

FINDING VEGAN POETICS: *LITERATURE FOR NONHUMANS* AS AN ECOFEMINIST  
RESPONSE TO CARNISM

A Thesis  
by  
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Submitted to the Graduate School  
at Appalachian State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS

December 2018  
Department of English

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## **Abstract**

### **FINDING VEGAN POETICS: *LITERATURE FOR NONHUMANS* AS AN ECOFEMINIST RESPONSE TO CARNISM**

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This thesis is my journey to finding and defining *vegan poetics*, a term I employ to define poetry that exhibits a vegan perspective through witnessing the mass slaughter of nonhuman animals and exposing the connection between the factory farming industry and climate change. As an example of vegan poetics, I present Gabriel Gudding's 2015 poetry collection *Literature for Nonhumans* as exhibiting a fusion of vegan ideology and poetic technique. To analyze Gudding's text, this thesis employs ecofeminist theory along with scholarship from the developing field of vegan studies to foster a discourse on what it means to write poetry in opposition to "carnism," a term referring to the culture surrounding meat-eating. In short, *Literature for Nonhumans* provides entrance into the institution of the slaughterhouse and, in turn, introduces a comprehensive vegan worldview through the genre of poetry.

## **Acknowledgments**

This thesis would not exist if it were not for the tireless support and encouragement I received from Appalachian State's English department, my mentors, peers, friends, and family members. I would like to thank my director, Dr. Kathryn Kirkpatrick, for believing in this project when I first pitched the idea to her as an undergraduate. She has been a constant source of guidance and inspiration, and I feel lucky to have had the opportunity to learn from her as both a scholar and a mentor. I cherish the many meals of tasty vegan food that Dr. Kirkpatrick and I have shared, and I am immensely grateful for her continued interest in my success and the many opportunities she has provided for encouraging my professional growth. I also extend gratitude towards my exceptional readers—Dr. Jessica Martell, Dr. Germán Campos-Muñoz, and Dr. Bret Zawilski—for their dedication and informative feedback and discussion. I am indebted to my committee for their encouraging and respectful appreciation of my work. Thank you to my mom, Angie Hunter, for calling and texting me daily to ask, “Samantha, are you working on your thesis?” I also owe thanks to my dad, Dave Hunter, for reminding me to, “just ‘do you,’ cutie,” whenever I felt discouraged or overwhelmed. Special thanks are owed to my sister, Marie Hunter, who, among other things, accompanied me on countless adventures to farms and animal refuges, where I was able to personally connect with individual nonhuman animals who belong to the mass grouping of “factory farm animals” discussed at length in this thesis. To my fellow English graduate students, especially those I share an office with—thank you for listening to my anxieties and

doubts and reminding me of my abilities. Lastly, I would like to thank and acknowledge my closest friends—Kiyoshi, Megan, Shea, and Tommy—for supporting me throughout this process, even when they had no idea what I was talking about.

## **Dedication**

For the nonhuman animals who never knew the feeling of grass on their skin or were never given the chance to nurse their offspring—to those whose deaths were not acknowledged as significant.

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## Introduction

This thesis is my journey to finding and defining *vegan poetics*, a term I have created to refer to how the identity of veganism manifests in writing *for* the benefit of nonhuman animals, specifically those whose bodies are consumed by humans on a mass scale. Using Gabriel Gudding's 2015 poetry collection *Literature for Nonhumans* as the primary model for uncovering a fusion of vegan ideology and poetic technique, this thesis employs ecofeminist theory along with scholarship from the developing field of vegan studies to foster a discourse on what it means to write poetry in opposition to carnism. While 'nonhuman' is a term that can broadly refer to both objects and beings that exist outside of the definition of 'human,' the title of *Literature for Nonhumans* uses the term more narrowly to indicate the text's focus on the factory farm animal victims of the carnist system of oppression that mutilates their bodies and individual identities, as well as the nonhuman environment that suffers as a consequence of the globalized factory farming industry. In this thesis, I argue that *Literature for Nonhumans* is a collection of prose poems that could only be written by an author who practices veganism, meaning that I interpret both the content and formal elements that make up *Literature for Nonhumans* as directly influenced by Gudding's vegan identity. When read as a cohesive text rather than as thirteen separate poems with an afterword, *Literature for Nonhumans* introduces a comprehensive vegan worldview through the genre of poetry.

This introduction supplies the contextualizing information needed for engagement with my discussion. To begin my exploration of vegan poetics, this introduction concerns four different—yet intersecting—areas of interest and outcomes. Firstly, this introductory chapter briefly engages with rhetorical theory to establish my reading of the rhetorical

exigence that informs *Literature for Nonhumans*. Secondly, it provides necessary definitions for the multiple terms germane to my analysis. Thirdly, this chapter reviews my chosen methodological approach to vegan studies through the lens of ecofeminism, while providing the justification supporting this choice. Lastly, my introduction outlines the trajectory of the following chapters, respectively. I will now begin surveying the rhetorical exigence of *Literature for Nonhumans*.

According to renowned rhetorician Lloyd F. Bitzer, “[a]ny exigence is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (6). Using Bitzer’s terminology, I identify *Literature for Nonhumans* as primarily responding to the obstacle of the globally detrimental consequences of the factory farming industry. More specifically, *Literature for Nonhumans* directly addresses and hopes to correct a paradox of ecopoetry. Ecopoetry is a sub-genre of poetry that deals with environmental topics and issues. In our currently tumultuous political and environmental atmosphere, one of the most notable areas of interest in ecopoetry involves climate change. However, in an alarmingly contradictory way, Gabriel Gudding finds this genre of ecopoetry, which is supposed to express climate concern, to be guilty of largely refusing to indict the industrialized eating of nonhuman animals as one of the main contributors to the fast deteriorating state of our environment, the literal heating of our planet.

According to a 2016 study and report by the Oxford Martin Programme on the future of agribusiness, “the food system is responsible for more than a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions, of which up to 80% are associated with livestock production” (Springmann et al. 4146). Mass producing nonhuman animals as a food source is one of the largest

anthropogenic contributors to carbon dioxide emissions, yet as Gudding's text makes evident, it is highly typical for the eating of nonhuman animals to be ignored by ecopoetry that allegedly addresses the factors of climate change. In the afterword of *Literature for Nonhumans*, Gudding shares some supporting evidence for his critical view of ecopoetry, which he calls "ecopoetics," as a genre that fails to fully address its exigence. Holding little back, he writes:

Having recently read two anthologies of critical papers and interviews on ecopoetics, I was disheartened to realize that the elision of the slaughterhouse's unprecedented ecological and ethical effects extends beyond the realm of strictly political thought into those poetries ostensibly most concerned with ecology and the plight of other beings. The books contained not one discussion of the slaughterhouse. In fact the word is not mentioned in the volumes at all. (*Literature for Nonhumans* 109)

As a response to this contradictory practice of otherwise environmentally concerned people continuing to eat nonhuman animals and refraining from rightly implicating factory farming as, to use Gudding's language, "the single most potent factor in the history of anthropogenic ecological destruction," *Literature for Nonhumans* repeatedly addresses an audience of people who willfully ignore the factory farming industry and leave nonhuman animal suffering out of climate change discourse (*Literature for Nonhumans* 109). The text labels this specific audience as "ethical misers," and this term speaks to the text's bold approach to reintegrating nonhuman animals into environmental discourse that the text critiques for often being anthropocentric (*Literature for Nonhumans* 36). Gudding's concise yet bold essays that make up his poetry collection's afterword, such as the one cited above, call out the ecopoets and thinkers who eschew vegan discourse from their writing make up a pointed part of the

text's audience of "ethical misers." In this way, the exigence of *Literature for Nonhumans* is slightly more specific than just responding to the injustices of factory farming, for the collection unambiguously aligns itself in opposition to paradoxical ecopoetry that excludes commonly commodified animal species from environmental discourse. Having outlined the exigence of *Literature for Nonhumans*, I will now explain why we can define it as "rhetorical" and demonstrate how this more exact understanding enriches my discussion of Gudding's text as an example of vegan poetics.

Bitzer establishes that "[a]n exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse" (7). To further explain this concept, Bitzer uses air pollution as an example of an urgent obstacle that can be addressed by discourse for the purpose of enacting positive changes to correct this "thing which is other than it should be" (6). According to Bitzer, the ability for rhetorical strategy, devices, and argumentation to invoke public response in hopes of eliminating the urgent obstacle of air pollution is what makes this exigence *rhetorical* (7). Using Bitzer's theorization on the concept, I find that the exigence of *Literature for Nonhumans* is rhetorical because the text utilizes compelling strategies for eliciting a reaction from its readers. *Literature for Nonhumans* directly asks readers to act and make changes in their lives as part of their engagement with the text, urging them to "come out of the human political" and practice ethical consistency by extending compassion beyond species borders (29). To positively affect this morally and ethically weighted obstacle of wide-spread injustice against other animals, *Literature for Nonhumans* uses poetry as a rhetorical form for spreading awareness about the suffering of factory farm animals and the devastating impact this industry of mass murder has on the environment we all inhabit. In a related way,

Gudding's text exposes the irony found in its rhetorical exigence, for "the very thinkers who love animals and grow disturbed by their mass slaughter still eat them," and these thinkers are unfortunately responsible for producing "the majority of contemporary political, philosophical, and ecological thought" (*Literature for Nonhumans* 108). The pattern of irony that occurs when an otherwise ethically consistent person who is informed on climate concerns consciously choosing to be an oxymoronic "ethical miser" when it comes to the suffering of nonhuman animals is a phenomenon that fuels every section and poem of *Literature for Nonhumans*. Therefore, *Literature for Nonhumans* responds to and attempts to correct the lack of recognition among the majority of the human population that nonhuman animal suffering and climate concern are intertwined issues.

Rooted in my interpretation of the rhetorical exigence driving *Literature for Nonhumans*, this thesis argues that the highly-intentional structuring of Gudding's courageous poetry collection serves to bridge the gaps between animal activism, climate justice, and veganism. In this way, I define *Literature for Nonhumans* as an example of vegan poetics because it is a poetic text that embraces vegan ideals and communicates to its readers, through both its content and form, this minority perspective that nonhuman animals are beings who deserve mutual respect. As a model of vegan poetics, I propose *Literature for Nonhumans* as an attempt to correct the mistakes of other writings and, more generally, the "ethical misers" who have wrongly chosen to erase factory farm animals from climate justice discourse as well as our everyday lives. By going against the norm, *Literature for Nonhumans*, and the larger body of vegan poetics this text anticipates and encourages, holds the potential for enacting real change that could positively affect the entire planet. In this way, the rhetorical exigence of *Literature for Nonhumans* is a necessary component of vegan

poetics.

The urgency of the rhetorical exigence of *Literature for Nonhumans* is undeniable. In October of 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released their sixth report on monitoring climate change. This grave report calls for immediate and drastic action, on a global scale, in an attempt to keep the planet's temperature below 1.5 degrees of warming. Supported by over 6,000 scientific references, this report demands that we reduce our carbon dioxide emissions to 45% below 2010 levels in the next decade in order to be at zero carbon emissions by 2050 ("IPCC Press Release"). The number of immediate changes required to achieve zero emissions by 2050 is striking—but necessary. Carolyn Kormann of *The New Yorker* defines the IPCC's sixth report as "a collective scream sieved through the stern, strained language of bureaucratese" (par. 4). In "The Dire Warnings of the United Nations' Latest Climate-Change Report," Kormann quotes Adelle Thomas, one of the lead authors on the IPCC's sixth report, as stating the following about the gravity of the report's findings: "The scientific consensus is really strong. It's not just a political slogan: '1.5 to stay alive.' It's true" (qtd. in Kormann par. 3). As the IPCC has indicated on their documents that they do not authorize anyone directly citing their report's findings in other documents for copyright reasons, I turn to Kormann's summary of the report, which I find accurately conveys some of the more concerning points. In Kormann's words, the report warns that if the planet were to warm by 2 degrees celsius, the following events are predicted to occur:

Ten million more people would be exposed to permanent inundation, and several hundred million more to "climate-related risks and susceptible to poverty." Malaria and dengue fever will be more widespread, and crops like maize, rice, and wheat will have smaller and smaller yields—particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia,

and Central and South America. [...] With two degrees of warming, three times as many insects (eighteen per cent), and twice as many plants (sixteen per cent) and vertebrates (eight per cent), will lose their geographic range, when compared with warming of 1.5 degrees. Nearly all the coral reefs (more than ninety-nine per cent) will be dead, including the Great Barrier Reef, an ecosystem some twenty-five million years old, which is visible from space and is already in severe decline. The global annual catch from marine fisheries will decrease by three million tons. The likelihood of a sea-ice-free Arctic summer will increase from once per century to once per decade. (par. 3-4)

These alarming predictions threaten to change everything we know about living on earth. The message is clear: this “collective scream” must be heard and acted upon—or else (Kormann par. 4).

While the IPCC’s report lists the changes that corporations must make immediately if we are to be successful in collectively lowering humanity’s carbon emissions, many news and media networks have also released practical suggestions for individuals to decrease their personal carbon footprints at the micro level. To give some examples, these listings for consumers suggest eliminating as much gas-fueled vehicle travel as possible and eating “less” meat. Even though the mass amounts of carbon emissions and waste from factory farming have long been implicated in scientific reports as a key contributor to the decline of the planet’s environment, the majority of these lists—even with the sixth mass extinction already underway—still do not suggest vegetarianism, let alone veganism. They only suggest *cutting back* on the slaughter of other animals and certainly do not go as far as to suggest looking for more permanent ways to eliminate industrialized slaughter from the diets and

habits of people living in developed areas. I'd like to remind that this thesis as well as *Literature for Nonhumans* does not recognize the minuscule group of small-scale animal farmers that practice sustainable farming methods as a solution capable of undoing the massive damage being caused at exponentially increasing rates by the global industry of factory farming. For as Jonathan Safran Foer reveals in his evocative and well-circulated *Eating Animals*, "ninety-nine percent of all land animals eaten or used to produce milk and eggs in the United States are factory farmed. Although there are important exceptions, to speak about eating animals today is to speak about factory farming" (34). Looking at these "practical" lists of changes for the individual, to me, it seems more drastic to ask people to completely change their daily methods of travel than their often purely taste- and convenience-driven choices to eat other animals. Regardless of whether the general population wants to acknowledge it, humans' carnivorous habits are not proven to be scientifically healthier than well-rounded vegetarian and vegan diets. The reader should take note that this statement is not to imply a call for universal veganism, for I recognize that the culture surrounding meat-eating has made vegan diets less accessible to some due to a variety of factors. To this end, the 53<sup>rd</sup> footnote of *Literature for Nonhumans* found in the text's afterword, informs that "[a]mong countless other dietary organizations, the American Dietetic Association [commonly referred to as the ADA] (not a liberal organization) clearly declares meats dietetically unnecessary" (qtd. in *Literature for Nonhumans* 108). This footnote also reports that the ADA, "the US's oldest and foremost scientific authority on diet and nutrition," declared "well-planned vegetarian diets" to be "appropriate for individuals during all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence, and for athletes" (qtd. in *Literature for Nonhumans* 108).



Three years prior to the IPCC's sixth report, *Literature for Nonhumans* anticipates this frightening and very real future of a heating planet and presents Gudding's vegan worldview as a possible solution. In the "Writing Literature to Benefit Nonhumans" portion of the afterword, Gudding provokes readers to recognize that "[e]ven for those who cannot intrinsically value nonhumans as ends in themselves, they should recognize that our fate is bound up firmly with their well-being" (114). Using lines that speak to the interwoven fates of nonhuman and human animals in every section of *Literature for Nonhumans*, Gudding frames his collection as an affront to the climate-altering and apathy-producing consequences of the U.S.'s slaughterhouse industry and its surrounding culture of ill-informed supporters. In a society that privileges the taste of animal flesh over the survival of the planet, *Literature for Nonhumans* is an anomaly. Unlike the dominant culture of meat-eaters, Gudding views veganism and issues of nonhuman animal mistreatment and representation not as a "private concern," but rather as a public, global issue with dire, widespread consequences (Personal interview). Expanding from my discussion on the rhetorical exigence of *Literature for Nonhumans*, I now turn to the broad issue of nonhuman animal representation in literature to ensure that my argument remains grounded in a literary context.

Nonhuman animals have been referenced in literature since the earliest epics and oral traditions, such as the 'de-beasting' of Enkidu in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, or the call for Adam to label and categorize nonhuman animals in the story of Genesis. As Mario Ortiz Robles posits, "animals are as old as literature," for one can easily identify the myriad of nonhuman species that have served the role of "the privileged presences that show us how to be human" (2). Today, U.S. literature is still teeming with nonhuman animals as background characters, mere puppets acting out human storylines, behaviors, and ideologies. From being represented

as primary fixtures in children's literature and fables, to standing in as poetic objects used to create metaphoric meaning to express human desires or invoke a naturalized 'pastoral' setting, other animals are largely represented in literature as tools for teaching and policing human behavior. Where in literature, however, do nonhuman animals exist outside of anthropocentric metaphors? Where is literature that serves to benefit nonhuman animals? How can writing positively affect the lives of nonhuman animals and the state of our shared environment? These are examples of the guiding questions that have fueled my research, leading me to explore my understanding of what vegan poetics would involve in the context of *Literature for Nonhumans*.

The need for a vegan poetics is most notably seen in the mistakes of ecopoetry that paradoxically eschew addressing the U.S.'s industrialized and culturally supported institution of eating nonhuman animals. Interestingly, Gabriel Gudding once identified as an ecopoet. However, once he became educated on the connection between climate change, factory farming, and the patriarchal oppression of non-male bodies, Gudding's poetry began to interrogate the premises of ecopoets and philosophers that the author of *Literature for Nonhumans* interprets as being "ethical misers." As hinted at, Gudding's relationship to ecopoetry is complicated. By the definition of self-proclaimed ecopoet Jonathan Skinner, "ecopoetics," is a complex field of writing not necessarily confined to one central ecological focus, such as the literary trope of the pastoral or critiques of "green" discourse ("What is Ecopoetics?"). As Skinner states, a common interest among ecopoets is "humanity's ethically challenged relation to other animals," in addition to the larger thematic issue of climate change ("What is Ecopoetics?"). Let it be noted that ecopoetics, in the way Skinner and other writers belonging to the genre define it, includes both ecopoetry and the stylized formal

choices also commonly referred to as “poetics” which these collective authors share.

Although the field identifies itself as ecopoetics, for the sake of clarity in my discussion on poetic techniques, I use “ecopoetry” to reference this genre of environmentally focused poetry and essays.

*The Arcadia Project: North American Postmodern Pastoral*, published in 2012 and boasting nearly six-hundred pages of ecopoetry as collected from over one-hundred different poets, is one of the largest ecopoetry anthologies to date. Since Skinner, one of the anthology’s contributors, identifies ecopoetry as being interested in “humanity’s ethically challenged relation to other animals,” I was surprised to find almost no mentions of factory farming (“What is Ecopoetics?”). While I am not implying that this one anthology accurately represents the entire genre of ecopoetry, it is troubling that in such a large and diverse anthology on the “postmodern pastoral” there would be so little space given to acknowledging the suffering of nonhuman animals and how their fates are linked to our own. As mentioned, Gudding has had a similar experience with ecopoetry anthologies and collections. The limited material from *The Arcadia Project* that does discuss the suffering of nonhuman animals was written by Gudding. In fact variations of his work presented in this anthology later became pieces of *Literature for Nonhumans* in 2015.

The appearance of Gudding’s poetry as one of the few flickers of acknowledgment of factory farm animals in this extensive ecopoetry anthology initially alerted me to this unexpected tension between ecopoetry and veganism. Gudding explicitly addresses this tension in *Literature for Nonhumans*, through arguing that the effects of factory farming, while notably devastating to our shared environment, remain largely under-addressed in the genre of ecopoetry (108). Generally, Gudding finds “[t]he majority of critical theorists, poets,

and ecologists who speak of biopower, ecopoetics, animal welfare and factory farming still willfully take pleasure in the brutalization of our most other others” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 108).

With Gudding’s difficult relationship to the genre of ecopoetry, I find it to be odd that Skinner, an established ecopoet, authored the blurb that takes up half of the back cover of *Literature for Nonhumans*. In his blurb, Skinner praises Gudding’s poetry for not avoiding the topic of consuming animal flesh. Skinner acknowledges Gudding’s approach to presenting environmental issues as entangled with factory farming as unique yet appropriate. Through *Literature for Nonhumans* confronting what Skinner refers to in his blurb as “the massive contradiction of the slaughterhouse,” Gudding’s work stands out from the majority of other ecopoets, and Skinner accuses these poets as observing “specious eco correctness” that keeps them from addressing the controversial topic of veganism. If “eco correctness” speaks to avoiding topics that could be interpreted as offensive to some, then Skinner is right in his assessment of Gudding’s lack of ‘correctness.’ In the afterword of *Literature for Nonhumans*, Gudding does not hold anything back in his critique of the anthropocentric contradictions rampant in ecopoetry. He writes:

If the nonhuman animal is substantively mentioned in an essay on ecopoetics today, it invariably is the wild, well-named bird or the cold fox in the threatened stream. It is not the 50 million cows who are hung in the nation of the buffalo annually by a back leg. Nor the 8.3 million chickens raised as balloons of protein above aquifers and thrown each year throughout the United States. Or the 60 billion animals worldwide whose bodies annually are littered everywhere from our alimential interiors to the

news stands of airports, and whose systematic and incessant slaughter is the single greatest driver of global climate change. (*Literature for Nonhumans* 110)

Reading Gudding's work in *The Arcadia Project* motivated me to seek out more of his work in hopes of discovering more poetry that discusses factory farming, climate change, and veganism while maintaining a high level of poetic craft. Thus, beginning with ecopoetry, much like Gudding's own journey as a poet, I was then led to *Literature for Nonhumans*, a text which inspired me to consider how poetry can perform veganism. Having finished my current discussion of ecopoetry, I will now establish how this thesis uses terms such as "vegan," "poetics," and "carnism."

In proposing *Literature for Nonhumans* as a model of vegan poetics, I must first explicitly define how I employ the word "vegan." The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the dietary choice of being vegan as a person who "abstains from all food of animal origin and avoids the use of animal products in other forms" ("vegan, n.2"). As is understood from this definition, to enact veganism in a corporeal sense, one does not consume the bodies or products of nonhuman animals. Veganism as a broader and politicized ideology also often involves a mentality that refuses to view nonhuman animals through the objectifying lens of "meat," but instead as individual beings with a purpose outside of becoming commodities for human use.

In her formative work that sets the stage for academic vegan discourse, *The Vegan Studies Project: Food, Animals, and Gender in the Age of Terror*, Laura Wright defines the complex and "contradictory category of vegan" as involving "both identity and practice" (1). Wright's two-pronged definition of a "vegan" claims that by taking on the practices of the "nonnormative position" of a vegan, one also becomes part of the vegan "identity category,"

which Wright explains as being much “like those that constitute race, sexual orientation, national origin, and religion, for example” (1, 6). In her social, cultural, and historical approach to exploring what it means to be vegan post-9/11, Wright’s *The Vegan Studies Project* proposes a much more in-depth contextualizing of the multiple forms veganism may take, specifically related to the varying reasons *why* an individual may become vegan than is discussed in this thesis. My work aligns with Wright’s in sharing the understanding that to be a vegan is not one definitive identity shared by all who practice veganism, for as Wright makes clear, “[v]egan identity is deeply invested in and embroiled with the stories we tell ourselves about nonhuman animals, our beliefs about gender, race, and sexual orientation, and our concepts of nationalism, American-ness, and good and evil” (174). For my purposes, however, I will be using the identifier of “vegan” more narrowly to refer to a dietary extension of ecofeminist activism and ideology. While the scope of this thesis does not allow space for making all of the important connections that Wright makes in *The Vegan Studies Project*, the arguments I present throughout this text are compatible with Wright’s findings. By drawing on Wright’s definition of veganism as a combination of identity and practice, I find that the composition of *Literature for Nonhumans* represents a fusion of vegan identity and practice because it employs poetry as a method of pro-vegan activism.

In the way I am framing it, one of the key elements of vegan poetics is the way it resituates nonhuman animals, specifically factory farm animals, into conversations about veganism and environmental concern. With ‘fad veganism’ and celebrity veganism that boast of weight loss and other elements of human enrichment, it is easy for nonhuman animals to become invisible even in discussions of veganism. Ironically, animals “have disappeared from the cultural understanding of veganism,” according to Carol J. Adams, which is due, in

part, to the alignment of Hollywood fitness trends with plant-based diets (“Foreword” xiii). While one’s individual decision to become vegan may not be related to animal activism, it cannot be ignored that plant-based lifestyles are benefitting the lives of nonhuman animals—and the state of our planet—by lessening the demand for industries to mass produce nonhuman animals as commodities. Drawing mainly from Wright’s premise that “[v]egan identity is deeply invested in and embroiled with the stories we tell ourselves about nonhuman animals,” I will be applying the following concept to my definition of ‘vegan’ throughout this thesis: the act of an individual choosing what, or rather, *who* they will not consume in a literal sense, also connects to the choices one makes in discussing and representing nonhuman animals through language due to the shift in perspective. I understand vegan poetics as a style of literature that is created only when the author’s identity as a vegan shapes how they view and, in turn, write about nonhuman animals. In this way, vegan poetics utilizes Carol J. Adams’ theory of the absent referent of meat in order to change how readers see nonhuman animals. To achieve this goal of undoing the cultural system that conceptualizes nonhuman animals as “food,” vegan poetics must be embodied—not only embodied through the author actively refraining from putting animal flesh into their bodies, but also through the poetry’s presentation of nonhuman animals as agentic and whole bodies that house individual identities.

In exploring elements of vegan poetics, this thesis creates space within literature for nonhuman animals to exist, beyond metaphors, as whole, embodied individuals. In her foreword to Wright’s *The Vegan Studies Project*, respected ecofeminist scholar Carol J. Adams “celebrate[s] that Laura [Wright] restores the absent referent of animals back into veganism” (xiii). Restoring nonhuman animals into the discourse on veganism and also

climate change discourse is one of the main components of vegan poetics that I see Gudding enacting in *Literature for Nonhumans*, as I will explore further in my following chapters.

During the early stages of conceptualizing this thesis, my research was guided by a central question: can the perspective of veganism noticeably manifest in writing? This question then led me to consider what qualities of *Literature for Nonhumans* separate the poems from other creative writing that uses nonhuman animals as a symbolic means to a metaphoric end. With Gudding's *Literature for Nonhumans* as my primary sample for literary analysis, this thesis attempts to answer these questions about how a morally and environmentally driven refusal to objectify or consume nonhuman animals may translate into, and affect, both the formal structuring and content of a poem.

*Literature for Nonhumans* not only opposes the practice of eating nonhuman animals but also the culture of meat-eating that encourages this practice. Throughout this thesis, I refer to this culture of meat eating as carnism. According to Melanie Joy, “we eat animals without thinking about what we are doing and why because the belief system that underlies this behavior is invisible. This invisible belief system is what I call *carnism*” (29). Due to its invisibility in popular culture, carnism disguises flesh eating as normative behavior in order to shroud the identities and suffering of the nonhuman animals who are being consumed daily on a mass scale. In this way, “the selective visibility of the animal—everywhere visible in culture and the popular imagination, yet hidden from view in factory farms, laboratories, and high art—suggests something else about our complicated relationship to animals: that it is also socially determined” (Robles 9). The dominant culture in the U.S. keeps carnism unnamed and invisible: “we can’t talk about it, and if we can’t talk about it, we can’t question it” (Joy 32). As I will show in this thesis, *Literature for Nonhumans* enacts vegan



poetics to expose and then actively dismantle carnism.

My overarching argument for *Literature for Nonhumans* as an example of vegan poetics is built around my framing of poetics as rhetorical strategies that appear in the genre of poetry. *Literature for Nonhumans* is mostly comprised of prose poems, although a few poems deviate from this style, and the text's afterword features several short essays. As Gudding shared with me in a personal interview, he "consider[s] much of the writing in the book 'historiographic prose poetry.'" *Literature for Nonhumans* is thus a hybrid genre of poetic essays that demands literary analysis that is not limited to formal understandings of poetics and prosody. When I asked Gudding about the poetics of *Literature for Nonhumans*, he responded:

I happen to think that the value of a piece of literature is rooted less in its stylistic dimension and foremost in what the piece of literature says, the kind of cultural work it does: its manner of conveying that meaning should be secondary to its stylistic and formal features, thus even those elements considered more stylistic than not (lineation or lyricism) can themselves be expository and bear annotation. (Personal Interview)

Yes, *Literature for Nonhumans* is a collection of poems; however, it is evident that Gudding values content and a text's message over its "stylistic" or poetic dimension. Any genre can participate in dismantling carnism, but *vegan poetics* refers to this cultural work that Gudding prioritizes over form manifesting in the specific genre of poetry. Although Gudding claims to not prioritize formal poetic techniques or prosody in his work, this is not to say that *Literature for Nonhumans* is devoid of poetic qualities. As Gudding makes clear, "[t]he idea that literature should be written to benefit nonhumans is new" (*Literature for Nonhumans* 114). Therefore, it follows that my approach for discussing this groundbreaking poetic

attempt at writing *for* nonhuman animals must be different from past approaches to poetry analysis.

In the afterword of *Literature for Nonhumans*, Gudding analyzes Book IV of *The Poetics* to expose Aristotle's style for poetic analysis as framed on the belief that "literature's purview is the imitation of the actions of men and gods" (*Literature for Nonhumans* 114). It would be contradictory to try and approach Gudding's text through the speciesist lens of Aristototle's *The Poetics*. Gudding concludes from his reading of *The Poetics*, Plato's *The Republic*, Sir Philip Sydney's *Defence*, and works of other western literary critics that nonhuman animals are not a concern of what past scholarship has deemed to be "permissible" or legitimate literature (*Literature for Nonhumans* 114). In the afterword, Gudding comes to the conclusion that since the initiation of humanist thought, "the project of literature is *humanity's* improvement. Full stop." (*Literature for Nonhumans* 114). Clearly, nonhuman animals are excluded from this western grouping of humanity, but in Aristotle's treatise on poetics, humans who do not belong to the male gender are also excluded. In Book XV of *The Poetics*, we find an explicit example of Aristotle's sexist and oppressive rhetoric while he is giving his four rules for composing characters. He argues that a "character must be true to life," and, consequently, he finds that "There is a type of manly valour; but valour in a woman, or unscrupulous cleverness, is inappropriate" (par. 4, 1). To employ Aristotle in my reading of *Literature for Nonhumans* would be incongruous with the intersectional and inclusionary nature of Gudding's text. Therefore, due to its hybrid generic qualities, ecofeminist perspective, and revolutionary nature, I find that the most productive way to engage with *Literature for Nonhumans* is to use a critical approach that expands the definition of "poetics" beyond Aristotle's problematic treatise.

My understanding of poetics as connected to rhetoric has been influenced by the work of I. A. Richards, specifically his well-known text, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. In this text, Richards posits that metaphor, commonly understood as a poetic device, is rhetorical due to it being “the omnipresent principle in language,” according to his theory that the metaphors we avoid using influence or “steer our thought as much as those we accept” (92). Along these lines, my reading of *Literature for Nonhumans* recognizes the text’s lack of anthropocentric and carnist metaphors as a component of vegan poetics. From Richards’ influence, my understanding of poetics expands beyond prosody and line breaks to include the strategies Gudding uses in *Literature for Nonhumans* to reassign embodied meaning to carnist culture’s fragmented and consumable representations of factory farm animals. For example, I find that Gudding’s representations of nonhuman animals consistently push back against the linguistic and cultural phenomena Carol J. Adams coins as the absent of referent of meat. Moving toward familiarizing my reader with Carol J. Adams’ many groundbreaking contributions to the fields of ecofeminism and critical animal studies, I will now review the scholarship responsible for influencing my methodology.

While vegan poetics may be a new concept, this thesis is supported by the scholarship of others. To conduct my reading of *Literature for Nonhumans*, I rely on the work of ecofeminist scholars such as Adams and Lori Gruen. My methodology for analysis also calls upon scholarship from the still-emerging field of vegan studies through employment of Wright’s work. In the introduction of her distinctive text which initiates vegan studies as an academic discourse, Wright indicates her project’s framing mission as a means to explore and challenge negative representations of veganism in popular culture (1). For instance, through analysis of popular culture phenomena such as the American television series *Buffy*

*the Vampire Slayer* and *True Blood*, Wright explores how dominant culture uses media to define veganism negatively in order to bolster support for carnism.

Like Wright's work, my analysis of *Literature for Nonhumans* strives to create more space within the academy to discuss veganism. As mentioned, although this thesis presents new ideas, it does rely on the past scholarship of others in order to establish foundational concepts so that I may expand my analysis toward new discoveries. In her introductory remarks on her text's methodology, Wright defines vegan studies as being both "within and outside of extant conceptions of [critical] animal studies, animal welfare/rights/liberation, and ecofeminism" (2). By this definition, vegan studies is a multifaceted field that combines elements from multiple academic discourses. Consequently, to perform a vegan studies analysis on literature is to take an interdisciplinary approach substantially involved with numerous levels of syntheses. With a text as complex, interdisciplinary, and genre-mixing as *Literature for Nonhumans*, it is congruent for my analysis to follow the interdisciplinary model of vegan studies scholarship set forth by Wright's *The Vegan Studies Project*.

As *Literature for Nonhumans* undoubtedly involves nonhuman animals, one may assume that the theoretical lens I will use to analyze Gudding's text would be largely involved with critical animal studies. However, while critical animal studies scholarship does deal with interspecies interactions and dynamics, I find the field to be subsidiary to my reading of *Literature for Nonhumans* when compared to ecofeminist theory. I find ecofeminist scholarship, on the other hand, explicitly necessary to my analysis of Gudding's work. I will now expatiate my reasoning behind using ecofeminism as my primary theoretical lens.

For over a century, ecofeminists have been examining and deconstructing

conventions of human-animal relationships, speciesism as a form of oppression that warrants feminist concern, and the ethics of veganism and vegetarianism. For example, as early as 1892, feminist writer Edith Ward argued that “the case of the animal is the case of the woman,” laying the foundation for ecofeminist inquiry into human-animal relationships (qtd. in “Groundwork” 7). According to two of the leading voices in ecofeminist discourse, Carol Adams and Lori Gruen, ecofeminism is a discourse which “addresses the various ways that sexism, heteronormativity, racism, colonialism, and ableism are informed by and support speciesism and how analyzing the ways these forces intersect can produce less violent, more just practice” (“Introduction” 1). To summarize, ecofeminism is an intersectional approach to feminism that attempts to broaden understandings across species borders of what it means to exist in a world of intersecting oppressions. Ecofeminism labels the industrialized institution of eating animals as a patriarchal system of oppression. Ecofeminist theory argues that the oppression of women is connected to the oppression of factory farm animals in the similar way that these systems of oppression function and intersect.

The connection between feminism and veganism that ecofeminism postulates is apparent throughout *Literature for Nonhumans*. For example, in a footnote from the collection’s fifth poem, “Jeremiad,” Gudding is explicit in his ecofeminist interpretation of the factory farming industry by quoting ecofeminist Carolyn Zaikowski: “animal farming is the most large-scale, institutionalized control of female reproduction, sex, and bodies-in-general that has ever existed” (qtd. in *Literature for Nonhumans* 28). By prioritizing ecofeminism over critical animal studies in this thesis, I am pushing back against the stigmas surrounding ecofeminism, especially vegan-ecofeminism, that both the academy and popular culture have perpetuated. However, this is not to imply that all ecofeminists practice

veganism or to force a rhetoric of universal veganism. For ecofeminist philosopher Dean Curtin, “contextual moral vegetarianism” is the answer, which implies that in contexts where individuals have the means to practice vegetarianism and veganism, they should (*Environmental Ethics* 143). Curtin also notes that “to choose one’s diet in a patriarchal culture...marks a daily bodily commitment to resist ideological pressure,” meaning that no one’s individually made choice of what they put into their bodies should be shamed or given less value (“Toward an Ecological” 71). To speak broadly, ecofeminism serves to explore binaries that situate cultural conventions aligned with female bodies as less valuable than their male counterparts, and to address these binaries, ecofeminism views all oppressions as linked, which makes the discourse complex and unable to posit universal answers (Wright 17). In the words of Adams and Gruen, “[e]cofeminist theory helps us imagine healthier relationships” with others, humans and nonhumans alike (“Introduction” 1). Yet the majority of ecofeminist scholars that study human-animal relationships and concepts, such as speciesism, are often ignored in favor of the more recently popularized, male-dominated field of critical animal studies.

In her informative essay, “Pussy Panic versus Liking Animals: Gender in Animal Studies,” Susan Fraiman traces the history of and then comments on this troubling pattern of feminist explorations into human-animal relationships being omitted from the larger discourse on nonhuman animals. She concludes:

If Derridean animal studies seems poised to corner the contemporary market, I am troubled in part by its revisionary history—the way an origin story beginning in 2002 [Derrida’s “The Animal that therefore I am (more to follow)”] serves to eclipse the body of animal scholarship loosely referenced above, dozens of books going back

some forty years, long before Derrida's essay was brought to the attention of English speakers. Much of this pioneering work was by women and feminists—a significant portion under the rubric of ecofeminism—and all of it arose in dialogue with late-century liberation movements, including the second wave women's movement. (92)

As an ecofeminist myself, whose research largely involves cultural representations of nonhuman animals, this sexist, revisionist history of critical animal studies that Fraiman confronts is something that I want my own scholarship to actively push back against. On this note, in her introduction to *The Vegan Studies Project*, Wright continues Fraiman's argument in the context of the future of vegan studies. Wright justifies why it is important for vegan studies to be more within the frame of ecofeminism rather than critical animal studies:

The absence of the ecofeminist perspective that has as long a history as animal studies indicates a troubling dismissal of such a position's tenets and shows how, in terms of Adams's absent referent, repackaging and renaming can constitute a dangerous erasure that removes from view that which is of primary importance: as Adams notes, "meat" renders "animals" absent. I would argue that "animal studies" does the same thing to "ecofeminism." (Wright 16).

Following Wright's model for a vegan studies project that relies primarily on ecofeminism, this thesis rejects the misconception that non-ecofeminist and often male scholars "appear to invent, as is if for the first time, the field of animal studies" without acknowledging the ecofeminists that were integral to forming the foundation (Wright 17). As the tenets of ecofeminism oppose binary structures that require a definitive 'this' or 'that' approach rather than more inclusionary methods, I am not presenting this information about the relationship between critical animal studies and ecofeminism in order to assert that one field of study is

more legitimate than the other. I am, however, clarifying why I closer align my approach to discussing nonhuman animals with ecofeminist thought.

Having justified why ecofeminism is the primary influence for my methodology, I will now introduce specific concepts and theories from the groundbreaking work of Carol J. Adams, whose work is the primary influence on my understanding of vegan poetics. Before the term carnism was coined, there was Carol J. Adams' pivotal work, originally published in 1990, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*. In this text, Adams proposes that "the absent referent" be used in the discussion surrounding the practice of mass consuming nonhuman animals through factory farming and agribusiness. Adams' concept of the absent referent of meat has largely informed my reading of *Literature for Nonhumans*, as has her extensive work on how nonhuman animal bodies and human consumption of nonhuman animals is constructed in U.S. culture. Hence, Adams' work acts as my primary theoretical frame throughout this thesis, as her work has guided me towards exploring what a vegan poetics would exhibit. In short, the main argument of *The Sexual Politics of Meat* articulates that the process of referring to nonhuman animals as "meat" or "food" is a manipulation of language that propagates the habit of inflicting, and then ignoring, violence towards nonhuman animals, which then connects in a complicated way to violence toward human women (40). For my literary purposes, it is important to note that the nonhuman animal as the absent referent of meat functions linguistically—through 'meat,' the subject of the animal is no longer present, and an object is signified in the place of nonhuman animals. Through the act of butchering, adult cows become "beef," male calves are then re-defined as "veal," sheep are viewed as "mutton," and pigs as living beings are erased through the use of the objectifying term "pork" (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 41-42). By applying the



absent referent to cultural eating patterns, Adams' work elucidates that the practice of eating meat habitually permits the "forget[ing] about the animal as an independent entity; [and] it also enables us to resist efforts to make animals present" (*The Sexual Politics* 42).

In 1994, Adams' *Neither Man nor Beast* expands her concept of the absent referent of meat through adding Willard Quine's concept of mass terms to her own theory. While the absent referent of meat indicates that the animal as a living being has been removed from the meaning of "meat," this process of making animals absent also functions as a mass term for "meat" points to an unknown amount of beings that have been reduced to the status of objects that "have no individuality, no uniqueness, no specificity, no particularity," and are thus grouped together into one indistinguishable food object (*Neither Man* 27). Adams points out that one of the consequences of applying mass terms to factory farm animals is that eating nonhuman animals is not understood by carnivorous humans as an interaction with an individual animal, another being. Through the power the absent referent of meat gains in being connected to a mass term, instead this intimate act of consuming and digesting another being "has been renamed as contact with food," contact with an *it* (28).

Another element of *The Sexual Politics of Meat* that is relevant to this thesis is Adams' retrieval and close-reading of literary works by and about vegans for the purpose of restoring their often-overlooked radical identities which the dominant culture has tried to erase. In this way, Adams discusses the presence of the absent referent in literature such as Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Greek mythology, and Sinclair's *The Jungle*; however, Adams does not explore poetry's relationship with the absent referent of meat. Whereas Laura Wright expands the discourse of veganism set forth by Adams and other ecofeminists to explore current popular culture post-9/11, my thesis enters where the discussion of literature and

veganism leaves off in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, by extending Adams' concepts to the genre of poetry. Therefore, using Adams' work as a key element in my approach to analyzing *Literature for Nonhumans* reveals that the composition of Gudding's text acts to deconstruct and reject mass terms and the absent referent of meat by using avoiding linguistic strategies that are often employed by carnists to oppress nonhuman animals. In direct opposition to the linguistic patterns of carnism, *Literature for Nonhumans*, as influenced by veganism, is an attempt at composing poetry for the benefit of nonhuman animals by representing them as whole, embodied beings capable of individuality.

In my research, I have found only one poetry collection that expresses the connection between veganism and climate justice: Gabriel Gudding's *Literature for Nonhumans*. In a personal interview, Gudding shared with me that he constructed *Literature for Nonhumans* as "a critique of meat eating [that] advocates for nonhuman beings" (Personal interview). As a vegan, Gudding interprets the low number of vegans in the U.S. as an effect of the ever-growing industrialization of the meat, dairy, and poultry industries, as well as the truth of the inner workings of the slaughterhouse not being seen or addressed by the vast majority of meat eaters: "We don't want to look at ...what we do to sustain the kind of brutality and apathy (necessary) to eat that way" (qtd. in Valente). Gudding's understanding of the covering up of the slaughterhouse that occurs in U.S. culture leads him to structure the poetics of *Literature for Nonhumans* differently than other forms of ecopoetry, and I will argue that it is due to this intentional poetic structuring that *Literature for Nonhumans* is able to address both factory farm animal suffering and climate change simultaneously and coherently. As *Literature for Nonhumans* makes apparent, these seemingly separate issues of animal exploitation and climate change, unfortunately, are tributaries of the same larger

problem: anthropocentrism and carnism. While I do not want to imply that every poem with an environmental focus must reference factory farms and the nonhuman animals that are killed there, I do want to question why eco poets have decided to indirectly support carnism through not acknowledging its link to climate change. Due to the collection's unique fusion of veganism, ecological concern, and poetry, I find that an ecofeminist vegan studies analysis of *Literature for Nonhumans* opens the door for understanding a new strategy for writing poetry, one that combines scholarly-informed climate justice and animal rights activism: vegan poetics.

In my first chapter, "The Surfacing of the Absent Referents of Meat after Hurricane Florence," I explore and interpret the popular media responses to the effects of hurricane Florence on the nonhuman animal farming industry in North Carolina. Through an application of the ecofeminist methodology that I will be using to analyze *Literature for Nonhumans* in later chapters, this first chapter's critical engagement with the effects of hurricane Florence acts to further expand upon the preliminary explanations of my terminology and methodology from this introduction. Expanding this discussion into the realm of current events, this first chapter highlights—through contemporary context—the relevance of *Literature for Nonhumans*, ecofeminist theories, and vegan studies.

The second chapter, "Entering the Slaughterhouse through *Literature for Nonhumans*," discusses a series of poems from *Literature for Nonhumans* in order to showcase how the individual poems are interrelated, for when read together, they present a more nuanced understanding of the themes and motifs explored throughout. In the beginning of this chapter, I work through the text chronologically; however, as the prevalent themes and patterns begin to emerge, the organization of the chapter becomes guided by thematic

associations as I work to unpack how the text exhibits my definition of vegan poetics.

In my third chapter, ““You, are a sister of that chicken and that / chicken’:  
Concluding Remarks and Thoughts on Finding Connections to Other Animals through Joy,” I reflect on this concept of vegan poetics by summarizing the categories of the genre that I have identified from my reading of *Literature for Nonhumans*. Looking forward to future discussions of vegan poetics, this chapter presents Deborah Slicer’s article, “Joy,” as a frame for beginning a dialogue on undoing the absent referent through joyful interspecies interactions. Through engagement with Slicer’s text, this closing chapter reminds that while humans need to empathize with the suffering of other animals and stop causing their pain, we also need to positively relate to other animals through sharing joyful, and sometimes humorous moments with one another. To this end, in order to be truly embodied and well-rounded, vegan poetics must also speak to the joys of living alongside other animals in addition to acknowledging the pain factory farming has inflicted upon nonhuman animals and the environment. Turning back to hurricane Florence, this chapter presents an applied example of recognizing and sharing in the joy experienced by other animals.

## **Chapter 1: The Surfacing of the Absent Referents of Meat after Hurricane Florence**

September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018, hurricane Florence made landfall on the coast of North Carolina. Over the next several days, Florence drenched the state from the coast to the mountains with eight trillion tons of rainwater, according to the National Weather Service (@NWSRaleigh). Once the rain stopped, however, the impact of Florence did not end. As the storm clouds dissipated, both local and national news programs announced the state's tragic loss: 39 dead. For the duration of September, I watched as many news networks continually broadcasted hurricane Florence's death toll, and hundreds of people on my Facebook news feed shared web articles with the sensational, stark headline: 39 dead. In an attempt to boost morale as the state mourned and began to rebuild, news networks provided heartwarming relief through brave stories of human owners risking their lives to rescue cats and dogs, their "furry friends," from the floodwaters. The impact Florence had on nonhuman animals raised as "food," however, was ignored by mainstream concern.

As a result of not being evacuated before the deluge, approximately 3.4 million chickens and 5,500 pigs died in hurricane Florence (North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services). Some drowned, some starved, some were crushed by the collapse of buildings—but none were accounted for or remembered in the death toll of 39 Carolinians. The flooding of Florence passed, and in its wake, millions of chicken and pig corpses floated to the surface.

A few days after hurricane Florence hit NC, images began to surface of CAFOs almost completely submerged underwater. According to the October 6<sup>th</sup> report from the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, 32 "lagoons" of pig feces, urine, and "waste" have overflowed into surrounding areas, with an additional 15 "lagoons" having "no

room for material in the lagoon, overtopping likely” (“Animal Operations—Swine Lagoons”). While the NC Pork Council released vague statements downplaying the environmental effects of this waste overflow due to rainwater possibly diluting the waste, a different narrative has emerged from recent photographic evidence released by NASA. Using satellite images from September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Joshua Stevens, NASA data visualizer and cartographer, identifies “dark plumes” of carbon-based pollution “shooting into the Atlantic” from NC waterways as a result of the 32 waste ‘lagoons’ overflowing (@jscarto). In order to function, carnism requires that evidence such as Stevens’ remain submerged, unseen. While proponents of carnism, such as the NC Pork Council, attempt to diffuse and discount the negative impact the industrialized farming system has on the environment, the “dark plumes” of pollution spewing into waterways from factory farms can be seen and felt by those willing to look beyond the intentionally mystifying rhetorical strategies of carnism.

While a discussion of this natural phenomenon may initially seem unrelated to this project’s central topic of vegan poetics, analyzing the consequences of this event reinforces the connection between anthropogenic climate change and the eating of nonhuman animals, which is the ultimate concern at hand in *Literature for Nonhumans*. This chapter discusses the disturbing aftermath of hurricane Florence’s impact on factory farms in North Carolina. Formal analysis of Gudding’s text further exposes the factory farming industry’s toxic relationship to the environment it is destroying. Thus, I first present this contemporary analysis in order to show an applied model of the ecofeminist methodology and theoretical approach that I will apply to Gabriel Gudding’s *Literature for Nonhumans* in later chapters. Having defined some of the terms necessary for my analysis in the introduction, this chapter takes the next step toward finding vegan poetics by illustrating an application of these terms

in a way that highlights the relevance of the detrimental effects of factory farming that is at the heart of *Literature for Nonhumans*. The issues presented in Gudding's work are grounded in the current reality of climate change. Therefore, I find it constructive to preface poetic analysis of Gudding's poems with cultural studies analysis on the media presentation of the livestock animal casualties that occurred during hurricane Florence in order to remind my readers of the real consequences that his work addresses. This brief study of the revelations about factory farming that the floodwaters of Florence uncovered shows how increasingly pertinent the subject matter of *Literature for Nonhumans* is as we all near a sixth mass extinction.

*Literature for Nonhumans* was not originally intended to be a study of the ethics of factory farming but instead began as a poetry project interrogating the polluted state of Illinois rivers. In a personal interview, Gudding shared the trajectory of the journey of writing *Literature for Nonhumans*, a journey which begins with examples of "anthropogenic devastation" and leads to a focus on nonhuman animal suffering and how there is an interspecies connection between the fate of humans and other animals:

This book began as a means of addressing the anthropogenic devastation caused in Illinois, the state in which I currently reside. It initially sought to be a kind of *zuihitsu* about the ecological history of Illinois, centering on the history of the rivers here. That project eventually and necessarily involved writing about CAFOs and animal farming, and that in turn necessarily invoked a critique of meat eating and advocated for nonhuman beings. (Personal Interview)

In a similar model, this chapter begins the journey toward finding vegan poetics by first exploring the environmental issues catalyzed by hurricane Florence and then tracing the path

of pollution back to the factory farming industry and the surrounding culture of carnism. Witnessed through the lens of ecofeminism, we find the 3.4 million chickens and 5,500 pigs that died during hurricane Florence to be reminders of the often-forgotten presence and consequences of industrialized farming.

In a September 22<sup>nd</sup> Facebook post, Carol J. Adams of *The Sexual Politics of Meat* and most recently *Protest Kitchen: Fight Injustice, Save the Planet, and Fuel Your Resistance One Meal at a Time*, shared Michael Graff's article, "Millions of dead chickens and pigs found in hurricane floods." Graff's article in *The Guardian* addressed the aftermath of hurricane Florence, and Graff supported his report by featuring Jo-Anne McArthur's post-Florence photographs that exposed the hundreds of rotting chicken bodies floating amid debris in rural North Carolina. These photos showed nonhuman animal victims of the factory farming industry on a mass scale as the whole bodies of several million chickens intended for slaughter washed onto NC residents' front porches and lawns, their soggy feathers still attached to their skin. Through the inclusion of McArthur's photographs in Graff's article, the hurricane floods carried these corpses into the public sphere as embodied individuals, rather than as "nuggets" or "food." In her Facebook post sharing Graff's article, Adams wrote the following about McArthur's images of the drowned chickens: "Here are the #absentreferents of flesh eating. Powerful photographs by Jo-Anne McArthur for *The Guardian*. North Carolina has a huge number of CAFOs—animal factories. This is why animal flesh is so cheap. And this is the result. #protestkitchen." By sharing Graff's article and McArthur's images in tandem with her caption, Adams' Facebook post accentuates that the millions of chickens and pigs killed accidentally in hurricane Florence represent only a small percentage of the nonhuman animals that are murdered behind the closed doors of



industrialized abattoirs.

While McArthur's post-Florence photographs witness to some of the livestock animal deaths that occurred during the storm, the photographs do not fully account for the estimated 3.4 million chickens and 5,500 pigs that died in hurricane Florence. Millions of bodies from this incident remain unseen, lost forever in the floods and destruction. Adams' Facebook post targets the mass scale of factory farming as responsible for an environment in which 3.4 million chickens and 5,500 pigs can be killed in one storm. The ugly truth highlighted by this storm is that the number of livestock animal deaths catalyzed by hurricane Florence is small in comparison to the number of animals slaughtered annually in factory farms. The 3.4 million chickens that perished in hurricane Florence account for less than 1% of the 830 million chickens slaughtered in North Carolina factories in 2017 alone (Piper par. 4). Addressing the nonhuman animal deaths attributed to hurricane Florence alongside the incomprehensible scale of the factory farming industry just in North Carolina elucidates the overwhelming size of this global industry. As Adams argues in her Facebook post, the size of this industrialized system of slaughter in which over 3.4 million deaths do not even account for 1% of the annual slaughter in one state in the US is to blame for "why animal flesh is so cheap." On average, chickens born into this industry are only given 6-week maximum life expectancies to be lived out in miserable conditions before they are slaughtered and transformed into edible products. Hurricane Florence did not cause the deaths of any factory farm animals; it merely catalyzed a few million deaths that were already pending. From a carnist perspective, hurricane Florence simply accelerated the expiration dates that had been stamped on these animals since before their births. This implied expiration date given to animals born into the factory farming industry leads Carol J. Adams to rename them in her

writing as “terminal animals.” In a culture made up primarily of flesh eaters that are not concerned with *if* a nonhuman animal dies, but rather *when*, it is not surprising that the livestock animal victims of hurricane Florence were forgotten by mainstream concern. The culture of carnism is not only responsible for the wasteful deaths of the 3.4 million chickens and 5,500 hogs in North Carolina but is also the reason why these deaths were not reported in mainstream news headlines. Carnist culture labels these deaths, if they mention them at all, as a waste of profitable product, not a loss of life. Let it be noted that although Adams does not use the term “carnism,” in the way I employ and interpret Melanie Joy’s term reinforces my argument about *Literature for Nonhumans* because I use it to acknowledge the ideology behind the system of factory farming that causes the linguistic and symbolic phenomena of animals as absent referents that is interrogated in Adams’ work.

Adams’ Facebook post refers to the 3.4 million chickens and 5,500 pigs as “absent referents of flesh eating.” In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams presents the absent referent as a semiotic analysis of how factory farm animals, the signified, have become absent through the normalized use of linguistic signifiers that transform their butchered bodies into “meat,” “pork,” and “food” (40). Adams makes the connection that while the act of butchering animals makes them “literally absent because they are dead,” these animals become further removed from the act of being eaten by how our language converts factory farm animals from living beings into commodified food objects (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 40). According to Adams’ theory, nonhuman animals are absent referents in the practice and culture of slaughter: “when we eat animals, we change the way we talk about them, for instance we no longer eat baby animals but veal or meat” (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 42). Through this process of killing animals and then understanding their bodies as “food” rather

than corpses, “animals are removed from the idea of meat,” meaning that no longer is someone eaten, but *something* (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 47). Thus, carnism utilizes and perpetuates a “cycle of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption” (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 47). The dominant culture in the US asserts flesh eating as the norm. As Adams finds, the culture surrounding factory farming, “permits us to forget about the animal as an independent entity; it also enables us to resist efforts to make animals present” (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 42). By making animals absent from the idea of meat, human society is able to become removed from any responsibility for the animals’ deaths. Thus, it is not surprising that 3.4 million chickens and 5,500 pigs would be left out of the Florence death counts from mainstream news networks, for to acknowledge these deaths is to first witness and then be held accountable for the 830 million chickens and the untold number of hogs slaughtered in NC factories just in 2017 (Piper par. 4).

While the absent referent refers to the linguistic and metaphoric ability to hide and distract from the staggering amount of slaughter occurring daily, it also involves “mass terms” and their ability to encourage humans to disassociate from the reality of who their “food” once was or how animals become “food.” In *Neither Man nor Beast*, Adams addresses mass terms as contributing to the culture surrounding factory farming that makes nonhuman animals absent from the act of humans eating animals. Adams argues the following:

When we turn an animal into ‘meat,’ someone who has a very particular, situated life, a unique being, is converted into something that has no distinctiveness, no uniqueness, no individuality. When you add five pounds of hamburger to a plate of hamburger, it is more of the same thing, nothing is changed. But if you have a living

cow in front of you, and you kill that cow, and butcher that cow, and grind up her corpse, you have not added a mass term to a mass term and ended up with more of the same. (*Neither Man nor Beast* 27)

Mass terms, such as “meat” and even “factory farm animals,” lead to ambiguous groupings that avoid associations of individuality. As Adams shows, having “more of the same thing” does not add any additional concern, for it then appears that “nothing is changed” (*Neither Man nor Beast* 27). The logic of mass terms would ask the following: how are the deaths of 3.4 million chickens more relevant or concerning than the 50 billion chickens slaughtered globally each year? Using mass terms, this question undermines the individual uniqueness of each death recorded amidst millions and billions of similar but not identical deaths. This cultural pattern of making the nonhuman animals we eat absent from the discourse of flesh-eating through mass terms has allowed the proliferation of the factory farming system to grow to its current overwhelming and practically incomprehensible size. The number of nonhuman animals slaughtered for consumption is a reality that the average citizen of an industrialized region does not have to face.

In a personal interview, I asked Gudding his thoughts on using mass terms to refer to nonhuman animals, specifically those who are slaughtered for consumption, to which he replied, “[w]ell, anytime we consider a living being an object or a commodity, we're in troubled waters. We see similar problems when we consider human beings in the aggregate: treating individual persons according to the traits of the larger populations to which they belong is one of the key features of racism and nationalism.” As a result of nonhuman animals being reduced to mass terms and absent referents in carnist cultures, the slaughter that occurs around the clock goes unnoticed by the majority of the U.S. population. The

widespread use of mass terms allows violent, oppressive behavior to occur without attracting much alarm or pushback. The lack of awareness the mass terms propagate leads those who regularly consume nonhuman animal flesh to be shocked when brought face-to-face with an individual referent, feathers and all, like the millions of dead chickens that surfaced on front lawns across North Carolina after hurricane Florence.

While I have included the approximate number of chickens slaughtered in NC in 2017—830 million—I refer to the estimated number of pigs and hogs annually slaughtered in NC as “untold.” This number is factually inestimable because there has been a withholding of NC specific data in the USDA’s *Livestock Slaughter 2017 Summary* report. According to the information listed on their website, Smithfield Foods, the global leader in pork production, has contract-owned and company-owned pig and hog farms in 15 states in the U.S., Mexico, Poland, and Romania (“Our Operations”). There are 225 company-owned pig and hog farms in NC alone, meaning that the Tar Heel state accounts for over 40% of Smithfield’s company-owned pig and hog farms (“Our Operations”). While NC does not disclose their individual head count of hogs slaughtered in the USDA’s 2017 summary report, I assume based on the overwhelming number of Smithfield company-owned pig and hog farms in NC, that a significant portion of the over 120 million hogs slaughtered in the U.S. in 2017 once lived and died in NC (*Livestock Slaughter 2017 Summary*). This assumption is supported by the fact that The National Pork Board lists NC as holding one of the nation’s largest hog inventory populations, second only to Iowa (“State Rankings by Hog and Pig Inventory”). Yet the data of just how many hogs were slaughtered in NC last year has been intentionally lumped into the national number, denying the opportunity to individualize the mass term of “hogs, number of heads” that were slaughtered by even one

degree.

Graff's "Millions of dead chickens and pigs found in hurricane floods" highlights the hurricane's livestock animal death count to reflect upon the larger system of industrialized farming responsible for these conditions. Flesh eaters oblivious to where, or rather, *who* the 'meat' they eat comes from may read an article such as Graff's and wonder, how did this happen? The short answer is the absent referent. In her article surveying Hurricane Florence's effects on North Carolina's chicken and hog CAFOs, Kelsey Piper, a staff writer for *Vox*, indicates lack of awareness about the reality of factory farming as one of the contributing factors to why 3.4 million chickens and 5,500 hogs were found dead after Florence. The title of Piper's piece, "How 3.4 million chickens drowned in Hurricane Florence," gives a concise answer through its subheading: "Most Americans don't know how many chickens are raised on factory farms: up to 50 billion a year." Through this explicit statement, Piper destabilizes the absent referent of flesh eating by acknowledging that the existence of factory farm animals has become absent from the discourse on agribusiness. In Piper and Graff's articles, the animals living and dying inside of factory farms are no longer reduced to the status of referent; they have been made present. By writing that "most Americans" are unaware of the current state and breadth of factory farming, Piper calls out the culture surrounding flesh eating that encourages the erasure of the experiences and suffering of factory farm animals. In turn, Piper's acknowledgment of the absent referent in the very title of her article allows space for chickens to exist as individuals outside of the mass signifiers of 'meat' and 'food' that have overtaken their identities and masked the significance of their deaths. After outlining similar incidents—the 2005 bird flu epidemic that killed 26 million chickens in Iowa and the Brazil truck driver strike of May 2018 that

resulted in 70 million chickens dying of starvation—Piper asserts that the several million factory farm animal deaths in North Carolina in September of 2018 were not caused by a natural disaster, but by the unchecked growth of global agribusiness: “The millions of dead chickens floating in the floodwaters of Florence are just one of many ugly effects of our current agriculture system and its unprecedented scale” (par. 12).

Natural disasters do upset and interrupt daily rituals—they invade spaces where daily routines are enacted and demand that those affected address the disaster’s destruction in order to survive. Hurricane Florence interrupted the lives of billions of humans and nonhuman animals alike, bringing new perspectives to those who awoke on the other side of the storm. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams posits that “describing exactly how an animal dies, kicking and screaming, and is fragmented—disables consumption,” thus making the absent referent present (52). Simply put, the act of witnessing a nonhuman animal’s butchering helps restore the identity of consumed nonhuman animals to their fragmented, objectified bodies.

I find that the closing statement of Michael Graff’s article on Florence’s effects on the agricultural system reinforces Adams’ suggestion for witnessing as a necessary component to undoing the absent referent. Bringing his piece to a close, Graff mentions the reality that thousands of animal carcasses literally washed onto people’s doorsteps, asserting their presence: “Residents will return to destroyed homes, and many will discover dead chickens on their lawns and in sheds, legs askew, their faces down in the oily water” (par. 15). However, a true restoring of the referent cannot occur in this interspecies meeting that Graff describes, for a key part of the chickens is still being obscured in this hypothetical interaction—the face is still absent, as the dead chickens are described as being strewn about

with “their faces down in the oily water” (Graff par. 15). In thinking about objectification, gaze plays a role in the distribution of power, for the initial stage of objectification is a viewpoint that “permits an oppressor to *view* another being as an object” (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 47, italics added). The watcher has power over the watched. For this reason, power dynamics often involve issues of gaze, such as the male gaze as a factor in patriarchal systems of oppression. As Adams elucidates in her work, this oppressive, objectifying gaze relates to animal bodies as a key component in the process of removing animals “from the idea of meat” by reducing them to absent referents (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 47). In this way, an objectifying gaze is a component of the cycle of “objectification, fragmentation, and consumption” that Adams implicates as responsible for the separation from moral consequences involved in eating nonhuman animals (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 47). Through Adams’ theory it becomes apparent that it is significant that the face, the area of the body connected to connotations of gaze, is still obscured in Graff’s narrative of dead chickens with their faces obscured from the gaze of their oppressors.

While these 3.4 million deceased chickens may have escaped the fate of slaughter, in the portrait of death that Graff narrates, these chickens are still victims of an objectifying gaze that refuses to witness them as individuals. By presenting them face down, the chickens are denied the agency of allowing even their dead eyes to confront the humans who induced making them absent from their own deaths. For factory farm animals to escape the literal and metaphoric constraints of being absent referents, they must be witnessed as whole individuals, capable of looking back at those who attempt to objectify them. To become present, they must be understood as individuals, not as a mass of 3.4 million and 5,500 awash in 8 trillion tons of water.



As seen in this chapter, the absent referent of meat, objectifying gaze, and carnism can be witnessed at work in the cultural response to a natural disaster such as hurricane Florence interacting with the violence of the factory farming industry. The aftermath of Florence's effects on CAFOs is anticipated in *Literature for Nonhumans*, originally published in 2015. From the second stanza of the text's opening poem, "Rivers for Animals," the text addresses the normalized, yet virulent practice of CAFOs in the U.S. annually relocating billions of tons of animal waste into waterways. In the same way that Joshua Stevens' satellite images identify the "dark plumes" of pollution from CAFOs "shooting into the Atlantic" after hurricane Florence, Gudding's "Rivers for Animals" aptly renames the planet's water sources as "a brambledom / of dissolving animals" (@jscarto; *Literature for Nonhumans* 1). In a footnote to the poem "The Historical City of the Slaughterhouse," Gudding uses the following source to contextualize why he labels rivers as largely made up of dissolved animal bodies in "Rivers for Animals":

70% of our nation's river impairment and 49% of our country's lake impairment are caused by agriculture. Livestock operations, otherwise known as Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations ('CAFOs'), are reported by twenty-two states to constitute approximately 20% of the total agricultural contribution to water quality.

(Danielle J. Diamond as qtd. in *Literature for Nonhumans* 35)

Investigation into the context of hurricane Florence's effects on CAFOs and the animals trapped within them directs us toward a formal discussion of *Literature for Nonhumans*. The thesis's progression models that of Gudding's research on river pollution which led him to compose a collection of poems actively attacking carnism and also presenting a vegan worldview. Chapter 2 moves into the realm of poetics as it analyses the first six poems of

*Literature for Nonhumans*, putting them in conversation with one another. Like tracing a river's path to the ocean, the next chapter discusses the first half of Gudding's text for the purpose of moving this project one step closer toward finding vegan poetics.

## Chapter 2: Entering the Slaughterhouse through *Literature for Nonhumans*

*Literature for Nonhumans* is a book of witness. Through this collection of thirteen poems and four short essays, Gabriel Gudding's work provides entrance into slaughterhouses. The doors and windows to CAFOs and slaughterhouses across the U.S. are shut tight to the public. To clarify, a CAFO—as defined by the USDA—is a concentrated animal feeding operation that contains a minimum of 100,000 pounds of “live weight” over a period of 45 days. From the outside, these CAFOs look like mundane, oversized sheds. For the average passer-by, the inside of these “operations” will never be seen as it is currently a crime for civilians to enter CAFOs and slaughter facilities. Since the insides of these factories are legally hidden and protected from investigation and public scrutiny, researchers like documentarian Mark Devries have resorted to using spy drones to record aerial footage of CAFOs, but even this footage leaves the internal conditions of CAFOs up to the imagination. Carol Adams wrote in her 1990 manifesto of feminist-vegan theory, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, that “[g]enerally, if we enter the slaughterhouse we do so through the writings of someone else who entered for us” (51). As it becomes increasingly difficult for humans to witness the reality of factory farming through first-hand experiences, Adams' statement rings truer than ever. In direct opposition to the culture of carnism that disguises the consequences of eating nonhuman animals, Gudding's poems direct the reader's gaze to the killing floor in order to witness embodied animals before they are literally and metaphorically transformed into food.

*Literature for Nonhumans* is a poetic appeal against the culturally supported practice of mass consuming nonhuman animals—carnism. The central concern throughout Gudding's text addresses not just an individual's choice to eat nonhuman animals, but rather the

dominant culture of meat-eating in the U.S. that provides space for humans to remain disconnected from the consequences of their problematic behavior. Carol Adams explains, “[t]o remove meat is to threaten the structure of the larger patriarchal culture” (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 37). In this way, Adams asserts that to discuss the culture of meat-eating is to also address the larger patriarchal structure that makes up the problematic foundation of carnism. Through this perspective of carnism as connected to the patriarchy, it is revealed that carnism, as a system, relies on members of the dominant culture obeying its tenets in advance and without close consideration, much like other systems of patriarchal domination. Gudding opens “What is an Illinois,” the fourth poem in the collection, by addressing this point:

Meaning that a human  
community will, without vote, fanfare,  
struggle, or even consciousness, adopt an  
immense and even at times disabling set of  
abstractions, laws, judgements, names, and  
imagined temporal and spatial frameworks.  
And they will both feel it real and call it  
reality. (12)

“What is an Illinois” opens with this broad observation about human communities to draw attention to the larger patterns of patriarchal culture that are also found in the mass consumption of nonhuman animals. Like with other systems of oppression, carnism asks human consumers to accept the system’s merciless ideology without any “struggle, or even consciousness” about these decisions (*Literature for Nonhumans* 12). For Gudding, one of

these “disabling,” yet widely accepted codes of belief, is the mass consumption of nonhuman animals. Through lines such as these, “What is an Illinois” and the eleven other poems and the four essays that make up Gudding’s text are aligned in direct opposition to carnism, the invisible belief system that creates an environment in which people can consume mass amounts of animal flesh with little to no thought about their actions. As Gudding, Carol J. Adams, Laura Wright, Melanie Joy, and many others elucidate in their work, the industry of flesh eating is supported by a cultural system that initiates distancing from the nonhuman animals who are being eaten. By addressing carnism, *Literature for Nonhumans* undermines this dangerous system of mindless consumption.

Nearly twenty years before *Literature for Nonhumans* was published, there was Sue Coe’s *Dead Meat*. Published in 1996, this collection of essays and art pieces by British activist and artist Sue Coe offered the world an opportunity to see inside some of the slaughterhouses of North America. Through *Dead Meat*, which contains graphically honest paintings and sketches of kill floors and the human and nonhuman animals that inhabit them, Coe invites readers to witness the suffering of others, which is information that carnism does not supply. Coe’s work captures both the fear of nonhuman animals near slaughter and the flickers of shame from the downcast eyes of the exploited, often minority, factory workers. *Dead Meat* also attempts to represent the elements of carnism that offers many citizens of industrialized nations that engage in eating animals the privilege of not feeling like active participants in the slaughtering of others.

During an interview, Coe discusses her purpose behind using artistic mediums, such as painting and writing, to address the institution of the slaughterhouse: “When I make art, I make more witnesses, and when there are enough witnesses, the horror stops” (qtd. in Heller

21). I reference *Dead Meat* to illuminate Coe's strategy of situating readers in the ugly reality of eating and exploiting animals through a creative medium. Since carnism permits its human believers the privilege of not knowing where their nonhuman animal food products come from, witnessing the slaughter that transforms animals into "food" is a vital part in reversing the inhumane and environmentally detrimental effects of factory farming. For both Coe and Gudding, artistic mediums are the means through which they strive to witness "exactly how an animal dies, kicking, screaming, and is fragmented," a sight which Adams argues "disables consumption and disables the power of metaphor" (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 52). According to Gudding, art that does any less than this, or does not embrace its political capacity is "stupid" (*Literature for Nonhumans* 117).

When Coe first compiled information about the industrialized eating of nonhuman animals in the 1990s, she reported that "six billion animals are killed each year in the United States for human consumption. The suffering of these animals is mute. For the defenseless, the gentle, the wounded, the ones who cannot speak, life consists of indescribable suffering" (63). However, more than 20 years in the wake of the release of Coe's book, The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, has found that in 2014 the U.S. had greatly increased its mass production of livestock, making the nation responsible for the lives of over two trillion animal "commodities" ("Livestock Primary") Furthermore, based on current statistics from The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations?, The Animals Deserve Absolute Protection Today and Tomorrow organization has created a continuously updated livestock animal death counter that predicts over 150 billion animals will be killed by the meat, dairy, egg and fish industries annually worldwide ("Livestock Primary"; "The Kill Counter").

While Coe reports that her books have caused many humans to stop consuming nonhuman animals, the data regarding livestock animal production shows that, paraphrasing Coe's statement, there have not been enough witnesses to halt or reverse the increase of livestock animal suffering (qtd. in Heller 20). To push back against the increase in production of nonhuman animals for consumption requires more awareness of the truth of slaughterhouses and their global impact, more art that creates empathy for the oppressed. In this way, artistic endeavors that witness and critique the slaughtering of animals must be revisited and not ignored as philosophical discussions of animal suffering often are, for these creative works hold the promise of encouraging cultural change. Gudding speaks to this in the afterword of *Literature for Nonhumans*:

In a climate of political concern that studiously ignores widespread and systematized suffering, it is precisely the epistemic role of the arts...to draw distant realities of suffering into the arena of warm concern....Where compassion is not enough, and where critical theory is clearly not enough, a change of diet is sufficient. And where a change of diet is sufficient, an outspoken and lived solidarity with the indignity of the enslaved and eaten is imperative. (117-18)

Having touched on the role of poetry and art in the fight against carnism, I will now analyze poems from *Literature for Nonhumans* that serve to establish the motifs and theoretical concepts explored throughout the text.

*Literature for Nonhumans* is made up of these thirteen poems, respectively: "Rivers for Animals," "And Not for Us," "Table of Contents," "What is an Illinois," "Jeremiad," "Historical City of the Slaughterhouse," "Economies of Collective Proprioception," "Our Fellow Drivers as the Analogs of Animals," "The Cathode and Anode of Modernity," "The

Nonhuman Human,” “&,” “Amnicola,” “Encomium: Sun.” By discussing several of these poems in conversation with one another, I hope to show the variety of poetic strategies that Gudding employs for his rhetorical purpose of dismantling the invisible belief of carnism, as well as how the individual pieces of this collection work together collaboratively in order to achieve this goal. The text of *Literature for Nonhumans* and its mission of undermining carnism, however, begins earlier than the collection’s first poem.

As a part of its frontmatter, *Literature for Nonhumans* opens with the following phrase, in bold text, floating across two otherwise blank pages: “THERE CAN BE NO PASTORAL AS LONG AS THERE IS A SLAUGHTERHOUSE.” In this context, the “pastoral” refers to both the literary convention that involves a pastoral setting and tropes that romanticize the shepherding tradition that dates back to the ancient Greek poet Theocritus as well as the literal pastoral landscape. As previously mentioned, this industrial mechanization of spaces that were once the inspiration the rural, picturesque setting of pastoral literature is causing drastic changes to not only how we view this environment but the very conditions and landscape of this environment. Open spaces where cows and goats, owned by private citizens, grazed at their leisure have now been replaced by the crowded, dark, industrialized CAFOs. The once local farm passed down through generations of family members is now owned by an industrialized, global farming conglomerate. With this new system of agribusiness, the setting of the pastoral has become obsolete; as *Literature for Nonhumans* asserts, pastoral spaces have been almost completely eradicated by the widespread industrial, mechanized institution of slaughter. The romanticized ideals highlighted in pastoral literature throughout the ages are nearing total extinction in the U.S. and soon the entire industrialized world as a direct result of the institution that the image of the modern slaughterhouse



represents. During our interview, I asked Gudding how his text employed the term “pastoral,” and he answered with the following:

I wanted to address the aesthetic and ethical piety we exercise toward "nature" and "animals." The pastoral is a genre that actively exercises a kind of false reverence toward both: we romanticize farming and idealize (that is, caricaturize) animals. The genre genuflects to the countryside in a romantic fashion, when in fact the rural, the pastoral (as region, not just as genre), has increasingly become a site of agribusiness and—frankly—mass murder. (Personal Interview)

By beginning the book with this stark statement linking the idealized myth of animal flesh coming from wide open spaces with rolling hills and babbling brooks to the ugly truth of the industrialized slaughterhouse, Gudding sets the tone for the collection’s urgent message against carnism.

After the reader is warned that “THERE CAN BE NO PASTORAL AS LONG AS THERE IS A SLAUGHTERHOUSE,” there is an epigraph from German philosopher Max Horkheimer’s *Dawn and Decline: Notes 1926-1969*. If the collection’s statement on the slaughterhouse eradicating the pastoral did not make the focus of the collection clear on its own, when viewed alongside the epigraph from Horkheimer, these two pieces of frontmatter begin contextualizing the ethical issue of eating nonhuman animals that is at the heart of *Literature for Nonhumans*. Below is the complete epigraph:

Below the space where the coolies of the earth perish by the millions, the indescribable, unimaginable suffering of the animals, the animal hell in human society, would have to be depicted, the sweat, blood, despair of the animals...The

basement of that house is a slaughterhouse, its roof a cathedral, but from the windows of the upper floors, it affords a really beautiful view of the starry heavens.

This quotation from Horkheimer sets the tone for *Literature for Nonhumans*, as it already begins the work of exposing readers to “the animal hell in human society” (Horkheimer qtd. in *Literature for Nonhumans*). This “animal hell,” according to Horkheimer, is the slaughterhouse, which he rightly interprets as being in the hidden basement of the metaphorical house of human society. The basement of the house is full of “the sweat, blood, despair of the animals,” but, in stark contrast to the horrific scene within this slaughterhouse-basement, from the upstairs windows of the upper cathedral, there is “a really beautiful view of the starry heavens” (Horkheimer qtd. in *Literature for Nonhumans*). Horkheimer’s note aligns with the ecofeminist theory that using the absent referent of “meat” to refer to nonhuman animal bodies hides the actual animals that are being consumed. Nonhuman animals that have been bred to be “food” are at the bottom of the hierarchy, in the lowest basement, practically a world away from the humans feasting on their flesh in the upper cathedral. In this way, as early as its frontmatter, the structure of *Literature for Nonhumans* addresses its purpose of exposing carnism in hopes of convincing readers to stop consuming nonhuman animals. As I will show later on in this chapter, both of these frontmatter texts will be recalled in the collection’s fifth poem, “Jeremiad,” in which Gudding laments the slaughterhouse’s inescapable impact.

Continuing through *Literature for Nonhumans* sequentially, we now reach “Rivers for Animals.” The first in the collection, “Rivers for Animals” is a twelve-stanza poem which begins the text’s exploration of the reality of rivers in the Anthropocene, the age of harmful human interference with the natural patterns of the environment. The poem starts with a wide

focus, beginning with a reflection on planets as being like “almost porches,” with us anchored on one planet, “stabled in a harbour of hemic” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 1). The fragmentation of the poem’s opening words is an early example of how the text works to witness dismemberment. While later in the collection the reader will be exposed to the literal butchering of nonhuman animal bodies in order to undo the absent referent of meat-eating, in “Rivers for Animals” this splicing of words allows for one word to have multiple meanings. “stabled” can now speak to ability through the word “abled,” and this forced fragmentation is a poetic technique used throughout *Literature for Nonhumans* both serves as a reminder of the physicality of dismemberment that billions of animals experience annually and also opens up the text, allowing room for multiple interpretations of the text’s linguistic and symbolic meaning.

In the second stanza of “Rivers for Animals,” the narrator repositions the poem’s setting from the vast cosmos to an estuary, a partially closed-off, liminal body of water in which freshwater streams and rivers meet salty sea water. In this second stanza, nonhuman animals begin to appear. Thus, as the poem progresses, its true focus—rivers and their relationship to factory farming—comes into view. In this early stanza of the collection’s opening poem ecofeminist thinking makes its first appearance in Gudding’s text. This stanza takes on deeper meaning when read through the lens of Adams’ aforementioned theory on mass terms as contributing to the carnist absent referent of meat. To review, Adams finds that mass terms dissolve any sense of individuality and, consequently, any ability to quantifiably measure what has been grouped into a massification. In *Neither Man nor Beast* Adams asserts: “In accepting their presentation in Saran Wrap packages as mass entities and calling this ‘chicken,’ the individuality of each chicken is lost; thus does the dominant culture

acquiesce to gathering eighty thousand living chickens together in one warehouse” (28).

Thus, an ecofeminist reading of the following lines from “Rivers for Animals” illuminates how Gudding’s text rhetorically performs vegan poetics:

how most corn, weather, cow,  
  
comes at us in pieces; how rain divided to  
  
thousand of pieces, coalesces to one piece  
  
of river, water mass of liquid distended to  
  
cohesive slab of rain slipping through hill-  
  
side in which is suspended a brambledom  
  
of dissolving animals (*Literature for Nonhumans* 1)

In this stanza there is a vision of the cow coming at us in pieces, an evocative image which invokes the fragmentation of nonhuman animal bodies through butchering, both literally and metaphorically. According to Adams, the literal butchering of animal bodies also causes a semiotic fragmentation that misrepresents sentient beings as objects. Thus, use of gastronomic mass terms like “meat” and “nuggets” causes a literal and symbolic consumption of nonhuman animals to occur (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 47). In “Rivers for Animals,” we are first shown the mass signifier for cow, which refers to the unmeasurable grouping of all cows, and then the mass term is fragmented as the animal body comes at us in broken pieces. In an inverted order, rain is first presented as a multitude of individual rain drops that then “coalesces to one piece” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 1). As the mass of rain washes down the hillside, it collects the fragmented pieces of animal bodies from the once

pastoral landscape that is now inhabited by CAFOs and industrialized slaughterhouses: the “brambledom / of dissolving animals” becomes one with the “thousand of pieces” of rain amassing to become one “water mass of liquid” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 1). This brief stanza from early in the collection shows *Literature for Nonhumans* establishing its subjects as veganism and ecofeminism. Already, from the second stanza of the collection’s first poem, the poetics of the text are pushing back against mass terms as well as taking the ecofeminist stance of linking factory farming to river pollution.

The pacing of “Rivers for Animals” features a steady increase toward quickness. The first line of the poem includes extra spaces between the first few words in order to break up the text and begin the poem at a crawling pace: “The plan ets are old co l ore d platforms” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 1). As the poem nears its climax, however, the pace increases significantly, and we are signaled to this shift by the line “The river is moving” that appears three-fourths of the way into the poem (*Literature for Nonhumans* 3). From this point on, the pace begins to emulate a rushing current, as the reader is swept toward the poem’s concluding sentiment.

On this now speeding journey of “Rivers for Animals,” we are shown multiple ways in which rivers, with “fats / impelled on its bank,” are polluted by humans through the factory farming industry:

smashing its current, its roaring a gonging  
  
and scattered abacus of knees and elbow,  
  
eye and forehead, this, still, is water, its  
  
endless clapping past the marshes, an

endlessness clapped by itself (*Literature for Nonhumans* 3)

In this stanza we see images of fragmented bodies, though it is unclear whether the body parts—knees, elbow, eye, forehead—are human or nonhuman. The “scattered abacus” of body parts invokes a mathematical tool, suggesting an inability for the numbers of individual bodies to be measured due to severe fragmentation and massification. The lens of ecofeminism permits us to interpret the indication of something interfering with the abacus’s ability to mathematically measure the quantity as related to Adams’ theory on the weaponized use of mass terms against nonhuman animals’ individual significance. As a result of analyzing this poem through the lens of Adams’ theory, I find that the abacus has been scattered by the influence of carnism, which erases nonhuman animals’ subjectivity and makes their individual deaths uncountable. This scattering of the abacus was seen through a literal example in my previous chapter when I referenced how the specific number of hogs slaughtered in North Carolina has been omitted from the USDA’s annual reports, as a result of being grouped in with the incomprehensibly massive national number. As this stanza reminds, this mass of an unknown amount of dismembered body parts, “still, is water,” giving the poem’s title new meaning. It is not a poem about rivers that are only for the use of animals, which is an uncontextualized meaning that the title may imply, but instead it is a poem revealing that rivers are essentially made up of “dissolving animals,” due to the waste products of factory farming defusing into waterways (*Literature for Nonhumans* 1).

Therefore, the poem views rivers as nonhuman entities that are brimming with the effects of factory farming, such as the discarded body parts of deceased factory farm animals, excessive amounts of waste products from the vast number of animals compressed into CAFOs, and the human waste that often includes nonhuman animal bodies since rivers have

become “where your shit goes, the extensor / and apparatus of your asshole” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 3).

These rivers for animals, according to the poem’s narrator, “comes to leave our knees again” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 3). This initially abstract statement gains more concrete meaning when contextualized by the collection’s fifth poem, “Jeremiad,” in which the narrator laments, “I cannot think of the slaughterhouse with- / out leaving through my knees” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 28). Thus, “comes to leave our knees again” is given deeper meaning through the poem calling toward a clearer appeal against slaughterhouses that occurs in a later poem. While “Rivers for Animals” may not directly name factory farming until its two closing stanzas, through contextualizing the allusion to “Jeremiad” in the eighth stanza, the “Bodily splatter everywhere” in the poem’s opening stanza can be interpreted as a vision of the slaughtering of animals that causes the narrator to leave through their knees in “Jeremiad” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 1). This method of the poems in the collection echoing each other is a common pattern throughout *Literature for Nonhumans* as the poems, when read together, help to develop the collection’s consistent motifs.

Another example of the collection’s echoing pattern at work in “Rivers for Animals” is found in the second-to-last stanza, when the poem shifts again, redirecting its focus from rivers to begin exploring a definition of the state of Illinois. Redefining Illinois through the lens of the slaughterhouse is a theme which will be continued and expanded most explicitly in the collection’s fourth poem, “What is an Illinois,” but is also apparent throughout the entire collection since much of Gudding’s research on agribusiness’s impact on the environment is specific to his home state of Illinois. In this stanza of “Rivers for Animals,” after giving an interesting description of Illinois as a “vast and battered graduation /

ceremony,” the poem informs what the state’s ceremony commemorates: “The killing of its animals” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 4). Although the stanza breaks, the sentence continues across the white space, connecting to the last stanza:

The killing of its animals

is blown back into the narrow gene. Their  
bones and sorrows shoved back into the ar-  
row and the embryo. An earthlet not for  
them. (*Literature for Nonhumans* 4)

By interrupting the flow of the sentence with a stanza break, Gudding gives emphasis to “The killing of its animals,” causing the reader to pause and reflect on the heavy significance of the slaughterhouse. I find this specific use of a stanza break that fragments a sentence as a technique of vegan poetics, due to its ability to refocus the reader on the importance of the poem’s message of addressing the eating of nonhuman animals as a moral and ethical concern. Through this stanza break, Gudding then leads the poem towards its closing point: witnessing the sorrow and suffering of nonhuman animals. The breaking of the line causes the reader to pause and consider “The killing of its animals.” While the poem begins quite broadly with mentions of planets, it then progresses toward a much narrower focus in the following order: planets, estuaries, rivers, Illinois rivers, the sorrow and damage caused by the factory farming industry. Earlier, the poem informed that it views “the earth itself an earthlet,” meaning that this “earthlet not for them,” refers to the planet (*Literature for*



*Nonhuman* 1). Through making nonhuman animals absent from their own deaths, carnism eliminates any space on the planet for these animals to exist as embodied individuals.

If this earthlet, this planet has become a space unwelcoming to nonhuman animals, then who is it for? Much like how stanza breaks in this poem do not necessarily suggest that the sentence has ended in Gudding's work, the title of the poem that follows "Rivers for Animals" continues the previous poem's closing thought. "Rivers for Animals" ends with "An earthlet not for them," and is directly followed by the collection's second poem, titled "And Not for Us." Beginning with the conjunction "and," the title of "And Not for Us" lends itself to being interpreted as a continuation of the last line from "Rivers for Animals," blurring the line between where one poem ends and the next begins. Ecofeminism views all oppressions as connected or linked to one another in some way; therefore, the interconnectedness of the thirteen poems and afterword that make up *Literature for Nonhumans* resonates with a key component of ecofeminist thought. With "them" referring to nonhuman animals in the closing line of "Rivers for Animals," it follows that the "us" from "And Not for Us" refers to humans, which invokes the limiting and problematic animal-human binary. What does Gudding mean by saying through these two poems that the planet is not for nonhuman animals *or* humans? Closer examination of "And Not for Us" is required in order to answer such a question.

Beginning with historical cataloguing of notable industrial inventions and advancements from 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Illinois, specifically those that relate to agribusiness and the food industry, "And Not for Us" ends with a stanza reflecting on the religious institution of the church as one of the forces responsible for the current state of the planet. "And Not for Us" introduces the essay-like style that is prevalent throughout *Literature for*

*Nonhumans*. For example, while the twelve stanzas in “Rivers for Animals” are made up of an average of thirteen lines each, two of the five total stanzas in “And Not for Us” are nearly twenty-five lines long. In its large blocks of text, “And Not for Us,” includes large amounts of referential material that serves to illuminate connections between the well-known history of the industrialization of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. society and the nation’s lesser-known history of factory farming. In this first stanza of twenty-three lines, there is a compact listing of inventions, one after the other, in concise phrasing that lacks accessory language or embellishment, leading to a mechanical, robotic tone of delivery. The listing often includes specific dates and locations, making “And Not for Us” one of the first examples of Gudding’s self-labeled style of ““historiographic prose poetry”” (Personal Interview). Throughout the twenty-three lines of this stanza, there is not a single period punctuation mark—only commas are used to separate the individual inventions. In this way, the cataloguing stanza reads like a run-on sentence, which I find makes the list feel interminable as it shows the history of the pastoral being supplanted by the mechanical.

This historiographical listing of “And Not for Us” begins with the familiar “steel plow 1837 John Deer, Grand Detour Illinois,” and then addresses more niche Illinois-based products of industrialization, like “the Union Stockyards & Transit Co 1865, its railway-butchery a progenitor of Fordism and the *Konzentrationslager*” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 5). While it is widely known that Henry Ford is credited with inventing the assembly line for his automotive factories in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is not as well-circulated that Ford’s invention was derivative of Chicago’s South Side stockyards and their highly efficient ‘disassembly’ system of butchering nonhuman animals. The connection between

“Fordism” and Chicago’s stockyards referenced in “And Not for Us” is given context through the following lines from a 2013 article from the *Northwest Indiana Times*:

Henry Ford visited the beef stockyards and was so impressed by the disassembly operation they had there that he actually took that back to his Highland Park facility, reversed that engineering and made the moving assembly lines to make the automobiles....This allowed us to increase the pace at which the units could be made. In turn, this made the cars more affordable for the masses. (Merritt as qtd. in Pete par. 9)

The effectiveness of the nonhuman animal disassembly system in Chicago led the city’s butchering industry to expand significantly in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, leading the city to be coined the “Hog Butcher for the World” by three-time Pulitzer Prize winning poet and Illinois native, Carl Sandburg. In a similar way, Ford’s recasting of the design led his business to becoming more lucrative and well-known.

On a grave note, Chicago’s Union stockyards allegedly also inspired other heinous designs: Konzentrationslager, Nazi concentration camps. While comparing the Holocaust, the abhorrent genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the mass murder of nonhuman animals is a highly contentious point of comparison, the design for Konzentrationslager has been attributed to Hitler’s preoccupation with the horror and systematic killing produced in Chicago’s stockyards: “For the Nazis their death camps were, in a way,...echoing from the Union Stockyards in Chicago, which perfected industrial methods of mass killing nearly a century before Auschwitz” (Cockburn and St. Clair par. 14). Thus, by labelling Illinois’s stockyards, their “railway-butchery,” as a “progenitor” of Konzentrationslager’s design, Gudding makes the connection between these two things without getting entangled in a comparison that is

often viewed as problematic (*Literature for Nonhumans* 5). With the current political climate of rising interest in the Alt-Right in the U.S., it is disconcerting that biographers of Hitler often point to his violently Nationalist ideas as being encouraged by his studies of U.S. history and ‘innovation.’ As ecofeminism strives to show connections between systems of oppression, I cannot mention the similarities between stockyards and concentration camps without also acknowledging the U.S.’s violence toward Native Americans as influencing the Holocaust. John Toland, one of the leading biographers of Hitler, writes:

Hitler’s concept of concentration camps as well as the practicality of genocide owed much, so he claimed, to his studies of English and United States history. He admired the camps for Boer prisoners in South Africa and for the Indians in the wild west; and often praised to his inner circle the efficiency of America’s extermination—by starvation and uneven combat—of the red savages who could not be tamed by captivity. (202)

Due to its focus on agribusiness, the cataloguing in “And Not for Us” does not connect the oppression of Native Americans to its mention of the Union stockyards; however, I find that Gudding’s ecofeminist approach to writing warrants my brief digression from the poem at hand in hopes of increasing the intersectionality.

Moving forward with its listing, the first stanza of “And Not for Us” ends on Illinois’s role in the early history of genetically modified crops. Like Chicago was the “Hog Butcher for the World,” Gudding shows that Illinois was the setting for Pfister corn, once the ““outstanding corn / breeder of the world”” (Sandburg, *Literature for Nonhumans* 5). Having the “1<sup>st</sup> globally successful modified seed,” Pfister corn of “Woodward County El Paso Illinois” was a leader in agricultural technology (*Literature for Nonhumans* 5). GM seeds and

biotech has a reputation of monopolizing agribusiness through a long history of lawsuits, and in “And Not for Us,” Gudding traces this pattern back to its origins, showing that “by 1940, 44 states and 30 countries / were planting Pfister corn” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 5). Pfister seed is now owned by Nuseed, a global seed distributor of the agrochemical monopoly Monsanto. Starting with the origination of GM corn crops in the collection’s second poem, corn, especially corn used for animal feed, is consistently mentioned throughout *Literature for Nonhumans*.

“And Not for Us” addresses the loss of Illinois’s wetlands as a consequence of the many large industries that took root in Illinois. The second stanza of the poem and its corresponding footnote reveal that the scale of Chicago’s furniture factories—the “unparalleled / immensity of furniture made in Chicago”—was one of the reasons the state was “drained for the placement of chair / leg” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 5). Supporting this claim is a footnote, which reads: “Three-fourths of the state prior to European settlement was wetlands. Only 3% of the state is covered in wetlands now” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 5). In a highly informational poem such as “And Not for Us” which begins with a catalogue of facts, it is curious to me that Gudding would choose to bracket off this information about wetlands as a footnote. Why not just include the referential information in the body of the poem alongside the other informative text? I do not see much difference between the language of the footnote and the body of the poem; however, I do see how the use of footnoting adds credibility to the poem’s claims.

Throughout *Literature for Nonhumans*, footnoting is a common occurrence. In its one-hundred and twenty-two pages, the text includes a total of seventy-two footnotes. In writing about controversial topics such as the eating of nonhuman animals and climate

change, I find that Gudding uses footnoting as an appeal to ethos to increase his credibility by showing the academic and scientific research that bolsters his text. In the afterword of *Literature for Nonhumans*, Gudding exhibits an awareness about the controversial and radical nature of his collection by providing academic essays that clarify and support the claims presented in his poems. A book that asks readers to practice veganism and consider extending compassion and mercy beyond the human species is not likely to be received neutrally. By putting poetry and essays that are literary extensions of a vegan identity into the public sphere, Gudding bravely offers himself up for the possibility of intense and perhaps even violent push back from the dominant patriarchal culture of flesh eaters. These normalized negative and aggressive responses to veganism can be rationalized by the simple fact that “the slaughterhouse offers knowledge we do not want to know” (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 49). Because the presence of veganism in society causes the consequences of eating animals to resurface, it is understandable why the dominant culture of flesh eaters would have visceral, negative feelings toward vegans and veganism alike.

Laura Wright’s *The Vegan Studies Project* informs that “veganism, in many ways, is monstrous, alienating and antithetical to a cultural dietary discourse in which meat and blood are of central significance” (46). To this same end, Gudding expresses in his afterword that those who stand up for nonhuman animals are often stigmatized. By often scrutinizing the choices and politics of animal activists and vegans, flesh eaters continue directing their focus on human issues in order to search for reasons to justify their discrediting of an ethics of care that extends compassion to those who are not members of the human species. He writes:

The most common objections, then, to the issue of animal abolitionism are less about the welfare of animals and more about the political and psychological biases of

animal abolitionists. The human is so invested in its resentments and antipathies for its own concerns that it would almost rather fight about those than extend basic consideration to animal others. (*Literature for Nonhumans* 116-17)

As Gudding will explore further in “Jeremiad,” the anthropocentric focus on human politics in discourse about nonhuman animal suffering is a symptom of carnist thought. With this in mind, the extensive use of footnoting in *Literature for Nonhumans* is a technique of vegan poetics intended to preemptively destabilize carnists’ typical defensive pattern of attempting to discredit vegan ideology.

*Literature for Nonhumans* often implicates Christian religion as an element of this “human political” that many of the poems address. In the last stanza of “And Not for Us,” we find a possible answer to my earlier question about the meaning behind Gudding labeling the planet as an earthlet not for nonhuman animals or for humans. As “Rivers for Animals” begins exploring how the institution of factory farming has drastically reduced the amount of space carnism provides for the individual realities of the nonhuman animals it consumes, in “And Not for Us,” the institution of the Christian church is linked to the anthropocentric human political. Christian religion promises its members an afterlife that is out of this world—literally. Gudding finds the promise of a perfect heaven overrides Christians’ responsibility to the planet we all currently inhabit. The last stanza of the poem explains why earth can be understood as also not being for “us,” humans, according to the teachings of the Christian church. The stanza reads:

A church is a machine that pulls corn out of fields. Its purpose is to induce a useful apathy. It is a closed structure in

which indifference to wanton extraction is brought about

by positing another world that is nondestroyable, engender-

ing in its believers the conviction they will inherit another

earthlet once this one is sucked through the hills. (*Literature for Nonhumans* 7)

By focusing on the next stage of ‘eternal life’ in a heavenly realm, Gudding interprets the church as propagating a “useful apathy,” which he deems partly responsible for the carelessness with which humans have treated the environment. Why would they care about the earth heating up when “they will inherit / another earthlet” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 7)? The idea first presented in “Rivers for Animals” that the planet is an earthlet “not for them,” ‘them’ being nonhuman animals, is expanded upon in “And Not for Us” through the poem implicating the Christian church’s redefining of the planet as a world “not for us,” ‘us’ being humans who believe they will ascend to a “nondestroyable” heaven (*Literature for Nonhumans* 4, 5, 7).

Gudding expands his idea of the Christian church as a factor in the current state of the environment in the collection’s third poem, “Table of Contents” and the fourth poem, “What is an Illinois.” In the middle of the fourth stanza of the ten-stanza poem, “What is an Illinois,” monotheism, Christianity specifically, makes another, but certainly not the last, appearance in *Literature for Nonhumans*. Even though the thirteen poems of Gudding’s collection employ multiple perspectives and poetic techniques for the purpose of dismantling carnism, many of the poems share common themes and motifs. The presence of these repeated motifs allows for the poems to extrapolate previously stated ideas. As noted, in “And Not for Us,” Gudding introduces the symbol of the “church” as a propagator of apathy



towards concerns of the nonhuman. In “Table of Contents,” Gudding addresses his interpretation of the function of religion more pointedly:

Monotheism, its evils.

Jesus Christ as a violent, politically and ecologically destabilizing influence. Love corrupted as a tool and method of violence. Kindness corrupted as a mask and habituation of violence. Religion as a means of utilizing and surreptitiously wielding evil rather than exposing or expunging it. (*Literature for Nonhumans* 9)

In this evocative stanza, the symbolic figure of Jesus Christ is called into the discourse on the state of the environment. Presenting Jesus as a “desta- / bilizing influence” on ethical and political concerns that relate to the realm of the nonhuman, the breaking of the line in the middle of “destabilizing” creates an effect that visually echoes the meaning of the word. The word as it appears on the page has literally been rendered unstable. Variations on the word “violence” occur three times in this brief section, highlighting the narrator’s frustration and aggressive feelings towards what the narrator interprets as the “evils” of monotheism (*Literature for Nonhumans* 9).

Continuing discussion of the religious themes in *Literature for Nonhumans*, in “What is an Illinois,” we are shown “Christ, a source of / ecological evil,” and Christian churches are renamed “anesthesia machines,” which evidently perpetrate violence through the corruption of their tenets of love and kindness and their focus on a human-exclusive “metaphysical haven” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 19-20). To counteract this anesthetizing

effect, the following stanza features an uncensored scene of “*Blunt Mechanical Trauma*” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 20). Citing a legitimate “fact sheet” and manual on how to kill piglets, “Baby Pig Management: Birth to Weaning,” this stanza from “What is an Illinois” instructs one to, “Place the piglet on the ground / and apply a quick, firm blow with a blunt instrument, such / as a hammer, to the piglet’s head” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 20). This “Baby Pig Management” manual is cited throughout *Literature for Nonhumans*, showing graphic instructions on how to mutilate and murder piglets and pigs. In this way, *Literature for Nonhumans* recount the horrific reality of factory farming, undoing the absent referent of meat by showing the embodied animal as their head is “forcefully hit...against a / hard surface such as concrete” until they stop breathing (*Literature for Nonhumans* 20).

“Jeremiad,” the poem following “What is an Illinois,” continues the collection’s religious theme, while also further contextualizing the statements from the collection’s frontmatter, as I will now begin exploring. A jeremiad is a poetic tradition rooted in chastisement of a culture’s lack of morality. Jeremiads, getting their name from the biblical prophet Jeremiah, are woeful laments that complain of injustices against humanity. The style of the jeremiad form invites a pejorative tone and graphic imagery, and Gudding’s reinterpretation of the form expands this tradition of lamentation about human issues across species borders by lamenting the injustices of the slaughterhouse. In this way, Gudding’s “Jeremiad” reinterprets a poetic model typically used to discuss human complaints through the institution of religion in order to shift the reader’s focus to the suffering of nonhuman animals and undo the absent referent of meat and the larger system of carnism.

Echoing the aforementioned frontmatter, “Jeremiad” begins with the following: “There can be no pastoral as long as there is a slaughterhouse” (*Literature for Nonhumans*

27). In the next line, the poem connects the powerful statement about the pastoral tradition from the text's opening pages to the epigraph from Horkheimer, explaining that there can be no pastoral because the slaughterhouse "is in the basement of all oppressions" (*Literature for Nonhumans* 27). Horkheimer's metaphoric basement of oppression invokes carnism, the invisible system of belief that aids in transforming nonhuman animals into "food" literally and linguistically, as it is "at the *ignored* forefront of every assertion / and definition / as to what 'nature' is" (*Literature for Nonhumans* 27, italics added). Linking the slaughterhouse to "all oppressions" is an intersectional approach to understanding the vast impact of factory farming by employing an ecofeminist perspective. "Jeremiad" asserts that evidence of the slaughterhouse can be found "in the folds of vulvas," and that "An entire slaughterhouse is founded each / morning on the clitoris of every girl" (*Literature for Nonhumans* 28). These lines are connected to the text's 24<sup>th</sup> footnote, which cites ecofeminist Carolyn Zaikowski's "The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's Rape Rack." This footnote and the text from the body of the poem address the connection between patterns of patriarchal violence and abuse against both human and nonhuman animal females. The footnote reads, "animal farming is the most large-scale, institutionalized control of female reproduction, sex, and bodies-in-general that has ever existed" (Zaikowski qtd. in *Literature for Nonhumans* 28).

In "Rivers for Animals," in discussing the movement of the river, the poem recalls that "it comes to leave our knees again" (*Literature for Nonhumans* 3). The "it" here is vague and undefined in "Rivers for Animals." However, in "Jeremiad" the line from "Rivers for Animals" gains a clearer meaning. In "Jeremiad" the narrator informs that they "cannot think of the slaughterhouse with- / out leaving through my knees" (*Literature for Nonhumans* 28).

Thus, after learning that the institution of the slaughterhouse causes the central narrator of the collection to buckle at their knees in “Jeremiad,” the line from “Rivers for Animals” can be understood as expressing a moment in which a person is reminded of factory farming by looking at a cloudy, polluted river. As seen from this example, reading *Literature for Nonhumans* as a united text rather than as separate poems and sections allows for the pieces to collaboratively develop the text’s central message: factory farming, referred to through the provoking image of the slaughterhouse, is ingrained in human culture, yet is shockingly ignored. These billions of deaths occurring annually do not take place in an open cathedral with windows, they take place in the basement of society, hidden from view. The narrator in “Jeremiad” witnesses the violence and injustice against other beings that takes place in CAFOS and slaughterhouses, and in acknowledging this collective suffering, they are brought to their knees just like the narrator of “Rivers for Animals.”

In the middle of “Jeremiad,” the word “cannot” is repeated five times throughout a section of ten short lines as the narrator’s focus turns outward from the image of the slaughterhouse to show the vast extent of how ingrained violence against other animals is in human culture. In this moment, “Jeremiad” features repetitive phrasing and more frequent, choppy line breaks than is typical to Gudding’s prose style. This section reads:

I cannot think of the slaughterhouse with-  
out being launched from my brow.

I cannot think of the slaughterhouse with-  
out leaving through my knees.

You cannot feel a rapid

you cannot say a name

or sit

you cannot love bugles

or understand a calendar

as long as there is a slaughterhouse. (28)

The deviation from longer stanzas in this section, when paired with the repetitive phrasing, creates a feeling of overwhelming monotony that resonates with the vast extent of factory farming's impact. In *Literature for Nonhumans*, even "bugles," a popular brand of corn chips, are implicated as a symbol of the systematic slaughter of nonhuman animals, "for what is a hog, but fifteen / or twenty bushels of corn on four legs?" (*Literature for Nonhumans* 30). By highlighting the more mundane reminders of how our society has commodified the bodies and flesh of other beings, this section of "Jeremiad" also implies the inescapable presence and impact of humans' long history of mistreating other animals. This realization can be dizzying, and I find that the repetitiveness of the phrasing in the above section of "Jeremiad" allows for an increased reading pace of the text, adding to this feeling of spiraling uncontrollably as the evidence of factory farming can be found permeating many corners of human culture.

"Historical City of the Slaughterhouse" also recognizes the overwhelming presence of the slaughterhouse in human culture that becomes apparent when animals are no longer misinterpreted as objects through the absent referent of meat. The poem addresses the hypocrisy in the vast number of songs, poems, and documentaries lamenting the loss of animal species that have gone extinct, such as the American buffalo. The ethics of animal

conservation is its own valid area of concern, but in “Historical City of the Slaughterhouse,” Gudding briefly references how “what was done to the buffalo” is acknowledged among “the educated” as “beyond barbaric” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 35). Yet many of the same people who lament the loss of the buffalo are active members of the majority of “Americans who / eat meat kill[ing] 50 million cows a year” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 36). The poem then reminds that what happened to the buffalo is not shocking by the standards of how humans typically treat other animals. One of the only differences between the mass slaughter of the American buffalo and the modern-day cow is how the dominant culture *perceives* these acts: one is mythologized as murder, the other is not seen at all. Like “Jeremiad,” “Historical City of the Slaughterhouse” reminds readers that in our society, the bodies of nonhuman animals are everywhere, regardless of whether we choose to acknowledge their presence:

Advertisements for beef and leather products

saturate our cites, screens, radios, comic

books, our t-shirts and roadways. Our

brightest candies are made from their feet.

It is the same slaughter, different ungulate. (*Literature for Nonhumans* 36)

Stanzas such as these which are interspersed throughout *Literature for Nonhumans* undo the anesthetizing effects of carnism that have played a role in hiding the truth of just how deeply ingrained the “products” of slaughter are in the dominant culture. In acknowledging that even the “brightest candies” and gummies we give to our children are laced with remnants of “ungulate[s],” hooved mammals, the poem reveals that the overwhelming statements from

“Jeremiad” which claim we cannot even sit without interacting with evidence of the slaughterhouse are not as dramatic as they might have originally seemed.

As this chapter has shown, through an employment of methods that I refer to as vegan poetics, *Literature for Nonhumans* exposes that “collective disavowal of the cur- / ent slaughter” harms us all and only serves to “make such dupes / and ethical misers of otherwise bright and / generous people” (36). To read *Literature for Nonhumans* is to experience an ecofeminist, vegan worldview. A text such as Gudding’s asks us to “come out of the human political” before it is too late (29). Through vegan poetics, *Literature for Nonhumans* asserts that while humans may have piloted the planet towards a sixth mass extinction, “[w]e are as much passengers as / the animals are” (103).

### **Chapter 3: “You, are a sister of that chicken and that / chicken”: Concluding Remarks and Thoughts on Finding Connection to Other Animals through Joy**

In my previous chapters I have unpacked *Literature for Nonhumans* for the purpose of revealing the specific ways the text performs what I refer to as *vegan poetics*. In this way, my engagement with Gudding’s text in this thesis has hopefully illuminated examples of Gudding’s vegan identity directly influencing his poetry, in terms of both content and form. I have intended for this thesis to create space for a conversation on understanding a strategy for writing poetry that combines scholarly-informed climate justice, animal rights activism, and veganism. In short, I intended for this thesis to introduce the concept of vegan poetics and to establish a methodological approach for future exploration into the topic. However, this thesis only serves to initiate the investigation into the concept of a vegan poetics. As I am basing my current understanding of vegan poetics off of only one book of poetry, there is certainly room for further research to explore the different ways in which a variation of vegan poetics may occur in other poems. The key word in the title of this thesis is “finding.” It is impossible to definitively define a new topical and stylistic genre of poetry through analysis of a singular text. While this thesis may be reaching its close, the quest for *finding* vegan poetics is far from over. As a part of my concluding remarks and thoughts for looking forward, I will now briefly summarize my findings from Gudding’s text that represent the qualities that should be looked for in other poetry in order to determine whether or not other poems could fit my current categorization of vegan poetics.

Poetry involved with vegan poetics references climate change and factory farming as linked issues. Vegan poetics acknowledges CAFOs and industrialized slaughterhouses as one of the largest contributing factors of climate change. In vegan poetics, there is a balance



between the poetry representing and engaging with environmental issues and the suffering of nonhuman animals. In essence, vegan poetics avoids anthropocentrism. This category of poetry attempts to reveal the often overlooked cultural and symbolic factors at play in the globalized system of eating nonhuman animals on a mass scale. Performing vegan poetics could be described as a poet presenting their perspective in order to enact and explore what a vegan worldview could be like, through the genre of poetry. Vegan poetics is an appeal against carnism, the invisible belief system that supports the mass consumption of nonhuman animals. In this way, an example of vegan poetics destabilizes the false idea of “meat” as an object, and instead witnesses the violent butchering of sentient animals that produces “meat.” Vegan poetics engages with Carol J. Adams’ concept of the absent referent of meat in hopes of dismantling this oppressive system of thought that fragments nonhuman animal identities from their corpses. Having presented some qualifying descriptions of my current understanding of vegan poetics as informed through my reading of *Literature for Nonhumans*, the remainder of this chapter looks forward to discuss an additional element that can be interpreted as a topic of vegan poetics that I have not yet identified as being present in Gudding’s text.

The third chapter of Adams’ and Lori Gruen’s most recent anthology, *Ecofeminism: Feminist Interactions with Other Animals and the Earth*, recounts the important lessons to be learned from storytelling, humor, play, courage, and joy. Written by Deborah Slicer, this chapter—titled “Joy”—urges that philosophical and theoretical scholarship involving interspecies relations must engage with suffering *and* “the moral significance of playing and laughing, of creating joy with another,” in order to experience this great tension of life, “and to keep one’s head attached and one’s moral bearings” (Slicer 61, 60). The chapter opens

with a compelling yet overlooked general truth: “We don’t eat those with whom we play, joke, laugh.... many of us find it odd, even incomprehensible, a kind of category mistake” (Slicer 59). Slicer’s chapter proposes that we embrace positive interactions with other animals as often as we object to those which are violent and oppressive (59). Her overarching argument relies on the understanding that to *be* is to live in a world that includes joy alongside “senseless suffering” (Slicer 60). Slicer finds it imperative that to live a balanced existence, we must not only acknowledge this tension between pain and joy, but also experience this tension in “the deepest existential sense” (60). We should not only theorize and postulate about the ability to share joy with other animals, we should *practice* these types of enriching, positive interspecies encounters. As an example of this, Slicer shares a narrative about her relationship with Asa, “a 21-year old, 16-hand, black quarter horse,” with whom Slicer has spent ten years joking and enjoying life. Slicer fondly refers to Asa as, “one of the funniest guys I know,” and brightens her chapter with stories about his playfulness and “devious sense of humor,” which becomes evident whenever he teasingly steals her hat or initiates a light-hearted game of tug-of-war (62).

While it is necessary to recognize and respond to the horrific truth that billions of nonhuman animals are slaughtered annually—a truth which Gudding’s poetry highlights—in order to fully interact with other animals, we must also appreciate them as beings capable of creating and sharing moments of joy (Slicer 73). Using the vegetarian character Elizabeth Costello from J.M. Coetzee’s evocative novel *The Lives of Animals* as a literary example, Slicer expresses worry for vegans and vegetarians who feel isolated from the dominant culture of carnivores, and, in turn, have lost the ability to connect with the joys of life (59-60). She writes,

Elizabeth is so thoroughly the utter astonishment, bitter frustration, rage, alienation, loneliness, and despair that many of us who are long-time vegans and activists frequently feel among families like Costello's, among students and colleagues like Costello's, at dinner parties much like the one in honor of Costello....My concern for Elizabeth is that she seems humorless, and laughter is joy juice, an affirmation of life. (Slicer 60)

Slicer finds that sometimes in empathizing with the suffering of other animals, activists can lose sight of what they are fighting for: extending the freedom to enjoy life to others, those within and outside our own species.

According to Carol J. Adams, the first step in undoing the damaging perception of nonhuman animals as absent referents of meat is to witness the animal's violent death (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 52). As I have shown in my previous chapters, *Literature for Nonhumans* does this for readers. For example, in the poem "What is an Illinois," Gudding dedicates an entire stanza to showing readers how piglets are murdered by quoting "Baby Pig Management: Birth to Weaning," an actual guide on 'effective' methods: "hold the piglet by / its hindlegs and forcefully hit the piglet's head against a / hard surface such as concrete. Immediately repeat the above / procedures if there is any possibility that the animal is still / alive" (*Literature for Nonhumans* 20). This pig management guide is cited throughout *Literature for Nonhumans*, describing in detail the horrific violence billions of piglets have and will experience. Following Slicer's model that includes laughter and joy into the discourse on veganism and animal rights, I propose that the next step in undoing the absent referent of meat is to remember other animals as beings with whom we can laugh and share positive emotions. For vegan poetics to be well-rounded, this style of writing for the benefit

of nonhuman animals must also include moments of joy, humor even, whenever possible.

Generally, it is not hard to imagine sharing a positive interaction with dogs, cats, hamsters, and horses—the animals we commonly label as “pets.” On the other hand, why is it difficult for some to even imagine cuddling with a turkey or playing fetch with a pig? To this end, Slicer theorizes, “[i]n the case of the not-pets, perhaps we stress the differences between ‘them and ‘us,’ while stressing the similarities between pets and ourselves” (69). Species that have been labeled as “factory farm animals” are no less capable of playfulness or complex emotions than dogs. Carnism, however, has defined them in a way that limits flesh eaters’ ability to see the nonhuman animals they consider to be “food” as living beings capable of having individual personalities, dreams, even. Watching Jordan, a turkey friend of mine, repeatedly try to peck a raisin and fail due to his own dangling “snood” blocking his beak from the treat, huff in frustration, and then waddle into my lap for me to feed the raisin to him is one of my favorite interactions with a member of another species. Laughing *with* Jordan and physically interacting with him as he happily snuggled against my chest while I rewarded his frustrated attempts with more raisins is one of the moments that reminds me of the positive, moral reasons *why* I do not consume other animals. When we allow ourselves to share joy and humor with other animals that are commonly understood as “not-pets,” we invite opportunity for “deep social relations [that] can take on moral weight” (Slicer 69).

Not every quotation from “Baby Pig Management” in *Literature for Nonhumans* invokes feelings of suffering. In the collection’s closing poem, “Encomium: Sun,” Gudding shifts from referencing methods for teeth clipping, castration, and bludgeoning to share a brief vision of piglets at play, which witnesses the capacity that “not-pets” have for enjoying life, if given the opportunity. The stanza reads:

*Daily Piglet Observation.* Healthy well-nourished piglets run around and play, especially when the sow rises to eat. After a successful nursing piglets will often settle down and sleep. Milk is frequently seen around their mouths. Well-nourished piglets have tight, shiny skin and a thrifty look, i.e., “bloom.” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 104)

In this vivid moment, we are shown piglets as joyful, playful beings that appreciate the simple pleasures they are so often denied. These “healthy well-nourished” piglets are embodied and agentive—they are not absent from their own existence—they live, they “run / around and play.” Following this scene of piglets playing, the poem shifts to address Gudding’s daughter, Clio. The poem then highlights the similarities between the playful nature of piglets and Gudding’s own human daughter, and in doing so, the poem extends joy beyond the human species, like Slicer’s “Joy” suggests. In these brief moments, the poem reminds of the social and cognitive similarities we share with other animals in hopes of showing a positive example of an interspecies interaction that does not involved consuming another’s flesh. “Clio” is a child of “that cloud and that cloud and that cloud” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 106). “Clio” is described as being whimsical and curious about the world and nonhuman others around her, she is a “child of apples, of / bellows, child of rivers, of otters, child / of sunspecks, of waters” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 106). Clio is also grounded in and connected to the material, embodied world: she is a “child of tendons, / thin, springing” (*Literature for Nonhumans* 106). While Clio is a human girl, the poem links her to other animals in a very ecofeminist way, presenting her as related and connected to other female animals: she is a “sister, of that chicken and that chicken, / you are a sister, of a sister”

(*Literature for Nonhumans* 106). *Literature for Nonhumans* is predominately a somber text; however, there are moments where warming sunlight breaks through and reveals flickers of hope and joy amid the terror. Vegan poetics has not fully been found—this thesis is only the beginning, the finding continues. Having established *Literature for Nonhumans* as an ecofeminist text that takes the first step toward undoing the absent referent of meat through attacking the culture of carnism and exposing its role in causing climate change, further investigation into understanding what a vegan poetics entails should explore poetry that works to present joy as an interspecies experience. The challenge is to now find poetry that embodies veganism by opposing carnism and also presents nonhuman animals typically understood as “food” as individual beings worthy of joy.

Hurricane Florence was not a completely negative force—ironically, the devastating storm provided an impetus for three 6-month old piglets to survive. 5,500 pigs died in hurricane Florence, but three found new lives outside of CAFOs: Jax, Flo Rida, and Champ, as they have now been named. Krisitn Hartness, co-founder of Ziggy’s Refuge Farm Sanctuary located in Providence, North Carolina where the three pigs now live, acknowledge that Jax, Flo, and Champ “have fought so hard to live” (qtd. in Hanson par. 3). Champ was found with a broken leg, Jax and Flo both had severe respiratory issues from living in a CAFO, and Jax is blind from untreated eye infections (Hanson). These three animals escaped slaughter through a storm powerful enough to claim human lives—one of them barely able to walk with his broken leg, another stumbling blind, but all three of them fought to live, for “[a]s bad as they had it, Hurricane Flo is the best thing that ever happened to them” (Hartness qtd. in Hanson par. 14). Even though they escaped the fate of slaughter, these three pigs were still impacted by their five months in CAFOS: “Flo still has breathing trouble and is fighting

off pneumonia. Jax is undergoing eye surgery in the hope that vets can cure his blindness.

Champ will likely walk with a limp for the rest of his life, and will ultimately be fitted with a brace that will help him move around more easily” (Hanson par. 12). But they live and that is a victory worth celebrating, and future investigations into vegan poetics should consider the presence of this celebratory element.

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### **Appendix: Call and Response: An Interview with Gabriel Gudding**

Upon reading *Literature for Nonhumans*, I knew that I had been introduced to a promising fusion of creative writing, scholarship, ecofeminism, and animal studies. While I quickly decided that I must critically engage with the text, I had not expected that Gabriel Gudding would become an integral part of my research. Once I discovered that Gudding was a professor of English and Creative Writing at Illinois State University, I tracked down his email address to thank him for writing the text which was currently fueling my academic writing and to ask his opinion on research directions I might take regarding zoöpoetics. As I had not imagined him to respond, let alone be willing to engage with my project, Gudding's email correspondence offered me the unexpected, yet rich opportunity to engage with the author whose work I was writing on, and his openness to discussion on the issues has enriched my understanding of *Literature for Nonhumans* and vegan poetics. The following is an interview with Gabriel Gudding that I hope will offer the reader a more complete sense of the innerworkings of *Literature for Nonhumans* and also inspire more scholarship to unpack the elements of the text brought to light in this interview that my paper did not address, specifically how vegan poetics would be situated among eco-poetics and zoö-poetics.

**Samantha Hunter:** What is your relationship with *Literature for Nonhumans*?

**Gabriel Gudding:** This book began as a means of addressing the anthropogenic devastation caused in Illinois, the state in which I currently reside. It initially sought to be a kind of zuihitsu about the ecological history of Illinois, centering on the history of the rivers here. That project eventually and necessarily involved writing about CAFOs and animal farming,

and that in turn necessarily invoked a critique of meat eating and advocated for nonhuman beings. I am currently writing a book that strikes me as a natural sequel to *Literature for Nonhumans*. With it I'm trying to address this issue from another angle: rather than advocating for nonhumans, I'm trying to write my way into a meditation on the insignificance of humans in a work that attempts to characterize our nature as monstrous.

**SH:** Although *Literature for Nonhumans* can be interpreted as a call for veganism, especially aimed at otherwise “politically committed people who ignore the argument of the animal,” can you speak to why the text does not seem to house an explicit statement about your personal veganism?

**GG:** My feeling was that I needed to show what a veganic *worldview* felt and looked like. I was careful not to simply frame it as a personal view. One tactic some not infrequently use when confronted with different or challenging, radical, or otherwise unusual ideas is they tend to dismiss the ideas as personal, specific to that person, not something that others should or even could adopt. So right away we're no longer talking about *the issue* (animal suffering – and humans gaining pleasure from animal suffering); instead, we're talking about someone's "belief" about animal suffering. Then we get into that sophomoric default that halts conversation, "Well, that's your opinion." Labeling something as a private concern rather than a public issue is, in short, a quick way of avoiding the topic addressed. So, of course, I hold these ideas. But it doesn't stop there: I also feel it's warranted to claim that others should hold these ideas as well.

And as far as my feelings about veganism and feminism: I think Carol Adams's *The*

Sexual Politics of Meat really broke the first ground here. Too, Ashley Capps, a poet and researcher at A Well Fed World, has helped me establish the conviction that one cannot truly consider oneself a feminist if one is not vegan.

**SH:** *Literature for Nonhumans* claims, “there can be no pastoral as long as there is a slaughterhouse.” How do you define pastoral and in what context is your text employing the term?

**GG:** I wanted to address the aesthetic and ethical piety we exercise toward "nature" and "animals." The pastoral is a genre that actively exercises a kind of false reverence toward both: we romanticize farming and idealize (that is, caricaturize) animals. The genre genuflects to the countryside in a romantic fashion, when in fact the rural, the pastoral (as region, not just as genre), has increasingly become a site of agribusiness and—frankly—mass murder.

**SH:** While much of your collection is in prose form, there are unmistakable formal exits. Can you speak to the inspiration behind some of your intentional breaking of patterns, like on page 37 of “Historical City of the Slaughterhouse” ?

**GG:** I once translated a chapbook by an avant-garde Cuban poet named Carlos A. Aguilera. In that chapbook he used very short one and two word lines, sometimes breaking the lines between words. This technique allowed him to highlight puns inside words, at the edges of words, and that sometimes extended across parts of two adjacent words (eg, "massed dying"

becomes "mass eddying"). Of course, Aguilera didn't invent this technique, but I was struck by what it allowed him to highlight.

**SH:** *Literature for Nonhumans* features substantial annotations and background material.

What was the reasoning behind this choice, and how does it connect to the overall message of the text?

**GG:** I think I have a kind of archivist's sensibility. I'm a fan of truth and detail. I would rather read history and nonfiction over lyric poetry, and would easily rather listen to a podcast about science than a Bob Dylan album. Moreover, I happen to think that the value of a piece of literature is rooted less in its stylistic dimension and foremost in what the piece of literature says, the kind of cultural work it does: its manner of conveying that meaning should be secondary to its stylistic and formal features, thus even those elements considered more stylistic than not (lineation or lyricism) can themselves be expository and bear annotation. For instance, I consider much of the writing in the book "historiographic prose poetry."

**SH:** *Literature for Nonhumans* speaks out against the lens of massification used by predatory human culture to view nonhuman animals. What do you believe to be at stake in viewing "animals as populations"?

**GG:** Well, anytime we consider a living being an object or a commodity, we're in troubled waters. We see similar problems when we consider human beings in the aggregate: treating individual persons according to the traits of the larger populations to which they belong is



one of the key features of racism and nationalism. In short, treating nonhuman beings as individuals is, in a very loose sense, merely applying the principles of the Enlightenment beyond the human. Clearly there are problems that can arise from this. For a nuanced discussion of those problems see Matthew Calarco's *Thinking Through Animals: Identity, Difference, Indistinction*.

**SH:** You mention Zoöpoetics as a needed branch in scholarship, and for reasons stated in your Afterword, you criticize “ecocriticism, ecopoetics, ecopoetry, and ecological literature in general.” How do you see your work and others like it being situated in the larger, but still developing realm of animal and vegan studies?

**GG:** I've tried to ensure that the book, as an example of both critical theory and a vegan aesthetic, stakes a kind of claim in two realms: ethics and aesthetics. That it speaks both from and across these two. There is a longstanding divide, stretching back centuries, that considers these two areas distinct magisteria. Thinking this way while making art (or philosophy) dampens a work's potency, and I feel that this effort – the effort to help people see that there is a vast injustice taking place under our noses – needs as much help as it can get. Too, I say in the afterword, “There is no ethically flat enactment possible in any art,” so we may as well fully own and inhabit this truth.

**SH:** While you and other zoöpoetic artists, I feel, are answering Elizabeth Costello’s call for “poetry that does not try to find an idea in the animal, that is not about the animal, but is instead the record of an engagement with him [or her]” (*The Lives of Animals* 50), I feel that

*Literature for Nonhumans* goes a step further by confronting the correlation and causation between anthropogenic issues and mass industrialized agribusiness. As your vegan practice is a crucial element of your text's message of expanding compassion outside of the human political, what is your opinion on situating *Literature for Nonhumans* in the niche of vegan poetics instead of zoöpoetics?

**GG:** Grouping it this way seems reasonable. I would think a zoöpoetical poetics would be characterized by depictions of nonhuman animals as sapient and individuated beings, while a vegan poetics would take that conceptual framework and add an overtly ethical component to it: nonhumans animals are sapient individuals and hence ought to be treated as beings with bodily and mental sovereignty. Meaning, in part, that no eating of them, no enslaving of them, can be considered ethically defensible.

**SH:** Can you share any other poets and bodies of work that speak to the same cultural work you unabashedly dig into in *Literature for Nonhumans*, specifically those that you do not identify in your afterword?

**GG:** This may sound like an odd answer, but some of the stories of H. P. Lovecraft are, I sense, trying to do the same thing as *Literature for Nonhumans*, except they seem to see the issue from a different vantage. Lovecraft was definitely not a vegan. However, he here and there characterizes vegetarianism in his work as a marker of an advanced civilization. More interestingly, a continuous theme throughout Lovecraft's work is that human beings are insignificant creatures who arose by accident in a vast and indifferent cosmos, and his stories

often depict his human characters realizing that they are prey, that they are no longer the most intelligent creatures who've inhabited earth. His stories carry an implicit critique of human hubris. Too, I might suggest Tobias Menely, as his scholarship traces the intellectual roots of animal rights thought in 18<sup>th</sup> century poetry.

### Vita

Samantha Edith Hunter was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, to Dave and Angie Hunter. She graduated high school in May 2014. One year later, Samantha earned an Associate of Arts degree and an award for Excellence in Sociology from Alamance Community College. Transferring to Appalachian State University in the fall of 2015 as an English major with a minor in Dance, she was awarded her Bachelor of Arts degree, magna cum laude from Appalachian in May 2017. As an undergraduate student, she was accepted into the accelerated M.A. program in Appalachian State University's department of English. While working toward her M.A. in English, she served as the Assistant Editor of *The Cold Mountain Review*, worked as a research assistant for the chair of her department, and taught and designed Rhetoric and Composition courses as a Graduate Teaching Faculty member. In December 2018, she earned her Master of Arts degree. Samantha will continue on at Appalachian State in the spring of 2019 as an adjunct instructor in the English department. She plans to continue teaching in higher education and pursue a Ph.D. in English Literature.