

Making a Killing: Poems

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Abstract

The poems in *Making a Killing* bear witness to the parallel and intersecting oppressions of women. Specifically, these poems analyze the oppression of nonhuman animals and women living in Western, patriarchal societies through fairy tales embedded in poetry, though not every poem re-tells a fairytale. In *Making a Killing*, the idea of a “fairytale” is extended to include anything that is or should be difficult to believe, but is continuously reinforced through the stories we tell. The poems are informed by theories of carnism, speciesism, and ecofeminism, as well as female poets who have used their work to challenge hidden systems of oppression, considered by many to be the unchangeable status quo, including Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, and Joy Harjo. *Making a Killing* concludes that the oppression of nonhuman animals reinforces violent ideology incompatible with rights the aforementioned authors fought — and continue to fight — for. Therefore, protest poetry, ecofeminist critique, and, indeed, our actions, must make space for nonhuman animals.

It is my hope that the poems in this collection prompt cognitive dissonance in the reader. At their core, the poems in *Making a Killing* recognize that people do not want to cause suffering and pain, but deeply ingrained carnist and speciesist ideologies have prevented many from recognizing the impact of their actions. *Making a Killing* gently, but firmly, demands that the reader examine their complicity in suffering, with the end goal of inspiring change.

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Poetry of Protest: A Critical Introduction

In *Sister Species*, Lisa Kemmerer asks “why . . . challenge cultural traditions that maintain male dominance over women, but not cultural traditions of human dominance over nonhumans?” (30). While Kemmerer and those who share her beliefs have worked for more than twenty years to challenge cultural traditions of human dominance, Kemmerer’s question is infrequently addressed in popular culture. In 1990, for example, Carol J. Adams wrote that meat is a “symbol and celebration of male dominance” (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 13). Through studies of animal-based economies and plant-based economies, Adams found that animal-based economies, such as the United States economy, also commonly include “sexual segregation in work activities . . . women doing more work . . . but work that is less valued,” as well as “worship of male gods” and patrilineality (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 14). Adams also pointed to the sexualization of meat products in advertising as evidence of the relationship between dominance over women and dominance over nonhumans. While recent social justice movements such as #timesup and #metoo have increased visibility of sexual segregation at work and the dangers of male dominance, the oppression of nonhuman animals remains largely unaddressed. A quick Google search yields dozens of overtly sexual meat campaigns: one ad shows a woman holding a sandwich from Fat Shack, mustard dripping from her mouth. The headline reads “Four Inches Has Never Been So Satisfying.” An ad for a Carl’s Junior chicken sandwich simply reads “Everybody Loves Big Breasts.” It is time, I believe, for the theories put forth by Adams and Kemmerer to join the rejection of sexual violence and male domination as part of the *zeitgeist*.

In order to answer Kemmerer’s question, the poems in *Making a Killing* protest Western, carnist, patriarchal culture and traditions which maintain human dominance over nonhuman

animals and other oppressed groups. The poems explore how carnism, speciesism, and patriarchy are intertwined in the stories we use to frame what is right and wrong: fairy tales, myths, religious stories, personal histories, and even stories we invent. In each of these narratives, the exploitation of nonhuman animals is framed as acceptable, in part, because of the belief that the connection of humans to nonhuman animals is degrading to the human. The poems in *Making a Killing*, therefore, work against the dominant narratives regarding nonhuman animals, in particular that their suffering is unequal to human suffering. Rather than using nonhuman animals as literary devices to explain the suffering of humanity, *Making a Killing* works to show the parallel oppressions and suffering of all individuals harmed by Western, patriarchal, carnist society.

Making a Killing engages with the work of poets whose work protested large-scale injustices perpetrated on minority groups whose perceived “differences” were cited as justification for their oppression: Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Joy Harjo, and Anne Sexton. Audre Lorde was particularly interested in perceived differences as a starting point for action. Lorde conceived as “difference as creative rather than divisive,” and encouraged people to focus instead on the common enemy: “heterosexist, patriarchal white supremacist culture” (Castro-Borrego 148). This same theory can be applied to the work in *Making a Killing*. The perceived human/nonhuman binary stalls the potential for progress, not just in nonhuman animal rights or ecofeminist theory, but also in undoing oppressions of other marginalized groups. bell hooks says that “all forms of oppression are linked in our society” and “one system cannot be eradicated while the others remain intact” (35); while the experiences of nonhuman animals may not fully intersect with the experiences of humans, the parallel oppressions of women and

nonhuman animals in Western, carnist, patriarchal society can each be traced back to the same oppressors.

It is my view that most people who engage in speciesist behavior do so unwittingly. Prunty and Apple's 2013 study found that, generally, humans express "generic disapproval of their [nonhuman animal] suffering gratuitously at human hands," but that there was also "an absence of related knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors seemingly implied by this stance" (265). My hope is that my work will draw attention to the similar oppressions of women and nonhuman animals through cognitive dissonance, the moment when "an individual is of two minds that disagree—especially about important beliefs, or their expressions in behavior—and realizes it" that leads to an "aversive motivational state, akin to hunger or thirst, which demands resolution" (Festinger). While I recognize that no one person can bring about the end of entrenched oppressions, my work aims to promote cognitive dissonance as part of a larger cultural shift away from the oppression of nonhuman animals.

I recognize that questioning systems of oppression that impact nonhuman animals presents a unique challenge: these systems of oppression are wrapped up in long-held traditions, including storytelling — which can also reinforce positive cultural norms — and the consumption of food. It is important to me that the poems in *Making a Killing* feel familiar to the reader even as their message is unfamiliar or causes discomfort. The primary goal of *Making a Killing* is to engage with the tradition of protest literature to encourage readers to re-examine their habits and ideologies. Specifically, it is my hope that readers will, in reading familiar stories re-told to focus on the parallel suffering of women and nonhuman animals, realize that the narratives regarding nonhuman animals in Western, carnist, patriarchal society are harmful to individuals regardless of species.

A Short History of Protest

From John Dryden's political satire *Absalom and Achitophel* to the anti-war and anti-racism poems of June Jordan and Audre Lorde, poetry has often challenged the status quo with the aim of motivating social change. Take Robin Morgan's "Monster," for example, which became a rallying cry for the women's movement of the 1970s with its bold declaration "I am a monster. And I am proud" (86). Protest poetry has enjoyed a resurgence in popular culture since 2016. The 2017 March for Science in Washington, D.C., for example, included "pop-up poetry writing workshops, and more than 20 banners with science poems by Gary Snyder, W.S. Merwin, Tracy K. Smith and others" (Alter). Of the rise of overtly political poetry of protest, Jeff Shotts said, "this isn't just confessional poetry, but poetry that's meant to stir us into action" (qtd. in Alter).

Before Trump's election and the resurgence of protest poetry, however, Indigenous authors in particular engaged with the tradition of protest poetry. Joy Harjo's "The Woman Hanging from the 13th Floor Window," for example, challenges social norms that cast Native women as invisible or expendable by drawing comparisons between the woman's body and the building from which it hangs (Andrews 95). In *The Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen explains that the tribal present of American Indian women is "inextricably bound to our continued awareness of imminent genocide" (155) and that, by necessity, even themes such as love and death take on "a pervasive sense of sorrow and anger" in indigenous poetry (155). Poets like Mary TallMountain have related the imminent threat of genocide to the imminent threat of nonhuman animal extinction. In TallMountain's "The Last Wolf," both human speaker and wolf are surrounded by the remains of a ruined city. The wolf comes to rest with the speaker, who says "I know what they have done" (15). The use of the word "they" unites speaker and wolf against an

oppressive “other” who would destroy them both. This poem, far from discouraging the commonalities between human and nonhuman animal, acknowledges the parallel and overlapping harm done to both human and nonhuman animal.

Part of the difficulty facing my project is the widespread perceived lack of importance of nonhuman animal rights, as espoused by several disparate groups in Western society. As Lisa Kemmerer argues, an individual’s worldview, influenced by factors such as sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, race, sex, and species (2), allows individuals to oppress an “other.” For example, white people have historically been taught to oppress people of color, men have been taught to oppress women, the rich oppress the poor, and so on. Regardless of where you fall in this hierarchy of oppression, however, Kemmerer maintains that “all human beings are systematically socialized to oppress cattle, chickens . . . and other nonhuman individuals” (23). While Kemmerer is correct that Western, patriarchal culture encourages the objectification and oppression of nonhuman animals, Kemmerer does not allow for the spectrum of distinctions made between human and nonhuman animals. The traditional Cherokee story, “How the Game Animals Were Set Free,” for example, teaches young hunters that “a hunter must always be serious and show respect for the animals” (Bruchac 37). In the story, because the young men do not respect the nonhuman animals they hunt, the nonhuman animals become more difficult to catch, implying that humans are not entitled to the consumption of nonhuman animals. Similarly, in the Pueblo story “The Bear Boy,” bears replace an inattentive human father, ushering a young boy into manhood by teaching “how we should care for each other” (Bruchac 82). In the end, the boy’s father also learns how to be more human, to “treat you as a father should treat his son” (Bruchac 83) from the example of the bears.

While I agree with Kemmerer's point that human beings are taught, through their experiences with privilege, to systematically oppress and other individuals hierarchically, this project must be sensitive to the fact that there are individuals living within the aforementioned Western, patriarchal, and carnist society whose relationships to nonhuman animals does not perfectly fit within Kemmerer's depiction. Indeed, there are individuals whose cultures are routinely erased by the dominant culture and who consume nonhuman animals but do not conceive of their relationship to the nonhuman animal as hierarchical. It is important to note, however, that regardless of the conception of the relationship between human and nonhuman animal as non-hierarchical, there is still a degree of distinction between human and nonhuman animals present; "the human/animal distinction appears to be a human universal" (Hart 669). In summation, this project must be sensitive to the perceived intimacy with nonhuman animals experienced by oppressed cultures and peoples; however, this collection will turn a blind eye to complicity in nonhuman animal suffering, wherever it exists. Indeed, I argue that if the end result is the same (the mass death of nonhuman animals to feed and sustain humans), the perception of the relationship between nonhuman animal and human as non-hierarchical loses meaning.

Regardless, it is my goal to encourage cognitive dissonance in my reader without creating a new binary: those who care about nonhuman animals and those who do not. I am hopeful that drawing on the tradition of protest poetry in addition to fairytales and folklore will successfully remind people that the patriarchal dualisms which we are taught are necessary to social order actually impede our progress as a society.

Relationships to Nonhuman Animals in Poetry

Suniti Namjoshi and, more recently, Gretchen Primack, have been some of the most vocal poets regarding the linked systems of oppression between women and nonhuman animals.

But we would be wrong to assume that the idea of nonhuman animals and people sharing oppression was absent in Western poetry before 1981 when Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables* was published. The shared oppression and experience of all creatures is present in oral tradition cultures. One such example is the Kumulipo creation chant. One chant describes a spirit born into the body of a dog; the Olohe people who associate with this dog "are believed to be dog men with the mystical shape-shifting powers of the demigods" (Beckwith 89). This portion of the Kumulipo creation chants ends with a reflection on "death as the universal fate of mankind" (Beckwith 153); this reflection is significant since, as Martha Warren Beckwith explains, the Dog Child story falls "in the period of the Po, before the birth of human life" (154). The child who is both human and nonhuman is part of mankind's universal fate, demonstrating an acknowledgement of the overlap of the suffering of all creatures.

In cultures where word-based writing systems were more common than oral traditions, poets such as Anna Letitia Barbauld used nonhuman animals as stand-ins for women in order to show the linked oppression of these groups. The question of why similar things are treated differently is a major concern in Barbauld's work. Barbauld was one of the few female writers of her period who argued for "natural rights," that is to say, "the rights that everyone had simply because they were alive," including nonhuman animal rights (Vargo 331). Critics have also noted that Barbauld uses nonhuman animals as speakers who "invite sympathetic identification with the animal as an alienated subject" (Howard 643). Poems like "The Mouse's Petition" and "The Caterpillar" make strong claims about equality through the voices of nonhuman animals who ask the "central question of social inequality: why do similar things receive different treatment?" (Howard 656).

It is with this understanding of Barbauld's background that we read "The Mouse's Petition" in particular. "The Mouse's Petition" was written after Joseph Priestley, an acquaintance, awoke with a change of heart about using a captured mouse to experiment with different gasses (Milne 126). Unlike Namjoshi and Primack, whose speakers are rarely nonhuman animals themselves, the speaker in "The Mouse's Petition" is the mouse, who argues that

The well-taught philosophic mind
To all compassion gives:
Casts round the world an equal eye,
And feels for all that lives (25-28).

The use of the word "all" suggests a much more expansive worldview than that advanced by many white, contemporary ecofeminists, who recognize the linked oppressions of women and nonhuman animals while ignoring other linked oppressions such as those perpetuated by racism and classism. As the petition continues, Barbauld argues against the idea of some creatures having less ability to reason than others:

If mind, -- as ancient sages taught, --
A never-dying flame,
Still shifts through matter's varying forms,
In every form the same (29-32).

The idea that the mind is "in every form the same" pre-dates Wollstonecraft's argument in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* that every human being has the ability to reason, an argument she extends to nonhuman entities. Note that Barbauld says "every *form*" and not "every *man*" or "*person*." The mouse as the speaker, combined with the actual words of the mouse's petition, demonstrates the ability for rational thought in *all* creatures. The nonhuman animal capacity for rational thought remains a radical idea even in the 21st century; indeed, scholars still debate the possible degrees and moral repercussions of nonhuman animal sentience.

Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables*, like the aforementioned poetry and chants, uses human and nonhuman doubling, but Namjoshi's work is more explicit about the implications of this doubling. In Namjoshi's "The Milk-White Mare," the human woman transforms *into* a nonhuman animal instead of merely being treated like one. In other poems, such as "The Anthropei," women are captured and domesticated like nonhuman animals and referred to as "creatures" (8), but the speaker of "The Milk-White Mare" consistently uses "human" terms to refer to the subject even after she is transformed from human to mare. These two different ways of using names to associate women and nonhuman animals are equally effective in drawing women and nonhuman animals together.

The basic story of "The Milk-White Mare" is this: a woman's husband does not like the way she looks and wants a divorce; he seeks to "return" her like unwanted goods. Her father does not want his daughter back. The woman, rather than being traded like goods, seeks help from a genie who transforms her into a "handsome and extremely useful" mare (20-22). As a mare, both her husband and her father see her body as a desirable commodity. It is important that the woman in this poem has been turned into a nonhuman animal and is not simply treated like one. If this were merely the story of a traded mare, Namjoshi seems to suggest, no one would find it reprehensible that she is commodified. It is only when we begin to think of the mare as a human woman that we recognize the shared systems of oppression more fully.

Similarly, in Gretchen Primack's *Kind*, we see the same themes of objectification, oppression, and consumption played out, but with a heavier focus on the nonhuman animal than the human. Primack's "Mother" poems clearly lay out the shared oppressions felt by females of multiple species. In "Mother I," the cycle of objectification begins with the mother cow viewed as an object who is "to mother yogurt" and "to nurture cheese" (42), to be consumed by the

oppressor. In the second stanza, the mother becomes an object, “denied her child” so that “we” (humans) “may suckle.” The idea of nonhuman animal as object is pushed further in the fourth stanza where “a machine is clamped / to her chafed breast” (42), effectively trapping her as a part of the machine. Primack only uses one word in the entire poem to firmly establish that the poem is about a nonhuman animal: “udder,” which she replaces with “breast” in the next stanza, drawing the nonhuman animal back toward the human. Based on Primack’s diction alone, this poem could be about the exploitation of any female reproductive system; we understand that this poem is about a cow only because we associate cheese and yogurt with cows.

The identification of female nonhuman animal with human woman in “Mother I” is made explicit in its sister poem, “Mother II”:

Only humans mother. Only we
care for our babies. Everything
else spits out young. Thank god
you’re here, they say . . .
Only you mother . . .
. . . I’m a vessel,
a factory, a vending machine.
Take my young. Profit from them (51).

The movement in the poem from “they” to “I” in reference to the speaker’s relationship to the nonhuman animals shows an identification with the nonhuman animals that contends with what the oppressed creatures say. The implication here is that human women and female nonhuman animals both have the capacity to care for their young, and each suffers from the loss of their young. Primack’s aim is to invite sympathy from the reader by invoking experiences that women and female nonhuman animals share before reminding the reader that, despite their commonalities, these two similar beings are treated differently.

The systems of shared oppression between nonhuman animals and humans which have been noted by my poetic ancestors are indicative of a shift in feminism as a discipline. Though

Barbauld considered shared systems of oppression in the late 18th and early 19th century, feminist theory has historically left out certain marginalized groups in favor of others.

Speciesism

Peter Singer framed his discussion of speciesism with the following quote from Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?":

They talk about this thing in the head; what do they call it? ['Intellect,' whispered someone nearby.] That's it. What's that got to do with women's rights or Negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half-measure full? (qtd. in Singer 6)

Singer extends Truth's point, claiming that "even if there are factual differences between human beings and animals, even if humans could be said to be 'better' in some sense, this would not justify treating humans better than animals" (Bailey 42). In essence, there is no way we could justify the way we treat nonhuman animals that when applied to a human would continue to hold true. Speciesism, the idea that "different species of animals are significantly different from one another in their capacities to feel pleasure and pain and live an autonomous existence, usually involving the idea that one's own species has the right to rule and use others" (Spiegel 9), allows us to ignore the fact that our hierarchy of species is flawed.

In her controversial book, *The Dreaded Comparison*, Marjorie Spiegel makes a case for speciesism as comparable to racism. Spiegel is not arguing that the experiences of enslaved peoples and nonhuman animals are exactly alike, or even that the lives of nonhuman animals are more valuable than the lives of humans. Rather, Spiegel argues that their oppressions share "the same basic essence, they are built around the same basic relationship — that between oppressor and oppressed" (Spiegel 28). Indeed, to Spiegel, the comparison of nonhuman animal suffering

to that of human suffering is only offensive to those who have “embraced the false notions of what animals are like” and furthermore, “to deny our similarities . . . is to continue actively struggling to prove to our masters, past or present, that we are similar to those who have abused us, rather than to our fellow victims” (Spiegel 30).

It is important, however, that discussions of speciesism as comparable to racism and the treatment of nonhuman animals as comparable to that of enslaved peoples do not dismiss the experiences of people of color or unintentionally uphold white supremacy. William David Hart, for example, has expressed concerns with Spiegel’s “lack of sympathy, insight, and compassion regarding black people’s dread of the ‘dreaded comparison’” (679). Indeed, Hart worries that Spiegel’s purported goal of elevating the status of nonhuman animals

will not be achieved so long as white animal rights activists ignore their subject position and disregard the history of animalizing black people in a white supremacist and beast-making society . . . In the absence of such moral and ideological work, I worry about the diminution if not the subordination of black suffering. I worry that standard forms of animal rights advocacy unintentionally animalize black people. (679).

Hart rightly points out that, to many, the suffering of people of color elicits less sympathy than the suffering of nonhuman animals (679). The particular nonhuman animals identified as more sympathetic than people of color by Hart and Harris-Perry, whom he cites, are important. The nonhuman animals cited as gaining more sympathy than people of color are nonhuman animals that Western society keeps as pets. Dogs, for example, were not only used as “weapons used against black bodies and black interests” (Harris-Perry), they were also evacuated after Hurricane Katrina on an air-conditioned bus while “tens of thousands of black residents” were still trapped in the storm (Harris-Perry).

While Harris-Perry is absolutely correct in calling out the prioritization of pets over people of color, the nonhuman animals routinely oppressed by Western society are livestock, not

pets. Therefore, we must not use the metaphor of slavery to trivialize the suffering of humans, but we must also recognize that the same oppressors who treat individual humans differently based on factors like race also consider different species of nonhuman animals to be of differing levels of importance. This is called carnism.

Carnism

The term “carnism” was coined by Dr. Melanie Joy in her 2010 treatise *Why we Love Dogs, Eat Pigs, and Wear Cows*. In her book, Joy argues that the way we perceive the value of different species of nonhuman animals is key in our treatment of those nonhuman animals. Therefore, humans love dogs and eat cows not because cows are fundamentally “less-than” dogs or because cows are incapable of forming close bonds with humans, but because our Western society has decided that nonhuman animals like cows, pigs, and chickens are “meat” creatures, whereas dogs are companions. This logic is fundamentally flawed; not every culture perceives the same nonhuman animals the same way. Additionally, though “we tend to view the mainstream way of life as a reflection of universal values” (Joy 31), in fact, what is “mainstream” is dependent on societal norms and historical context. Indeed, according to Carol J. Adams, “taking animals out of the equation in discussions of interlocking oppressions is based on a colonialist model. . . to deal with humans first, then animals. To only have the lens on humans shows how imperialism has succeeded because most cultures are not structured that way” (qtd. in Fox).

Dr. Joy suggests that our revulsion at eating nonhuman animals like dogs is due to the fact that our disgust is not innate, but learned; “our schemas . . . are constructed. . . the system teaches us how to *not feel*” (17-18). She believes that this learned numbing takes away our natural empathy in the name of what is deemed *normal, natural, and necessary* (Joy 96).

Carnism, then, is “the belief system that conditions us to eat certain animals . . . [its] ability accounts for why choices appear not to be choices at all” (Joy 30).

Carnist ideology is reflected not only in our actions, but also in the way that we speak. As Carol J. Adams noted years before Melanie Joy’s study, “our language . . . is human centered as well . . . we use the word ‘animal’ as though it did not refer to human beings . . . we have structured our language to avoid the acknowledgement of our biological similarity” (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 46). Additionally, we seek to distance ourselves from nonhuman animals through the use of the word “it” in place of a pronoun, thereby reducing them to objects (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 46). Carnist society builds on this linguistic distancing by dividing nonhuman animals into sub-groups: “pets” vs. “livestock.” Those who recognize the impact of language on carnist oppression, therefore, refer to “animals” as “nonhuman animals,” and use words like “companions” to describe nonhuman animals who live with them. The language in *Making a Killing* is faithful to these rules.

Feminism, Carnism, and Speciesism

In Carol J. Adams’ *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), she relates the treatment of nonhuman animals in Western society to the treatment of women, arguing that “female marginality. . . invokes the position of animals . . . both are caught in the overlapping structure of oppression” (29). In conjunction with this viewpoint, Adams advances the idea of a cycle of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption. In this cycle, objectification allows the oppressor to view another being as an object, which leads them to fragment that being by treating them like an object (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 27). Finally, the being is consumed through “the fulfillment of oppression, the annihilation of will, of separate identity” (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 27).

This cycle, which ends, for the nonhuman animal, in butchering, allows humans to continue making nonhuman animals and women “absent referents” for each other. The absent referent, Adams says, replaces the live animal with a dead body through language. This is done in three ways: literally (the nonhuman animal is absent because he or she has been slaughtered); definitionally (we change the way we talk about animals, i.e. “veal” instead of “baby cow”); and metaphorically, when we use animals as metaphors for describing the experiences of people (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 21).

Women, like nonhuman animals, are absent referents: the patriarchal system of oppression takes individual experiences and makes them metaphors for other acts of violence, erasing the individual through metaphor. Mary Daly touches on this idea in *Beyond God the Father* when she argues “women have had the power of *naming* stolen from us . . . to exist humanely is to name the self” (8). Adams gives the example of the word “rape,” which is often used to apply to “other instances of violent devastation, such as the ‘rape’ of the earth in ecological writings of the early 1970s” (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 22). According to Adams, critics who are skeptical of the overlap between violence — especially sexual violence — toward women, and the treatment of nonhuman animals, will find a point of overlap in the absent referent. In our Western, patriarchal culture, for example,

images of sexual violence, and actual sexual violence, often rely on our knowledge of how animals are butchered or eaten . . . the bondage equipment of pornography — chains, cattle prods, nooses, dog collars, and ropes — suggests the control of animals. Thus, when women are victims of violence, the treatment of animals is recalled (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 22).

Because of the ubiquity and normalization of these overlapping absent referents, women are often complicit in this system. To combat this complicity, Adams argues that as feminists, we must “acknowledge and accept accountability for what we do to others’ bodies” (*Neither Man nor Beast* 13). In this case, to atone for wrongdoing involves abstaining from the consumption of the nonhuman animal body.

Throughout its history, feminist theory has had to become more inclusive in order to discuss the experiences of women of color, poor women, and men. My goal with this project, like Carol J. Adams’, is to “expand even further the accountability of feminist theory” (*Neither Man nor Beast* 18). The belief systems as well as the social structures involved in carnism, speciesism, and feminism (in opposition to carnism and speciesism), therefore, are inextricable from each other in this project.

Fairytales and Morality

Just as humans living in Western, patriarchal societies generally view carnist ideology as “mainstream” and therefore reinforce carnist values through what we eat and wear, the stories we tell reinforce entrenched ideologies. Fairy tales are used to impart morals and values believed to be necessary and “mainstream.” Several theorists have debated just what makes fairy tales so compelling. In *Clever Maids: The Secret History of the Grimm Fairy Tales*, Valerie Paradiž posits that fairy tales “penetrate our collective psyche with their mythic portrayals of our humanity, and our inhumanity” (x). In other words, fairy tales elevate or mythologize the human experience; these narratives, even when harmful, are compelling.

While Paradiž never makes a value judgement, good or bad, regarding the impact of fairy tales, in *The Uses of Enchantment*, Bruno Bettelheim argues that fairy tales “answer the eternal questions: what is the world really like? How am I to live my life in it? How can I truly be

myself?” (45). Furthermore, in “dealing with universal human problems,” fairy tales are helpful to the human psyche, as they relieve “preconscious and unconscious pressures” (6). Essentially, fairy tales allow people to perceive the world as orderly, even binary. Things are simply good or evil, right or wrong. Bettelheim suggests that the use of binary oppositions in fairytales allows children to “comprehend easily the difference between the two, which he could not do as readily were the figures drawn more true to life . . . ambiguities must wait until a relatively firm personality has been established” (9). While I agree that the impacts discussed by Bettelheim exist, I also believe that since *The Uses of Enchantment* was published, we have discovered that children are much more capable of understanding nuanced argument than Bettelheim suggests. Just as Clare Hemmings argues that feminism cannot progress if feminists fall back on the familiar narrative that feminism has progressed linearly (things were bad for women once, and now equality has been achieved) (34), it is my belief that progress toward a more inclusive and egalitarian society requires us to upset tradition through our habits (such as slaughtering nonhuman animals for meat) and the stories we tell.

There is certainly a precedent for combining poetry and fairytales to engage in social critique. In “The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking,” Alicia Ostriker coins the term “revisionist mythmaking,” arguing “whenever a poet employs a figure previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that . . . the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends . . . ultimately making cultural change possible” (72). Ostriker draws a distinction between the revisionist mythmaking of female poets and male poets; while male poets such as Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and Auden are impacted by nostalgia, and “faith that the past is a repository of truth, goodness, or desirable organization,” female poets “insist that past and present, for better or worse” are “essentially the

same” (87). In *Transformations*, for example, Anne Sexton transforms fairytales as a way to engage in social critique of the patriarchy — both past and present — and its damaging effects on women. Once Sexton has set up her book as a subversive interrogation of multiple aspects of society, she uses individual tales within the book to critique the patriarchy, women’s roles, and other negative aspects of the period. *Transformations* was published in 1971, at the height of the women’s movement (just one year before the aforementioned “Monster”). Therefore, issues of female equality and the objectification and commodification of the female body were among Sexton’s chief concerns. While these concerns still exist today, my project builds upon them instead of merely reiterating them.

Carnism and Fairytales in *Making a Killing*

Because carnism is particularly resistant to change, I will divide my project into multiple sections which build on each other, allowing the complicity of the reader in the violence described to become increasingly apparent. Additionally, in order to avoid perpetuating the use of metaphorical absent referents, language which describes women as “meat” (or any similar terms) is avoided unless the speaker is part or fully nonhuman animal. A speaker might smell “like meat” (as is the case in “Wicked Stepmother”), but the speaker is not literally meat; the oppression of the nonhuman animal is not co-opted.

The collection is prefaced with “Feast of the Ouroboros,” which sets up the threads which run throughout the manuscript. It begins:

When the world bares the teeth
of a bedtime story, when another
body becomes a stuck jar to force
open, when an animal is ear-tagged
with their expiration date, we eat.

The poem methodically deconstructs the desire for stories to condone behavior, whether that behavior is usually excused by tradition, taste, or any other factor. The speaker argues

We dream of devouring the still-
hot beating center of truth —
a butchery in the name
of love or tradition, a first
hunt, buck strapped to the top
of the family car.

The poem ends with a direct comparison between the state of the nonhuman animal and women caught in a patriarchal, carnist, speciesist cycle:

Poor bear. Poor wolf.
Poor little girls wrapped up
in the same tale: sweltering and primal.

The first section, separate from “Feast of the Ouroboros,” contains the most poems in which the speaker is held with equal complicity to the reader because of their past experiences exploiting nonhuman animals and engaging with patriarchal myths and fairy tales. In these poems, the speaker discovers the harm that comes from ignoring or buying into carnist myths, including but not limited to nonhuman animal sentience, the “need” to eat nonhuman animals and their by-products, and that human dominion over other creatures is absolute. In one such poem, “On Guilt,” the speaker muses on their body’s supposed natural reactions to cooking flesh:

I follow rescue pets on Instagram, think of how many I could fit
between my couch and the wall, in tupperware boxes

under my bed, ‘til the house became engorged with my goodness.
Mornings in bed, I watch videos of pig sanctuaries

and never once think of the smell of their crackling skin,
though, if I did, I might feel my lip curl back, my teeth

might grind against each other as if gnawing gristle from bone,
guided by some part of myself I do not recognize.

The speaker is ultimately unconvinced that these reactions are normal, natural, or moral. The poem ends with the bond between nonhuman companion animals and nonhuman animals considered livestock:

I know that the acid in my throat
when I see a dog paw against chain link

has a different taste from the burn that comes with a face
pressed against a cattle car at a stoplight

where I scroll through my feed and follow the stories of lucky ducks
and elderly chickens, of extraordinary pigs solving puzzles and perplexed

farmers who wonder why their dog ran away after they sold their cow,
the same cow the dog snuggled long before he answered to his own name.

In drawing together dogs and cows specifically, I hope to illustrate the similar sentience and capacity for care in each species, ultimately aiming to dissolve the idea that some nonhuman animals exist to be eaten, while others do not.

While the first section introduces the themes of the collection and the speaker's complicity, the second section weaves in more retold fairy tales, paying careful attention to the moments when the treatment of women resembles that of nonhuman animals, and vice versa. In my revision of "The Little Mermaid," entitled "Daughter of the Air Regrets Bartering Her Voice for a Nice Set of Gams," for example, the speaker is acutely aware that her body is being exploited for male pleasure. She likens this exploitation to being caught in a net: "Caught in his sheets like bykill, new legs twisted up, I choke on air like a fish." Though other poems in the collection play with the idea of the absent referent, this piece is particularly attentive to the ways in which we remove the physical body of an individual through language. Thus, "Daughter of the Air" begins "names he gives me in a name's absence: bright one. pet. a fine cut. fresh."

Between the second and third section, I have included a long poem, meant to explicitly draw together the relationship between the various themes in this collection: sexual violence, religious imagery, nonhuman animal sentience, consumption of the body, and fairy tales. This poem is particularly important to the manuscript because it sets up the speaker's definition of "fairy tale." It ends

True Story
is just a way to say You'll Believe This.
So much of what I know is
a Fairytale.

In establishing "fairy tale" as something that is true but not necessarily believed, the speaker changes the ways in which the other poems in the collection may be interpreted. While poems such as "Daughter of the Air," "The Jack Poems," and "Bluebeard" might have, to that point, been read as simple feminist versions of known stories, the ending of the bridge poem indicates that there is real truth to these poems, and that the speaker is, perhaps, not a far-off narrator, but an individual with stakes in the action of the poems. An example of a poem where the real and fairytale blend is "Trapped in a Room of Glass Eyes, I Think," which plays on the "Beauty and the Beast" story while also condemning hunting, especially trophy hunting:

Collectors are the truest beasts
I've found: they capture that
which can no longer
run, display kills
as trophies, delight in bloodshed
made sterile with formaldehyde

The speaker in "Collected" goes one step beyond simple condemnation, ultimately asserting that the human species is not naturally suited for hunting. The speaker notes the "flat, harmless teeth" of the collector, who, for all of his violence, is "helpless as all of our species" when stripped of his weapons. Indeed, the weapons of the collector serve as metaphors for the patriarchy and a

carnist society. When these weapons are stripped from those who perpetuate violence on women and nonhuman animals alike, the result is powerless figures unable to “devour” those they’ve deemed “other.”

In the final section, I examine stories invented in my personal life alongside fairy tales in order to further demonstrate that narratives which perpetuate the carnist, patriarchal status quo are harmful regardless of their dissemination. “Cinderella and the Pickles” and “My parents killed a dog before I was born,” for example, both show how the stories of my childhood influenced my perception of nonhuman animal rights, the treatment of women, and my role in the world. The former, for example, examines how my mother was trained by her mother to be selfless, regardless of the personal cost:

My mother’s fantasy, like all of her stories, is one of giving. Her mother burned out hot, nursing her husband through his dying after keeping seven children alive. By the end, my grandmother believed herself a child again. The stories of her life mis-remembered fairytales.

Similarly, “My parents killed a dog before I was born” tells another story my mother told me. In this particular tale, my parents perceive themselves as the “villains” for accidentally killing a dog, all the while continuing to consume the bodies of nonhuman animals. What is both said and not said informed my understanding of which nonhuman animals are may be killed, thus indoctrinating me with carnist ideology:

Over dinner, my father describes the night he and my mother hit a dog with their car, a story I’ve never heard. My mother clicks her tongue against the roof

of her mouth, a lock opening. *Let’s not talk about this*, she says, then *it was a lab or something. It came out of nowhere.*

The waitress collects menus, my parents order chicken alfredo, fried calamari. Meatballs on the side. Bread swimming in garlic butter. Tubes of frozen-then-reheated

4-cheese blend. I do not ask about the dog. *We couldn't stop*, my mother offers.
It came out of nowhere. It wasn't safe to stop. She spears a lump of flesh
 on her fork, metal dividing the body in two.

Because the stories we tell ourselves about cultural norms are linked with fairy tales, some of the poems in this collection could fit into any section. Therefore, the collection will be organized in such a way that the poems ending each section bleed thematically into the next. “La Femme,” which ends section 1, for example, discusses marriage and womanhood, and “On being uprooted,” which begins section 2, discusses my upbringing in Utah, where marriage and female subservience are common and expected. It is my hope that organizing the collection in this way will subtly remind the reader that the stories we tell ourselves about nonhuman animal welfare in a society that still rests on carnist ideology are just as contrived and ultimately imaginary as fairy tales.

Formal Influences

The pieces in this collection deliberately resist traditional form. I draw inspiration from poets like Lorenzo Thomas and Romaine Moreton, whose poetic forms were, themselves, part of the protest in their poetry. Thomas’ protest poetry, for example, drew on oratorical traditions of the black church, African American music, and Black Arts poetry readings (Smith 78-9). Thomas’ poetic forms intentionally made his protest accessible to “an audience in need of reconciliation to traumatic events” (Smith 79). In exposing this audience to social issues through protest poetry, Thomas’ “persuasive appeal enables new perspectives on current events and brings the possibility of social transformation to his audience” (Smith 79). Similarly, Moreton’s use of “dialogic structure,” “conversational tone,” and “direct address to the reader (you)” promote identification with the speaker while revealing tensions between white and black

Australians (Čerče 55). It is my goal to use form as a tool to reach a diverse audience who may or may not recognize the oppression and trauma that is inherent in many social structures.

Like the fairytales and fables they draw on, my poems are short, narrative pieces, the notable exception being the bridge poem between sections two and four. The point of these poems is to tell the story of linked oppressions between nonhuman animals and women living in specifically Western, patriarchal, carnist societies in a palatable, accessible way. As such, many stanzas break where a block of prose might, with the goal of propelling the reader through the narrative. As these stories are already constrained by the values that they teach, I feel that the lack of strong traditional form throughout the collection is appropriate.

The length of any given line is of particular importance in this project. Many of the poems in this project use short, clipped lines that span less than half of the page; the last word of the line is often selected so that the line which follows will surprise the reader. The shapes of these poems draw influence from Ocean Vuong's *Night Sky With Exit Wounds*. In "Aubade with Burning City," for example, Vuong manages to surprise the reader with juxtapositions of violence and tenderness. The romantic scene set with "his hand running the hem / of her white dress . . . their shadows: two wicks" is followed immediately by "A military truck speeds through the intersection, the sound of children / shrieking inside" (3). Vuong's short lines, such as "milkflower petals on the street / like pieces of a girl's dress," act like snapshots, as if one is flipping through an album of memories from a time both frightening and exciting to the speaker. In my own work, the use of the short line works, in part, to convey the same "snapshot" feeling; the familiar images from fairy tales juxtaposed against unfamiliar violence are meant to inspire nostalgia, followed by cognitive dissonance. "Men, Blood, Apple," for example, begins "you've heard seven," situating the reader firmly in the "Snow White" tale. The line immediately turns:

“but three men / came.” The contradiction of the “facts” of the original story, combined with the broken line and suggestive double-meaning of “came” is meant to make the reader feel ill at ease, as if they don’t truly understand how this story might end.

Some pieces in this collection, far from using short lines, stretch across the page like a block of prose. These pieces draw inspiration from collections like Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen* and the prose poems in Joy Harjo’s *In Mad Love and War*. Rankine’s *Citizen* makes use of the narrative form in order to fully tell a story; no detail need be omitted in the name of rhythm, line length, or any other constraint of the short line. The second section of *Citizen*, for example, is a 13-page examination of black artists, black rage, and the career of Serena Williams. The lyric is arranged in what might be called either stanzas or paragraphs separated by white space. Each of these shorter pieces might stand alone separated from the whole, but each piece is wholly necessary to the overall story. Take this stanza from the middle of section two:

Yes, and the body has memory. The physical carriage hauls
more than its weight. The body is the threshold across which
each objectionable call passes into consciousness—all
the unintimidated, unblinking, and unflappable resilience
does not erase the moments lived through, even as we
are eternally stupid or everlastingly optimistic, so ready to
be inside, among, a part of the games. (28)

Similarly, Harjo makes use of the long-line narrative form in many pieces in *In Mad Love and War*, though none of the pieces are as long as Rankine’s. “Deer Dancer,” “Rainy Dawn,” and “Santa Fe,” like Rankine’s work in *Citizen*, all make use of the long line and long stanza to tell a continuous story. Harjo differs, however, in her use of the isolated short line or short stanza for emphasis, almost as if experimenting with the haibun form within a longer narrative work. While Rankine *does* occasionally employ the single line—the repeated use of “have you seen their faces?” throughout section six is a notable example (83)—Harjo’s long stanzas are much

more varied in length than Rankine's. As a result, Harjo's work is much more easily identifiable as "poetry," and individual pieces from *In Mad Love and War* are easier to read and analyze in one sitting. "Deer Dancer," for example, moves from

My brother-in-law hung out with white people, went to law school
with a perfect record, quit. Says you can keep your laws, your
words. And practiced law on the street with his hands. He jimmied
to the proverbial dream girl, the face of the moon, while the players
racked a new game He bragged to us, he told her magic words and
that's when she broke, became human (68)

to the single line "But we all heard his bar voice crack" (68).

While my work draws inspiration from both Rankine and Harjo, the pieces in my collection which make use of the long line and long stanza more closely resemble Harjo's on the page. Like Harjo, I make use of the isolated line within the prose poem for emphasis. In "The Juniper Tree," for example, the speaker, recounting their last moments of life, rambles through an exercise meant to soothe a person having a panic attack:

Don't lose your head meaning act calm as in recall the breathing exercises learned
for anxiety remember four in four out. Hold at the crest. Nestle the breath. Make
your lungs so full they push against your bones. Remember the times she held you
like this: hard but not intimate.

The poem is made up of four stanzas like this one, each immediately followed by a line from the original fairytale. In this case, the above stanza is followed by the isolated line "*my mother she killed me.*" This line is meant to emphasize the immediate danger the speaker is in while also mounting the tension in the poem, just as Harjo does when she undercuts the brother-in-law's bravado in "Deer Dancer."

This is not to say that there are no distinct forms in my collection. Poems which follow some formal impulse, rather, do so in order to convey something deeper about the poem's subject. Poems featuring speakers who are physically constrained, such as Rapunzel or Snow

White in her glass coffin, employ more “restrictive” poetic forms, such as the sonnet. While none of the speakers in this collection are truly “free” from oppression, those who are particularly limited in their available actions are similarly limited in their line length, rhythm, and rhyme scheme.

Conclusion

The proposed collection, *Making a Killing*, combines feminist scholarship, fairy tales and folklore, and nonhuman animal rights theory in order to engage with the tradition of protest poetry. Because the project takes inspiration from several disparate sources, I felt that it would find the most success as a collection of poems. Poetry, unlike academic articles or even fiction, allows for slow digestion by the reader. The moral heaviness of the subject matter in this collection makes it imperative that the reader be able to take time to consider their cognitive dissonance and even complicity in the suffering of nonhuman animals and humans alike. It is my hope that in *Making a Killing*, readers will find these aforementioned factors, as well as a deeper understanding of oppression and injustice — and a voice with which to fight.

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