THE MODERN PYGMALION: CROSSING BOUNDARIES IN PETER GOLDSWORTHY'S *WISH**

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Abstract

Peter Goldsworthy's novel *Wish* (1995) narrates an unusual love story, that between the female gorilla Eliza and her Sign teacher John James. It can be interpreted as a re-writing of George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* (1912) where a Cockney flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, is turned into a lady thanks to her training in proper speech by professor of phonetics Henry Higgins. Both works depict language experiments oriented towards social transformation. It can therefore be argued that both works aim, in sum, at dissecting the inequalities of their time and producing an ontological turn. This article therefore aims at analysing the strategies used by Australian author Peter Goldsworthy to dismantle the human/animal binary and demonstrate the contingency of the species boundary based on notions such as verbal language.

Keywords: *Pygmalion*, Sign language, ape language experiments, species boundary, disability studies, primate literature, bestiality, literacy narratives.

EL MODERNO PIGMALIÓN: TRASPASANDO BARRERAS EN *WISH* DE PETER GOLDSWORTHY

Resumen

La novela de Peter Golsworthy *Wish* (1995) narra una historia de amor inusual entre una gorila, Eliza, y su profesor de lengua de signos, John James. Puede interpretarse como una reescritura del texto de George Bernard Shaw *Pygmalion* (1912) donde una florista Cockney, Eliza Doolittle, pasa por ser una dama gracias a las lecciones de dicción del profesor de fonética Henry Higgins. Ambas obras describen experimentos lingüísticos orientados hacia la transformación social. Puede por lo tanto argumentarse que ambas tienen como objetivo, en suma, diseccionar las desigualdades de su tiempo y producir un giro ontológico. Este artículo por lo tanto pretende analizar las estrategias empleadas por el autor australiano Peter Goldsworthy para desmontar el binario humano/animal y demostrar lo contingente de la separación entre especies basada en nociones como el lenguaje verbal.

Palabras clave: *Pygmalion*, lenguaje de signos, experimentos lingüísticos con simios, separación entre especies, estudios de discapacidad, literatura de primates, bestialismo, narrativas de aprendizaje.

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For a long time scientists and philosophers alike have tried to find the distinctive element separating humans from nonhuman animals. As Helen Tiffin contends, today, thanks to a new approach to the animal question by science and animal studies, those traits that were in the past deemed peculiar to humans are now also attributed to animals (38). In his novel *Wish* (1995) Australian author Peter Goldsworthy uses a Pygmalionesque framework to deal with one of these categories, language, and sets it in the context of an experiment: teaching Sign to Eliza, a female gorilla who later will be renamed as Wish. The story brings to mind the ape language experiments dating back to the late 1960s and which continue today with Dr. Sue Savage-Rumbaugh's work with bonobos in Des Moines, Iowa. But it most importantly highlights humans' contradictory way of dealing with the human/animal divide, as well as the arbitrariness of the attribution of the category of person to two groups situated in the margins who often intersect, animals and the disabled. This intersection has actually been already highlighted in the work of Cary Wolfe, Kari Weil and most recently by the formulation of the term eco-ability by Anthony J. Nocella II, Judy K.C. Bentley, and Janet M. Duncan. That is why Sign, the language of the deaf, acquires a great significance throughout the novel as the instrument of transformation of the gorilla Eliza into a person.

Focusing on the initial metaphor of Sign as the symbol of the dissolution of the species boundary and using references to George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913) as structuring device, this article aims at reflecting on the process of transformation from animal to person and vice versa experienced by the novel's main protagonists. Such metamorphosis affects both human and animal characters in reverse ways. Hence, throughout the novel, Sign teacher John James, J.J. for short, will undergo a process of animalization in his own eyes and the eyes of the rest of society, while female gorilla Eliza will be humanized, almost turned into a woman. These transformations will have the body as their site of realization: interspecies sex between J.J. and Eliza in contrast with J.J.'s unsatisfying flirtation with Stella, the gorilla's guardian, will serve to signal, at the end of the novel, the crossing of categories and will highlight the continuities between species. And ultimately, Wish's death, another transformation of the body, will become a symbol of such continuity since, as Cora Diamond observes, "The awareness we each have of being a living body, being "alive to the world", carries with it exposure to the bodily sense of vulnerability to death, sheer animal vulnerability, the vulnerability we share with them" (74).

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DISABLING THE SPECIES BOUNDARY THROUGH SIGN

Peter Goldsworthy's novel is divided into four parts that describe the education of Eliza/Wish, a gorilla whose intelligence was biologically enhanced in the laboratory while still in her mother's womb. After being rescued from the lab, she is put under the care of two animal rights activists, Dr. Clive Kinnear and Stella Todd, who, by teaching her Sign, seek to turn Eliza into an animal spokesperson for animal liberation.

The first part focuses on J.J., a teacher of Sign and the narrator of the story. It presents him as an intermediary between the worlds of the hearing and the non-hearing. Such a function will actually be expanded in the second part where he becomes Eliza's teacher and interpreter. The second part describes Eliza's education not only in Sign, but also in disciplines such as mathematics, painting and music. With time this process will be superseded by a relationship beyond that between teacher and student since Eliza, already identified as Wish, and J.J. will fall in love with each other. The third part of the book develops J.J.'s and Wish's realization of their love which culminates in a scene of sexual climax in Wish's room. And finally, the fourth describes the consequences of their illicit love. He is charged with bestiality and she is put into a zoo far away from her lover and from the animal haven where she used to live. Having no reason to go on living, Wish eventually kills herself.

This unconventional love story is sustained in the interaction between two characters that do not conform to standards of normalcy: Wish, the gorilla with enhanced intelligence, and J.J., the speaking son of two deaf parents. As Oliver Sacks reveals in his book on the world of the deaf, *Seeing Voices* (1990), those deprived of hearing since birth face the drama of being considered mentally retarded since they are kept in a prelinguistic stage that impedes them from organizing their world and being part of society (8-9). Prior to the invention of Sign the congenitally deaf used to be isolated from human society. In *Wish*, however, there is little victimization on the part of the deaf who are described in the story. J.J. reckons his parents are deaf but they are also "proud as peacocks," proud of being deaf (*Wish* 4). The deaf community is never portrayed as inferior in the story. They are generally equipped with keen independence from the world of the hearing, like J.J.'s parents, and also demonstrate their own sense of humor emanating from a culture of their own which they defend as being better and subtler than that of the hearing.

In line with this, throughout the book, Sign is described as a better form of communication than speech, thus working against phonocentrism. This is illustrated by J.J.'s frustration when interpreting from Sign into English. He is always left feeling there is a lack, something missing, even though he tries to give the best possible description (*Wish* 17). It is in the acknowledgement of this void that J.J. acquires the role of interpreter between the world of the hearing and that of the non-hearing, and later between the human and the nonhuman world. On account of this, Goldsworthy's novel serves to shake traditional assumptions about the dominant role played by verbal language among humans. Goldsworthy creates

a story of transgressions that aims at questioning our assumptions about disability and species continuity, and this is aimed at blurring the boundaries that separate the able from the disabled, the human from the animal.

SIGN AND THE HUMAN-ANIMAL CONTINUITY

Eighteenth-century intellectuals agreed that language was the defining element separating humans from animals. Since it is through language that thoughts are shaped into ideas that are later uttered, they asked themselves about the working of the minds of those deprived of language. To what extent were they human?

The Age of Reason offers two examples, deaf-mutes and feral children, where language features at the center of the distinction between human and animal. In both cases, categories are blurred highlighting the contradiction inherent to traditional distinctions between human and nonhuman animals. But what is most significant is that these two cases serve to underline another area of human self-contradiction, that revolving around the definition of human normalcy which is expressed in the contrast between ability and disability. The same set of tensions can be located in Goldsworthy's novel.

In 1726, Peter the Wild, a boy found in Hameln, Germany, made British court doctor Mr. Arbuthnot wonder about the nature-nurture dilemma. He thought that by making this boy who had been raised by wild animals talk, he could find which behavior was innate and which was learnt through experience (Candland 13). However, Peter was never able to utter a word. This German boy shared an animal trait, silence, with another human group, the poor deaf who roamed the streets of eighteenth-century Paris. The latter served as inspiration to the founder of Sign language, Abbé l'Epée (1712-1789), who observed how these deaf people used a kind of mimicry to communicate. Obsessed with the salvation of their souls, he learned their language, refined it and turned it into a system of signs that gave them access to communication with the outside world by means of an interpreter (Sacks 17). Some years later, in 1801, Dr. Itard based part of his work to acculturate another feral boy, Victor of Aveyron, on the language and techniques developed by l'Epée (Sacks 10). His results were disappointing, but he at least managed to develop some techniques that he later used in the instruction of deaf people. It could be argued that in this case the roads of the human –especially the disabled– and that of the animal met. Victor was a human-animal hybrid, the expression of the intersection between natural instincts and adaptation to the environment. Itard placed his hopes in finding a way to break through the opaque veil of silence that kept the child isolated from the human world. Victor did not really manage to master speech, but he became the inspiration behind the ape language experiments of the twentieth century (Candland 291).

In 1967, psychologists Allen and Beatrix Gardner decided to study the consequences of raising a female chimpanzee, Washoe, as a human baby and of

teaching her Sign. Although their experiment was not exempt from controversy,[1] their example prompted an interest in ape language experiments for at least two decades. Sign language became a symbol of the intersection between the human and the animal, thus illustrating the continuity between the two. These experiments served as well to call attention to the arbitrariness of the attribution of personhood. It seems that when considering the status of categories that are tangential to notions of appropriateness, this is generally grounded in the characteristics of a dominant majority. Thus, when it comes to regarding the relationship between the status of the disabled and that of the nonhuman animal, their status comes to be based on the lack of any of the attributions markedly associated with the ruling group. As such, for example, disabled people are defined mainly by an *impaired* body, a body where the senses or their material construction are affected by an absence or an alteration of capacities that results in capricious combinations. These new ways of being in the world disrupt the definition of human. Therefore, they unsettle the boundaries between what is human and what is not, and place the disabled in a space of liminality. It is precisely in this zone where the animal and the disabled meet, for they are both defined by a lack with regard to the predominant concept of the human. The deaf, the blind, the mute, the handicapped, the autistic, etc., are all defined against standards of normalcy by what is not present: hearing, sight, speech, movement, empathy, etc. By the same token, the broad category of the animal is defined by those characteristics that she[2] does not share with the human. But interestingly, when the same animal that is rejected from the category of moral being for her *lacks* becomes the add-on of the disabled person, the animal and the disabled merge in a symbiotic relation that helps them rise above their discriminated categories. Examples of such fusions abound in recent cultural artifacts where the disability always leads to an enhanced channel of communication with the animal who in return help the disabled person to become whole. This is for instance the case of David Wroblewski's *The Story of Edward Sawtelle* (2008) about a mute boy and his guide dog Almondine.

In Goldsworthy's *Wish* the reader is engaged in a discourse hinging on notions of ability and disability, of normalcy and abnormality, of humanity and animality. In it, Sign features as the metaphor of the space of intersection between the animal and the human, and becomes the instrument of empowerment of both groups. As Cary Wolfe states, "disability can in fact be a powerful and unique form of abled-ness" (117). In *Wish*'s case, representations of "disability" linked to Eliza/Wish and J.J. propose what María Vidal calls "new ways of being human" (60). This is why this book can be analyzed as a text that questions long established no-

[1] In *The Other Side of Silence: Sign Language and the Deaf Community in America* (1990), Arden Neisser argues against the use of Sign in language experiments with apes (202-234). He describes this practice as devoid of scientific seriousness and degrading for the deaf community.

[2] In line with the gender of the animal protagonist of the novel under analysis, throughout this article the use of the feminine form of the third person pronoun is favored to refer to animals in general.

tions –human/animal, abled/disabled– by contrasting them in a game of reversals and transformations.

THE MODERN PYGMALION OR HOW TO MAKE THE GORILLA TALK

> Would the world ever have been made if its maker had been afraid of making trouble? Making life means making trouble.
> (Professor Higgins. *Pygmalion* Act V)

Peter Goldsworthy's *Wish* can be interpreted as a re-writing of G.B. Shaw's text *Pygmalion*. Both works depict experiments oriented towards social transformation. In the case of Shaw's work, as Laura Otis contends, "Henry Higgins's experiment promises to subvert class boundaries" and Shaw ridicules with it social distinctions on the basis of speech in early twentieth century Britain (493). In the same line of socially committed narratives, Goldsworthy's novel uncovers Western culture's contradictions when it comes to negotiating the borders between the human and the nonhuman animal and, in doing so, aims at subverting the species boundary. Both of them can be defined as literacy narratives in the sense that they evolve around the subject of teaching. Teaching becomes an engine of transformation for both teacher and student, but curiously, in the end, the student is the one to teach a lesson to her docent. In Act V of *Pygmalion* Eliza Dolittle, for instance, shows Henry Higgins that her acquired fineness in speech cannot transform her into a lady if he insists in seeing her as a flower girl and so, she tries to make him understand that, "The difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated" (Shaw 93). In the case of Eliza/Wish, the gorilla teaches a lesson on humanity to her guardians when she decides to put an end to her life in an act of defiance to those who still see her as an animal and have placed her in a zoo away from her lover. Both works aim, in sum, at dissecting the inequalities of their time and producing an ontological turn. So, if in the case of *Pygmalion* the stress is put on the social differences and on the need to raise the poor from their object-like standing, in the case of *Wish* the novel strikes at the foundations of human exceptionalism by radically questioning the exclusiveness of the attribution of personhood to humans. In this sense, although Wish seems to have all the attributes of a person, she is not given the chance to choose who she wants to mate with, and even less so when this results in an interspecies relationship.

Keeping this in mind, Goldsworthy's novel invites analysis as an exercise in reversing categories. It is precisely this technique that serves to call into question the artificiality of boundaries such as those built around concepts of humanity and animality, as well as those of ability and disability. This process hinges on the value each of the human characters of the story attribute to the female gorilla Eliza who is later given the very telling Sign name "Wish" by her teacher. In essence, Wish becomes the result of the projections of each and every one of these characters. She will become J.J.'s "star pupil" as well as the object of his desire. Moreover, she is

given "an education" thanks to her protectors Dr. Kinnear and Stella, so that she can become "a *spokes*-animal," "a prophet for the Animal Rights movement," "an animal Messiah" (*Wish* 272). However, the more successful these projections are, the further she is situated from the pursuit of her happiness and this will, in the end, drive her to suicide.

EDUCATING WISH AND APING *MY FAIR LADY*

In "Monkey in the Mirror: The Science of Professor Higgins and Doctor Moreau," Otis speaks of how turn-of-the-century literacy narratives insisted on "comparing workers to savages or beasts" who could only be distinguished from the animal by speech and cleanliness (499). It is only natural then to expect a reference of this sort in Shaw's *Pygmalion*. Eliza, a Covent Garden flower girl, is definitely part of the underprivileged. And in fact, one of the first measures taken at Professor Higgins's house is to give her a good scrub to make her look more human. Eliza's cleansing signals the beginning of her humanization and actually, as Otis defends, turns her into a human-animal hybrid (488). This is so because she is compared to the monkey who looks at her face in a shiny pan in the advertising image of the soap "Monkey Brand" Mrs. Pearce uses to wash her (489). Shaw is certainly playing with the proximity of apes to humans, turning Eliza into a character that apes the middle class and unsettles the human-animal boundary (Otis 489). However, later in the play her full humanization will be possible thanks to her education.

In *Wish*'s case there is also a process of transformation affecting both the gorilla Eliza and her teacher J.J. This transformation works in opposite but complementary directions, so while Eliza experiences a process of humanization, J.J. progresses towards animalization. This reversal of categories helps to support the idea of the contingent nature of the species divide. The two main characters occupy a space of liminality whose borders are less and less defined leading them to cross not only the moral barriers of interspecies sexuality, but also their own definition as members of a species group.

The novel is told from the point of view of J.J., a modern Pygmalion. He is a middle-aged oversized man haunted by a series of life drawbacks. He is divorced from a woman with whom he had little in common except for her initial interest in Sign. Jill was too reasonable for him and trusted "the power of words" too much (*Wish* 251). Besides she censured every one of J.J.'s appetites–food, sex–and did not make an effort to enter into the culture of the deaf in which J.J. was brought up. His daughter, Rose, also reminds him of his feeling of inadequacy as family man. She resents her parents' divorce and hides this behind a veil of mature detachment and "amused condescension" that J.J. finds discomforting (*Wish* 70). Furthermore, J.J.'s uneasiness is made even greater by his return to his parents' house as jobless son in search for a place to stay. His parents are both deaf and he has always had the feeling they never completely accepted him as their own kind since he is the hearing son to deaf parents. His mother even invented names for him in Sign such as "Big-Ears" that referred to his *defect*, being "born with a pair of ears that let in

noise," ears that in the world of the deaf just "get in the way" (*Wish* 11). As a result, J.J. who is inclined to favor the unpredictability of emotions over the logic of ideas, finds himself longing for the love and acceptance he does not find in his family life. But since he is a socially inept person with few resources to relate to other people in unstructured social situations, he turns his teaching of Sign into the ideal source of the appreciation he does not find anywhere else.

It is precisely through teaching that J.J. meets Eliza. Her name–identical to that of the Shavian heroine–together with the fact that the novel revolves around her education as a proficient *speaker* of Sign, allows for connecting Goldsworthy's novel with Shaw's *Pygmalion*. But to the puzzlement of both readers and J.J. himself, Eliza is no flower girl wanting to become eligible as shop assistant in a fancy flower shop; she is a female gorilla who has been rescued from a laboratory. Besides, Eliza's education into the world of Sign is not her own decision, as in the case of Shaw's play, but rather her guardians'. On account of her enhanced intelligence, of which J.J. will only be informed in the last stage of her education, Dr. Kinnear has thought she can become the perfect spokesperson for the animals and hence transform society by fighting back against speciesism through her example as acculturated signing gorilla. But reality will prove otherwise and Eliza will become the victim of human ignorance. She commits suicide as the only possible escape from a life of captivity at a zoo where she is denied access to J.J., by then not only her teacher but also her lover. Such a grim end serves also to position this novel within the tradition of Pygmalionesque stories of failure where the transformation of the heroine only leads her to fatality or a sense of incompleteness as Bloom has contended (qtd. in Porten 83). Moreover, as this story develops in the context of an ape language experiment, it can be defended that Goldsworthy aims at questioning the ethics of such experiments that cannot fail to be analyzed as an attempt to domesticate the wild. For, in general, ape language experiments, especially those involving signing apes, have left a sense of dissatisfaction and the idea that no matter what the animal is *able* to do, it will never be enough for humans to accept them into the moral community of beings. It is the insistence on this self-satisfying disenchantment with the animal which perhaps has driven Goldsworthy to write a clever analysis of the contradictions of humanity when it comes to defining its place among the rest of beings. Thus, aware of the contingent character of the species boundary, he aims at showing the inconsistencies of even the most committed of activists, Clive and Stella, when it comes to deciding on the future of their *adopted daughter* Eliza, a gorilla in love with her Sign teacher.

This fluidity of the human-animal boundary is made evident in various moments throughout the narration. J.J. for example seems to be protean in nature, "a creature more at home in the water than on land" (Tiffin 50). He acknowledges this proteanism when he refers to himself as someone who is "part-amphibian" (*Wish* 19) because he loves being in the water. Furthermore, the fact that he moves with equal ease in the world of the hearing and in that of the non-hearing makes him also the perfect bridge between these two worlds. Indeed, it is through Sign and its treatment of names that the specialness of his personality and that of Wish is highlighted.

J.J.'s name is really John James, J.J. is just the sign shorthand, the J-shape repeated. Deaf people find "John James" too long for finger spelling and actually they prefer to give names that mean something. J.J.'s family name is in fact "Sweet Tooth" which he finds not to suit him anymore because he lost the taste for sugar while married to Jill. Later in the novel, however, he will find a new identity for himself that again will be defined by his relationship with a female, this time with the gorilla Eliza. He is perceived by Wish as her alpha male, protector, and sexual partner. Terry, the activist who rescued Eliza, calls J.J. "Silverback," his new-found identity as Eliza's chosen male. J.J. identifies better with this new acquired identity that feels empowering, both morally and sexually, a thing he had hardly found in his marriage. As he tells himself, "there was something in the nickname that I liked, some implication of grey-beard wisdom that appealed to vain parts of me" (*Wish* 237).

Eliza, on the other hand, will be renamed Wish, for she shows a tendency from the beginning to use the Wish Hand, middle finger crossed over the back of index finger, instead of the Point Hand, index pointing upwards. J.J. describes this signature as especially moving: "Eliza stepped [sic] back and repeated my shape for tomorrow, but with the Wish Hand, I saw, not the Point Hand: the first two fingers crossed in hope. It was a beautiful touch, an improvised variation, another poem which moved me as much as anything else I had seen during that extraordinary morning" (*Wish* 117). In fact, this will become a very significant feature of Eliza/Wish as a character that, like J.J., shows the potential to fulfill the expectations placed on them by the others. Naming, therefore, acquires a power to change or modify who the characters are, leading them into unexpected directions.

Another strategy used by Goldsworthy to signal the plasticity of the species boundary is that of animalization of the human and its reverse, humanization, or more specifically, feminization of the animal. With regard to J.J.'s animalization, as mentioned above, at some point in the narration he refers to himself as "part-amphibian" and later on, he is also compared with an ape when Terry calls him Silverback. But furthermore, his affair with the gorilla is seen as beastly, an act separating him from anything human. In Wish's case, her process is certainly different. She goes from being an aping gorilla to being described in terms that make the reader think of her as a woman. Her ears, according to J.J., "would not have been out of place on a young girl" (*Wish* 96). Later, when he is fully aware of his feelings for Eliza, he refers to her scent as being similar to "the raw smell of heat, a hot universal woman-smell" (*Wish* 239). Besides, throughout the book, he is constantly comparing his relationship with Wish with the one he had with his ex-wife, Jill, always finding the former more satisfying. Wish and Stella, on their part, represent all the sensuality he had longed for, and tempt him equally although after a brief experience with Stella, J.J. realizes that it is not only sex that he needs but true love. Thus, at the end of the story, J.J.'s and Wish's surrender to their love for each other will signify a blurring of the species boundary enabled by each character's crossing of the threshold that separates the human from the animal. But such a destabilization of boundaries will also provoke the incomprehension of a society not yet prepared to accept what is seen as a grotesque crime: bestiality.

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD: LOVING THE APE

Do any of us understand what we are doing? If we did, would we ever do it?
(Professor Higgins. *Pygmalion* Act II)

Wish has already been described as a failure story because the female character is doomed the moment she is in the hands of her Pygmalion. Her transformation from animal into human leads her to a tragic end because she is separated from her human lover by a society that is not prepared to consider her as a person. The ways in which this incomprehension impacts the lives of both J.J. and Wish are best expressed through the inclusion of the topic of bestiality. In this section, it will be argued that Goldsworthy has resorted to this thorny issue in order to call attention to the arbitrariness of the line separating the human from the animal. As mentioned before, the novel develops a series of reversals in relationship with the main characters. Such reversals acquire a special potency at the end of Book Two and throughout Book Three for they signal the completion of the process of transformation from animal into human in Wish's case and from human into animal in J.J.'s.

In this respect, J.J.'s and Wish's sexual act deserves special attention because it is in its misinterpretation, its manipulation and its condemnation that the reader is most blatantly presented with human contradiction. This is why here it will be sustained that, although bestiality is, as Piers Beirne explains in his study of animal abuse, frequently described as a sexual deviation by psychiatry and sexology, and as a form of abuse by feminist and animal activists (168), in the case of *Wish*, intercourse between the male human and the female gorilla can be read metaphorically as a statement in favor of a new status for the animal where the continuity between the human and the nonhuman is acknowledged. This is grounded on the fact that J.J.'s and Wish's lovemaking is portrayed by the narrator, J.J., as an expression of consensual love and emotional intimacy, and not as the abuse of the human on the animal. He cannot help but being mesmerized by the gorilla who he sees not as a beast but as a person who has given him more love and tenderness than he ever found in his relationships with women.

In regard to this, at the beginning of the book, J.J.'s ex-wife Jill is described as distant, cold, and domineering. Later, when J.J. meets Stella, the veterinarian and poet who looks after Eliza, he finds someone who differs a lot from his former wife. Stella is described as a creative, playful, sexually attractive woman. J.J. actually becomes intrigued by animals thanks to Clive Kinnear, Stella's partner, but he starts understanding them and loving them because of Stella's poems. In fact, at the beginning of his friendship with them, he craves both Stella's animal poems and Kinnear's intellectual wisdom. Stella and Clive represent two ways of knowing the animal: poetry and science. By the same token, both Jill and Stella act as foils to Eliza/Wish. They represent two types of women. Jill's coldness and control contrast with Stella's warmth and carefreeness. It is because of this sheer difference between the two that J.J., who is in need of love, is soon attracted to Stella who, on the night they are alone while Clive is away on a business trip, tries to both tempt him with food a strict vegetarian should not eat and seduce him into going to bed with her.

As a consequence, the night turns into a time for disclosures. Stella is too frivolous for J.J. who is in search of true love and who fails to perform sexually when taken by surprise by the lascivious Stella. Nevertheless, this helps him to discover the true object of his desire: Wish. However, the following morning the gorilla sees them in bed and, out of jealousy, shaves herself until her body is covered with bleeding wounds. When discovered by J.J., Wish, who is in estrus, presents herself to him who rejects her although he cannot help being aroused by her intentions and runs away to hide his physical response.

Sexual desire becomes the equating factor between Wish and J.J.. It is also the force that impels them to transcend their own boundaries and become the other. Hence Wish expresses her will to become a woman the moment she brutally shaves her body of the hair that she assumes keeps her from being sexually attractive to J.J.. Likewise, once J.J. sees himself as Wish's protector, her Silverback, he sees himself entitled with certain "responsibilities" (*Wish* 238). Furthermore, in this part of the novel, the body becomes the text on which these two characters inscribe their evolution. Wish does it by trying to get rid of her fur to look womanlike, while J.J. strips his body in the light of the moon in an act of absolute acceptance of his rotund size. This is the same body that Jill rejected and that he tried to forget every night by floating weightlessly in water, but that he now accepts in its full display of potency and maleness:

> She shifted her haunches a little, raised them higher, and a gust of her smell came to me; not her usual asparagus-musk, but the raw smell of heat, a hot universal woman-smell. I began to harden again. Her eyes left mine, moving down to watch this strange growth. This time I didn't turn away. I stood by the bed, facing the curtainless window, clothed only in moonlight, fully aroused. I felt, for once in my life, beautiful: a giant of a man, a human silverback, in full sexual rut. (*Wish* 239)

However, by fully humanizing herself and entering the world of the humans, Wish becomes more vulnerable to human incomprehension, a fact that is incontrovertible when she is discovered in bed with J.J. This discovery will lead to her separation from J.J. So, Wish returns to captivity and therefore to her original status as animal and thus non-person. Such regression triggers a cascade of dramatic events for her. She is separated from J.J. and taken to a zoo where she falls into a depression. J.J. tries in vain to rescue her but is jailed for trespassing. Later, J.J. learns through the newspaper that Wish has been found hanging from one of the ropes in her zoo enclosure. The headline reads "LOVE APE DIES IN FREAK ACCIDENT," refusing to name Wish's voluntary action a "suicide" (*Wish* 291).

Consequently, Wish's suicide may be interpreted as the last of the reversals of the novel. It can be concluded that her voluntary death subverts this Pygmalionesque narrative of failure since not only is the death of a female, but that of a nonhuman animal and hence an "*other*." In this sense, Margaret Higgonnet points out that female suicide, especially when the woman belongs to a minority, can be interpreted not as a final victimization of the female, as it has traditionally been analyzed in romantic texts, but as an act of defiance against social norms and an

affirmation of identity (232). This implies that, by opting for her own death, Wish manages to inscribe herself into the category of person. Hence, in another twist of events, another reversal, she inverts her victimization as mere object of sexual pleasure, according to those who accuse J.J. of bestiality, and, in so doing, acquires the personhood she is denied. Moreover, her suicide also defies the objectification to which Wish was submitted by her guardians, Clive and Stella, for whom she was an experiment, and by the society represented by the legal system that condemns her.

Only J.J. truly cared for the gorilla's happiness and was attached to her. Thus, when he gets out of jail, he goes to the place of her cremation to try to find a trace of her in the smoke emanating from the high chimney. There he ponders about Wish's last thoughts before dying and hopes death, the last of her transformations, brought her "a fresh start" (*Wish* 298). He already knows his life will not be the same after having known and loved her. Thus, in the end, Wish, with her death, acquires an agency she never had in life. She uncovers the true intentions of so-called animal activists, Clive and Stella, calls attention to human society's hypocrisy and contradictions when dealing with the human/animal divide, and leaves an indelible mark on J.J.'s life.

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