous marks and vibrations of his present-tense. Dawson, like Gerstein in his Victor sections, makes use of repetition to capture the sense of the boy’s and the water’s movement. The passage begins with Victor touching the water, and as the circles expand outwardly from this contact, so too are the words “circle,” “stares and taps,” “trembling and fading,” repeated concentrically. Finally, it is the intervention of Itard that shatters this rhythm, and transforms the contemplative boy into the shrieking and clawing wild beast.

Part human, part animal; part flesh, part text; part real, part fantasy. Wild children, like all feral animals, are in themselves hybrid beings, always seemingly out of context; and the texts these children inspire are also hybrids. Caught between science and mythology, fact and fiction, animal studies and human psychology, the literature of wild children also tends to struggle with context. Rather than offering streamlined narratives, both the case studies and the fictions they inform tend to be patchwork affairs, a collection of information taken from the official reports and historical studies of Victor combined with the imagery found in classic wild-child fictions and fairy-tales, thus forming a mosaic effect rather than a consistent trajectory. An intellectual vivisection is performed on the wild child of history, the parts given names and sectioned into categories, and then the pieces are resewn together into a fictional account that will regenerate the original child for the public. Whether it is Pygmalion's statue or Frankenstein's monster that is evoked to illustrate the process of humanisation through education, what this process requires is a calling to life of something inanimate, something without an independent life force, and certainly something without (human) language.

CHAPTER TWO

Ferals and Strays: Speaking Doggerel in *Dog Boy* and *Animal's People*.

The previous chapter examined both a historical example of a specific wild child and some fictional accounts of this child—a child who provoked a myriad of theories and philosophies regarding childhood, psychology, education, and humankind's instinct for language and language acquisition. Framing these debates is the well-worn question of whether it is “nature” or “nurture” that makes a human animal a human being—a question based on the false premise that either nature or nurture alone can constitute a person or a species, or that they are separate and opposing concepts. The Victor novels depict the physical and psychological mechanics of attempting to turn a “child of nature” into a civilised man. What these novels do not do, or at least not in any great detail, is explore the wild child's life before his capture and interpolation into human culture. Eva Hornung's *Dog Boy* (2009) and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007) by contrast, depict feral-child characters of varying degrees of wildness and civilisation. The dichotomy between the wild and the civil that was so pronounced in both fictional and factual accounts of Victor's life is shown to be overly simplistic in these two novels. The feral-child characters of Hornung and Sinha's novels are involved in scenes of non-human socialization and complex interactions with other animals, and have a degree of choice and self-determination that was denied Victor.

Both Hornung's and Sinha's feral-child characters and the circumstances of their narratives are based on actual events and, therefore,

carry the burden of presumed authenticity. However, both texts make an imaginative leap into apparent Otherness: into the life and mind of a Russian boy who lives with dogs and a victim of the Bhopal disaster who goes on all-fours. Both narratives are based on contemporary cases of “homeless” (depending on how this term is interpreted) youths, who dwell on the fringes of urban society with and as animals. Unlike the wild children of older myths, suckled by wolves and other wild animals, the children of *Dog Boy* and *Animal’s People* associate with (other) feral animals—specifically dogs. Romochka, the feral child of *Dog Boy*, works as a contemporary Victor, as a semi-mythological figure used to probe the nature of humankind, but Hornung’s narrative also traces the child’s experience as a member of a feral-dog clan prior to his re-civilization. While the fictional and fact-based Victor narratives generally describe the child going from a state of nature into a place of nurture, *Dog Boy* demonstrates the intensive and comprehensive nurturing and education involved in dog society.

Animal of *Animal’s People* does not fit so tidily into the category of the classic “wild child” as he was never completely estranged from human contact, he has a highly developed linguistic ability in spite of his illiteracy, and in the narrative’s present, he is nineteen and no longer a child. The character of Animal presents the unique possibility of imagining the feral child grown up. We rarely hear stories of wild children beyond early adolescence—they tend to fade into oblivion once the innocence and tractability of youth has passed. Animal is a feral child, who has lived on the streets with his dog companion, but who has become an adult (in age, at least)

without compromising his wildness. It is precisely because Animal challenges and exceeds the categories and oppositions of animal/human and adult/child that I find the term “feral” useful in describing his liminal state. As discussed in the introduction, “feral” ambiguously refers to a being that has either been taken into captivity, or of a domesticated animal who has gone wild; it is a category with no easy definition because it depends upon the context and varying identity of the animal involved. Like Romochka, Animal also requires for his feral existence an education in animality and animal survival.

However, his identification with and as a non-human animal is a consequence of a physical disfigurement that visually and kinaesthetically designates him as not-quite-human. He is legally an adult, but as he refuses to either identify himself as human or behave in a manner deemed suitable for an adult male, his age seems indistinct and, like his humanity, is subject to change with his behaviour. I would not suggest that his animality is a product of his physicality, as his identification as animal is a social strategy—one that Animal cleverly manipulates—but his physical comportment and altered sensory perception and perspective of the world muddies the idea of a contained, identifiable, and unambiguous human body.

As important as the circumstances in which these feral-child characters are depicted is the manner in which the two narratives are told. Romochka and Animal, as feral children who are both domesticated and wild, and manipulators of language and forms of communication with all manner of animals, require as an integral part of their characterisation that their stories be told in a style reflective of their experience and singular points-of-view.

The term I have adopted and adapted to describe the kind of language used by the characters of *Romochka* and *Animal* is “doggerel.” Introduced by Kathy Hirsh-Paese and Rebecca Treiman and adapted by Jean Veevers, the term “doggerel” refers to the type of baby-talk or “motherese” that people also often use to speak to their companion animals. It is also a clever play on the original meaning of the word: a lowbrow type of poetry using irregular rhythm—bad or trivial verse. I think the word can be re-appropriated and both meanings melded to refer to the hybrid dog-speak that *Romochka* uses in *Dog Boy*: a guttural, obscenity-thick, patchwork of human words mixed with his dog sounds, twitches, and inflections that are all “*a fraction out of sync*” (216). Doggerel, in this case, both refers to a way of speaking to dogs in a different register and tone, and to the coarse, clichéd, and often parodic, nature of human speech used by *Romochka* and *Animal*.

Dog Boy contains only snatches of *Romochka*’s doggerel speech, whereas *Animal* narrates an entire book using this mongrel language. *Animal’s People* is written (except for the “editor’s” foreword and the glossary) from the first-person perspective of *Animal*, as he tells his story into a series of tapes for an Australian journalist. *Animal* strikes the deal that, if he gives his story, it must be printed exactly as he tells it, and so Sinha has written the text in *Animal*’s lexicon, with the phonetic phrasing and inclusion of any other noises that *Animal* might make. The term “doggerel” is a particularly appropriate term for *Animal*’s speech, as it reflects the original meaning of the term: a degrading and bawdy type of verse, characterized by trite rhyming and low-brow humour. In both novels, the doggerel speech is full of

obscenities, threats, growls, and other noises that announce to other human ears that the speaker is, if not inhuman, then decidedly a feral variety of *Homo sapiens* and *homo voce*.

“He learned teeth”: Nurturing the Beast in *Dog Boy*.

Dog Boy tells the story of Romochka: a four- or five-year-old boy abandoned by his mother and “uncle” on the urban outskirts of Moscow, who is adopted by a stray dog and integrated into her pack. The story is inspired by the contemporary real life case of Russian “dog boy” Ivan Mishukov who, as a four-year-old in 1996, escaped a brutal household and joined a pack of stray dogs, living and begging with them for two years before his capture (Newton 1-2). Romochka in *Dog Boy* is left alone in his “uncle’s” apartment which has been emptied of furniture, food, warmth, electricity, and people. As hunger and loneliness sets in, he ventures out of the apartment, only to find out the entire building has been abandoned—emptied of its humanity. Escaping the unnaturally still building, Romochka finds himself torn between the need to ask for help and the ingrained warning from his mother, “Don’t talk to strangers” (9).

The term “stranger” does not, it would seem, apply to dogs, as Romochka shows very little hesitation in following one back to her lair. This dog is her pack’s leader, a matriarch who has recently whelped a litter of puppies. Romochka becomes one of these puppies, feeding from her milk, and naming her “Mamochka”—his mother. The novel follows Romochka’s physical

and social upbringing as a dog: from his beginnings as a defective and relatively useless pup, to his acquisition of skills in begging, manipulating, and negotiating amongst humans as a dog boy. Two nodal points that alter both the trajectory of the narrative and Romochka's identity are Mamochka's introduction of a second younger human boy as a brother for Romochka, whom he names Puppy, and Puppy's later capture and internment at the Anton Makarenko Children's Centre—an institute that takes in select candidates from the sea of faceless homeless, abandoned, and abused children to study and rehabilitate. When Puppy dies before Dmitry, a child behaviourist, and Natalya, a paediatrician, can unlock the secrets of his upbringing, it becomes necessary for them to capture Romochka. The manner in which this is achieved in the novel mirrors the actual circumstances of Ivan's capture, as the authorities poisoned the dogs at the restaurant where the pack frequently begged for food—effectively destroying Ivan's family in one fell swoop. Little is documented about what happened to Ivan after he was institutionalised, but it is said he eventually returned to school and was assimilated back into human society successfully (Newton 2).

Ivan's is not the only story Hornung draws from, as Mamochka's adoption of a second, much younger human baby boy as another child and a sibling for Romochka immediately suggests the original wolf children Romulus and Remus, as many reviews of the novel have also noted.⁷ The

⁷ Reviews by Christopher Bantick, Peter C. Pugsly, and Philip Womack, all compare *Dog Boy* to the myth of Romulus and Remus. Womack even suggests that Hornung's text is a rewriting of that myth as Romochka is a "pet name for 'Roman.'" None of these reviews mention the real-life connection of *Dog Boy* to the recent cases of feral

narrative also resembles, to some extent, the case of the Indian wolf sisters Amala and Kamala. These wolf girls were captured in 1920 after villagers consulted the Reverend J.A.L. Singh about a pair of “*Manush-Bagha*, the man-ghost of the jungle”: a beast that has the “body and limbs of a human, the face of a ghost” (Steeves 228). On tracking these “animals” to an old termite mound Singh discovered that the alleged ghosts were actually two human female children living with a pack of wolves. As the men dug up the termite mound that served as the wolves’ den, the protective mother wolf was shot and the snarling wolf girls captured. Singh defied the wishes of the villagers to shoot the unnatural children and, instead, brought them back to his orphanage in Midnapore. The two girls, thought to be approximately eight (Kamala) and one and a half years old (Amala), were initially considered to be biological sisters that were taken by the wolves together. It was later speculated that the physically dissimilar girls must have been taken separately, due to the advanced animal acculturation of the older girl. The girls had thick calluses on their wrists and feet from running on all fours, elongated arms, and a distended jaw from bolting raw meat like a wolf. Amala died a year after their capture and Kamala only lived another eight years: succumbing to illness before the plans for her to travel abroad to be studied by “experts” could be brought into effect.

dog-children in Russia, particularly the case of Ivan Mishukov; rather, they emphasise the mythic and literary history of wild-child stories that have preceded *Dog Boy*. Alongside this literary tradition of wild-child stories, reviews by Pugsly and Helen Elliott also position Hornung’s novel within the category of dog, or animal, narratives, such as *Tarka the Otter*, *Call of the Wild*, and *Timbuktu*, the difference being that the protagonist of *Dog Boy*, Romochka, is a human animal.

Despite the close genealogical relationship between wolves and dogs, there is a great categorical and ontological difference between the two species, particularly in the case of literature. Unlike the wolves that raised Amala and Kamala, a dog is generally considered a suitable companion for a child—especially a boy child:

He was a boy; his companions dogs. There was nothing to show that he was following, not leading. They looked like three obedient dogs, and he like a boy master —neglected, young to be out alone, but everyone knows without thinking that a person with dogs is not lost. (Hornung 14)

There is nothing particularly unusual about the sight of a boy with his dogs. It could even be considered a quintessential tableau of childhood. However, the suitability of this relationship is contingent upon many factors: the number of dogs, the human's mastery of the dog and the domesticated status of the animal, and the landscape in which this relationship takes place. Hornung's novel both reinforces the adage that dogs are man's (or boy's) best friend in the most fundamental and life-giving manner, and she perverts what Dmitry labels the "sentimental anthropomorphic fantasies" of "you dog-lovers" (197), as she portrays Romochka and Puppy's life as dogs in all its unsanitised, carnivorous abjection.

To "domesticate" conventionally means to tame or train, but the root of the word lies in the "domicile," and signifies an animal's entry into a human household, or at least its grounds. The non-human dwells amongst humankind as either an extended family member or a supplement to the

human family. In contemporary society a domesticated animal or a pet in particular is thought of as a “minimal animal”—as sanitized, neutered, neotenized, fixated at adolescence” (Shapiro 193). Dogs, perhaps more than any other domesticated animal, are widely integrated into the human family structure because they are popularly considered “almost human.” The phrase “fur child” has also entered the common lexicon, referring to the pet as either an additional child or a replacement for human children. In these cases the child status persists even as the dog reaches maturity. The infantilization of pets, as Kenneth Shapiro points out, decreases the animality of the dog, cat, or other animal, as the animal is integrated into human society and culture (193).

The cultural evolution of domestic species parallels the cultural evolution of humankind, which could be said to epitomize domestic animality. In *The Companion Species Manifesto* Donna Haraway explores what it means to think of dogs as a “companion species” alongside their common role as a companion animal—pets, family members, service and sporting dogs. According to Haraway, “[c]o-constitutive companion species and co-evolution are the rule, not the exception” (32). The keywords here are “co-constitutive” and “co-evolution,” as they denote a relationship between human and other beings that is not characterized by humanity mastering and sculpting unformed nature into its own image. Rather, it implies a mutual process in which humankind is coextensively shaped by other species. These are species that depend on one another and flourish because of their relationship: from bacteria, to plants, insects, and fauna—including human beings.

Physically and socially humankind exists in a symbiotic relationship with dogkind, but our canine compatriots are generally treated as subordinate, as extensions of ourselves as a species and as dog-owners. As companion animals, dogs are considered to be an addendum to humanity and their individual human owners rather than individuals themselves: they can become part-human depending upon the nature of their relationship to their masters. Dogs are a species defined by its closeness to humankind in a mutually beneficial partnership; the most obvious example being the term “man’s best friend.” Haraway sees it as her task to put *canis lupis familiaris* as a companion species at the centre of the bio-cultural narrative: “Dogs are not an alibi for other themes; dogs are fleshly material-semiotic presences in the body of technoscience. Dogs are not surrogates for theory; they are not here just to think with” (5).

Hornung, likewise challenges the idea of the dog valued for its humanness, or its fidelity to humans in general, as her narrative depicts in great detail the complex and formal structure of the dog-pack society and the fact that even life as a stray or feral dog is something that must be learned. The narrative of *Dog Boy* is centred on dogs: dog knowledge, culture, and social structure. Rather than distracting or detracting from the dogs in the narrative, the entry of the human child and his perspective reveals the complexity and potency of the pack structure and its bonds, and its highly nuanced systems of communication. One of the shocks of *Dog Boy* is how real and individuated Mamochka and Romochka’s siblings—White Sister, Black Sister, Grey Brother, and Brown Brother—become in spite of the fact that

they are never given either human or classic dog names, and any anthropomorphic descriptions evoke behaviour which falls well within the documented and observable range for canines. We do not hear their voices and we cannot read them as Romochka learns to do, but what is always evident is their subjecthood—an interiority that the reader is aware of even as it remains largely inaccessible to us. They are dogs and remain dogs throughout the text, never turning into little humans in dogs' clothing.

As dogs become subjects in *Dog Boy*, in the sense that they maintain a distinct personality and character even within the phenomenon of the shared consciousness of the pack that Hornung describes, many of the humans become like dogs or take on a doglike status. This is not only true of the literal case of becoming-dog that Romochka and Puppy undergo but in terms of the masses of homeless people or “Bomzhi” who live on the fringes of the city of Moscow, and on the fringes of society. The adult Bomzhi, who are treated by the authorities as subhuman or a plague species, are distinctly lacking in terms of self-preservation, cooperation, and communication skills compared to Romochka's clan:

Sometimes they seemed to him just like sick dogs or lone strays. You couldn't predict when they would be dangerous. Some of them didn't know how to behave, either with him or with each other. They fought and yowled, ripped and tore each other over food and scraps of metal.

(85)

To Romochka, humans in general want for the subtle knowledge that he knows dogs possess, lacking in both senses and sense. Whether they are the erratic Bomzhi or the insular office workers in the city, human beings are considered by Romochka to be inferior to his dog clan. Much as humans regard other animal species in regards to our own values and criteria, and in the process anthropomorphise them, Romochka judges humans by canine standards. Romochka zoomorphises humans and, with the possible exception of the clans of street kids who somewhat resemble his own clan's structure, he finds humans wanting: undisciplined and fairly stupid.

For Romochka, human beings are manipulable and, depending on how they present themselves or threaten him, he is capable of responding as a dog or hiding behind his "boy-mask" (210). Just as the feral-dog pack learns to stalk and perform as downtrodden domestic pets so that people will offer them food, Romochka, too, is able to "perform the boy" (220) and play the human to protect his clan and his own dog-nature. The only human beings who are comparable to the dogs of Romochka's clan are the gangs of older homeless children who "were loving to dogs but brutal to children and adults outside their own clan" (47). These youths, like Romochka, have adapted to conditions on the fringe, in the place where wildness and civility meet, where they have established their own set of rules and codes. While both the child gangs and the dog clans seem like closed systems, each practices a series of negotiations between themselves and other species—companion species, in particular.

The feral-dog characters of *Dog Boy*, too, are highly perceptive and adaptable creatures who must share the same spaces as human. The feral dogs need to understand and predict human behaviour in order to negotiate the same shared territory. In "Understanding Dogs through Kinesthetic Empathy, Social Construction, and History," Shapiro writes about his relationship with his dog, Sabaka, and how they communicate: "I directly sense his searching for my bodily attitude to him. He is, as it were, studying my kinesthetics—my posture, bearing, incipient movements, and the like . . . this is the habitual way in which he knows me" (190). In looking beyond the one-way command and response model of human-dog interaction there is the potential for a greater mutual understanding through kinaesthetic empathy. Shapiro's model of kinaesthetic empathy is a tool for better understanding his companion dog and does so, first and foremost, because it acknowledges the minded being that he is empathising with. That is, the dog is not an automaton, but a creature with specific perceptual and emotional responses. Hornung attempts to represent in fiction how such a dialogue can be established between members of two different species without the use of anthropomorphised talking animals. The lack of direct speech between Romochka, Puppy, and the feral clan-dogs means that Hornung must depict their communications through other types of discourse and description. This communication is a form of doggerel, in the pet-speak or "motherese" interpretation of the term. That is, Romochka and the other clan dogs share a kind of short-hand language that is a mix of body language, scent, and more obvious signs of growls and barks. The difficulty in portraying this feral language, of course, is that all languages must be learnt and the human

readership of *Dog Boy* could scarcely imagine the complexity and alterity of feral-dog perception, let alone speak their language.

Positioning themselves at the top of the evolutionary tree, as the dominant and most advanced species on Earth, human beings value their perceptions and knowledge of the world, as individuals and as a species, above those of other species. With a world-view that is structured around visual cues it is difficult for humans to imagine how the world is experienced by others whose sensory apparatus has different strengths. Despite the closeness and familiarity of dogs to humankind it is very difficult to actually imagine a dog's perception of the world considering that dogs "see" through their noses. "For dogs, scenting is believing," writes Vicki Hearne (*Adam's Task* 79), "We cannot know, with our limited noses, what we can know about being deaf, blind, numb or paralyzed; we do not have words for what is absent" (80). Hearne investigates the different ways we may communicate with animals and attempts to translate the many ways in which the animal responds. Understanding what animals of other species mean or intend requires a leap of faith or, as Hearne describes in relation to the working relationship with tracking dogs, a trust in the animal's keener senses. Humans cannot smell as dogs do and we do not even have the vocabulary to describe the lack of this skill.

Given the great difference between human and canine sensory perception, and given the lack of an adequate vocabulary to describe the sensory experiences of other animals—such as the scent-centrism of dog world-view—it would seem that this gulf would create an insurmountable

barrier in any literary depictions of these animal perspectives. Hornung illustrates the breach between the senses of human perception compared to that of a dog. Romochka learns early on of his olfactory disadvantage and his inability to “read the stories” (20) that the older dogs bring back to the lair in their scent and fur the way his puppy siblings can. Romochka is able to train his nose over time, although never to the degree that Puppy is able to, and he makes up for his lack by learning different ways to “read” the dogs. Romochka’s education in doghood is much more involved than learning to understand the meanings of different barks and growls, although he does quickly learn how to distinguish these sounds and their meanings:

He learned teeth: the friendliness of a gesture that held teeth low and unthreatening, and slowly all the gradations from bared-teeth threat, lip-veiled threat, and teeth set aside or used for play. He found himself quickly fitting in with teeth serious and teeth playful, reading easily the bodies around him with eyes, fingers, nose and tongue. (27)

Beyond learning how to speak dog, Romochka’s education consists of a realigning, or reimagining, of his body schema. In the pitch dark of the den where he initially spends the majority of his time, Romochka loses the advantage of eye-sight. Without the constant visual comparison Romochka can feel himself becoming doglike as his other senses expand to fill the void: “In the darkness his sense of himself became fluid. His teeth lengthened and his bite was deadly” (31). During the course of the book, Romochka’s appearance changes from that of an ordinary-looking young boy to a lean, muscular, sharp-nailed and black-matted beast-child, but in spite of these

external indicators of his otherness, his physiognomy remains that of a human. Romochka rarely walks on all fours as Puppy does; he never loses his human verticality and yet he physically identifies himself as a dog.

As much as Romochka's body topography is altered through his cohabiting with dogs, his sense of his own physicality is also transformed through his use of language on the rare occasions he uses his old knowledge—only, in this case, language has the power to metamorphose Romochka back into human form:

He felt his words changing everything, not just between him and the dog, but between him and the place. He sensed his limbs: long and smooth, a boy's legs and arms. His ears, he knew, were flat to the sides of his head, not pointed and hairy. No dog would see his ears dip or prick—they were fine shells hidden under his hair. (162)

Significantly, Romochka is conversing with a house dog when he feels his words turn him into a boy, for it is because the small dog only recognises what Romochka is when he speaks and will not acknowledge his mutual doghood that this transformation takes place. It is not his contact with other humans that makes Romochka more or less human; rather, he is defined through his relationship with different dogs. On the other hand, when Romochka does use language it becomes misshapen upon his tongue. According to Natalya, he sounds at times “*like a migrant using Russian as a second language. He reuses what he hears and cobbles together phrases, manufacturing meanings*

on the spot" (217). Romochka uses phrases he overhears in a seemingly parodic way, more for effect and their music than for their meaning.

Romochka's doggerel speech is only interspersed throughout the text, and large periods go by in the narrative where no voice of the boy is heard at all. Romochka's early time with the dogs is characterized by a silence, by a lack of a speaking voice—making it all the more startling and stark for the dogs and the reader when he does speak aloud. Romochka's life as a dog is not represented through his own telling of his narrative, and human language would be too inadequate a medium to represent his interior life in the first-person voice. Rather, his experience of dog-hood is portrayed by Romochka's *not* speaking; by the precedence of sensory description, of making the reader feel, or empathize with, the different physicality and sociability of Romochka's life as a member of a feral-dog clan.

"I used to be human once": The Body Made Animal in *Animal's People*.

*I am an animal fierce and free
in all the world is none like me
crooked I'm, a nightmare child
fed on hunger, running wild
no love and cuddles for this boy
live without hope, laugh without joy
but if you dare to pity me
i'll shit in your shoe and piss in your tea. (172)*

Sinha's novel *Animal's People* is set approximately twenty years after a catastrophic fire at a chemical factory in the fictional Indian city of Khaufpur. The circumstances and location of the story are based upon a similar disaster that occurred in Bhopal, India in 1984. The story is narrated by nineteen-year-old Animal, a child of the fire who was born shortly before the toxic cloud enveloped the city. Orphaned and placed in the care of French missionary Ma Franci, Animal survives the fire but six years later develops a fever. His spine twists itself until his back is as bent as a "scorpion's tail" (47), and he cannot stand upright and must move about on all fours. Teased by the other children at the orphanage, who call him "'Jaanvar, jungle Jaanvar.' Animal, wild Animal" (15), he eventually takes on the name, and the identity, of "Animal," refusing his humanity.

Leaving the orphanage Animal becomes a street kid, a stray animal, sleeping in the abandoned factory which is home to scorpions, snakes, and dangerous wild dogs with "foaming mouths" (30), but where no other human dares to set foot. The pesticides the "Kampani" were producing prior to the accident (with the aim to improve the crops of the third-world poor) were never cleaned up from the factory site or from the water supply. The effect at the factory is total silence as no insects or birds can live there. The fallout has also resulted in a population of creeping, cringing, dying people whose deaths and deformities from the pesticides essentially turn them into a pest species as well—both physically and legally. Surviving by scavenging, begging, stealing, and hustling amongst the feral dogs of Khaufpur, Animal befriends Jara: "We used to be enemies. In the days of living on the street we were

rivals for food. We used to work the same territory, the alleys behind the eating houses in the old city” (17). Early on in *Animal’s People* the character of Jara (short for “Banjara,” meaning “gypsy” [18]) is introduced as if she were human—simply as Animal’s friend. Animal is never acculturated into dog society, like Romochka and his feral clan, but by living with and alongside Jara and the other wild dogs he comes to learn from them and about them, as Jara does from him. As Animal becomes more doglike, scampering about the city and living off the waste of society, so too does Jara become more like a street urchin, participating in Animal’s schemes and trickery for food.

Running parallel to the story of the people of Khaufpur’s suffering and the continuing medical fallout from the chemical fire is the equally prolonged and torturous fight for justice in bringing the foreign-owned chemical company to court. Leading this fight is Zafar: not a native of Khaufpur, the educated and idealistic Zafar is a hero of the people for taking up their cause. Animal becomes involved with Zafar and his cause when he meets a student, Nisha, whom he hopes to sleep with. Zafar and Nisha plan to elevate Animal from living on the streets, to find him a job and a human name, but Animal rejects all such offers. “Plus you should not allow yourself to be called Animal. You are a human being, entitled to dignity and respect” (23), Zafar tells Animal, implying that these are rights to which an animal is not entitled. Animal recoils at Zafar’s “do-gooding” (27), but in order to stay close to Nisha he takes a job “jamisponding” (“James Bonding” or spying) on the Amrikan (American) doctor Elli who has opened a free clinic in Khaufpur. Zafar suspects she is working for the Kampani, but Animal is principally

interested in Elli's promise to treat his back and fulfil his secret wish to walk upright.

Animal's attitude to the court case, and to life in general, is one of ambivalence. He despises the "Amrikan" company but fosters a relationship with the potentially duplicitous American doctor Elli in the hope of a potential treatment. He is scornful of the foreign journalists who come to places like Khaufpur to mine their tragedy for stories, but nonetheless takes delight in weaving his own story for what he imagines to be the foreign readers (the "eyes"). Most importantly, Animal is ambivalent about his human/animal status and nature. Throughout the text Animal oscillates between his desire to be human and his desire to stay outside of humanity. Verbally he defies and denies any vestige of humanness but secretly fantasises and conspires with Elli to be "made" human once again. Rob Nixon provides an ecocritical analysis of both *Animal's People* and the Bhopal disaster, foregrounding the globalised politics and the literary responses to such power struggles. He writes: "From [Animal's] vantage point on humanity, Homo looks neither sapiens nor erectus, but a morally debased species whose uprightness is mostly posturing" (453). Animal has no good reason for wanting to be human based on the examples set before him, besides his desire to find a mate. For Animal to be human means he would always be defective: "if I agree to be a human being, I'll also have to agree that I'm wrong-shaped and abnormal. But let me be a quatre pattes animal, four-footed and free, then I am whole, my own proper shape, just a different kind of animal from say Jara, or a cow, or a camel" (208). To see himself

through the eyes of others, particularly the eyes of foreign others, is to see himself as defective, homeless, and abject; whereas to be an animal is to have no correct form other than his own, and to be at home in his rootlessness. Animal is a unique being but his body also serves as the metonymic symbol for all the suffering, degradation, and dehumanizing of the people of Khaufpur. On the one hand, being an animal is considered a terrible, undignified, and demoralizing fate for a human being. On the other hand, the word “jaanvar” (animal) is etymologically linked to the word “jaan” (meaning “life,” as indicated in the glossary of Khaufpurian terms [370]), and Animal has thrived as a non-human where others have struggled to maintain their humanity.

If Animal were to view himself through the Western middle-class “eyes” that he imagines will consume his narrative, he would see only the horror of Khaufpur and his own twisted form. Similarly, when Animal sees Khaufpur through Elli’s eyes his home ground turns into a slum, a faeces-strewn, decaying, shanty town thrown up by an earthquake (178). The slums of Khaufpur are the abject that is expelled by the foreign powers of the Kampani and their lawyers: the filth, the excrement, the corpses, the disfigurements, and sickness. The three categories of abjection described by Kristeva—food, waste, and sexual difference—are all evident in *Animal’s People*. In “The Body of Signification” Grosz describes the abjection of bodily waste thus:

Bodily fluids, waste products, refuse—faeces, spit, sperm, etc.—provoke cultural and individual horror and disgust, symptomatic of our cultural

inability to accept the body's materiality, its limits, its 'natural' cycles and mortality. Faeces, for example, in signifying that the opposition between the clean and the unclean draws on the distinction between the body's inside and its outside. Inside the body, it is a condition of the body's ability to regenerate itself; as expelled and external it is unclean, filthy. The subject is implicated in this waste, for it can never be definitively and permanently externalised: it *is* the subject; it *cannot* be completely expelled. (91)

Animal, in his visible state of difference and disfigurement, demonstrates the merging of supposedly opposing fields: of human and animal, the spiritual/intellectual and the physical, sickness and health, child and adult. Kristeva writes: "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). What is at stake is the "ontological hygiene" (Graham 11), of the human species; the corruption of the perimeters of what makes a human. Animal's body, in particular, is literally corrupt and is, therefore, corrupting of the category of human.

In Khaufpur, where sickness is normality, where bodies ooze and excrete and fall apart, where mother's milk is spilled on the ground so as not to infect the young with inherited poisons, the fluids of the body cannot be hidden, denied, and excluded from the self. In Western societies, a healthy and properly regulated human body requires that the abject be flushed away and the individual sanitised, but for the sick and the poor the borders are not

so easily maintained: “Leakages suffuse the novel: gas leakages and category leakages, porous borders and permeable membranes, the living who are semi-dead and the dead who are living spectres” (Nixon 458). Nixon describes these processes of becoming fluid as semantic and cellular, cultural and natural. It is not the illness of the Khaufpurians and Animal that makes them abject in themselves; rather, it is their relationship with the West, the chemical company, the foreign lawyers, and the politics of ignorance and distance by which they are constructed as the abject other to the civil, the law, the hygienic, and the healthy.

To focus on the abject elements of the text would seem to place all the emphasis on the victimization and powerlessness of the Khaufpurian characters. Yet the abject, though usually a symbol of what is worthless, can also be deployed as a form of negative power. Heather Snell uses Kristeva’s theory of the abject and Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque to analyse the manner by which Sinha challenges the fetishization, or “Third-world” patronization, of both Animal and the Khaufpur/Bhopal disaster (3). Snell argues that the reversal of the norms, by which the abject is up-front and the “top” and “bottom” are swapped, with the “substitution of Animal’s buttocks for his face” (10), perverts any attempts at identification or sentimentalization of Animal and Khaufpur. In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White discuss the efficacy of the carnival and carnivalesque to challenge the status quo, arguing that one of the pleasures of the carnival is the temporary revelling in the abject, the

monstrous, and the juxtaposition between the classic Vitruvian man with the grotesque, unclassifiable body. They write:

The grotesque body, as Bakhtin makes clear, has *its* discursive norms too: impurity (both in the sense of dirt and mixed categories), heterogeneity, masking, protuberant distension, disproportion, exorbitancy, clamour, decentred or eccentric arrangements, a focus upon gaps, orifices, and symbolic filth (what Mary Douglas calls ‘matter out of place’), physical needs and pleasures of the ‘lower bodily stratum’, materiality and parody. (23)

By this description, the grotesque is linked to the erotic, to a perversity of physical pleasure, and a certain power found in the reversal of the common order and its hierarchy. A potential problem is that this reversal does not undo the binaries of body and mind, high and low, or human and animal, and these occasions of the carnivalesque and the grotesque are usually relegated to the fringes of society, and locked within the cabinets of curiosities.

The most grotesque and carnivalesque character in *Animal's People* is the Kha-in-the-Jar: a two-headed miscarried embryo floating in preservation fluid. Not quite dead as it cannot decay, and never born or given breath, the Kha is the ultimate object of abject horror. Whether it is an element of magical realism or a sign of schizophrenia,⁸ Animal is able to converse with

⁸ Reviewers of *Animal's People* such as Lucy Beresford and Nick Rennison have read Animal's ability to converse with all manner of beings as a characteristic of magical realism (if not in the traditional sense of the genre). In an interview Indra Sinha has acknowledged this interpretation; however, as the real boy who inspired the character

the Kha, which renders the foetus's status all the more ambiguous as it cannot be ogled as a dead and contained freak of poisoned nature. Giving language to such a distortion of humanity is more transgressive and horrifying than if Animal shared such an exchange in human language with Jara or another non-human animal. Though far from a monster, Animal is something of a grotesque figure in the tradition of teratology: he displays physical and categorical impurity; his famous, monstrously huge, "lund" (penis); his preoccupation with sex, combined with the curiosity of others' as to how an animal would perform such an act with a human or an animal.

To be an animal is to be rendered low, close to the ground, as opposed to the vertical uprightness that is the ideal for human. Animal begins his narrative: "I used to be human once. So I'm told. I don't remember it myself, but people who knew me when I was small say I walked on two feet just like a human being" (1). The comparative physical schema of low and high, horizontal and vertical, four feet or two, is a manifestation or indicator of the intellectual and spiritual life of the individual in the novel. For example, it demonstrates the supposed difference between Zafar's transcendence of illness and physical privations to conquer the "Kampani" and Animal's immanence in his preoccupation with sex and the physical. Physically incapable of holding his head high, Animal is associated with the "lower bodily stratum," loins, anus, spleen and belly, in spite of the fact that he is highly verbose and extremely clever. Animal is "a literal 'lowlife'" (Nixon 453),

of Animal developed schizophrenia, Sinha argues that the voices Animal hears form his own reality and are neither magic nor madness from his perspective.

who, because of his physical comportment, has a different perspective on the world, a different centre to that of the upwardly extensive human being. The vertical human uses its eyes to navigate the world, whereas Animal at street level relies on his other senses to construct a “picture” of the world:

The world of humans is meant to be viewed from eye level. Your eyes.
Lift my head I’m staring into someone’s crotch. Whole nother world it’s,
below the waist. Believe me, I know which one hasn’t washed his balls, I
can smell pissy gussets and shitty backsides whose faint stench don’t
carry to your nose, farts smell extra bad. (2)

Animal’s point of view is not premised on the ocular in constructing and making sense of the world; rather, down at ground level amongst the waste, detritus, and bowels of human and non-human life, he uses his other senses in mapping the world. “How well I know this city’s zameen, its grounds, from an altitude of two feet, this is my home earth, discarded things are my city’s treasures” (272): Animal exists at the level of the abject so that all that is excluded by human beings constitutes his reality. He, in turn, excludes the clean, the contained, and the metaphysical. Slipping beneath the gaze of human beings, Animal is able to cross borders and permeate different strata of society—not because he is able to deceive people into thinking he belongs, but because of his categorical exclusion from all groups.

While Animal cannot see over people’s heads, he gains an altogether more intimate insight into their minds and bodies. Animal tells the tape: “I’ve always caught the meanings of speech even when I could not understand a

word, I had not just an ear but an eye for meanings. I could read expressions and gestures, the way someone sat or stood” (35). Animal is adept at reading both human and non-human beings because he does, seemingly, transgress the species boundaries at a somatic and social level, and because he is aware of all that is beneath the gaze of most human beings. Animal is a polyglot who is not only able to read bodies, and speak in his native tongue of Khaufpur, which is a mix of Hindi and Urdu, but is also the only Khaufpurian to learn the French of Ma Franci. But there are other languages he understands too:

I know most of the Inglis words, those I don't know spit their meanings into my ear. C'est normal. Since I was small I could hear people's thoughts even when their lips were shut, plus I'd get en passant comments from all types of things, animals, birds, trees, rocks giving the time of day. (8)

Whether a side-effect of the chemical disaster, madness, or magical realism, Animal's ability to talk to and understand all matter of things moves language away from something that is exchanged merely between human beings. And not all human languages are the same in effect—that is, share a one-to-one translation in sense—but, rather, each language has its own inflections, accents and emphases that create language-specific meanings. For instance, English, for Animal, is a secret language. Animal pretends he does not understand “Inglis” when confronted with foreigners and journalists, just as he instructs Elli to pretend she does not speak Hindi when she visits the slums, so that the mistrusting villagers will speak freely in her presence. French, which is only spoken by Ma Franci and Animal is depicted as “la

langue humaine” (142). After the chemical fire Ma Franci lost all knowledge of Hindi, Urdu, English, and all languages other than French: “she could no longer recognise that what they were speaking was a language, she thought they were just making stupid grunts and sounds” (37). To Ma Franci, therefore, Animal is the only inhabitant of Khaufpur whom she considers sane and civilized because he is the only person who can speak French.

The multitude of different languages in Animal’s lexicon not only expands his comprehension to many different people and beings but also transforms how he uses language itself. Each language is a discrete signifying system, and while a language may be influenced by and incorporate phrases from other languages, it cannot be entirely translated into another without some leakage of sense. Rather than attempt to translate his thoughts and meanings into the specific languages of his audience, Animal uses a melange of different tongues to create a new, intermixed, or feral, language.

It is not a coincidence that this practice is described in terms of the body and its flows and functions. Animal is aware that the body is intrinsic to language: “well you know what they say, the tongue has no bone so it can twist and turn to all kinds of things” (296). Yet speech is not held static by the body; rather, languages like bodies can evolve and inter-breed—over long periods of time or rapidly like the cellular mutation caused by a sudden chemical contamination. As Animal’s body is corrupted, so is his language, thus forming the idiosyncratic first-person voice of the novel. He warns the foreign “jarnalis” and the “eyes” he imagines consuming his story upon publication: “If you want my story, you will have to put up with how I tell it”

(2). Animal is unapologetic for his graphic use of slang, swear words and offensive phrases like “sisterfuck” or “sisterfucker” (3, 9, 90, 109, 112, 179, 313). Kristeva argues that the language of slang can be a language of abjection:

The vocabulary of slang, because of its strangeness, its very violence, and especially because the reader does not always understand it, is of course a radical instrument of separation, of rejection, and, at the limit, of hatred. Slang produces a semantic fuzziness, if not interruption, within the utterances that it punctuates and rhythmicizes . . . (*Powers* 191)

The slang used by Animal is not only abject because it is verbally and semantically filthy, full of terms for bodily waste, body parts, and debasing sexual acts, but also because it is a mongrel speech, that blurs the boundaries between different dialects to create a new verbal effect. It is not necessarily the meaning of the words themselves that are important in establishing the sense of Animal’s utterances, so much as the overall prosody and visceral effect of the words strung together.

Nowhere in the novel is this more evident than in the verses of low-brow doggerel that are interspersed throughout the novel. These dirty little rhymes—such as the song he writes about himself cited at the start of this chapter section—are both Animal’s own compositions and the manifestations of the bodiless voices he hears in his head. The subject of these verses is

always concerned with bodily functions of the “lower strata,” that is, shitting, pissing, and fucking:

feet on tiptoe

head down below

arse en haut

thus do I go. (16)

Doggerel is both a semantically and syntactically offensive form of verse which, in Animal’s case, uses jarring punctuation and strange ordering of words to create a rhythm. All of Animal’s speeches are a form of doggerel: a language that is contaminated and corrupted by his association with other “lower” species, a hybrid grafting of several human languages, an invocation of the abject; a language that is shaped and mutated to reflect Animal’s specific corporeality, comportment, and rhythms of his hum-animality.

Both *Dog Boy* and *Animal’s People* demonstrate different ways that the category of the wild child actually involves a spectrum of beings between wildness and civilization: Romochka and Animal inhabit a zone and being of in-betweenness or “feralness.” This spectrum of hum-animality also means that varying degrees of literary access to these child characters are credible and, therefore, different methods of portraying them are useful. The previous chapter examined two novels that engaged with a real-life wild child. Victor presented as an enigma for scientists like Itard to study and unlock the mysteries of human nature. His inscrutability in history is reflected in Gerstein and Dawson’s texts as Itard attempts to construct a human from the raw materials of the seemingly empty wild child. Romochka might similarly

have presented an unbreachable wall of comprehensibility, so dissimilar is his experience to that of most human beings. Yet we have an access of sorts to Romochka, not because Hornung discovered the truth about the psychology of the feral child, but because she endeavoured to understand the psychology and physicality of his dog family. It is through the appreciation of the kinaesthetic otherness and sameness of *canis familiaris* that Hornung and the text's reader may gain some sense of Romochka's experience. Animal, as a self-identified non-human who walks on all-fours and sees the world from a crouched perspective, speaks from an alternate kinaesthetic experience, a form and mode of functioning that, if not unimaginable, is completely impracticable for most humans. His narrative is a demonstration in doggerel; that is, it illustrates the manner in which the imagined comportment of the protagonist might be reflected in the language and format of the narrative. Both *Dog Boy* and *Animal's People* are examples of ways to think, through literature, into the bodies of other humans and non-human animals; and through these literary bodies, into the minds and experiences of other beings.

CHAPTER THREE

Sign-ifying Silences: The Borderland Child in *The Bone People* and *Wish*.

The “wild” and “feral” child are two particular, though not necessarily simple, examples of beings who inhabit the murky borderland between humanity and animality. In this chapter I consider the experiences of wild-child characters who are raised as, and by, humans, but, whose status as human beings remains in doubt. Simon of Keri Hulme’s *The Bone People* is a fair-haired, fair-skinned boy of indeterminate age and origins, found washed ashore on the coast of New Zealand. His unruly behaviour and muteness mark him as a wild child, and he is often described in non-human animal terms; however, in spite of his speechlessness Simon is a highly articulate boy, with a seemingly preternatural grasp of written language and a fluent and creative, if not officially sanctioned, ability with Sign language. In Peter Goldsworthy’s *Wish* the mute child is a juvenile female gorilla who has been raised like a human child and has been genetically altered to increase her brain-size, thus enhancing her ability to learn languages and, therefore, become more human. Wish is biologically mute and is taught official Sign language in the tradition of such famous apes as Koko, Washoe, and Nim Chimpsky. Because Wish is a non-verbal non-human animal, she is treated as a child, as powerless or disabled, even though she displays the animal signs of maturity and knowing. Like Simon, Wish’s aptitude for Sign exceeds the structure of the proper signs, and produces a hybrid system that draws from a highly complex morphology of Sign and body language, or kinesis. Within these texts, Simon’s

and Wish's savantian competence with signs, written and gestured, grants them some distinction above savagery, but without a "voice" their idiosyncratic languages are devalued in the face of subjects who can "speak" their mind.

The Silent Child and the Symbolic in *The Bone People*.

The Bone People is set in a small coastal town in New Zealand and follows the intertwining stories and fates of Kerewin (an artist of mixed Maori and Pakeha ancestry and ambiguous sexuality), Joe (a bereaved Maori man who drinks and beats his adopted son), and Simon (the adopted son of Joe). Simon is a mute child of unknown origin found washed ashore like a piece of driftwood. He is taken in by Joe and his extended Maori family and given the name Simon. Despite his unquestioned acceptance into this family and his apparent affection for his sometimes abusive new father, Simon resists the processes of domestication and socialisation meant to integrate the lost boy into the institutions of the society—family, school, the law, and the medical system. While the dominant voice in the story is Kerewin's, the elusive figure of Simon drives the narrative, bringing the different elements into cathexis.

I do not posit Simon as a type of wild-child figure simply because he acts out wildly, which would not be unusual behaviour for any child suffering from sustained abuse, but due to a myriad of thematic and textual signals. Simon fits into the framework of the "wild child" because of the processes he must undergo to become sufficiently human and a proper member of society.

Stories about wild children, fiction and non-fiction, are often preoccupied with the child's re-induction into the human fold and the lessons the child must undertake. Unlike Victor, the quintessential wild child, Simon understands and can write using a complex human language; however, Simon prefers not to write messages, he vomits if he attempts to speak (61, 271), and generally only endeavours to communicate using a sign language made up of transparent gestures and signs of his own devising. Despite Simon's negotiations in creating a method of communication that suits his mind and experience, the adult characters in Hulme's novel—particularly in the institutions of education, medicine, and the law—try to coerce Simon into speaking and writing in acceptable forms. The combination of the boy's unspeakable past and the traces and scars of his unknown upbringing are interpreted differently by Joe and Kerewin. Joe is disposed to start afresh by naming the strange boy Simon and integrating him into his family life as if the boy were born into it. Kerewin on the other hand wants to unlock the mystery of Simon's past, investigating the clues about the boy's origin and trauma. By reading the child, Kerewin attempts to learn about Simon—his past and who he is as an individual, as opposed to who he is expected to be in the family unit or at school—and she even takes steps to learn his language on his terms in order to better understand his experience and life-world.

The multilayered readings and interpretations of Simon, as performed by Kerewin and Joe within the text, are echoed and compounded in the critical interpretations of the role of Simon in *The Bone People*. Antje M. Rauwerda, for example, succinctly describes his position in the novel, stating

that Simon “is a white-skinned, blond-haired, blue-eyed child who represents both the Pakeha (white) colonist in a national, postcolonial allegory and, paradoxically, a Maori god” (23); and Susie O’Brien states that “the silence of the mute child may be seen as metonymic of the cultural and linguistic ruptures endemic in post-colonial society” (80). He is both the sacrificial Christ-child and a mischievous trickster god; the “white whipping boy” of postcolonial culture—to use Rauwerda’s term (23)—or the scape-goat that will bring catharsis to the cultural divides of contemporary New Zealand. As interesting as these characterisations are, what fascinates me is the critics’ reading the wild-child characters as *figures* of something else. In the same way that the real child Victor became a reflection of Itard’s own philosophies, Simon is commonly read as something other than his literal meaning.

It is no surprise that the wild child is read in this way, as both animals and disabled humans in literature have typically been interpreted symbolically. Clare Barker argues that disabled characters, and disability in fiction generally, have been used by authors as a “narrative prosthesis,” or a metaphor for a broken or corrupt society (131). The disabled, broken, or “abnormal” body is applied as a metaphor for either a damaged internal (personal) state or a diseased and derelict external environment. However, Barker suggests that *The Bone People* does not conform to this pattern: she argues strongly against reading Simon’s muteness as primarily symbolic, claiming that his disability operates as an “ontology rather than metaphor” (133). In *The Bone People* physical and social “normalcy” constitute an “oppressive presence” (Barker 137) for the three principle characters, which

threatens their well-being as individuals and as a family (of sorts). Barker argues that the character of the mute child Simon brings the politics of disability to the fore, rather than existing as an ancillary theme or symbol of the greater meaning of the text (131). Simon is not simply a silent and broken boy but is an active and *abled*, creator, producer, and participant in the dialogue.

Likewise, the symbolic function of the wild-child character is much like the role animals often play in fiction; that is, as a representation of some greater truth about humankind. Erica Fudge explains that the “animals as such disappear and are replaced by a metaphorical structure that attempts to represent what is, for humans, unobtainable” (*Animal* 12). One might argue that non-human animals exceed human languages to such an extent that the only way to write about them is through metaphor, and analogy. While this approach makes valuable connections between human beings and other species, it can also have the effect of erasing the animal from the text. In a similar way, the wild child is obscured to become merely a symbol for humanity.

In *The Bone People* animals are undoubtedly used instrumentally, through metaphor analogy, and imagery, to explain or allude to some aspect of the human condition: some of which are overt and others sub-textual. For instance, Hulme’s description of the physical abuse Simon suffers at the hands of Joe is evocative of the abuse of an animal: “The child has crawled part way back to his bedroom. The tired sick way he moves, the mess of him, his cringing, the highpitched panting he makes instead of any normal cry—e

this is no child of mine” (213). And Kerewin states, after seeing the result of one of these beatings: “Man, I wouldn’t bash a dog in the fashion you’ve hurt your son. I’d shoot it, if the beast was incorrigible or a killer, but never lacerate it like *that*” (181). To simply allude to Simon, or to interpret him, as a beaten dog is to fundamentally ignore the non-human animal in deference to the plight of the human child; however, Hulme’s visceral prose reduces the difference between the human and non-human while not ignoring the Other in the allegory (that is, the injured animal). The focus on the sensory description—the “cringing,” the “panting,” the way the child moves and the unlanguage sounds he makes—collapses the distinction between child and dog. The experience of the beaten child makes explicit the pain and suffering an injured animal feels—not because the child is mute, or because of any correlation between disabled people and non-human animals, but because the fear and violence creates a vacuum in which semantics and species differentiation become meaningless.

In *The Body in Pain* Elaine Scarry examines the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of describing physical pain, arguing that “physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (4). She attributes the inexpressibility of physical pain to its “complete absence of referential content” (162); that is, the body in pain has no object outside itself as its referent. This lack of a referent outside the body means that pain, too, is generally described through metaphor and analogy. The implication of this is

that there is an insignificant difference between the experience of a human being and a non-human being in pain. The threshold of language is reached and the species distinctions of cognisance and linguistic competence become trivial. Ironically, Joe claims he beats the boy to break the animal in him—to drive out the wild: “I resented his difference, and therefore, I tried to make him as tame and malleable as possible, so I could show myself, ‘You’ve made him what he is, even if you didn’t breed him’” (461). In this case the violence done to Simon (the wild animal) is synonymous with the civilizing, or domesticating, of the human child; but, like all civilising or humanising procedures, there always remains something outside and in excess of the human subject.

Hulme’s use of animal imagery and the analogies between animals of different species and the human characters (Simon in particular) not only work to illustrate human characteristics and experiences but draw a more critical attention to the experiences of other animals. The suffering and violence done to the voiceless child parallels and brings into the relief the everyday violence done to other “silent” animals. Witnessing Simon’s pain and reactions, Kerewin cannot help but consider the consequences and the reasoning behind the killing of some animals. For example, Simon’s reluctance to eat a live pipi from its shell, his pale, quivering, silent condemnation, makes Kerewin question her own assumptions:

She hopes he won’t ask why because she isn’t sure herself. She suspects it’s because even a lowly frog, not to mention a fowl, could make one hell of a racket as you gnawed ’em. All the helpless pipi could do, was spurt a

feeble squirt of water and die between your teeth. Dammit kid, you've started to make me feel guilty. (152)

By this logic, cruelty to animals is measured by their varying degrees of silence and sounds of distress. It is hard to muster empathy for a pipi, a mussel, or an oyster; however, Simon's visceral reaction to eating the live organism is all the more powerful for being unspoken. This correlation between violence and silence is repeated several times in the text in episodes that juxtapose Simon and a dead or injured animal. In the first instance, Simon digs out a burrow that has two mummified baby rabbits "sleeping" at the bottom of it (247). In the same chapter, on a fishing trip with Kerewin and Joe, Simon hooks his own thumb after landing a massive groper with a "bluegrey, massive, huge mouth . . ." (263). The makeshift surgery Joe performs on Simon's thumbs follows the bludgeoning, gutting and dissection of the fish. In the final episode in this series Simon comes across a flapping shape on the beach—an injured bird, "the beak opens and shuts soundlessly" (286). Unable to stomach the bird's suffering, Simon beats it to death with a rock and covers the body in sand. The same imagery is reiterated of the bird's gasping mouth without sound as Simon, too, is a silent, gasping creature on the beach: "There is a singing in his head, and a bitter constriction in his throat. He tries to swallow and his gorge rises. He dry-retchs repeatedly" (286). Here, animal silence is linked to sickness, pain, and death; but so too is speech, for Simon.

Simon's reaction to the dead rabbits and the dead bird is similar to what happens when he tries to speak out loud: vomiting, shaking, frustration,

fear, and eventually lashing out. Even in trying to write down his thoughts Simon struggles to translate his meaning into words:

He is actually shaking all over with the effort of trying to find a way to show what he wants to say.

‘Is it a word you need? Or a whole sentence?’

He hits the table with the pencil and it breaks. Point smashed. (86)

When words fail, violence becomes Simon’s language; his body erupts to fill the space that the linguistic cannot reach or, rather, that it excludes. Pain is a physical and psychical experience that cannot be contained in language, as Scarry makes explicit, because it has no referent outside the body. Pain, however, is only one extremity of the physical experience that clearly demonstrates the breakdown of language. It is not simply pain that defies description but, more specifically, the body in pain. Dorothea Olkowski argues that the “resistance of physical reality to linguistic and logical symbolisation is due either to the inadequacy of logical symbols (rigid and hegemonic while this reality is fluid) or to a complete lack of power on the part of logic to ‘incorporate’ fluid reality” (94). It may be the case that the “fluid” physical cannot be represented in language, but it could also be argued that the instability of the body exposes the instability of language, that the two cannot be separated. That is, while bodies provide the locus and conduit for language to be created and become meaningful, so too, when bodies fail or experience illness or injury, language is affected and at times fails. In extreme cases like Simon, the body itself is the primary form of communication; that is, the boy’s communications cannot be readily externalised from his body as in written

text and the breath of speech. When Simon is forced to use written communications, divorced from the kinaesthesia of his physical expression, the language breaks down and the body reacts in kind.

The breakdown of language—or, rather, certain types of socially acceptable language—is linked in the novel to the breaking down, or abjection, of bodies. This breaking down of bodies might be manifested in the intervention of physical violence or, as in the case of Simon in particular, the attempted disarticulation, by other, usually adult, characters, of the boy’s “voice” from his odd body with all its idiosyncratic gestures. The latter occurs most frequently when Simon is faced with authority figures from the institutions of the school, the law, social services, and hospitals. Wilkie-Stibbs argues that loss of language “is the symptom of the abject status of all of [borderland] child figures who share in the same semiotic space of effacement through their mutual experiences of becoming hidden or defaced bodies, of becoming ‘strays’” (330). Wilkie-Stibbs’s analyses of children’s texts are informed by Kristeva’s categorisation of the abject as the “jettisoned object that is radically excluded, which draws towards the place where meaning collapses” (2). In *The Bone People* Simon is literally a jettisoned object, a “stray” nameless body. Simon’s abjection, his physical “wrongness” and general queerness, is manifested by his whiteness, described by Rauwerda as “unnatural and excessive” (25); his excessively pale, long white-blonde haired, emaciated, sexually ambiguous body; by his relationship with the old urine-stained pervert Binny Daniels; by his frequent vomiting from nightmares and bleeding from beatings.

What makes Simon most abject is his indomitable and obdurate silence. Simon's silence is abject in that it is the result of his body's rupturing of the linguistic: through physical pain, and memories of his former abuse, and even bouts of drunkenness and illness. He is characterised by his muteness; by a lack or insufficiency. In their introduction to the collection of essays *Semantics of Silences in Linguistics and Literature*, Gudrun M. Grabher and Ulrike Jessner attempt to unpack the meaning of, and behind, silences: "In Western culture silence is, by its very definition, negatively connoted. Signifying the lack or absence of something, be it a sound or language, it is mainly qualified in its deficiency. It is the word that carries meaning and the holder of the word that enacts power" (xi). Silence is understood as the opposite of sound and, therefore, the opposite of speech and language, a "vacuum of semantic reference" (xi). In this antithetical relationship the absence of sound in the form of verbal speech equates to a lack of meaning, of sense, and of self.

Simon rejects rigid, standardized symbolic language for his own fluid and instinctual physio-morphology. His hybrid language of recognised signs and written notes and his improvised gestural/body language is arguably more of an "animal" language; that is, it is both more akin to the series of subtle sensory cues that characterises non-human communication, and in the sense that his use of language is clearly a living, changing and physical process. In *Powers of Horror* Kristeva traces the effect of the abject on narrative structure, its sense, and its meaning: "its makeup [the narrative] changes; its linearity is shattered, it proceeds by flashes, enigmas, short cuts,

incompletion, tangles, and cuts” (141). The invasion of the abject threatens the integrity and homogeneity of the narrative voice. All things abject—the body, the animal, physical matter and pain—are relegated outside the symbolic order. Within the tripartite structure of the narrative of *The Bone People* Simon works as the abject element that undermines the verbose “obfuscation” (29) of Kerewin and the accessible colloquialisms of Joe: the two adult characters who contribute the authoritative perspectives. Simon’s counter-narrative reveals the unreliability or untrustworthiness of many of Joe’s and Kerewin’s assertions. Simon is not necessarily a more trustworthy perspective; however, his position of relative silence in the text, as one who communicates “otherwise,” makes us conscious of all that Joe and Kerewin do not say. The interjection of Simon’s perspective undermines the comprehensiveness of Kerewin’s and Joe’s narratives, as he never offers a complete, linear, and rehearsed version of either the story of his past or his present state of mind.

The breaking up of the narrative into three focalizers, three versions of events, destabilizes any singular interpretation of the text. Maryanne Dever argues that “Hulme’s treatment of language is suggestive . . . of an attempt, not to perpetuate colonialist intent, but to repudiate notions of absolute cultural or linguistic authority, to introduce the possibility of alternatives” (25). Dever is referring to the splintering of the narrative voice into different languages and, specifically, the metonymic gap that the addition of the passages and glossary of Maori injects. Dever contends that the style and structure of Hulme’s writing, rather than just an attempt to de-centre English

as the dominant discourse and privileged perspective, is “suggestive of a rhythm of being that exists beneath language, that exists in violent silence, instinctual knowledge, residual tensions,” (27). The injection of the abject, in the form of Simon, brings the possibility of this alternative language or “underside” of language. Kristeva contends that if a writer were “to proceed farther still along the approaches to abjection, one would find neither narrative nor theme but a recasting of syntax and vocabulary—the violence of poetry, and silence” (*Powers* 141). The abjection of Simon leads to a complete *verbal* silence that has no physiological basis.

Simon is not, however, completely silent. In the Prologue of *The Bone People*, in the very first paragraph of the text, Simon is identified as “the singer” (3), referring to the music he hears and that he makes. Within the sensory mosaic of Simon’s perception, music is one of the ways that he reconstructs the world. Simon’s abject influence splinters the text, but he also draws the fragments together: “the sounds and patterns or words from the past that he has fitted to his own web of music. They often broke apart, but he could always make them new” (90). This process manifests itself physically in the construction of Simon’s music hutches—instruments of wind and debris that frighten Joe with their other-worldliness. Simon’s music is not formed through the Symbolic and is not dependent upon its referentiality but, is rather, an unconscious and instinctual sound:

Then he sits back on his heels, keeping his mind dark, and sings to it.

It is a thin reedy sound at first, nasal and highpitched. It is the only sound he can make voluntarily, because even his laughter and screaming are not under his full control, and it is as secret as his name.

The singing rises and builds atonically. (288)

In the above passage Simon empties his mind and sings to the injured bird he kills and buries on the beach in what Kerewin comes to describe as his “wordless mouth music” (293). Simon uses his music as a communicative act of empathy; but it is not a language. The only noises that Simon is able to make are the nonsensical and atonal singing and the spontaneous, animal sounds that are manifestations of his emotions and are not symbolic in the sense of other linguistic utterances: laughter, screaming, and crying.

Thus far I have described Simon’s different methods of communication and how they affect and respond to the other characters, human and non-human, in the text. These include the written notes Simon resorts to using when necessary, the violent eruptions when the notes fail to convey his meaning, the animal sounds that are born from pain and emotion, and his singing that is simply noise but connects him to other beings. Yet Simon’s preferred and most fundamental form of communication is tactile: he uses an idiosyncratic mixture of official Signs, his own improvised gestures, and touch. Simon’s own blend of established and spontaneous gestures is as complex and layered as the convoluted English Kerewin speaks: “You need eyes like an archerfish, able to see what happens on two planes at once. One set for watching the hands, and the other for watching whatever it is he mouths” (65). Kerewin is quite adept and quickly learns this language as she

too keeps her “mind in her hands” (16). For Kerewin “hands are sacred things. Touch is personal, fingers of love, feelers of blind eyes, tongues of those who cannot talk” (87); yet hers are the hands of an artist who works in her hermetic tower, creating symbols “within the tautological security of a private code” (O’Brien 82) that will carry her meaning intact through time and space. Conversely, Joe and Simon communicate primarily through touch: in moments of both affection and anger. O’Brien proposes that touch “is the only reliable reality gauge for Simon, whose identity, unlike Kerewin’s, is confirmed not through its difference to and separateness from others, but through his interconnection with them” (83). Hands, then, are the primary medium through which sense is conveyed for Simon.

The principal effect that the borderland-child character of Simon has on the narrative is that of rupturing. Firstly, the interjections of Simon’s perspective rupture the detailed interior monologues of Kerewin and Joe, thus shattering any particular version of reality. Secondly, despite the largely symbolic function of the child, detailed earlier, Simon’s physicality and visceral experience rupture a purely figurative reading. This physical element manifests itself through Joe’s abuse of Simon, the injuries and pain he suffers as a result; the pain and death of other animals that Simon encounters; Simon’s physical muteness supposedly caused by emotional trauma; and the violent bodily reaction Simon undergoes when he is prompted to speak aloud. This rupturing is caused by the body, the animal, or the abject element that destabilizes both human identity and the language they use.

The Articulate Animal: Signs of Humanity in *Wish*.

Wish tells the story of J.J., the hearing son of deaf parents, who as an adult must negotiate his way between the deaf community and the hearing world. The bilingual J.J. is fluent in Auslan (Australian Sign language) and even teaches at the Deaf Institute; however, he cannot help but feel like an outsider in his family. His parents are aligned with the Deaf Pride movement that seeks to preserve deaf culture as autonomous and whole; a culture that is not supplementary to and does not require integration into the dominant culture. He speaks his parents' language with skill and ease but with the aural "deformity" (11) of perfect hearing. J.J.'s perspective and experience of the world seems so irresolvably dissimilar to that of his parents that he feels estranged from them. In spite of this difference, J.J. is much more comfortable signing than speaking aloud: "English is my second language. Sign was—is—my first. I still think in Sign, I dream in Sign. I sign in my sleep ..." (3); "The graft took slowly; even now I can say things with my hands that I could never squeeze into words" (4). Finding verbal communication difficult and inadequate, J.J. feels outcast from non-signing society and from his marriage to a hearing woman. He also feels himself to be conspicuously different from other people, deaf and hearing, because of his size. He is a large, overweight man who, in spite of the fluency and fluidity of his speaking hands, is physically awkward and ungainly.

J.J.'s job teaching Basic Auslan brings him into contact with Stella Todd and Clive Kinnear, a couple who engage J.J. to teach their eight-year-old daughter, Eliza, who is mute but not deaf, to Sign. Clive Kinnear, J.J.

comes to realise, is the author of the animal liberation text *The Rights of Animals*: he holds a chair in Zoology and his wife is a poet and veterinarian. What is then revealed is that the eight-year-old student is a gorilla who was abducted from the laboratory in which she was born. Unusually intelligent and adept at Sign language, Eliza is not an ordinary gorilla. We eventually come to discover that her adrenal glands were removed surgically when she was an embryo, causing her brain cells to proliferate and leaving her with a larger-than-usual brain and a rounder, more humanlike, face. Eliza, whose Sign name and proper name becomes “Wish,” was raised by humans and very much like a human; however, unlike other apes raised amongst humans, “all of *whom*... believed themselves human” (201, emphasis in original), Wish does not necessarily see herself thus. Based on her horrified reaction to his eating a fish, J.J. comes to realise that she does not see a distinction between the different animal species: “Either she regarded herself as animal rather than human, or she regarded *all* animals as human” (200-1). In either case, with her “enhanced” brain and human socialisation combined with the animal rights principles and practices of her “parents” and the specificities of her gorilla physiology, Wish inhabits a borderland between human and non-human status, between child and adult, and between “dumb” or illiterate and speaking subject.

Thus far I have been analysing texts about human wild children to see how literary language, and language as a theme, works, or fails to work, in the face of these “silent” or uncivilized minds. In *Wish* we are confronted with the possibility of a human (or human equivalent) mind in an animal form,

thus raising the question (within the text) of how to engage with such a mind. To return to Candland's account of the etymology of the term "feral" discussed in the introduction—from its original use referring to a domesticated animal transplanted to the wild, to the reverse meaning used to describe a wild animal taken into captivity—we can see that the gorilla Wish, as a wild animal born into the most extreme captivity, fits the latter definition. To refer to a human wild child is generally to describe a child who has gone wild, but to use the term to describe Wish, or any other such case of a non-human wild child, is to describe a wild creature who has been turned into a "child." In this light, the questions I am asking are: how does the physical form of Wish affect both how she communicates and how her communications are interpreted?

Wish is written from the first-person perspective of J.J. so it is only through his translations of Wish's signs that we can have any access to her thoughts. The style of the novel is conversational and personal, almost like a journal, so the reader knows the version of events in the narrative are clearly inflected by J.J.'s perceptions and predilections. Because he is a teacher of Auslan, Wish's tutor and confidante, and the translator for the non-signing readership, J.J.'s description of events become a narrative about language itself: specifically, how to tell his story in the static, two-dimensional format of written text: "How to pin a pair of fluttering hands—the wings of a butterfly, a bird—to a flat page? . . . how, above all, to translate *feelings*, so easily and naturally expressed in the dance of Sign, so much a part of the actual vocabulary of Sign, into words?" (4). Goldsworthy attempts to overcome the limitations of the written word by incorporating Signs into the language

of the novel. These Signs are interspersed throughout the narrative as graphics of single signs, and a glossary of common hand signs—much like the appendix of Maori phrases in *The Bone People*—is included at the end of the text. However, rather than offering a real translation or depicting the nature of Sign language, these illustrations only reveal how inadequate textual representations of Sign language are—that in isolation these frozen symbols become, if not meaningless, then emotionless. J.J. is well aware of this disparity between living Sign and the motionless representations:

Of course something, perhaps everything, is missing from these cartoons
I keep sketching among the words. Sign is lifeless the moment it hits
the page: a language as dead as any hieroglyphs painted on the walls of
a tomb. It is no longer even Sign; Sign moves and breathes, whispers,
shouts, pirouettes, jives . . . (17)

Bodies—or, rather, live bodies—are what is lacking in the translation of text into Sign. All speech acts depend upon live bodies as their most basic and fundamental premise in order for them to function. However, this functionality should not reduce the bodies involved to a mere instrumental status, reaffirming the Cartesian split between mind and body. Unlike verbal and written language, Sign languages cannot be so readily separated from the communicating body. Vocal chords are hidden and the spoken word becomes intangible as it leaves the body; the written word is severed from the hand and the present in which it was scribed; but Sign language is only intelligible as an embodied practice.

In Sign language the role of the body is made quite explicit, whereas in the culture of the hearing, the body is the silent, supplementary participant to the mind's proactive communications: the absent referent in discussions about languages and the linguistic. In *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* Judith Butler expositis the relationship between speech acts and the body:

The body is the blindspot of speech, that which acts in excess of what is said, but which also acts in and through what is said. That the speech act is a bodily act means that the act is redoubled in the moment of speech: there is what is said, and then there is a kind of saying that the bodily "instrument" of the utterance performs. (11)

The body provides the meta-text to the recognized discourse of verbal speech; a concurrent narrative that sometimes supports, and sometimes contradicts, what is said. This is true of all types of verbal language, but it is perhaps more evident in the case of Sign languages where the unconscious body language cannot be isolated from the intentional Signs. Trained in reading Sign language, J.J. is attuned to the nuance of the underlying body language of every utterance: "The body is its own polygraph: a visual display—a leakage—of signs and shapes that tell the truth despite what emerges from the mouth. The body always betrays the voice" (31). The bilingual J.J. is aware of the different strata of language and has learnt to read the body against the grain of the speaking mind.

The malleability of language is not an exclusive feature of Sign but, rather, pertains to all that is spoken and written—including the creation of neologisms and play with form and syntax. Goldsworthy attempts to add this “flavour and nuance” to the text through the addition of the hand sign illustrations. These cartoons do not provide a narrative concurrent with that of the written English but are more than just token “gestures”: they break up the blocks of text, interrupting the dialogue and, while they by no means constitute or adequately represent the live body, these sketches remind the reader of the body’s place in the meanings of language. J.J. considers what it would mean to render his story in Sign—to achieve the same fullness of sense:

I could never do it justice in English—the nuances, the shadings, the movement—so perhaps it’s best to settle for this: a transcription of the physical hand-shapes, rather than a full translation of their freight of sense. That would be a re-creation, a new kind of poetry. (35).

W.J.T. Mitchell argues that if language is a means of “worldmaking,” a filter through which the physical world is interpreted, re-imagined, and recreated, then we should consider how Sign language could “lead us to new vistas of apprehension and comprehension, new forms of ‘prehensibility,’ literally a grasping of new meanings with a hand as eloquent and labile as the tongue” (xvi). The potential exists, then, for us not only to rethink our understanding of the world through a language rooted in the body but to locate a space in literature for Other voices that do not speak within the phonocentric parameters of the dominant discourse.

The Other voices that may be reclaimed through Sign language are not just those of deaf or mute humans but, potentially, those of non-human minds as well. Helen Tiffin reasons,

Sign will provide . . . the possibility of cross-species communication. In this “place,” mind *and* body operate as a whole, destabilising Cartesianism and the separation of reason and emotion. JJ [*sic*] and Wish are creatures of the ‘place’ of sign, where reason is not necessarily superior to emotion. (49)

For Tiffin, Goldsworthy not only reverses the hierarchy of spoken and written English as a form of communication superior to Sign languages within the world of *Wish*, he also challenges the privileging of reason above emotion, or cognition as something removed from the body and its senses. This shifting of values means that both J.J. and the reader of the novel cannot reduce Wish’s actions and communications to simply an “aping” of human behaviour—a response as opposed to a reply. Yet, in a different sense, *Wish* does propose an “aping” of the human, in that it depicts J.J.’s education and appreciation of his primate origins and nature. The human voice is de-privileged as the standard or the ideal method of communication among humans and, potentially, among human and non-human animals.

In *Wish* the already porous species boundary between human and the great apes is weakened further through the relationship between J.J. and Wish; not only through the bridge that a shared language constructs, but through the sense of empathy that is developed between them. Empathy is an

act of communication that bypasses the socially recognized systems of spoken and written language, yet it is not adverse to language. Empathy is a kind of knowingness, a feeling for/of the Other, that is experienced in excess of the limits of language but can, to some degree, be reproduced through language. In *Wish* the poet, Stella, attempts to generate a sense of inter-species empathy through her poems written from the perspective of various non-human animals. She answers, to some degree, Thomas Nagel's famous philosophical question "What is it Like to Be a Bat?" by performing, through language, her kinaesthetic interpretation of non-human animals' sensory experience. "I read several through again, aloud, enjoying the feel of seeing the world through different eyes: slitted cat-eyes, wide owl-eyes, eyes with transparent lizard-lids" (65): the mere act of trying to think as animals do, with its potential threat of anthropomorphisation, at least acknowledges that non-human animals can think. The words themselves in their individual meaning are of secondary import to the overall effect of the poetry. J.J.'s position as a fluent signer and speaker of English allows him to assess the method by which language creates real experiences despite the distance and difference between the signifier and the signified: "But those words are only symbols. Translations. The perceptions are animal perceptions" (75). Even if it is accepted that other animals are sentient beings capable of conscious thought, it has been argued that their embodied experience and perceptions would be so dissimilar to those of human beings that we could not possibly think our way into their life-world—an idea encapsulated in Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous statement "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him" (qtd. in Wolfe 1). The case of *Wish* or, indeed, any species of

great ape, is a different issue considering their close relationship to the human animal; nonetheless, the story of Wish, as a borderline figure, is a negotiation between imposing a voice and a language upon a non-human animal and allowing that animal to speak with its own voice.

Finding Wish's voice is no simple matter, not only because the novel is narrated through the first-person perspective of J.J., but also because within the text Wish's ability to communicate is interpreted and used differently by her three guardians—Clive, Stella, and J.J.—“Stella wanted a spokes-ape for Animal Rights; Clive wanted, at least in part, a guinea pig to test certain theories of language acquisition; I wanted a single, happy student” (152). Clive's assertions that “Wish is the first animal mind that can tell us what it sees,” and that she is “outside human culture, looking in” (165), are challenged by J.J. He argues that imposing a human language upon Wish means that she can no longer be classified as strictly an animal, existing outside of culture: “I mean that by teaching her a human language surely we are setting limits to what she can think. We are supplying the frame. Perhaps she can only see what language permits her to see . . .” (165-6). For J.J. the world is constructed through language and the world becomes meaningful as an effect of language; his tutelage of Wish, however, makes J.J. reconsider the ordering of thought and language:

We can't think about the world until we have named it, I'd always believed. We can't manipulate it, move it about in our minds until we have clothed it in language. We can't even *see* it, naked. Words provide

the costumes, the labels, the categories—words permit us to divide the world, and rule.

I was wrong. As the days passed it became clear that the signs I taught to Wish were merely clothing things that she already knew, concepts she had thought about, grasped wordlessly, but could not communicate. (147)

Wish's adoption and adaption of Sign language challenges the logocentric belief that thought is dependent upon the symbolic exchange of languages; that without language there is no reason or judgement. Ironically, this is made evident through Wish's use of language. The important difference is that the language in this case is not simply prescribed in a didactic manner but, rather, Wish is given room to literally shape her own speech based on her specific knowledge of the world: "[Sign is] a young language, still evolving. It's open to improvisation. Wish is free to invent as much as she learns—she can mould the language to her consciousness, rather than have her mind trapped by the language" (166). Sign language is not a gestural derivative of spoken or written languages—a second-hand version of established communication. Sign creates the potential for non-verbal animals to enter the symbolic exchange; and yet, there is still the requirement that the animal in question has hands that are structured and recognizable in human terms.

Wish's communications not only differ from the official Auslan hand shapes in her ability to create her own words, sentences, and imagery; at the *prima facie* level, her "voice" is already different because of her different physiognomy. Describing Wish's signing as "someone speaking with a thick

accent, or a speech impediment: a swollen tongue or a hare-lip" (97), J.J. must accustom himself to the different emphases and movement of the gorilla's hands: "The odd anatomy of those black hands also had a distracting effect, the message obscured by the medium" (112); "Her hands were a different instrument, a different voice" (114). The official language of Signs changes and evolves in the hands of Wish, inflecting in the sense and syntax of her utterances.

What makes a language from the static hand symbols printed on the page is their interpretation through the speaking subject's body; that is, their performance. In a collection that surveys the literature of American Sign Language, Heidi M. Rose explains how the poetry of Sign transforms the concept of text as a two-dimensional and unchanging piece of writing because the site of the text is the body and the words and sentences are kinetic. "ASL literature is more than a literature of the body; it is a literature of performance, a literature that moves through time and space, embodied in the author's physical presence" (131), Rose argues. It not only creates a "new space for literature to exist" (131) but transforms the body into a site where meaning is produced. The performance is what makes the Signs a "voice" in their capacity to evolve and be manipulated. This involves a rupturing of the coded message—the overflow of the body that interrupts and proliferates meaning. The improvisation of Signs is an aspect of the performance, or livingness, of language; it is the difference between the flat, inflexible depictions of hand shapes and the relative volatility of the live body as it signs in time and space. As much as the sense of Sign language relies on a concrete

set of symbols and shapes, just as importantly, the meaning of any sequence of hand shapes depends on the specificities of the body performing them, and of the variations of “pronunciation” that these minded bodies produce. This is true of all types of speech acts but is all the more explicit in Sign language.

For Wish, learning Sign language is not simply a utilitarian enterprise, a perfunctory means of getting what she wants, for the composition of the language is as important to her as having her wishes met: “Wish would shake her head from side to side after I had signed, and suggest a better alternative, or some new blend of old signs, a hybrid shape” (149). Wish encounters no problems in shaping language to her body and her experience. The only thing lacking in Wish’s ability to communicate is other beings who will speak to her on her own terms, or the compromised, hybrid terms she is capable of negotiating, and who will not dismiss the greater meanings of her statements and actions because she is a gorilla.

For instance, Wish commits two acts of self-determination that breach the boundary of orthodox human and animal behaviours. The first is her initiation of a sexual relationship with J.J. At first she tries to make herself human, or more human-like, by shaving her fur (216). For many human women to shave one’s “fur” is a sign of a transition into adulthood, but when Wish takes a razor to her pelt it is interpreted as an act of self-mutilation. If shaving herself is a symbol of her potential humanity, then the actual sexual encounter between Wish and J.J. is the act of a gorilla. Wish “presents” herself to J.J. and he eventually responds to her as a male gorilla would to a female in oestrus. As Wish becomes a mature woman to J.J., he in turn

becomes an ape, and it is at this time that J.J. adopts his true Sign name of “Silverback” (236-7). Wish’s second and ultimate act of self-consciousness and understanding of the place she has been relegated to in the world is that of hanging herself in the zoo enclosure in which she is imprisoned. Her suicide is interpreted as an accident, it being inconceivable that an animal could have the self-awareness and foresight to take her own life.

It is possible that although they belong to different species, J.J. is Wish’s only fellow being. As she becomes more human through her brain enhancement and education, J.J. discovers his primate self and changes himself to better understand Wish. Rather than achieving Clive Kinnear’s goal of elevating Wish to the legal status of human, J.J. loosens the bounds of his own human identity—becoming something of a borderland creature himself.

Although I use the “borderland” as a category specifically in regards to child characters in this chapter, the term may accurately be used to describe human beings in general, and some non-human animals in particular, because Simon and Wish, as examples of borderland existence, simply make this interspecies and inter-experiential bleeding more explicit. Both *The Bone People* and *Wish* demonstrate unconventional language practices and the development of communication between wild-child characters and their human guardians. Writing and reading this kind of borderland demonstrates the different ways that language may be used and comprehended in the literary context and in everyday life. The possibility of inter-species

communication opens up—even if the majority of this communication occurs in the human imagination.

CONCLUSION

Wild Literature: Loosening the Bounds of the Human.

The “wild child” is a paradox: at once a real (although rare) phenomenon and a purely literary construction; both a human and an animal; a “blank slate” and an “encrypted text”; fact and fiction. The child may be silent or illiterate and yet be highly communicative. The “child” may not even be a child for, as some of these novels have shown, the semi-animal status of a being (whether human or not) renders them childlike. This is why the term “borderland” is a valuable description, for it encompasses beings who worry the human/animal border, but who cannot be contained in the classic “wild child” framework, with all the connotations involved in the term and its history.

The child characters I have discussed in this thesis are all “wild” or “feral” in their own ways, but as I have observed there are many variations within the meanings and usage of these terms. It is very likely, for instance, that Victor, the emblematic wild child, was never raised by wild animals, yet he is still thought of as a “wolf” child in the tradition of Romulus and Remus. Romochka of *Dog Boy* and Animal of *Animal’s People*, though quite different, live like animals, share spaces with animals and have the comportment of animals, and yet are both verbally skilled and capable of manipulating language. Sinha’s character, Animal, is no longer a child as such, yet he has not transferred into adulthood either. This in-betweenness only adds to his ambiguity as a character and makes him all the more unsettling a narrator. Simon of *The Bone People*, as I have stated, is certainly wild in many ways,

though not (presumably) in the tradition of the “wild child” proper. Simon brings the “wild child” into familiar domestic territory as an abused foster-child who for reasons physical or (more likely) psychological cannot speak; he is not some mythological creature in a far-away forest, or an homeless urchin in an urban wasteland, but is a suburban example of a wild child whose silence makes him less comprehensible and more difficult to domesticate. The gorilla Wish shows how the same transgression of the human/animal binary that turns a human child “wild” can work in the opposite direction: in this case, a wild non-human animal is raised as a human child. Regardless of how intelligent or articulate Wish may become, she is branded by her physical form. Even those who seek to “liberate” her and gain human-like status for her are only interested in her capacity as a Signing ape. Wish, like Animal, is a physically and sexually mature being and yet is never granted the self-determination and freedom of choice of a human adult. Her physical bearing and animal status require that she remain “lesser” than a human adult.

All these child characters exist in an ontological borderland—between human and animal, wildness and socialisation, language and speechlessness. They also demonstrate the potential breadth of the category of the wild child: from absolute “wildness” or alterity, to the partially domesticated and language-skilled feral child, and expanding further outwards to encompass the borderland child, who learns to structure language to correspond to and communicate his/her experiences and physicality. The literary wild child, in all his (and occasionally her) manifestations, is also characterised by varying degrees of non-human animality and, therefore, a varying kinesis and

experience of embodiment. There are the cases such as Wish, as an example of a fur child, or a hybrid human-gorilla, who is permanently marked as both “wild” and “animal” in Goldsworthy’s text, even if she were to attain the legal status equivalent to an adult, individual human being as Kinnear hopes. Animal, too, is defined by his comportment, his horizontal bearing and four-footedness. However, despite his physical association with non-human animals, Animal’s animality is principally a social, even political, decision. Ultimately, he considers it better to be a singular animal of his own species than to be a deformed and defective human being. Romochka the dog boy’s animality, too, is a decision of sorts. His adoption into a feral-dog clan may have been born of desperation but as he grows older and his ties and communications with other humans on the urban fringe develop he must make the decision whether to remain a dog or to become a boy. The ending of the novel may be read as ambiguous in this regard: that is, whether he actually chooses to become a fully human boy, or if he just decides to put on his human “mask” (210) and play the boy.

Particularly complicated in terms of their animality are the cases of Simon and Victor. The historical figure of Victor, as the quintessential wild child, was associated with the myths and legends of other wild children thought to be raised by wolves and other wild animals, such as Romulus and Remus. Even as it was decided by Dr Itard that it was unlikely that Victor was raised by animals, based on his diet and behaviour, the association remained—most likely due to his habits of eating and defecating, his lack of social awareness, and an inscrutability that was sometimes interpreted as an

emptiness or lack of mind. This association is repeated, and magnified, in the fictional accounts of Victor. Simon, too, would seem on the face of it to have little association with non-human animals, and there is no suggestion in the novel that he was raised by them. However, it is significant that in spite of this lack of an explicit relationship in the text, Simon is still constantly coupled with and placed in parallel to other animals of different species. Perhaps this is due to his silence or his abused and abject status in the novel, in that he is sometimes treated like an animal.

As well as inhabiting the borderland between humanity and animality, these child characters exist in the borderland between language and unspeaking silence. There are children like Victor who seem to be incapable of learning to speak language or to understand it in any complexity. His silence is manifested in Gerstein and Dawson's texts as gaps, or spaces where language is broken down to a simple form where there are only objects and actions and no complex or convoluted relationship between them and the subject involved. There is Simon, whose muteness would seem to be caused by a psychological trauma; but a trauma so intense that his silence and inability to speak becomes an embodied symptom, and at times involves a complete physical shutdown. This experience of the character similarly affects the language and flow of the text. Wish's silence, on the other hand, is purely physical, due to her species' lack of appropriate vocal chords. She speaks fluently in *Sign* but, even so, this is not enough to overcome her external appearance as a gorilla, and within the text the extent of her ingenuity and acuity with language goes unappreciated and unacknowledged by all but a

couple of people. In textual form, the language of Wish's character can only be second-hand, filtered through both the narration of J.J. and the static drawings of Signs throughout the text.

Romochka and Animal are the characters who have the greatest ability and usage of verbal language, though a fairly mongrel form of language. Romochka never entirely loses his memory of human speech and retains fragments of phrases from his pre-dog childhood, and things he overhears from humans in the urban wasteland in which he dwells. However, when he does use speech after long periods of non-speaking and no verbal dialogue, it is jarring and very unnatural sounding. Animal, on the other hand, is a highly attuned linguist and an orator of sorts. Rather than posing an impediment to his ability to use and learn language, his animality, it would seem, allows him access to many different factions of human and non-human society—all of which have their own dialect and relationship to language. *Animal's People* is the only one of these novels narrated in the first-person by the wild child himself. Animal's voice structures and defines the text. Animal is not only a feral-child character, but his speech is a feral being too: written predominantly in English, it is also mixed with the native dialects of Urdu and Hindi, and the French he picked-up from Ma Franci. In this regard, Animal is a magpie of languages—taking what he can use and making it his own.

The breadth of these examples of wild-child narratives and wild-child characters not only demonstrates the heterogeneity of a seemingly limited and isolated category (in fiction and in history); each example also

necessitates a unique relationship between the kinaesthetics and the language practices of the child. Particularly prevalent in these narratives is a rupturing of the narrative that occurs when the child character's silence or idiosyncratic language enters the text. This can manifest as a gap in the text, or an obdurate blockage that the narrator or focalizer must work around; the case in point is J.J.'s negotiating the telling of his narrative around both his preferred use of Sign and Wish's own idiosyncratic use of this official language. While it may as yet be impossible for Goldsworthy to narrate a text from the perspective of a gorilla, many of the other texts analysed here engage in what I describe as "feral" literary practices. I come back specifically to the term feral here to denote both the interstitial or "borderland" aspects of these characters, while maintaining the reference to non-human animals (the wild). These practices include the portrayal of the wild child using free indirect discourse—neither entirely inside nor outside of the character's perspective—and the development of eccentric voices, with particular vocabularies, odd syntax, and lowbrow terms.

The breakdown of the subject and of language need not signal an insurmountable failure in our ability to access the wild child in text. It may be impossible to "capture" the wild child, and they may have no stake in the literary economy; however, this paradoxically opens up the potential to redefine the boundaries of language as well as the human/animal divide.

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