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BETWEEN SPECIES: BIOPOLITICS, RESISTANCE, AND INTERSPECIESALITY

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Mississippi

Temple Gowan

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines three twentieth-century novels—Carson McCullers’s *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, Charles Johnson’s *Oxherding Tale*, and Ruth Ozeki’s *My Year of Meats*—in the context of posthumanist animal studies. A Foucauldian biopolitical lens foregrounds the inextricably linked ways that both human and nonhuman animal bodies are governed and controlled in a biopolitical era. Each chapter focuses on textual links between speciesism and the oppression of particular human groups based on gender, sexuality, and race, arguing that each novel offers new ways of thinking about both our own species, other animal species, and how humans relate to the nonhuman world.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, Louis and Janice Gowan, who gave me the opportunity to explore the nonhuman world the moment I was able to venture outside.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my thesis committee, Deborah Barker, Leigh Anne Duck, and Karen Raber, for their guidance and support.

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INTRODUCTION

WHY WE NEED POSTHUMANIST ANIMAL STUDIES

In early July of 2015, the killing of “Cecil the Lion,” a thirteen year-old African lion, by Minnesota dentist Walter Palmer ignited an international storm of Internet outrage. Scientists from the University of Oxford had been tracking Cecil since 2008, and though the animal lived in the Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe, hunters lured him out of this protected area, enabling Dr. Palmer to shoot him with a bow and arrow for a sum of \$50,000. Though many called for criminal charges to be pressed against Palmer, it was ultimately determined that he would not be held responsible since he claimed he was under the impression that the hunt was completely legal. Several weeks after the incident, the editorial board of *The New York Times* wrote, “The fury over Cecil’s death should...prompt some soul-searching among hunters who pursue African game, a large number of whom are well-to-do Americans” (Editorial Board). They also pointed out, however, that perhaps individuals who were so incensed over Cecil’s death should redirect their concern to one of the major reasons for the decline in African lion populations—not big game hunting, but the destruction of their habitats due to human encroachment.

The public response to Cecil’s killing, along with the subsequent backlash in reaction to that response, reveal how complicated and complex the relationships of humans to nonhuman animals really are. As *The New York Times* editorial board points out, activists and animal lovers

outraged over Cecil's death had perhaps misplaced their passions. It is easy to grieve the deaths of charismatic megafauna like lions, especially ones with names, and easier still to direct collective anger at an individual, a man with \$50,000 to spend in order to hunt and kill a threatened species. It is much harder to grieve the loss of habitat that has caused the population of African lions to decline from 200,000 to 30,000 in a century, and harder still to know exactly where to place the blame for this reality.¹

Further complicating matters is the fact that Zimbabwe is a former British colony; in fact, Cecil the Lion was named after influential colonialist Cecil Rhodes. Like many former African colonies dealing with the financial and social consequences of being stripped of their natural resources by colonial powers, Zimbabweans have turned to sport hunting to bring in large sums of money from mostly Western tourists. As writer S.E. Smith points out, seventeen percent of Zimbabwe's land is set aside for game parks that serve this purpose, and they still operate "within the framework of a system...in which white people wield considerable power as they exploit natural resources." Thus, the circumstances of Cecil's killing have colonial and racial undertones that point to a web of injustices not accounted for in the vast majority of public reactions to his death, not to mention how culturally tone-deaf these reactions may have seemed to Zimbabweans themselves. In an opinion piece for *The New York Times*, native Zimbabwean and American student Goodwell Nzou writes, "We Zimbabweans are left shaking our heads, wondering why Americans care more about African lions than about African people." He asks that his American friends not offer him "condolences" about Cecil unless they are also willing to offer the same "for villagers killed or left hungry by his [Cecil's] brethren, by political violence,

¹ Statistics taken from "The Death of Cecil the Lion." Nytimes.com. *The New York Times*, 31 July 2015. Web. 20 April 2016.

or by hunger.” Not only does Nzou draw attention to the apparent hypocrisy of American friends who seem to care more about the death of one lion in his country than the lives of humans, he also highlights the complex ways that we define, relate to, and understand animals. While lions are beloved “Simba-like” figures for most Americans who may only experience them on screen or perhaps in zoos, Nzou writes that in his village, lions are “objects of terror” that stalk villages, steal food, and make people afraid. Thus, animals, as individuals or species, never represent one thing in all times and places, but rather change with context and with the language humans use to define them.

Just a couple of weeks after Cecil the Lion was killed, Sandra Bland, a 28 year-old black woman, hanged herself in a Texas jail. Bland had been plagued with legal troubles for years—unpaid traffic tickets and fines, a DUI, a possession of marijuana charge—troubles that may be rightfully attributed not to her personal failings as a “good” American citizen, but to systemic racism that causes people of color to be disproportionately affected by such minor charges. Furthermore, Bland had a history of mental health issues that were ignored by the police department holding her in custody, and her death almost certainly could have been avoided if she had been provided with proper services. Especially because the death of Bland occurred so soon after the killing of Cecil, the display of public outrage over the lion’s death, especially from outspoken celebrities, elicited a backlash from people who wondered why Bland’s death, along with those of numerous other African-Americans who lost their lives at the hands of law enforcement officials in recent years, had not inspired an equally intense public reaction. People took to Twitter to express the ironies they perceived in the reactions to one lion’s death compared to the unjust deaths of numerous black Americans. “I’m watching so much empathy

and understanding and speaking out about an animal while the same spaces remain silent on Black death,” one man tweeted (qtd. in Craven and Bellware). Others used Cecil’s killing to draw attention to ways black victims are often villainized and blamed in such cases, tweeting, “Cecil was no angel,” and “Cecil reportedly had cat nip in his system at the time of his death” (qtd. in Craven and Bellware), references to how, for example, the media eagerly reported that Michael Brown was a suspect in a convenience store robbery and had marijuana in his system when he was gunned down in the street by a police officer in 2014.

The loud and furious response to Cecil’s death raises the question of why so many Americans are more apt to protest the killing of a particular lion than the killing of multiple human beings of a particular race, and of why so many more people are willing to publically recognize and label the former as murder, but often not the latter. Some conjectured that anger over Cecil’s death was “easy outrage,” in part because animals are “apolitical” (Craven and Bellware).² Others noted that, especially in the case of celebrities, racism is too controversial an issue for people to speak out about. For example, “Hollywood watcher” Howard Bragman stated, “Celebrities have found when they step into some of the race issues, they’ve gotten their hands slapped for perceived insensitivity, even when they were trying to do and say the right thing. They realized animal activism is a win-win” (Puente). Even if animal activism is a “safe issue” for people to speak out about compared to issues of racial injustice, the outrage over Cecil’s death still leaves one to wonder at the deep ironies and inconsistencies in the ways most of us relate to nonhuman animals—Cecil’s death prompted calls for policy changes, as well as punishment for the man who killed him, yet billions of animals per year are killed and/or confined in miserable

² This is in part a reference to the fact that Bland was outspoken about the Black Lives Matter movement on social media and had thus defined herself as a “political” figure.

conditions in order to produce or test products that most of us use or consume on a daily basis, a fact that inspires relatively little public protest.

The reaction to Cecil's killing, along with the subsequent backlash in response to it, raise a number of questions about our complex relationships to animals, along with the inextricable entanglements of human and nonhuman animal lives. Why did the death of one particular lion draw such outrage, while billions of animals a year are killed in slaughterhouses, are treated poorly on factory farms, suffer through product testing in labs, and are abandoned in shelters? Why was it easier for so many more people to be outspoken about Cecil's death as opposed to racial injustices like the death of Sandra Bland and so many others? What does it look like to care passionately about both human *and* nonhuman animal lives? And finally, a central question of this project, can we actually understand and begin to reverse injustices committed against human beings without doing so for other species?

Scholarship in animal studies, or what is sometimes called human-animal studies, that has been rapidly emerging over the past several decades can offer us ways to understand and unravel the complex relationships between human and animal lives, particularly how and why we tend to justify the valuation of some lives over others, both human and nonhuman. In order to do this work, we must first understand that, as Jennifer McDonnell points out, "the category of 'animal' is contingent and shifts according to the convenience of the dominant; and that human rights are inextricably linked to the question of the animal, making the intersectionality of the categories of the human and animal...a central starting point to any discussion of the field" (8).³ A major premise of the chapters that follow is that the categories of "human" and "animal" are

³ For an extensive list of authors who have been developing this work in literary studies since the late 1980s, see McDonnell, "Literary Studies, the Animal Turn, and the Academy."

fundamentally and mutually constituted by three types of violence: the symbolic violence committed through language, interpersonal violence occurring between subjects, and institutional and systemic violence that is often invisible.

Derrida argues that human language is the primary means through which the human/animal hierarchical dualism is established and reified.⁴ The abstract concept of the “animal” undergirds the belief in human exceptionalism that lies at the heart of humanism, and this linguistic distinction is so powerful that it actually determines who or what gets to live or die. It creates what Derrida calls a “symbolic economy,” which makes possible the “noncriminal putting to death” of some humans, as well as nonhumans.⁵ It is not surprising, for example, that in testimony defending himself in the shooting of Michael Brown, white police officer Darren Wilson described the eighteen year-old black teenager in “animalistic” terms, saying that Brown looked like a “demon,” that he looked “aggressive” and “hostile,” and that he made “a grunting, aggravated sound,” even as Wilson was actively shooting him (Bouie). In perhaps an even more disturbing use of what Cary Wolfe has called the “discourse of species,” the hashtag #Chimpout emerged on Twitter to denigrate the (mostly black) protesters in Ferguson, Missouri, who were outraged at Brown’s murder and the grand jury’s decision that Wilson would not be charged with a crime (Boswell). Describing particular humans in animalistic terms, or even calling them animals—“chimps,” in this example—allows people to posit others’ opinions, perspectives, and even lives, as valueless, and also reinforces the notion that nonhuman animals’ lives are without value as well. Crucial to my project is the understanding that not only is the category “animal” established and maintained by the human/animal dualism rooted in language, but also by other

⁴ See Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*.

⁵ See Wolfe, *Animal Rites* 6.

hierarchical binaries such as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, white/nonwhite, master/slave, reason/nature, mind/body, and subject/object that undergird Western philosophy and that form an “interlocking structure” recognized by theorists working in feminist, queer, and critical race studies as constituting a violent hierarchy because one term is always privileged over the other, while the middle term is elided. These dualisms are based on what Val Plumwood calls the “master model”—white, male, heterosexual, and “rational”—at the core of Western culture.⁶

Equally insidious as violence committed through language is systemic and institutional violence, which is often invisible. As Sean Parson points out, the public outcry over Cecil the Lion’s killing and the relative silence surrounding the killing of numerous black Americans by police officers over the past several years both reveal something important about how the public deals (or doesn’t) with systemic violence against both people of color and nonhuman animals. Parson explains that the Black Lives Matter Movement “frames the murder of black men and women through a systemic lens: highlighting the role of police, judges, and prisons in the maintenance of the white supremacist order” (Parson). Thus, this type of activism holds up a lens we don’t like to look at because it makes us complicit in racial injustice—we would rather this fact remain invisible. On the other hand, public outrage over Cecil’s killing functions in the opposite way. While we are all *also* complicit in systemic violence against animals based on the speciesist assumption that they exist mostly for human use, pleasure, or consumption, getting angry about the death of a somewhat well-known lion deflects our own guilt in a speciesist system.

* * *

I begin with these examples from contemporary culture to highlight how literary human-

⁶ See Plumwood and Gaard.

animal studies can both inform and be informed by them, as well as to show that what is at stake are real lives, human and nonhuman alike. The following chapters are based on the premise that any work in animal studies must be posthumanist, and therefore, not anthropocentric, in its theoretical and methodological approaches in order to effectively address the concerns of the field. Wolfe's stance has emerged in response to what is generally referred to as "animal rights" activism rooted in the 1970s and 80s, in which activists like Peter Singer (*Animal Liberation*, 1975) and Tom Regan (*The Case for Animal Rights*, 1983) made the argument that "a wide range of animals should not only be protected from violations to their bodily, emotional, and intellectual integrity (including slaughter and animal experimentation, for example), but should have moral and legal standing" (Johnson, *Race Matters* 6). According to traditional animal rights activism, "ethical and legal considerations should be afforded to all animals, regardless of their species, *who exhibit certain characteristics* such as the ability to anticipate pain and duress and an awareness of 'self'" (my emphasis, Johnson, *Race Matters* 6). The problem, however, with this so-called extensionist approach, which holds that established human rights should be "extended" to certain nonhuman animals, is that its ideology is ironically grounded in notions of human exceptionalism—animals who supposedly deserve better treatment or protection are those that are *most like humans*. On the other hand, a posthumanist animal studies, according to Lindgren Johnson, "attempts to resist anthropocentrism and to acknowledge the lives and histories of animals, and in doing so, demands the radical interrogation of the very idea of the human; Erica Fudge argues, in fact, that the history of animals can only be told *at the expense* of the human, demanding its demolition" (7). Furthermore, and of central concern to this project, is that scholarship that pays attention to animals but maintains humanist assumptions, does nothing

to expose or disentangle the interlocking oppressions of the human and nonhuman because it leaves the symbolic economy of the institution of speciesism in place.

Therefore, I attempt to do the kind of posthumanist work Wolfe champions through three approaches to the novels I examine. One approach is to analyze how the authors expose and subvert the discourse of speciesism. Another is to illuminate how biopower functions in relation to both humans and nonhumans in the texts and how this approach can inform our understandings of both ourselves and animal others as subjects governed at the level of the body. Finally, the third is to argue that each novel offers a way to think about the relationship between the human and nonhuman in terms of new materialism, especially material feminist approaches articulated by Stacy Alaimo and Donna Haraway. Of central concern here is always the question of how human beings can live more ethically and peaceably with other species, as well as with members of our own, and what possibilities the study of literary texts can offer in terms of, if not clear answers, new ways of thinking.

In the first chapter, “‘To be a good animal’: Towards a Queer-Posthumanist Reading of Carson McCullers’s *Reflections in a Golden Eye*,” I focus on Carson McCullers’s 1941 novella, a text filled with numerous literal and figurative animals. Some previous criticism on *Reflections in a Golden Eye* has at least acknowledged the prevalence of nonhuman animals in the novella, some paying closer attention than others, but ultimately, the scholarship itself is rooted in humanist assumptions that occlude reading for the posthumanist potentialities the text presents. I tease out McCullers’s engagement with the discourse of speciesism, arguing that she not only exposes its insidious nature in relation to both human and nonhuman subjects, but subverts it as well. Much of the first chapter focuses on representation—how *Reflections*

represents animality within both human and nonhuman animals, as well as how it represents affective relations between humans and animals, focusing in particular on the figure of a horse named Firebird, an animal that plays a significant role in the plot. Like many other critics of McCullers's work, I focus on its queer elements, but from a ecofeminist perspective, which, along with Foucault's analytics of biopower, highlights how the oppression of queer subjects in the novella is linked to speciesist rhetoric, ultimately arguing that affective relations between humans and animals can create a liberatory space.

The second chapter, "'Revolutionizing George's Meals': Vegetarianism, Identity, and Resistance in Charles Johnson's *Oxherding Tale*," focuses on the relationships between meat eating, race, and gender in Johnson's 1982 neo-slave narrative. Though vegetarianism is central to the novel's plot, emerging at the center of one of its key conflicts, no previous criticism has examined it. I argue that the novel posits vegetarianism as an act of resistance to systemic and institutionalized violence against African-Americans and women, while simultaneously recognizing and grappling with the sensitive issues related to a posthumanist approach to the linked oppressions between nonhuman animals and Othered social groups. That is, if people of color have historically been, and are often still, excluded from the category of "human," what is their stake in dismantling this category altogether? As Lindgren Johnson explains:

It almost goes without saying—according to the logic of extensionism—that while whites may have the requisite privilege to focus on animal rights, blacks, whose human status is rendered tenuous through the persistence of racism, do not. The purported rarity of black animal rights activists is symptomatic of the ongoing black fight to secure human rights, a fight which necessarily trumps the

animal rights fight. (4)

The text's recognition of this potential conflict places it in conversation with animal studies and critical race studies, fields that some would argue having inherently conflicting interests.

Because the consumption of animals for food is a key issue in regards to our ethical relations with other species, the predominate theoretical frame I introduce in this chapter is Carol Adams's groundbreaking work in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), which focuses on the gendering of animals and the animalizing of gender, as well as the racializing and classing of meat. Adams argues that meat eating, [white] patriarchy, and violence are linked. Focusing on interpersonal violence that appears early in the text, I show how the novel ultimately prompts us to think about the connections between meat eating and often invisible, institutionalized violence committed against both humans and animals and how it undergirds systems of domination.

Chapter three, "Invisible Violence, Biopolitics, and the Marketing of Modern 'Meat' in Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats*," takes up some of the concerns I explore in the previous chapter, but in a global, industrialized context. This chapter maintains a focus on the relationships between meat eating, race, gender, and class, but highlights how these issues play out on a much broader scale, especially in terms of how meat is marketed to consumers. Published in 1998, Ozeki's novel engages with contemporary issues such as the animal industrial complex, the primary site at which systemic violence against nonhuman animals is made invisible. I argue that the novel presents the alimentary as a system of regulation through which we define our identities to ourselves, to others, and in relation to meat eating, a practice that is inherently tied to speciesist rhetoric. In particular, human bodies—especially female bodies—in the text become sites of conflict and resistance to both actual and symbolic violence related to

meat eating. By exposing such violence, inherent in the production of meat, the novel foregrounds the complexities and difficulties of living ethically in relation to animals, as well as other humans, in a globalized, late-capitalist society. I also examine how both human and animal bodies in the text are transformed through biopower, ultimately claiming that while the novel offers no easy answers to the question of how to live ethically in the present, it foreshadows new materialist understandings of the human and nonhuman, which show that humans can no longer reasonably think of ourselves as wholly apart or separate from our physical environment, and in turn, other species.

Because meat eating, along with the production and marketing of meat, figures so heavily in the final two chapters, I conclude with another set of contemporary examples that illustrate not only the relevance of these issues to our lived experience, but also their entanglement with the identities that shape our ethical and political lives. A number of recent articles show that the link between meat eating and masculinity that Adams began to articulate in the early 1990s is still pervasive in mainstream American culture. In January of this year, *The New York Times* reported that for the first time ever, a federal report from the Agriculture and Health and Human Services Departments (updated every five years since 1980) singled out teenaged boys and men for consuming too much meat, chicken, and eggs (O'Connor). Not surprisingly, an industry spokesperson, Texas cattle rancher and doctor, Richard Thorpe, issued a public statement on behalf of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association meant to mitigate these findings (O'Connor). Especially pertinent to Adams's critical framework is the persistence of demeaning attitudes towards men who choose not to eat meat. For example, a 2014 story on NPR's *All Things Considered* titled "For These Vegans, Masculinity Means Protecting the Planet," includes

interviews with semi-professional athletes who claim they must regularly defend their choice to not consume or use animal products and address stereotypes that vegans are “weak, skinny, frail, [and] pale” (Ulaby). Another article, published in 2015 on the website VICE, titled “Why Men Are Afraid of Going Vegan,” asks, “While a ‘V’ on a restaurant menu now commonly means ‘vegetarian’ or ‘vegan,’ isn’t there also an unspoken assumption that it stands for ‘vagina’?” (Bolen). Men’s choice to maintain a vegan or vegetarian diet is implicated in heterosexism as well as sexism, since the refusal to eat meat is often framed as a failure of masculinity; thus, the implication is that men who refuse to eat meat are not only not “real” men, but more specifically, are queer.

Not only are veganism and vegetarianism associated with sexist assumptions and problematic gender and sexual stereotypes, they are also commonly implicated in racist ones as well. In an online article titled “Veganism Has a Serious Race Problem,” Claire Heuchan explains:

Type ‘vegan’ into Google and you won’t need to scroll through many pages to see what I mean. The routine comparisons of animal abuse to the enslavement of Black people shows exactly how little value white members of the vegan community, generally considered a liberal breed, place on Black life. This racism, so casually delivered, is designed to add shock value—to trigger a dietary epiphany. In reality, the only message these campaign materials send to Black people is this: veganism isn’t for you.

The comparisons to which Heuchan refers are a tactic used by activists based on the extensionist model, meant to suggest: “We’ve moved beyond these injustices committed against human

beings, so it's time to do so with animals." However, in a society in which black citizens are regularly gunned down in the street or beaten to death by white police officers who face no repercussions, such appeals can seem at best, out of touch, and at worst, offensive. In another particularly tone-deaf example that discounts the Black Lives Matter Movement for the sake of promoting animal rights, the activist group Vegan Revolution tweeted in April 2015, "Black lives matter...more than Chickens or Cows (sic) lives...apparently" (Heuchan). Furthermore, because so many visible vegan and vegetarian animal rights activists are white, more specifically, white people with a level of economic privilege that allows them to make very specific choices about what they will and will not eat, one may get the impression that there is no place for people of color in such movements, or even worse, that these individuals must choose to care about the lives of either humans or animals, but not both.

These examples align with my investment in Elspeth Probyn's argument that the alimentary, much like the sexual, is a major system of regulation in contemporary forms of identity. Probyn states that this assertion is based on "the current media fascination with food as the 'authentic' or fundamental grounds for identities, in terms of how individuals differentiate themselves, and as the conduit through which new collective identities are formed" (421). While a project in animal studies could lend itself to an examination of any number of ways that humans interact with animals—through experimentation, zoo keeping, pet keeping, training, labor, etc.—it seems to me that meat eating is perhaps the site at which violence against animals, both literal and symbolic, is most clear, but least visible, and thus requires significant work to disentangle in order to begin thinking about ethical relations with other species. Additionally, because what we eat figures so prominently in how we construct identities, meat eating is an

ideal place to start in order to map the relationships between animal studies, queer studies, critical race studies, and feminism. Food, as matter (often once-living animals) that we take into our own bodies, is also a clear starting point to begin thinking in terms of posthumanist new materialist modes of thought, such as Alaimo's notion of trans-corporeality. In her brief but instructive essay "Thinking as the Stuff of the World," Alaimo explains that trans-corporeality, along with other new materialisms, has emerged from a tradition in feminism which insists that "the human body is, simultaneously, a political, ontological, and epistemological site"; these perspectives thus recognize that "the posthuman being is entangled with the very stuff of the world" (16). As Alaimo puts it, "For feminists, LGBT people, persons with disabilities, and others [I would add, people of color] thinking through how corporeal processes, desires, orientations, and harms are in accordance with or divergent from social categories, norms, and discourses is a necessary epistemological and political process. For some people this is a matter of survival" (16). Thus, much more than mere thought experiments, new materialist understandings of the human subject have an important stake in the lives and deaths of both human and nonhuman animals.

CHAPTER I

“TO BE A GOOD ANIMAL”: TOWARDS A QUEER-POSTHUMANIST READING OF CARSON MCCULLERS’S *REFLECTIONS IN A GOLDEN EYE*

Carson McCullers’s poem “Love and the Rind of Time” reflects on the material history of the earth and the relatively recent evolution of the human species, posing two questions: “Only a flicker of eternity divides us from unknowing beast / And how far are we from the fern, the rose, essential yeast? / Indeed in these light aeons how far / From animal to evening star?”⁷ Though the poem references the traditional humanist binary—“us” and “unknowing beast”—it also acknowledges that “only a flicker” of evolutionary time separates humans from other sentient species. The poem even asserts that only an infinitesimal difference separates humans from even plants or fungi, and perhaps most strikingly, wonders at the notion that animals, which, in the context of the poem, I take to include human beings, are made of the same matter, the same material substance, as the stars. It goes on to claim that in the entire cosmos, “Nothing lapses, no gene is lost,” and in the last stanza, reflects on how, in the evolutionary process, the “struggling gene[s]” of seaweed “predestine” cells that become fish, that become nonhuman mammals, that become human beings.

McCullers’s poem provides an appropriate entry into understanding how this chapter’s analysis of her 1941 novella *Reflections in a Golden Eye* can both benefit from and inform

⁷ Printed in *The Mortgaged Heart* 290-1

twenty-first century modes of critique—literary human-animal studies, posthumanism, and material feminisms—that have turned away from the human and the discursive and towards the other-than-human and the material as their primary areas of focus, and their intersections with gender studies, critical race theory, and queer theory. “Love and the Rind of Time” serves as an excellent example of McCullers’s interrogation of the human and her interest in thinking about not only species, but materiality in general, in terms of connection and continuum. The poem imagines corporeality as what Stacy Alaimo calls “trans-corporeality”—“in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world” (*Bodily* 4). The concept of trans-corporeality, Alaimo explains, “underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’” (*Bodily* 2). Literary analysis that takes into account the other-than-human has become increasingly urgent as we recognize how our fantasies about the human have had destructive effects on other species and the planet, as well as how the human/nonhuman binary has been deployed against members of our *own* species.

In this chapter, I argue that *Reflections* problematizes the discourse of speciesism by making it visible, thus, exposing a network of interlocking oppressions. I also attempt to take nonhuman animal agency in the novel seriously, along with human/nonhuman animal relations, particularly by focusing on the figure of the horse Firebird. Drawing from Michel Foucault’s analytics of power, this chapter illuminates ways that McCullers both subverts the discourse of speciesism and queers the human/nonhuman binary, specifically through her characters’ challenges to regimes of biopower. Though other critics have observed the presence of numerous nonhuman animals in the text, their readings are mostly anthropocentric—they take the institution of speciesism for granted and fail to interrogate its related discourse. Such readings

assume that nonhuman animals in the text are mere symbols or substitutes that ultimately only exist to serve humanist ends.

Before delving into my analysis of the novel, it is pertinent to clarify some key terms and concepts that I use throughout this chapter. First, in discussing queer aspects of McCullers's work, I am unconcerned with how the author herself uses the term "queer." Rather, I agree with Rachel Adams that current usages of queer theory "not only allow for a more supple understanding of intimacy but also help to explain how McCullers's fiction resists the regimes of the normal that dominated American culture in her time" (556). The novella's main character Captain Weldon Penderton is arguably the most clearly "queer" character in all of McCullers's fiction, that is, if the term "queer" is used solely to denote same-sex object choice. The narrator explains that the Captain had "a sad penchant for becoming enamoured of his wife's [male] lovers" (314), and McCullers herself referred to the Captain as "a homosexual" (*The Mortgaged Heart* 276). The term "homosexual," however, suggests a fixed identity category that does not adequately reverberate with the wide range of intimacies and relations that abound in text.

Secondly, adding the term "posthumanist" to a queer analysis foregrounds the importance of both human and nonhuman bodies, along with materiality more generally, in the text. My understanding of posthumanism is drawn from Cary Wolfe, who states in *What Is Posthumanism?*:

[P]osthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatics, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore, a historical development that points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms...a new mode of thought that

comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon. (xv-xvi)

Wolfe asserts that the concept of the “human” is predicated not only on the hierarchical binary of human/animal, but is also achieved by “transcending the bonds of materiality and embodiment altogether”; thus, to suggest that something is posthumanist is to say that it “opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy [about the human], inherited from humanism” (*What Is?* xv). In other words, humanism imagines the human subject as both *disembodied* and separate from “nature.” My goal in performing a queer-posthumanist reading of McCullers’s novella is to highlight those moments in the text that work towards what Michael O’Rourke explains as “open[ing] ourselves to the sense of the world,” becoming “singular plural, not substantial, settled, or stable subjects, but singular beings in a relational regime independent of identitarianism or anthropomorphism,” which is, in turn, “facilitative of a creation of the world, a redesigning of it, and makes space for new relations, affective ones, between subject and world” (xvii-xviii). Reading *Reflections* from a queer-posthumanist perspective provides opportunities for greater openness and for foregrounding the importance of relationality and intimacies between the human and nonhuman.

Finally, a queer-posthumanist lens allows me to foreground the discourse of speciesism and its intersections in the text with gender, sexuality, race. Traditional humanist understandings of the human subject require the sacrifice of the “animal” and the “animalistic” to constitute the full transcendence of the “human.” This, in turn, Wolfe explains, “makes possible a symbolic economy in which we can engage in what Derrida will call a ‘noncriminal putting to death’ of other *humans* as well by marking *them* as animal” (*Animal* 6). As I illustrated in the introduction,

Othured human individuals and groups can be categorized as “animal” as a means to justify their oppression by the “fully” or “more” human. Like categories of race, gender, and sexuality, species difference is produced as an effect of interconnected power relationships. Val Plumwood articulates a critique of Western philosophy based on what she calls the “master model,” or the identity that is at the core of Western culture, arguing that the oppression and devaluation of nature are linked to the construction of the dominant (white) human male as the possessor of reason, and the construction of reason as inherently opposed to nature and all its associations, including women, the body, emotions, reproduction, and of course, nonhuman animals.

Plumwood’s master model is based on a number of hierarchical dualisms, including, but not limited to master/slave, male/female, white/nonwhite, mind/body, subject/object, reason/nature, civilized/savage, and human/animal (43). Greta Gaard, constructing a framework for queer ecofeminism, adds heterosexual/homosexual to this list (116). In order for the rhetoric of speciesism to succeed, the institution of speciesism and the hierarchical binaries on which it is based must be taken for granted and accepted as “natural.” Essentially, it is an invisible rhetoric.

Details of McCullers’s biography suggest that she must have been acutely aware of her own corporeality, her body’s limitations and longings, its potentials for pleasures and pains. When she was only a senior in high school, McCullers was stricken with rheumatic fever, an illness that probably contributed to her lifelong struggle with poor health and bouts of mandatory bed rest (Carr 568). She completed *Reflections* in just two months, soon after she had been confined to bed once again after physically exhausting herself writing her first novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (Carr 570). Additionally, McCullers’s non-normative relationships and desires are well-documented. In Rachel Adams’s work on “deviant” and “freak” bodies in

McCullers's work, she argues that the bodies of "freaks" in McCullers's work "provide the visible evidence of queer desires that cannot be domesticated" (553). Finally, McCullers's experience as the wife of a soldier must have made her intimately familiar with the disciplinary practices that an institution such as the military imposes on bodies.⁸ Originally titled *Army Post*, *Reflections* is set on a military base in the South and portrays the convoluted relationships that play out on an army post during peacetime. Its main character, Captain Penderton, becomes obsessed with a young soldier, Private Williams, who in turn becomes obsessed with the Captain's saucy wife Leonora. Leonora herself is having an affair with the Captain's colleague, Major Langdon, who is married to the fragile and disturbed Allison, whose closest friend is her effeminate Filipino "houseboy" Anacleto. In paying attention to corporeality, along with the intimate entanglements in *Reflections*, I join other scholars such as Rachel Adams and Sarah Gleeson-White, who are both concerned with McCullers's deviant bodies or "freaks," but I add to their critiques a specific attention to biopower and how it manifests in the text, a perspective that seems especially pertinent to a novel set on an army base, and that additionally opens *Reflections* up to posthumanist potentialities.

Foucault's analytics of power holds that in the modern era, citizens are governed at the level of the body rather than the level of the "mind" or "soul." In *Discipline and Punish*, he argues that discipline produces "docile bodies," bodies that are subjected and practiced, explaining the dual function of discipline as such:

Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it

⁸ Although the term "the body" may sometimes seem to flow more efficiently, will attempt to avoid it because I feel that it implies an abstraction, when what I mean to emphasize is the *particularity* of individual bodies.

dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an ‘aptitude,’ a ‘capacity,’ which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. (138)

In other words, discipline takes hold of bodies by controlling their energies—by regulating the movements they exercise. This is particularly clear in settings such as factories, schools, and military bases, where the repetition of specific bodily acts is the mechanism by which power functions. Foucault identifies four techniques of discipline: It sometimes requires *enclosure*, “a protected place of disciplinary monotony” that is different from all others and closed in on itself (141). Disciplinary space is divided into sections and thus relies on *partitioning* (143). It requires *functional sites*, or usable space (143). And finally, its units, which exist in the form of individual bodies, are organized by *rank* (145).

The opening lines of *Reflections* demonstrate Foucault’s analysis of how a disciplinary system like the military functions, a point on which the remainder of the novella’s plot turns:

An army post in peacetime is a dull place. Things happen, but then they happen over and over again. The general plan of a fort in itself adds to the monotony—the huge concrete barracks, the neat rows of officers’ homes built one precisely like the other, the gym, the chapel, the golf course and the swimming pools—all is designed according to a certain rigid pattern. (309)

McCullers’s description of the army base highlights its monotony and insularity and its partitioning of usable space. Especially interesting is the mention of spaces that are meant for recreation—even these cannot exist outside of the disciplinary organization of space, and thus,

seem incapable of fulfilling their promise of pleasure, opening a gap, or raising questions of where, when, and how pleasures may be experienced. While Foucault's perspective on the potential for resistance to power in *Discipline and Punish* has been regarded as quite bleak, he later contends in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, "The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures" (157). Ladelle McWhorter reminds us that, according to Foucault, sex was invented, and thus, "There is no naturally existing single thing that every instance of the word *sex* actually names. Once it emerges as an epistemic object, sex can be used to explain all kinds of things about people's behavior. Eventually, it becomes the explanatory principle par excellence, used to explain virtually everything about most of us" (124). Individuals who are deemed sexually deviant are, of course, particularly at the mercy of the disciplines. Desires, then, even in the plural, can always be used in disciplinary regimes to create and control subjects. Pleasures, on the other hand, are productive, and can resist normalizing discourses. In *Reflections*, such pleasures manifest as queer-posthumanist experiences shared by human and nonhuman, which produce new spaces for unexpected experiences that defy conventional or expected categorization.

Though Foucault does not explicitly examine how biopower functions in relation to nonhuman animals, scholars of critical animal studies have recently begun to apply his analytics of power to humans' relationships with other species. For example, Chloë Taylor points out that biopower, as regulatory and disciplinary, is not mutually exclusive with Foucault's concept of sovereign power, or "the right to kill." She reminds us that this relation of power is typically invisible because sovereign power, while originating with overt war or violence, "continues in

the guise of politics and through the exercise of a law that becomes naturalized” (“Foucault and Critical” 541). The fact that many of our encounters with nonhuman animals actually occur when we consume them or use products produced by, or made from, their bodies is a clear example of the naturalized “right to kill,” as well as a powerful symbol of our sovereign power over other species. “Sovereign power,” which is actually a self-appointed right, is naturalized through myths of origin and/or difference. We use the concepts of difference and similarity to govern our relations with various nonhuman species—whether it is ethical to domesticate them, confine them to zoos or labs, preserve them, or kill them. If we agree with Foucault that in the modern era, citizens are governed at the level of the body, then this emphasis on corporeality, as Sherryl Vint puts it, “forces us to confront our continuity with other animals, and to rethink the nature of governance in a biopolitical era in which power acts upon bodies and forms subjects through its action” (444). Similarly, Wolfe asserts, “For biopolitical theory, the animality of the human becomes a central problem—perhaps *the* central problem—to be produced, controlled, or regulated for politics in its distinctly modern form” (*What Is?* 100). Thus, thinking about humans *as* animals in biopolitical systems, as well as considering parallel ways that biopower governs both humans’ and nonhuman animals’ bodies, can lead to posthumanist understandings of human and animal subjects and relations.

In a telling exchange near the end of the novel, Major Langdon shares with Captain Penderton his philosophy on “the good life”: “Only two things matter to me now, to be a good animal and to serve my country. A healthy body and patriotism” (386). The Major’s favorite aphorism reflects a major concern of posthumanist thought—the recognition that human beings *are* animals *with* bodies. As Wolfe points out, “far from suggesting a period “after” the human,

posthumanist perspectives require that we “attend to that thing called ‘the human’ with greater specificity, greater attention to its embodiment, embeddedness, and materiality” (*What Is?* 120). In other words, we can no longer set “the human” wholly apart from other species based on concepts such as “mind” or “reason,” *especially* if we understand one condition of modernity to be that subjects are governed at the level of the body. The Major’s comment also makes the point that humans, like many other animals, undergo a process of domestication. This process occurs through their positioning within disciplinary systems that construct and reify the categories of gender, sexuality, race, and species. Like the Captain’s recognition of his own animality in Firebird’s gaze, Major Langdon’s statement reminds us that the subject we understand as “human” has always been animal.

Foucault’s fourth technique of discipline—rank—is crucial to my reading of *Reflections* because McCullers explicitly links the concepts of rank and species in the text. Early in the novella, the narrator lists the “participants” of the tragedy as “two officers, a soldier, two women, a Filipino, and a horse” (309). As Robert Martin points out, “The sequence can hardly be accidental: first the White men, by rank; then the women, unranked; then the ‘Oriental,’ sex not indicated; then the horse. The men are situated by their military ranks, the women by their gender; the Filipino has neither rank nor gender,” and the horse, of course, is named last in the hierarchical list (2). Rank, however, is not fixed; it exists only within a network of relations. Foucault observes that discipline itself is an “art of rank, a technique for the transformation of arrangements” (*Discipline* 146). Counterintuitively, however, the “difference” of rank, like species, is achieved through perceived sameness—the individual who is most like the one “above” him will rise in rank—a point the narrator reiterates by explaining that part of the

“dullness” of life on an army base can be attributed to the fact that “once a man enters the army he is expected only to follow the heels ahead of him” (309). In other words, the “art of rank” is based on norms, whether they function as genders, sexualities, races, bodies, or species.

McCullers also explicitly positions the concept of rank within disciplinary structures of gender and sexual normativity. For example, Major Langdon, the most normatively masculine character in the novel, is constantly irritated by his employee Anacleto’s queer gender performances, but he begrudgingly tolerates Anacleto due to his wife Allison’s attachment to him. Anacleto, frequently referred to in the text as the “little Filipino,” mimics the timbre of Allison’s voice (335), paints watercolors (384), moves about house like a ballet dancer, and attempts to speak French, in part to annoy Major Langdon (333). In turn, the Major fantasizes about how he could discipline Anacleto’s body if only the latter were one of his soldiers, telling him, “God! You’re a rare bird. What I wouldn’t do if I could get you in my battalion!” (333) In a revealing conversation with Captain Penderton, the Major expresses his understanding of how military discipline functions by reflecting, “Anacleto wouldn’t have been happy in the army, no, but it might have *made a man of him*. Would have *knocked all the nonsense out of him* anyway...In the army they would have run him ragged and he would have been miserable, but even that seems to me better than *the other*” (my emphasis, 384). The Captain, struggling with his own maligned queer desires, responds:

You mean that any fulfillment obtained at the expense of normalcy is wrong, and should not be allowed to bring happiness. In short, it is better, because it is morally honorable, for the square peg to keep scraping about the round hole rather than to discover and use the unorthodox square that would fit it? (384)

The Major replies in the affirmative, and his statement demonstrates that one goal of the military's regulatory power is normative gender expression, which is achieved at least in part through the perpetual threat of physical violence to bodies. Furthermore, the Major asserts that gender and sexual normativity is more important than being happy. To put it another way, being queer is worse than being unhappy.

In addition to positioning the concept of rank within disciplinary structures of gender and sexual normativity, McCullers also links the concepts of rank, species, and race. Describing the Captain's disdain for unranked men, the narrator explains, "He looked on all soldiers with bored contempt. To him officers and men might belong to the same biological genus, but they were of an altogether different species" (314). Here, McCullers explicitly uses the discourse of species to express the Captain's prejudice against men that he views as "beneath" him and compares the concept of rank to that of species. Ironically, however, Private Williams's own disregard for higher ranking officers is described in very similar terms: "To this young Southern soldier the officers were in the same vague category as negroes—they had a place in his life, but he did not look on them as being human" (390). This example demonstrates how the institution of speciesism and its surrounding discourse, mostly naturalized and invisible, actually function. The Private views neither blacks nor officers as human beings. In fact, we learn that in his past, the Private murdered a black man in an argument over a wheelbarrow of manure, hid the body, and never felt remorse for the act: "He had felt a certain wondering, numb distress, but there was no fear in him, and not once since that time had the thought shaped definitely in his mind that he was a murderer" (369). By rhetoric inherent within the institution of speciesism, the Private assumes, in Foucauldian terms, sovereign power—"the right to kill"—over the black man

because he does not think of him as human.

By revealing the ironic similarities in the Captain's and the Private's attitudes towards their social others, framed by the language of rank, species, and race, McCullers denaturalizes and subverts the hierarchical binaries associated with all three. The parallelism of the two men's perspectives is shocking and reveals precisely the dangerous consequence of the institution of speciesism: As long as violence towards, or the killing of, nonhuman animals based on species difference remains lawful, naturalized, and unexamined, there is always the possibility that the symbolic economy of speciesism will be used to mark *any* social Other as not-human, and in turn, not deserving of the right to live or live safely.

At this point, I should clarify that my goal here is not to argue that *Reflections* engages in what is typically understood as "animal rights activism." I do assert, however, that McCullers's engagement with the discourse of speciesism, along with its potential consequences for both human and nonhuman subjects, is more complex than others have acknowledged. Specifically, along with the categories of gender, sexuality, and race, the text troubles the category of the "human" through its attention to corporeality and queer affective relations between humans and nonhuman animals. Other critics have provided a lens through which to view the discourse of speciesism in the novella as a reification of the status quo. For example, Gary Richards argues that McCullers "demonizes" the novel's "heterosexual" characters—Major Langdon, Leonora, and Private Williams—by portraying them as "stupid, animalistic, nymphomaniacal, and/or sadistic," claiming that this is evidence of McCullers's "plea for the acceptance of nonnormative gender and desire" (165). Richards rightfully points out that the Major and Leonora are particularly associated with their physical bodies, along with indulgences in physical pleasures,

from sex to food and drink.⁹ The Major is zoomorphized by his nickname “The Buffalo,” and Leonora’s name is rooted in animality, which, according to Richards, connotes “ferocious leonine femininity” (166).

Richards’s critique, however, in addition to leaving the discourse of speciesism unexamined by assuming that the term “animalistic” “naturally” connotes stupidity, nymphomania, and sadism, also misses several important points. While the Captain and Allison Langdon express disdain and disgust for their spouses’ indulgence in physical pleasures—for example, Allison describes Leonora as “*nothing* but an animal” (my emphasis, 360) a clear instance of how the discourse of speciesism can be used to dehumanize human beings—the text *also* demonstrates the dangers of such speciesist rhetoric when applied to human subjects by juxtaposing Captain Penderton’s and Private Williams’s parallel dehumanization of their social others. Furthermore, the novella seems to valorize characters’ embrace of their own corporeality, and thus, their animality. For example, Private Williams is able to escape the disciplinary space of the army base by riding into the woods where he often removes his clothing and basks naked in the sun (344). Leonora walks around nude in her own living room, a behavior her husband feels threatenby, thus laying claim to her own power, sexual and otherwise. When the Captain threatens her with violence on one such occasion, Leonora replies, “Son, have you ever been collared and dragged out in the street and thrashed by a naked woman? (317) Richards also contends that Allison is “sadistic” because she attempts to cut off her own nipples with a pair of garden shears because, according to his reading, she is “so invested in the results of her

⁹ For example, the narrator claims that Leonora is “very stupid” and that her mind is usually filled with “thoughts of food and sport” (349), and both she and the Major are referred to as “great eaters” (319). Leonora’s standard of cleanliness and propriety is also called into question: “If the Captain’s wife ever chanced to find a black, crooked hair in her food, she wiped it calmly on her napkin and went right on with the enjoyment of her dinner without the bat of an eye,” and her kitchen is “by no means clean” (316).

procreative heterosexuality that when her child dies, she mutilates those parts of her body simultaneously associated with erotic stimulation and the nurture of children” (166). However, recalling Plumwood’s claim that the hierarchical binary of production/reproduction is analogous to human/animal, Allison’s self-mutilation can also be understood as the manifestation of her anxieties over her own status *as* human-animal. Both the Captain and Allison repress their sexuality and are unable to embrace physical pleasure or their own bodies, unlike their spouses, who consummate their affair in “nature,” among the blackberry bushes during a ride in the woods (339). The result is that both Allison and the Captain are deeply unhappy and troubled, and pleasure eludes them.

Finally, Richards’s claim that the novel’s “heterosexual” characters are “demonized” as “animalistic” is inaccurate because *none* of the characters can be clearly classified as heteronormative. While the Major consistently maintains a traditionally masculine gender performance, his obsessive wish to have institutionalized access to and control over Anacleto’s body—“What I wouldn’t do if I could get you in my battalion!”—suggests the presence of queer desire and certainly the desire to force Anacleto to assimilate into homosocial relations and spaces. Leonora’s heterosexuality is complicated by the framed photograph of her boarding-school roommate that has hung in her various rooms for eleven years, which reads, “To Leonora with Oodles of Love from Bootsie” (341). Finally, while the text does not suggest that the Private is attracted to other men, neither has he ever engaged in hetero-sex, and his affective relations with animals are quite clearly coded as queer. Taught by his father, a minister, that women’s bodies are sources of sickness and contagion, the Private is drawn to animals in a way that, while not explicitly sexual, clearly provides the satisfaction of physical intimacy. For

example, at seventeen, he saved up his own money to purchase a cow he named Ruby Jewel: “On winter mornings the boy would get up before daylight and go out with a lantern to his cow’s stall. He would press his forehead against her warm flank as he milked and talk to her in soft, urgent whispers. He put his cupped hands down into the pail of frothy milk and drank with lingering swallows” (325). I discuss some of Richard’s points at length not merely to point out that they do not take into account McCullers’s complex engagement with the discourse of speciesism, but also to highlight how the text frames both animality and relations between humans and animals in terms of the non-normative or queer. The queer affective relations portrayed between Private Williams and animals, for example, are consistent with Leonora and the Captain’s interactions with the horse Firebird, the central nonhuman figure in the novella.

Though Firebird is listed last among the participants of the novella’s tragedy, he nevertheless plays a major role in the plot. Other critics have taken note of Firebird’s significant, or perhaps unusual, role in the text. In 1952, Oliver Evans noted that “not even the horse...is normal” (qtd. in Free 432). Free has pointed out that the name “Firebird” is constructed with words connoting “passion” (fire) and “queer” (bird), which leads her to assert that, for Captain Penderton, the horse becomes a substitute for Private Williams. Free argues that the Captain’s eventual violence towards Firebird is “an attempt to destroy desires that are specifically queer” (434).¹⁰ Similarly, in her excellent book on McCullers’s work, Sarah Gleeson-White claims that Firebird is a “substitute for more orthodox channels of desire for Penderton” (54). While Free and Gleeson-White connect Firebird to the Captain’s queer desires, both of their

¹⁰ Free also performs an interesting reading of queer birds in the text, citing Lillian Faderman’s extensive history of 20th-century American lesbian life. According to Faderman, “queer bird” was a term popular in the 1930s that was used to refer to lesbians (Free 106). The Major refers to Anacleto as a “rare bird” (333), and the novella’s title—*Reflections in a Golden Eye*—refers to a vision of a peacock that appears to both of the queer male characters, Anacleto and Captain Penderton.

arguments position the horse as a mere substitute, which ignores his agency and essentially erases his presence in the text, a symbolic violence committed by language that renders the animal invisible.

Much more than a mere symbol or substitute, Firebird is full character, and McCullers gives him a degree of agency that exceeds that of some of the novel's human characters. The narrative positions Leonora and her beloved horse as a young married couple—the narrator refers to Firebird as “a young husband” and to Leonora as his “beloved and termagant wife” (322). Early in their relationship, when Firebird was “ill-trained,” the pair struggled for dominance, resulting twice in Leonora being thrown and biting through her bottom lip, leaving blood on her clothing, a visible sign for all the soldiers to see.¹¹ The sign of Leonora's blood is especially significant in light of the fact that the Captain had been impotent and unable to take his wife's virginity on their wedding night, which further confirms Firebird's role as Leonora's “lover.”¹² Despite their earlier struggles, Firebird is eventually “perfectly trained” by his mistress. Fascinatingly, however, the two continue to *act out* their prior skirmishes because it gives them both pleasure: “During this struggle between horse and rider, Mrs. Penderton laughed aloud and spoke to Firebird in a voice that was vibrant with passion and excitement: ‘You sweet old bastard, you!’” (322). Their erotically charged performance “had a theatrical, affected air—it was a jocular pantomime performed for their own amusement and the benefit of spectators. Even when the froth showed on his mouth, the horse moved with a certain fractious grace *as though aware of being watched*” (my emphasis, 322). Firebird, though perfectly trained, docile, and

¹¹ “Twice Mrs. Penderton was badly thrown, and once when she returned from her ride the soldiers saw that she had bitten her lower lip quite through so that there was blood on her sweater and shirt” (322).

¹² “When she married the Captain she had been a virgin. Four nights after her wedding, she was still a virgin, and on the fifth night her status was changed only enough to leave her somewhat puzzled” (322).

under the command of his mistress, chooses to perform this daily “mock rebellion,” which both he and Leonora understand to be a game, a form of play. McCullers portrays Firebird as a creature with agency—he actively engages in a shared dramatic performance with Leonora, is aware of being observed by an audience and derives pleasure from this fact, as well as from the repetition of the performance itself.

The play between Leonora and Firebird is especially pertinent in light of the strict disciplinary structure of the military base. As I mention above, even those spaces meant for recreation do not exist outside of the disciplinary organization of space, which raises questions of where, when, and how pleasures may be experienced on the base. Leonora and Firebird’s “games” suggest an answer that lends itself to a Foucauldian understanding of the subversive potential of bodies and pleasures. In work on what she refers to as “queer canine literature,” Alice Kuzniar asserts that pleasures shared between humans and their pets can disrupt normative sexual identity categories because these relationships may “redefine where intimacy, even eroticism can lie, and articulate a desire for a different passion, intensity, and tactile knowledge” (206). Instances of play, whether they occur between humans, or between humans and nonhuman animals, as with Leonora and Firebird, are examples of intimate, though not necessarily sexual, relations. Thus, such interactions between humans and nonhumans have queer potentiality. According to Kuzniar, intimacy between humans and their pets can transcend the “constrictions that gender and sexuality place upon the human body...not in the banal sense that it offers different forms of genital stimulation”; rather, pleasure shared between humans and nonhuman animals “opens up the subject in unique ways that, *precisely because independent of gender and sexuality*, are liberating” (my emphasis, 208). Thus, Leonora and Firebird’s play can be

understood as a queer-posthumanist resistance to biopower, which resurfaces in Captain Penderton's own intimate relations with the horse.

As the title of the novella suggests, the trope of vision—as various forms of seeing, looking, and watching—plays a significant role in the text. In one sense, this is a reminder of the perpetual surveillance that, according to Foucault, disciplines modern subjects, or more specifically, encourages us to discipline ourselves. The nonhuman gaze, however, also figures heavily throughout the text. In fact, the “golden eye” of the title refers to the vision of a “great bird,” that both Captain Penderton and Anacleto see. Free argues that these two [queer] birds link the grotesque and the queer, “an association that generates a picture of the destructive effects of queer silencing” (426). She also notes that the color purple, used to describe Firebird's eyes, signals queer desire (434). I argue that, in addition to connoting anxieties over non-normative desire, the pervasiveness of the animal gaze in the text also connotes anxiety related to the status of the human as a transcendent figure. The nonhuman gaze is a reminder that, in Wolfe's words, the animal is always “frightfully nearby, always lying in wait at the very heart of the constitutive disavowals and self-constructing narratives enacted by that fantasy figure called ‘the human’” (*Animal* 6). In his now-famous account of his own pet cat seeing him naked, Derrida states in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*:

As with every bottomless gaze, as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called “animal” offers to my sight the abysmal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say, the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name that he believes his gives himself. (12)

When Derrida asserts, “The animal looks at me, and I am naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there” (5), being “naked” refers both to the cultural standard that we should feel shame at our own nudity and being stripped of the supposed difference at the foundation of our self-definition as “human.” When Captain Penderton meets Firebird’s gaze, a moment that occurs prior to his fateful ride on the horse, which I discuss at length below, he sees in Firebird’s “round, purple eyes...a liquid image of his own frightened face” (351). Gleeson-White asserts that eyes in the novel do not see, but merely reflect; in this case, she convincingly argues that Firebird’s eyes reflect the Captain’s anxiety over his culturally-maligned desires (56). I would add, however, that the horse’s gaze also produces anxiety in Captain Penderton because it forces him to confront his identity stripped of the normalizing terms not only of rank, gender, and sexuality, but of species as well.

Presumably, Firebird’s gaze evokes a sense of shame in the Captain. According to Freud and Lacan, shame is what separates humans from other animals. Kuzniar, however, suggests that humans actually experience shame when we act most naturally or “animal like.”¹³ Shame, like abjection, Kari Weil asserts, “reveals our animality in the moment we most wish to distinguish ourselves from it” (63). She continues, “Abjection [often conceived of as animal or body] unsettles the boundaries between me and not-me or between me and my group or kin and forces me to separate myself from it, sometimes violently, in order to affirm who I am” (64). The Captain’s recognition of both unfathomable difference *and* sameness with the nonhuman other reiterates the line in “Love and the Rind of Time”: “Only a flicker of eternity divides us from unknowing beast.” We see these anxieties play out when the Captain beats Firebird in an attempt to reinstate the condition of sovereign power of the human over the nonhuman, of normative

¹³ See Weil, 63.

over queer, an ordering that, despite his fleeting moment of joy, re-makes Captain Penderton's world so that its order makes sense.

The most straightforward explanation of the Captain's queer desires in the text is his habit of "becoming enamoured of his wife's lovers" (314). This is true of his friend Major Langdon, with whom Leonora has carried on a prolonged affair.¹⁴ Because Firebird is clearly figured as one of Leonora's lovers, the text sets up parallel triangulations: Leonora/Captain Penderton/Major Langdon and Leonora/Captain Penderton/Firebird. Additionally, the Captain seems to associate his wife's horse with the object of his obsession, Private Williams, who works in the stables, is always near animals, and unlike the Captain, is a skilled rider. Though the Captain is a clumsy and ill-trained rider, a well-known fact among the soldiers—they refer to him as "Captain Flap-Fanny" behind his back—he nevertheless opts to take the defiant and strong-willed Firebird out for a ride. When he initially mounts the animal, Captain Penderton expects Firebird to rebel, and he is pleased, if surprised, when the horse seems amenable to his command. Though the Captain takes Firebird's docility as a sign that he is in control, the reader knows that Firebird is likely performing just as he does with Leonora. At the beginning of their ride, the Captain allows Firebird to gallop as he pleases, but suddenly, "with no preliminary tightening of the reigns, [he] jerked the horse up short" so that "Firebird lost his balance, sidestepped awkwardly and reared" (352). This procedure, we learn, "was not new to the Captain. Often in his life he had exacted many strange and secret little penances on himself which he would have found difficult to explain to others" (352). It seems clear that the "strange

¹⁴ "And although the affair between his wife and Major Langdon had been a torment to him, he could not think of any likely change without dread. Indeed his torment had been a rather special one, as he was just as jealous of his wife as he was of her lover. In the last year he had come to feel an emotional regard for the Major that was the nearest thing to love that he had ever known" (327).

and secret little penances” the Captain enacts on himself are sexual, probably masturbatory, in nature, and he attempts to enact this process on Firebird.

Captain Penderton’s critical mistake, however, is that he fails to take the animal’s own agency into account. When this becomes clear, the Captain is terrified, but Firebird’s actions lead to a momentary transformative experience for him. Waiting until they reach a steep cliff, Firebird finally abandons the established trail and plunges down “with the speed of a demon” (353). As the Captain clings desperately to the horse’s mane, resting his head along Firebird’s neck, he whispers to himself, “I am lost.” He “saw suddenly as he had never seen before. The world was a kaleidoscope” (354). Through the dizzying speed of his movement atop the horse, the Captain sees anew the stuff of the world in impossible detail—a tiny flower half-buried in leaves, a pinecone, a bird in the sky, an individual shaft of sunlight, and he becomes aware of his own body as a part of the body of the world. When he loses control of the horse, the Captain feels a “mad joy” and a corporeal pleasure that he has never experienced before:

He felt the marvel of his own tense body, his laboring heart, and the miracle of blood, muscle, nerves, and bone. The Captain knew no terror now; he had soared to that rare level of consciousness where the mystic feels that the earth is he and that he is the earth. Clinging crabwise to the runaway horse, there was a grin of rapture on his bloody mouth. (354)

The Captain’s experience is orgasmic and, like some of Leonora’s rides with Firebird, marked by blood, a reminder of his inconvenient, but unavoidable, corporeality and physical desires.

Gleeson-White argues that this climactic scene speaks to the “transformative promise” of “alternative pleasures” (52). She goes on to assert, “In creating *metaphoric relations between the*

self and an other, the homoerotic body of McCullers's text swells beyond its limits in a shattering of the self" (my emphasis, 58). It is essential to point out, however, that the Captain's transformative experience is not, in fact, the result of "metaphoric relations." Rather, the agency of the nonhuman animal, along with the *specific* corporeal relation between man and horse, is the catalyst for the Captain's moment of transcendence. The question of the Captain's homoerotic sexual desires is irrelevant in this particular time and space, for the very *escape* from these desires into pure bodily pleasure is what constitutes the moment as transformative. Furthermore, while I agree with Gleeson-White that the Captain experiences a "shattering of the self," specifically through abandoning his own subjectivity—the normative identity constituted by the disciplinary structures governing his day-to-day life—I take her conclusion a step further. Not only is Captain Penderton freed from his identity as white, heterosexual, male officer, but the even more essential identity as *human*, the category upon which our notions of race, gender, class, and sexuality are fundamentally based. Thus, what the Captain experiences is a queer-posthumanist loss of selfhood, a moment that shatters the self and opens a space for new affective relations between self and Other.

This moment is also very specifically dependent on Captain Penderton's particular interaction with a companion species. Donna Haraway points out that as a verb, "*to companion* is 'to consort,' 'to keep company,' with sexual and generative connotations always ready to erupt" (17). We can understand the Captain's experience as what Haraway refers to as "becoming with." The notion of "becoming with" offers one way to imagine humanity as "a spatial and temporal web of interspecies dependencies," not set apart from the rest of the material world (Haraway 11). For Haraway, this particularly means humans in relation to the companion

species with which we share our everyday lives, with which we share both bits and pieces of our material bodies, as well as various forms of non-verbal communication. In reference to her companion canine Cayenne, Haraway writes: “We are training each other in acts of communication we barely understand. We are, constitutively, companion species. We make each other up, in the flesh. Significantly, other to each other, in specific difference, we signify a nasty developmental infection called love. This love is a historical aberration and a naturalcultural legacy” (16). The prose that McCullers uses to describe what Captain Penderton experiences is reminiscent of the question posed at the end of “Love and the Rind of Time”: “From weed to dinosaur through the peripheries of stars / From furthest star imperiled on the rind of time, / How long to core of love in human mind?” Arguably, nothing like what we typically understand as “love” occurs between the Captain and Firebird, yet, his experience, which occurs as a result of queer affective relations with a nonhuman animal, is the closest thing to self-love that he is able to experience. Notably, this love of self emerges only when he is able to see himself as both self *and* Other, when the borders between human self and world are dissolved. This moment leads the Captain to perceive himself as trans-corporeal; thus, the text invites both the rider and the reader to reflect on the subject we perceive as “human” as always intermeshed with the more-than-human world.

Though *Reflections* presents a moment of radical openness and freedom for the Captain, it is ultimately fleeting, and the text forecloses the possibility that he will either live more peacefully with himself, or more ethically in relation to nonhuman animals, issues that are framed in relation to one another in the novella. Early on, McCullers sets a precedent for the Captain’s sadistic behavior towards other species. For example, on an occasion during which he

was presumably experiencing queer desires, the Captain remembers an earlier time when he felt similarly “restless.” Walking through town alone on a freezing night, he found a tiny kitten that had taken shelter in a doorway. The Captain picked up the purring kitten “and felt it vibrate in his palm. For a long time he looked into the soft, gentle little face and stroked the warm fur” (315). Then, taking the kitten down the street, he came to a mailbox, and “relieving himself in a curious manner,” he “opened the freezing letter slot and squeezed the kitten inside” (315). Similarly, as soon as Firebird comes to a halt and the Captain realizes he has survived his disorienting ordeal, he tears a branch from a tree and beats the horse “savagely,” to the point that he renders himself unconscious (355). This act of violence serves as a way for the Captain to separate himself from the Other in order to reestablish not only his “master identity” as white, heterosexual, and male, but also as “human”—dominant over, and thus separate from, the nonhuman. By establishing a pattern of violence towards nonhuman animals that manifests when the Captain is faced with his own queer desires, McCullers links the oppression of the nonhuman to the oppression of the queer and foregrounds the insidious nature of disciplinary structures rooted in species difference.

CHAPTER II

“REVOLUTIONIZING GEORGE’S MEALS”: VEGETARIANISM, IDENTITY, AND RESISTANCE IN CHARLES JOHNSON’S *OXHERDING TALE*

Charles Johnson’s *Oxherding Tale*, published in 1982, is concerned with the formation of identities and notions of the “self.” Ashraf Rushdy categorizes *Oxherding Tale* as a “neo-slave narrative” because it is a contemporary novel that assumes the form, adopts the conventions, and takes on the first-person voice of the antebellum slave narrative but engages with social, cultural, and political debates that were prevalent in the 1960s. Johnson eschews the purity of form, however, as *Oxherding Tale* variously presents itself as not only a slave narrative, but as a picaresque, a passing novel, and a Buddhist parable. While engaging in discussions of the realities of black life during slavery, the novel’s wealth of comedic, parodic, and anachronistic elements confirm that its foremost concern is the construction of race, gender, and class in twentieth-century America. Johnson also foregrounds the issue of ethical vegetarianism, which mirrors a growing ecoconsciousness in 1960s counter-culture. In particular, the novel explores the complex relationships between meat eating and race, and to a lesser extent, gender and class, and posits vegetarianism as an act of resistance to systemic violence against both nonhuman animals and oppressed social groups.

Oxherding Tale reflects a growing awareness and critique within academic disciplines of

the linked oppressions between humans and nonhuman animals. For example, the novel foreshadows much of Marjorie Spiegel's work in the seminal animal studies text *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*, which was published six years after *Oxherding Tale*. Spiegel outlines in detail the similarities between the treatment of African slaves and the treatment of nonhuman animals, asserting that racism and speciesism are structurally interrelated. Arguments like these—for animal rights on the basis of comparisons to slavery—often lead to passionate objections from various perspectives, a reflection of competing ontological and political goals concerning both human and nonhuman subjects. If objectors are invested in maintaining the hierarchical binary of human/animal, they claim that the oppression of human beings should not, because they *cannot*, justifiably, be compared to the oppression of nonhuman animals at all. On the other hand, protesting the poor treatment of any human social group on the basis that they are treated “like animals” may serve to naturalize the oppression of animals by reifying the human/animal hierarchical binary. As I mention in the introduction, the extensionist argument, that human rights should be extended to certain nonhuman animals, sometimes draws criticism because it assumes that all humans have attained such rights. As Lindgren Johnson points out, these critics believe that the idea of “a society in which all humans currently receive the same privileges under liberal humanism in their inclusion within ‘the human’—is a fantasy” (6). The problem that such critiques identify is that “[b]lack humanity, despite the successes of the civil rights movement [that extensionist activism invokes] has *not* been fully recognized, and blacks’ position within the human has not been stabilized enough to warrant a move on and out to the question of the animal” (Johnson, *Race Matters* 6). If the end goal of such “dreaded comparisons” is a posthumanist dismantling of the humanist subject, still

other objections arise.

In his recent book *Habeas Viscus*, Alexander Weheliye scathingly criticizes such approaches: “It is remarkable...how the (not so) dreaded comparison between human and animal slavery is brandished about in the field of animal studies and how black liberation struggles serve as both the positive and negative foil for making a case for the sentience and therefore emancipation of nonhuman beings” (10). Weheliye references Cary Wolfe’s discussion of Toni Morrison in the introduction to *Animal Rites* as one such offensive example. In the example in question, Wolfe states:

[Morrison] argues that the hallmarks of the individualist imagination in the founding of United States culture—‘autonomy, authority, newness and difference, absolute power’—are all ‘made possible by, and shaped by, activated by a complex awareness and employment of a constituted Africanism,’ which in turn has as its material condition of possibility the white man’s ‘absolute power over the lives of others’ in the fact of slavery. (7)

Wolfe believes that if we are to truly understand how the modern socio-political notions of autonomy, authority, newness/difference, and absolute power are constructed and reified, however, we must look even further—to the status of the animal. He asks what it *really* means “when the aspiration of human freedom, extended to all, regardless of race or class or gender, has as its material condition of possibility absolute control over the lives of *nonhuman* others” (my emphasis, 7). Weheliye wonders why, since Morrison herself does not mention the subjugation nor liberation of animals, Wolfe references her ideas about blackness and slavery at all. It seems inaccurate, however, when Weheliye states that Wolfe actually believes “the

aspiration for human freedom would ineludibly lead to the subjugation of nonhuman others” (10). Rather, Wolfe asserts that oppressions of humans and nonhumans are always-already linked within a web of domination. It is pertinent here to recall Derrida’s assertion that if the category of the “human” is always-already constituted by its supposed transcendence and exceptionalism in relation to the “animal,” then this makes possible, “a symbolic economy in which we can engage in...a ‘noncriminal putting to death’ of other humans as well by marking them as animal” (*Animal* 6). Since the institution of speciesism and its related discourse—in which any social Other, human and nonhuman alike, may be marked as “animal”—can lead to their exclusion from full ethical, political, and legal considerations, the formulation of a posthumanist understanding of the subject may, in fact, involve concerns about “animal rights,” but has consequences that reach far beyond those concerns. Wehliye’s critique of Wolfe represents an example of a critical divide between some scholarship within animal studies and critical race studies and is important to framing my own theoretical approach to *Oxherding Tale*, since Charles Johnson seems to be conscious of the potential for such conflicts to arise and of the complexities inherent in a posthumanist approach to understanding linked oppressions between Othered human social groups and nonhuman animals.

In the 1995 introduction to *Oxherding Tale*, Johnson confirms that the novel emerged as a way for him to deal with issues related to the social and cultural movements of an earlier decade. He states, “In the 1960s, when black cultural nationalism...was all the rage, the importance of the black self was on the lips of every militant writer and speaker. But not one ventured to define the self they spoke about” (xii). Rushdy explains that Johnson was, and continues to be, critical of the Black Arts movement in particular because in Johnson’s view, it

repressed his creative and intellectual growth because it was “ideological” and “did not and continues not to interrogate and problematize essential questions of the political construction of ‘race,’ the vexing issue of ‘identity,’ or the complicated nature of ‘experience’” (Rushdy 171). Among the questions that have concerned Johnson is, in Rushdy’s words, “What strategically was most effective in the transformation of [a new] social order—an ‘identity politics’ emphasizing ‘differences along the fault lines of race or a ‘commonality politics’ emphasizing a shared or ‘universal’ qualities among persons and groups?’” (171). Relatedly, Johnson has expressed the view that dwelling on difference is both unproductive and inaccurate, arguing instead that “the things that separate us make up one percent of who we are, that ninety-nine percent of our lives are similar” (qtd. in Rushdy 173). It is clear in *Oxherding Tale* that a substantial portion of Johnson’s concern with difference and similarity, or universality, is related not just to human “persons and groups,” but to the nonhuman as well.

Johnson’s response in *Oxherding Tale* to what he saw as the problematic ideology of 1960s black cultural nationalism is an emphasis on what Rushdy refers to as “intersubjectivity”—an examination of how different versions of the self are created and maintained through social relations and everyday lived experiences. The Allmuseri, a fictional West African culture that appears in both *Oxherding Tale* and Johnson’s later novel *Middle Passage*, embodies Johnson’s ideal worldview that is rooted in an understanding of intersubjectivity. In *Middle Passage*, the narrator explains that the Allmuseri reject the “world of multiplicity, of *me* versus *thee*” (140) and that “the failure to experience the unity of Being everywhere was [the Allmuseri] vision of Hell” (65). In *Oxherding Tale*, Andrew’s mentor Reb the Coffinmaker is from the Allmuseri clan-state, and before being captured and brought to

America, was trained as a powerful sorcerer by his great-grandfather (48-9). Reb teaches Andrew that no identity exists outside of relation to someone or something else and that this is the key to understanding, and thus manipulating—sometimes merely to survive—unequal structural power relations. Reb tells Andrew that learned to know his former master better than the master knew himself: “Had to,” Reb says. “He had the whip. If I couldn’t guess what was in his heart before he thought of it, I was hup river without a paddle” (62). Reb manages to survive by accepting the “unity of Being,” rather than fighting against the material realities of his enslavement. Rushdy explains that Reb teaches Andrew “the empowering of the individual who surrenders to Being instead of dwelling on the divisions” (188). Allmuseri philosophy—for example, the belief that “the Real, if it was anything at all... was a matter of consent, a shared hallucination” (*Oxherding Tale* 49), may seem an insufficient and impotent response to the violence and terror fundamental to American chattel slavery. Andrew is not unaware, however, of the essential role of violence in shaping social categories. He reflects, for example, “Again and again, and yet again, the New World said to blacks and women, ‘You are nothing.’ It had the best of arguments to back this up: nightriders” (76). Like the whip wielded by Reb’s former master, nightriders represent the institutional violence inherent in modernity’s constructions of race and gender, as well as the category of “human.”

While much of the focus of *Oxherding Tale* is on the main character Andrew Harkins’s spiritual and intellectual journey, the text also consistently brings our attention back to corporeality and the ways that black bodies are used, consumed, and destroyed, and it is clear that Johnson wants the reader to pay attention to the ways that slaves were treated as nonhuman. In one such example, Andrew addresses the reader: “To some it may sound peculiar that I

consulted the Vet for a serious medical problem. In the South before Surrender, men of color were treated, if treated at all, by the local veterinarian” (67). At the root of such comparisons is something far more complex than an emotional appeal to illicit empathy—presumably one goal of the extensionist argument for animal rights—though this could also be the case. It is crucial here to point out that a key tenant in Wolfe’s formulation of posthumanism is that ‘the human’ is achieved by escaping not just its animal origins in nature, the biological, and the evolutionary, but more generally by transcending the bonds of materiality and embodiment altogether” (*What Is?* xv). The notion of Cartesian dualism and its influence on modern Western thought and culture has led, until recently, to a significant privileging of the “mind” over the physical body. Neil Badmington explains that we can understand Descartes to be one of the principle architects of humanism in his articulation of a new definition of what it means to *be* human when he proposed that reason is “the only thing that makes us men [sic] and distinguishes us from the beasts” (3). If rational thought is understood to be the sole marker of the “human,” then human embodiment, and materiality more generally, are ignored, or even denied, since the body serves as a reminder of our shared corporeality with the nonhuman. Thus, Wolfe asserts, in one sense, posthumanism actually comes *before* humanism in that it “names the embodiment and embeddedness of the human being” (*What Is?* xv). Attention to the reality of physical bodies, then, is an important aspect of any posthumanist attempt to disentangle the linked oppressions between humans and nonhumans. As Lindgren Johnson explains, white exceptionalism takes violent control of and destroys human bodies, seeking to “reduce” humans to animals by exposing the body’s vulnerability; however, if this is a way to enforce racial and species distinction, then attention to shared embodiment can also undermine these distinctions by

recognizing corporeal “sameness” (34).

Middle Passage articulates one of the key elements of Allmuseri philosophy—a commitment to nonviolence against nonhuman animals: “Allmuseri elders took twig brooms with them everywhere, sweeping the ground so as not to inadvertently step on creatures too small to see” (78). Accordingly, the Allmuseri also reject meat eating, a point that is significant in light of *Oxherding Tale*’s foregrounding of vegetarianism. I use Carol Adams’s groundbreaking work on feminist-vegetarian critical theory as a framework to understand the role of vegetarianism in the text. Adams argues that meat is often a symbol of masculine power and dominance because in most pre-modern cultures, men were the hunters, and because meat was a valuable economic commodity, men achieved power because they controlled it (45). When meat was scarce, it was reserved for men over women and children (36), and thus, Adams argues, “gender inequality is built into the species inequality that meat eating proclaims” (45). Racism is also implicated in the history and culture of meat eating. For example, nineteenth-century medical doctor George Beard asserted that, unlike whites, people of color—whom he referred to as “savages,”—could subsist on plant-based diets because they were “little removed from the common animal stock from which they are derived. They are much nearer to the forms of life from which they feed than are the highly civilized brain-workers” (qtd. in Adams 41).

Another key component of Adams’s critical framework is meat as an “absent referent.” In the process of meat eating, animals are made absent through language—for example, cows become “beef,” pigs become “pork”—so that the animal’s body is transformed into “meat.” The once-living animal is erased, and its body becomes the absent referent, the thing to which we do not refer (51). Adams further develops the connection between meat eating and [white]

patriarchy through her claim that “women and animals are linked by an overlap of cultural images of sexual violence against women and the fragmentation and dismemberment of the body in Western culture” (51). Because racist rhetoric so often animalizes people of color and/or associates them more closely with the “animal,” this framework can be applied to race, as well as gender. In Adams’s literary critical perspective, meat eating becomes a trope for oppression, and vegetarianism becomes an act of resistance. This perspective is crucial to my analysis of vegetarianism and its relationship to gender and race in *Oxherding Tale*.

Andrew Harkins is the offspring of his father George, a slave, and Anna Polkinghorne, the white wife of George’s master Jonathan. Though George is essentially tricked into having intercourse with Anna, his wife, and Andrew’s step-mother, Mattie, never forgives him for it. Andrew explains that in the years after George’s indiscretion, “They argued. They fought. They paced circles round each other like cats. Mattie made him fix broken floorboards, then the front steps” (22). She made George wipe his feet, smoke outside, and say grace” (22). Eventually, Mattie’s “war” with George culminates in her embrace of vegetarianism. Andrew recounts the event that served as a catalyst for Mattie’s “conversion”:

I bit into my huge sandwich of split cornpone, with a thick slice of fat bacon inserted between the halves, and the Lord made it fall apart (so Mattie claimed), then a dollop of meat dropped to the floor, and George’s hunting dog Daisy...snapped up that scrap. She took one gulp, gagged, showed her blue-black gums, spat the meat straight across the cabin, then fainted with her legs in the air like an upended chair. (23)

Mattie, whom Andrew describes as “deeply religious,” believes Daisy’s ordeal is a sign, “an act

of God” (23). Adams notes that the adoption of vegetarianism often amounts to a kind of conversion experience, identifying three parts of this process: first, “an awakening in which the revelation of the nothingness of meat occurs”; second, “naming the relationship one sees with animals”; and finally, “rebuking a meat-eating world” (187). Mattie experiences all of these stages, beginning with a “vegetarian awakening,” which is prompted by Daisy’s fainting. After this incident, Mattie attempts to define her own relationship to animals, borrowing biology textbooks from Andrew’s tutor Ezekiel and trying to determine if animals have souls (23). She eventually insists, “Life is process,” and everything is connected (25). Finally, she rebukes the meat-eating world, declaring to George that, “what Ezekiel thinks—and what I think, too, is that meat eating is evil” (25). After a series of attempts to subvert George’s dominance in the home, Mattie exerts control in her household through mealtime by forcing her husband to eat vegetarian meals, which prompts him to complain, “It was...a sin to Moses...the way she made him finish his vegetables and, later, live *only* on herbs and roots” (22). Andrew refers to this as Mattie’s attempt to “revolutionize George’s meals” (24). While Andrew’s characterization of the situation is comical because it seems hyperbolic, *Oxherding Tale* does, in fact, frame vegetarianism as a revolutionary act, a point that becomes more clear when Andrew later experiences his own vegetarian conversion.

When George has finally had enough of Mattie’s vegetarian meals, he drunkenly drags Andrew into the woods with his gun, railing “against the helplessness of black men before masters and Modern Women,” and declaring, “I’ve got to kill *some*thin’ tonight or I’ll go crazy!” (26) Earlier, George complains that Mattie forces him to “Eat this paste, rice, and wood fibre without salt or syrup or anythin’ like I was a bird or an English poet” and declares that he is so

hungry he could “chew the ass out of a dead goat”¹⁵ (24). Adams notes that, because of the sexual politics of meat, “Men who decide to eschew meat eating are deemed effeminate; failure of men to eat meat announces that they are not masculine” (44). Thus, vegetarianism is implicated in not only sexism and racism, but in heterosexism as well, since the refusal to eat meat is often framed as a failure of masculinity. Notably, in the latter portion of George’s quote, he *restores* the absent referent by saying, not that he craves “meat,” but through his choice of graphic and violent language, clarifies that “meat” is the flesh of a dead animal. Thus, George’s wish to reestablish his dominance in the household manifests as a desire to kill and consume the body of another animal.

George eventually does shoot a deer and commands Andrew to skin the animal; however, when Andrew engages with the animal’s dead body, slicing its windpipe, severing the largest arteries, and tying it, leg-up, to a tree, he suddenly feels “as if someone ran a finger across” his mind, and he wonders:

What if all Ezekiel’s talk about how poleaxing preceded porkchops was saying that violence of the shotgun blast, the instant before the final explosion of dust, stayed sealed inside like a particle, trapped in the dying tissues, and wound up on the dinner table—as if everything was mysteriously blended into everything else, and somehow all the violence wars slavery crime and suffering in the world had, as Ezekiel suggested, its beginning in what went into our bellies? (27)

As with Mattie’s vegetarian conversion, Andrew first restores the absent referent, recognizing that “meat” is the body of once-living creature. He then acknowledges his relationship to the

¹⁵ The first portion of George’s statement is probably a reference to Percy Shelley, who wrote *A Vindication of Natural Diet*, and along with other Romantic poets, was a vocal proponent of a vegetarian diet (Adams 151).

animal, seeing himself and the deer as part of a living system. Finally, he consciously rejects his father's Way of violence as a viable mode of being in the world. Andrew's conversion experience forces him to see violence as a pervasive force, a cycle, that is never contained within just one act.

Through the aftermath of Mattie's and Andrew's vegetarian conversions, Johnson explores the complex relationships between race, gender, and meat-eating. After Andrew refuses to continue dressing the deer, declaring that to do so is "*wrong*," he recalls, "My father stared at me as if I had slapped him. In my refusal he saw everyone who had ever hurt him" (27). Later, Andrew says that George would mutter in the middle of family meals, "Y'all *against* me" (27). For George, his son's refusal to dress the deer is not merely the result of the boy's squeamishness, but rather, a representation the end of an ideological standoff that George feels he has lost. George blames the change in his family on two distinctly white influences—Andrew's tutor Ezekiel and "too much imagination" (23). Forced to submit to a vegetarian diet, and then seemingly rejected by his son, he feels that not only is his masculinity compromised, but his racial identity as well. As Cynthia Bailey points out, the adoption (or rejection) of particular foodways can be an important aspect of how individuals claim particular cultural identities (46). Tellingly, George declared earlier that Mattie had better learn to cook "like a black woman" (26). His perspective resembles that of some Black Arts thinkers of the 1960s, who sought to reclaim "soul food" and emphasized its importance to black cultural identity. Amiri Baraka, for example, in his *Home: Social Essays* (1966), responded to criticism that black Americans had no cuisine of their own by describing the meals of his childhood:

Hoppin' John; hushpuppies (crusty corn meal bread cooked in fish grease and best

with fried fish); hoecake; buttermilk biscuits and pancakes; fatback, i.e., streak'alean-streak'afat; dumplings; neck bones; knuckles, both good for seasoning lima or string beans; okra; pork chops; grits, eggs and sausage; pancakes with Alaga syrup; a chicken wing on a piece of greasy bread; a piece of barbecue hot enough to make you whistle; and small sweet potato pies.

(qtd. in Bailey 46)

Baraka's list is not only laden with meat dishes, but specifically with those parts of animals that white slave masters would have most likely discarded. As long as meat is considered to be the "best" source of sustenance and particular animal parts are considered to be the "best" meat, meat eating will always be intertwined with privilege. From George's perspective, *choosing* not to eat meat means being implicated in the racist dogma that non-whites do not *need* meat and further, have no right to it. For George, claiming the privilege of masculinity and the dominant white culture means killing and eating animals.

Unlike his wife and son, George is uninterested in establishing connections between himself and the nonhuman because as an enslaved black man, he feels that his own status as fully human is still unrecognized. Mattie tries to convince George that meat eating is wrong by convincing him that all living things are interconnected. "Life is process, dear," she explains, "We know that now," to which George replies, "Which we you talkin' about? Whitefolks-*we* or blackfolks-*we*?" (25) As far as George is concerned, reflecting on the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman life is a privilege that only white people can afford. As Wolfe points out, marginalized people may resist rejecting "the humanist model of subjectivity, with all its privileges, at just the historical moment when they are poised to 'graduate' into it" (*Animal* 7).

For George, the greatest injustice of his life is his banishment from the “Big House” to the slave quarters after he impregnates Anna Polkinghorne. Referencing humanism’s nature/culture divide, he resents that he is condemned “to the bleakest life possible, *a life spent among animals*, away from the center of culture at CrippleGate” (my emphasis, 23). Although George sees his exile as a blessing in one sense because it proves that “whites were not, morally, Nature’s last word on Man” (24), he still clings to the promise of liberal humanism represented by the “Big House.”

George’s resistance to vegetarianism is not only rooted in the connections between meat eating, gender, sexuality, and race—it also exemplifies his primarily violent mode of relating to the world. After he is exiled from Jonathan’s house on the night of Andrew’s conception, George nurses his hatred for whites, but Andrew sees his father’s position as deeply flawed: “Logic was not, I’m afraid, my father’s strong point. ‘If they [whites] say *hup*, Hawk, it’s gotta be *down*.’ He stood Jonathan’s world on its head, to speak plainly, inverting Big House values at every turn” (24). Eventually George leads a slave uprising at CrippleGate and murders Jonathan, an act of revolutionary violence that Andrew believes was performed in vain. As Rushy points out, the uprising only leads to the break-up of CrippleGate’s slave community, who are separated and sold off. Further, Andrew imagines that his father will spend the afterlife in Hell doing menial work—“precisely the reward all black revolutionaries feared: an eternity of waiting tables” (175). Near the end of the novel, the brutal slave catcher Horace Bannon, whom Andrew calls the “Soulcatcher,” tells Andrew that his father was an easy target because George “was carryin’ fifty-‘leven pockets of death in him anyways, li’l pools of corruption that kept him so miserable he *begged* me...to blow out his lights” (174). The Soulcatcher is so successful at what he does

because, in a perverted version of the Allmuseri philosophy, he is able to put himself in the position of his prey, to feel what they feel and experience what they experience. Thus, George is an easy kill—his violent Way leads to his own violent death. Andrew learns from his father that inverting the flawed logic of the oppressive dominant culture and adopting the violence used to reify it only leads to more suffering, a parallel to the way the symbolic economy associated with the institution of speciesism functions, and why *Oxherding Tale* presents intersubjectivity as the only viable approach to genuine equality.

Though the issue of vegetarianism as an ethical and political personal choice mostly occupies the first portion of *Oxherding Tale*, the trope of consumption continues to appear as Andrew progresses into his journey to adulthood. From Flo Hatfield, the mistress of the Leviathan Plantation for whom Andrew becomes a sex slave, he learns another Way that he subsequently rejects. Rushdy asserts that Flo is “cannibalistic insofar as each of her reflections on black men is couched in terms of appetite” (187). He adds, “This image of ingestion is crucial to understanding Flo, for what Andrew learns from her is that making love can be used as a way of incorporating others within oneself” (187). Flo is a kind of proto-feminist character—she runs Leviathan without the help of a man and spends her days satisfying her seemingly bottomless sexual appetite. She thinks of the bodies of her slaves (for though some may be her lovers, they are still certainly her slaves) as meat, looking at them “like a woman comparing chunks of pork at Public Market” (41), or as if one of them were “a six-foot chicken quiche” (42). Flo coquettishly confesses to Andrew soon after he arrives at Leviathan, “I wonder what you’d taste like” (45). In a sense, Flo’s Way, of sexual consumption as a means to take other bodies into one’s own, is based on intersubjectivity as well, but like the Soulcatcher’s Way, it is exploitative,

a different perversion of the Allmesuri philosophy. In light of the text's earlier attention to meat eating, however, Flo's conflation of black men's bodies with meat is significant beyond discussions of her sexual fulfillment understood in terms of appetite.

Early in the novel, Andrew frames the entire institution of slavery in terms of meat eating and consumption (of black bodies) when he expresses his desire to escape what he refers to as "the sausage-tight skin of slavery" (16-7). Reb confirms the link between Andrew's enslaved body and the commodity of meat when he declares, "You ain't folks or white. You fresh meat, boy" (36). Flo is infamous for using the bodies of her slaves for sex until it actually kills them. Thus, "Freshmeat" becomes Reb's affectionate, if menacing, nickname for Andrew. As Flo's slave, he is reduced to the signifier "meat," emphasizing his nothingness within a system that defines him as not human, not even animal, but "meat," an object to be consumed, another apt example of Adams's framework of the sexual politics of meat. In this case, however, Flo takes on the dominant "role" of the stereotypical heterosexual man. Like George, Flo disapproves of Andrew's vegetarianism, arguing, "There is something *lowbred* in self-denial" (42), equating meat eating with power and privilege, which both George and Flo believe one *should* claim if he or she is in a position to do so. Just as George's Way inverts the values of dominate white culture, Flo inverts the stereotypical values of men, and in both cases, this leads not to increased freedom, but merely to more suffering. Flo is implicated in this suffering not only as a slaveholder who maintains the economic success of her plantation at the expense of black lives and causes the emotional and physical suffering, sometimes leading to death, of her enslaved "lovers," she is personally deeply unhappy and lonely.

Flo Hatfield appears in the text as the physical embodiment of slavery itself as a set of

social relations predicated on violence, which actually consumed the bodies of black human beings. Notably, when Andrew meets Flo, he observes that she is wearing clothes “of a period I could not place, but the material was embroidered to look like a landscape—forests and fauna” (37). Flo is far from a nurturing “Earth Mother” figure, however. Rather, she represents the potentially compromised relationship between black men and women and “Nature” as a result of the conditions of slavery. This becomes clear when Andrew and Reb are exiled from Leviathan to work at the Yellowdog Mine, which is the fate of Flo’s “undesirable” slaves—“the unruly, the lazy, the rejected lovers” (79). Sam Plunkett, the man in charge of blasting at the mine, tells Reb and Andrew, “You come this way just ten years earlier, you wouldn’ta seen nothin’. Sprawlin’ wilderness. Forests fulla deer. Rabbits. Skunks. Maybe a lynx or two” (79-80). Observing the land post-mine, Andrew notes that it “was blackened by the sites of old shafts and heaps of slate, the air was fouled by carbonic gas and smoke from blasting. Red dust, like plague, settled filmy on the ribcages of workhorses burned in ditches by the road” (79). The scene of environmental devastation, along with cruelty to animals, that Andrew observes, compared to Sam’s idyllic recollections about the land pre-dating the mine, is striking. This observable change in the environment is inextricably tied to the exploitation of black bodies and nonhuman bodies. Sam explains the history of the mine: In 1850, twelve of Flo’s slaves were the first on the site. Six months later, the shafts were in, and around fifteen men had died, their bodies literally consumed by the earth itself, just as Flo consumed the bodies of her slaves.

The assertion that the above scene illuminates a compromised relationship between enslaved people and nonhuman nature is not meant to suggest that any particular group of people is somehow “closer to nature,” or inherently aligned with nonhuman nature, for to do so would

be to reinscribe the racist pseudo-scientific theories that I have already mentioned. Rather, it further articulates Johnson's linkage between the exploitation and use of black bodies and the exploitation and use of the nonhuman, which often, perhaps *most* often, occurs in the form of labor and consumption. Camille Dungy explains, "Viewed once as chattel, part of a farm's livestock or an asset in a banker's ledger, African Americans developed a complex relationship to land, animals, and vegetation in American culture," which may incite the urge to resist environmental or ecological concepts of interdependency (xxii, xxiii). This also relates to George's resistance to vegetarianism—George, whom Andrew refers to as "flinty old Race Man" (21)—is resistant to understanding himself as a part of the natural world because historically, the linked binaries of human/animal and culture/nature have been used to exclude black people from the category of the human. As Lindgren Johnson notes, the "grand narrative of African American studies" has held that the heroic struggle of slaves and former slaves, which has historically and continues to inform civil rights struggles, was to demonstrate and claim the human status that slavery denied. She continues:

This liberating graduation [into full human status] depended on an implicit and often explicit contrast to the subhuman status of the animal. Instead of questioning or challenging humanism's constructions, we are assured, African American slaves desired to express and reveal their innate humanity in order to have it acknowledged within a humanist framework. The unrelenting demand for this recognition enabled and was responsible for emancipation and full civil rights. (13)

Thus, this narrative of the black struggle for freedom and civil rights may resist comparisons

between the oppression of humans and nonhuman animals. Further, it may especially resist attempts to dismantle humanism and the category of the human altogether. *Oxherding Tale* challenges this narrative, however, both through Mattie's and Andrew's vegetarian conversions, and through the text's comparisons of human and nonhuman suffering, especially through Andrew's early perspectives and the Allmuseri philosophy of intersubjectivity. For example, at the mine, Andrew notices that the men "were shattered—they had the unseeing gazes I'd glimpsed on birds my father had shot, just before he finished them" (79-80). The description of these men and their lifeless, yet alive, bodies, another comparison to nonhuman animals, is one of Andrew's most tragic observations of the institution of slavery. Unlike George, who seeks to reaffirm his masculinity and humanity through violence against animals, and eventually, other people, Andrew is willing to view domination and oppression intersubjectively and through interspeciesality.

Though Andrew represents and acts from a perspective that can arguably be called posthumanist throughout most of *Oxherding Tale*, the text at least suggests that he does not fully maintain or develop this perspective. Unlike McCullers's *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, in which Captain Penderton attempts to violently reestablish his dominance over the nonhuman Other after a fleeting experience of "becoming with" the horse Firebird and a recognition of his own trans-corporeality, *Oxherding Tale* does not completely foreclose the possibility that Andrew's posthumanist perspective will continue to inform his ethical relations in the world. It does, however, suggest that Andrew becomes "forgetful," which, in part, speaks to the pervasive influence of humanist ideology. Andrew and Reb escape from Yellowdog Mine with a plan for Andrew to pass as white and Reb to pose as his slave; however, Andrew admits concern that he

will not be able to pass, not because of the relative lightness or darkness of his skin, but due to something more intangible. While he and Reb watch a white family on whose property they are hiding out, Andrew observes, “No one is going to knock on their door and demand identification, or feel resentful—not too resentful—if the pleasures of their table increase...I can’t fake that kind of belongingness, that blithe, numbed belief that the world is an extension of my sitting room. Or myself” (108-9). In a chilling revelation that the “warm, dumb domesticity” Andrew observes and envies in the white family is underwritten by money the husband can earn through the policing of black bodies, he looks on as the white man kisses his wife and fetches his gun, on his way to hunt for two missing slaves worth the monetary sum of one hundred-fifty dollars. The runaway slaves are actually Andrew and Reb, and their bodies as commodities make possible the (white) domestic comfort that Andrew longs for.

At the culmination of Andrew’s journey, he *does* successfully pass, marrying a white woman who is initially unaware of his origins as the offspring of an enslaved black father and a white slaveholding mistress, and he settles into his own quiet and comfortable (white) life of domesticity. Rushdy makes a salient point about Andrew’s “forgetfulness” in relation to the systemic violence that undergirds racist and classist systems he observes during his escape, after he becomes a white property owner himself: “It is vitally important to note that Andrew manages to forget the political violence that underwrites property ownership and the domesticity superimposed on it at precisely the same time that he is reconfiguring his identity, transforming himself from a fugitive slave to a white husband” (195). In order for Andrew to successfully live as a white male property-holder, he *must* forget the systemic violence upon which those dominant identity categories are based so that he is not “faking,” but rather, embodying, a sense

of inherent belongingness and privilege; in turn, living as such decreases the visibility of systemic violence. Similarly, by the end of the novel, the prominence of vegetarianism fades, and it is figured more as a personal choice rather than a form of radical political resistance. I contend that a Marxist perspective can serve to make sense of Andrew's various forms of forgetting, even in relation to the institution of speciesism.¹⁶

Despite a history of problematic engagement with nonhuman animals in Marxist thought—Marx himself often used animals as tropes to signify the suffering of humans, thereby reinforcing human exceptionalism—recent work applying Marxist theory to animal studies examines the treatment of nonhuman animals in advanced industrial capitalist societies in order to elucidate the material situations of both humans *and* animals. Amy Buzby asserts, for example, “The suffering non-human animal ensnared in advanced industrial capitalism is... an essential mirror that *must be held up*, however uncomfortably, before the reified modern subject” (my emphasis 28). This approach forces us to recognize that human and nonhuman animals are in “similar and linked positions... in a system that voraciously consumes the life force of all living beings” (Buzby 28). Johnson illuminates this point during the scene in which Andrew and Reb arrive at Yellowdog Mine. Sam tells them, ““Course, I don't approve of what goes on there! Oh, it's terrible, treating men like animals! Or machines! I'm a Socialist! I'm on your side! You men should pull together. I mean, *we* oughta pull together” (80). Sam's correction to his original statement—changing the second-person pronoun “you” to “we”—relates to my earlier point in regards to Andrew living as a white property-owner, that power and privilege can make it harder to see how one is implicated in systems of oppression. Similarly, the power and privilege

¹⁶ Marxist thought has been influential in Johnson's personal and intellectual life, as well as his fiction, since he first studied Marxist theory as a graduate student (see Selzer).

associated with being “human” can make it difficult to see how we are implicated in speciesist systems of oppression, which become “naturalized” through law and culture. Sam’s objection to the condition of slaves based on the fact that they are treated “like animals” appeals to the same speciesist rhetoric that Marx used. He at least recognizes that slaves are human beings, and thus, should not be treated “like animals”; however, the rhetoric of his appeal is still based on the institution of speciesism and its related discourse. By this point, though, the text has already problematized such rhetoric by elucidating how the oppression of nonhuman animals and particular human social groups is structurally interrelated, exposing the speciesist basis of Sam’s objections. Thus, his observation still highlights the similar and linked positions of enslaved humans and nonhuman animals, the two groups by which the cost of capitalist achievement is most heavily borne.

Johnson’s original point of departure for the discussion of meat eating is hunting, in which Andrew comes into contact with the body of the deer George kills. This one-on-one contact makes it easier for Andrew to restore the absent referent and recognize that “meat” is always a once-living animal. In direct contact with the animal intended for consumption, Andrew is able to theorize that all the violence and suffering in the world, including wars, slavery, and crime, begins with consumption, and thus, the naturalized violence committed against the animals we eat, which prompts his vegetarian conversion as a way to “opt out” of this system and resist its interrelated structures. It is worth reiterating that while *Oxherding Tale* is set during the era of American chattel slavery, the novel is concerned with issues Johnson confronted in his own time, and in contemporary American society, the vast majority of us never come into contact with the animals we consume. Factory farms and slaughterhouses have mechanized

killing and obscure it from public view. Buzby argues that these modern inventions are the best possible examples of Horkheimer and Adorno's contention that "Technical rationality today is the rationality of domination" (32). The animal industry makes violence against animals, as well as the institution of speciesism upon which such violence is based, "rational," and thus, invisible, precisely because we no longer view it *as* violence.

Andrew makes a striking and instructive comparison between black life and the slaughterhouse when, ironically, the veterinarian who treats Flo Hatfield's slaves suggests that he could escape Leviathan and pass as white: "I wondered if life would indeed be easier if I abandoned what appeared to be a no-win struggle for happiness in the Black World. You needed little more proof than I'd received to believe that this world was, had always been, and might ever be a slaughterhouse—a style of being characterized by stasis, denial, humiliation, [and] thinghood" (70). While Johnson's novel does not directly engage with the contemporary animal industry, the site at which the bodies of animals are most efficiently and effectively made invisible and transformed into absent referents, where animal flesh becomes "meat" and the products of animals' labor and suffering become commodities, *Oxherding Tale* ultimately prompts us to consider how naturalized and systemic violence maintains the linked oppressive categories of race and species. Just as Andrew eventually "forgets," as a white householder, that his position is undergirded by violence, the sanctioned and institutionalized forms of violence committed against black bodies and animal bodies is especially insidious because it is so often rendered invisible by, and in, our day-to-day existence.

CHAPTER III

INVISIBLE VIOLENCE, BIOPOLITICS, AND THE MARKETING OF MODERN “MEAT” IN RUTH OZEKI’S *MY YEAR OF MEATS*

The previous chapter argues that in Johnson’s *Oxherding Tale*, Andrew Harkins converts to vegetarianism because he restores the absent referent of the animal’s body after coming into direct contact with it through hunting, and subsequently recognizes the ways that the oppression of human beings is often bound up with the institution of speciesism. Although Andrew compares the plantation life to a “slaughterhouse,” due to the scope of Johnson’s novel, set in the antebellum South, this analogy is not fully developed. However, as I suggest in the last chapter, the modern industrial slaughterhouse, and in turn, the marketing of meat as commodity, unlike Andrew’s experience with an individual animal killed for consumption, effectively and efficiently erases animals’ bodies, as well as the potential impact of modern meat consumption on human bodies, through the mechanized violence, made invisible to consumers, inherent in the production of “meat.” Ruth Ozeki’s 1998 novel *My Year of Meats*, focuses on meat eating, the industrial production of meat, and the ethical concerns inherent to both. While the novel does not deal explicitly with the discourse of speciesism as discussed in the previous two chapters, it is important to note that species hierarchy is necessarily built into the practice of meat eating, a point that evokes concerns about which, and on what grounds, particular subjects are considered

“human.”¹⁷

Like *Oxherding Tale*, Ozeki’s novel is concerned with issues of meat eating, race, gender, and class, but engages specifically with how the linked oppressions humans and nonhuman animals can play out in industrialized capitalist societies on a global scale.¹⁸ Put another way, Ozeki’s novel “zooms out” from the concerns that *Oxherding Tale*, as well as McCullers’s *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, raise about the connections between speciesism and the marginalization of particular human subjects, exposing how exchanges of global capital intersect with sexism, racism, and classism, particularly in the production and marketing of modern meat.

In this chapter, I continue to use Carol Adams’s critical framework of the sexual politics of meat to show how women’s bodies, along with other marginalized human bodies, become sites of conflict and resistance to real and symbolic violence related to meat production and consumption. This chapter also extends chapter one’s Foucauldian analysis to an examination of how human and animal bodies are transformed by biopower and posits that in *My Year of Meats*, the alimentary, along with, and often overlapping with, the sexual, is an influential system of

¹⁷ As Chloë Taylor asserts in “Foucault and the Ethics of Eating,” humans do not decide we are superior to other animals and *then* determine to eat them, but rather, we constitute our superiority *through* our consumption and use of other species—since we use animals for various human ends, we must be inherently superior to them. Thus, the choice to not eat meat on moral grounds can be a rejection of this supposed human superiority. On the other hand, Taylor asserts, it can be an embrace of the same, since some individuals *choose* to reject meat eating on the grounds that it is harmful to animals, and/or other humans—for some vegetarians, making the choice to not eat meat is a sign of the truly “human.” Whatever the underlying conscious and unconscious motivations to either consume other animals or not, these practices are fundamentally tied to our self-definition as *human*. (75)

¹⁸ Jennifer McDonnell explains, “The dualisms that form such forceful undercurrents in Western culture—master/slave, male/female, human/animal, white/nonwhite, reason/nature, culture/nature, civilised/savage, mind/body, subject/object—form an ‘interlocking structure’ that is recognised by theorists working in feminist, disability, postcolonial, queer, indigenous, and critical race studies as a violent hierarchy because one term of the binary is always suppressed in relation to the other, while the middle term is elided. The animal, therefore, is constituted not only through the human/animal dualism but also by other pairs as well” (10). Species difference is constituted by and produced through the effects of power difference, and each hierarchical binary is linked to the others.

regulation. Ultimately, I argue that the novel presents posthumanist possibilities for human beings to formulate better ethical relations to each other and the nonhuman world.

While *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, as I argue in the first chapter, presents potential resistances to normative regimes of sexuality through pleasure-producing human-animal relations in the context of a highly regulated and regimented space of a military base, *My Year of Meats* foregrounds the alimentary, along with the sexual, as a system of regulation. Elspeth Probyn wonders if, post-queer theory, critical attention to the sexual has displaced “the fact of the body as the site of connection, the body as material manifestation of the shifting lines of class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality” (421). Probyn argues that food and eating can, and should, be understood as regulatory systems, and that thinking about food, eating, and cooking—in particular, the ways that eating and sexuality overlap—“has the potential to highlight in spectacular ways the interarticulation of sites of difference: the interweaving of class, gender, [and] ethnicity with sexuality” (422). *My Year of Meats* grapples with a prominent question in Foucault’s thinking of how we can live ethically in the present, and thus, “how we hope to produce ourselves as thoughtful and even ethical beings, connected to each other in sometimes pleasurable, often painful, and always regulated ways” (Probyn 422). To approach the issue of ethical living in globalized industrial late-capitalist spaces, we must, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, question, “the precise state of bodies in a society, including all the attractions and repulsions, sympathies and antipathies, alterations, amalgamations, penetrations, and expansions that affect bodies of all kinds in their relations to one another,” and that “what regulates the obligatory, necessary or permitted interminglings of bodies is above all an alimentary and a sexual regime” (qtd. in Probyn 423). As Andrew Wallis points out, Ozeki locates the female

body in particular as “a literal and metaphorical crossroads” where issues of race, class, gender, and environmental injustice are played out in the text and “as a site of resistance within a geographic and social network of contested spaces” (841). While Wallis’s work focuses on the female body in relation to real and imagined geographical space, this chapter builds on the notion of the body as a site of conflict by locating the human body as the nexus of the alimentary and the sexual, particularly as these regulatory regimes relate to meat eating.

One issue foregrounded in *My Year of Meats* is how the marketing of meat, especially in a global economy, can rely on problematic sexist, racist, and classist stereotypes. Japanese-American documentarian Jane Takagi-Little is approached to coordinate a television series sponsored by a fictional American national lobby organization called the Beef Export and Trade Syndicate, or BEEF-EX. The program is filmed in America but airs in Japan and is meant to promote American-produced meat, especially beef, to Japanese housewives. The first memo Jane receives from the “research team” in Japan, led by Joichi “John” Ueno, lists a number of “desirable” and “undesirable” qualities to be featured on the series:

DESIRABLE THINGS:

1. Attractiveness, wholesomeness, warm personality
2. Delicious meats recipe (NOTE: Pork and other meats is second class meats, so please remember this easy motto: “Pork is Possible, but Beef is Best!”)
3. Attractive, docile husband
4. Attractive, obedient children
5. Attractive, wholesome lifestyle
6. Attractive, clean house

7. Attractive friends & neighbors
8. Exciting hobbies

UNDESIRABLE THINGS:

1. Physical imperfections
2. Obesity
3. Squalor
4. Second class peoples (11-2)

The Japanese research staff expects Jane to create episodes that present a very particular version of Americanism and American families—conventionally attractive, “clean,” white, heteronormative, and meat eating—in order to convince Japanese wives to increase meat consumption in their own households. Each episode of *My American Wife!* revolves around the figure of the wife as she prepares her family’s favorite meat dish, and the sponsors are particularly focused on conveying an impression of “traditional family values,” which they claim are “symbolized by red meat in rural America” (8).

The idea that red meat symbolizes “traditional family values,” is a pertinent example of Adams’s assertion that meat is a symbol of patriarchy, which I discuss in the previous chapter. For example, John, based on his study of texts such as P. Thomas Ziegler’s 1953 *The Meat We Eat*, espouses the rhetoric that meat eating, power, and virility are linked. He encourages his wife Akiko, who has been unable to conceive, to eat more meat by quoting Ziegler: “A liberal meat supply has always been associated with a happy and virile people” (20). Drawing from the work of anthropologist Mary Douglass, Adams asserts that the foods we expect to make up a meal—in this case, meat—“reflect a taxonomy of classification that mirrors and reinforces our larger

culture,” and that a meal is an “ordered system” that “represents all the ordered systems associated with it” (47). Thus, in the “ideal” episode of *My American Wife!* meat represents hegemonic patriarchal culture, coded by the BEEF-EX campaign as “traditional family values.”

Another key component of Adams’s critical framework is the cycle that she claims links the slaughter of animals to sexual violence against women. She states:

I propose a cycle of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption, which links butchering and sexual violence in our culture. Objectification permits an oppressor to view another being as an object. The oppressor then violates this being by object-like treatment: e.g., the rape of women that denies women freedom to say no, or the butchering of animals that converts animals from living, breathing beings into dead objects. This process allows fragmentation, or brutal dismemberment, and finally consumption. [...] Consumption is the fulfillment of oppression, the annihilation of will, of separate identity. (58)

Since Adams also argues that those who control the commodity of meat achieve power, it may appear that the goal of *My American Wife!* is to *empower* its target audience—Japanese women—or at least to promote more egalitarian relations between heterosexual spouses. In fact, in her research for the series, Jane finds market studies suggesting that Japanese wives “often feel neglected by their husbands and are susceptible to the qualities of kindness, generosity, and sweetness that they see as typical of American men”; thus, the episodes are meant to convey to Japanese wives that “[t]he wife who serves meat has a kinder, gentler mate” (13). The original pitch for the series, however, reveals that the sponsors’ goals are rooted in a misogynistic sexual politics of meat:

Meat is the Message. Each weekly half-hour episode of *My American Wife!* must culminate in the celebration of a featured meat, climaxing in its glorious consumption. It's the meat (not the Mrs.) who's the star of our show! Of course, the "Wife of the Week" is important too. She must be attractive, appetizing, and all-American. She is the Meat Made Manifest: ample, robust, yet never tough or hard to digest. (8)

The pitch for *My American Wife!* frames meat eating in sexual terms—"climaxing in its glorious consumption"—and conflates women's bodies with meat—the "Wife of the Week" must be "appetizing," "ample," "robust," and easy to "digest," the "Meat Made Manifest." This is a clear example of Adams's assertion that the same cyclical process links sexual violence against women and the slaughter of animals. In the above description of the series, both animals' and women's bodies are presented as objects to be consumed.

Throughout the novel, Ozeki presents examples of how both women's and animals' bodies are objectified and fragmented through the trope of consumption. As Wallis points out, "It is no coincidence that the film crew, whose members constantly watch porn, linger on one of the wives' breast and lips [as she prepares her roast] the same way that they pan across the aisles of Wal-Mart and 'track' the women shoppers [as they fill their carts with shrink-wrapped cuts of meat]" (35). In another example, when the crew films inside a slaughterhouse, Jane notices that the main office overlooking the factory where cows are disassembled and transformed into "meat" is decorated with a large poster of "a young blond Amazon in jungle bikini, who overlooked the meat-cutting operations below" (280). As she walks down the staircase onto the kill floor, Jane looks up through the office window and sees only "the jungle girl's large

proffered breasts” (281), an image of the woman’s fragmented and objectified body, which mirrors the dismembered body parts of the animals below. In yet another example, at a beef trade show, Jane picks up magnets distributed by a pharmaceutical company that are “shaped like voluptuous humanoid cows in cocktail gowns, with the words “Ready when you are...big shot!” in dialogue bubbles over their heads” (227). This “humorous” and seemingly innocuous image reveals how animals’ bodies are often feminized and women’s bodies animalized, a conflation that presents both as objects for male consumption.

Since, as Adams asserts, meat eating is usually associated with masculinity, it can also be associated with the exploitation and abuse of women, along with nonhuman animals, at the hands of men; therefore, the refusal to consume meat can be understood as a resistance to patriarchy. This phenomenon is foregrounded in *My Year of Meats* through the parallel narrative of John and Akiko. As Adams argues, a female character’s rejection of meat can signal rejection of male acts of violence and control (139). For such characters, “meat eating becomes a trope of their own oppression. Women come to see themselves as being consumed by marital oppression at the domestic front and realize that their bodies are battlegrounds” (141). For example, we learn that before her marriage, Akiko had a career in publishing, writing copy for action-adventure *manga*, but her husband forced her give up her job so that she could learn to cook and prepare for motherhood, though after three years of marriage, she is unable to get pregnant. Likely as a way to deflect insecurities about his own impotence, John blames his wife for their inability to have children. Already domineering and emotionally abusive, he eventually becomes violent as well. Because John is convinced that eating more meat will make Akiko conceive, he makes her watch every episode of *My American Wife!*, prepare the dishes, and fill out a response survey of his

own design. However, Akiko vomits after each of her meat-laden meals: “[S]he’d start to feel the meat. It began in her stomach, like an animal alive, and would climb its way back up her gullet, until it burst from the back of her throat” (38). While Akiko does not choose vegetarianism as a conscious act of resistance, her body seems to simply reject meat.

Ironically, the end of Akiko’s aversion to meat is also prompted by an episode of *My American Wife!* This episode features the Bukowsky family and their daughter Christina, who was rendered paraplegic and comatose when she was hit by a Wal-Mart delivery truck. The episode details Christina’s recovery and how her community rallied around the family. Christina’s first word when she emerged from a comatose state was “ambchop,” because lambchops had been her favorite food before the accident—thus, Mrs. Bukowsky prepares “Hallelujah Lamb Chops” on the Bukowskys’ episode of *My American Wife!* At home in Japan, Akiko carefully prepares the lamb dish, and kneeling before her husband that evening, presents it to him “like an offering” (143). John reacts violently, however, because he believes the use of lamb is traitorous since it is an Australian, rather than American-produced meat. Akiko, on the other hand, tries the lamb and finds that she actually enjoys the taste: “It was the best meat she’d ever eaten. She gnawed all six chops, then sucked the bones dry. Afterward, she went to the bathroom and waited, but the animal inside her was quiet” (143). This is an apt example of how what we eat can represent more than mere sustenance, because for Akiko, the Hallelujah Lamb Chops symbolize the inspirational quality of Christina’s seemingly miraculous recovery.¹⁹ Additionally, because John disapproves of the lamb, it is the first meat Akiko eats that is free

¹⁹ Wallis points out that Christina herself is imbued with Christ-like redemptive powers for her town and its citizens, who, after her recovery, change the name of their town from “Quarry” to “Hope,” Indiana. Her physical presence also has an effect on the Japanese film crew, “whose heretofore macho and violent attitudes towards women were emblematic of the predatory male gaze” (Wallis 849-50).

from her obligation to prepare and consume it merely to please her overbearing and abusive husband.

Ozeki uses another episode of *My American Wife!* to link non-normative dietary choices to queer sexuality—thus, foregrounding the alimentary and the sexual as related systems of regulation. Akiko experiences this episode, which features an interracial lesbian couple, as liberatory. Dyann, Lara, and their two daughters are vegetarians, so Jane must edit the episode to disguise this fact. As Akiko watches, she cries “tears of admiration for the strong women so determined to have their family against all odds. And tears of pity for herself, for the trepidation she felt in place of desire” (181). Akiko realizes she wants a child, but does not want her husband, and that once she becomes pregnant, she will no longer need him. She begins using the meat dishes as a way to “seduce” John so he will impregnate her, though when he fails to react, Akiko realizes, “Meats are no longer enough.” She begins to explore her own sexuality, “studying” pornography to determine how best to seduce John. She finds that the images of women actually arouse her own desires, but not for John. The conventional heterosexual pornography awakens in Akiko potentially queer desires: “She liked looking at the pictures. Even though they weren’t so authentic, she found them sexy—but she was not sure whether she wanted to make love to the girl or simply to be her” (188). This mirrors an irony in the way that *My American Wife!* functions in a similar way—targeted at Japanese housewives so they will purchase more meat for their presumably heteronormative families, the series presents not only the meat, but the women who prepare it, as objects of desire for its female audience. Even the title suggests that the show’s female viewers think of the featured woman on each episode as “their” American wives, blending the desire to *be* her with the desire *for* her.

One way to understand Akiko's transformation in terms of the alimentary linked with the sexual is to think about women's relationships to food and cooking in popular culture in the late 20th-century. Probyn points out that as sexuality and desire became increasingly prevalent in the public sphere, women were notably absent except for in the roles of "wronged wife or cast-off mistress." Probyn states that while the "widespread publicized sexual detail and ensuing public acceptance of sex,"—as in the Clinton and Lewinsky "scandal," for example—may have represented "the triumph of 'liberation' discourses around sexuality," it should also "alert us to the return of an accepted exclusion of women as actively sexual" (424). Thus, Probyn argues, if "ordinary" women were absent from the public sex scene in the late 1990s, it may have been "because they [were] at home watching the cooking shows that...usurped the ill-fated attempts at sexual equality," represented by *Playgirl's* centerfolds, for example (424). Probyn suggests that the gourmet sections of women's magazines and television shows about food and cooking, both "[d]renched in the codes of seduction," became for women "the privileged arena in popular culture for the promotion of pleasure, [and] sexuality" (425). Probyn's analysis of representations of women's sexuality in the public sphere and the rise of so-called "food porn" for women coincides with the 1998 publication of *My Year of Meats*. Akiko accesses desire first through food, and then through her own sexuality. Despite the sponsor's sexist vision for *My American Wife!*, the series proves to be liberating for Akiko, but only because Jane subverts the show's intended message by featuring individuals who are queer or otherly-abled.

In addition to linking the alimentary and the sexual as regulatory regimes, *My Year of Meats* exposes the violence necessary to transform living animals into "meat," violence that is made invisible by modern industrialized slaughterhouses and the marketing of meat as a

desirable, and even necessary, commodity. As Jane notes, in the 1990s, meat eating in Japan was a relatively new custom because for much of Japanese history, eating meat was considered “uncouth,” and due to the influence of Buddhism, it was likely thought to be “unclean” (14). In her research for *My American Wife!*, Jane comes across a fictionalized Japanese newspaper article titled “Supermarkets to Introduce Vending Machines for Meat,” which claims that “Japanese housewives between the ages of 20 and 65 find it embarrassing to say the names of meat cuts out loud” and that they “find the human interaction necessary to purchase meat distasteful,” leading them to prefer purchasing meat from vending machines.²⁰ Considering the cultural history of meat eating in Japan, Jane is faced with the task of convincing Japanese housewives to engage in an activity that they may find not only unfamiliar, but even distasteful. Noting the “look of astonishment” on her Japanese cameraman Suzuki’s face the first time he visits a Wal-Mart in America, Jane initially believes that “the heart and soul” of *My American Wife!* must be to recreate the “spectacle of raw American abundance,” meant to evoke in Japanese wives “a state of *want* (as in both senses, ‘lack’ and ‘desire’), because *want* is *good*” (35). Accordingly, Jane makes the American superstore a focus of early episodes:

We panned the shelves, stacked floor to ceiling, tracked women as they filled their carts with Styrofoam trays of freezer steaks, each of which, from a Japanese housewife’s perspective, would feed her entire family for several days. “Stocking up” is what our robust Americans called it, laughing nervously, because profligate abundance automatically evokes its opposite, the unspoken specter of dearth. (843)

²⁰ Though Japan is known to offer a wide variety of products for purchase from vending machines, my research has yielded no evidence of actual Japanese vending machines that sell meat.

In his essay on Ozeki's novel, Wallis misquotes the phrase "specter of dearth" as "specter of death," an understandable, and perhaps fitting, mistake, if we consider that the American supermarket, in its meat-laden abundance, not only evokes *want*, but achieves this abundance through the deaths of billions of animals per year, as well as through harm inflicted on human beings. This point becomes increasingly clear as the novel shifts its focus from meat preparation and cooking to the transformation of animals into meat.

Through the Dunns, a Colorado family featured on *My American Wife!*, Jane and her crew gain access to a slaughterhouse, the site at which invisible violence turns billions of living bodies each year into the "meat" we consume. As Cholë Taylor notes in "Foucault and Critical Animal Studies: Genealogies of Agricultural Power," the shift from traditional farming to the advent of CAFOs (Confined Animal Feeding Operations) is "analogous to the birth of the disciplinary institutions of confinement described by Foucault. Like prisons, schools, hospitals, and asylums, industrial...farms are characterized by disciplinary features such as partitions and meticulous record-keeping" (544). As Jane approaches the slaughterhouse, she notes that its exterior resembles many such disciplinary spaces—"a long, low-lying rectangular structure, made of cement and cinder block, embellished here and there with curlicues of razor wire" (279-80). While the structure is clearly not meant to appear welcoming to the curious industry outsider, its exterior still does not reflect the degree of horrors within.²¹ "Stepping into

²¹ It is worth noting that while the general public today may be far more familiar with the processes and abuses, of both humans and nonhumans, that occur in the meat industry, such familiarity was not as common in 1998. The Internet now provides us with a proliferation of images and videos that expose the "ugly" side of meat production, most of which are obtained in secret and sometimes illegally. The last two decades have also produced an explosion of books, documentaries, and TV series that explore where our food comes from and how it is produced; one groundbreaking example is Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*, which is sometimes compared to Sinclair's *The Jungle*. *Rolling Stone* first serialized *Fast Food Nation* in 1999, and it was published as a book in 2001, but Ozeki's novel, published in 1998, precedes it. Because of these historical phenomena, contemporary readers may miss some of the impetus behind Ozeki's descriptions of the slaughterhouse interior, though they are still quite powerful.

the slaughterhouse,” Jane explains, “was like walking through an invisible wall into hell” (281). She continues:

Sight, sound, smell—every sense I thought I owned, that was mine, the slaughterhouse stripped from me, over-powered and assaulted. Steam hissed, metal screeched against metal, clanging and clamoring, splitting the ear, relentless. Chains, pulleys, iron hooks, whipped around us with unbelievable speed, and as far as the eye could see, conveyors snaked into the distance, heaped with skinned heads and steaming hearts. (281)

Jane also observes that “[b]lood was everywhere: bright red, brick red, shades of brown and black; flowing, splattering, encrusting the walls, the men. The floors were graded toward central drains for easy cleaning, yet the place was caked with a deep, rotting filth. And thick with flies” (281). Her descriptions reflect nothing of the “wholesomeness,” “happiness,” or “virility,” that the sponsors of *My American Wife!* attribute to meat eating. Rather, they suggest rot and decay—the physical realities of processing flesh—in an environment in which even human workers become blood-covered objects themselves in the service of fast production and efficiency. What Jane observes is a terrifying mechanization of death—the grotesque and perverse other side of her earlier description of the abundance of the American superstore. The slaughterhouse is similarly dizzying in its effect on the human senses, however. It overwhelms human sensorium so that the scale of production, and of death, is practically unfathomable.

Not only do slaughterhouses transform animals’ bodies into meat, the industrial farming complex also changes the biology of animals’ bodies *before* they are killed, sometimes along with the bodies of the humans who consume them. As I argue in the first chapter, the concept of

biopower, particularly Foucault's conception of disciplinary power, is a useful perspective for analysis in regards to both human and nonhuman animals. When Jane enters the slaughterhouse, she actually evokes Foucault by describing the office overlooking the kill floor and meat cutting operations as a "wood-paneled panopticon" (280). Here, I should point out that the notions of "docility" and the "docile body" are closely connected to Foucault's concept of disciplinary power. He states that a docile body is one that "may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" by various regulatory systems (qtd. in Thierman 96). The docile body is created and maintained through regulation of space, control of activity, and surveillance; thus, the slaughterhouse can be understood as a site of disciplinary power. Stephen Thierman argues that, though Foucault himself did not apply these concepts to nonhuman animals, to do so makes sense because we can use the concepts of "subjection," "transformation," and/or "improvement" when thinking about the bodies of nonhuman animals and how they are acted upon and caused to perform in various contexts (96). Thierman notes that we need not necessarily read a strictly pejorative tone into Foucault's discussion of disciplinary power—for example, just as human bodies can be made docile in order to attain any number of *useful* skills, animals' bodies may be too, as in the training of a dog or horse. However, discipline becomes problematic "when the individual is ontologically reduced in a way that elides their individuality/singularity" (Thierman 96). As I point out in the previous chapters, various forms of discipline can function in such a problematic way in the case of both nonhuman animals and marginalized or oppressed human social groups.

My Year of Meats explores one of the most extreme ways that the disciplinary structure of the meat industry transforms or "improves" animals' bodies in its discussion of DES and other

artificial growth stimulants. Jane explains that DES (diethylstilbestrol), a synthetic estrogen, was first used in male chickens to chemically castrate them and cause them to develop female characteristics—plumper breasts that produced more meat. In cows that were DES “enhanced,” the animals “could be ‘finished’ (brought to slaughter weight) more than a month sooner than unenhanced animals, on about five hundred pounds less feed” (124). Taylor anticipates that a potential objection to a Foucauldian analysis of the animal industry could be that the *kind* of docility produced in animals’ bodies on industrial “farms” is fundamentally different in kind from that of the docile bodies described by Foucault. She states, “While prisoners, students and psychiatric patients are made docile through habituation and internalization of pedagogical, penal, psychiatric, medical, or social norms, they are not bred or genetically modified to be docile”; nonhuman animals, on the other hand, “are transformed into new kinds of beings not through panopticism and writing...but, in part, because their ancestors have been genetically modified and bred for particular traits” (“Foucault and Critical” 544). As Ozeki shows, however, not only does the meat industry produce new kinds of animal subjects through the use of artificial growth hormones like DES, its practices can similarly transform the physical bodies of human beings.

For example, Jane discovers that she herself is a victim of the profit-driven big pharmaceutical industry when she finds out that her mother was prescribed DES when she was pregnant with Jane. DES was later shown to make reproduction difficult or impossible for the daughters of women who were exposed to it. Jane also learns that until 1979, DES was legally and widely used in the meat industry:

DES changed the face of meat in America. Using DES and other drugs, like

antibiotics, farmers would process animals on an assembly line, like cars or computer chips. Open-field grazing for cattle became unnecessary and inefficient and soon gave way to confinement feedlot operations, or factory farms, where thousands upon thousands of penned cattle could be fattened at troughs. This was an economy of scale. It was happening everywhere, the wave of the future, the marriage of science and big business. (125)

Though DES was finally banned in the cattle industry, plenty of other legal growth hormones took its place. Jane discovers her own exposure to DES in the womb and realizes that her body's reproductive function has been compromised, her body's physiology changed, and her uterus misshapen. Thus, when Jane learns she is pregnant, she knows it will be unlikely for her to carry the fetus to term. This revelation about the truth behind industrial-scale meat production leads Jane to rebel even further against the guidelines set by BEEF-EX for *My American Wife!* She tries to use the show as a platform to expose the ugly realities caused by the American expectation for abundant and cheap meat, which leads her to Colorado to feature the Dunns, a family that runs a CAFO.

Five year-old Rose Dunn is another important example of how meat industry practices can transform human bodies. Like Jane, Rose also suffers from DES poisoning, exposed because her father and half-brother use DES on their cattle illegally. Rose's mother Bunny reveals to Jane and the film crew that her young daughter has already developed full breasts and pubic hair and has already started menstruating. Tragically, Rose has also suffered sexual abuse from her older half-brother, and though Bunny feels sad about what happened to her daughter, she seems to think that Rose is fated to be objectified: "Oh, what the hell. It's not like it's her fault. And with

a body like that, who's gonna be looking at her face, right?" (276) Bunny is woman very aware of her own conventional sex appeal—when she catches the film crew staring at her body she laughs it off: “Forget it. I’m used to it. Hell, I used to be an exotic, remember? People were always laughing and staring. And darn it, they oughta stare. These babies are Nature’s Bounty. That’s what John [her husband] calls ‘em. No artificial growth enhancement here” (253). Because Jane has already risked losing her job by ignoring the sponsor’s guidelines for the families she features on the series, she subverts their wishes in a different way with Bunny and the Dunns. Jane notes that Bunny is “amplitude personified, replete with meats, our ideal American Wife” (252). In a calculated move, however, through Bunny and her family, Jane actually gains access to the CAFO and slaughterhouse and learns more about the meat industry’s unethical practices. It is ironic, and perhaps, fitting, that through Bunny, a woman who fits the sponsor’s version of the “most ideal” American wife, Jane meets Rose, a tragic example of the human cost of cheap and abundant meat.

Though Rose is exposed to DES through playing around her family’s feedlot, people who consume animals treated with DES can also be affected, which Jane discovers when she tries to film an episode of *My American Wife!* featuring the Purcells, a black family in Mississippi. Prompting the Purcells to discuss the kinds of meat they like to eat, Jane discovers that Mr. Purcell is a victim much like herself and Rose:

“Chicken,” Mr. Purcell said. We sure do like chicken, but even chicken ain’t cheap now. Used to be they had these parts that was real good. And cheap down at the packin’ house...”

Miss Helen let out a hiccup that turned into a burst of laughter. “Yeah, we thought

they was real good...until Mr. Purcell's barry-tone came out soundin' serpraner!"

Purcell explained. "It was some medicines that was usin' in the chickens that got into the necks that we was eatin'...An' that medicine, well, if it didn't start to make me sound just like a woman!"

"And look just like one too, with them teeny little titties and everything!" Miss Helen chimed in. (117)

Jane discovers that the FDA's 1959 ban of DES for use in chickens was finally prompted when "someone discovered that dogs and males from low-income families in the South were developing signs of feminization after eating cheap chicken parts and wastes from processing plants" (124). Despite the cultural associations of meat eating with masculinity, Mr. Purcell's meat consumption actually queers his body. Though Miss Helen and Mr. Purcell laugh about what happened to him, their experience reveals how questionable meat industry practices that are used to increase profit and productivity, and are often deemed acceptable by the industry itself, often affect already-vulnerable working class populations. Jane's exploration of the history and effects of DES provides a striking example of how those who enjoy the least amount of privilege—children, women, nonhuman animals, the poor, and people of color—may be disproportionately affected by unethical practices used in the meat industry to increase profits.

Though *My Year of Meats* focuses on the myths and realities of the production and marketing of meat, the text features conspicuously few actual living animals. One rare but notable instance occurs when Bobby, the child of Mexican-American family featured on *My American Wife!* shows off his pet pig for the camera, which becomes the culminating scene for

the episode. At home in Japan, Akiko is moved to tears while she watches as “a young Mexican child stood in the middle of a waving field of wheat, smiling shyly up at her and offering her an enormous pig” (63). A gust of wind blows off the boy’s hat, and his pig, wet from a bath, slips from his arms. The boy “broke into peals of laughter as he chased them both in circles” (63). During filming, Jane recognizes, like Akiko, that the final scene featuring Bobby and his piglet is “a surreal and exquisite moment” (63). However, by giving the reader access to Jane’s perspective as well as to Akiko’s as the viewer, Ozeki frames this moment as complex and deeply ironic because we learn from Jane’s narrative that Bobby’s piglet, whose name is “Supper,” is not just his pet, but also his 4-H project. As Jane watches the scene in real time, she reflects, “Bobby smiled at the camera, a little Mexican boy shyly offering his American Supper to the nation of Japan” (61). The scene portrays childhood innocence and the uncomplicated love of a boy for his pet and playmate, while simultaneously reminding the reader that the piglet is not only a pet, but a “project,” which will eventually become supper for Bobby’s family. Bobby and Supper represent an example of the multifaceted relationship most of us have with nonhuman animals, especially when we treat animals as both companions, even as family, *and* as objects for our own use and consumption.

My Year of Meats is also astutely sensitive to the cultural, economic, and ethical factors at play in regard to the practice of meat eating on both individual and socio-cultural levels. As Cynthia Bailey points out, eating practices can both deconstruct and reproduce racial, gender, and class identities (40), a fact of which both Jane and her bosses at BEEF-EX are well aware. In reference to meat eating and, specifically, economic class difference, Bailey asserts, “We should not minimize the attachment of working-class people of all races to meat eating either. If the

steak dinner is reserved for the master or regarded as the upper-class person's mark of distinction, then a claim to class privilege can reasonably be thought to require a claim to meat" (46). Jane recognizes, for example, that the Texas-style Beefy Burritos Bobby's mother prepares for her family "were the symbol of their hard-earned American lifestyle, something to remind them of their roots but also of their new fortune" (61). Jane herself notes that before she got the job with BEEF-EX, she "had just defaulted to a vegetarian diet of cabbage and rice" (7), only because she could not afford to eat meat, another detail that links meat to class privilege. The complexity and irony inherent in Bobby's relationship with and to his "Supper" is consistent with the novel's portrayal of and engagement with meat eating generally, as it portrays how meanings associated with meat can shift with changing contexts, as well as how the relationships most of us actually have with nonhuman animals are a paradoxical combination of sentiment and violence.

The second notable example of a live animal portrayed in the novel is a cow, whose botched slaughter, by methods deemed "humane" by the meat industry, Jane and her crew witness when they film inside the slaughterhouse. Jane describes the particularly harrowing scene:

Down below, a cow was herded into the pen by a worker wielding an electric prod. The cow balked, minced, then slammed her bulk against the sides of the pen. She had just watched the cow before her being killed, and the cow before that, and she was terrified. Her eyes rolled back into her head and a frothy white foam poured from her mouth as the steel door slammed down on her hindquarters, forcing her all the way in. (283)

The retractable bolt that a worker shot into the cow's forehead in order to stun the animal failed to hit its mark, and Jane and company watch as the worker shrugs and wraps a metal chain around the cow's leg anyway, hoisting her into the air where she spins slowly, head straining, legs kicking futilely to touch solid ground (283). Despite the first worker's disregard for the animal's suffering, the next man on the assembly line reacts very differently:

The worker put his hand on the cow's arched neck to steady her. [...] The worker was talking to her all the while saying, "There now, girl, calm down, it's gonna be all over soon," and then he did the most amazing thing. He bent down and looked straight into her bugging eye and stroked her forelock, and it seemed to calm her. (284)

What seems to redeem this horrific scene for Jane is the second worker's direct interaction with the living animal. He shows compassion before he ends her suffering by plunging a knife into her heart. Tragically, however, when blood spurts from the cow's body, the cameraman suddenly recoils, subsequently knocking Jane's own body "into the path of a thousand pounds of oncoming carcass" (284), and onto the bloody slaughterhouse floor. Jane's fall causes her to miscarry and lose the fetus that her exposure to DES in the womb had already made it unlikely for her to bear to term, so that her body's reproductive function is *doubly* damaged, first by a pharmaceutical closely tied to the meat industry, and then by the dangerous environment of the industrialized slaughterhouse.

In exposing numerous troublesome aspects of modern industrialized meat production, marketing, and consumption, *My Year of Meats* leaves the reader to wonder at the ethical questions and possibilities raised by the text. When Jane's job as producer of *My American Wife!*

comes to an end, she writes an exposé book detailing her experiences of traveling around the United States and learning about the meat industry—*My Year of Meats*. Jane writes, “Whatever people may think of my book, I will make it public, bring it to light unflinchingly. That is the modern thing to do” (361). Presumably, at the root of Jane’s motivation to publish a book is the idea that exposing the public to new information that they will, or should, care about, is a way to affect change. Ironically, however, Ozeki’s novel has already staged its *own* exposure, which forecloses this possibility, or at least, the likelihood of it, when Jane laments that when she took the job with *My American Wife!* she willfully ignored what she *already knew* about unhealthy mass-produced meat, widespread animal suffering in factory farms and slaughterhouses, and the devastating environmental effects of the meat industry. Jane believes this typifies the contemporary American public’s relationship to information. She explains, “Coming at us like this—in waves, massed and unbreachable—knowledge becomes symbolic of our disempowerment—becomes bad knowledge—so we deny it, riding its crest until it subsides from consciousness” (334). She adds, “I would like to think of my ‘ignorance’ less as a personal failing and more as a massive cultural trend, an example of doubling, of psychic numbing, that characterizes the end of the millennium. If we can’t act on knowledge, then we can’t survive without ignorance” (334). The cultural trend of “willful ignorance” to which Jane refers can perhaps be explained in terms of what Kari Weil calls the “impossibility of reality” (131). As Steve Baker points out, it is understandable that those who are concerned with animal ethics have focused on the “humanity,” or lack thereof, of the treatment and killing of individual animals within slaughterhouses “because what is unthinkable is the scale of the whole industry and all its economic, social, and cultural ramifications. That’s too big a thing to take on” (qtd. in Weil 132).

In much the same way that Jane's human sensorium is overwhelmed in the slaughterhouse so that she is unable to perceive the vast scale of mechanized killing, the entire global system of meat production is an even more vast "impossibility of reality." Therefore, the pertinent question in relation to ethics becomes: How *can* we, effectively, and as accurately as is possible with the limited perceptive faculties we humans have, grasp the realities of our relations and entanglements with the nonhuman in the modern era?

While Ozeki's novel does not provide easy answers to this question, I believe the text provides two posthumanist possibilities for at least approaching, or rethinking, this issue. Tracing the counterlinguistic turn in animal studies, Weil notes that reason, the capacity deemed by the humanist tradition to be unique to the human, and thus, the supposed marker of human exceptionalism, is insufficient for thinking about what Donna Haraway has referred to as "killing well," and similarly, what Derrida has termed "eating well." Based on this belief, some scholars of animal studies are concerned with "ways of knowing that appear to work outside those processes of logocentric, rational thinking that have defined what is proper to the human as opposed to the nonhuman animal" (Weil, *Why?* 118). For example, Cora Diamond argues that a proper ethics of killing animals must rely on the experience of humans' shared vulnerability and mortality with nonhuman animals (Weil, *Why?* 118). When Jane describes the remarkable actions of the compassionate slaughterhouse worker, she notes specifically that he "bent down and looked straight into [the cow's] bugging eye," meeting the animal's gaze. This moment seems to redeem the otherwise horrific ordeal from Jane's perspective. As I discussed in the first chapter, the nonhuman gaze can be a powerful provocation of posthuman recognition, and meeting the gaze of the nonhuman animal Other may be particularly powerful at the moment of

its imminent death, “the place where the conceptual and ontological distinctions that language makes possible break down—including the distinctions between human and animal” (Weil, *Why?* 122-3). Thus, to meet the animal’s gaze at this moment is to understand our shared vulnerability, corporeality, and mortality, while still recognizing difference.

The second posthumanist possibility presented in *My Year of Meats* for achieving more ethical relations with the nonhuman is a new materialist conception of the body as not separate from the world, but materially co-constituted by it. As Stacy Alaimo explains, this is a perspective that “does not begin with discrete objects, separated from the human subject, but instead begins from a material feminist sense of the subject as already part of the substances, systems, and becomings of the world” (“Thinking” 14). In the novel, bodies that are biologically transformed by DES, which enters those bodies in various ways, serve as an excellent way to think of corporeality as what Alaimo refers to as “trans-corporeality,” which is both a recognition that “the human” is ultimately inseparable from “the environment,” or “nature,” and an acknowledgement of “the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, and other actors” (Alaimo, *Bodily* 2). Not only do the bodies that have been changed by DES in *My Year of Meats* highlight a collapse in the boundaries between human and animal, since DES is often ingested through meat consumption, they also collapse boundaries between the bodily, or the “natural,” and the synthetic or technological. As Julie Sze asserts, “DES is a rich example of how human and animal bodies interact with a variety of technological and environmental systems. Understanding DES bodies as technologically polluted is to argue, as Haraway suggests, against the purity and integrity of social, natural, and bodily categories” (793). Sze sees DES-affected bodies as “hybrids” of

animal and human, particularly female bodies, “with nonmachine-based forms of technological intervention, such as the pharmaceutical, petrochemical, and livestock industries and the products they create and normalize through their production processes” (793).

My Year of Meats foreshadows a materialist turn in recent feminist scholarship that recognizes human bodies as sites of conflict in an industrial capitalist global economy, never independent or completely “human,” but always entangled with and inseparable from the more-than-human world. This understanding of the human lends itself to new ways of thinking about how we relate to the nonhuman world. As Cecilia Åsberg puts it, from new materialist perspectives, “Ethics is an integral part of the diffraction (ongoing differentiating) patterns of worlding, not a superimposing of human values onto the ontology of the world,” and thus, “Responsibility is not an obligation that the subject chooses but rather an incarnate relation that proceeds the intentionality of consciousness” (11). These perspectives have the potential to help us think ethically outside of our collective troubled relationship to “information,” especially about the ways in which the human species has increasingly devastating and massive-scale effects on the nonhuman world, as well as to recognize the limitations of specifically human ways of knowing.

CONCLUSION

APPROACHING A POSTHUMANIST HUMAN-ANIMAL ETHICS

The goal of this project is to contribute to the growing and varied field of posthumanist animal studies, in one sense, as a response to previous literary criticism that has ignored the presence of animals or the significance of meat eating in these texts, especially in the first two chapters, and in another, to show how each text presents alternate ways of thinking about our own species and how we relate to each other and the nonhuman world. Each of the three texts foregrounds different problems and issues, but I argue that they all interrogate and destabilize the figure of the human in related ways. Each either implicitly or explicitly exposes and subverts the discourse of speciesism, pays particular attention to corporeality and the ways that both human and nonhuman subjects are governed through biopower, and offers new perspectives on how to think about the relationship between the human and nonhuman. In linking these three seemingly disparate texts, I hope to show the universality of the concerns they all raise. It is notable that all three authors—Carson McCullers, a queer woman, Charles Johnson, an African American man, and Ruth Ozeki, a Japanese-American woman—occupy minority subject positions, a fact that manifests in the texts as an acute awareness of the dynamics of power and privilege, which each work exposes and problematizes in terms of humans and animals alike.

In the first chapter, I examine how Carson McCullers engages with these issues primarily at the level of language and representation. As a queer woman undoubtedly aware of the dangers associated with queer labeling and violence, she maps those anxieties and fears onto the nonhuman animal, but animals, particularly Firebird the horse, are not merely symbols in the text for purely human concerns. As many critics of McCullers's work have pointed out, much of her fiction, including *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, is interested in articulating alternative desires outside the confines of heteronormative frameworks. While her fiction avoids representing what would have been understood in her time as homosexual relationships, McCullers portrays non-normative love and desire through interactions between "deviant bodies" or "freaks." *Reflections in a Golden Eye* is McCullers's first full-length work, and the novella thus represents her first attempt to map queer love and desire onto non-normative bodies. Fittingly, she chooses the figure of a horse, if not a representation of a "non-normative" body, certainly the most fundamentally "Other" body in our cultural imagination. In representing queer affective relations between human and animal, McCullers complicates our understandings of intimacy and pleasure, and the ways that not only are the abstract categories of "human" and "animal" co-constitutive, but also how *actual* humans and *actual* animals can co-shape one another.

While maintaining a focus on speciesist discourse, its related rhetoric, and biopower, chapters two and three shift their attention to meat eating. While this shift may seem abrupt or unwarranted, as I have argued previously, the practice of meat eating is inherently linked to the institution of speciesism. Meat eating is, perhaps, the major node at which humans "declare" our superiority over other species. The consumption of meat is also inextricably tied to identity and privilege—meat eating is one way that we potentially define ourselves not only as human, but as

different *kinds* of humans, and I believe it does so more powerfully than other complicated ways we interact with nonhuman animals. Additionally, as I show in the introduction, meat eating is often associated with racist and sexist stereotypes, along with masculinist rhetoric, in contemporary culture.

Charles Johnson's *Oxherding Tale* and Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* approach the issue of meat eating in very different contexts but with similar concerns—the construction of identities and the violence fundamental to the practice of eating meat. While *Reflections in a Golden Eye* links violence towards nonhuman animals to the oppression of queer subjects, *Oxherding Tale* connects the violence of meat eating to the subjugation of oppressed human groups, particularly African American slaves. The novel's various anachronistic elements, such as the main character's articulation of ideas resembling eco-conscious thought that emerged in the 1960s, reveal that the text is as concerned with issues facing contemporary society as those relevant to the antebellum American South. When Andrew Harkins suggests that the “violence of the shotgun blast...stayed sealed inside like a particle, trapped in the dying tissues, and wound up on the dinner table—as if everything was mysteriously blended into everything else, and somehow all the violence wars slavery crime and suffering in the world had...its beginning in what went into our bellies,” he raises a concern about the how the violence and domination inherent in the consumption of other animals might be inextricably tied to some of our worst, and most fundamental, ways of relating to the world.

While in *Oxherding Tale*, Andrew experiences this epiphany through the context of hunting and killing a deer, a distinctively personal experience, his words remind us that we are all implicated in such violence and domination when our diets, along with other aspects of our

modern lives, depend largely on the killing of other species. Industrialized farming and mass slaughter in the animal industry often make this violence invisible to consumers, but *My Year of Meats* renders it visible, as well as explores the complex relationships between the culture of meat eating, the construction of identities, and problems of social justice. *Oxherding Tale* presents ethical vegetarianism as a potential response to the problematic aspects of meat eating, while Ozeki's novel foregrounds the complexities and difficulties of living ethically in relation to nonhuman animals in a globalized, late-capitalist society. Rather than positing a clear-cut ethical response, *My Year of Meats* presents us with another way to think about human bodies as in continuum with, rather than separate from, the nonhuman world, especially through its portrayal of the transformative and detrimental effects of the synthetic growth hormone DES, passed from animal to human bodies in a cycle perpetuated by industrial-scale meat production.

The importance of thinking about human bodies as inseparable from “the environment,” of collapsing boundaries between “the human” and “the animal,” even between the “natural” and the “technological,” becomes more and more pressing in our current historical moment. Recently, for example, a woman in Pennsylvania was infected with the first antibiotic-resistant “superbug,” a strain of *E. coli* that is impervious to treatment by any of our developed drugs. According to Sushrut Jangi, doctors and scientists have been predicting the emergence of a superbug for decades. Researchers from Tufts University conducted an experiment in 1974 that mimicked the treatment and conditions of factory-farmed chickens. The chickens, along with the farmers and their families, who were colonized with the bacteria through the air, became infected with a strain of *E. coli* resistant to a number of medicines used to treat common infections in humans. Though the first definitional superbug has just recently emerged, doctors have seen so

many cases of patients with bacterial infections resistant to commonly-used antibiotics in recent years, the World Health Organization has labeled antibiotic resistance a global health crisis (Jangi).

Though we have known about the likelihood of a superbug for years, industrial farming practices have continued to include the use of antibiotics in order to produce meat faster and more cheaply. Almost eighty percent of the antibiotics in America are used on factory farms (Jangi). Antibiotic use in the animal industry is directly tied to the way we treat the animals we eat—overcrowding, inappropriate and cheap feed, filthy conditions, and short lifespans are all elements of factory farming that have necessitated the heavy use of antibiotics, but concern over the treatment of animals on factory farms and in slaughter practices has consequences that reach far beyond consideration for nonhuman animals. As Ozeki shows in *My Year of Meats*, irresponsible industry practices often disproportionately affect disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals and communities. As Jangi explains:

Reducing agricultural consumption of antibiotics depends on what customers like us are willing to pay for. If we continue to buy meat from factory farms where unhealthy practices abound, the problem of antibiotic resistance will persist.

Buying locally produced and antibiotic-free chicken, for instance, can cost \$2 or more per pound at the supermarket—but it is the socially responsible alternative.

The “socially responsible alternative,” which is also safer and healthier, is easily obtainable only by those who have the means to spend more on what they eat. Thus, issues related to meat eating and meat production are fair and relevant concerns for human social justice movements.

In a society filled, everywhere, with antibiotic soaps, gels, and cleaning products, we

have focused on protecting ourselves from the outside, foolishly imagining the human body as independent, separate, impenetrable, often forgetting that danger lies in what we take *into* our bodies, particularly in the case of meat, a “commodity” often touted by cultural scripts and popular diet regimes as healthy and “wholesome.” The commodification and marketing of “meat,” for which, as Carol Adams explains, the body of a once-living animal becomes the absent referent, not only hides the violence of meat production, but allows us to forget that we are consuming other animals at all. Shrink-wrapped in supermarkets or marketed as cheap and easily accessible fast food, the flesh of animals becomes nothing more than a seemingly innocuous object to be consumed.

I began by juxtaposing the cases of Cecil the Lion and Sandra Bland, a comparison that, on the surface, may appear callous, or even offensive. However, the public reaction to Cecil the Lion’s killing reveals not only a number of problems related to how we define and relate to nonhuman animals, but the public mourning and calls for justice for Cecil, along with the subsequent (and justifiable) backlash *against* those reactions, reveal some of the conflicting, complicated, and flawed ways that we tend to approach human and animal activism as an either/or prospect. As I show by discussing Darren Wilson’s defense in the murder of Michael Brown, the use of speciesist rhetoric to continue the subjugation of human beings—to justify killing them, in fact—is alive and well in contemporary discourse. This is one reason attempts to articulate posthumanist ethics are so important. As Jennifer McDonnell puts it, “[H]uman rights are inextricably tied to the question of the animal” because “the category of ‘animal’ is contingent and shifts according to the convenience of the dominant” (8). Thus, discussions of ethics that merely begin *and end* with the assertion that human life is fundamentally more

valuable than animal life miss the point, as well as miss an opportunity to think more deeply about questions that affect all of our lives, some more powerfully and detrimentally than others. These three texts present ways to think from posthumanist perspectives, either by emphasizing that relations shape identities, even, and perhaps especially, in the case of human and nonhuman animal relations, or by figuring the human body as entangled with and constituted by, at its most fundamental biological level, that which we have attempted to deem separate from us and confine to the subordinate category of “nonhuman.”

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