

FINDING VEGAN POETICS IN *LITERATURE FOR NONHUMANS*

by

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Generally, if we enter the slaughterhouse we do so through the writings of some else who entered for us.

—Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*

Then I remember that today Americans who eat meat kill 50 million cows a year in the U.S. alone. Their bodies everywhere. Advertisements for beef and leather products saturate our cities, screens, radios, comic books, our t-shirts and roadways. Our brightest candies are made from their feet. It is the same slaughter, different ungulate.

—Gabriel Gudding, *Literature for Nonhumans*

### Abstract

In the ever-expanding realm of scholarship discussing nonhuman animals, the question of the animal is experiencing shifts to integrate ethics of care. To explore an extension of ecofeminist writing—vegan poetics—my paper enters the debate within eco-writing regarding the eating of nonhuman animals. Currently, there is a small subgroup of authors openly including their politicized abstaining from using nonhuman animal as objects in their diets, as well as in their writing. Through a close reading of *Literature for Nonhumans* by vegan scholar Gabriel Gudding, this paper follows the motif of rejecting the erasure of factory farm animals from discussions and writings regarding anthropogenic and environmental issues. *Literature for Nonhumans* encourages future scholarship to both uncover and create more texts embodying elements of vegan poetics, such as confronting human exceptionalism found among the ethical considerations of dominant Western culture. Critically entering *Literature for Nonhumans* exposes a call for both poetics and scholarship to reassess the consequences of mass consuming nonhuman animals and viewing them as edible objects: “When you eat the muscles of animals / your anus is a tunnel to the slaughterhouse”—“We really are ethical misers when it comes / to other beings” (Gudding 27-9).

## **Ecopoetry and Disregard for Nonhuman Animals**

According to a study done by the Oxford Martin Programme on the Future of Food, “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). With the effects of mass producing and consuming nonhuman animals being a direct link to our rate of dispersing greenhouse gas emissions and consequently, climate change, I argue that ecopoetry and environmentally focused creative writing, now more than ever, should be attempting to improve our understanding of anthropogenic issues from a perspective that includes the state of factory farm animals. According to Georgette Leah Burns, “Anthropocentrism involves separating ourselves from nature in order to exploit it,” and the *Oxford English Dictionary* confirms that the term names a “primary or exclusive focus on humanity” (10; ‘anthropocentrism, n.). In this way, I find that anthropocentrism has no place in writings about, and for, the environment and its inhabitants, for what would be the positive purpose of exploiting other creatures that share the world we—humans—have been destroying? This is to say that as it is *through* anthropogenic interference that the environment is at its current state, anthropocentrism should not also plague how we write about environmental issues. Therefore, I argue that nonhuman animals, especially those living and dying in factory farms, must be accurately presented in poetry that addresses environmental concern. This is not to imply that every piece of poetry with an environmental focus must reference factory farms and the nonhuman animals that are killed there, however, as climate concern and pollution are intrinsically linked to the abattoir it is hard to justify why the practices surrounding mass consuming nonhuman animals and their products would *not* be mentioned. As seen in the finished product of Gabriel Gudding’s most recent poetry collection, *Literature for Nonhumans*, “a critique of meat eating [that] advocated for nonhuman beings”

sprouted from his initial ecopoetry project of regarding the history and current ecological state of Illinois rivers (Personal interview). In this way, the shift in Gudding's project from a study of rivers to a confrontation of Western industrialized cultures' practices of eating nonhuman animals shows that if one is open to the available information on the connection between factory farming and negative impacts on the environment, it proves incomplete to not discuss the slaughterhouse. Therefore, I am presenting this paper as a study on Gudding's collection of thirteen evocative poems and a comprehensive, bold afterword to search for technical elements that constitute a style of poetics that uses its formal tools to witness to the realities of nonhuman animals beyond metaphoric purposes and makes choices that integrate the reader into the suffering, physical bodies of the living they consume. Gudding's work invites the question of how does one write poetry *for* the benefit of nonhumans?

Before further exploring the style of poetics that Gudding's work utilizes, I must first define and distinguish between several terms I will be employing. As noted, anthropocentrism is a mind-set that prioritizes human concern over that of any other form of existence, and for my purposes I will be using the term as it relates to humans dominating other nonhuman animal species. In a related way, anthropogenic refers to pollution or any negative effect on the environment that arises from human intervention, such as the loss of coral reefs or CAFOs spreading *E. coli* into waterways ("Environmental Impact..."). A vegan is "a person who abstains from all food of animal origin and avoids the use of animal products in other forms," as the *OED* states ("vegan, n.2"). A vegetarian, however, is a person who does not eat the bodies of cows, chickens, or pigs, among others, but may still ingest their products, such as dairy and eggs. I must also distinguish that 'poetry' refers to a form of literature, but 'poetics, on the other hand, refers to the formal elements of poetry as they are studied. According to the *Princeton*

*Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 'poetics,' is the literary study of the formal techniques and strategies used in poetry, and poetics can also refer to "the compositional principles to which a poet subscribes," and it is in this way that I will use the term (1063).

On the topic of poetics, Jonathan Skinner defines eco-poetics as a complex field of writing not necessarily confined to one central ecological focus, such as the literary trope of the pastoral or critique of 'green' discourse ("What is Eco-poetics?"). Let it be noted that eco-poetics, in the way Skinner and other writers belonging to the field define it, includes both ecopoetry and the stylized formal choices these collective authors share. Although the field identifies itself as eco-poetics, for the sake of clarity in my discussion on poetic techniques I will use the term ecopoetry to reference the broad genre of environmentally focused poetry. As Skinner states, a particular interest among the vast grouping of ecopoetry is "humanity's ethically challenged relation to other animals" ("What is Eco-poetics?"). However, I would argue that the effects of factory farming, while notably devastating to our shared environment, is largely under-addressed in ecopoetry, which falls under the category of humans' relationship with nonhuman animals. As Jonathan Safran Foer exposes in *Eating Animals*, "ninety-nine percent of all land animals eaten or used to produce milk and eggs in the United States are factory farmed. So although there are important exceptions, to speak about eating animals today is to speak about factory farming" (34). Therefore, in discussing nonhuman animals, my focus is on those raised and produced for human consumption. However, a focus on, or even mention of factory farm animals is not consistently shared throughout ecopoetry. *The Arcadia Project: North American Pastoral*—which boasts nearly 600 pages of eco-focused material—offers very few pages of content to explore how mass consuming nonhuman animals has complicated human-animal relations and the state of the environment. In fact, much of the material from *The Arcadia Project* that

discusses factory farming was written by Gabriel Gudding, and it was through his poetry appearing as one of the few flickers of acknowledgment towards factory farm animals in the collection that encouraged me to further explore his work.

Furthermore, to address the lack of presentation granted to factory farm animals, I am proposing a distinction between ecopoetry and poetry that uses “compositional principles” to witness to nonhuman animal suffering, and thus benefitting the lives of nonhuman animals by speaking to the politicized message of refraining from eating their bodies or products. To make this distinction, I will be discussing the poetic elements at work in the poetry of vegan poet and scholar Gabriel Gudding, specifically in his collection *Literature for Nonhumans*, which I argue offers an example of what a ‘vegan poetics’ might entail. In short, this paper is an exploration of a poetry collection from a developing realm of poetics that makes its formal decisions to confront the ever-present issue of the slaughterhouse and the vital role it currently plays in human-animal relations.

In 1996, British artist and activist, Sue Coe offered the world an opportunity to see inside slaughterhouses of North America. Through her book *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 the culture surrounding the eating of meat does not supply easily. Coe’s work captures both the fear of nonhuman animals near slaughter and the flickers of shame from the downcast eyes of the often-exploited, minority factory workers, and Coe also includes representations of the many humans in industrialized nations who engage in eating animals with the privilege of not having to see them be slaughtered. During an interview, Coe discusses her purpose behind using an artistic medium, such as painting, to address the issue 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 Coe’s paintings to illuminate her strategy of situating humans in the realm of eating and exploiting nonhuman animals. Her work confronts the astonishing habit of the many who support the dominant practice of factory farming, yet refuse to acknowledge their direct participation in the slaughterhouse. The culture of eating animals allows many of its members the privilege of not knowing where their nonhuman animal food products come from, and thus, the practice of witnessing the slaughterhouse is vital in reversing its inhumane and environmentally detrimental effects. For *how* can one stop supporting something they are not in the practice of imagining the contents of, and *why* would they stop if they do not see themselves as active participants in the slaughterhouse? I will more closely address this concept of humans ignoring their role in slaughtering the nonhuman animals they eat and wear and how this ignorance relates to poetics in a later section of this paper titled, “Vegan Poetics and the Absent Referent.”

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, 30 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,’ that is, nonhuman animals who serve the purpose of human consumption (“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 (ADAPTT) 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). The increase of producing nonhuman animal flesh and products for consumption in China, India, and the U.S., I argue, reveals a need for more awareness of the truth of slaughterhouses and their global impact. In this way, artistic endeavors that witness to and critique the slaughtering of animals must be revisited and not ignored as discussions of animal suffering often are, for these creative works hold the promise of encouraging cultural change. Working with Coe’s understanding of art as a means to gain witnesses, my paper seeks to answer the following question: how can poetic choices push back against predatory human culture and the effects of the carnist consumer?

Practicing vegans are a minority group in the U.S. population. Although calling for reduced meat consumption would effectively curtail industrial agriculture and therefore help ameliorate climate change and reduce animal suffering, a study done by the Vegetarian Resource Group found that only 0.5% of U.S. adults are committed to practicing veganism (“How Many Adults in the U.S. are Vegetarian and Vegan?”). A vegan himself, Gabriel Gudding, asserts that the low number of vegans in the U.S. is an effect of the growing industrialization of the meat, dairy, and poultry industries, as well as the truth of the innerworkings 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 our culture leads him to structure the poetics of *Literature for Nonhumans* differently than other forms of ecopoetry. As Gudding shared with me in an interview about *Literature for Nonhumans*, his choices in creating the collection stem from his intention of envisioning "what a veganic worldview felt and looked like" (Personal interview).

In our interview Gudding's, mentioned of his choice to poetically structure or frame his collection as a worldview and not as a "personal view," is an example how his vegan identity affects his poetic choices (Personal interview). Gudding frames his collection in this way so as to not encourage the ignoring of the slaughterhouse simply because our dominant culture views veganism as a "private concern rather than a public issue." Thus, Gudding is confronting how dominant, carnist U.S. culture brushes off animal suffering as a distanced belief that an individual may choose not to believe, even though the data points to factory farming harming humans and our planet in addition to nonhuman animals (Personal interview). As I will argue throughout this paper, Gudding's poetic choices are directly influenced by his vegan identity, and this manifests in the stylistic choices in *Literature for Nonhumans* and its lack of anthropocentric metaphor and its rejection of the ignorance ecopoetry commonly offers on nonhuman animal issues.

The identity of 'vegan' is a minority status, and only in the past several decades, with the introduction of vegan studies and vegan ecofeminists, has there been an inclusion of positive discourse about veganism within the academy. In fact, many ecofeminists have been discounted for discussing their vegetarianism or veganism, for their alignment with compassion has been deemed outside of reason, as Carol J. Adams explores in "The War on Compassion." Therefore, it is common for non-vegans/vegetarians to discount the work done by vegan/vegetarian writers

and to accuse pro-animal writers of arrogant moral superiority. In *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society*, however, A. Breeze Harper unpacks how being a racial minority and a vegan minority is possible, and that much of the backlash she receives stems from the idea that there is a specific way to be a minority, which allegedly does not include an ethically conscious diet. Likewise, *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food, and Power*, discusses the constricting understanding of black identity as being directly related to ‘soul food,’ which, traditionally composed of nonhuman animal products, limits the opportunity for African Americans to easily make ethical food choices without being viewed as defecting from their cultural traditions. Indeed, the idea that veganism only belongs to middle class to upper class members of society is a lie, a capitalist lie which excludes many people, groups, and identities from obtaining or pursuing information about how veganism could fit into their lifestyle. As veganism includes a plant-based diet, simple recipes including whole food ingredients are not as economically out of reach as the culture of meat eating would have us assume. Beans, canned or otherwise, and brown rice are not expensive in comparison to many processed foods and offer greater nutritional value and a complete protein.

While this paper’s intention is not to explore how one can access a vegan diet, I do find it relevant to discuss how, to propagate meat eating and the factory farming of nonhuman animals, dominant culture encourages the idea that veganism is unobtainable for many members of society. As Jonathan Safran Foer addresses, much of what we believe to be good or bad food is culturally learned knowledge; Foer says of his own childhood attachment to his Jewish grandmother’s chicken soup: “Her food was delicious because we believed it was delicious. We believed in our grandmother’s cooking more fervently than we believed in God” (4). However, our cultural understandings of food can be unlearned and supplemented with new information,

and this is the purpose of the style of writing I will define as vegan poetics, as found in Gudding's *Literature for Nonhumans*. Joyelle McSweeney's *The Necropastoral: Poetry, Media and Occults* claims "the future of poetry is the present" (153). Thus, with the slaughtering of nonhuman animals as such a large part of our present, how can poets interested in the environment continue to shy away from engaging in cultural work *for* the benefit of nonhuman animals?

In the afterword of *Literature for Nonhumans*, Gudding addresses anthropocentric tendencies that appear in the writings of otherwise environmentally aware individuals, such as those writing ecopoetry. By reflecting upon the problematic methods ecopoetry may use to erase factory farm animals from environmental writing, Gudding pinpoints the major issues in ecopoetry that his collection, I would argue, addresses through an inverse style of poetics:

Dozens of poets in a collection of essays on eco-poetics will rail against damage to the environment and the loss of connection to the animal world and nature caused by human hubris but never once mention a slaughterhouse, the practice of meat eating, or the fact that animal farming is not only predicated on human supremacism but is also the single greatest driver of climate change and the chief ecological threat to rivers and aquifers worldwide [both common subjects of eco-poetics]. (114)

Here Gudding outlines much of the cultural work he performs in *Literature for Nonhumans*. As noted, climate change and factory farming are intrinsically linked, and it is for this reason that Gudding's style of poetics refuses to ignore factory farmed animals and, consequently, uses formal techniques to insert readers into the bodies of nonhuman animals suffering at CAFOs or inside slaughterhouses. Not only is the content of *Literature for Nonhumans* devoted to

witnessing anthropogenic issues connected to the abuse of factory farm animals, but the structural elements and the research and ecofeminist concepts that have influenced its author also speak to this purpose.

By unveiling the vegetarian and vegan ecofeminist influences from prominent authors such as Carol J. Adams that are embedded in *Literature for Nonhumans*, I demonstrate that Gudding's text is an example of poetic choices that when critically analyzed through a lens of vegetarian and vegan scholarship proves to witness to the increasingly relevant oppression of nonhuman animals. Likewise, based on the collection's content and methodology, I argue it enters a developing branch of ecofeminist writing, vegan poetics. In this way, *Literature for Nonhumans* is both a response to the current state of ecopoetry that ignores carnism, and a request for future writings to both uncover and create more texts embodying elements of what I am calling vegan poetics. A crucial focus of Gudding's collection is to confront, as referenced from the poem "The Nonhuman Human," "the meat-loving human" who, like a zombie infected by the disease of cultural traditions of food "eats no / greens, vegetables, no fruit, is so rapacious / for flesh it devours bloated rats, rotting / beavers, and its own lips.... the human who can't conceive / of a meal that doesn't have meat in it" (Gudding 63).

In the "Vegan Poetics and the Absent Referent" section of this paper, I will unpack the formal choices in "Jeremiad," a poem from Gudding's collection. I have chosen to closely analyze "Jeremiad" because I find it exemplifies the distinguishing elements of the collection and aids in understanding what vegan poetics looks like in practice. Through my analysis of "Jeremiad," I uncover how the use of synecdoche, broken stanzas, and abrupt line breaks, as well as the poem's focus leaping from an internal perspective to the external, all lead to an overall sense of dizziness in the face of the reality of dismembered animals. As I will explore further,

through these poetic structures, “Jeremiad” allows readers to see how ingrained the slaughterhouse is in the everyday lives of many members of Western industrialized cultures. I argue that the graphic language Gudding uses to convey the fact that “if you eat any part of an animal / your rectum is an atrium / of the slaughterhouses,” may be dizzying to those who have never been exposed to, or have allowed themselves to forget, the reality of how ‘meat’ and ‘food’ appears on their tables (Gudding 27). As Gudding observes, “We really are ethical misers when it comes / to other beings” (Gudding 29). Overall, this line expresses a veganic mind-set against the species borders in the majority of human ethics; however, the line also employs vegan poetics through the intentional use of a line break that harshly separates “other beings” from the “we” that represents humans. This line break is an example of vegan poetics because this formal choice shows how human identity has commonly been defined as simply not-animal and how we continue to distance ourselves from the suffering we cause “other beings” to experience.

As *Literature for Nonhumans* is a part of the expanding realm of scholarship and writing discussing animals, it is important to explore the meaning behind attaching the negative prefix ‘non’ to the word ‘human’ that occurs in its title. As I will show, using the term ‘nonhuman’ acknowledges the animal’s identity as outsider, naming the inferior level of recognition that cultural hierarchies of species grant nonhuman animals in comparison to the vast focus and importance placed on humans. In *Thinking Through Animals*, a reader on animal studies theorists and their most notable works, Matthew Calarco defines that how scholars view the human-animal distinction greatly affects their theoretical approach to nonhuman animals. For my purposes, I turn to a major concept from difference theorists, as Calarco refers to them. Engaged with discussing the ways in which humans and animals differ from each other, difference

theorists such as Jacques Derrida view animals as nonhuman *others*. In this context, the term *other* refers to the practice of heteronormative, patriarchal Western culture in the age of the Anthropocene (human dominated age) distinguishing itself as separate from those who function outside the culture's idealized norms, and thus, the nonhuman animal is *other* when compared to the dominant status of human. Based on this consideration, difference theorists view human encounters with animal *others* as an opportunity for humans to practice empathy work with those outside of their experiences, as well as to alter their actions through expanding and redefining their codes of ethics (30). Among Calarco's grouping of difference theorists is also Carol J. Adams, and as I will continually utilize Adams' work to better understand how vegan poetics might be situated in animal studies and ecofeminism, it is crucial that I explain a key notion of difference theorists. This group of theorists has determined that by acknowledging and ethically responding to *others*, the 'I' is also altered—"And inasmuch as I affirm the Other's call and become another kind of person, I do so in view of the Other. In a genuinely ethical relation, I become a different 'I,' an ethical sub-ject, someone thrown-under the Other as support" (Calarco 32-33). Therefore, the presence of the term nonhumans in the title of Gudding's collection illuminates the greater carnist culture's attitude towards animals as exploitable for human gain since they are descriptively outside the realm of human, which evokes the ecofeminist concept of speciesism as well as drawing attention to the poetry collection's call for readers to engage with empathetic work with the animals they view as *other*.

As Carol J. Adams addresses, Western industrialized cultures—through both actions and language—prioritize humans over *others* categorized as 'animals,' and this translates into a hierarchy of caring that affects actions, leading "people to believe they have to help humans first," and remain apathetic towards the suffering of nonhuman animals, creatures we disconnect

from our own identity even by title (“The War on Compassion” 34). Thus, by employing the term nonhuman animal, there is a witnessing to the history of *othering* that animals have experienced. In this way, the term ironically confronts the differences between humans and animals that have led to the current Anthropocene, that is, the age in which humans as the most dominant species, are seriously compromising our planet as habitat for humans and nonhumans alike

Towards the beginning of *Literature for Nonhumans*, Gudding opens his poem “What is an Illinois” with a quote from Illinois legislation regarding the ‘proper’ treatment of nonhuman animals—“‘Animal’ means every / living creature, domestic or wild, / but does not include man” (12). Thus, the collection confronts, early on, the linguistic human-animal distinction that leads to the objectification of animals caused by humans separating their identities from those of animals. Defining animal as simply not human enforces the human-animal boundary or species barrier that Adams argues supports humans’ lack of compassion for nonhuman animals; thus, I find the term ‘nonhuman animal’ to be beneficial to the goal of respecting animals when discussing their lives and the questions of ethics that surround them (“The War on Compassion” 22). As mentioned, by using ‘nonhuman animal’ in his title, Gudding offers a flipped perspective on the usual species hierarchy that privileges humanity, even through language. Similarly, the structure of Gudding’s title implies that his writings are *for* nonhuman animals, which includes using an ethics-based approach to writing in order to evoke questions of who is subject and what is object. Thus, if Gudding’s poetry collection is *for* animals and advocates for them, it will not be objectifying them. According to Gudding, “writing literature for the improvement and benefit of nonhumans isn’t some boutique issue, especially when we consider how animal farming is altering our climate and damaging our health and environment” (114). By integrating

‘nonhumans’ into the title of *Literature for Nonhumans*, Gudding exposes a problematic component of human exceptionalism that affects the war on compassion that ecofeminists, such as Adams, have been opposing for decades. Thus, even a brief analysis of the collection’s title and only three short lines from “What is an Illinois” already engages with a major topic in critical animal studies regarding the human-animal distinction and ecofeminist questioning of species hierarchies. Going forward, I will discuss ecofeminism and its relationship to the study of animals in order to prepare for a close reading of Gudding’s “Jeremiad,” through an ecofeminist lens.

From its beginnings, feminist scholarship has been expanding to integrate intersectionality into the quest for equality; however, the analyzing of how oppressive structures also affect nonhuman animals and the environment was not eminent (although not non-existent) in feminist research until the 1990s, 80 years behind feminism’s origin (“Groundwork.” 1). Currently, prominent scholars in the field, such as Carol J. Adams and Lori Gruen, maintain that, “Ecofeminism 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 practices” (“Groundwork.” 1). However, this is not to imply that all ecofeminists address human-animal relations from a similar stance; in fact, the ‘question of the animal,’ as Kelly Oliver writes, is not approached univocally in any current realm of study, and she argues that discussions of nonhuman animals on similar topics often differ in how they view nonhuman animals “with regard to *the moral community*” (494). The introduction of *Ecofeminism: Feminist Intersections with Other Animals and the Earth* supports my claim that witnessing, for the purpose of halting, the slaughtering of nonhuman animals is unfortunately increasingly relevant to ecofeminism and ecopoetry: “At a time when human

violence and encroachment as well as climate change threaten to permanently alter the earth, with devastating consequences for all the animals and plants that make this planet home, the insights of ecofeminists are more important now than ever” ( Adams and Gruen 5). In agreement with Adams and Gruen, I argue that the knowledge of ecofeminist concepts is crucial to the understanding of the poetic work in *Literature for Nonhumans*. As noted, even the collection’s title becomes more dynamic and active in the role of pushing back against the objectification of nonhuman animals and their status as *other* when critically read alongside the works of Adams and other scholars. Through committing to dismantling the absent referent of meat eating—a concept which I will soon address in greater detail—*Literature for Nonhumans* works in tandem with ecofeminism to create a creative entrance into the slaughterhouse with its poetic strategies. Through my email interviews with Gabriel Gudding, I learned that Gudding views feminism and veganism as intrinsically linked. As I view his poetic style as embodying veganic concepts, and he himself refers to his style as a creation of a “veganic worldview,” I have determined that vegan poetics need not be separate from ecofeminism, but instead a creative extension of the field (Personal interview).

Intermixed in ecofeminist scholarship about nonhuman animal experience and nonhuman animal representation in culture is often the debate about the consumption of animals and their products. While veganism was originally referred to as “strict vegetarianism,” since 1944, the *Oxford English Dictionary* recognizes ‘vegan’ as its own term (“vegan, n.2.”) In its truest form, veganism is a lifestyle practice against consuming products that are derived from, or out of, nonhuman animals, which also expands into consumer choices that do not involve food, such as refraining from purchasing leather, silk, or wool. Of course, cultural, racial, and class differences should not be forgotten when discussing the privilege of deviating from our carnist culture’s

ideal diet. However, it should also not be ignored that vegans are often demonized and deemed as radical *others*, separate from reason. Lynn Worsham reflects on the “othering” of vegans in a footnote from “Toward an Understanding of Human Violence: Cultural Studies, Animal Studies, and the Promise of Posthumanism”:

I now see that these dietary practices [vegetarian/vegan] are more than simply a personal “lifestyle choice”; they also represent a radical repudiation of the social solidarity created by patriarchy, misogyny and sexism, and speciesism. A vegan commits (intentionally or unintentionally) the ultimate betrayal: a repudiation of the social compact that constructs “human” (especially the human male) as the preeminent predatory identity. Perhaps this explains why some individuals feel so threatened by these dietary practices that they are compelled to lash out by “othering” vegans and vegetarians. (72)

Worsham’s observation that vegans are viewed as betrayers of society matches the audacious tone of *Literature for Nonhumans* and its bold pushback against the eating of nonhuman animals. Gudding’s tone is loud in comparison to the silencing of vegans and animal rights activists alike. Gudding’s text does not shy away from addressing how the use of animals is deeply ingrained in U.S culture, yet often goes unnoticed.

In the opening poem of the collection, “Rivers for Animals” Gudding introduces the poetic strategy of listing or cataloging, which was made popular in the environmentally focused poetry of Walt Whitman. Gudding employs this poetic technique of cataloguing in many of the poems in his collection of thirteen, and these catalogs consistently involve presenting anthropogenic issues as nested in between a list of connected objects. I argue that Gudding’s intention behind this choice is to present the mistreatment of animals as just another cog in the

wheel of our lives that we do not understand the functioning of and the majority of us choose not to think about too much. In this way, the lines that reference factory farming and livestock animals are situated within a blur of societal institutions: “the companies for lumber, companies for water, companies / for meat, companies for leather. The companies for ordure / and companies for order” (6). In the poem, Gudding’s use of word play with “ordur” and “order” is an example of the text not fearing its subject matter and using a poetic technique to explicitly call social institutions that support oppression, ‘shit.’

Likewise, in the poem “Table of Contents,” Gudding also employs cataloguing. However, in this instance of cataloging, Gudding offers a climactic build into the issues the piece addresses, instead of intermixing the symbols of oppression within the catalog as executed in “Rivers for Animals.” Gudding opens this section of cataloguing from “Table of Contents” with the following: “Greetings, their function. Greetings to your overlarge ve- / hicles. Yr Buick Enclave, yr Cadillac Escalade, yr Chevrolet / Avalanche, yr Suburban Glacier, yr Tahoe, yr GMC Yukon / and Denali” (17). Gudding continues, listing eighteen other SUVs in a block of text that builds tension as the repetitive structure of restraining the word ‘your’ to ‘yr,’ gives the nature inspired names of the vehicles more prominence in comparison to the understated and technology-influenced shorthand. As the poem’s catalog continues to build towards its confrontation of pollution by the vehicles named for the environment their fuel harms, there comes a shift from ‘yr’ to ‘your’: “ yr Subaru Forester named of, yr mountains, yr / crisp nonadventures names of, yr seas named, tribes named / of, your weaponized nomenclature” (Gudding 10). This shift occurs at the direct mention of the system of naming off-road vehicles after the elements of nature that they ironically boast of their ability to crush underneath their wheels, and this off-road crushing relates to Gudding’s naming of that particular nomenclature as

“weaponized.” Gudding then utilizes his own nomenclature by identifying and naming other anthropogenic issues that have been caused by the increased presence of cars, and consequently, roads, which lead to “your / emptying of trees, your calm metallized world of the / road” (Gudding 10).

To continue the discussion of the formal and contextual elements of *Literature for Nonhumans*, I now present a close reading of “Jeremiad,” a poem which I find summarizes the overarching message of writing as a witness *for* livestock animals. Like the aforementioned poems from the collection, “Jeremiad” relies on formal choices to deploy a politicized message against anthropocentrism. The utilization of form in the service of nonhuman others observed in “Jeremiad,” introduced me to my understanding of *Literature for Nonhumans* as a collection that functions differently from other ecopoetry that I had read, and it is this poem that inspired me to reach out to Gabriel Gudding and discuss the bold confrontation of carnism that his poems present.

**“Jeremiad” by Gabriel Gudding, transcribed from pages 27-9 of *Literature for Nonhumans***

There can be no pastoral as long as there is a slaughterhouse.

It is in the basement of all oppressions.

It's at the ignored forefront of every  
assertion

and definition

as to what “nature” is.

The front and back of every face is con-

joined by the foyers of slaughterhouses.

When you consume the muscles of animals  
your anus is a tunnel to the slaughterhouse.

If you eat any part of an animal  
your rectum is an atrium  
of the slaughterhouses.

The beginning of the wilderness is the  
end of the wilderness as long as there is a  
slaughterhouse.

Wherever still in a comic book a frontier  
contains a bush or a star

on the top of every pedal of every bicycle  
there is a slaughterhouse

inside every sack and clock, on every piece  
of piss on every monocle, on the aerosols,  
on each puddle, at the sled, on the back of  
the jam jar, in the folds of vulvas.

An entire slaughterhouse is founded each  
morning on the clitoris of every girl.

We carry the slaughterhouse as a  
mouse would carry Tibet.

I cannot think of the slaughterhouse without being launched from my brow.

I cannot think of the slaughterhouse without 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 slughterhouse.

The animal should have cinders for snot,  
scabs for shoulders, we should not spend  
time with it, let it have velcro for hair so  
that it sticks where we put it, the sheep  
will shit its body directly into cellophane,  
the chicken—you will not love it—shall be  
born in a feather factory, much of the cow  
should sound in the drains—and the calf  
can't follow its eyes through its childhood.

And the piglet just sees another farmer  
balancing the world's thermostat  
on the end of his dick.

Its body should be a balloon of protein, its  
 ears and tails are cut away as ballast, its tes-  
 ticles will become earthlets, horns burned,  
 the being in the animal fully sensate, its  
 scrotum is crushed and who needs its little  
 face to be shouting.

I am not asking us  
 to go patch the foxes at the roadway  
 I am not asking us to exduce  
 along the earth, by electric sled,  
 suet, bath, shed  
 brass, death  
 or pump the stars  
 back into the telescope.

Come out of the human political.  
 We really are ethical misers when it comes  
 to other beings.

### **Vegan Poetics and the Absent Referent**

The room is dark. The crowd watches a man insert his gloved hand into a black hole. The man's hand emerges, bringing with it a white object, dangling. The crowd is stunned by the appearance of the rabbit at the end of the man's wrist. No pulleys or wires are visible, and yet it seems as if the living prop appeared out of thin air, as if it did not exist until the magician produced it, caused *it* to be.

Many would agree that ‘pulling a rabbit out of a hat’ is an outdated trick incapable of fooling cognizant adults, yet so many of those with the ability to make ethical decisions do not question the daily slaughtering of nonhuman animals that causes food to appear in their kitchens with seemingly no wires or strings attached. In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Carol J. Adams proposes that the absent referent be used in the discussion surrounding the practice of mass consuming nonhuman animals through factory farming and agribusiness. According to Adams, referring to nonhuman animals as ‘meat’ or ‘food’ is a manipulation of cultural language that propagates the habit of inflicting, and then ignoring, violence towards nonhuman animals (40).

Choosing to understand the nonhuman animal as the absent referent of meat functions linguistically—the subject of the animal is no longer present, and a different object is signified in the place of nonhuman animals (“absent, a. *adj.*”; “referent, *n.*”). In this way, through the act of butchering, as Adams refers to the slaughtering process, adult cows become “beef;” male calves are then defined as “veal;” sheep are referred to as “mutton;” and pigs are represented as “pork.” By applying the absent referent to cultural eating patterns, we see 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 of Meat* 42). Through *Literature for Nonhumans*, Gudding opposes the pattern of ignoring nonhuman animal suffering that the absent referent of meat eating presents, and asks readers to question why the industrialization of nonhuman animal consumption has made “dupes / and ethical misers of otherwise bright and / generous people” (36).

Gudding’s concept of the “ethical miser,” an otherwise politically engaged individual privileged with the awareness of human injustices who still does not expand compassion or their personal ethics across species borders, describes a person who chooses not to see the ruse of the

absent referent of meat, and allows the individuality of nonhuman animals to be fractured for human use. The absent referent of meat is an effect of butchering, and on this note, Gudding uses line breaks to embody the fractured, mutilated bodies of beef cows when he writes in “Rivers for Animals” that the “cow, / comes at us in pieces,” (1). While the image of butchered fractals of “beef” in grocery stores is not a shocking one to most members of industrialized societies, the image of a cow—a creature that was once alive, and may still be during much of the process of slaughtering—with skin and fur still attached falling in chunks onto our heads as “rain, divided to / thousand of pieces” is a visual that the absent referent of meat does not permit to be seen or considered within the dominant human culture of carnism (Gudding 1). By confronting this ignorance through his imagery of a butchered cow, Gudding reinstates the nonhuman animal identity that is absent in “meat.” As Adams writes, the act of butchering “enacts a literal dismemberment upon animals while proclaiming our intellectual and emotional separation from animals’ rights to live” (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 42). Thus, it follows that the absent referent of meat removes questions of ethics and empathy along with the identities of nonhuman animals, and this absence of the bloody reality involved in the experience of livestock animals, accounts for the lack of discussion about industrialized carnism and its effects on the planet. What’s more, the splicing of nonhuman animal bodies and their identities is ignored by the normative cultural language of meat eating, which encourages the nonhuman world be viewed “as an asymptote filled with ejected things,” and not as a shared realm of other conscious beings as Gudding’s, “Rivers for Animals” also shows.

In *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, Adams retrieves literary works by vegetarian authors to restore and make visible their ‘radical’ identities, which the dominant culture has tried to erase. In this way, Adams also discusses the absent referent in literature such as Shelley’s

*Frankenstein*, Greek mythology, and Sinclair's *The Jungle*; however, Adams does not discuss the genre of poetry's relationship with the absent referent of meat. Therefore, my argument enters where Adams's leaves off, by using ecofeminist concepts to critique how the absent referent of meat manifests in *Literature for Nonhumans* differently than it does in the dominant culture of eating nonhuman animals.

To continue an exploration of the functions of Gudding's "Jeremiad, I now turn to J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*, which does address poetry, and the technique of regarding nonhuman animals as metaphors solely for human concerns. Through the fictional character of vegetarian writer Elizabeth Costello, Coetzee confronts anthropocentric poetry and its role in normalizing our culture's lack of compassion for nonhuman animals (50). In her lecture, "The Poets and Animals," Costello claims that Hughes' "The Jaguar" includes a nonhuman animal better, or more ethically, than Rilke's "The Panther," because the former "ask[s] us to imagine our way into the moving body of the animal" (Coetzee 50-51). Costello distinguishes between the two poems by arguing that Rilke's lacks a true enactment with a nonhuman animal and simply uses the panther as a prop to discuss concepts and images from physics (Coetzee 50). I, however, do not find Hughes' poem to be an example of vegan poetics, for it does not use any technical elements to address the anthropocentric purpose that has forced the jaguar into the life of a performance animal. The narrator in Hughes' poem goes as far as to align the identity of the captive jaguar with that of a willing "visionary," which falsely ascribes agency to the state of the jaguar as an object for human viewing and evokes the question of what 'higher purpose' led the jaguar to being a captive? Hughes' "The Jaguar" falls short on the practice of writing *for* nonhuman animals that *Literature for Nonhumans* enacts. Instead of witnessing the honest experience of a nonhuman animal in captivity for human pleasure, Hughes attempts to end the

poem about a large cat kept in a confining cage on the fantasy that the cat is not negatively affected by his confinement, and Hughes' narrator envisions that the jaguar sees that "the world rolls under the long thrust of his heel," while he is ironically still in captivity (15). Perhaps if Hughes had occasionally broken from his poetic structure of four lines per stanza during descriptions of the jaguar's cage, there would have been an added texture of isolation and tight confinement in the poem's form to poetically embody what the jaguar must have been experiencing. In this way, Gudding's "Jeremiad" does what Hughes' poem does not by addressing the suffering that would be found if one were to envision themselves entering the bodies of nonhuman animals whose identities are defined by their ability to provide pleasure for humans, whether that be from entertainment or food.

Speciesist poems are lifeless, for when metaphor ignores and distracts from the mistreatment of nonhuman animals, "a dead body replaces the live animal," and we cannot interact with the subject as it has become a distanced, non-living object (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 40). Consequently, I propose that 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]," also include poetry that utilizes the naming and restoring of the absent referent of meat, as cultural language surrounding the practice of eating nonhuman animals is a predominant factor in how a culture views, and does not view, nonhuman animals and their deaths (Coetzee 50). During a debate with a philosophy professor, Elizabeth Costello "urge[s]" her anti-vegetarian opponent and the audience "to read the poets who return the living, electric being to language.... if the poets do not move you, I urge you to walk, flank to flank, beside the beast that is prodded down the chute to his executioner" (Coetzee 65). Thus, Costello extends an invitation to enter the slaughterhouse, where what capitalist 'magicians' hide about the

slaughtering of animals would be unveiled. However, Costello's proposal implies that an entrance into the slaughterhouse need be separate from poetry, yet Adams acknowledges that "if we enter the slaughterhouse we do so through the writings of someone else" (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 51). In this way, poetry engages with cultural, advocacy work, and Gabriel Gudding opens the door to the slaughterhouse while attacking the absent referent of meat in "Jeremiad."

From its placement as the fifth poem in the collection, it is notable that "Jeremiad" is the first poem to directly attack the institution of the slaughterhouse. This is not to imply that the four previous poems do not address this issue, on the contrary, the entire collection manages to mention factory farming at varying degrees. The intention of "Jeremiad," however, is present from its opening line, and consistently until its close. In fact, the use of zeugma towards the poem's beginning speaks to the yoking together of the effects of the slaughterhouse to human culture. Through a syllepsis type of zeugma, the state of being verb 'is' conjoins the slaughterhouse in "the basement of all oppressions" and "at the ignored forefront of every / assertion / and definition / as to what 'nature' is" (Gudding 27). The idea of connectivity that this poetic technique employs in these lines occurs throughout the piece, for in the following line there is even an explicit mention of conjoining, however, Gudding ironically breaks the line in the middle of the word, "con- / joined" (27). This intentional and meaningful fracturing of lines and breaking from the typical prose style of jeremiads also works throughout the poem to convey the disconnect between how carnist cultures attempts to break away from the effects of the slaughterhouse that remain at "the front and back of every face" (Gudding 27).

A jeremiad is a poetic tradition rooted in the chastisement of a culture's lack of morality. Jeremiads, from their biblical inspiration, are often woeful laments that complain of an injustice against humanity. The style of the jeremiad invites a pejorative tone and graphic imagery, and

Gudding's interpretation of the form attaches this tradition of lamentation about human issues to the issue of the slaughterhouse. Thus, Gudding's text embodies a form typically used to discuss human complaint and shifts the focus completely to the suffering of nonhuman animals for, hopefully, their benefit. Gudding does this, I argue, through a manipulation of the common understanding of the absent referent, an instigator of the culturally muted state of the events of brutality that occur inside slaughterhouses. Instead of using nonhuman animals as metaphors, Gudding uses the image of the slaughterhouse to accurately represent violence towards animals. Gudding's image from reality may only be ironically interpreted as a metaphor if one is unaware of the cruelties directed toward factory farmed animals due to the erasure component of the absent referent of meat.

This inversion of metaphor in "Jeremiad" can also be illustrated through Sue Coe's *Dead Meat*, which exposes the reality of the kill floor, which is often unseen in industrialized human cultures; thus, upon first exposure to Coe's work, the information may seem abstracted, unimaginable, and discordant to those that support the abattoir, but do not witness or acknowledge the lives or deaths of the nonhuman animals they consume. Based on this understanding of society's lack of knowledge about the innerworkings of slaughterhouses, the evocative yet accurate language referencing practices of the slaughterhouse in "Jeremiad" may appear metaphoric to those unfamiliar with what the eyes of a piglet may witness. This is to say, that if the absent referent of meat is accepted by an individual, it may prevent them from envisioning that a piglet could see "the world's thermostat / on the end of his [the farmer's] dick" (Gudding 29). Thus, if the images in "Jeremiad" appear to be nothing more than metaphoric vehicles, the reading is being obscured by the absent referent of meat. In "Jeremiad," Gudding continually manipulates the referent of meat by asking readers to reconstruct their understanding,

or lack thereof, of factory farming and imagine their rectums as “atriums of the slaughterhouse,” for why is that an impossible description if one commonly consumes meat? (27). In “Jeremiad” reality is not absent—nonhuman animals are not absent from their own deaths; they are there, as the poem reminds, “at the ignored forefront” (27).

The tenor of “Jeremiad” is the experience of nonhuman animals raised for consumption, and the poetic vehicles are clear images from slaughterhouses. In fact, my point is that the metaphoric vehicles in “Jeremiad” only works metaphorically *if* the reader believes and engages with the commonly hidden practice of butchering nonhuman animals, and it would seem aberrant to these readers that the effects of the slaughterhouse are “inside every sack and clock, on every piece / of piss on every monocle, on the aerosols, / on each puddle, at the sled, on the back of / the jam jar, in the folds of vulvas” (Gudding 28).

Through the aforementioned section of “Jeremiad,” Gudding employs the use of synecdoche by referring to parts of objects to identify the whole. Meaning that “the back of the jam jar” and “the fold of vulvas” represent whole things, such as an entire jam jar, and a vagina (Gudding 28). The use of this technique of synecdoche, I argue, contrasts with the use of identifying objects as whole structures to evoke a sense of the poem’s focus becoming extremely narrow on one small element of a singular visual, such as a singular fold of a vulva, and then drastically expanding outward to take in “every sack and clock” (27). In this way, this section offers a dizzying embodiment of the contracting and expanding focus of a telescope, and these poetic choices confront the discrepancy between viewing nonhuman animals as whole, living individuals, and the dominant culture of meat eating’s narrow view of factory farm animals as ‘meat’ distributed in pieces. In fact, there is a mention of an actual telescope in the poem’s ending, where the poem’s narrator exclaims, “I am not asking us / to... pump the stars / back into

the telescope,” to address many carnists’ hyperbolic response to veganism, which is that it is incomprehensible for them to imagine removing nonhuman animals, and their products, from their diets (Gudding 29). The use of a ‘telescoping’ focus also appears in the poem following “Jeremiad,” “Historical City of the Slaughterhouse,” where he confronts the limited, tight view of nonhuman animals that the culture of meat eating encourages through the absent referent of meat that “taught a world to see the nonhuman through the telescope of meat” (Gudding 34).

Adams argues, that “to make the absent referent present—that is, describing exactly how an animal dies, kicking, screaming, and is fragmented—disables consumption and disables the power of metaphor” (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 51-2). Therefore, through the unpacking of the work of the absent referent of meat in the lives of many living in industrialized nations, “Jeremiad” confronts readers with human culture’s role in the normalization of nonhuman animal cruelty by unabashedly exposing the absent referent of meat as metaphoric language. In this way, Gudding’s envisioning in “Jeremiad” places the nonhuman animal and human animals alike inside the reality of meat-eating, evoking what Coetzee’s character, Elizabeth Costello, would deem ‘poetic invention’: “When you eat the muscles of animals / your anus is a tunnel to the slaughterhouse” (Coetzee 53; Gudding 27).

As this paper has been exploring, “the slaughterhouse offers knowledge we do not want to know” (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 49). While “Jeremiad” starts slowly, the increase of momentum matches the build in the amount of graphic imagery. The poem begins with a broad statement that floats on the page, unhinged from context that may signal the direction of the poem: “There can be no pastoral as long as there is a slaughterhouse.” (Gudding 27). Meaning, “Jeremiad” does not define its particular definition of the pastoral or lecture with statistics about nonhuman animal slaughter (although statistical data is footnoted in other sections). The amount

of white space surrounding the poem's opening speaks to the way in which the truth of the slaughterhouse is isolated from mainstream avenues of information. "Jeremiad" builds through repetition of the word "cannot" to ironically invert this isolation of knowledge of the slaughterhouse that should not be hidden information as so much of human culture is built on the oppression of nonhuman animals (Gudding 28). The repetition of listing what humans "cannot" do without experiencing the effects of the slaughterhouse crescendos towards the alarming fact that factory farming cannot currently be removed from our knowledge of ourselves as a human culture as long as we are reliant on nonhuman animals and their products: "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" (Gudding 28). Thus, the poem builds from a blunt statement lacking much context, to a clear call against factory farming that mirrors Elizabeth Costello's call for poems "that mingle breath and sense" (Coetzee 53). "Jeremiad" ends by asking readers to "Come out of the human political" and stop being "ethical misers when it comes to other beings," which sends a message against the dominant view of nonhuman animals as unimportant "balloon[s] of protein" (Gudding 29).

As defined, the use of the absent referent of meat shows that without witnessing "the slaughtered, bleeding butchered animal, meat becomes a free-floating image," and Gudding exits from the typical prose style of jeremiads by using abrupt stanza breaks to disrupt the otherwise essay like structure of both jeremiads and *Literature for Nonhumans*. This use of shortened stanzas evokes images of broken nonhuman animal bodies floating in white space, similar to how the absent referent of meat separates the consequences of butchering nonhuman animals from the violence and inhumaneness of the act (*The Sexual Politics of Meat* 48). "Jeremiad" also echoes what the culture of the slaughterhouse wants the nonhuman animal to be, an unconscious

form that lacks feeling, for “who needs its little face to be shouting” (Gudding 29). In this way, “Jeremiad” invokes Margaret Atwood’s speculative fiction of nonhuman animal genetic modification and consumption in *Oryx and Crake*. There, much like in current human culture, meat, and thus nonhuman animals, is a commodity; however, in Atwood’s novel, plant-based meat substitutes are a main part of the culture’s normalized eating patterns—meat that once had the ability to bleed is rare and only available to the wealthy. While it can be argued that Atwood’s portrayal of exaggerating the monetary value of meat reflects an element of truth in human culture’s classifications of meat (i.e. poorer citizens eat highly processed foods that are far removed from their ‘natural’ state, and those with more income ingest ‘better’ cuts of meat that have a much shorter shelf life and higher price), it is also valid to assert that the genetic modifications of nonhuman animals in *Oryx and Crake* are not far removed from our current use of antibiotics and GMOs. In “Jeremiad,” Gudding envisions that nonhuman animals should have “velcro for hair so / that it sticks where we put it” and that the ‘ideal’ “sheep / will shit its body directly into cellophane,” while “the chicken—you will not love it—shall be / born in a feather factory” (29). These creative images of the ‘ideal’ nonhuman animal, pull on an underlying cultural thread propagated by dominant, industrial agricultural practice which asserts that nonhuman animals exist for human purposes (Gudding 29). In *Oryx and Crake*, this thread is even more apparent in the creations of the genetic modification students who devised ‘Chickienobs.’ I reference Atwood’s speculative fiction to expose how the current attitude towards factory farm animals that Gudding confronts in “Jeremiad,” is similar to the society in *Oryx and Crake* removing “all the brain functions that had nothing to do with digestion, assimilation and growth” from what was once, biologically, a chicken so that “the animal-welfare freaks won’t be able to say a word, because this *thing* feels no pain” (Atwood 120, *italics*

*added*). I end this section here, leaving readers on the notion of the possible future of factory farming that Atwood explores in *Oryx and Crake* and Gudding warns against in “Jeremiad,” where livestock animals no longer have the physical facility to exist for anything other than human consumption and are completely severed from the conscious elements of their being that compose their individuality.

### **Finding as Key**

The key word in the title of this paper is ‘finding.’ I employed this discussion to answer my research question of how the vegan identity of a poet may manifest in poetic choices. Are these choices distinguishable from other subgenres of eco or zoöpoetics? At this time, I have only addressed one poetry collection and only a few of its poems in depth. Thus, this project is introductory groundwork to allow others and myself to continue unpacking the different ways that vegan poetics may manifest, and also to what extent we can argue for the cultural work it undertakes. Due to the nature of backgrounding and context needed for an exploration of my research question, I found that I lacked the space to comprehensively answer the many questions about what vegan poetics might entail that continued to bubble up from working with the text, but this is not the end. It is only the beginning of “finding.” The afterword of *Literature for Nonhumans* proposes several other poets to continue expanding on the concepts found in his collection. Most interestingly to me among these are the vegan poets Gretchen Primack and Ashley Capps. I would also suggest that the works of Cody-Rose Clevidence be considered in the efforts of further extrapolating the definition of vegan poetics. Writing from the perspective of veganism, like any identity or cultural background, affects how a poet creates the world of their poetry. These poetic choices may require nuanced information to understand their dynamic

and multifaceted meanings, but I find that is part of the power of vegan poetics—that it asks readers, such as myself, to engage with information about factory farming and its effects.

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

Upon completing *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 *LFN* (as the primary text will be denoted), and 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 ecopoetry and zoö-poetics.

### **What is your relationship with *Literature for Nonhumans*?**

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 *LFN*. 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.

**Although *LNH* 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?**

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 its 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, ["a hunger relief and animal protection organization" ("Our Mission")] has

helped me establish the conviction that one cannot truly consider oneself a feminist if one is not vegan.

***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?**

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.

**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” ?**

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.

***LNH* 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?**

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."

***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”?**

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*.

**You have mentioned 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?**

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.

**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 *LNH* 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 *LNH*'s message of expanding compassion outside of the human political, what is your opinion on situating *LNH* in the niche of vegan poetics instead of zoöpoetics?**

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.

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

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 *LNH*, 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.

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