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Issue Introduction: Biography as a Lens into Social Relations with Nonhuman Others

Nathan Poirier

The concept of “the sociological imagination,” as conceived by critical sociologist and anarchist-sympathizer C. Wright Mills (1959), refers to the reciprocal influence of individuals and society. This implies thinking through both individuals and society at large, in addition to their relation through historical biography. Thus, the methodological approach to research and storytelling through biography is not new in the social sciences. While there are critiques to such a method, an advantage is that personal experiences are much less likely to be misrepresented than inferring or interpreting others’ feelings. It also allows for reflexivity as the scholar-activist must interrogate their own positionality during the writing process as events are recalled and interpreted. This approach has also been used within Critical Animal Studies (CAS) (see, for example, Thomas, 2013). Griffin (2014) believes that biographical methods can and should continue to occupy an important role within CAS precisely because they hold potential to be transformative both in academics and activism. As Griffin (2014) states—and I would agree—biographical methods are more receptive to allowing and incurring empathy and compassion towards the nonhuman others CAS scholar-activists work alongside.

Both essays included in this issue are (auto)biographical in nature and method. Together they illustrate how, somewhat ironically, first-person storytelling can decenter the self to emphasize the *relations* between beings instead. The first, a photo-essay by Lynda Korimboccus, opens with her positionality as an ethical vegan and parent. These identities frame why Korimboccus investigates the contradictory consumptive patterns of children. She examines the popular animated children’s television series, *Peppa Pig*, that follows the life of a family of pigs. While the show has become wildly popular and children perceive Peppa as a loveable character, these same children continue to consume pork products. It is Korimboccus’s parental and vegan insight that deems this contradiction problematic and solvable through compassionate-oriented vegan parenting.

The second essay, by Anne J. Mamary, relays a series of encounters Mamary has had with human and nonhuman animals. This essay is an

extended reprint of an earlier version of the article first published in [*Feeling Animal Death: Being Host to Ghosts*](#) (2019) edited by Brianne Donaldson and Ashley King. Inspired by her neighbors' adopted cat, Mamary pays special attention to how individual animals and animal encounters can shape people's lives, and conversely, on how individual humans can also have profound effects on the lives of animals. As Mamary illustrates through (auto)biographical narrative, these relations influence our sense of self, which in turn have reverberations for future social interactions.

Following the essays are two book reviews. The first, by Dibyajyoti Ghosh, considers how animals are represented in Perumal Murugan's *Poonachi*. This review is particularly unique and interesting because, as Ghosh notes, few Indian authors give animals such attention in writing fictional works. Next, Cynthia Rosenfeld reviews *Virtual Menageries: Animals as Mediators in Network Culture* by Jody Berland.

This issue concludes with a poem by Lynne Goldsmith, "Operation Egglifts" in which Lynne asks a bird what it feels like to have their eggs stolen for human reappropriation. Now, amid COVID-19, Goldsmith's poem resonates as it is more relevant than ever to meditate on the repeated human protrusions into and the pilfering of nonhuman realities.

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Pig-Ignorance: The “Peppa Pig Paradox”: Investigating Contradictory Childhood Consumption

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Abstract

Despite Peppa Pig being a billion-pound character favourite of children across the globe, many of those same children regularly consume pig products. Using cognitive dissonance as a starting point, this photo essay aims to investigate how the “meat paradox” (Loughnan et al., 2010) may be applied at an intra-species level to this phenomenon: The Peppa Pig Paradox. It may be that animals in the Peppa series are simply anthropomorphised versions of ourselves (Mills, 2017); that the anthropocentric human-is-animal metaphors we employ maintain negative views of all things porcine (Goatly, 2006); or that the socialisation process and norm maintenance necessitate dissociative language (Plous, 1993) about other animals to maintain a boundary across which we dare not tread. As the 21st century develops and veganism increases in popularity, perhaps connections will become more explicit as plant-based food becomes more readily available. Increased associations might create a shift in consciousness away from strategic ignorance (Onwezen & van der Weele, 2016) to a more conscious, species-inclusive society, where Peppa Pig fans will shun the very notion of consuming pig flesh and demand the same of others.

Key terms: cognitive dissonance; meat paradox; dissociation; strategic ignorance; anthropocentrism; anthropomorphism; veganism; Peppa Pig



Figure 1

“When I was nine, I had a babysitter who didn’t want to hurt anything. ...

“You know that chicken is chicken, right?” ...

My brother and I looked at each other, our mouths full of hurt chickens, and had simultaneous *how-in-the-world-could-I-have-never-thought-of-that-*

before-

and-why-on-earth-didn’t-someone-tell-me? moments.

I put down my fork.”

(Foer, 2009, p. 6)

As an ethical vegan, I have chosen to raise my daughter (now six years old) following the same moral compass I now use to traverse my way through life. Like Foer, I was not raised vegan. Unlike Foer, I did not have the insight of a babysitter who subscribed to such ethics and was in my twenties before I made the (similarly sudden) connection. This is not unusual, even as I write in 2020, and although veganism and mainstream vegan food choice is on the rise, the vast majority of the “Western” world remain animal-loving omnivores. This contradiction is referred to as the “Meat Paradox” and pinpoints the categorization of some animal species as *food* and others *pets* as responsible for this apparent contradiction (Loughnan et al., 2010). My experience as the vegan mother of a vegan child led me to focus this inter-species dichotomy further to an intra-species one I have named the “Peppa Pig Paradox” --that so many children are fond of Peppa Pig whilst also frequently dining on pig flesh. This paper investigates some of the existing explanations that may be applied to such behavior and, although unable to conclusively establish one single origin of paradoxical practice, suggests that more investigation is required into the systematic socialization of children into these norms and values. Whilst evidence exists to show that some young children make their own moral food decisions (Hussar & Harris, 2010), it is minimal and its sample small. Meantime, the strategic ignorance (Onwezen & van der Weele, 2016) of family and other caregivers in particular may hold the key to shifting these sands. Maybe one day, consumers will make connections, children will have a choice and Peppa Pig fans will shun the very notion of consuming pig flesh and demand the same of others.

Throughout this paper I use the single word “animals” in place of a number of alternatives for nonhuman animals, such as other-than-human animals, more-than-human animals and others. My personal dislike for classifying animals as *pets*, *farmed* and so on is also worth noting. However, the use here of these (and other) normative terms is designed solely to allow the paper maximum accessibility to non-academic readers.

Who is Peppa?

Peppa is a cartoon pig that since launching in 2004, has become a global brand. Nick-named “The Simpsons for toddlers” (Catt, 2017), the character is a young female pig, around the same age as my daughter, drawn two-dimensionally with a fairly simple palette of colors, and features as the

title character in a preschool animated television (TV) series. Most of the episodes (of which there are now more than 300 (Wikipedia, 2020)) are around five minutes long and air daily in the United Kingdom (UK), where she was created, during Channel 5's "Milkshake" preschool schedule (6:00-9:15am).

“Bringing Home the Bacon”

However, Peppa is not restricted to her British roots – the series has been translated into 40 languages and shown in 180 countries worldwide. Nor is her presence restricted to the small screen—from cinematic experiences, live theatre shows and party franchises, the Peppa Pig brand has been licensed to producers of toys, books, clothing, videogames and foodstuffs. One of these live theatre shows prompted this paper: in 2018, a friend and I took our daughters (then aged 4) to see *Peppa Pig Live!* at the King's Theatre in Edinburgh.

Our two, along with most other toddlers present, were dressed in their best Peppa finery—dresses or t-shirts and leggings, hoodies or jackets, shoes or boots, hairclips and handbags. We went to a local café for a drink before the show and I noticed another little girl, similarly adorned, eating a ham salad. Once in the theatre, as well as the over-priced novelties at the kiosk, adults could order a snack box for the break with a choice of either cheese or ham sandwiches. I wondered just how many of the Peppa-loving theatergoers would opt for the sandwich filled with slices of pig. Later that year, we took the girls to the *Peppa Pig First Cinema Experience*, and I witnessed many little ones requesting hot dogs at the foyer's food stand. These children all eagerly consumed Peppa-themed products but also consumed pigs.

Licensed merchandise is worth \$171.5 billion globally (O'Connell, 2019) and Peppa has her fair share of the children's merchandise business. The most popular of all UK children's TV character merchandise is Peppa Pig—58% of parents say their children like Peppa products—a third more



than Disney's Mickey Mouse Clubhouse (Statista, 2014). Such is Peppa's popularity, the character has her own theme park, *Peppa Pig World* on the south coast of England (Ashley Baker Davies, 2018). Chalking up around £1.35 billion in sales every year (Statista, 2018) and increasing by an astonishing 10% per annum over the last five fiscal years (O'Connell, 2019), Peppa has permeated the psyche of children the world over and

shows no sign of abating.

What is Peppa? Metaphoric or Anthropomorphic?

Peppa is the eldest of two in a traditional nuclear family who live in a detached house at the top of a hill. The supporting cast is a mix of animal species from rabbits and gerbils through sheep and ponies to zebras and rhinos. Each character has an alliterated name (except Peppa's brother, George) such as Freddy Fox and Candy Cat, and converse in the same language, though toddler George still "oinks."

The children attend playgroup, the parents work (in predominantly middle-class jobs), wear clothes, watch television, eat at the table, play with toys, ride bikes and visit opticians, dentists and so on. Human representation is rare: Peppa Pig and her friends are essentially anthropomorphized animals living in a very human-like society. However, there are frequent hints of egomorphic stereotypes with the majority of the species presented: Peppa and her family all "oink" on occasion and adore getting muddy (the very first episode of Series 1 was entitled "Muddy Puddles"); and Rebecca Rabbit's favorite toy is a cuddly carrot.

Some of the remaining characteristics are often sourced from human animalistic metaphors or fairytales—Mr. Bull is clumsy (Episode 44 was titled "Mr. Bull in a China Shop") and Daddy Pig is stubborn ("pig-headed"), overweight ("fat pig") and loves eating ("pigging out"). Goatly (2006) suggests that it is anthropocentrism that causes so many "human is animal" metaphors to be employed in society and Peppa Pig is no different. It could be argued that such stereotypes exist to provide comedy value for adults

watching alongside children. However, Goatly points out (with similar exemplification to that above, including pig, hog and swine) that most animal metaphors are “negative and pejorative” (2006, p. 25) allowing reinforcement of human superiority. I add to



Figure 3

Goatly’s list “pig-ignorant,” officially defined as an informal and pejorative adjective meaning “*extremely ignorant or unknowledgeable*” (HarperCollins, 2018). The etymology of this term is hard to establish, but makes it no less ironic in this context.

Peppa and the Family “Pig”?

Brett Mills (2017) considers that the anthropomorphic nature of *Peppa Pig* and its characters means viewers need make no connection other than to themselves. There is no ignorance, other than to the exploitation of animals more generally for human gain. Peppa simply reflects, via pet-keeping, insect-chasing and wildlife-viewing, the rejection of the subjectivity of animals present throughout our society. Pig behavior is evident—their appearance, grunting, and penchant for muddy puddles—but suggests “Pig” to perhaps simply be the family name rather than “*Peppa the Pig*” which would make explicit the species (Mills, 2017).

Despite the human-like social qualities of the program, Mills also acknowledges that whether “humanised animals or animalised humans ... their ‘piggishness is inescapable’” (2017). As highlighted in an earlier paper, certain grunting noises are only employed by pigs in the presence of humans—perhaps a specific pig-to-human language that we as yet do not understand (Mills, 2010). One could even imagine it to be negative and pejorative pig chat about humans.

Curly tails are one key element of “piggishness” we are taught from infancy. However, the majority of piglets reared for food in the European



Figure 4

Union have their tails cut off (D’Eath et al., 2016) to reduce the incidence of tail-biting (see Fig. 4). That Peppa and family retain theirs (even through clothing) may subtly imply they should not be considered the same as food pigs.

Separating Pig from Pork—And Farm from Fork

Most people like eating meat but “find animal suffering emotionally disturbing” (Peden et al., 2020, p. 21). Categorization can be vital to maintaining separation from the source. Mills considers the pig to have once been eligible for the *pet* category but that pet consumption is socially unacceptable (2010). That these categorization processes are culturally relative is rightly highlighted. In the early to mid-2000s, UK TV presenters Richard Madeley and Judy Finnigan hosted a discussion on horse milk consumption during their daytime talk show. Finnigan indicated disgust by scrunching up her nose at the thought of it and even more so when lifting a glass of horse’s milk to her lips to taste it. Yet the milk of mares has been commonplace in other cultures for centuries (Park & Haenlein, 2006) and is in principle no different to Brits drinking the excretions of a cow or a goat.

One cannot help but think of the public disgust during the UK’s so-called “horsemeat scandal” of 2013 (see Fig. 5) when beef products were found to contain meat from both horses and pigs. By law, however, the meat content of a beef burger need only be 47% bovine origin—the remainder usually water, fat and “seasoning,” which often includes pork rind (Lawrence, 2013). Little media mention was made of the porcine content despite its being found in more than 85% of the samples tested in contrast to one third with horse meat. That people are so horrified at the thought of eating horses or drinking their milk is interesting given how their children might



Figure 5

react to the origins of ham or sausage, or the fate of male dairy calves for cow's milk production.

Parts of pigs are routinely fed to our children, despite knowing their fondness for characters like Peppa. Printed inside pink heart signage, the contents of a 2010 "Peppa Pig Fairy Party" savory menu lunch box by an events business in London were as follows:

HAM SANDWICH
CUCUMBER
COCKTAIL SAUSAGE
CHEESE
BOX OF RAISINS
CHOCOLATE BAR
(Hopkins, 2010)

Setting aside the dairy content of the cheese and chocolate, the popularity of ham sandwiches and chipolata sausages (not forgetting the mandatory sausage rolls) as a British kids' party staple continues through such practises. Peppa almost provides a platform for such perpetuation.

Schools & Speciesism

Whilst it seems easy to assume complete ignorance on our children's part, it is naïve to presume they know nothing. Many UK school curricula include activities designed to make children more aware (or one could say, more willing to accept the utility of animals for human gain). My daughter's nursery school's Spring 2018 theme was "farming" and included a trip to the local country park's deer farm and fishery. In Primary 1 (aged 4-5), the Spring topic was also "farming" and a visit to the local city farm was organized, where children could feed the spring lambs (the farm informed me these were "borrowed" from a local farmer for the purpose). A "Living Eggs" chick-hatching program is also an annual school event as well as regular purchases of "chrysalis kits" for children to witness the life cycle of the butterfly from the comfort of their classroom.

In 2015, a school blog post outlined the classwork for 7-8-year-olds learning about animals around the world. Related activities included making animal face sandwiches using cold meats as the facial base for various vegetable features. One in particular depicted a pig, with a meat slice face under its cucumber nose and red pepper mouth.



Figure 6

The older primary children have links with a local non-profit Community Interest Company located within walking distance of the school. It provides therapeutic experiences for vulnerable people through the range of animals kept on-site, including rabbits, ducks, alpacas, ponies, goats, and pigs. Despite research suggesting direct

interaction with farmed animals may mean “urban children [aged 6-11] are in a position where empathy towards these animals can be enhanced with relatively little complication” (Burich & Williams, 2020, p. 312), a class visiting to help clean the animals last year tweeted photos of themselves eating bacon rolls during a break. “Empathy from experience” (Peden et al., 2020, p. 30) is not always a given. A visit to a local Tesco supermarket might see one pass a small contingent of local primary school or youth group children sporting yellow high-visibility vests emblazoned with “I’m learning where my food comes from” and beneath it, “Farm to Fork” (see Fig. 6).

These sorts of activities simply normalize the eating of animals and their body parts, seemingly without risk to the meat, fish, and dairy industries, all of which rely on continuing such practices. As a global enterprise, it makes marketing sense to commence the inculcation into meat-eating as early as possible and reinforce it as a social norm.

In a previous role as Campaigns Manager for a national animal protection organization, primary schools were welcoming of my suggestion to visit and talk to the children about protecting animals and promoting their welfare. However, they were clear that no part of this could mention meat-free diets. The school recognized that many children care for animals. They also imagined the real possibility that any talk might make connections, anticipated a shift in some children’s cognition, subsequent challenges at home and, thereafter, parent complaints to the Education Board. Fear ultimately drove those objections and prevented our school speakers’ program from commencing. Meantime, other well-established activities with animals (such as those aforementioned) continue without concern and the status quo is maintained.

Intransigent Denial—and “Convenience” Food

A reasonable range of literature exists attempting to explain the factors behind contradictory behaviors such as animal-loving meat-eaters (Plous, 1993; Rothgerber, 2012; Rothgerber & Mican, 2014; Joy, 2010; Sahlins, 1976; Cole & Stewart, 2016; and many more). However, there is a dearth of research into this behavior in young children specifically. There exist some studies on the belief systems of adolescents and adults regarding pigs in particular where, for example, pig farmers, more than citizens, students and even veterinarians, understand the capacity of pigs to experience suffering (Peden et al., 2020).

One way to justify our eating of animal flesh is through linguistic dissociation (Rothgerber, 2012; Kunst & Hohle, 2016). That we use different words for parts of mammals we eat maintains a disconnect between what we consume and the creature from which it came (Plous, 1993, p. 17). Whilst some argue this is merely habitual (in the UK, at least—in Germany, pig flesh is known as its literal translation: “schweinfleisch”), there is evidence that it is sometimes deliberate. In certain United States youth club animal fairs for example, participants are instructed not to “humanize” the animals—for example, to avoid the word “babies” for chicks and calves (Plous, 1993, p. 18). Additionally, a case can be made even when the name of the species is evident in that mass nouns provide distance from the individual animals (Stewart & Cole, 2009, p. 468)—*turkey* rather than *turkeys*; *fish* rather than *fishes*.

Kunst & Hohle (2016) believe our attitude to animals and subsequent meat consumption is influenced by how it is presented, prepared and, crucially, discussed. Many years ago, I recall asking my grandmother (a fan of cold meats from the local butcher) why what she was eating was called “tongue.” I did not think for a moment that it was an actual tongue. But it was, from a cow, and she told me so. I am unsure whether or not I believed her, but I asked no further questions. I continued to eat meat. I am not even sure I understood it was optional.

Attitudes vary in several ways—willingness to eat meat reduces when the head is present on a roasted pig; when the meat is unprocessed rather than processed; when a photograph of the living animal is present; when words such as *kill* are used in place of *harvest*; and when the name of the animal rather than the meat is utilized—e.g., *pig* rather than *pork* (Kunst & Hohle, 2016; see also Earle et al., 2019). Language and semantics are of course important in how we view society and all of its inhabitants, but many argue

that failure to make a *meaningful* connection between what and who we are eating is more akin to a cognitive coping mechanism than any disconnected terminology. Melanie Joy (2010) believes humans to be in “intransigent denial” of the living source of the dead meat we consume. The referent is absent, yes (see Adams, 2010), but that is irrelevant. We know. Children know. Especially when it comes to pigs—an American study evidenced that 88% of children knew what animal bacon came from (Plous, 1993, p. 24) where it is also likely that a high percentage of them consume pigs. Work is currently underway to reshape how 20th century American history has viewed animals and in particular those used to represent food establishments throughout the United States (Aiello, 2020), such as the example in Figure 7. No accusations of direct dissociation can be made here, but failure to be shocked by the blatancy of such images further evidences the disconnect taught through classification.



Figure 7

Research undertaken by Faunalytics into the use of euphemism to “linguistically deceive” produced surprising results, countering Kunst & Hohle’s 2016 study. Making explicit the species being eaten (i.e., *pig* rather than *pork*) made no marked difference to the attitudes of respondents to a variety of statements regarding animal ethics and welfare (Anderson, 2018) though as usual, study participants were adults. But adult attitudes are crucially important here. Whether labeled by cut or corpse, as long as the animals are socially accepted “food” or “farmed” animals, excuses can be made and traditions upheld and passed on.

That meat is a frequent dining experience for children is ultimately located in this socialization process. With caregivers, educators and producers all invested in norm maintenance (Mills, 2017), the message must remain consistent despite the ethics being far from it. How animals are represented to children from a young age in books (Bowd, 1982; McCrindle & Odendaal, 1994), on television (Paul, 1996; Mills, 2017), in feature films (Bettany & Belk, 2011; Hirschman & Sanders, 1997; Cole & Stewart 2012, 2014) and through interactions with pets (Rothgerber & Mican, 2014), has a measurable impact on how children relate to animals in later life (see Geerdts et al., 2016). Current UK television programs such as preschool children’s BBC channel CBeebies’s *Down on the Farm* simply reinforce the

classifications taught to children on certain species' edibility. A recent study into Scottish children's knowledge of animal welfare and their levels of empathy with cows, lambs and chickens claimed: "children held a view of humans and animals as engaged in a mutually beneficial relationship, where animals give products in exchange for food and protection" (Burich & Williams, 2020, p. 306). This implies the excretions, indeed the lives themselves, are willingly surrendered. It is little wonder children believe this since most presented abstractions of farmed animal lives are thus. "Symbolic constructions have real consequences for the lives of the animals and humans involved" (York & Mancus, 2013).

Why Peppa? Why not Babe ... or Wilbur?

Favorite children's stories mentioned in other studies (such as Stewart & Cole, 2009; Cole & Stewart, 2012, 2016) had often profound effects on adults. Focusing on species that are more commonly classified in the UK and USA as "edible," one could highlight animal characters such as Babe, Bambi, Nemo and movies such as Chicken Run and of course, Charlotte's Web. Starring in the *Babe* movies prompted lead actor James Cromwell (Fig. 8) to move from long-time vegetarianism to veganism in 1995 and become an activist for animal rights (Viva! and VivaHealth, 2019) for which he has spent time in prison.

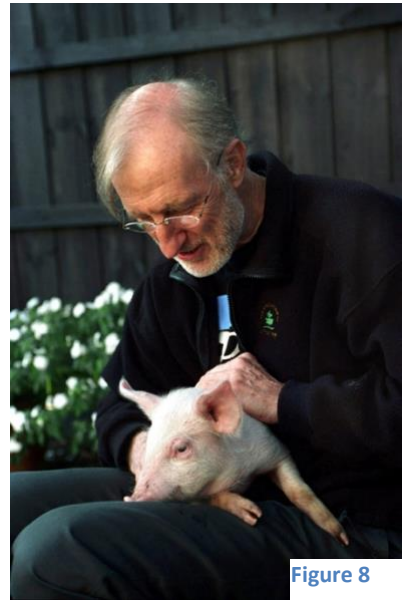


Figure 8

Bruce the Shark in the *Finding Nemo* movie can be seen chanting "Fish are friends, not food" (and handing an animal rights campaign on a plate, so to speak, to PETA (Welch, 2004)). My mother recalls fleeing a movie theatre in tears at a young age when (spoiler alert) Bambi's mother died. Many animals considered food animals have starred on the big screen and yet meat consumption has remained relatively unaffected as the connections remain unmade (or ignored). Thankfully, difficulties with these



Figure 9

socially constructed, contradictory attitudes are now being highlighted and discussed (for example, Cole & Stewart, 2016). The *Peppa Pig Paradox* is but a small contribution to this body of work.

Why, though, is Peppa significant enough to warrant the naming of an entire concept? The answer lies in her daily presence in the lives of millions of children on mainstream, free-to-access TV and streaming services. Not a one-off movie that may soon be forgotten in the everyday of post-cinema life or a novel such as *Charlotte's Web* read in a classroom setting. UK Channel 5 airs six episodes of Peppa Pig each morning—four at 6:00am and a further two from a different series at 7:25am (Channel 5.com, 2020). The channel's "Milkshake!" morning schedule is considered "the no.1 commercial channel for kids [...] 50% of kids are likely to say Milkshake! has their favorite characters. 78% of parents trust Milkshake! as a safe space for kids" (Getmemedia, 2018). The show was recently voted one of the UK's Top 50 Children's Shows of All Time (Immediate Media Co. Ltd., 2020). In July 2020, the audience demand for *Peppa Pig* was 22.3 times the average TV series demand in the UK. Only 2.7% of all shows in this market have this level of demand and *Peppa Pig* ranks at the 99.7th percentile in the "Children" genre (Parrot Analytics, 2011-2020). No other daily program in the Milkshake! schedule features what UK children would normally classify as a "farmed" animal as its main character and few other 21st century characters have experienced Peppa's longevity (currently 16 years) on mainstream UK TV.

Peppa's trotters are also far-reaching. *Peppa Pig* ranks globally as the 9th most popular children-themed YouTube channel with more than 16.6 million subscribers worldwide (Clement, 2020) and is one of the top ten favorite shows of Russian children (Elagina, 2020). Only ten other character toys are more popular in France than Peppa toys (Statista, 2015). In Spain, Peppa was the third most searched character toy leading up to Christmas 2016 (Statista, 2016) with more than 62,000 searches. Back in her homeland of the UK, Peppa Pig "Bag-o-Fun" (costing £4.99 per issue) is the leading children's magazine with sales exceeding 150,000 copies in 2018 alone (Johnson, 2019).

Despite the strength of Peppa's worldwide popularity, pig meat is also the most widely consumed meat at around 36% of global meat intake (FAO, 2020). Herein lies the necessity to identify, name and discuss this peculiar paradox.

Other Popular Porcines

Whilst the endurance of Peppa Pig's reign appears unique for a two-dimensional pig, she is not the only pig to hog the limelight. Popular three-dimensional puppet pigs both past and present have had their share of fandom. Brought to life by their puppeteer creators in 1957, *Pinky and Perky* saw 15 years of success with a regular television show featuring many famous guests (Turnipnet.com, 2020). The show was briefly revived and updated to CGI animation in 2008. It seems that producers may have been hoping to capitalize on Peppa's success as her fans got a little older, however, this was unsuccessful, running for only one year in the UK (IMDB, 1990-2020).



Figure 10

A few years after the original *Pinky and Perky* retired, Jim Henson's *The Muppet Show* debuted on television and became a much-loved staple of young American lives. Also popular in the UK, it was voted second favorite children's TV program of all time at the turn of this century (BBC, 2001). Amongst its most well-known characters is Miss Piggy: a blonde, karate-chopping diva in a volatile relationship with one of the show's other stars, Kermit the Frog. Miss Piggy has graced screens across the world since 1976, appearing in ten series of *The Muppets*, eight Muppets movies and ten Muppets albums. She is also a main character in the toddler spin-off series, *Muppet Babies*, which airs on Disney subscription channels (IMDB, 1990-2020).



Figure 11

Whilst Miss Piggy has aged well (her first appearance was in 1974), she remains *part* of a series, not a title character. Few other children's animated animals (aired in the UK at least) represent the food animal category as Peppa Pig. Most others are what preschoolers would more commonly recognize as pets: *Peter Rabbit*; the dogs in *Paw Patrol*; or the cats in *Talking Tom and Friends*.

Although Miss Piggy, Pinky and Perky provide other examples of famous television pigs, none are as long-standing, as easily accessible, or as pervasive as Peppa.

Woolly Thinking—Another Di-lamb-a?

There is one small exception: Timmy, a younger cousin of popular Aardman character Shaun the Sheep (part of the UK animators' Wallace and Gromit franchise). On screen since 2009 on CBeebies, Timmy is a young lamb attending nursery with his friends, their antics captured in each episode of *Timmy Time*. The characters communicate only with relevant animal sounds (baas, oinks, woofs, and so on) so, unlike Peppa, need no translation. Only three series totaling 80 episodes were ever made and aired between 2009-11 (Wikipedia, 2020), but repeats run regularly. One of Timmy's nursery peers is Paxton, an over-eating, overweight piglet—but Timmy, the cute lamb, remains the clear star of the show.



Figure 12

Comparing pig-eating Peppa fans with lamb-eating Timmy fans, lambs are eaten less than pigs in the UK, and fewer food choices are created from a lamb's body parts than the ham, bacon, gammon, pies, sausages and other processed pig pieces familiar to consumers. Recent data indicates one third more UK households eat pigs than lambs: "household penetration" of these meats is 86% and 52.9% respectively (Magee, 2020; AHDB, 2020a, 2020b). Consumers are also less likely to eat a lamb chop if presented with a picture of a living lamb on its advertisement (Kunst & Hohle, 2016). As I found in my Master's dissertation and in line with Herzog (2010), many consumers admit to shunning lamb as a meat mainly because of their "cuteness." There is further irony in children visiting city farms in Spring to feed the cute newborn lambs before heading home with the family for Easter Sunday roast lamb.

Mixed Messages, Confused Consumption

But *still* we're faced with contradictory practice. We persuade children to eat Brussels sprouts by calling them "baby cabbages." Supermarket retailer Lidl introduced child-friendly packaging for fruits and vegetables with illustrated animal characters to encourage kids to eat a wider variety of plant food. These include fun size "Celery Storks," "Radfishes" and "Tawny Tomatowls." Lidl claims their range is "designed to encourage kids to make healthy food choices [...w]ith colourful packaging and animal themes to attract kids" (Lidl GB, nd). One in particular caught my eye as I researched this paper (see Fig.13).



Figure 13

If this the only way to have omnivorous children eat plant food, it says so much about how our society has allowed the animal products industry to flourish in an age of convenience; and perhaps says even more about how willing children are to eat something pig-like when a link to the animal is made explicit. The "Sweet Potato Piggies" packaging does not use a real piglet to represent its "fun size" potatoes but a simple two-dimensional cartoon. This contrasts with some Peppa products, where parts of real pigs represent the much-loved fictional two-dimensional cartoon character.

Similarly, processed meat hot *dogs* are made from *pigs*; canine breed



Figure 14

Dachshunds are often referred to in the UK as *sausage* dogs; but then dogs are categorized as pets and therefore inedible. It is easy to understand any confusion created within our children.

Various mechanisms are said to come into play to protect our (and their) psyches from such contradiction. From conflict reduction strategies suggested by Plous (1993) to "Meat Eating Justification" purported by Rothgerber (2012) and others (see Piazza et al., 2015), there are many ways that humans suppress

the reality of meat at a subconscious level. This ensures avoidance of action, necessary to maintain consistency of behavior.

Much blame must rest with how human adults socialize their young and the classifications into *edible* and *inedible* animals. Normality is one of the key justifications provided by meat eaters alongside natural, necessary and nice (Joy, 2010; Piazza et al., 2015). Evidence to counter meat as a natural or necessary human requirement is weighty, and the “mmmmm, bacon though” argument is a long-standing one employed by many who malign meat-free peers—easily countered on moral grounds at least. That leaves *normal* as the key ingredient in moral decision making about animal-eating, particularly if one also claims to be an animal-lover. For Stewart and Cole (2009), before children can think for themselves, society normalizes the categorization of other animals through this process, reinforced through mass media and other agents. These categories produce normative responses to different species so that one may become a visible subject (such as a “pet” dog, for example) or an invisible object (such as a “laboratory” mouse). Stewart and Cole represent these visible-invisible and subject-object dichotomies diagrammatically (see Fig.15) illustrating the differences between and sometimes within animal species.

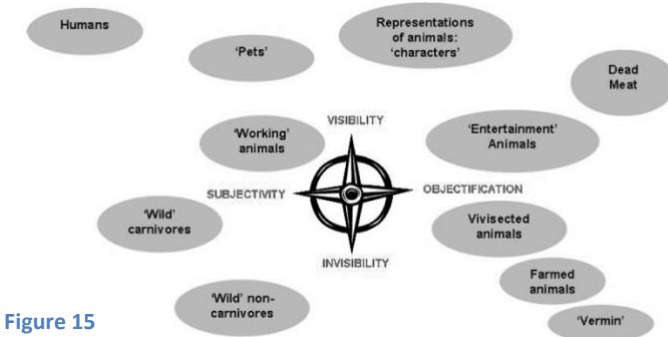


Figure 15

As a classified *farmed animal*, the pig is an invisible object: thought little of and seen less often. Ham, as *dead meat*, is a visible object, i.e., a piece of “food.”

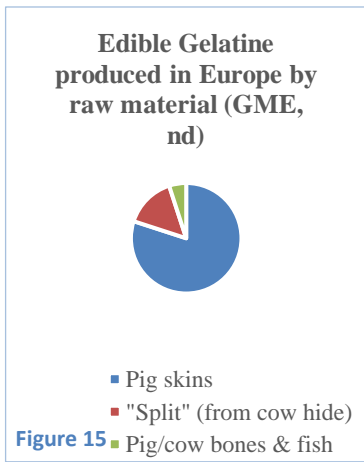
Whilst these explanations provide an understanding of why society fails to acknowledge the hypocrisy of its beliefs and behaviors, the necessity for such strategies and the persistence of these norms stems from something much simpler: Strategic ignorance.

Strategic What?

Based on Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory, much development work has been done to relate this tension between belief and behavior towards animals. Most notably, the "meat paradox" as conceptualized by Loughnan, Haslam and Bastian (2010) deals directly with the discomfort experienced by those who claim to be a lover of some animals whilst an eater of others. The strategies employed by individuals to reduce this discomfort tend to fall into one of two categories of change: belief or behavior. Applied to animal use, a change in belief might see someone deny certain species the capacity to suffer. A behavior change might result in a shift towards a plant-based diet. Rationalization is a recognized (Freudian) defense mechanism that allows its practitioners to maintain their moral sense of self and defend themselves socially, particularly when guilt may arise. To persuade another that one's view is valid, rationalization may be employed, though it naturally works best if at some level one truly believes the supportive statements one makes. Strategic ignorance was identified as "moral wiggle room," allowing individuals to maintain the *illusion* of fair and compatible beliefs and behaviors whilst in reality, remaining far from it (Dana et al., 2007).

In 2016, Onwezen and van der Weele applied this concept to meat consumers. They defined strategic ignorance as functional, allowing someone to "engage in pleasurable and selfish activities that may be harmful to others" (p. 96)—in this case, eating animals. They identified four categories of consumer: struggling, coping, indifferent, and strategically ignorant. Coping consumers were more likely to be full- or part-time vegetarians and of particular interest to this paper, the "flexitarians" here were less likely to eat pork (2016, p. 101). These consumers had taken responsibility for their behavior and adapted to reduce the dissonance experienced. At the other end of the spectrum were the self-reported strategically ignorant consumers (more than a quarter of the large study sample) who purposely ignored any knowledge that would interfere with their habitual consumption (2016, p. 103). Faced with the opportunity to become more fully informed (risking negative emotion or the requirement to take responsibility to act), many strategically ignorant people opted to remain as such. The strugglers had not found a way to cope quite yet; and the indifferent were just that.

Confronted with the Peppa Pig Paradox, it is clear to see how all but the coping group might carry on regardless, and this may explain the persistence of such counter-intuitive behavior across generations of the animal-loving British public. There can be little other explanation for the UK popularity of a 75g Peppa Pig Strawberry Jelly pot, despite its ingredient list clearly showing “gelatine” and rendering it unsuitable for even vegetarian children, let alone vegan ones. The pot itself is a Peppa Pig shaped reusable mold (though most jelly crystals and blocks also contain gelatine). Confusingly, the manufacturer’s adult jelly dessert products contain animal-free gelling agents such as pectin with no gelatine in sight (Fun Food Family, 2018).



It may be, though, that most consumers think little of the origins of gelatine. The protein substance is “prepared from skin [tendons, ligaments, and tissues] and bone material, mainly from pig, cow and fish carcasses but also potentially from any mammalian or bird species” (Fera Science Ltd., 2017, p. 2). Porcine gelatine is cheaper than bovine gelatine and so preferred by profit-making producers, though the specific animal origin of gelatine in food products need not yet be legally labeled (Grundy, 2018, pp. 2-5).

Jelly (another UK kids’ party staple) is so-called due to its gelatine content. Whilst this provides further illustration of symbolic separation, it may well be planned and purposeful dissociation—a rational irrationality to assist the strategically ignorant.

Children’s Choices?

As adults, we tend to raise our children in our image in that family custom and practice is instilled from birth and throughout childhood. Whether language, religion, morality, food or clothing, most children have a choice only within restricted options set out for them by their caregivers.

A work colleague once commented how awful it would be to “force” views on children by raising them as vegans. I responded that *all* parents enforce their lifestyles on their children, asking (though already knowing)

whether she had raised her own children in the specific religious faith I knew she practiced. She exclaimed it was not comparable. It is.

An academic search for studies on vegan children reveals the vast majority relate to health and nutrition rather than morals and ethics. One of the few exceptions (though with vegetarian rather than vegan youngsters) is Hussar and Harris’s 2010 research into the moral decision-making of young children who choose not to eat meat. Their participant groups were:

- independent vegetarians (in non-vegetarian families)
- family vegetarians (in vegetarian families); and
- non-vegetarians (in non-vegetarian families).



Figure 16

Each group consisted of 16 mostly white, middle-class children, aged 6-10 years, five boys and 11 girls. Of particular interest were the reasons given by the independent vegetarians for becoming so. In all 16 responses within this group, animal welfare was their prime concern. Only 7 respondents in the vegetarian families group stated this as a reason for abstinence. None of the non-vegetarians claimed animal welfare as the reason for avoiding a particular meat, instead motivated mainly by taste (in line with Piazza et al., 2015) and as a secondary concern, health (Hussar & Harris, 2010, p. 631).

Given the once subcultural nature of vegetarianism and still to some extent veganism, it is perhaps understandable that a majority who misunderstand meat avoidance would seek to investigate its benefits and drawbacks. Unfortunately, moral, environmental and even health-based arguments for plant-based diets remain ignored by too many. Despite attempts to debunk the ethics or empirical evidence with sensationalist anti-vegan media trope, experts in the World Health

VEGAN FOOD PYRAMID



Figure 17

Organisation (WHO, 2003), British Medical Association, American Dietetic

Association and Dietitians of Canada have consistently promoted such eating practices as beneficial to health and disease prevention (Viva!, 2019).

Percy Pig Goes Veggie—Piers Morgan Goes Bananas

Accusations have been leveled against licensed character food producers for containing far too much fat, salt, and sugar—some Peppa products are the second-worst UK offender. *Peppa Pig Candy Bites* are 99% sugar. *Peppa Pig Muddy Puddle Cupcakes* 47.9% sugar—9.6g sugar per cupcake (Action on Sugar, 2019). The aforementioned *Peppa Pig Strawberry Jelly* contains almost 9g of sugar per 75g Peppa-shaped pot.

Despite this, it is not Peppa Pig products that have received the UK public’s attention, but Percy Pig, Marks and Spencer (M&S)’s 28-year old character candy. Established in 1884, M&S is by its own definition “a leading British retailer bringing quality, great value food, clothing and homeware to millions of customers around the world” (M&S, 2020) and viewed by many predominantly middle-class consumers as part of the British establishment.

Percy Pig is a range of soft gummy sweets and has been an “integral part” of M&S for more than a quarter of a century (M&S, 2019). Percy has a long and detailed history (outlined on a dedicated M&S web page) including meeting Penny at age 21, and getting married, with consumers encouraged to feel part of and invested in Percy’s “life” (M&S, 2019). In 2018, his parents were introduced as characters, and to celebrate the Chinese Year of the Pig in 2019, M&S launched a limited edition sweet and sour flavor, “Phizzy Pigtails.” Since its inception in 1992, this product range has contained real fruit juice and no artificial colorings or flavorings. However, it also contained gelatine from pigs.

A vegetarian version of the candy launched in 2011 was discernible by Percy’s green ears on the packaging. Whilst welcomed at that time, in 2019 M&S moved from having two different versions of the chew to making the entire Percy Pig range vegetarian. There was public outcry led by well-known journalist and breakfast TV presenter Piers Morgan, who instructed “Vegans and vegetarians, go and get your own sweets!” (GMB, 2019).

Guardian writer, Zoe Williams, whilst in overall agreement with Morgan (whom it transpired had never consumed the original product) did concede:

Just putting this out there: it was never cool to put pork gelatine in Percy Pigs. Not because it is not vegetarian, but because it comes

from pigs. When you butcher real pigs to make fake pigs, that is actually worse than feeding a cow to a cow, and the universe will one day have a mightier punishment than mad cow disease (2019).

It seems then that, even when a connection is explicitly made and understood, it can matter little. Taste comes first. Self comes first. Humans come first.

What Next—Peppa-roni Pizza?

Anthropocentric, anthropomorphic, metaphoric, speciesist, or none, one wonders how it is possible that parents or caregivers could ever present children with a plate such as Figure 20. Creative as it is, it appears quite clearly (though perhaps more so to an ethical vegan) to be ham. Not cow’s milk disguised as ice-cream or chicken eggs disappeared in a cake, but slices of pig on a pig salad.

This Peppa Pig homemade pizza idea (Fig. 20) provides another striking example of the dissociation we have thoughtlessly taught our children.

I suggest that many caregivers prefer to deny children the truth of the origins of their dinner plate contents for several



Figure 18

reasons. Firstly, to prevent a demand for lifestyle changes that they simply believe would be unpopular. Veganism, until recently, was viewed by non-vegans almost entirely negatively (Cole & Morgan, 2011; Markowski & Roxburgh, 2018) and a shift to such a lifestyle choice can be tough to socially navigate. With the significant increase in the acceptability of plant-based food choices in recent years, this will likely improve. For others, the prospect of such change may feel unfamiliar and overwhelming. It may be difficult to know where to start in altering such ingrained habits, even when there are strong moral concerns at play. Connections are likely to remain implicit until dietary shifts are made, but with big business chasing “the green pound,” consciousness is slowly stirring.

As products increase, become more easily accessible and widely advertised, so too does information on the nutritional value and relative ease

of a plant-based diet. In 2019 and 2020, British viewers have watched vegan cookery shows for the first time on mainstream TV: *Dirty Vegan* (BBC, 2019) and *Living on the Veg* on ITV (BOSH!, nd).

For as long as society continues to label certain animals as “edible,” “farmed” or “food,” those within it will be able to maintain strategic ignorance. The normalization of animal-eating impacts the choices we make for our children, and meat avoidance will likely remain the realm of the few, not the many, for the foreseeable future. Strategic ignorance is as convenient as the hamburgers it excuses away. But forewarned is forearmed. Vegan parents, become familiar with plant-based nutrition, be ready to respond to other concerns people understandably hold when your behavior challenges their belief systems at their core. Challenge your customs, rage against the rhetoric, highlight the habitual hypocrisy. Call pork, bacon or sausages “pig.” Talk about the Peppa Pig Paradox with others. Meat-eaters, arm yourselves with the knowledge that will ultimately benefit you, your children and the future of their planet. Choose to *know*. Decide to stop contributing to the exploitation of humans, animals and the environment. Your children may follow your lead and one day thank you for it. Consider the fact that pigs are easily as cognitively complex, intelligent and emotional as the children watching *Peppa Pig* (Marino & Colvin, 2015) and likely smarter than the canine companion that may lay at their feet as they do so.

Foer’s babysitter chose to know and thereafter so did he. On the other hand, his brother chose to remain strategically ignorant, despite receiving the same information at the same time. Most caregivers read or sing about animal utility to babies and toddlers in nursery rhymes like *Old MacDonald had a Farm*; and *Chick, Chick, Chicken*. To face the reality of meat eating, adults must address their own strategic ignorance head on—and it is this prospect (in line with cognitive dissonance and the meat paradox in particular) that they may ultimately be trying to avoid. Hussar and Harris’s study showed the power of socialization in that all 16 independent vegetarian children had learned of the horrors of slaughter from others rather than through observation (2010). I myself learned from a campaign leaflet in 1999 without witnessing anything first-hand. The meat abstainers in my Master’s dissertation all made changes following learning and logic rather than a love for animals. As supported by recent evidence (Schwitzgebel et al., 2019), my findings strongly suggested that *information* rather than *experience* prompted the dietary change.

There is some weight then in the claim that significant others frame our so-called independent moral judgments and practical choices. Unfortunately, the agents socializing our children include institutions that remain inherently anthropocentric (for example, mainstream media, education, healthcare and government) and which benefit from (and contribute to) the strategic ignorance of the like-minded majority. Once more associations are made than masked, Peppa may achieve further success with a claim to be the catalyst for a meat-free generation; and in the process, render pig-ignorance a thing of the past.



Figure 19

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Essay: How Do You Know His Name is Gabriel?

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Abstract

My neighbors brought a three-week-old kitten home out of the cold and in certain danger of starving. Gabriel, they named him, after the angel, and we held this tiny one under our sweaters and fed him from a dropper. He lived only four weeks, but he taught us about being human and about not being human. The little boy, Devon, age six, wanted to know “how do you know his name is Gabriel?” From a tiny kitten and a tiny boy, this paper unfolds in a series of vignettes of human and nonhuman animal relationships. While Gabriel brought us together, Devon reminded me that Gabriel also is his own self. As T. S. Eliot says in the “Naming of Cats,” each cat has three names, including “His ineffable effable/Effanineffable/Deep and inscrutable singular Name.” As we hosted this singular cat, I am reminded that “host” also implies the “guest,” who is also possibly (maybe necessarily, even among friends), a stranger. Yet, the host/guest relationship reminds us of our connections to each other, strangers and friends. The guest and the host change each other’s worlds, even if only one is a physical traveler. “The guest always brings a different world with herself/himself” (Müller 106), and there is no guarantee that that world is not hostile. But we do not treat the soil, the insects, the birds, the pigs as guests, with sacred obligations of hospitality. We do not give them the chance to enter our lives, oftentimes. Not only do we sacrifice millions of pigs and other nonhuman animals, but we sacrifice our imperative to treat the stranger as a guest. We too often have forgotten our human roots threading into the planet’s dark earth and have forgotten our humanity, our humility, at the same time. The singular kitten swept our vision to the heavens as the metaphor of the tree as *axis mundi* connects the depths of the earth to the soaring cosmos. The paper moves from one small cat’s life to the world as living organism, the macrocosmos mirrored in the microcosmos, as the ancient alchemists and Pythagoreans

understood. The planet is at once our host and sighs with its ghosts, at once departed and always living. In the overtones of the word host itself, there is a recognition of the sacred nature of our bodies and all of the creatures with whom we share the planet. In it, there is maybe the idea that we might take the bread and the wine (I am not a Christian, except by culture, but the metaphors permeate my cultural heritage) as nourishment that does not require the sacrifice of animals and which might help us to see how the tiniest kitten, Gabriel, is an *angelos*—a messenger—if only we have ears to hear.

My neighbors, Stephanie and Sara, came home from delivering the *Penny Saver* with a tiny kitten. It was a cool, damp spring evening, and the little thing was shivering, alone, and hungry. We didn't know it then, but the kitten, who weighed eight ounces and was three weeks old, had already lived half of his life. Sara, her mother Stephanie, and father Bird, held that small cat close, fed him with a tiny dropper, and fussed over him as though he were the only real thing in the world. Stephanie named him Gabriel.

Sara took care of a little boy named Devon, who paid a special kindred attention to the tiny cat and asked, "How do you know his name is Gabriel?" I think Stephanie was aware Gabriel was fragile and other-worldly but also that he was precious and came to us as if with a message. If anyone could have seen us through Stephanie, Bird, and Gabriel's window—three adult humans, one a large man with shoulder-length hair the same marmalade as the kitten's fur—taking turns with the eye-dropper, Gabriel's powers to bring people together would have been immediately obvious.

I think of kittens dashing up curtains and down trees, wild dancers on four little legs. Gabriel was too weak to dance but could he ever sing. When I held him under my sweater and felt his tiny beating heart against mine, his purr filled the room as if he were my seventeen-pound Flitwick across the street with a purr big enough to make the whole place rumble. As Gabriel enjoyed the warmth, the food, and the attention, I realized that all of us were at once kindred spirits and that Gabriel had his own unique life. How do we know his name is Gabriel, except that is what he brilliantly inspired in Stephanie, who has a poet's heart? From time immemorial, people have sung their poetry, and Gabriel sang his, too, purring to beat the band.

I only met little Devon once, when I gave him and Sara a ride. When I asked him if he was a pro at putting on a seatbelt, he looked at me with the kind of pity adults often deserve from children and said with some exasperation, "Well, I am six." Fair point, little guy. While Gabriel brought four, then five, humans together and while Stephanie and Sara and Bird gave him comfort and love and warmth, Devon reminded me that Gabriel also was his own self with his own life and thoughts. In "The Naming of Cats," T. S. Eliot (1939/1982) reflects:

The Naming of Cats is a difficult matter,
It isn't just one of your holiday games;
You may think at first I'm as mad as a hatter
When I tell you, a cat must have **THREE DIFFERENT NAMES**.
First of all, there's the name that the family use daily,
Such as Peter, Augustus, Alonzo or James,
Such as Victor or Jonathan, George or Bill Bailey—
All of them sensible everyday names.
There are fancier names if you think they sound sweeter,
Some for the gentlemen, some for the dames:
Such as Plato, Admetus, Electra, Demeter—
But all of them sensible everyday names.
But I tell you, a cat needs a name that's particular,
A name that's peculiar, and more dignified,
Else how can he keep up his tail perpendicular,
Or spread out his whiskers, or cherish his pride?
Of names of this kind, I can give you a quorum,
Such as Munkustrap, Quaxo, or Coricopat,
Such as Bombalurina, or else Jellylorum—
Names that never belong to more than one cat.
But above and beyond there's still one name left over,
And that is the name that you never will guess;
The name that no human research can discover—
But **THE CAT HIMSELF KNOWS**, and will never confess.
When you notice a cat in profound meditation,
The reason, I tell you, is always the same:
His mind is engaged in a rapt contemplation
Of the thought, of the thought, of the thought of his name:
His ineffable effable
Effanineffable

Deep and inscrutable singular Name. (pp. 1-2)

Gabriel. Angel. And something only the little angel knew. His own ineffable, inscrutable life. We played host to him for a moment of his brief life, and I know Stephanie will forever host his ghost, yet we honor him best when we also realize that he had his own, singular cat life, to which we tried to bring some comfort and which also brought comfort and joy to us while he lived and in the memory that he did not die cold, hungry, and forsaken.

Ghost: an Angel, a Demon, a Good or Bad Spirit

Bird worked for two decades at Farmland, the Smithfield slaughterhouse in our small town. Thousands and thousands of pigs go there to die uncomforted, shivering, and alone. The human workers cannot help but be diminished in one way or another, physically or psychically, in their work. A guest is not always a friend. The word is double, indicating a stranger, one who may not always mean the host well. The root of the English word hospitality, Anatoly Liberman (2013) writes, is the “Old French (*h*)*oste*, from Latin *hospit-*, the root of *hospes*, which meant both “host” and “guest,” presumably, an ancient compound that sounded as *ghosti-potis* “master (or lord) of strangers” (*potis* as in *potent*, *potential*, possibly *despot*, and so forth).” Liberman suggests that a guest comes from afar and could well be a stranger, one who may or may not be friendly, one who, for that matter, may or may not find a safe refuge with the host. He continues, “Etymology shows us that the distance from host to guest, from friend to enemy, and from love to hatred is short.” As we host those pigs now and the workers at Farmland, we are parasites, parasites on their singular, ineffable, inscrutable lives.

The name, Farmland, seems somehow to me like a Demon, a Bad Spirit, a Ghost who does not mean us well and casts a pall over our whole town. We are all implicated in the daily murder in that place, whether of bodies or spirits. The name Farmland also seems to me like a swindle. It calls to mind pastoral images, human and land interaction, and, for me, an English folk song from before the industrial revolution, “Country Life” (1975):

I like to rise when the sun she rises
Early in the morning,
I like to hear them small birds singing
Merrily upon the laylum.
And hurrah for the life of a country [girl]
And to ramble in the new-mown hay.

Yet farming, large-scale, industrial farming, the factory farming of animals, pumps chemicals into the air, soil, and water, destroying all manner of insect life, making those small birds’ singing more like a canary in a mine than a celebration of life. None of the pigs at Farmland ever had so much as a ramble. Many of the workers on enormous farms risk exposure to chemical clouds, deployed by farmers at computer terminals. The very host on which our lives depend has, in many places, become lifeless rather than soil teeming

with life. And small farms often close operations along with so many of the small business in rural towns. While the pigs and chickens suffer in Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, so, too, do the rural communities, which once relied on “seeds, implements, vehicles, and insurance from local suppliers and used local veterinary services, banks, shops, and restaurants” (Shaxson, 2020, p. 15). Yet, as Shaxson points out, “those local circulatory systems for money were replaced by one-way conveyor belts shipping rural wealth out . . .” (p. 16).

Physician and poet Lewis Thomas (1980/1995) writes both literally and metaphorically about living, teeming language, when he urges readers to see from “the corner of the eye” (p. 12). There are some stars we can only see if we look obliquely, the eye’s rods around the edges of the retina rather than in the center. The stars are ghostly, in our eyes. Some concepts we can only get at if we cultivate an appreciation for the unexpected. Ghostly shadows become real, depending on our angle of vision. Words have this quality, telling us something of our ancient ancestors and how they thought of themselves in relationship with the planet. Thomas brings the ghosts of a planet discarded in modern European thinking, which replaced an organic model of the cosmos with a mechanistic one, one which disenchanting, desacralized the world and, despite our most heroic efforts, our human selves along with it. Thomas suggests “there is a deep hunch in . . . etymology,” when he writes:

The earliest word for earth in our language was the Indo-European root *dhghem*, and look what we did with it. We turned it, by adding suffixes, into *humus* in Latin; today we call the complex polymers that hold fertile soil together ‘humic’ acids, and somehow or other the same root became ‘humility.’ With another suffix the world became ‘human.’ Did the earth become human, or did the human emerge from the earth? . . . In ancient Hebrew, *adamha* was the word for earth, *adam* for man. (pp. 14-15)

The teeming humus and human have common tendrils, planted deep in the living planet—our fates inextricably connected.

What, then, if we were to take seriously the ancient imperative “always treat a stranger as a guest” (Müller, 2012, p. 105)? Müller reminds us of Derrida’s “Hostipitality (*Hostipitalité*)” curiously enough published in the journal *Angelaki*, which is a combination of hostility and hospitality. The guest and the host change each other’s worlds, even if only one is a physical

traveler. “The guest always brings a different world with herself/himself” (Müller, 2012, p. 106), and there is no guarantee that that world is not hostile. But we here in the Midwestern United States do not treat the soil, the insects, the birds, the pigs as guests, with sacred obligations of hospitality. We do not give them the chance to enter our lives, oftentimes, as we, Stephanie, Sara, Devon, Bird, and I welcomed Gabriel and allowed him to change our lives. Not only do we in this small town—and even those of us who do not eat meat and mourn the pigs going to slaughter by the thousands each day are in some way complicit—sacrifice millions of pigs and other nonhuman animals, but we sacrifice our imperative to treat the stranger as a guest. We too often have forgotten our human roots threading into the planet’s dark earth and have forgotten our humanity, our humility, at the same time.

I Can’t Breathe

In the spring of 2020, COVID-19 hit workers at the Smithfield plant especially hard. Forced to return to work by the president’s executive order, those workers—who come from French-speaking Africa, from Mexico, from Myanmar, from many, many other countries, and also from the white American working class—were and are at high risk for not being able to breathe. Poor communities of color suffer higher infection rates and higher mortality rates as the virus attacks the lungs and George Floyd stammered “I can’t breathe,” as the white officer knelt on his neck. In the streets, crowds protested suffocating systemic racism in nearly every institution in this country.

The pigs who are destined for Smithfield, raised most often in unsanitary, overcrowded, stinking CAFOs, could barely breathe their whole short lives. Thousands of miles away, the nitrogen from their waste makes deadzones in the Gulf of Mexico. Researchers at Auburn University (2019) anticipated that human incursions into animal habitats and destruction of broad swaths of forests make it more likely that zoonotic diseases will spread from animals to humans. This same human behavior contributes to climate change, which has already led to the extinction of species and has made the most severe, sustained problems for people who are least responsible for burning fossil fuels that have sucked so much literal and proverbial air from the room.

While people protest systemic racism the world over, people’s retreat from the virus has led to blue skies over some of the most smog-filled places

in the world—from Los Angeles to Shanghai, from Venice to the Himalayas. Animals, too, have taken to the streets in an ironic reversal. In this truly frightening time, there are also signs of hope—hope that oppression in its many forms might give way to a different world, one that is fairer—with a bit more breathing space for all.

Bringing a Different World

From a singular, tiny, creature of the earth, the kitten-angel, Gabriel, too, reminds me of the ancient connection of the depths of the earth and the soaring heavens. Some cultures thought of trees as *axis mundi*, rooted firmly in the deep earth with canopies flying skyward, connecting the microcosmos to the macrocosmos, reminding us that we are all part of one living organism (Maathai, 2004). The sections of this essay try to reflect the interconnections of seemingly disparate parts of the planet and her creatures, the cosmos and this one planet. From one small kitten to the tops of the trees, I hope the writing itself moves through the world a bit like a dandelion seed on the wind and the tiniest of organisms busy underground. Each segment has its own singular focus, but, taken together, they are something like the teeming life in the soil, in the air, in the trees, in the house down the street, in the stars and the skies.

In *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant (1990) writes that “the world [a Modern European consciousness] lost was organic” (p. 1). In the disenchantment of nature, modernity moved from seeing the world as a living organism to seeing it as a machine. Merchant’s writing on pre-modern European consciousness shows that the archaic and the medieval consciousness organized itself after “nature’s . . . communal colonies—bees and ants,” communities of “mutual interdependence,” which gave way to a hierarchical organization in the modern, mechanistic period (Merchant, 1990, pp. 70-71, 81). In the “earth’s-eye view” of her “ecosystem model,” Merchant writes in partnership with all of Earth’s creatures and notes, as Thomas suggested in his discussion of etymology and human understanding, that a society’s paradigms are revealed in its language, in its metaphors (pp. 42, 2). In graphic detail, Merchant describes Francis Bacon’s “inquisition” of nature in the sexist and racist language of the “inquisition” of so-called witches in the same time period when nature was, in his mind, to be “penetrated” and “enslaved,” bound to modern European projects of domination and colonization. She writes:

Here, in bold sexual imagery, is the key feature of the modern experimental method—constraint in the laboratory, dissection by hand and mind, and the penetration of hidden secrets—language still used today in praising a scientist’s ‘hard facts,’ ‘penetrating mind,’ or the ‘thrust of his argument.’ (p. 171)

Similarly, Joyce Trebilcot (1994) asks readers to think about the masculine and masculinist language in describing “issues arising, points to be made, penetrating analyses, hard cases, thrusts and upshots” in academic essays (p. 3). As an heir of that modern consciousness, and also as a human being, I ask in horror, “What have we done to our planet host? What have we done to ourselves?” Certainly not all human beings are equally complicit in a world still reeling from European colonial expansion and from the neo-colonial ravages of global capitalism. One way to resist is to recognize that archaic lenses and contemporary anti-racist, anti-colonial, ecofeminist lenses and a variety of non-European lenses shine a light on the “academic essay.” Not a universal or neutral convention, it, too, is raced and gendered, specied and classed. There is something consciously fluid in my choice of organization, something not determined in advance that invites the reader to bring her own experiences and interpretations to the reading. Experiential writing is conceptual work, as my friend Myra Love said to me years ago—it refuses a modern mind/body, human/nature, male/female, poetic/analytic dualism.

Writing in, rather than removed from, the hoped-for, sensuous, embodied world, I felt fortunate to meet the pig Christopher Hogwood, even if only vicariously, in the pages of Sy Montgomery’s (2007) *The Good Good Pig: The Extraordinary Life of Christopher Hogwood*. Christopher, a black and white pig, came to live with Montgomery and her husband, Howard Mansfield, when he was the size of a cat. Chris was small, sick, and not expected to live. Except for the small and sick part, most pigs in our country are not expected to live. As Müller (2012) writes, “The awaited or unexpected guest finally can haunt his hosts and become their ghost, changing their lives not only significantly but sometimes totally” (p. 107). Christopher not only lived and grew to be 750 pounds, but he also thrived and helped a whole community of people grow and change, both guest and host, transforming his community with his own “Effanineffable/Deep and inscrutable singular life.”

The man Christopher Hogwood, founder of the Academy of Ancient Music, was delighted to share his name with the porcine Christopher Hogwood, while Montgomery was delighted to share her life with the pig (Montgomery, 2007, p. 13). Montgomery describes Chris' deep intelligence and his talent for bringing people together who might never have had two words to say to each other. He drew the shy little girls next door out of their shells, and they especially loved "pig spa," during which they washed and brushed Christopher who gave them confidence and love and a feeling of beauty unlike anything human culture tried to foist on them.

Montgomery had a similar experience of getting outside ideals of beauty foisted on us human women. Somehow, even when we don't care one whit about those ideals, they infiltrate our very skin in a culture that cares more about selling us something than on how we move in the world. Living among and trying to understand emus from an emu's point of view, Montgomery wrote that she didn't change her clothes or brush her hair for ages so that the birds would recognize her. "But," she wrote, "as I wandered through the emus' stark desert world with my runny nose and filthy clothes and matted hair, I felt whole, even beautiful, for the first time in my life" (p. 44). Montgomery helps me to understand not only how hosts can be changed by their guests but how hosts can make their guests comfortable, and, being transformed in the process of trying to see and live through an emu's sensibility—or a pig's. Or, as David Abram (2011) urges in *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*, people might reflect on "our human entanglement with the rest of nature." We have not always been becoming animals, we humans, who have engaged in plenty of unbecoming and downright ugly behavior. He invites us to "own . . . up to being an animal, a creature of earth," becoming *humus* once and again (p. 3). We might become better animals and better human beings in the process.

Montgomery (2007) describes a similar shift, a similar expansion, in her human self when watching Christopher eat, which she describes as "the ultimate vicarious thrill . . . here is someone following his bliss" (p. 59). If emus redefined beauty and made Montgomery (who seems beautiful in every way) feel beautiful for the first time, Christopher made her understand bliss. When I read *The Good Good Pig* (2007) with students, several of them were moved by Montgomery's descriptions of "eating like a pig," and of our human, troubled relationship with food. Montgomery writes, and they agreed, "We humans aren't allowed to enjoy food this much. To do so is

labeled the sin of gluttony. . . . For many of us, food is the enemy. But while Christopher was eating, it seemed he was communing with his Higher Power. It was a beautiful thing to see” (p. 59).

And the human visitors got tremendous pleasure out of feeding Christopher. He invited generosity, invited the intimacy of food going literally from a guest’s hands to a host’s mouth, or is it a host to a guest? And each is transformed in this most sensuous of acts. Montgomery (2007) learns from Christopher about paradise itself. As a child, she was skeptical about the stories of Heaven she heard in church, not wanting to be in a house or even a mansion, especially one so crowded with humans, whom she had felt since a childhood classmate pulled the legs off a daddy long legs, were “a rather bullying species” (p. 18). Heaven she could do without, but Eden was something else entirely. Montgomery preferred the garden, the garden with plants and animals, including a snake with whom she could talk. Oh, and no humans, either, much to Montgomery’s delight. She writes:

Ever since we left that garden, we have been longing for Eden. It is a testament to human blindness that so few of us find it. ‘Heaven’ wrote Thoreau, ‘is under our feet.’ Heaven, Eden, paradise, the Encante—call it what you will. It is as close as a backyard or a barnyard and as extensive as the Amazon. . . . But in Hancock, all you needed to point you to Eden was a good pig. (p. 145)

They were equally guests and hosts, strangers and friends, changing each other’s lives significantly, totally. That piglet in a humble barn was like a guiding star in the sky, bringing together people of different political persuasions who might never have been friends otherwise. Christopher taught the sheriff of that little New Hampshire town to carry apples in his cruiser in case the pig was out for a ramble and had to be led home. What if all police officers changed their behavior along those lines, becoming agents of comfort and joy, making their mission to lead home the wandering and to enjoy with them the journey?

Host: A Substrate on Which to Live

A host is a substrate, providing a surface on which some other life can grow. Even those of us who do not eat meat, by virtue of being part of the economy of our town, by living in this country, in this world, use those pigs as hosts, feeding on them parasitically. If we had any compassion at all,

we might learn to suffer with those pigs, as Montgomery and Mansfield sometimes suffered with Christopher.

Yet, a host can also summon ghosts of those departed, feeding memory, encouraging reflection. I saw a dancing chorus of yellow coltsfoot growing where a tree had once lived. The day I got the news that my father had pancreatic cancer, I was walking along the Raquette River in Potsdam, NY. As my father tried to reassure me, almost refusing to be reassured himself, a small, grey toad appeared as if out of nowhere, quietly breathing. A bumpy, little hopping bearer of calm. Some six years after my father's death, there was the very same kind of toad watching as I planted a garden, nearly indistinguishable from the black, grey earth, as if a host bearing a message from my father. Live, plant, care, eat. You are not going on without me; you are going on with me. And the toad went on its way and I on mine, swelling with emotion and with determination and the hopeful anticipation only a newly planted garden can bring, in the days of broad, black earth and the faith that nearly invisible seeds will sprout into plants. It seems to me a kind of alchemy, the word, of course, having its roots in ancient Egypt. According to the Royal Society of Chemistry (2017), the word alchemy is "derived from the Arabian phrase 'al-kimia.' The Arabic root "kimia" comes from the Coptic "khem" that alluded to the fertile black soil of the Nile delta. Esoterically and hieroglyphically, the word refers to the dark mystery of the primordial or First Matter (the Khem)."

After a few weeks, the fertile black soil, fed on the host of plants long-since decayed, springs into chaotic, teeming life. When I first moved to this place, in the northern reaches of New York State known as "The North Country," I was lucky enough to have two gardening neighbors, Don Peckham on one side and John Hall on the other. John at 90 is still stronger and more energetic than many people a third his age. If anyone would understand that I have a relationship with the particular weeds and flowers that grow here, John would in a minute. Betty Peckham raised six children and was active as a scout leader and in local politics, but she had very little interest in the garden, except to feed eight people every day and to make rhubarb punch for the annual Church Street picnic. When Don died, the garden became completely overgrown with weeds. Yet Don lives on when I encourage the young family who bought the Peckham's house after Don's death and Betty's departure and faced what must have seemed like the impossible task of reclaiming the garden. Don, I tell Brian, used to encourage

me, saying, “If the weeds won’t grow, nothing else will either,” and wishing “May all your weeds be dill.”

When I saw Rachael sitting in Betty Peckham’s window, her dark brown hair in a bun at the nape of her neck, children at her knee, I thought for a moment, I was seeing a young Betty with her own little flock. But, I remind myself, Betty probably never had her hair in a bun. It was always clipped smartly short and was salty when I knew her. She announced her retirement from cooking the year Don retired from the university, and some of her grandchildren thought that only grandpa knew his way around a kitchen. Betty used to look for a sign in what is now my kitchen window from Mrs. Huddleston, who lived alone in the house for years after being widowed. Every morning after putting water on for tea, she put a sign in the window letting Betty know “I’m ok.” The rhubarb, the children on the old wooden swings Don made for his own babies, the violets in the lawn, and the bindweed Don insisted has one common root meeting in the center of the earth—all of these are hosts for Betty and Don’s living spirits.

As I meet my neighbors’ memories and am comforted by John’s steady devotion to the land, I am reminded how many activists and scholars use organic metaphors in their work when trying to imagine and embody sustainable, nourishing cultures. For example, Cornel West (1993) is concerned about deracination, that is, rootlessness, in a world of global capitalism in which acquisitiveness rather than human connection or inquisitiveness confers value. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980/1987) propose the rhizome as a non-hierarchical, multiple and mutual organizational metaphor, unlike the tree with its vertical, hierarchical organization originating from a single taproot in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Yet some plants with rhizomes, like bamboo, can swallow up everything in their environment. In the southern sun, protected by the house, milkweed grows from rhizomes and spreads merrily. I am happy to leave it for the monarchs and their caterpillars, who only eat milkweed. The plants are often taller than I am, and when I pull them out of the poppies, the rhizomes are often yards long, tenacious, and sometimes quite destructive.

And deforestation, such as the clearcutting of forests in Kenya to make way for tea plantations, provides monetary benefit for the government and international corporations at the cost of soil erosion, desertification, loss of fuel, local agriculture, and self-sufficiency for many Kenyans. As a

metaphor for the organization of human culture, perhaps the tree is problematic, but only if trees are conceived as hierarchical, dominating. As Wangari Maathai (2004) shows in *Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World*, cultures all over the world have revered trees, rather than seeing them only as resources for human consumption or as symbols of authority (p. 80). Their roots are less like the rhubarb's single, tenacious taproot and more like a spreading, meandering map. They unite heaven and earth, for those who consider them an *axis mundi*; they are patient and sheltering, providing homes for birds and small mammals, for insects and mosses and lichens.

For the survival of human and nonhuman ecosystems, trees provide stability, shelter, habitat, and shade. Maathai's work on the Greenbelt Movement began as a local response to deforestation and the increasingly long walks women in Kenyan villages undertook daily for drinking water. In the face of harassment, physical assault, and government and corporate attempts to silence her, Maathai and the women of Kenya simply planted trees, recognizing the symbiotic relationship between people and the land. In the spirit of local empowerment, in the spirit of returning the exiled trees to their homes, the women worked together with the plants to make a habitat in which many species could live together, one in which erosion decreased, water did not run off, and some small measure of power returned to the people, the nonhuman animals, and the land. A tree can be flexible and strong, an abiding and adaptable presence. As Joan Armatrading (1977) sings in "Willow":

Thunder
Don't go under the sheets
Lightening
Under a tree
In the rain and snow
I'll be your fire inside
Come running to me
When things get out of hand
Running to me
When it's more than you can stand
I said I'm strong
Straight
Willing

To be a
Shelter
In a storm
Your willow oh willow
When the sun is out

Dancing with June: This is my Body

In 2010, my friend, Annegret, asked if I'd go to Zumba with her. I wondered if Zumba was a bar in Montreal. She laughed and told me it was the best dance-exercise class led by June Peoples, an athletic dancer and an artistic athlete. I told Annegret I'd go to class with her one time, because I liked her, never expecting to go again. But I was hooked immediately on June's choreography that captured the spirit of the music perfectly and by her care and grace. June was in charge of membership at the North Country Public Radio station, and she is the only person I know who could make a public radio fund drive into an exciting community event. June, with her husband Joel, extended that care and grace to all living things and especially to the sheep, dogs, horses, and peacocks they rescued and with whom they shared their home. Last winter just before the end of classes in Illinois, I got several emails from several friends in the North Country saying our June had been killed on her way home from work, two weeks shy of her 53rd birthday. She had stopped to help two dogs on a dark, country road and was struck by a car. How could Joel survive knowing that she would never come home again? How could he help the dogs, the sheep, the peacocks, who loved her, to understand why she would never be with them again?

I went to Zumba with Tammy in Illinois and hugged her tight, willing her to be careful, to be safe. On the way home, I imagined what I would say if I could have made it back to New York for the memorial service. I remember my earliest Zumba classes, my arms and legs all akimbo, feeling as if they might fly off at any moment with June smiling encouragement all the while. There is no formal instruction in Zumba; one dances with the teacher, imitates the teacher, tries to make her movements one's own. June always made us feel as if we were moving like she was moving, only the mirror reminding me that I had not nearly her power, elegance, or beauty. Yet, she was worth emulating, not only in the dance studio, but in the way she moved through the world, giving her precious life for those dogs, who survived, and leaving all who knew her better for her presence.

A Communion of Saints

In 2004, when they were six, seven, and eight, I met Atterrue, Rashard, and Billy, who moved in with their parents, Doreen and Bill, just two doors down the street. They let me into their kids' world, to play games like, "What time is it Mr. Fox?" outside, or "Hide and Seek" in my apartment. One time I baked cupcakes, and the kids came over to decorate and pack them up for Christmas/Kwanzaa presents for their parents. Rashard and Billy were disappointed that they didn't get to bake the cupcakes, and Atterrue, taking her turn making frosting with the hand mixer, was fascinated with the idea of centrifugal force as a way to clean off the beaters. Except, she was seven, and held the beaters high in the air, asking, "Like this?" as the walls and all of us, laughing, found ourselves covered in sweetness.

On another visit, Atterrue came out of my study, scandalized, and said, "Miss Anne, I found something!" I wondered what sort of embarrassing thing I'd left lying around to make this brilliant child so indignant. She had become fascinated with the electric typewriter, a ghost of another age, and thought I was trying to hide it under its dust cover. The movement of the ball and the carriage, the whirring of the machinery, the very physicality of the paper moving when she pressed the Return key kept her fascinated, typing out words and phrases, making mistakes, just to try out the correcting tape.

Billy, for as long as I've known him, has had an unwavering sense of fair play. When he was eight, he helped me plant some Sweet William, and wanted to know if I knew that his name was really William? Sweet William, I think I told him, which made him smile shyly. He and his buddy Robert grew up like brothers, Billy Black and Robert white. Robert had a speech impediment, and other kids teased him. There was no way Billy would stand by and watch that. He was loyal friend and protector. One day when I was seeker and the kids were all hidden in my house, Billy came darting out of the bedroom, not caring about the game or winning. "Miss Anne," he said breathlessly, "I was hiding in the closet and thought I sat on a stuffed animal—until it moved! I'm sorry, I think I sat on your cat."

So, what could the three of us do next, but bake something really wonderful and sort of horrible at the same time—cat box cake! We filled a large foil pan with the cakes we made together—smashed up yellow cakes and spice cake and loads of crumbled vanilla sandwich cookies. Rashard was the expert tootsie roll turd maker, turning those innocent candies into

something much fouler after they spent a few seconds in the microwave. We used a scoop to serve ourselves kitty litter dessert after taking loads of pictures and congratulating each other on our cleverness.

But on another day our meeting was deadly serious. Lucky, their beautiful golden retriever, was sick, really sick. The three children and Bill, their round-faced, sweet, strong, sturdy father, were just about in tears, Dad unable to make the dog or the children feel better. Doreen was being mom and looking up veterinarians and possible diagnoses and home remedies. We came from different circumstances, by race, by class. We came from the same street. I knew that the children were supposed to be home when the streetlights came on. They knew they could knock on my door if mom and dad were at work and they needed something. We joined up with other neighbors when the utility company cut down mature trees at the park at the end of our street, something they wouldn't have done, we were pretty sure, in a more affluent neighborhood. Those trees fueled the children's imaginations and shaded the old, stooped white couple across from the park, who were famous for their well-tended vegetable garden and impossibly large peonies, trying to explain to the city officials how devastating the loss of those trees was to our community, trying to explain that the tiny replacements would take longer to grow up than the children, that race and class seemed to us to be part of the utility company's decision, that the North Side sometimes seemed to be "throw away" to outsiders.

Attterue once came to my front door, nearly inconsolable. By the time we determined that she wasn't injured or hungry, that there was no emergency at home, and she was able to speak a few words, she said she thought it wasn't fair that my nieces were related to me and that she wasn't. This is the same child who wouldn't eat raspberries growing from a volunteer plant in the yard between our houses, because they might be hosts for ghosts in the form of "invisible bugs"; I know how deeply she feels. I also told her that we can't choose our blood relatives but that we can still choose our family and that as far as I was concerned she was my niece, my "special niece," she insisted. Special niece.

What can I do with the privilege I have by accident of birth? I just happened to be outside at the moment the little family was huddled around the big and suffering dog. I called the veterinarian, Doreen got Bill, the kids, and Lucky into their car, and they followed me to the office. What I had that they didn't was not compassion (we are all equally good at suffering with

each other) but simply a credit card that allowed us to pay vet bills over a year and a half with no interest. That privilege, my access to that world of credit, might well have meant the difference between life and death for that dog. Lucky had parvo. Lucky got lucky. He survived but was so emaciated someone called authorities, worried that the family was neglecting or abusing the dog. Again, just by luck, I was outside when the animal control officer came to check. I think my white skin, my middle-aged face, and my receipt from the vet, was enough to convince him that the dog was in the best of hands, that he had just survived a deadly virus. I can understand why people like me think of the world as more fair than Lucky's family. It is not more fair; I have a cushion that buys some breathing space.

Not many summers ago, Robert and Billy were twenty and nineteen and still best buddies. They came to see me before heading off to Robert's favorite swimming hole. Robert never came home. When Billy and his parents came to tell me the dreadful news that he had drowned at the quarry, I just wanted to go back one day, put my arms around these two grown men I'd known since they were children, and tell them not to go, to go to the swimming pool instead, to come inside to bake cookies, even though it was patently too hot to turn on the oven. Billy and I talked about going on, not without Robert, but with him. Could Billy see the world for Robert? Could he be the host for Robert to live on, so Robert can live on? How can we do the best we can for each other, even for people and creatures we may never know, a community or communion of saints. Saint, from consecrate (*sancire*) and holy (*sanctus*), both in the Latin *sanct* and then in Old English. The Greek *koinonia* means "common," "communion," "fellowship," and the Greek *hagiazō* to make holy.

Kids, cats, and dogs know suckers, but kids, cats, and dogs are also both common and the occasion for many communions of the sacred. Saints (yes, even when they can drive a person to distraction) on two legs, on four legs. Or on no legs, like the catfish my friend Brianne rescued from the asphalt in Houston after Hurricane Harvey and hosted in a bucket for a few days before releasing the little thing into a receding bayou.

Host: Participation in a Sacrament

Hostia (rather than (*h*)*oste*) means a multitude, not always friendly, as in an invading army (Lieberman, 2013). But it also carries overtones of a heavenly host, singing in praise. This gaggle, this heavenly host, of

neighbors, dogs, cats, fish, trees, flowers, vegetable plants, weeds, and friends reminds me that host also means sacrament. We are reminded to resacralize the world, from the starry heavens above to the center of the world where the roots of all bindweed meet in their *koinonia*, which also means a gift jointly given. Just a few weeks ago, I was driving away from my dear friend Peter's house, when I saw a young grackle either hit by another car or at least knocked out of the air by the speeding vehicle's slipstream. The small bird lay on the side of the road, still as death, little feet in the air. Three of the bird's siblings or friends—a feathered community—stayed by the dazed one's side, looking for all the world like a feathered rescue operation, or else a funeral procession. Maybe I am a coward, but I didn't stop. Instead, I called Peter and left him with the burden of tending to the little bird, still grey and fluffy and not yet blue-black and iridescent.

Just moments later, the phone rang. The bird lived. Peter held the small, stunned body in his warm hands and felt the little heart beating. Soon the bird opened an eye and tentatively tried shaken wings. Peter found the grackle a branch in a secluded bush, where he hoped the neighborhood cats wouldn't find the young one and where there would be a place to land safely if flying proved too much. Later that evening, the phone rang again. There was a young grackle with two adults at the bird feeder. The young one had a rumpled wing, but seemed otherwise all right. It seems as if the other young birds had stood sentinel long enough for Peter to arrive and that the five of them together had participated in a sacrament.

Sy Montgomery lives with chickens—the ladies, she calls them—as well as a pig. She also lives in New Hampshire and, despite her very best efforts, realizes she cannot always keep the ladies safe from foxes, skunks, and other hungry critters. Such creatures are often called predators, not for what they do to humans in most cases but for their attacks on animals humans care for or for the livestock people think of as their property. She writes (2007), “Here in southern New England, town histories celebrate the wars waged against wolves, mountain lions, bobcats, bears. Our region's last wolf, a crippled female with three legs who had retreated to Mount Monadnock, was pursued for months by angry men from nearby towns” until she was finally killed in the early 19th century (p. 106). When Montgomery tells these stories, she invites her readers to examine our own preconceptions, often reflected in the words we choose: predators, angry men, wounded,

bludgeoned. There is something broken in these words, in these actions, in separating our human selves from the whole of creation.

A shift in vocabulary might well launch a shift in the conceptual scheme. Or, “seeing from the corner of the eye,” would likely change the words chosen. Montgomery (2007) writes of a visit to the Sundarbans in India and Bangladesh, a forested region on the Bay of Bengal, to learn about the human population’s relationship with the tigers, who were as likely to kill humans as they were other animals. The tigers actively pursue people, sometimes swimming out after their boats, taking three hundred human lives a year. “And yet the people upon whom the tigers prey don’t wish to eradicate the tigers. Instead, they worship them” (p. 106). The only time the people of the Sundarbans kill a tiger is in direct self-defense. This is such a shift in thinking from the white settlers in New England, who thought of the land and many animals as their possessions, humans positioned above and apart from the whole.

In the Sundarbans the conceptual positioning of humans is as equals, or sometimes as lessers. “Daskin Ray [at once a tiger and a god] has always owned the riches of Sundarbans—the fishes, the trees, the bees, and if the people understand that the forest is his, and give both him and the land due respect” (p. 118). The result is a kind of environmentalism but arrived at through a different reasoning than thinking of the land as a resource for human use and under human stewardship. Montgomery continues:

The stories reflect a sophisticated understanding of ecology. The tiger protects the forest: fear of the tiger keeps woodsmen from cutting down all the mangroves. The mangroves protect the coastline: their limbs and leaves soften the winds of cyclones. Their roots form nurseries for fish, which feed the people. The people understand that without the tiger, Sundarbans could not stay whole. (p. 118)

When Montgomery discovered on Christmas morning that someone had killed one of her hens, one of the ladies, whom she loved, I wondered how she would stay whole. When she tried to pick up the head of the dead hen, she discovered that the small, fierce creature, who had dug into the barn and tried to pull the hen out, was still clinging to the body, looking her in the eye. It was an ermine, dressed in its snow-white coat. Montgomery described their encounter with grief, yes, but also with a kind of reverence. These tiny creatures, Montgomery explains, have to be fierce to survive. “With their tiny

hearts pounding 360 times a minute, ermines must eat five to ten meals a day. . . . This is part of what makes ermines what they are. Ferocity is part of their dharma—as pure, and as perfect, as their dazzling white winter coat” (p. 189). As she held the body of her beloved hen in her arms, Montgomery welcomed in Christmas day with the awe of forgiveness. She says, “I could not have felt more amazed, or more blessed, if an angel had materialized in front of me” (p. 189).

In Their *Umwelten*

Jeffrey Masson (2004), too, encourages his readers to rethink our relationships with nonhuman animals. In *The Pig who Sang to the Moon*, he exhorts us to listen carefully, to hear songs we might not have heard before but which were there all along. He says, “Perhaps if we listen carefully enough to the songs Piglet and her cousins sing at night to the moon, we may yet learn about emotions that could bring us a new and utterly undreamed of delight” (p. viii). The book was panned in a review by Tom Jaine (2004) in *The Guardian*. Jaine claims that Masson over-encumbers animal emotion and intelligence. And, although Jaine agrees with Masson’s critique of factory farming, he writes, “Masson loads the brains of beasts with a freight they cannot bear, to him little short of the genius of Einstein, or the creative vigour of Benjamin Zephaniah.”

Although exhorting readers to look at Masson’s logic, Paine smugly concludes his review, saying he will contemplate Masson’s ideas “over [his] beefsteak,” to which I can hear Peter Singer (2010) sighing, for humans, meat eating is only about taste; it is not a nutritional requirement (p. 569). It seems to me that Jaine is suffering rather from a failure of imagination, a failure to see through another creature’s eyes, from the corners of his own. That is, if we consider animal emotion and intelligence only as it compares to our own, we are missing the chance to understand their unique gifts and to learn something about both them and ourselves as a result. When Montgomery (2007) claims Chris is a genius, she writes, “the porcine intellect shines most brilliantly when applied to the pig’s own projects” (p. 47).

Frans de Waal (2016) says something like this in *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?* He thinks we might be but that it would be hard to know that from looking at much of our behavior toward them. A primatologist himself, de Waal says many of the experiments performed on animals are simply unethical. If we behaved toward other

human beings the way we behave toward animals, we would face prison time. And, he continues, we actually learn very little about animal behavior from experiments that deprive the animals of food or sleep or of any semblance of the worlds they ordinarily occupy. de Waal argues that if we want to know other species of animals, we need to try to understand them not using ourselves as a yardstick but against the backdrop of their own surrounding worlds, their *Umwelten*.

To do this de Waal continues, we must guard both against anthropomorphism and at the same time against anthropodenial, “the a priori rejection of humanlike traits in other animals or animal like traits in us” (p. 25). Nonhuman animals are not just like us (and we are not just like each other, when it comes down to it), and we need to guard against judging them against our own standards of behavior and creativity and by projecting our understandings and standards onto them. Yet we are all part of the same evolutionary family tree, and we need not deny who we are or deny that we have connections to other animals. T. S. Eliot seems to me to have gotten at something like this in “The Naming of Cats.” On the one hand, I ought to try to understand my now-departed cat friend Minerva through cat eyes, realizing that she has her own inscrutable life. On the other hand, she is a mammal, and I am a mammal, and we lived together for over thirteen years and came to share rather a lot. We might find it easier to do this with primates, who are genetically hardly removed from us at all, or with mammals more generally, realizing that pigs, for example, have hearts so similar to ours that their valves can be transplanted into humans (would we take a human heart valve to save a pig’s life?) and that their skin is sensitive to the sun in ways very similar to ours, while their senses of smell and hearing are more highly developed (Montgomery, 2007, p. 53).

Some ethicists who are keenly in favor of changing human behavior toward nonhuman animals and the planet actually urge anthropocentrism, which seems at first glance counterintuitive. They recognize, though, that we ought to pay special attention to our own kind, because we have done the most damage. For one example, Mary Anne Warren (2009) argues that we humans have the potential to be admirable through our ability to solve problems through conversation rather than through violence. Our human ability to use language to negotiate solutions to problems is “morally relevant insofar as it provides greater possibilities for cooperation and for the nonviolent resolution of problems. It also makes us more dangerous than

non-rational beings can ever be. Because we are potentially more dangerous and less predictable than wolves, we need an articulated system of morality to regulate our conduct” (p. 349).

We have done unspeakable violence toward each other and toward other species. Since we are responsible for the (I almost wrote lion’s share) vast majority of environmental problems, genocides, and extinctions, we require special attention, so that we might do better. This doing better might involve shifting away from “rights” language, although Warren uses it for practical reasons, as it resonates so strongly with so many. Josephine Donovan (2006) and others in the feminist care tradition argue that we might do better not to privilege human language as much as we do, that we can learn to understand the communications of nonhuman animals. Donovan suggests that our language might entrap us and might get in the way of our learning to listen to other species (and to each other, too often) and to the land. She urges dialogue as the foundations of our understanding of human and nonhuman animals, each in its own context, so that we might share this life. Likewise, in *The Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram (1997) not only writes about the possibilities of communicating with nonhuman animals and the planet, possibilities which were cut off by our development of written language. Although words can be “winged,” writing all too often cuts “ties to the larger field of expressive beings. Each image . . . came to have a strictly *human* referent: each letter was now associated purely with a gesture or sound of the human mouth. Such images could no longer function as windows opening on to a more-than-human field of powers, but solely as mirrors reflecting the human form back upon itself” (p. 138). Oral languages, Abram explains, sing with “rhythms, tones, and inflections . . . likely . . . attuned, in multiple and subtle ways, to the contour and scale of the local landscape, to the depth of its valleys or the open stretch of its distances, to the visual rhythms of the local topography. But the human speaking is necessarily tuned, as well, to the various nonhuman calls and cries that animate the local terrain” (p. 140). Language made flesh. So that we might become united or reconciled, so that we might atone.

Hostia: A Sacrificial Victim

Liberman (2013) points out that “‘the etymon of *host* ‘consecrated wafer’ is Latin *hostia* ‘sacrificial victim.’” The communion bread and wine replaced the sacrifice of animals for a community moment of honoring the

sacred in all. Of course, this tradition is not only Christian. Pythagoras rejected both animal sacrifice and war. The ancient Greeks often poured a measure of wine on the ground as a libation for the gods. The communion bread and wine are the body and blood of the community, a physicality not requiring animal sacrifice, encouraging us to think of our physicality as one with our spirituality, hosting a transformed consciousness.

As one thinks, so one acts. One's movements in the world shape one's consciousness. Especially in these waning days of European so-called Enlightenment, since early modernity in Europe, it is all too easy to think of conceptual work and experience as two distinct spheres. The "father" of modern philosophy, René Descartes (1641/1993), thought of the essence of physicality, our bodies included, as extension and change over time (p. 42). He split the human mind from the human body and from all embodiment and disenchanting the world, thinking of all physicality as inert matter subject to scientific and mathematical laws.

Paula Gunn Allen (1998), who so indelibly shaped my thinking and who is both no longer with us and always with us in the rustling trees, starts with the same premise as Descartes, that the human body and all physicality are the same sort of thing, but what that thing is for Allen is so far removed from Descartes as to be in a different cosmos, a different plane of consciousness, a different embodiment. In "The Woman I Love is a Planet, the Planet I Love is a Tree," she writes, "Our physicality—which always and everywhere includes our spirituality, mentality, emotionality, social institutions, and processes—is a microform of all physicality" (p. 118). One hardly need argue that plants or rocks, rivers, stars, trees, kittens, pigs, catfish, or grackles are worthy of moral consideration. We are planets, hosting multitudes of life, Allen suggests. "The planet, our mother, Grandmother Earth is *physical* and therefore a spiritual, mental, and emotional being" (p. 118).

Allen (1998) urges us to consider that this is not the time for tranquility or serenity, that the turmoil we experience at present is "Our planet . . . giving birth to a new consciousness of herself and her relationship to the other vast intelligences, other holy beings in her universe" (p. 120). Allen is, in a sense, inviting us to be hosts to ghosts. She is inviting us to pay attention to our embodiment and to ourselves as microcosms not only of the earth but of the whole vast cosmos. She urges us to pay attention to our own physicality, including attending to gender, culture, race, class, ability, age,

sexuality, and all the manifold ways we embody humanity. She asks us to listen, to attend to the planet in travail, in her labor pains and to attend to the rebirths of our own consciousnesses. We are trees, she says, since “The mortal body is a tree; it is holy in whatever condition . . .” (p. 122). How can we humans learn to listen, really to listen. Allen asks, “What can we do to be politically useful, spiritually mature attendants in this great transformation we are privileged to participate in? Find out by asking as many trees as you meet how to be a tree” (p. 123). Sweet Honey in the Rock (1981) sings into being the spirit, the breath of life, in “Listen More Often to Things than to Beings”:

Listen more often to things than to beings
Listen more often to things than to beings
Tis the ancestors breath, when the fire’s voice is heard
Tis the ancestors breath, in the voice of the waters
Ah – wsh Ah – wsh
Those who have died have never, never left
The dead are not under the earth
They are in the rustling trees, they are in the groaning woods
They are in the crying grass, they are in the moaning rocks
The dead are not under the earth

Angels: Messengers

Gabriel the kitten came as an angel, a messenger. He sang his way into our hearts and helped us to change how we looked at the world, as have so many of the beings I’ve talked about and so many of the essays and songs that have moved and shaped me. Trees come on four legs with marmalade fur. Trees come with squirrels in their branches; trees come in the hands of women in the Green Belt Movement and in tiny hopping toads. Vandana Shiva (2005) offers the seed as “site and symbol of freedom” (p. 91). The tiny seed—mobile and powerful, and surviving even when removed from the soil for years—also represents a refusal to accept international corporations’ attempts to patent life, another vertical arrangement that, ultimately, benefits no one in the long term. In “Diasporism, Feminism and Coalition,” Melanie Kaye/Kantrowicz’ (1998) offers a transformative discussion of diasporism, a sort of rootlessness—often forced—that is also possibly a strength. One carries “home” wherever one travels and can use that experience of always

transporting the seeds of one's culture and of exile to make coalitions with others who likely have very different experiences.

When I'm in the garden, I have a relationship with one weed in particular, grateful that it comes out easily by the roots, but there's a deal. I am inevitably covered with its green seeds, stuck as if by velcro to my hair, my clothes, my cats' tails, so it lives on, Java, Minerva, and I its temporary hosts, until it finds a new home in the soil. Those days in the early spring filled with infinite possibility before deep, dark earth turn, by the middle of June, into teeming, chaotic life. There are spirits in the garden, in the watchful toad breathing with my father's memory, in the apple tree bearing the heirloom Green Tolmans, in the dill that always laughs with Don Peckham's voice. And in the tiny kitten, the Angel Gabriel, singing:

As a candle can conquer the demons of darkness
As a flame can keep frost from the deepest of cold
So a song can give hope in the depths of all danger
And a line of pure melody soar in your soul
So sing your songs well and sing your songs sweetly
And swear that your singing it never shall cease
So the clatter of battle and drums of disaster
Be drowned in the sound of the pipes of peace
With chariots of cherubim chanting
And seraphim singing hosanna
And a choir of archangels a-caroling come
Hallelujah Hallelu
All the angels a-trumpeting glory
In praise of the Prince of Peace (Kirkpatrick, 2000)

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Book Review: Representing Animals in Perumal Murugan's *Poonachi*

Perumal Murugan, *Poonachi or the Story of a Black Goat* (Chennai: Westland, 2019). vii + 173 pp. ISBN: 9789386850966. Paperback. Maximum Retail Price: Indian Rupees 299.

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In order to understand the meaning of an artistic work, we often compare it against earlier exemplars. It helps us fathom the intricacies of allusions and tropes, among other signs. How should one try to understand Perumal Murugan's December 2016 novel *Poonachi*? Given that the novel marked the resurrection of his writing career after giving up on it because of the backlash against his previous novel, *Madhorubhagan* (2010) (translated in 2013 as *One Part Woman*), one may try to read *Poonachi* as a political fable in the vein of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. However, the characters in *Poonachi* are not thinly veiled portraits of real-life political characters. The goats in *Poonachi* are not a cipher for Indian citizens, either citizens in general or citizens in particular. If one were to read the novel as a moral fable as one finds in Aesop's fables or the *Panchatantra*, one would again find that the story of the animals in the novel does not leave the reader with any morals or ideas as to how one should lead the rest of one's life. The animals do not behave in either a good or a bad manner. They seem to be just like animals or rather the way we humans think of animals.

Poonachi is not a pastoral novel where the village and the animals function as a kind of setting or backdrop for a discourse on human nature. The focus is solely on the animals and the lives of a village couple and their few animals. The animals in this story are not extras that could be dispensed with and the reader would still be left with the basic structure of the story. *Poonachi* does not use anthropomorphism to the extent as one would see in a cartoon film. The animals do not behave in ways which one only associates

with humans but never with animals. The animals are not crypto-humans delivering a commentary on human behavior.

What kind of a story is *Poonachi* then? The Tamil story, published by the Tamil Nadu-based publishers Kalachuvadu (original) and the now Amazon-owned Westland (English translation, 2018 by N. Kalyan Ram), deals with the lives of those forming the wide base at the bottom of our society. There is no indication of what year or decade the story takes place. The story is set in a village near the fictitious Odakkan Hills among a community known as Asuras. Other than these names, there are no proper nouns as place markers. As for names, the animals mostly have names and even some of the gods have names, Mesayyan and Mesagaran. The humans in the story are not identified by their names. The only markers of modernity in the story are the presence of a government and its officials and policemen who make the villagers stand in queues. Other than that, the story could have been set at any time in the past. The story is presented in a world where there is no electricity and where people travel in bullock carts and on horses, rather than in motorized vehicles. The villager's primeval lifestyle is in sync with the primitive settings in which the story is set.

At the end of the book, the English translator writes that the novel may be the first of its kind in Tamil. It may be the first of its kind in Tamil but there are some similar stories in the literature of other Indian languages. In Bengali literature, for instance, there are not many stories with animals as central characters though there are a few which have some common threads. Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's 1926 short story "Mahesh," about a Muslim father-daughter pair and their bull Mahesh in a Hindu village which was suffering from severe drought, is a story which comes closest to *Poonachi* as the drought theme is also witnessed in *Poonachi*. Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay's 1913 short story "Adorini" is about a rich man who bought an elephant during his heydays but later fell on bad times and was forced to sell off the elephant though he retained emotional attachment with the animal. The story, however, revolves in a social class far removed from the world of either *Poonachi* or "Mahesh," and is about people who could afford to keep elephants in the first place. Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay's short story "Kalapahar" about a farmer and his buffalos also fictionalizes the deep emotional attachment between small farmers and their working animals. Bibhutibhushan Bandhyopadhyay's short story "Budhir Bari Phera" (1938) is written from the point of view of a cow who manages to escape a

slaughterhouse and return to the villagers in whose house she stayed. It contrasts some of these short stories where an animal is sent off to the slaughterhouse.

At the basic hand-to-mouth level of existence in which the elderly human couple in *Poonachi* operate, it is futile to think of the story as having an animal rights theme. *Poonachi* was written both before the November 2016 demonetization exercise which led to Indians queuing up or the 2017 pro-Jallikattu protests even though the English translation was published only in 2018 thereby creating a greater readership. It is interesting to note that Murugan voiced his support for carrying on the tradition of Jallikattu and implied that animals were meant for humans and humans had a right to play with them. Instead of stopping Jallikattu, he urged animal activists to try and stop the meat industry. Given the heavy dependence on animal labor in farm work in Indian villages, it is counter-productive to pursue a policy of banning the meat industry.

The novel begins and ends with two fantasy elements. It begins with the appearance of a giant, as large as Bakasuran, the *asura* in the *Mahabharat*. In a community named “Asuras”, the Bakasuran is not a monster to be slayed. Rather, it is a kindred soul. The opening of the story with the appearance of Bakasuran and his gift seems straight out of a folk tale. The rest of the novel uses a realist mode of writing. The novel follows a realist style except for the incident of Poonachi giving birth to septuplets. Goats giving birth to septuplets is rare but has been recorded. In the novel, this incident is presented as a miracle given its rarity. The novel ends with the sentence: “What lay there was not Poonachi, but a stone idol.” The translator says in his end note that, “this may well be the key to reading this novel as an adult literary text for our times” and that it harks back to the tradition of memorializing innocent victims (especially girls), who fall prey to the random and ever-present violence of the world, as a martyr and later a deity.

It is perhaps unwise to label *Poonachi* a magical realist novel. These two fantasy elements permeate the seemingly realist world. However, unlike novels widely regarded as magical realist masterpieces, these two fantasy elements do not set up an opposition to the realist narrative. There is no metafiction or an oppressed world which gives meaning to its subdued existence through such flights of fancy which help it co-exist beside a glittering world. Nor do these fantasy elements help to subvert the rational

order of the dominant hegemony. If one were to look for post-modernist multiple realities in this novel, one would have to look very hard and even then one may fail to find it.

How should one understand this novel since it does not directly follow any recognizable writing model? Most reviews of the novel have touched on a seemingly political undertone—identifying people and animals through tags. While these initiatives of tagging people and animals bear resemblances to recent administrative exercises in India, they do not form the bulk of the story of *Poonachi*. The drought the village faces is a more important element of the story. In the preface to the novel, Murugan says that he wrote the novel in three months during the 2016 drought in Tamil Nadu, the worst the state had faced in 140 years. The drought, however, can hardly be called a political element. In the timeless world of the novel, the harshness of nature seems to be in keeping with the bleakness of the lives of the characters who inhabit the story. The human characters pass through a whole range of emotions, the elderly woman more so than the elderly man or any other characters. It is the goats whose emotions are highlighted to the greatest extent in the novel.

How to represent animals in literature? Placing animals in pastoral literature often involves describing their appearance, and associating a host of adjectives indicative of happiness. Even if one brushes the emotive adjectives aside, the exercise is understandable since animals do not occupy a central place in pastoral literature. Pastoral literature is written by city people whose primary subjects are generally other denizens of cities. Rural people serve as a foil to characters who live in cities. Animals usually serve as a backdrop. Anthropomorphism describes humans and human emotions. Animal bodies are a vessel to perform that exercise. Thus, in order to describe animals eschewing such modes of representation, one is left with two choices—either describing the human experience of living with animals or imagining what it is like to be an animal. Murugan manages to achieve both in *Poonachi*. Such narratives are rare in literature because humans who closely co-habit with animals have not written too many books describing such experiences in roughly the last one hundred years. *Poonachi* fills that gap, that leap of imagination coupled with the knowledge of experience. It may be that the animals in *Poonachi* behave a lot like animals. However, it does not seem unimaginable. The animals in *Poonachi* do not behave in an explicitly fantastic manner. Both fiction and empathy require a leap of

imagination, imagining what it is to be someone else. What is it like to be a goat? The question may best be answered by someone who has had experience living with goats. Murugan's own life bears testimony to that experience. What kind of empathy does Murugan have for the animals? Does he believe in the animals' rights? I am afraid not. The animals are part of the economic system which ensures the survival of the humans in that system. Given the marginal state of small farmers in India, it is a struggle where only the fittest manage to survive another day. There is little room for explicit sympathy. There are moments in the novel though when uneasy pangs of conscience crop up. An example would be when the castrator of the billy goats starts wailing and castigating himself for being a sinner. The castrator tries to deal with this harsh truth of life through toddy, the elderly man through silence. This silence pervades the rest of Murugan's novel as well. The reaction of the female goats witnessing this castration scene is another exercise in pathos that pervades Murugan's novel. One can think of Ted Hughes's poems about the shearing of sheep and the rest of the flock on seeing a shorn sheep. It is not surprising that Ted Hughes also spent a lot of time living on farms with animals. The leap of imagination enabling such a literary exercise is difficult to imagine unless one has had the experience of living with animals.

Poonachi is a tale about an elderly couple in a village living mostly with goats and both humans and goats find it hard to survive given the paucity of material resources. What is special about the tale is the realms of human experience which have not often been imagined into literary artifacts. Murugan manages to uphold this aspect of human experience. The workings of such a destitute economy manage to strip bare a kind of raw life, a King Lear on the heath, a Maus in a Nazi concentration camp. Murugan manages to uphold this bare life through *Poonachi*. It is shorn of politics. He deliberately stays clear of that. If one manages to read a kind of politics into the novel, it is because the novel reveals a kind of bareness that invites covering, covering with the politics of bare life.

Poonachi's 2019 paperback English edition features a notice on the cover mentioning that the novel was shortlisted for the inaugural JCB Prize for Literature in 2018. A book is rarely written for a contest. The jury, however, must have felt that the book somehow fell short. The novel's simplicity and its slice-of-life landscape of the marginal rural household do not seek to fit themselves into any of the well-established categories of

political satire, magic realism, moral fable, pastoral idealization or animal rights' advocacy. Singed by the experience of his previous novel, Murugan steers clear of tackling thorny issues. What one is left with is a seemingly genuine account of the experience of living on the fringes of survival at the very bottom of the social pyramid, where people usually do not stoop to peer into. One is left with the residents of that level, leading a primeval, basic life. Murugan offers us a glimpse of that bare life. In sharing his experiences of living with animals in an economy dependent on animals, he presents a very close approximation of the realities lived by animals. He highlights an experience and a perspective which, as the translator says, may be unprecedented in Tamil literature. For that, his readers are grateful to him.

Book Review

Virtual Menageries: Animals as Mediators in Network Cultures, by Jody Berland, The MIT Press, 2019, 328 pages. ISBN #978-0-26203-960-4. \$35.00 hardcover

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Where do wild things roam in the age of the Anthropocene? In *Virtual Menageries*, Jody Berland reveals that the answer is often on digital screens and digital spaces. For readers coming to critical animal studies from a primarily philosophical background, Berland’s intervention—exploring animals as media and mediators in physical and digital spaces—may seem like an odd choice. The common (if false) binary of technology and nature tells us that animals do not belong in media, except by act of human agency. Berland illuminates the artificiality of any rigid boundary between technology and animality.

Berland’s book analyzes animals as mediators, not animals in media. The distinction is important and an important contribution to materialist media theory, much like John Durham Peters’s (2015) *The Marvelous Clouds* prompted a radical reconceptualization of water, fire, sky, and time as fundamental media. A focus on “animals in media” would tend to yield representational critique. Although representational critique can offer important political insight, “animals in media” is still a content-driven anthropocentric approach to media studies. Berland is too versed in the medium theory of Marshall McLuhan to offer only an analysis of a medium’s content, and she is too steeped in Harawaian notions of “making kin” with nonhumans to erase them for an accounting of media.

In *Virtual Menageries*, Berland argues that animals have always been mediators between people, territories, and technologies. For example, in 1414, a giraffe from Bengal sent to China served to make “first contact” and open relations between the two lands. This could be an infuriating thought for those committed to de-centering the human, as it seemingly reduces the

animal to a tool—a technology—for human communication. However, Berland does not stop at illuminating the ways humans have placed animals. She explores how animals can resist and act back, how they complicate the aesthetic, emotional, economic, and political practices of human connection. Berland aims not only to re-present nonhuman animals but to bring media theory and critical animal studies together to offer a critical (i.e., both necessary and rigorous) engagement with human practices of connectivity. “What is at stake is our need for new ways of thinking about animality, humanity, nature, culture, and capitalism” (p. 16).

Berland uses materialist media theory (cf., Bollmer, 2019)—drawing from literature from continental philosophy to cultural studies—to explore human-machine-animal performativity. By taking this theoretical approach, Berland situates herself to explore the materiality of a medium and not just the content transmitted across it. Exploring the materiality of technology is important because “it is through materiality that power is secured and maintained” (Bollmer, 2019, p. 1). The move to materiality is of great ethical and ecological consequence for Berland; it allows the author to go beyond a critique of what kinds of cat videos we are uploading on YouTube (i.e., to focus on the content of media) to explore how animals are “co-constitutive entities in the imbrication of machines and humans” (p. 35).

Virtual Menageries explores how animal images have been used to negotiate and naturalize human relations with a machine. From Honeywell computers to Twitter, animal imagery has been deployed to help humans traverse their first contact with new technology. Indeed, Berland readily concedes that the population and biodiversity of virtual animals in our digital media landscape are “incalculably larger” than what most people would see in the flesh at any time in history. However, as we increasingly make different life forms visible, we are also backgrounding attention to the material infrastructure that brings those images before our eyes. Words like “cyberspace” and “clouds” obscure the wires, routers, relays, server farms, and hard drives that enable these digital practices of looking. “Virtual space” and “digital clouds” do not sound like entities that could disrupt habitats, displace animals, and disturb the ecological balance.

Although Berland produces what may at first glance seem a condemning piece of technological determinism, that is not the case. The author engages in a Latourian critique that problematizes the human-machine-animal performativity. Berland asks us to “broaden our

understanding of what is being mediated and what is being set into motion by these entities” (p. 209), but she also does not take a position “that the game is over, it’s too late, there’s no sense trying to make anything better” (Haraway, 2016, p. 3). Instead, Berland suggests that maybe we are just asleep, and perhaps the nonhuman animals can wake us.

Virtual Menageries tries to help the animals wake us by working through a number of encounters with animal mediators. First, Berland illuminates the history and practices of the menagerie. The origins of the menagerie—the private keeping of exotic animals—are inextricably linked to power relations. The ability to subdue and transport wild animals from “exotic” lands transformed the animals from embodied beings to powerful symbols of human domination and mastery of nature. In addition to forceful taking of animals from one land to another, sometimes animals were gifted between rulers of nations. In the age of information, animal menageries have been used to colonize virtual space. The images of animals used by telecommunication companies and social media platforms invite us to associate these new technologies with good and familiar feelings. However, if animals help serve as “hinges” for global networks and facilitate new “common situations” among humans, they also have the ability to interrupt technology. “The human dance of mediated becoming does not only intersect with technology, however, animals are also mediators of social relations” (p. 32).

Next, in two case studies, Berland explores the social impact of two giraffes. The first is the giraffe gifted from Bengal to China in 1414, mentioned earlier. The second is April, the pregnant giraffe who drew an online audience of millions of viewers waiting for her calf’s birth. As endangered animals, giraffes are becoming “vanishing mediators.” Giraffes have helped shape international relations and create a community in a digital space, and yet, they are vanishing from their natural environment, raising the question, “What do we owe creatures who have helped us create our societies?” Berland explores this question by looking at the relationship between beavers, the fur trade, the Indigenous peoples of Canada, and colonists. The fur trade, a complex assemblage rigorously described by Berland, worked to transform bodies into commodities and establish a social classification system. Beavers also reveal present-day notions of human exceptionalism. We decry their waterway management, as we manage water for our ends, including draining ponds for housing development in the name

of “progress.” Beavers can be labeled “pests” as we increasingly view our mediations, but not theirs, in the landscape as “normal” and even “natural.”

Then, Berland illustrates how iconic animals are used to usher in new communication practices and technologies with photographs and examples ranging from the blue bird of Twitter to the Gopher search protocol to the menageries of Honeywell (advertisements featuring animals built from computer components) and O’Reilly (software guides featuring images of animals). While the advertisers of the technological evolution use animals to cultivate images of carefree creativity, again, what is made invisible are the consequences of a continual drive for “progress” and “new technology” on animal lives. Berland explores the consequences of a progress narrative with an analysis of animals in cellular phone advertisements. The neoliberal subject is demanded to be mobile and to be a consumer of the newest and best technology—always seeking the exotic, whether it is a new space or new technology. The problem with our continual search for exoticness, Berland points out, is we forget we are also exotic.

Berland’s final two chapters provide a rich accounting of how cats help us negotiate our social networks in this techno-domestic sphere (i.e., cat videos on YouTube help us feel familiar in an unfamiliar space) and explore the relation of field recording, musicology, and media emotion research. Both chapters explore human connectivity to the nonhuman animals with whom we share the earth and ask us to take stock of our technologies and the logics that they (re)produce do to others and ourselves.

Berland closes *Virtual Menageries* with some thoughts on monsters, hybrids, commodity fetishes, menageries, and ambient fear. She asks us not to give up our entwinement with either animals or technology, a state of entanglement which is “our nature.” We must also realize that technology and animals are also entangled. Animals do not exist outside of the technological world; nature and technology are not separate spheres. Humans and animals are not distinct kingdoms of biological classification; we are not immune to the Sixth Mass Extinction. We are human animals living in a natural and technological world, and we *must* remember all of that.

Operation Egglifts

Lynne Goldsmith ¹

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What was it like for you,
tallest of white birds,
as the helicopter flew
down to spill men
out of their whiteness
to pilfer your young
to hatch in two days,
(time frame
when scientists say
you're most protective)

as if you won't notice
one egg gone from two
of clutch

another for white men
preempting offspring

to incubate in drawers

administer oxygen
through tubes
during airline transport,

your chicks later to be
artificially hatched
and raised
with young turkeys,
"pecking bags" for fledglings.

Nineteen born
from "Operation Egglift."

Again no later mating.
Eight years passed

before men charged again
to grab and bend
to artificially inseminate
the bird sperm bank
into your resistance
of no choice airs beating
fear to wildly unknowing
there being no calming first,
no introduction to foreignness,
no gentleness before violation
of space and bodies delicate.

One chick from this—
scientific intervention—
remained alive
seventeen days.

Humans returned
for gatherings, more eggs
Northwest Territories
(whooping crane attachments)
embryonic-stage
plunder for delivery
to Gray's Lake, Idaho nests
of sandhill cranes
(their own eggs removed
for artificial birthing),

National Wildlife Refuge
name not protecting.

Some nine “whoopers”
hatched—shaped
into same story
setting of no blessing:

Birds never bred:
Experiment terminated.

Birds decimated,

almost the extinction
around 1940

to become lands overrun
beyond the guns of humans
still to this day exerting
as controlling hands of centuries.

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Dibyajyoti Ghosh is Assistant Professor of English at Ananda Mohan College, University of Calcutta, Kolkata, India. His doctoral dissertation at Jadavpur University, Kolkata was titled “Writings on Animals in Early Modern England.” Among his research areas are both critical as well as cultural animal studies.

Lynne Goldsmith is an author, licensed therapist, and award-winning poet. Her first book, *Secondary Cicatrices*, won the 2018 Halcyon Poetry Prize and was a 2019 Finalist in the American Book Fest Awards and a 2020 Human Relations Indie Book Award Gold Winner as well as a 2020 Finalist in the International Book Awards. She has been published in all-creatures.org, *The Environmental Magazine*, *Interalia Magazine*, *Red Planet Magazine*, *Spillway*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *Tiny Seed Literary Journal*, and elsewhere. She holds three graduate degrees in teaching, counseling, and English.

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JCAS Editorial Objectives

The *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* is open to all scholars and activists. The journal was established to foster academic study of critical animal issues in contemporary society. While animal studies is increasingly becoming a field of importance in the academy, much work being done under this moniker takes a reformist or depoliticized approach that fails to mount a more serious critique of underlying issues of political economy and speciesist philosophy. JCAS is an interdisciplinary journal with an emphasis on animal liberation philosophy and policy issues. The journal was designed to build up the common activist's knowledge of animal liberation while at the same time appealing to academic specialists. We encourage and actively pursue a diversity of viewpoints of contributors from the frontlines of activism to academics. We have created the journal to facilitate communication between the many diverse perspectives of the animal liberation movement. Thus, we especially encourage submissions that seek to create new syntheses between differing disputing parties and to explore paradigms not currently examined.

Suggested Topics

Papers are welcomed in any area of animal liberation philosophy from any discipline, and presenters are encouraged to share theses or dissertation chapters. Since a major goal of the Institute for Critical Animal Studies is to foster philosophical, critical, and analytical thinking about animal liberation, papers that contribute to this project will be given priority (especially papers that address critical theory, political philosophy, social movement analysis, tactical analysis, feminism, activism and academia, Continental philosophy, or post-colonial perspectives). We especially encourage contributions that engage animal liberation in disciplines and debates that have received little previous attention.

Review Process

Each paper submitted is initially reviewed for general suitability for publication; suitable submissions will be read by at least two members of the journal's editorial board.

Manuscript Requirements

The manuscript should be in MS Word format and follow APA guidelines. All submissions should be double-spaced and in 12-point Times New Roman. Good quality electronic copies of all figures and tables should also be provided. All manuscripts should conform to American English grammar spelling.

As a guide, we ask that regular essays and reviews be between 2000-8000 words and have no endnotes. In exceptional circumstances, JCAS will consider

publishing extended essays. Authors should supply a brief abstract of the paper (of no more than 250 words). A brief autobiographical note should be supplied which includes full names, affiliation email address, and full contact details.

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