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Unsettling the Yoke of Humanity: T. C. Boyle's Strange Man, Apes, and Dog Woman

*Wei-bon Wu**

ABSTRACT

Through his novella "Wild Child" and a collection of short stories published in the past four decades, T. C. Boyle engages in a train of thought experiments on crossing the threshold between absolute humanity and animality. On one side of the threshold is "humanized man": civilized, socialized, and categorized humans who are purged and cleansed of animality. On the other side is "animalized man": humans affected or shaped by the animality of other species. In "Wild Child" (2010), Boyle reimagines one of the most well-known feral children, Victor, the Wild Boy of Aveyron. Captured as a naked boy running wild in the forest, Victor is brought back to human society but refuses to be domesticated. Boyle's "Descent of Man" (1974) marks another level of interconnectedness between the human race and another species. The story portrays a woman falling in love with a "humanized" erudite chimpanzee named Konrad, who reappears in "The Ape Lady in Retirement" (1988), in which he is transformed into something between chimp and man. In "Dogology" (2005), the heroine Cynthia literally roams among a pack of dogs. By correlating Boyle's human-animal stories, this paper aims to demonstrate that the "strange" characters' ferality holds the key to destabilizing anthropogenic essentialism, defying compliant domestication, and breaching the nature/nurture divide.

KEYWORDS: animality, domesticity, feral, persona-mask, threshold, humanity

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Wei-bon Wu, Assistant Professor, Department of Applied English, National Quemoy University, Taiwan (weibon9970@yahoo.com.tw).

> It is interesting to contemplate an *entangled* bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds . . . with worms crawling through the damp earth, and to reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us.
>
> —Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*

What constructs the demarcation line between humanity | animality? The demarcation may be an anthropogenic device for man to recognize the human veneer in a vanity mirror so as to distinguish man from other animals. As Giorgio Agamben comments: "*Homo sapiens* . . . is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human" (*The Open* 26). Agamben continues to argue that the "anthropogenic machine" is an optical device that is "constructed of a series of mirrors in which man, looking at himself, sees his own image already deformed in the features of an ape. *Homo* is a constitutively 'anthropomorphous' animal, . . . who must recognize himself in a non-human in order to be human" (26-27). Between man and animals, however, when man are appreciating the images of *Homo sapiens* through the optical machine, some anomalous/feral creatures might disrupt or block the view in that, under the man-like appearances, they act like non-human animals (or animals acting as man).

In T. C. Boyle's novella, "Wild Child," and three of his short stories, "Descent of Man," "The Ape Lady in Retirement" and "Dogology," *anomalies* among humans are presented as portals connecting us to a constellation of non-human animals.[1] On the evolutionary paths of mankind, human progress has outgrown our origin as a species and has been crowned with the title of "enlightened" humanity, which has the authority to disown our "decrepit" animal inheritance. In the process of becoming "fully" human, man diverged from our hominid ancestors to secure absolute humanity to the point where the cord between humans and animals was snapped. Yet human exceptionalism has sprawled so rampantly that it has become shackles that bound human potentiality. In the name of absolute humanity, particularly after being culturally reinforced and purified, it is customarily unbecoming for man to cling

[1] I take my cue from Kalpana Rahita Seshadri, who describes the wild child as "always unexpected, a surprise, an *anomaly*, a contingency for which the law is unprepared and must remain unprepared" (144; emphasis added).

to our animal origins. However, a strange man/woman/creature who does not belong to the category of a modern man, a "stranger" who defies the classification of a well-defined species, or an *anomaly* in the constellation of human society could warp our existential continuum. This anomalous creature may lead us closer to the portals of animality, to where humanity and animality collide and converge. This paper argues that "strangers" (anomalies in a human society) hold the power to unsettle anthropocentric supremacy and the demarcation line between the wild and domesticity by undermining the façade/mask of absolute humanity.

Here, an *anomaly* in human society refers to someone who walks between man and other creatures, or someone who is labeled as not fully human, a feral creature. The term "feral" has been concomitant with something undomesticated, untamed, uncultivated, brutal, bestial, savage and wild. "Ferality" is manifested as something that does not conform to the norms, values, standards, and categorization of absolute humanity; it belongs to somewhere else, on the outskirts of human civilization. As reflections of human existence, T. C. Boyle's feral creatures become *anomalies* that lead us to the portals between humanity and animality. With their feral experiences, either as humanized animal or as animalized human, these creatures' presence in human society is a reminder of our hominid past which will continue to haunt our future. The feral ones may have been confined to the subjective interpretation of human exceptionalism, but they can also be emancipated from absolute human subjectivity and empower us to venture into the heart of unexplored darkness and beyond.

Leading us to the journey into the heart of darkness is Boyle's "Wild Child," a fictional retelling of the life of Victor, the Wild Boy of Aveyron, who has sparked our imagination for over two hundred years.[2] Instead of romanticizing Victor's life story or turning him into an object of study, Boyle explores various aspects of Victor's life. The story displays a naked life that is comical, bizarre, eccentric, feral, and in the raw. As Wells Tower comments in *The New York Times Sunday Book Review*: "Moments that could easily topple

[2] According to *An Historical Account of the Discovery and Education of a Savage Man* (1802) written by Jean Marc Gaspard Itard (a physician who worked with Victor the "feral child" at the National Institution for Deaf and Dumb at Paris), the "wild boy" was "captured" in the woods near Aveyron in southern France in 1798. The story has been told in various forms; among them is François Truffaut's dramatization of Victor's life in the film *L'Enfant Sauvage* (*The Wild Child*) in 1970. One of the more recent retellings of Victor's story is Mary Losure's *Wild Boy: The Real Life of the Savage of Aveyron* (2013).

into low farce—Victor eating a benefactor's beloved elderly parrot or serially masturbating before mixed audiences—instead reach a desolate pathos" ("Wrestling"). As readers, we witness a human child "captured" on the outskirts of humanity and brought back to human society. The feral child experiences communication barriers, bewilderment, anxiety, and solitude within the community, where he is identified as a strange human animal. Recognized as an outcast of humanity, Victor invokes pathos in the human psyche in that he was born in a human society, deserted, and then forced to return and conform. Victor could be any child who has lived isolated from human community but manages to survive against all odds, only to find that he becomes an oddity, an anomaly among his/her own species.

Victor's oddity is designated by the controlling, authoritative, absolute humanity, with sets of values, standards, principles that categorize and arbitrarily define him as *Homo ferus*, an anomalous specimen who falls out of the taxonomy of *Homo sapiens*. Becoming an untamed child in the woods, Victor's body and mind are adapted to the elements, but then he is spotted, snatched, compelled to submit to the *yoke* of humanity, and banned from his intuitive "animal" behaviors which empower him to subsist in the wild without human care. Imprisoned by the yoke of human society (regardless of his multiple attempts to take flight), the feral child receives an education that is "unnatural" and foreign to him. New clothes are undesirable for him, and the new language is nonsensical. From the utterly "human" perspective, Victor's obliviousness to social norms and incongruity with his fellow species make him a curious case, an outcast caught between two worlds, an animal man that is severed from the ties of human society—a man on the threshold of animality | humanity.

The pathos roused by Victor is deeply *conflicted*. The incongruity between Victor's "natural" inclinations and integrated society makes us wonder and reflect on our own nature: how far have we gone from our being animal on the evolutionary road, metamorphosed ourselves in the descent (or ascent) of man, and in which directions will we sail and diverge from where we are? To delve into these questions, Boyle's short story "Descent of Man" offers another perspective to dismantle the domineering veneer that is laid upon humanity. "Descent of Man" tests the boundaries of bestiality, with Jane Good[3] working

[3] Paul William Gleason notes that "[t]he name 'Jane Good' is . . . a thinly veiled reference to Jane Goodall, the ethologist who lived with and studied chimpanzees in the wilds of Tanzania, and the name

as an animal behaviorist, who is emotionally attracted to the "well-educated" chimpanzee, Konrad. In contrast with Victor the wild boy, Konrad first appears to be more "humanized" in the domestication—with his adeptness in reading and translating multiple languages and deftness in ASL (American Sign Language) as well as his mannerism and dress code. Konrad is capable of performing human manners: in his ways of communicating and even relating a humorous "anecdote" (7), and of crossing the *threshold* to human society, which is also signified by his meticulous fashion of dressing like a gentleman, putting on cologne, and going out to a fancy restaurant (12). Being a domesticated chimpanzee, Konrad adapts remarkably well to "humanized" society. He masters human behaviors far more competently than the semi-fictional Victor in Boyle's "Wild Child."

Strangely, in the love triangle that develops among Jane, Konrad, and Horne (Jane's authentic human boyfriend), Konrad gets the upper hand vying with Horne, the desperate narrator of "Descent of Man." It may seem contradictory and ridiculously bizarre that a man is compelled to compete for love against a domesticated/humanized chimp. Through Konrad, Boyle conducts a bold experiment on Darwinian "sexual selection," challenges human essentialism, and dismantles the façade of humanity. In the sequel to "Descent of Man," however, after reaching puberty, Konrad's animality as a chimp is progressively restored, and his façade of "humanity" regresses in "The Ape Lady in Retirement." At the whim of human experiment on animals, after being inculcated with humanity and then robbed of it, Konrad becomes schizophrenic. Stuck on the *threshold* between his animality (or chimpanity) and humanity, the domesticated chimpanzee is caught in a zone of exception. Neither chimp nor man, Konrad is trapped in the space between the human and the animal—a space deliberately invented by the anthropogenic machine. Humanity is like clothes/fabrics that are put on Konrad and then taken away, leaving him in a state of embarrassment: embarrassed in a way that he could never have felt if he had never been domesticated and human(ized).

Konrad is not the only animal who suffers from schizophrenia in "The Ape Lady in Retirement." On the one hand, Konrad is trapped between two species: chimp | human; on the other hand, Beatrice Umbo, "the celebrated ape lady, the world's foremost authority on the behavior of chimpanzees in the wild" who

'Konrad' refers to Joseph Conrad, the modernist author whose novella *Heart of Darkness* reveals the irrational desires that reside at the heart of the nominally rational enterprises of Europeans" (105).

has "come home to Connecticut to retire" (403), is also torn apart by her memories, causing her schizophrenic symptoms. Beatrice repeatedly relapses into her reminiscences of the good old days with the wild chimps in "Makoua Reserve." She is trapped between the vivacious past (in the wild of Africa) and the desolate present (in domesticity). Her ennui of retirement is broken by the arrival of "feral" Konrad, whom Beatrice is more than willing to take in as a "permanent visitor." The chimp's restoring ferality reminds her of her carefree days in the wild.

The convergence of Beatrice's and Konrad's lives indicates an impasse, a cul-de-sac in which both of them desire to find an escape from domesticity. This brings the travel with Boyle's anomalies to the next fictional locale: "Dogology," in which the dog woman Cynthia—or "C.f. capital C. lowercase f" (44) as she insists on being addressed—literally mingles with a pack of feral dogs. Getting rid of her veneer of domesticity, Cynthia's metamorphosis becomes an embarrassment to her husband. Yet she "disembarrasses" herself: shedding her persona (with her tattered *clothes* and augmented senses like a super dog-woman), she embarks on a journey in the becoming of an untamed *humanimal*, roaming into the realm of less trodden paths, unsettling the yoke of humanity. Cynthia's going feral with the dogs is a mental and physical exercise. By becoming C.f.—an immersive companion species to dogs as well as an anomaly to human standards and norms—she is "enmeshed" in a dog pack and resists being categorized purely by humanity.

I. Yoke of Humanity

Humanity can be shaped into a yoke that conditions us to think and live in absolute terms. As an anomaly that ruptures the fabrication of absolute humanity, Victor's eccentricity is a byproduct of his conflicted status in domestication. As a human, he is constantly associated with other species and consequently denied entry to absolute humanity. In Boyle's "Wild Child" numerous non-human attributes are affixed to Victor's conflicted body: e.g., he has "the hypersensitivity of a stoat or weasel" (237), and he digs "in the sodden earth, like a dog" (240). Looking through the optical machine of absolute humanity, he is deficient in human essence and is regarded as a "sensation" that rouses interest and passion to the extent that he is not treated with human reason: "They chased the boy without thinking, *without reason*, chased him

because he ran from them, and they might have been chasing anything, a *cat*, a *hind*, a *boar*" (240; emphases added). Victor is recognized as a "ghost" and a bestial existence through the anthropogenic machine. On the purely human side of the vanity mirror, he is alien and affiliated with other species. In Victor's eyes, however, before his captivity, he sees humans as "bipeds," "shagged and violent and strangely habited and gibbering animals" (240). Victor embodies the ghostly past of human animality, which is renounced by the optical machine of absolute humanity. As a feral child roaming the forest, he is a disclaimed "creature," rejected by his fellow species for being a remainder/reminder of human primitiveness, an anachronistic creature that only lives in a distant past: "He was feral—a living, breathing atavism—and his life was no different from the life of any other creature of the forest" (241). Victor's atavism is manifested by his quadrupedal movement in Boyle's depiction as well as other historical records and retelling of Victor's story.[4] When Victor is captured and taken to a tavern to be displayed, his captors and the local crowd find themselves in turmoil with "this freak of nature" (242); this atavistic human child, the "*enfant sauvage* stripped from the fastness of the forest" (243), is found incompatible with the anthropological fabric of society. Victor—dragged away from his natural refuge—is referred to as "beast," "demon," or simply "it." And questions about his essence are raised among the crowd: "What's the matter, Father?". . . . "Is he *not* human?" (244; emphasis added). Victor is marginalized as an animalized beast, a subhuman, an animal donning human form, caught at the *threshold* between two worlds, abandoned, chafed, wounded, and despised by the exclusivity of human essentialism. He is intentionally severed and animalized by the anthropogenic machine so as to keep the façade of absolute humanity immaculate.

"Animal" is a contradictory term in human perception. As a species, humankind walks the Earth among other animals. On the other hand, animality can be regarded as something inhuman or anti-human and is thus shut out by absolute humanity. Victor's contradictory existence is an effect of his being severed from humanity, which then casts a yoke on him, putting him in a state of exception, suspended in the categorization of animals that includes humans but is found incompatible with human essentialism and even repudiated by absolute "humanity." The split between culturally refined human(ity) and

[4] In a recent retelling of Victor's story, Mary Losure also illustrates that the wild boy "could run very fast on all fours" (13).

biological humankind is internally conflicted, as Tim Ingold expounds: "These contradictions stem, to a large degree, from our propensity to switch back and forth between two quite different approaches to the definition of animality: as a domain of the 'animal kingdom' including humans, and as a state or condition, opposed to humanity" (*What is an Animal?* 4). On the threshold between the human and the animal, Victor is stuck at the split. His body is a locale of contradictions, with a human body that is shaped by the elements of the forest and an animal state or condition; the feral child is a schizophrenic existence torn apart between humanity | animality.

The word "animal" is filled with contradictions that are produced by absolute humanity as it progresses, advances and "transcends." The sources of this split or "these contradictions" might have been spawned by human essentialism and finalism, "the belief that the living world has the propensity to move toward 'ever greater perfection,'" as Ernst Mayr, the renowned evolutionary biologist, commented (75). Before Darwin's time, the western worldview had been permeated with essentialism. The propensity for finalism urges man to evolve and break away from non-human animals, being a species yet "unlike and higher than" other creatures:

> Those who adopted finalism assumed that evolution moved necessarily from lower to higher, from primitive to advanced, from simple to complex, from imperfect to perfect. They postulated the existence of some built-in force, because, they said, how else can one explain the gradual evolution from the lowest bacteria up to orchids, giant trees, butterflies, apes, and man? (Mayr 75-76)

On the evolutionary road towards human "perfection," to become completely and exclusively human, it may seem degenerative if an individual returns to bear some atavistic semblance to apes, chimps, and some feral or wild creatures. For a man to show uncanny similarities to non-human animals, through signs such as muteness, quadrupedality, and hirsuteness, may indicate defects that are "unbecoming" to a fully evolved man. Human essentialism is built on the idea of stable forms and species, with necessary properties that make man appear exceptional in the hierarchical structure—the great chain of being that depends on normative classifications. In the contested field of evolution theories,

Richard Dawkins (an English ethologist and evolutionary biologist) observed: "According to Mayr, the reason Darwin was such an unconscionable time arriving on the scene was that we all—whether because of Greek influence or for some other season—have essentialism burned into our mental DNA" (23). In other words, human essentialism has long been taking root and has embedded itself in the human collective unconscious in such ways that the idea of absolute humanity is preprogrammed and hardwired to the extent that it is unyielding to mutation and *variational evolution*. Anthropogenic essentialism had been so reinforced through history that when Darwin's evolutionary ideas were first disseminated, they were ill-timed and contradictory to human exceptionalism: a jarring clash between variational evolution and normative concepts. In this sense, human norms might have evolved and become a *yoke* to mankind. In Dawkins's words, it is "unevolutionary":

> Indeed, psychologists studying the development of language tell us that children are natural essentialists. Maybe they have to be if they are to remain sane while their developing minds divide things into discrete *categories* each entitled to a unique noun. It's no wonder that Adam's first task, in the Genesis myth, was to give all the animals names. (23; emphasis added)

In order to convert the *enfant sauvage* into human norms so as to fit into the suit of absolute humanity, it is imperative to give the creature a proper name. In "Wild Child," Victor's name is given by his "educator" Marc Gaspard Itard, who trains Victor to speak human language but with little success. In his training to become fully human, Victor's incapacity to speak human language is a "proof" of his feral quality that renders him unable to cross the threshold to humanity. As a species, humans ascribe logos to our existence, allowing us to differentiate ourselves from other species. To define *Homo sapiens* requires logos, which ascribes rational language as a particular quality to man. In *Form and Object*, Tristan Garcia says: "In the ancient Greek world, the form of humanity as substantial spirit led in particular to the concept of *logos*" (224). Logos is burned into human mental DNA through chronic repetition and anthropogenic practices. With logos, humans are positioned to fit into the category, match the form of an "ideal" species, and set up a perimeter between exceptional man and non-human animals. Without logos, a defining trait of

humanity, Victor is barred from entering the taxonomy of *Homo sapiens*. In Swedish taxonomist Carolus Linnaeus's *Systema Naturæ*, Victor is categorized as *Homo ferus*—something between an ape and a man, a wilding, uncultivated and probably beyond redemption.

Wandering on the outer range of humanity, Victor is recognized as a feral creature and associated with other animals, monsters, even ghostly demons: "Someone speculated that he'd been raised by wolves, like Romulus and Remus" (244), and that he "was a *spirit*, a *demon* outcast like the rebel angels, *mute* and staring and mad" (246; emphases added). Among all the speculations about Victor's feral upbringing, wolf is one that has constantly haunted the human mind. Through human projection, wolves have become synonymous with ferocity, brutality, greed, and deception; idioms such as "cry wolf" and "wolf in sheep's clothing" remind us of their treacheries and latent dangers. Wolves incorporate the qualities that are incompatible with domesticity, so they should be kept from the vicinities of human territory.

Through the repetition of anthropomorphous storytelling, wolves also haunt the human mind in the form of the *werewolf*, a creature that roams the forest and the city with its convenient double identity. As an ambiguous figure, the werewolf poses unidentifiable threats to the town dwellers and villagers: in the human collective unconscious, any ghostly creature that calls this monstrous hybrid to mind should be kept at bay. As Giorgio Agamben writes: "What had to remain in the collective unconscious as a *monstrous hybrid of human and animal*, divided between the forest and the city—the werewolf—is, therefore, in its origin the figure of the man who has been banned from the city" (*Homo Sacer* 63; emphases added). The werewolf manifests as an animal with a human appearance, but one that is tainted by the animality of other species. Analogously, Victor—condemned as a creature too wild to be "domesticated"—is animalized and excluded by the anthropogenic machine. As a species in the domain of the animal kingdom, he is "unadulteratedly" human. Ironically, even with his unequivocal human appearance, Victor is still recognized as a regressive and deformed version by his own species. Vacillating between two sides of the anthropogenic mirror, Victor is projected as a monstrous mongrel of human and other animals, a savage between an ape, a wolf, and a man under the yoke of humanity.

II. Domesticated Animal

Subjugated to domesticity, Victor is barred from running around naked and relapsing into animal behaviors acquired from his life in the woods. To cleanse Victor's animality, he is coerced to go through a process of *domestication* and education to fit into the categorization of absolute humanity. It is imperative for him to be stripped of his regressive behavior so as to don humanity. If Victor is to return to the human realm, he must abandon his unbecoming feral mode of existence; he can no longer be a mongrel, an intermediary amidst animality | humanity—the feral child has to be trained for *domesticity* and to differentiate from other animals.

To humanize Victor, experiments are conducted on him to uproot his "wildness"; the first priority is to enlighten him with logos. Shortly after the "capture" of the wild boy, the local government commissioner, Constans-Saint-Estève, is also roused by this creature and is "eager to see this phenomenon" (251). He reasons: "Did he know of God and Creation? What was his language—the urlanguage that gave rise to all the languages of the world, the language all men brought with them from Heaven? Or was it the gabble of the birds and the beasts?" (251). This excerpt reiterates the demarcation between verbal man and nonverbal animals, accentuating that language comes naturally or "divinely" to man while other animals are denied access to the inherent (ur)language. The sounds made by non-human animals are rendered gibberish, signifying nothing. Monopolized by man, logos has become exclusively and essentially man; it serves as a demarcation line between humans and "other creatures," barring beasts from entering the realm of man. To question this human monopoly of logos and the absolute power that comes along with it, Boyle's humanized chimp (a beast that is capable of logos) challenges the imaginary veneer of mankind.

With a talent for multiple languages, Konrad beats humans in the intellectual game in "Descent of Man." In addition to his capacity for sign language that Victor has never acquired in "Wild Child," Konrad masters several written languages, and has cultivated a wide spectrum of interest in "humanities": philosophy, anthropology, and linguistics; as the janitor at the Primate Center tells Horne in vernacular English:

> ASL is what we was talkin. A-merican Sign Language. Developed for de deef n dumb. Yo sees, Mastuh Konrad is sumfin ob a genius round here. He can communicate de mos esoteric i-deas in bof ASL and Yerkish, re-spond to and translate English, French, German and Chinese. Fack, it was Miz Good was tellin me dat Konrad is workin right now on a Yerkish translation ob Darwin's *De-scent o Man* [sic]. (7)

With his "superman" aptitude for the areas of study in humanities, Konrad proves to be highly evolved in human *domesticity*, allowing him to prevail in the sexual selection over Horne, whose manhood is severely undermined in the intellectual and physical rivalry between species. In reaction to the janitor's description of this intellectually superior chimp, Horne is "hot with outrage" (7) and temporarily loses his human reason. To make it worse for Horne, the janitor continues: "No sense in feelin personally threatened by Mastuh Konrad's achievements, mah good fellow—yo's got to ree-lize dat he is a genius [sic]" (7-8). Konrad's ingenious adaptability to logos empowers him to cross the demarcation line between chimps | humans, even to attract the opposite sex from a different species.

Boyle's chimp narrative satirizes the veneer of humanity by weaving other species into the human social fabric. "Descent of Man," as Gleason observes, "parodies the concept of enlightened and rational humanity. Jane's objective science fails when she becomes sexually attracted to Konrad, and Horne cannot use his rational faculties to account for Jane's defection to the arms of the chimpanzee" (Gleason 16). By reversing the optical device, Boyle leads us to question human essentialism: what makes us distinctively human if other species can cross the *threshold* to humanity, enter our domestic life, walk among and converse with us? The responses to such questions can never be exhaustive. To give a clear-cut answer may again fall into essentialism, in which certain and definite characteristics are assigned to the species in question; that is to say, a demarcation line (|) would be imposed between one species and another, rendering categorization of species absolute and immutable.

The insertion of a clear delimitation is itself "unevolutionary." Both regression and progression are involved in the continuum of evolution. The intermediate space is one of convergence, conflicts, clashes, friction, adjustments, adaptation, and divergence. Contradictions are a driving force of

life. Paradoxical and extreme as they may be, Boyle's deeply conflicted feral animals, through cogitation, can be reckoned as liminal beings that walk between species. Their transitional experience of crossing the threshold between species can galvanize psychological metamorphoses in us. As portals between domesticity and wildness, the feral ones are transitional, *strange* beings that create and expand the inter-species intermediate space, breaching the demarcation line constructed by the optical machine.

Ferality is mutable, liminal, and reversible in that it is situated between the domesticated and the wild. As Douglas Keith Candland notes: "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). Comparatively, Victor and Konrad are two varieties of ferality. Victor is abandoned by human society after birth, "released" into the wild, and coerced to return to "the human side," whereas Konrad is snapped from the wild, domesticated, and modified by the anthropogenic machine. Having weathered the elements in the woods, Victor's body and mind—isolated from human contact—have survived the wild. However, ironically, his adaptive metamorphosis makes him unfit for domesticity. In contrast, Konrad—isolated from his own species and raised in an artificial environment since an early age—becomes highly cultivated in his domesticated life.

In a sense, both Victor and Konrad are brought to submit to the yoke of humanity. At some point in their lives, domestication becomes confinement and bondage, especially when they are no longer allowed to manifest signs of ferality. Having attempted to escape human captivity several times, Victor is invariably recaptured by what he sees as the alien species (a.k.a. humans) that are "bigger and more powerful than he" (245). "Now he was a creature of the walls and the rooms and a *slave* to the food they gave him. . . . He was *wild no more*" (261; emphases added). Having been domesticated by the anthropogenic machine, Victor no longer stands on the threshold between humans and animals. He is forced to give up ferality and put on garments so as to be humanized as "somebody" with a given name and a *persona-mask*. Just as Victor appears to be tamed and accustomed to domesticity, however, the "former savage" still manages to tear up the fabric. On one occasion Itard takes him to a social gathering (the salon of Madame Récamier) where he reverts to his feral mode:

> . . . the boy was divesting himself of his garments. . . . A moment later, despite the hot baths, the massages and the training of his senses, he was as naked to the elements as he'd been on the day he stepped out of the woods and into the life of the world—*naked*, and scrambling up the trunk of one of Madame Récamier's plane trees like an arboreal *ape*. (275; emphases added)

Without garments and a persona-mask, Victor is once again condemned for answering the call of the wild and revealing his natural inclination, which is considered degenerate and deviant from human norms. He is placed under the category of other animals (an ape in this instance), and is thus excluded from the social fabric. If Victor cannot act with decorum, he fails to "ascend" to a more 'civilized' humanity and that would be a regression, a descent of man. This brings shame on his mentor, Itard, who can no longer "tolerate any deviance from civilized behavior, which most emphatically means that Victor is put under surveillance and bound to appear more human in order to be recognized as one. And there would be no more tree climbing—and no more forays into society" (276). Relapsing into ferality makes Victor a failure in the domestic education and an "embarrassment" in the eyes of Abbé Sicard, the director of the Institute, who reproaches Itard for insisting on "*civilizing*" the child: "The boy is an embarrassment—to you, to me, to the Institute and all we've accomplished here. Worse: he's an insult. . . . [I]t will destroy you, can't you see that?" (278). The feral child's naked existence, lack of human language and decorum make him an inconvenience to the Institute and what it stands for. His untamed behaviors put him in a zone of suspension between man and animals. Neither domesticated nor wild, Victor is excluded from full membership in domestic life, but still subject to the anthropogenic machine.

For not being able to conform to the norms, values, and standards of domesticity, Victor is deemed mentally defective—a retard—and too wild to be tamed. His feral presence causes vexation to the institutional system. He is marked as unprincipled, uncultivated, without decency, a semi-man with a human mask and animal body: ". . . Sicard began to regard him as an immoral influence on the other children. . . . There was no more sense of shame in him than in an arctic *hare* or an African *ape* that lived in its skin. . . . No amount of discipline or punishment could make him feel shame or even *modesty*" (293; emphases added). As an untamed and strange creature in domestication, Victor

leads a marginal existence on the outskirts of humanity. Unable to cross the threshold from the side of animals (being categorized as akin to hare and ape) to the side of the purely human, he is regarded as a blemish on the social fabric. Even though Victor is biologically defined as human, he is mentally and socially inhuman and unbecoming in the sense that he does not comply with the essential form of absolute humanity. On the other hand, we can see Victor as an opening, a chink in the optical machine. As an anomaly that does not conform to ready-made categorization, Victor defies the essentialism that is produced by the anthropogenic machine. The illiterate, eccentric, strange man (only identified as the *enfant sauvage*) is spurned by his fellow species. Victor can only be put in the interim categorization of *Homo ferus,* whose entrance to Homo sapiens is barred, since his ferality causes disruption in the view of an all-too-human domesticity.

III. Strange(r): Man, Apes, and Dogs

Recurrently, feral children are labeled as "less than human" due to their lack of capacity for rational language, and are therefore unable to be recognized as humanized/domesticated. In Boyle's "Wild Child," a fabricated bar (|) is thus inserted between the animalized child and humanized man. Caught in the liminal space, Victor embodies an *anomaly*, a strange variant and mutant without a "proper" persona-mask. As a defective man, uncanny animal and stranger to human reason, he is seen as an antithesis—and a reflection—of absolute humanity. However, his strangeness gives us a window to re-examine the human/inhuman dialectic: "the *enfants sauvages*," as Agamben remarks, "are the messengers of man's inhumanity, the witness to his fragile identity and his lack of a face of his own" (*The Open* 30). The wild boy stirs up the static human essentialism; his naked presence is an embarrassment and a reminder of human primitivism devoid of the persona-mask or the veneer of humanization. It is acutely strange to witness a naked quadruped man roaming in the public. The exposure of the animal side of mankind is too conspicuous and noxious to the optical machine and the façade of humanity. Resisting a *persona-mask*, the feral child marks a "faceless" status of mankind. It is a slap in the face of absolute "humanity" to witness a regressive human creature that poses a threat to the customary order of the social fabric; accordingly, Agamben continues: "when confronted with these uncertain and mute beings, the passion with which

the men of the Ancien Régime try to *recognize* themselves in them and to '*humanize*' them shows how aware they are of the precariousness of the human" (30; emphases added). In a way, feral children's presence exposes the shaky footing of the old regime/system and its anxiety of being influenced by the murky uncertainties of animal nature. In order to anchor humanity, it is essential that the feral creatures be humanized and donned with a mask so as to stabilize the fragile identity of man. In this sense, if Victor fails to be fully humanized, it also undermines the system of the anthropogenic machine. Without a recognized *persona-mask*, Victor is a "manlike" animal made to suffer from a deficit of customary humanity. That being said, we can also see him as a transitory and passing being that challenges humans' (in)tolerance for an ambiguous, obscure, conflicted existence.

Another strange presence in the eye of the human beholder is Boyle's literate chimp in "Descent of Man." Walking between two species, Konrad performs a pseudo *persona-mask* and human articulation; his existence satirizes the façade of absolute humanity. In contrast with Victor, who is categorized as a *Homo ferus*, on the spectrum of humanity Konrad is another form of "manlike" animal that may be regarded as "more than human" in that he surpasses Horne's mental and physical capacities and beats him in the human game, which mocks and tears the social fabric. In "Descent of Man" the tension between a man and a "manlike" chimpanzee escalates, as Nicole Merola remarks: "Boyle ratchets up Horne's level of anxiety about his deteriorating relationship with Jane and his deteriorating sense of identity" (347). As an embodiment of the species boundary, Konrad—the articulate, domesticated, strange animal—sabotages Horne's reason and relationship, demolishing his manhood and human identity.

In "The Ape Lady in Retirement," however, Konrad's "manhood" and his condition as a humanized animal wearing a *persona-mask* are deprived before being adopted by Beatrice. As a product of human experiments during the sixties, when Konrad reaches puberty and grows to be too much of a threat, it is "abruptly decided that he could be human no more" (405). Since then, he is trapped on the threshold between ferality and domesticity, leaving him a stranger to humanity and his own animality. Konrad is snatched from the jungle, raised and dressed as a man, and then deserted in a zoo, "where they made a sort of clown of him, isolating him from the other chimps and dressing him up like something in a toy-store window. There he'd languished for twenty-

five years, neither chimp nor man" (406). Becoming even stranger at each stage in his captive life, Konrad has lost his latitude in being a chimp; he is made into a by-product and a collateral damage of human experiments on animal intelligence.

Having conducted long-term non-experimental research on the social behaviors of the African wild chimpanzees, Beatrice loathes the deprivation of social norms in a domesticated and humanized chimp: "When she agreed to take Konrad she knew she'd be saving him from the sterility of cage, from the anomie[5] and humiliation of the zoo" (405). Disoriented in his neither-man-nor-chimp catch-22 situation, Konrad suffers from alienation and breakdown of social norms that lead to a broken sense of self. In "The Ape Lady in Retirement," Konrad eventually drifts off from the natural course of great apes and can recognize himself neither as a non-human animal nor an animal acting as man.

Transformed into a stranger to his own species and animality, Konrad's natural disposition is dislocated by the brutal force of imposed domesticity. Trapped in an artificial cul-de-sac, Konrad, as a humanized animal in captivity, picks up the habit of smoking, which leads him and the Ape Lady to a tragic end when Howie (a young man who admires Beatrice's work at the Makoua Reserve) offers them a light aircraft flight: "Konrad had saved one of the [cigarette] butts from Howie's car, and when he reached out nimbly to depress the cigarette lighter, Howie, poor Howie, thought he was going for the controls and grabbed his wrist" (414). In the tug of war, Howie is knocked unconscious and Konrad "sat atop Howie in a forlorn slouch, the cigarette forgotten, the controls irrelevant, nothing at all. 'Urk,' he repeated . . ." (415). As if in their mutual way of understanding, a nonverbal communication echoing reminiscences of their memories of living in the African wild, the story ends with Beatrice touching Konrad, uttering the sound "Urk" that is lost in the translation of human logos or (ur)language. Hapless as it may be, the ending to the Ape Lady and Konrad fosters a sense of companionship which brings slight relief to their distress.

In comparison, in Boyle's depiction of the wild boy of Aveyron, the end of Victor's life is one of forlorn emptiness. Even on a rare occasion when Itard

[5] The Greek etymology of anomie is "*anomia*" (lawlessness), from *a-* (without) and "*nómos*" (law). Anomie indicates disordered identity, rootlessness, and social instability, which results from alienation, unrest, and confusion from the lack of purpose.

comes to visit him, years of close companionship appear to be irrelevant: "[T]here was an awkwardness between him and his former pupil now, all the physical intimacy of their years together reduced to that initial hug. . . . Victor spoke with his eyes, with certain rude gesture of his hands, but that was a vocabulary in which Itard was no longer interested" (302). Despite their long-term companionship and Itard's efforts to instill logos into Victor, their communication barriers remain insurmountable. Viewing from the optical machine, Victor's nonverbal messages are unfit for human recognition; the socially fabricated bar created by the anthropogenic machine renders his voice as meaningless as the gibbering cries of non-human animals, which do not produce meaning in the wor(l)d of man. From another point of view, however, it can be inferred that human centrality produces a parochial language that may confine human understanding of other forms of communication.

To unsettle the rigid essentialism that tethers humanity to an anthropocentric pole, this paper probes the possibilities of digging fissures into the fabricated barrier so as to shed light on the seeds that are capable of being prolific, if allowed to propagate and evolve with less stifling human imposition. In Boyle's "Dogology" the probabilities for the feral seeds to thrive come to light. Stimulated by channels of communication via *human-animal* senses, imagination, and encounters in various forms, the stifled animality in humans is again refilled with the fluid force to activate *variational evolution*, which does not occur exclusively in the wild. (R)evolution can be created by transforming domestic life. In Merola's observation, "Descent of Man" and "Dogology" stand for Boyle's critique of conventional American domesticity (342). What can be further extrapolated is that ecological (r)evolution happens within and without home life. Metamorphoses in domestic life pertain to mental and physical workout that connects humanity with other beings' animality: the interconnectedness of things (or the mesh of life in Timothy Morton's terms). In *The Ecological Thought* Timothy Morton provides some nourishing food for (r)evolutionary thinking, stating that this process "doesn't just occur 'in the mind.' It's a practice and a process of becoming fully aware of how human beings are connected with *other beings*—animal, vegetable, or mineral" (7; emphasis added). As opposed to the kind of thinking which "assumes that there is no continuity between humans and animals," Morton puts forward an eclectic thinking system that encompasses "warmth and *strangeness*, infinity and proximity, tantalizing '*thereness*' and head-popping, *wordless* openness" (12;

emphases added). Rather than embracing a persistent and static mode of recognizing the human veneer, Morton replenishes multifarious shades across the broad spectrum of the ecological system wherein human exceptionalism has propagated itself while other animals are rendered mute, closing our possibilities of understanding other "wordless" critters who may not possess logos but are not voiceless.

In an attempt to immerse in the "*thereness*" of another species and experience their *wordless* openness, in "Dogology" Cynthia launches a variational (r)evolution by living and mingling with a pack of feral dogs in her neighborhood. She adapts herself to the "dogsbody" by running in close proximity among them on all fours and becomes a stranger to her fellow species through entering the infinite connectedness and immeasurable realms that entangle us with non-human species. Becoming a stranger to her husband and the neighborhood, she joins forces with the non-human neighbors in order to explore the stale domestic life in feral mode, roaming the untrodden heart of darkness, plunging into the uncanny new reality, shaking off the persona-mask and yoke of humanity. To defy the "norms" (categorization and standardization) of a mundane suburban life in Connecticut, which exemplifies a state of domestic captivity in Boyle's narrative,[6] Cynthia experiments with taking up an alternative identity that is abbreviated to C.f.: an acronym whose full form is not explicitly spelled out in the story and is therefore left obscure. This identity marks a departure from Cynthia's "previous" life—"after the graduate committee rejected her thesis" (35)—as well as a daring escape from a captive situation. To undermine the anthropogenic machine, she takes an uncanny path that appalls her husband Don as well as Julian and Cara (a couple in the neighborhood who relish the well-managed, predictable and placid suburban life before the "alien intrusion"): "Julian was up early, a Saturday morning, beating eggs with a whisk and gazing idly out the kitchen window . . . expecting nothing, when all at once the scrim of rain parted to reveal a dark, crouching presence in the far corner of the yard. At first glance, he took it to be a dog . . ." (32). Julian's first witness of the "strange" woman, rumors about whose existence "he'd dismissed . . . as some sort of suburban legend" (34), takes place on an ordinary weekend morning. This encounter with an anomaly

[6] Another example is Boyle's "The Ape Lady in Retirement," in which Beatrice Umbo comes "home to Connecticut to retire" (403); it is a place where Beatrice's life comes to an impasse and she struggles to drive out the ennui of domesticity.

creates a breach in Julian's daily routine and his domestic normality. His impression of this dog-human hybrid is thus marked: "all limbs, as if a dog had been mated with a monkey" (32). The section titled "cynomorph" (dog-like ape) in "Dogology" epitomizes Cynthia's variational (r)evolution of woman-ape-dog. Exercising her mind and body as a dog-like ape, C.f. not only de-subjectivizes her personality but also reorganizes her own humanimality by sharpening and restructuring her senses; she reboots "the olfactory receptors of a brain that had been deadened by perfume and underarm deodorant and all the other stifling odors of civilization" (34). Opening up her senses by acting like non-human animals is a new way for C.f. to recognize a brave new world. It is "nothing short of reordering her senses so that she could *think like a dog* and interpret the whole world—not just the human world—as dogs did" (35; emphasis added). Through the exploration of senses, C.f. gains access to other channels of inter-subjective communication and productive ways of scouting the feral borderland, where threshold crossing also leads to perceptive openness.

C.f.'s mind and body become a locus of exchange as well as a locale of (r)evolution, debunking the unrelenting boundaries between absolute humanity and animality. Trespassing on Julian and Cara's private property with a bunch of stray dogs is an action of remonstrance against the ossified orders and social norms. Another defiant expression is made explicit through her tattered *clothes*, which appear to be more and more irrelevant as she goes feral. Her metamorphosis evolves from Julian's first impression of C.f.: "the clothes stuck to her like a second skin" (33). This intermediate stage of her metamorphosis is thus illustrated: "[e]ven her clothes seemed to get in the way, but she was sensible enough of the laws of the community to understand that they were necessary" (40). Eventually C.f. arrives at the point where she takes an exit route from her domesticated life, exposing herself to the elements when her husband finds her under the roof of the most expansive "House," i.e., ecology: "Her clothes barely covered her anymore, the turtleneck torn at the throat and sagging across one clavicle, the black jeans hacked off crudely . . ." (54).

Clothes are an essential feature of human veneer. Analogous to private properties, clothes suggest a façade of identity and serve as an indicator of social condition. Doing away with "dress code" is recognized as an oddity in the optical device and an anomaly on the vanity mirror. For instance, in Boyle's "Wild Child," Victor, after being sent to an orphanage, proves too wild to be

"domesticated" and "he tore at his garment as if the very touch of the cloth seared his skin . . ." (257). Domesticity and clothes appear to cast a burden on the feral child. In one of Victor's escapes from the institute, Itard pictures "Victor passing swiftly through the city, guided by his nose and ears, throwing off his suit of clothes like a *yoke*" (288; emphasis added). For Victor, going nude is his declaration of independence, a break from the imposition of a persona-mask. His feral mode of existence is his key to survival before being institutionalized, domesticated and trained to fit into the social fabric. As for the domesticated chimpanzee in "The Ape Lady in Retirement," Beatrice sees clothes as something alien to Konrad and that "the obscene little suits" are "foisted on him" (407). Clothes have become a reminder of Konrad's captivity, flaunting his status as a human creation and a pet in captivity.

In "Dogology," however, the yoke of absolute humanity is loosened by Cynthia through her voyage of self-discovery and transformation into an anomaly in a typical suburban community; her conflicted identity and newly acquired senses empower her to cross the human-animal threshold. By embracing a feral mode among a pack of wild dogs, Cynthia becomes one of the "strange strangers" that are enmeshed in Timothy Morton's "thinking of interconnectedness":

> . . . the life forms to whom we find ourselves connected. The strange stranger is at the limit of our imagining. As well as being about melancholy, dark ecology is also about uncertainty. Even if biology knew all the species on Earth, we should still encounter them as strange strangers, because of the inner logic of knowledge. The more you know about something, the stranger it grows. (17)

In a sense, C.f. represents one that discards her old name and persona-mask so as to recognize "life forms" in the entangled mesh wherein "[t]he strange stranger lives within (and without) each and every being" (17). C.f. is a bodily practice of Morton's dark ecology in that she, as an anomaly among her fellow species, plunges into the unknown and thereby crosses the threshold between humanity and animality. Ferality empowers her to get entangled in the porous and ambiguous mesh where uncertainty is a staple of life; as Morton puts it: "Knowing more about interconnectedness results in more uncertainty" (59). Going feral is C.f.'s thought experiment in action, which liquefies her identity,

enabling her to explore the fissures in the fabric of humanimality so as to enter the terra incognita where there is no absolute center or edge. Instead of a supreme structure that accentuates the form and essence of being, Morton's ecological thought makes visible the ambiguous ramifications in which all forms of life are encountered in ways that exceed expectations. Evolved from Darwinian evolutionary theory, Morton envisages an entangled form of life that is intimate, strange, and without absolute identity: "Evolutionary theory deconstructs 'life' itself" (67).

Morton's non-teleological, non-essential theory of evolution leads to perceptive uncertainties that are both stirring and invigorating: stirring in the sense that it is meant to elicit paradoxical ideas about our being; invigorating in the sense that the mesh incorporates a sequence of mutual dependency. The thought is to prompt us to recognize the abnormal phenomena surrounding us, "to explore the paradoxes and fissures of identity *within* 'human' and 'animal'" (41), and to be *entangled* with the strange strangers in the sprawling mesh that has neither margin nor centrality: "We can never absolutely figure them out. If we could, then all we would have is a ready-made box to put them in, and we would just be looking at the box, not at the strange strangers. They are intrinsically strange" (41). This can also be said of the uncanny characters in Boyle's stories. Ostensibly, they seem out of place (especially in domesticity), but by making their anomalies "visible," they resist fitting in the man-made box and disrupt the anthropogenic machine. They are strange strangers whose arrivals are unexpected. Between men, apes, and dogs, their feral modes of living are conduits that lead us towards murky territories rather than an impasse that is marked by a demarcation line.

Domesticity, as depicted in Boyle's stories, frequently leads to a cul-de-sac structure that is enmeshed in deadening routines. Living in the loop serves as a protective mechanism that is designed to fence out intrusions and all sorts of alien critters for whom man-made signs and rules are nonessential. After all, the ready-made system is not insusceptible to the feral/anomalous forces that could breach the façade and expose the thin veneer of absolute humanity. In Boyle's stories, the culturally reinforced ramparts of anthropogenic domesticity are sabotaged by the trespassers/anomalies: either by a humanized animal (Konrad) or an animalized, mute, and quadrupedal human (C.f.). Their strange appearances throw the established order into confusion, loosening up the structure of the unwieldy anthropogenic machine. Encounters with anomalies

or feral creatures remind us that human existence is not a constant and unified formation but a continuance of transitional junctures. As agents on the threshold, the feral creatures demonstrate unexpected modes of humanimality, which are capable of disrupting the anthropogenic barrier between humanity | animality. The humanimals are transversal inter-beings who undermine the demarcation that restrains the human tendency to evolve and make connections with the anomalous terra incognita.

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