Revista de Lenguas Modernas, N.° 29, 2018 / 69-91 / ISSN: 1659-1933

"Strange Coupling": Vegan Ecofeminism and Queer Ecologies in Theory and in Practice

CHAPTER 3: A Vegan Ecofeminist Queer Ecological Reading of Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats*

Adriana Jiménez Rodríguez
Escuela de Lenguas Modernas
Universidad de Costa Rica

Abstract
This chapter offers an example of the practical aspect of what I have termed vegan ecofeminist queer ecological approach in the course of this research project, in a very detailed analysis of Ruth Ozeki's novel *My Year of Meats*.

Key words: vegan ecofeminist queer ecological literary analysis, *My Year of Meats*, Ruth Ozeki

Resumen
Este capítulo ofrece un ejemplo del aspecto práctico de lo que durante toda esta investigación he llamado un análisis ecofeminista vegano de las ecologías *queer,* en una cuidadosa lectura crítica de la novela *My Year of Meats* de Ruth Ozeki.

Palabras clave: análisis ecofeminista vegano de las ecologías queer, *My Year of Meats*, Ruth Ozeki

Recepción: 10-08-17 Aceptación: 10-04-18

I see our lives as being a part of an enormous web of interconnected spheres, where the workings of the larger social, political, and corporate machinery impact something as private and intimate as the descent of an egg through a woman's fallopian tube.

This is the resonance I try to conjure up in my books.
In the end, though, it is a tribute to the power of the imagination. You cannot make a better world unless you can imagine it so, and the first step toward change depends on the ability to perform this radical act of faith. I guess I see writing as a similar endeavor.

Ruth Ozeki

My Year of Meats tells the story of one year in the life of documentarian Jane Tagaki Little, a heterosexual American-Japanese woman that gets hired to work on a corporate beef export company-produced television show that seeks to promote meat-eating in Japan via the imaginary construct of "American housewives" and their influence on the imaginary of "Japanese housewives": "*My American Wife!* must be a modern role model, just as her mother was a model to Japanese wives after World War II" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 13). Jane's journey into the intricacies of American-Japanese cultural transactions, mediated by her and her Japanese team, paid for by BEEF-EX, and ran by a violent misogynist Japanese man (Joichi "John" Ueno) who desires nothing more than to be American himself, suits itself to perfection to the type of methodology that I suggested in Chapter 2 of this series. I want to show how this novel exposes the myriad interconnections of the strange coupling dream that began this entire project: vegan ecofeminism and queer ecologies. Jane begins by writing the show's proposal under very strict guidelines:

> My American Wife!
>
> 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. Through her, Japanese housewives will feel the hearty sense of warmth, of comfort, of hearth and home—the traditional family values symbolized by red meat in rural America. (Ozeki, 1998, p. 8)

From the start, we can clearly see the imbrications between transnational capitalism, (profiting from the massive murder of nonhuman animals for human consumption) intercultural marketing, identity struggles and the modification of eating habits, and the clear symbolic equivalence of women and meat (following Carol Adams, for instance, the real equivalence is between women and the nonhuman animal killed to become "meat" which she terms the absent referent). The American Myth needs to sell meat to a nation that has historically not included meat-eating in their cultural diet, using women as a consumption tool to achieve an imaginary ideal of

femininity and heteronormative homely bliss. "The eating of meat in Japan", Jane's research shows, "is a relatively new custom. In the Heian Court, which ruled from the eight to the twelfth centuries, it was certainly considered uncouth, due to the influences of Buddhism, meat was more than likely thought to be unclean" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 14). Jane, however, ends up negotiating the content of the program, and she does so from her position of self-identification of a bi-racial, a Japanese-American female hybrid. She is too tall to be Japanese: "Polysexual, polyracial, perverse, I towered over the sleek, uniform heads of commuters on the Tokyo subway" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 9).[1] She is, as well, too Asian to be American: "And in a voice that was low, but shivering with demented pride, I told him, '*I ... am ... a ... fucking ...* AMERICAN!" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 11) she responds to frequent "Where are you from" questions that become more and more hostile the deeper she goes into the American rural landscape.[2] *My American Wife!* becomes, then, a polyphonic threading of very diverse cultural voices that respond to the American-Japanese capitalist beef exportation machinery in very distinct ways.

My discussion of Japanese eating habits as portrayed in cultural tension in *My Year of Meats* departs from one of the most important connections between characters, times and places in the narrative structure of the novel. The information from the Heian period in Japan comes mostly from female diarists of the time, who wrote about their female experiences in society in their so-called "pillow-books," so named because wives kept them under their pillows in their beds. In the novel, Jane reads Shonagon's *The Pillow Book* in awe of her precise, documentarian style. At the same time, the other female protagonist in the book, Akiko Ueno (Joichi "John" Ueno's wife), finds solace in reading the same text and part of her process of transformation is evidenced in her at first clumsy, then masterful attempts at writing her own. Jane's process mirrors Akiko's, of course, because her pillow book is *My Year of Meats*. In terms of the intricacies of national identity and its corresponding mythology, it is very interesting that Shonagon stands out from the other female diarists of the times because of her choice of language:

> Murasaki Shikibu scorned what she called Shonagon's 'Chinese writings,' and this is why: Japan had no written language at all until the sixth century, when the characters were borrowed from the Chinese. In Shonagon's day, these bold characters were used only my men—lofty poets and scholars—while the women diarists, who were writing prose, like Murasaki and Shonangon, were supposed to use a simplified alphabet, which was soft and feminine. (Ozeki, 1998, p. 14)

From the very beginning, then, the novel presents three female characters that are connected through their transgressive deviation from traditional gender roles, their documentation of the social / cultural realities that they astutely observe—speciest capitalist patriarchy, and their transformation as individual women in light of the specific circumstances of the contexts that they live in. Akiko's husband makes her watch each episode, prepare the

meat dish it displays, and then fill out a survey that rates the show for various aspects, of which the one that interests him (and me) the most is Authenticity, which I will discuss more at length later. While Akiko obeys in the preparation of the meat dishes, she struggles with her relationship to the food itself. Two issues intersect here, the fact that she does not really like meat and prefers more traditional fish-based dishes, and the fact that she suffers from eating disorders (possibly a combination of anorexia and bulimia). Here I think Ozeki is being ambivalent towards the eating of nonhuman animals because she has already shown some of the horrors of the farm-factory business, and seems to be pointing out fish-eating as a possible alternative; however, her description is curiously detailed: “The line of salted smelts hissed and popped over the gas grill. Akiko flipped them, careful not to burn the little bamboo skewer that pierced the bottom of their delicately gaping jaws” (Ozeki, 1998, p. 224). At first Joichi “John” is angry that she is serving something other than American beef, but he then acquiesces; again, the description of the dead fish that they are eating is peculiar: “He picked up his chopsticks and skewered a salty smelt. ‘Mmm,’ he said, biting it in half. ‘Delicious. Filled with eggs” (Ozeki, 1998, p. 226). Ozeki does not use “eggs” or the image of pregnant dead fish by accident. The entire novel revolves around the meat-eating industry and its consequences on the female human reproductive system. The strongest pulsation of *eros* in the novel is the desire to procreate and the ability or lack thereof of achieving pregnancy and then sustaining it. Akiko herself is at that particular dinner celebrating that her periods have returned (until then pregnancy is an impossibility due to her severe underweight) and she chooses not to break the news to her husband over dead cow.[3] But what statement is Ozeki making about the eating of fish? She closes the scene thus: “She [Akiko] picked up the little fish, piercing its fat, oily belly with the tip of her chopsticks, then ground the bones between her teeth” (Ozeki, 1998, p. 226). I find this ambivalence interesting, in terms of the text’s struggle with the ethical aspects of what or who we eat, and this is especially relevant because the tension in cultural dietary habits between America and Japan is what sparks *My American Wife!*

In terms of the Authenticity rating category, Japanese housewives do not start praising the program until male control of the content destabilizes. Ueno and male Japanese directors control the show at first. But Jane, from the location of her culturally-hybrid position and transgressive feminist gaze, gets her first chance when the director accidentally has an allergic reaction to the meat dish of the week’s episode. This reaction is quite severe and forces Jane not only to rethink her opinion of the meat-industry, but to explore the divergent ways that she can include her new perspective into the show. “Are you kidding?” Asks the doctor treating Jane’s director, “especially in veal. Whew! Those calves live in boxes and never learn to walk, even—and the farmers keep them alive with these massive doses of drugs just long enough to kill them. What sent your director into shock was the residue of the antibiotics in the Sooner Schnitzel” (Ozeki, 1998, p. 60).

Even if none of these people care about the brutal cruelty inflicted on baby calves, the poison that the industry uses to maintain their profit (quite poetically) ends up on their plates, and almost kills this particular human. With no other choice and faced with a deadline, the producers authorize Jane to choose the next "wife of the week" (like a menu special, exactly) and to direct it as well. She veers from the Japanese male (ignorant) vision of "authentic": Meanwhile, the first episode featuring a Latino family (and dead pig instead of dead cow) airs, to the fury of Ueno. At this point, the episodes complicate further and further, as Jane's research of the meat-industry continues and she acquires more control in choice of content *and* editing of the episodes:

> We'd been standing there for a good part of an afternoon, shooting a very small child playing with his piglet. In the background was a white farmhouse. The boy, whose name was Bobby, lived there with his parents, Alberto and Catalina Martinez. Alberto, or Bert, as he now preferred to be called, was a farmworker. He'd lost his left hand to a hay baler in Abilene seven years earlier, a few months after he and Catalina (Cathy) had emigrated from Mexico, just in time for Bobby to be born an American citizen. That had been Cathy's dream, to have an American son, and Bert had paid for the dream with his hand. (Ozeki, 1998, p. 58)

Here, with the active inclusion of non-white Americans into the show, the show's ratings begin to climb. Jane chooses to display a successful American Dream story, without forgetting to point out that the dream came with a heavy price. She also emphasizes the couple's "new" names. What Ozeki highlights in this passage, I believe, is the process of cultural assimilation that immigrants sometimes achieve. The Martinez family does not want to change American society, or the economic gain that comes from exploiting nonhuman animals, in this case, pigs; they just want to be allowed entrance into the national myth. They become part of the ecological landscape, modifying it perhaps in terms of the Mexican last name, the color of their skin and their Spanish accent, but they also resolve it by heterosexual procreation: Bobby is truly American. National identity is legitimized by "proper" reproductive practices, and once in place, placidly continues participating in the economic / social meat-eating American system. The Martinez family profits from the death of nonhumans, in perfect accordance to "wholesome" American values. Of course, the silence regarding the horror behind rural American 4-H programs speaks volumes; children are forced to watch the nonhuman animal friends that they have lovingly cared for sold and murdered in exchange for money. God bless America. No Charlotte spider to save the pig in the real world. However unfortunate the ending for this particular pig, he / she participated in selling the complaisant, happy American Dream ending to Japanese audiences across the world: "Bobby smiled at the camera, a little Mexican [was he not American?] boy shyly offering his American Supper to the nation of Japan. Everything was in slow motion. It was a surreal and exquisite moment" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 61).

Racism interconnects in the novel with many other forms of oppression when Ueno vetoes Jane's proposal of a black "wife," Miss Helen. The male-dominated corporation that produces the show displays, with uncanny clarity, the type of America that they want to sell to Japanese housewives: "UNDESIRABLE THINGS: 1. Physical imperfections 2. Obesity 3. Squalor 4. Second class peoples *** MOST IMPORTANT THING IS VALUES, WHICH MUST BE ALL-AMERICAN" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 12). Thus, according to them, the wives must adhere to all the mythical properties that they think potential Japanese meat-buyer women think American housewives possess. Jane ironically tells Sloane, her lover during her Year of Meats: "The BEEF-EX people are very strict. They don't want their meat to have a synergistic association with deformities. Like race. Or poverty. Or clubfeet. But at the same time, the Network is always complaining that the shows aren't 'authentic' enough" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 57). I believe that Ozeki manages to displace the cultural imaginary of the BEEF-EX executives in this smart move. The Japanese housewives do not buy into the fake, mythical Barbie-like American housewives. Therein lies the power that *My American Wife!* has to transform the lives of the individuals that it touches, especially Akiko, but including the families of the "wives," the Japanese crew, and of course, Jane herself. Ueno rejects Miss Helen because she is poor and black, no matter that she has a wonderful family is an excellent singer and softball champion—which Jane believes her audience would find extremely interesting. Miss Helen even convinces her pastor to allow them to film during a service in the Baptist Church that she and her family attend. The warmth and respect with which they are received has no effect on Ueno (who attempted to rape Jane the previous night). While Ozeki remains critical of some of the religious elements of the service, she highlights the message of love that comes through it all, and which I believe Jane considers a truly American value: "And when there is sickness in the family you must turn to your neighbors and to your community to help cure the sickness, because the community is there to help each member and the community is only as healthy as each member" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 112). Ueno is not impressed. He is horrified when he learns that *chicken* (definitely a second-class meat in his opinion) would be the featured dish. Here I will take a moment to show how Ozeki writes about the reality of many working-class families in the U. S. and which evidences the connection between environmental justice movements and vegan ecofeminist queer ecologies: Who eats who in America? Who profits from that and who suffers? What relationship exists between humans and nonhumans in this current distribution of power? "When Miss Helen blurted out that remark about chicken necks causing Mr. Purcell's voice to change and his breasts to grow, I was shocked" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 123), says Jane. Miss Helen had been saying that they have been eating less chicken because the parts of the dead chickens that they could afford were having actual toxic effects on their family because of the hormone manipulation they endured (for cost efficiency reasons of course) before slaughter. Working-class black

people eat cheap parts of hormonally-altered dead chickens because the people that get richer selling the "good" parts of the dead chickens to middle-class white people, for example, want to make even the last penny of profit of each carcass—not to speak of the really smart rich people selling "organic" dead chickens to really rich top tier white people that *know* about the hormones and their dangers. Most of these working-class black people do not even have health insurance and so suffer the racist violence to their health without any hope. Meanwhile, the nonhumans, the chickens, remain the absolute bottom rung, voiceless and tortured more every day to increase profit at the cost of whoever poor person's health. Thus, the extremes to which speciesism and environmental racism have degenerated to become evident in Ueno's multi-layered, racist refusal of a black "Wife of the Week."

Is there a connection between meat-eating and violence? Yes. It is also not a coincidence that Jane's ruminations on the obscene realities of the meat industry and the evident violence in American culture begins with an observation about obesity. Everything is connected: race, health, violence, sex, the slaughter of innocent nonhumans, the depletion of the ecological landscapes of rural areas, planetary devastation. Jane does not hesitate to share her questions with the reader: "Anyone who travels around the sprawling heartland of this country must at some point wonder why Americans are so uniformly obese. Are we *all* so ignorant about diet and health? Or so greedy, or so terrified of famine that we continuously, and almost unconsciously, stockpile body fat? Or is there something else?" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 123). Interestingly, she moves on to speak about violence and comments on a recent incident when a Japanese exchange student knocked on a door to ask for directions and got shot in the chest by the owner of the house, a butcher: "And while I'm not saying that Peairs pulled the trigger because he was a butcher, his occupation didn't surprise me. Guns, race, meat, and Manifest Destiny all collided in a single explosion of violent, dehumanized activity' (Ozeki, 1998, p. 89). In their travels across the country, in fact, the Japanese crew "were astonished at how deeply violence is embedded in our culture, how it has *become* the culture, what's left of local color" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 89). This is not to say that they themselves were not violent. In fact, when she first meets them, Jane wryly describes Oh, the sound man, as follows:

> [Oh] was walleyed and mean, except to animals. He loved animals. Sometimes you'd see him holding his boom pole, taking sound, and his coat would be alive, stuffed with a writhing litter of barnyard kittens poking out from his collar and cuffs. But if he loved animals, he worshipped Suzuki. They would get drunk on Jack Daniel's and tape pictures of blondes from *Hustler* all over the Sherlock walls of motels across America, then use the girls for target practice, shooting out their tits with air guns they'd bought at Wal-Mart. (Ozeki, 1998, p. 34)

What Ozeki *is* saying, is that in their process of transformation, of meeting these "wives" and their families,

on realizing the horrifying violence done to nonhuman animals, and its undeniable connection to violence against humans, especially women, these Japanese men *change*. She points to the wild stretch of human imagination that transformation *is* possible. "Suzuki," Jane explains after the visit to the "wife" who was also the mother of a girl who could not walk after being hit by a Wal-Mart truck, who I will refer to more in detail later, "was quiet in the van and on the plane and for several weeks afterward. I noticed that he and Oh stopped shooting out the crotches of blond girls in their motel room. Our visit to Hope [the people renamed the town] had changed them" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 139). In the unravelling of the connections between meat-eating and human violence in general, Ozeki emphasizes the human capacity (and I would add responsibility) to change. As long as the human brutal torture and murder of nonhumans continues, with its corresponding and undeniable environmental devastation continues to flourish in the name of capitalist greed, humans will continue to treat each other with the same intensity of violence.

My American Wife! suddenly goes rogue with the first-ever representation of a lesbian family in Japanese daytime television programming. As Jane becomes more defiant, the novel becomes richer for a vegan ecofeminist queer ecological analysis. Curiously, at first Jane is hesitant and one of the crew members actually works hard to persuade her: "If I was serious about wanting to use *My American Wife!* As a platform to further international understanding, he urged, then why not do a show about alternative lifestyles, something that was not often tolerated in Japan [...] but one small hitch had come up—the women were vegetarians. [...] I mean, lamb was one thing, and lesbians were another, but vegetarian lesbians were something else entirely" (Ozeki, 1998, pp. 173-174). Here is where things become really interesting. Jane chooses an alternative model to show, and with this representation, manages to de-stabilize the violent speciesist heteronormative patriarchal corporate power that supposedly "controls" her as their spokeswoman. Jane herself at one point cleverly points out how sometimes her Asian femaleness actually helps her in subverting the racist class system that rules American society: "It's the Asian-American Woman thing—we are reliable, loyal, smart but nonthreatening. This is why we get to do so much newscasting in America. It's a convenient precedent. The average American is trained to believe what I tell him" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 157). She is not any of those things, but she outsmarts the system by using what racist, sexist Americans believe about her, and this is genius. Lynn and Carol not only formed a lesbian family, but a lesbian, interracial, vegetarian family. Talk about transgression! Back in Japan, Akiko starts to cry, as she slowly wakes up from the asphyxiation stupor that her marriage has produced in her, and begins to draw the courage that she needs to face herself in terms of her own sexual orientation, the baby that she wants, and the necessity to leave a violent man that hates and abuses her: "These were tears of admiration for the strong women so determined to have their family against all odds [...] She wanted a child; she'd never wanted John; once she became pregnant, she wouldn't

need him ever again" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 181). Ozeki once again emphasizes the power of representation in this translational portrayal of a deeply moving moment. Representation matters. You cannot be what you cannot see. How can you be a lesbian if you have never seen one? How can people begin to see the brutality of the meat-industry as connected to the violence that they experience every day without the first brave documentarians who literally showed people the truth? This family in particular impacts Jane in terms of the need to be responsible and research even more: "You know, we're vegetarians by default. I mean, we like meat, like the taste of it, but we would just never eat it the way it's produced here in America. It's unhealthy. Not to mention corrupt, inhumane, and out of control, you know?" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 177). But Jane realizes something else when she read an article that Lynn wrote. Her own reproductive challenges are very likely the consequence of the indiscriminate use of DES in both cows and women in the 1970s. "Truth lies in layers, each of them thin and opaque, like skin, resisting the tug to be told. As a documentarian, I think about this a lot" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 175), reflects Jane. Ueno, of course, is absolutely furious, and he expresses his fury in very revealing terms, when he asks how Jane was capable of "polluting" Japanese housewives' minds with the "unwholesome" lesbians. From a vegan ecofeminist queer ecological perspective, this statement of hatred is clearly a manifestation of the heteronormative delusion that homosexuality is both "unnatural" and a disease that "pollutes" the otherwise "natural" and "healthy" landscape ecology of normative heterosexual society. These queer women also challenge the normative mandate of meat-eating, thus breaking assimilationist homonormative tendencies as well. Ironically, Ueno is right! His own wife (thankfully) becomes "infected" with the before-unthinkable possibility of becoming a happy, healthy, lesbian single mother! The lesbian episode, thus, becomes a pivotal point in the character development of the two protagonists, and unleashes the motivation that Jane in particular needed to uncover the information that she needs to effect real transformation in both American and Japanese audiences in terms of the violent reality of the meat-industry.

My Year of Meats also discusses disability as a consequence, in a way, of the corporate takeover of small-town businesses in rural America. "When I returned from Japan," explains Jane, "I found that all local businesses from my childhood had been extirpated by Wal-Mart. If there is one single symbol for the demise of regional American culture, it is this superstore prototype, a huge capitalist boot that stomped the moms and pops, like soft, damp worms, to death" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 56). When Christina Bukowsky got hit by a Wal-Mart truck the doctors told her parents that she would never recover consciousness, much less speech or movement in any of her limbs. When they ran out of insurance and vacation days, her mother had to quit Wal-Mart because they refused to "look bad after what had happened" and "she was suing the corporation." Instead of giving up, they turned to the population of their town, and in a move that echoed what Miss Helen's pastor said about community, love and health, turned the situation around

in hope that someday they would get their daughter back:

> They [the Bukowskys] installed their daughter in the living room, outfitting it with a hospital bed. They read books, they consulted with specialists, and they developed a method of treatment that involved the entire underemployed population of the town. Eleonor posted signup sheets with visiting times on the bulletin boards at the schools, at the beauty salon, and even at Wal-Mart, and soon they had a steady stream of visitors coming over to their living room to sit with Christina. (Ozeki, 1998, p. 132)

Ozeki points out how even in the face of great odds, a community can decide to actively fight an injustice and become organized, and that in helping one person, each other, they are inevitably helping themselves. In a town half-killed by multinational corporations that routinely destroy entire communities, this particular town refused to surrender, so to speak, and turned the tables on power dynamics to create an alternate system. "Along with the contribution of food," Jane tells us about the organization that took place, "you had to bring the Thing in Life That You Love Best, to share with Christina. A Hope was okay too" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 134). It worked. She even regained speech. What started off as a community effort reverberated farther, and soon the Bukowskys had created an alternative hospital for "lost cases" of sorts, that had real effects on people termed "inevitably disabled for life" by the medical institution but still believed that there was another way: "The town of Quarry had discovered a new natural resource—compassion—and they were mining it and marketing it to America" (Ozeki, 1998, pp. 135-136). The town eventually changed its name to Hope. However, the relationship between humans and nonhumans is not altered. In fact, the featured meat of that episode is "Heavenly Lamb Chops," which is actually Christina's first request on speaking again for the first time after the accident. It had always been her favorite dish. I find it strange that a damaged human can symbolically heal through the unnecessary death of an innocent nonhuman. This is one of the textual locations of what I can only call ethical ambivalence towards meat consumption. Whether it is purposeful (in an effort to not fall into a doctrinaire kind of narrative stance) or truthful (maybe eating an emotionally meaningful dish does have the capacity to heal a particular human individual, even if made of the dead body of a nonhuman individual) I think it succeeds in making the narrative rhythm interesting. All texts have gaps and contradictions, after all. The other issue that I find problematic in this episode is the representation of disability itself: Christina is a spectacularly beautiful young white girl, and while the appeal is somewhat understandable given the fact that Jane is indeed producing a television show, I cannot escape a feeling disappointment. What if she had not been "beautiful"? Then would people have helped? Would Jane have chosen them for that episode? Would Suzuki had hopelessly fallen in love with her? The questions remain. Ageism and normative standards of beauty aside, though, I do like that she is portrayed as a sexual

being, and that, as Eli Clare and many others have written extensively about, is rare. When the crew arrives, her mother confides in Jane that the only thing that she is a little concerned about is Christina's lack of sexual interest, and Suzuki comes to fill in that gap. While nothing physical happens, the obvious current of sexual flirtation that takes place, and which makes her parents happy, is significant in spite of that the fact that she will always be destined to mobility in a wheelchair, this fact is not seen as detrimental to her being an integral individual, and this girl will eventually fulfil her sexual self and be a complete person, disability or no disability. In this sense, *My American Wife!* represents the diversity of bodies successfully and, while still placing responsibility where it belongs—Wal-Mart's destruction of small-town commerce and legal dodging of liabilities funded by huge capital—manages to challenge the normative view of disability as a disease.

The repercussions of human reproduction on the environment and the planet's resources are juxtaposed to the immense desire of the two female protagonists to have a baby in *My Year of Meats*. But before looking into the particular experiences of Jane and Akiko and their experiences' relationship to the American meat industry, I want to start my analysis with the episode of *My American Wife!* that portrays a very valid representation of another type of family that diverges from the traditional heteronormative biological family, precisely because I think Ozeki is extremely talented in showing different perspectives, even (especially!) those that oppose the biological imperative desires of the protagonists. "Then", Jane explains to the BEEF-EX producers when proposing this "wife of the week", "suddenly she [Grace] got real serious. 'I've always thought that folks should just replace themselves in the world, you know, one kid for each parent, so you're note really adding anything. If everyone does that, we won't have the population explosion…" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 69). Grace and Vern chose to have two biological children and then adopted eleven more (from diverse ethnic backgrounds), yearly, and after family meetings where each individual had the right to express her / his opinion on whether or not to add a new family member—they unanimously settled on a family of fifteen was the right size for them. Is this racist in its redolence of deep ecology? The white privilege type of environmentalism argues that "people" need to stop reproducing if the planet is to be "saved." Many are the queer ecological critiques to such views, as in reality it is a particular type of "people" that are to blame for planetary devastation—people of color / the Global South. This view is extremely dangerous in that it circumvents blame from multinational corporations, mono-agricultural practices, labor exploitation based on race and gender… in essence, all the oppressive mechanisms that exist to support the capitalist consumer practices of the Global North. According to Grace's view exactly who has the right to have even that one child that she so specifically determines? It is also difficult to ignore the white savior complex bias in this particular family formation. But really, in critiquing these aspects am I saying that it is then ethically wrong for privileged white people to adopt abandoned children from the Global

South? I do not know. [4] From one possible perspective, it is almost as if they *should*, in moral repair to the damage that their country has done to ours in amassing the world's resources and selling them for a profit. What bothers me is perhaps the aggrandized self-satisfaction in achieving "the greater good" from a position of privilege and power. Notice the detailed attention with which Ozeki described the scene where the family takes in Akiko once she manages to escape Japan and Ueno's abuse:

> But the biggest surprise had been a turkey! Golden, glazed and resplendent, carried triumphantly to the table by the eldest boys and placed in front of Vern, who presided over it. Wielding his carving knife like a sword, he addressed the bird, but before he did so, he saluted Grace across the length of the table, where she sat, regal, her contentment running deep and feeding them, all fifteen members of the Beaudoroux family and Akiko too, like a taproot. There was singing afterward. It was Akiko's first Thanksgiving. (Ozeki, 1998, pp. 336-337)

Is this description meant as a happy ending or as an astute last-minute provocation? I find that there is irony in the description of the dead turkey and its inevitable ideological tie to the American mythology of itself. Maybe Ozeki is displaying (a happily pregnant) Akiko's "everything is beautiful in America" in-love stage as a cautionary tale? In any case, there is little doubt that in problematizing the issue of human reproduction Ozeki is acknowledging the huge importance of the discussion, especially from a vegan ecofeminist queer ecological point of view.

During the filming of the Beaudoroux family episode (and the movement from "wife" to "family" is noticeable indeed) a fascinating intercultural exchange takes place and directs Jane to make further connections between the meat industry and the depletion of natural resources in the American landscape. The crew follows Vern around in his daily routine, which is a lot about weeding a plant called kudzu. When one of the crew members understands that the American has no idea of what he is doing, he decides to intervene:

> Suzuki stashed the camera in the van and returned with a tire iron, which he used to dig up an armload of the tubers. Back at the house, he showed Vern how to turn them into starch, then how to use the starch to thicken sauces and batters. He made a salad with the shoots and the flowers, and even a hangover medicine that resembled milk of magnesia. Vern was astounded. He'd never thought of the plant [kudzu] as anything but an invasive weed. It was an interesting story, I thought, especially for a Japanese audience. (Ozeki, 1998, p. 76)

The process of change continues to manifest in each individual that is touched by Jane's vision. After a little research, she discovers the cause of the introduction of kudzu: "By the early part of the century, decades of careless cotton and tobacco farming had depleted Southern soil, and bankrupt farmers were fleeing their barren fields. In 1933, desperate to keep the South from washing away, Congress established

the Soil Erosion Service, and kudzu, with its deep biding roots and its ability to reintroduce nitrogen into the soil, was seen as Dixie's savior" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 76). The government started paying farmers to plant it, and the solution worked temporarily, until the plant's wild tendencies took over and it aggressively became out of control. A common threat to rowdy children was "I will throw you in the kudzu patch if you don't behave." As the years went by people forgot its nutritional, ecological, and soil-replenishing virtues and "[m]ostly, nowadays, its only use is metaphoric, to describe the inroads of Japanese industry into the non-unionized South" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 77). How interesting that a Japanese plant saved Southern American soil from complete depletion caused by extractist, non-organic mono-agriculture (sustained, how can anyone forget, by the brutal institution of slavery) can then became nothing more than a "bothersome weed." So many of the recovery paths proposed by alternative / organic / sustainable agriculture methods are simply about remembering, rediscovering gentle farming practices of the past that were swept away by the cruel greed of corporate America. Jane mentions at one point that "the body remembers." It is clear that the earth remembers as well. How did the changes on the ecological landscape of the rural South affect the lives of the humans and nonhumans living as part of it? How many negative effects were the consequence of the usual human assumption that they were above the landscape? The assumption that both land and nonhuman exist only in their service? How much more time is it going to take for humans to realize that there will be nowhere to escape when the last resource is used up irresponsibly in denial of the complicated web of interconnectedness of ecosystems / bio-social spaces / naturecultures? Across cultures as disparate as Japanese and American, a memory sparks a world of possibility, as Vern continues to explore kudzu long after the crew leaves, and this event pushes Jane to dig deeper into the devastating effects of the meat industry on the environment.

When Jane's research allows her to make the final interconnections between DES, soil depletion, misogyny, slaughterhouses, the gynecological institution and infertility in America she reaches the point of no return as a character. When visiting her mother, she goes to the library to reread a racist book of her childhood.5 After skimming over some of the most horrifying passages she concludes: "The conflict that interests me isn't *man* versus *woman*; it's *man* versus *life*. *Man's* REASON, his industries and commerce, versus the entire natural world. This, to me, is the dirty secret hidden between the fraying covers" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 154). This vegan ecofeminist queer ecological statement basically summarizes the controlling force behind *My Year of Meats*. Jane begins to think more seriously about the landscape that they travel: "The United States has lost one-third of its topsoil since colonial times—so much damage in such a short history. Six to seven billion tons of eroded soil, about 85 percent, are directly attributable to livestock grazing and unsustainable methods of farming feed crops for cattle" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 248). On the road to what proves to be their last destination, the *My American Wife!* crew hires an

Revista de Lenguas Modernas, N.° 29, 2018 / 69-91 / ISSN: 1659-1933

American local, Dave, to show them around. He has a bitter attitude of Nothing Is Ever Going To Change, but as it happens, he also offers a lot of useful information related to her latest discoveries: "The impact of countless hooves and mouths over the years has done more to alter the type of vegetation and land forms of the West than all the water projects, strip mines, power plants, freeways and sub-division developments combined" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 249). [6] This staggering fact still leaves meat-eaters around the world unmoved. Why? How is this possible? Jane will take this up towards the end of the novel. For now, she also reflects on land as "owned," and how ridiculous it really is to think that you can "own" a piece of the earth: "The vistas, unbroken then and alive with grasses, are now cropped and divided into finite parcels whose neat right angles reassure their surveyors and owners while ignoring the subtle contours of the land. The fences stretch forever" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 247). A good fence makes a good neighbor, right? Substitute "fence" for "wall" or "border" and we find ourselves in the midst of the horrifying violence inflicted on human and nonhuman alike for the sake of nationalism, patriotism, migration and refugee policy. However, there is no need to look outside the borders of Great America to consider the consequences of private property, capitalism, toxic dumping and the concomitant effects on the health of human and nonhuman individuals. We can look at one example in the novel, of what Americans do to Americans:

> Just outside Denver was the Rocky Flats plutonium plant. It was closed in 1989 after two major fires and numerous accidents and leaks led to charges that the plant had seriously contaminated the surrounding countryside, causing a significant rise in cancers among Denver area residents and a veritable plague of mutations, deformations, reproductive disorders, and death among farm animals [...] In the 1950s, it was discovered that the radioactive iodine had contaminated local dairy cattle, their milk, and all the children who drank it. As the incidence of thyroid cancer grew, the farmers in the surrounding areas—'downwinders,' they are called—began to wear turtlenecks to hide their scars. It was the fashion, the waitress told me. (Ozeki, 1998, p. 246)

Turtlenecks become a fashion statement of good old American corporation toxic dumping and environmental classism. But how exactly does DES come to complete Jane's understanding on the devastation caused on the body of the land, cows, and women in America?

Jane's personal struggle during her Year of Meats is precisely related to hormone-enhanced cattle, specifically in terms of her reproductive capacity and health. She got married when she was studying in Japan, very much in love, and after some time discovered that it was nearly impossible for her to conceive. Her reproductive system was congenitally damaged, and her marriage destroyed: "After almost five grim years, we woke to the realization that we just didn't love each other enough. It wasn't the frustration of our biological imperative; I think we could have survived that and accepted childlessness with grace. But neither of us could recover from the overwhelming sense of? failure. It poisoned every single thing we tried to do as a couple"

(Ozeki, 1998, p. 153). She was single when she came back to the States. "I had a lover in the Year of Meats. His name." Jane tells the reader, "was Sloan and he was a musician from Chicago. A mutual friend had sort of set us up, but I was never in New York much and he was always on the road, so it was months before we actually met in person" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 51). They meet occasionally when she is out on the road and one night they have sex without a condom. Jane explains that she cannot get pregnant. As she goes deeper into her DES research, Jane begins to realize that her mother might have taken the hormone while pregnant with her (as it was believed to prevent miscarriages —in both human and nonhuman females—) and meat industry's hormone horrors become a physical reality in her own skin:

> Many doctors prescribed [DES] as casually as a vitamin, to an estimated five million women around the world. *Five million!* This was despite evidence, right from the start, that hormone manipulation during pregnancy was dangerous" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 125) [it was thought that DES would prevent miscarriages and premature births. [...] Then, in 1971, a team of Boston doctors discovered that DES caused a rare form of cancer, called clear cell adenocarcinoma, in the vaginas of young women whose mothers had taken the drug during pregnancy. (Ozeki, 1998, p. 125)

These women later became medically known as "DES daughters." How did the masters of the medical institution end up prescribing this drug to women? Well, if it worked for cows, why not women? From a vegan ecofeminist queer ecological perspective, it is absolutely fundamental to understand that in a patriarchal, speciesist, capitalist society, cows and women are exactly the same as absent referents for reproductive bodies to be exploited and profit from. It is equally fundamental to understand that the very little value placed on the female body is only one aspect in the misogynist, economically-driven force of pharmaceuticals in factory-farming "production." Big forces joined together and became very rich. And Jane's malformed uterus was only one of millions. Who gets rich and who gets fucked? These are the facts:

> DES changed the face of meat in America. Using DES and other drugs, like antibiotics, farmers could 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. If I sound bitter, it's because my grandparents, the Littles, lost the family dairy farm to hormonally enhanced cows, and it broke their hearts and eventually killed them. But I'd never understood this before. (Ozeki, 1998, p. 125)

Jane (of course) got pregnant that night. And the more information she uncovers, the more terrified she becomes of losing her baby. Jane also sadly acknowledges that her own

family's "old-school" farm was erased from the map because of the meat industry, that her body was damaged irreparably because of the meat industry, that the ecological landscape of America was savagely devastated because of the meat industry, that human and nonhuman health alike was considered a nonfactor for the profit-oriented meat industry.[7]

Jane's pregnancy connects to Akiko's. One baby will survive and one will die during the Year of Meats. But before I get into that, I want to show how from the beginning of the novel Ozeki clearly illustrates what Carol Adams so aptly termed the pornography of meat—simply put, the misogynist, brutal, sadistic treatment of both women and nonhuman females (to a lesser degree male nonhuman individuals as well). This is where it all starts: the fact that meat-eating is directly and irrevocably related to violence against women. Following a Japanese tradition, Jane picks up little presents for the people at the production office. These "little" trinkets are evidence of the connection of the meat industry and violence against women and of the sexualization of nonhuman female animals which proves it:

> For the boys in the office I got kitchen magnets from Lambert Pharmaceuticals, shaped like voluptuous humanoid cows in cocktail gowns, with the words 'Ready when you are... big shot!' in dialogue bubbles over their heads. For the research girls, I got pink sun visors that said 'Beef Babes are Best,' and also these small square green tins of a lanolin substance called bag balm, for applying to cows' chafed udders. It looks just like Vaseline, and ranchers and their wives swear by it. The illustration on the tin is right out of a 1920s Sears catalog, a hand-drawn sketch depicting an elegant set of swollen teats encircled by an oval cameo frame. The girls loved this. (Ozeki, 1998, p. 227)

"The girls loved this." Wow. Not only are they consciously oblivious to their own meat-ification; they *love* it (probably smiled and said thank you like well-behaved little girls). Ozeki cleverly points to the invisibilization of this shared patriarchal violence very clearly when setting in the local color—the *local color* in rural meat-industry America is violent, speciesist and misogynist, and you are supposed to find it funny. During the taping of the last episode, the son of the ranch's owner, Gabe, who also sexually molests his DES-residue hormone altered five-year-old baby sister, threatens Jane thus: "If you got something to accuse me of doing illegal around here, you just go right ahead and try. You and that whore my daddy's married to. This here's ranch country, girl, and we do *what* we want, *when* we want, without no government's say-so. You got that?" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 279). The word choice could not be more explicit: *whore*, *girl*... not expected to do anything else than perform gender-appropriate bovine behavior. The man who will guide their visit of the slaughterhouse, says Jane, "met us in the office, a wood-paneled panopticon decorated with a large poster of a young blond Amazon in a jungle bikini, who overlooked the meat-cutting operations below" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 280). I think this imagine of a hyper-sexualized,

objectified woman "supervising" the brutal slaughter of innocent nonhuman creatures is an excellent poster for the connection between violence against cows and women. The actual murder of the cows is compared to the rape of human females very clearly as well when Gabe continues his verbal abuse of Jane by telling the other man: "What's the problem, Wilson? Get 'em suited up and out there. We gotta educate these city folks, show 'em how we murder our animals round here, ain't that right Miz Tagaki? Hos we stick it to 'em. That's what you want, ain't it? That's what you been askin' for... " (Ozeki, 1998, p. 280). His rape speech cannot be any more explicit: women "ask" for rape the same way that cows "want" to die so that humans can eat their dead bodies. Both are essential assumptions of speciesist, misogynist patriarchal meat-eating culture in America (and elsewhere). Jane is reluctant to go on the tour of the kill floor because of her pregnancy, but in spite of Sloan's plea to re-think it, she chooses to go ahead. The night before, Bunny, the "whore" married to Gabe's father, and mother to Rose, decides to show her hormonally-altered infant daughter's body to Jane and the crew to film it. [8] After that very intense moment, Jane dreams that she miscarriages a cow fetus—Ozeki makes the equivalence woman = cow exquisitely explicit: "As I stood there with my legs spread, it started to emerge, limb by limb, released, unfolding, until gravity took the mass of it and it fell to the ground with a *thump*, gangly and stillborn from my stomach. It was a wet, misshapen tangle, but I could see a delicate hoof, a twisted tail, the oversize skull, still fetal blue, with a dead milky eye staring up at me, alive with maggots (Ozeki, 1998, p. 277). The cows' babies are her own; her babies, hurt by DES, are the cows' as well… human and nonhuman mothers exploited by violent patriarchal capitalism are all the same… Her premonition becomes true, in a way, because after an accident on the "kill floor," her dead baby comes out of her, blood intermingling with the ones of the innocent slaughtered cows: "I pulled out the jeans, and as I unfolded the stiff leathery creases, it occurred to me: How much of this blood is slaughtered cow and how much is my baby? And then the sadness was back again" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 303). Jane's baby is not meant to be, and the undeniable connection of her damaged body's reproductive failure to the meat industry is devastating.

Akiko's baby not only survives, but is *conceived* via Jane and her crew's efforts to make *My American Wife!* a show with the most ethical intercultural projection possible. Akiko lives vicariously through the various messages that Jane manages through sheer force of will and strategy to infuse the programs with, and her incredible process of transformation would not have been possible otherwise. If I can go back to Joichi "John" Ueno, the disgusting sack of patriarchal violence that she calls her husband, I can begin to trace Akiko's amazing change, especially in light of her context and circumstances: "When her periods stopped coming, Akiko's doctor had told her that her ovaries were starved and weren't producing any eggs. Akiko's husband, Joichi, was very upset. He told her that she must put some meat on her bones" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 20). Because meat in Japan was American, of course:

Revista de Lenguas Modernas, N.° 29, 2018 / 69-91 / ISSN: 1659-1933

"Joichi believed in meat. The advertising agency he worked for handled a big account that represented American-grown meat in Japan" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 21). Ozeki makes a point to clarify that Akiko was plump when her boss introduced her to her future husband, and that it was because of him that she became excruciatingly thin and lost the ability to menstruate. When her husband decides that it is time for them to procreate, her body, in a very real way resisting him in the only fathomable way, rejects even the possibility thereof.[9] Before even the mere possibility of a thought of rebellion against her heteronormative reproductive "duties", Akiko's body does the resistance for her. And how could it not? Jane's initial description of the man is repulsive enough: "Ueno was a large, soft-bodied man, with smooth, damp skin and a stunningly profound halitosis, indicative of serious digestive problems, which rose, vaporlike, from the twists of his bowels" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 42). In one of her daring, typically ironic moves, Ozeki manages to connect this man's very putrid odor with digestive, meat-eating habits. Akiko's bulimia is also narratively connected to the terrifying effect that this violent man has on her: "After that first meeting [with Ueno] and long into the marriage, her throat frequently clenched and went into spasms, making it difficult for her to swallow. That's when she started to lose weight" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 97). Akiko's description of purging is also very revealing in that it is the first time in the novel that meat is explicitly connected to "animal" and this, of course, cannot be a mere coincidence:

> Akiko had a hard time with positive thoughts. After dinner, when the washing up was done, she would go to the bathroom, stand in front of the mirror, and stare at her reflection. Then, after only a moment, she'd start to feel the meat. It began in her stomach, like an animal alive, and would climb its way back up to her gullet, until it burst from the back of her throat. She could not contain it. She could not keep any life down inside her. But she knew always to flush while she was vomiting, so 'John' wouldn't hear. She also knew that she felt a small flutter in her stomach, which she identified as success, every night when it was over. (Ozeki, 1998, p. 38)

The connection between meat-eating and the insufferable feeling of having a live being inside her body is an unmistakable commentary of the ethical instability of consuming the corpses of innocent nonhuman animals. It is also connected, of course, to the ways in which women living in extremely violent, constricting contexts are forced to express themselves only in self-destructive ways: "'The modern Japanese housewife, living a hermetic existence, increasingly cut off from contact with the world, is literally losing her voice. Is it any wonder that she prefers to interact with a machine?' asks Dr. Yoko Horii, of Tokyo University. Dr. Horii studies eating disorders, depression, substance abuse, suicide, and other dysfunctional behaviors among Japanese housewives" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 87). The male doctor that Ueno sends Akiko to in search of a solution to her "problem" is equally violent and

misogynist, and makes Akiko fell even worse, as even the relief of purging is taken away from her.[10]

The turning point for Akiko (and her eventual pregnancy) is when she gathers the strength and courage to actually contact Jane. When she gets the brutally honest fax (which includes information on Ueno as a domestic / physical / sexual abuser), Jane is not only warned by her local boss to be careful, as it is the real boss' wife that she is dealing with, but also amazed at how all this time she had not even considered the effects of her show on the Japanese women that were her target audience: "Now it hit me: what an arrogant and chauvinistic attitude this was. While I'd been worried about the well-being of the American women I filmed as subjects, suddenly here was the audience, embodied in Akiko, with a name and a vulnerable identity" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 231). She decides to commit to helping Akiko and tries to coordinate a response fax via phone call. Unfortunately, the coordination attempt fails and Ueno discovers it. He gets drunk and sadistically rapes Aiko:

> 'You deserve more than this [anal rape] for lying to your husband,' he hissed into her ear. 'You think I'm stupid?' He lifted her by the shoulders and pounded her against the floor, over and over. 'You think I don't know you started again? That I couldn't smell you bleeding?' Then, just as he was about to ejaculate, he pulled out. 'You think I don't know when you are in heat... ?' he whispered, inserting his penis into her vagina now. 'So you want to be a lesbian? You want to have a baby but not a man? Well, here...' He pulled out, then thrust himself into her as hard as he could. 'Tell *this* to that *bitch* Tagaki.' He ejaculated, then collapsed on top of her. (Ozeki, 1998, p. 239)

How many times has Jane been called *bitch* by furious, violent men in the novel? Is rape not a weapon used to punish any woman that steps out of line and dares to challenge the system? Is Ueno finally completing the attempted rape from the beginning? Is he sexually violating Aiko because he was not able to do it (completely) to Jane? Before Akiko even checks the damage done to her own body, she crawls to the phone to warn Jane; that is the extent of sorority that the novel presents are an alternative to patriarchally-indocrinated submissive women who act out their passive victim roles and fight only with other women. Later, in the hospital, Aiko witnesses the conception of her baby in her mind: "Something was happening, she realized, though she didn't quite know what. But she could feel it and knew it was a miracle of sorts, watery, lunar, and profound. She looked down the length of her body, skeletal beneath the thin hospital sheet, and that's when she saw. Not saw, as with her eyes, but conceived, in her mind" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 305). The sympathetic nurse that has befriended her seems to humor her when she stops some X-ray exams, but is truly surprised when a few weeks later Aiko shows her the results of the pregnancy test in her house, where she has cooked her a special thank-you Japanese (not American) dinner. Aiko leaves Ueno forever and is going to finally meet Jane and some of the American families from the show in person.

She is going to stay in America and nurture her pregnancy: she knows that it is a girl. Does Akiko's pregnancy comfort Jane in the loss of her own? Is happiness for all the women in the novel only achieved through motherhood? And it is important to note that ALL the women in the novel are biological mothers (including the adoptive mothers like Grace), even the lesbian couple decided to have one biological child each. Lynn and Carol fight to get pregnant, as do Jane, Jane's mother, and Akiko, even if that means putting their own health at risk. I cannot not question the overwhelming pulsation of the biological imperative in the novel, especially from a vegan ecofeminist queer ecological point of view.[11] What is clear to me is that Ozeki is placing the forced reproduction of nonhuman females in juxtaposition to the chosen reproduction of human females and then asking very interesting questions when some women cannot get pregnant precisely because of their bodies' imbrication with meat-industry related pharmaceutical plotting. I think she goes as far as to ponder if each woman in only ethically allowed one child (to replace herself, in Grace's opinion). Whatever the answer is, textually speaking, Akiko's pregnancy is the biological, *lunar* path that leads her to independence, happiness, and healing.

My Year of Meats ends in parallel independence and healing. Jane's team risked everything and lied about the tapes being destroyed in the accident. They deliver them to her in New York and ask her to "so something with them." It takes her some time, and all of her money, but after meeting Akiko she begins editing the material. She gets support from the most unexpected places. Cynical, unbelieving Dave, for example:

> "You remember what I said?" he asked. He was talking into the top of my head, but I could hear his words rumbling in his massive chest. "About nothing helping and no one caring and it being too late?"
>
> I nodded, and he squeezed me harder.
>
> "Well, I don't believe that anymore. "He released me abruptly and looked embarrassed. "I'm really looking forward to seeing what comes out of those tapes." (Ozeki, 1998, p. 302)

In the so-called Era of Information, people still simply do not want to hear it. In reflecting on her core motivation for editing the material, in processing everything that she learned and everyone that was transformed during the making of *My America Wife!* Jane has to explore this question very deeply:

> In this root sense, ignorance is an act of will, a choice that one makes over and over again, especially when information overwhelms and knowledge has become synonymous with impotence. [...] We are paralyzed by bad knowledge, from which the only escape is playing dumb. Ignorance becomes empowering because it enables people to live. Ignorance becomes empowering because it enables people to live. Stupidity becomes proactive, a political statement, Our collective norm." (Ozeki, 1998, p. 334)

However, Jane chooses not only to step out of her defensive mass-induced ignorance, but to do something about it. What happens when she gives others the space and opportunity to exercise their agency and voice, for the very first time? In a surprising turn of events, Bunny (Gabe's "whore" stepmother) decides to send Jane's finished documentary to a few people and now every network is interested in buying *and* showing it to the public. "Well," says Bunny about opening up to Jane about her daughter's DES-induced condition, "it was like I finally made a choice, talkin' for the camera, and it felt good. Like I was takin' a stand" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 295). Jane also took a stand, and like many brave documentarians in the field of animal liberation rights movements, vegan ecofeminist queer ecological theorists must do the same. After her baby calf miscarriage nightmare, Jane tells the reader: "I dreamed about the slaughtered cow, hanging upside down, her life ebbing out of her as she rotated slowly. In my dream I saw her legs move in tandem, like she was running, and I realized she was dreaming of an endless green pasture at the edge of death, where she could gallop away and graze forever" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 297). I like that dream. I believe in that dream. One day, the farm-factory meat-industry will be a distant, shameful memory.

Notes

1. "We Japanese get weak genes though many centuries' process of straight breeding. Like old-fashioned cows. Make weak stock. But you," Joichi Ueno compliments Jane on meeting her for the first time, "are good and strong and modern girl from cross-breeding" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 43). The explicit comparison that he makes between women and cows is accurate, and Ozeki continues to build on this symbolic equivalence throughout the novel's development.
2. "All over the world," Jane reflects on her identity, "native species are migrating, if not disappearing, and in the next millennium the idea of an indigenous person or plant or culture will just seem quaint. Being half, I am evidence that race, too, will become relic" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 15). This queer ecological observation is interesting. While Jane experiences the physical / social realities of race politics in America, and struggles in the negotiation to sell the American Myth to Japanese housewives, she knows that race (even species) is a socially-constructed concept that does not have any real, innate, "natural" basis.
3. "Her children [Suzie's] pushed between her sturdy, mottled legs and hung off her hem. They must have poured out, Akiko thought," while watching the first episode of My American Wife! "one after the other, in frothy bursts of fertility. It was a disturbing thought, squalid somehow, and made her feel nauseous" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 20). It is indeed curious that Akiko perceives Suzie as bovine, and the physical reaction that she has towards watching the "sturdy" woman and her children is reminiscent of the ways in which she describes her feelings while she purges after eating, meat especially.
4. Jane herself cues in to her own ambivalence on the topic when she reflects: "I realized that truth was like race and could be measured only in

ever-diminishing approximation. Still, as a documentarian, you must strive for the truth and believe in it wholeheartedly" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 176).

5. She has been reflecting on the fact she never knew she was anything other than "American" when she was growing up in her small town, where her mother was the single Asian person. She tells the reader: "I finally got it one day at a Peewee League softball game. It was an away game, and this black girl from another team called me a 'chink'" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 148). Racist society at its best divides the minorities and pits them against each other, and the hierarchy of oppressions that Audre Lord warns about is clearly displayed in this passage. Location, national identity, racial politics, ecological landscape as urban space—all these elements factor in when Jane-As-Little-Girl realizes that she is different.
6. To be more specific to the relationship between meat-consumption and resource depletion, Dave clarifies it thus: "every McDonald's Quarter Pounder represents fifty-five square feet of South American rain forest, destroyed forever, which of course affects global warming as well..." (Ozeki, 1998, p. 250).
7. Finally, in 1979, the government banned DES for use in livestock production. In 1980, however," Jane discovers, "half a million cattle from one hundred fifty-six feedlots in eighteen states were found with illegal DES implants [...] Today, although DES is illegal, 95 percent of feedlot cattle in the U.S. still receive some form of growth-promoting hormone or pharmaceutical in feed supplements. The residues are present in the finished cuts of beef sold in the local supermarket or hanging off your plate" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 126).
8. "These girls with estrogen poisoning. They thought is was some kind of growth stimulants in meat or milk or poultry. I think," explains Dave to the crew before they even actually saw Rose, "they suspected DES [...] Some of the girls were just babies, like a year old, with almost fully developed breasts" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 270).
9. "By, then, though," the reader is told, "Akiko had lost weight and her menstruations were beginning to dry up. She hadn't told 'John' because it hadn't mattered. But suddenly her periods became his business, and as soon as they did, she stopped having them entirely" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 47). They stop immediately. That is how strongly Akiko's body resists the husband's ruling over her reproductive system, which of course if very much at the very center of the novel: Who dictated what happens or does not happen to reproductively-aged females in a patriarchal, speciesist, violently capitalist society? Who profits from such exploitation of female reproductive systems? Who commits the rapes. Hormone-alteration, infant-separation and murder of offspring necessary to make this an entirely economic-efficient operation? The answer to all these questions is the same.
10. The authoritarian male doctor, after painfully examining her without any regards to her body, comfort, or wishes as in any way separate from her husband, ends the appointment with the following violent accusation: "But you, you [Akiko] are not honest. You lack fortitude. Simply put, you have a bad attitude. This is my diagnosis, which I will give to your husband. I hope, for both your sakes, that he will be able to help you correct your problem" (Ozeki, 1998, p. 81).

11. It is inevitable (and fair) to put the question to myself. I never wanted anything more than being pregnant and having a biological daughter "of my own." I have been a radical feminist my entire adult life; I have been an activist and a theorist, working from inside academia to further my strong belief in every woman's right to choose. I also know that not every woman lives in enough privilege to make that choice, which is why I defend abortion (under any circumstance, not only under "rape" or "congenital defects" justifications) publicly as well. As a vegan ecofeminist I am also aware of over-population and resource depletion, but I also believe that the world needs people with alternative views to "survive in the ruins" of planetary devastation. Am I deluding myself or putting an extraordinary amount of pressure on my children (my son is my daughter's brother; they share the same DNA from their father's side)? As a feminist I defend women who choose never to become mothers, but I am also under the obligation to be completely truthful and admit that in my personal experience, I was not happy or felt complete until Kaelan was born. Perhaps this is why I identify with the women in the novel. If I take an even braver step forward and do the radical act of putting myself inside my academic work fearlessly, I, like Akiko, felt the moment of conception, and knew my baby was a girl. Call it essentialist literary hallucination or unexplainable biological happenstance; it is one of my truths.

Bibliography

Ozeki, Ruth. (1998). *My Year of Meats*. New York: Penguin.