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ANIMAL SUFFERING AND TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN RUTH OZEKI'S *MY YEAR OF MEATS*

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Abstract

My Year of Meats (1998), Japanese-American novelist Ruth Ozeki's first novel, follows the parallel but converging storylines of two ethnic Japanese women: Jane Takaki Little, an American television producer, and Akiko Ueno, an ordinary Japanese housewife. Through the intricate description of their experiences and psychological changes, Ozeki discusses the broader situation facing not only women but also non-human animals in meat-eating societies. Ozeki greatly criticizes from the standpoint of her strong feminist consciousness and ecological awareness the similar oppression of women and animals. In this respect, this paper analyzes the victimization of the bodies of both animals and women in Ozeki's novel. Use of hormones and unqualified feed in husbandry have greatly damaged animals' health, while the severe living environment and the assembly-line slaughtering process aggravate their conditions. Meanwhile, women suffer the threats to their health of dangerous hormone treatments under fertility pressure and domestic violence from the husbands who are their ostensible patriarchal. This article adopts a vegetarian ecofeminist reading of the novel to show how Ozeki portrays both women and animals as victims of patriarchal abusive in a meat-eating society.

Keywords: Animals, Women, Victimization, Meat, Hormones.

INTRODUCTION

Japanese-American writer Ruth Ozeki's critically acclaimed debut novel *My Year of Meats* deals with animal and female sufferings in the contemporary world. The novel has two parallel storylines, each focusing on the story of one of two women: one is a Japanese-American TV show producer, Jane Takaki Little, and the other is an ordinary Japanese housewife, Akiko Ueno. The TV show *My American Wife*, produced by Jane Tanaki, links the two women together. Through directing the show, Jane gradually recognizes the dark side of the American meat production industry and also gets a better understanding of herself. Meanwhile, Akiko finally gains the courage to leave her violent husband. At the end of the novel, both women start a new life and a brighter future that they had never imagined before.

At first, Jane, an unemployed, is offered a job by her former boss, now living in Tokyo, to produce a TV show for a beef exporting company, BEEF-EX. "Because Jane needs money, she accepts a job as coordinator and location scout for a nameless Japanese TV production company commissioned to create a commercial program for promoting American meats in the Asian market" (Kalejahi, 2002, 84). Since Japan is an island country, seafood is preferred. In order to open up the Japanese market, BEEF-EX launches a campaign to increase beef's popularity among Japanese housewives. Jane is required to invite one middle-class American wife each week as guest and record how she cooks delicious beef, promoting beef exports to Japan and profits for the company. She accepts this job gladly at first, but after several episodes, she begins to deviate from the pre-planned course and wants to invite some other housewives: non-traditional

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housewives. The manager of this project becomes incensed. Jane apologizes but still tries her best to show the Japanese audiences a cross-section of real American wives from all social classes instead of simply those from white wealthy families.

Jane is ultimately fired owing to her resolution to reveal the secret of the meat industry. During filming, Jane finds that hormones and antibiotics are widely used on animals in order to make them grow faster." One of her colleagues almost dies after eating antibiotic-treated meats. Later, she finds out that her infertility is closely related to the diethylstilbestrol, a kind of hormone also known as DES, which the Doctor has subscribed to her mother during pregnancy. What's more, her marriage is ruined by the facts that she cannot give birth. In order to improve people's awareness of the harm of the drugs, she decides to launch a campaign of exposure. "As Jane uncovers the connections between hormones (specifically diethylstilbestrol, or DES) and meat, she discovers strategies of resistance against BEEF-EX that allow her to maintain her integrity as a director, editor, and author" (Milne, 2015, 466). While collecting evidence, she develops a relationship with Sloan, a saxophone player, and soon surprisingly finds she is pregnant. Later, she meets a family who owns a large meat factory and finds that their little daughter has precocious puberty. She records their stories with the help of the housewife and finds out that the puberty is linked to the hormone used in their factory. However, when she tries to record the miserable situation of animals in the slaughter house, she had an accident and in the hospital, she is told that her baby had been dead for several weeks within her which is again related to her gynecological diseases caused by hormones.

The other part of the novel tells the story of Akiko Ueno. She is the wife of Joichi Ueno, the Japanese director of *My American Wife!* They live in Japan. Their marriage is not based on love but was arranged by their bosses. In fact, Joichi, also known as John, does not know his wife very well. Akiko used to work in a manga company but quite after getting married and became an ordinary housewife. However, she is not contented with her life and keeps a diary. John wants to have a baby but she never gives him one. Therefore, he forces Akiko to watch the TV show *My American Wife!* and learn to cook beef, hoping that eating the meat would help to prepare his wife's body for childbirth. Unlike John, Akiko appreciates Jane's ideas and gradually begins to have her own ideas about life and the world. Finding out that Akiko is having contact with Jane, John gets extremely angry, and Akiko's infertility also adds to his anger. As a result, he beats and rapes her. Nevertheless, these two women are not defeated. Despite being fired, Jane's records of the dark industry remain untapped and with the help of her friends, these tapes are revealed publicly, sparking great attention. When she finds that she is falling in love with her new partner, she decides to seek his forgiveness for the loss of their baby. As for Akiko, after being violently treated, she finds herself pregnant and decides to escape her husband on the same day he returns to Japan. With the help of Jane and other American wives she has seen on the show, she gradually gets used to the life in America.

As *My Year of Meats* takes the welfare of both non-human animals being raised for slaughter and human women, and it's "explicit connections between nonhuman animals' experiences and female-bodied human experiences within structures of power, its ecofeminist critical perspective is readily distinguishable" (Williams, 2014, 247). In this respect, this paper adopts vegetarian ecofeminism as the theoretical support to analyze the novel. The term *vegetarian ecofeminism* first appeared in Greta Gaard's article with that title in 2002. Gaard defines this perspective as "the logical outgrowth of both feminism and eco-feminism. For if eco-feminism can be seen as the offspring of feminism, and then vegetarian eco-feminism is surely feminism's third generation" (Gaard, 2002, 117). Although this term may seem to be new, its origin can be traced back to the Australian bioethicist Peter Singer's call for animal liberation and the American ethicist Tom Regan's advocacy of animal rights. In 1975, Singer published *Animal Liberation* in which he criticizes the cruelty of animal experimentation and argues a utilitarian case for animal rights. Singer points to animals' ability to experience sorrow and happiness and believes "that if a creature is capable of suffering and enjoyment, that creature has interests that are as worthy of consideration as are those of any other sentient being" (Gaard, 2012, 122). As Carlo Alvaro states,

the idea is that since animals are sentient beings, they have preferences- they prefer to live a life of free of pain, and therefore their preferences should be given the same consideration that we give to the interests of human (Alvaro, 2019, 25).

Meanwhile, Regan criticizes the utilitarian aspects of Singer and argues that animals and human beings are the same in that they have their own purposes for existence and should not be treated only as tools for human benefit. Despite these differences, both Singer and Regan have contributed to the advocacy for animal welfare. Vegetarian eco-feminism recognizes their contribution but argues that they put all the focus on reason and neglect the importance of human emotion. Lori Gruen states that,



by arguing for the inclusion of animals in the moral sphere on the basis of reason, not emotion, philosophers are perpetuating an unnecessary dichotomy between the two. Certainly it is possible that a decision based on emotion alone may be morally indefensible, but it is also possible that a decision based on reason alone may be objectionable as well (Gruen, 1991, 351).

Therefore, vegetarian eco-feminists advocate that reason and emotion should be merged in order to give a better guidance to animal liberation.

The key point in vegetarian ecofeminism is the idea that women's bodies, like meat, are also objects of consumption. "Absent referent is central to this argument" (Puskar-Pasewicz, 2010, 90) which declares that the real object of reference is missing in meat eating process. Carole J. Adams makes clear in *The Sexual Politics of Meat* that under a carnivorous cultural background, meat-eating is the "text" and animals are the "absent referents." Animals "are absent from the act of eating meat because they have been transformed into food. (Adams, 2010, 40). Language is important in this process, for example, when a cow is still alive, it is called a "cow, but when it is slaughtered for the meat, it is called "beef." When one sees *beef* in the supermarket, it is quite difficult for that person to connect it with the real cow, who suffered while being slaughtered for market; thus the person tends to ignore the suffering that made possible the packaged meat purchased in the clean supermarket meat section. "In a similar way, patriarchal societies, through language and structure, construct the male as the norm and the female as the other who is similarly the absent referent" (Puskar-Pasewicz, 2010, 90). From a feminist point of view, since men occupy the dominant positions in a patriarchal society, women, in the same way as animals, become objects and lose their subjectivity. Vegetarian eco-feminism argues about this correspondent relationship between women and animals that "speciesism functions like and is inherently linked to racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism and naturism" (Gaard, 2012, 117). To clarify, class, gender, and racial discrimination are essentially speciesism: Whether the repressed subject, the referent made absent, is a human being of a particular social class, of a particular racial group, or is a woman, the dominant patriarchal society shows favor of one group over another. The same is true about non-human animals reduced to commodities bought and sold as, for example, food. In this way, vegetarian ecofeminists advocate for both animals and women's rights.

Since women and animals are often associated with each other and morality and reason are deemed to be masculine human capabilities, vegetarian eco-feminists advocate that females can also make their own contribution to the issue of liberation - through the application of emotion, or to be more specific, attention, sympathy, and caring. Patriarchal ideology criticizes emotion as being connected with irrationality that impedes reasoned decision-making; moreover, such emotional responses have long been associated with women. However, vegetarian eco-feminism regards emotion as a strength with irreplaceable power. They "argue that only by forestalling our sympathies for other animals are humans able to overlook the enormity of animal suffering" (Gaard, 2012, 119). In this way, it differs from Regan's vision of animal rights and Singer's vision of liberation. Moreover, it calls attention not only to the sufferings of animals themselves but also of the political and economic systems that underlie and perpetuate these sufferings.

Victimized Bodies of Animals and Women

The body is the prerequisite for one's existence. When one is oppressed, one may suffer from both physical and psychological pains. It is the body that takes on the resultant physical suffering. In a carnivorous society, animals are victims whose flesh is the meat that is eaten, fur is used for decoration, and the more precious they are, the more sufferings they might endure from human beings. This process is the same with women who are in inferior positions compared to men in a meat eating society. Their bodies are usually connected with sex and, like animals, with fertility. Using this "focus on the materiality of the body" (Yazgünoğlu, 2016, 145) Ozeki first connects her protagonists to animals through their bodies and "uses motifs of food production and consumption to explore the multiple sites of power and resistance deployed by and against bodies marked by race, by gender, and by proximity to other animal bodies" in her novel *My Year of Meats*. In the novel, Both Jane and Akiko are damaged in their bodies in the novel (Williams, 2014, 247). Through the production of *My American Wife!* Jane discovers the secret behind the American meat industry and gains intimate awareness of the sufferings of animals. The hormone "DES exposure motivates Ozeki's protagonist to become a more environmentally conscious television producer" (Fish, 2009, 44). During her investigations, the parallels between women and animals becomes clear.

The most popular yet harmful way to improve reproductivity is the application of hormones. In the novel, there is one hormone that constantly appears: Diethylstilbestrol, also known as DES, "a non-steroidal compound with properties similar to the natural female sex hormone estradiol" (Naz, 2005, 50). Synthesized in 1938, it was widely used as a growth hormone for chicken and beef in the 1960s. In face of the huge



production needs, DES is “trumpeted as a ‘miracle’ and a ‘revolution’ in cattle industry” (Ozeki, 1998, 124). As Jane puts it:

DES changed the face of meat in America. Using DES and other drugs, like antibiotics, farmers could process animals on an assembly line, like cars or computer chips. Open-field grazing for cattle became unnecessary and inefficient and soon gave way to confinement feedlot operations, or factory farms, where thousands upon thousands of penned cattle could be fattened at troughs. This was an economy of scale (Ozeki, 1998, 125).

DES destroyed the regular growth of the animals it was given to and made their bodies alienated from nature. It was abandoned in poultry industry in 1959 in USA. Nevertheless, in face of huge profits, it was still used in some farms secretly after being banned in livestock industry in 1979. Another chemical mentioned by the author that is used in beef is lutalyse. Though their apparent benefits to factory animal industries, these hormones turn out to be extremely harmful to animals. In the novel, Jane describes that lutalyse as below:

Lutalyse is a prostaglandin, a chemical that functions similarly to a hormone, affecting almost everything that a body does, including respiration, digestion, nerve response, and reproduction. Prostaglandins work equally on both cows and women, and are being used in human medicine to stimulate menstruation as well as to abort fetuses in the second trimester of pregnancy (Ozeki, 1998, 206).

Through the application of lutalyse, animals lose autonomy over whether or not to reproduce. They are controlled to have intercourse and get pregnant whenever the farmers desire. Their bodies are exploited for new babies until the end of their lives.

Apart from hormone application, there are several other factors that aggravate the health of animals' bodies. Animals have to live on resources such as grass, water, and environmental conditions. Since the number of animals is increasing to unnatural, unsustainable, exploitative levels owing to human technology and the resources are relatively fixed, it is no wonder that farmers would make the most of these resources. As a result, the quality of each animal's living environment deteriorates. First, space is limited. More livestock means more space is needed to keep them, but this increases cost and reduces profit. Therefore, many animals are crowded in a small space with ominous implications for their well-being. Beside the space limitation, sanitary conditions are also poor. As Jane discovers, “in feedlot, where cattle are crammed into pens, standing knee-deep in urine, feces, and mud, with no place to move” (Ozeki, 1998, 206). Jane visits such a farm in Colorado and records the situation she sees there:

The dirt was parched and the hot wind buffeted your face with a stench you could taste- the sick-sweet smell of manure, cut with searing fumes of ammonia that rose from the urine-drenched ground by the feed bunkers. Black flies buzzed furiously around us, but Suzuki had given up trying to shoo them away from the lens, concentrating instead on clearing his eyes of the sweat that cut rivulets through the dust on his forehead. Dust were everywhere. It got in your eyes, in your throat. The wind lifted up the dust, twirling it into tight little twisters that danced in and out of the pens. The only sounds were the wind, and the flies buzzing, and the eerie wheeze and rattle of twenty thousand cattle coughing (Ozeki, 1998, 257- 258).

Living in such environment, some animals undoubtedly contract diseases, and at least some of them cannot survive from this. Huge doses of antibiotics are used to prevent disease, but given the conditions and the disease that does affect some animals, the animals' lifespans are sharply cut. According to studies, the average lifetime of chicken is reduced to only two years from 15 to 16 years due to factory farming. In addition to the side effects, these drugs can remain in the meat after the animals are killed and poisonous the humans who eat them. What's more, baby animals are taken away from their parents and feed on enhanced hormones that exacerbate their development, making them ready for the slaughterhouse earlier. All of this is done to maximize profits from a small feedlot.

Animal feed is another concern. In order to lower the cost, many replacements are synthesized. The farm that Jane meets operates an exotic feed program that shocks not only Jane but all her staff. They use by-products from potato chips, breweries, liquor distilleries, sawdust, and wood chips. They also use by-products from fellow animals who were slaughtered. “We even got by-products from the slaughterhouse – recycling cattle right back into cattle” (Ozeki, 1998, 258). The one that they are most proud of is a plastic pellet because “you only need a tenth of a pound compared to four pounds of hay...and the best thing is



they can get back about twenty pounds of it— right out of the cow’s rumen at the slaughterhouse” (Ozeki, 1998, 259). Feeding animals in this way leaves little possibility of developing healthy bodies.

The final destination for those animals is the cruel slaughterhouse. Although their bodies are already victimized, they cannot have a comfortable ending. In order to save costs, an assembly line is introduced into the slaughtering process. Numerous animals wait in line, watching their fellows being killed mercilessly and wondering if they are next. There is nothing that could be crueller than an animal watching her or his fellow being killed and waiting for her or his own death. Then they get quartered, and some parts of their meat go to the supermarkets and others either get processed into by-products or just thrown away. When getting slaughterhouse footage, Jane notices the following scene:

Down below, a cow was herded into the pen by a worker wielding an electric prod. The cow balked, minced, then slammed her bulk against the pen. She had just watched the cow before her being killed, and the cow before that, and she was terrified. Her eyes rolled back into her head and a frothy white foam poured from her mouth as the steel door slammed down her hindquarters, forcing her all the way in. (Ozeki, 1998, 283)

As mentioned above, meat-eating is patriarchal and implies power hierarchy. According to Carol J. Adams, “a link exists between meat eating and notions of masculinity and virility in the Western world. Meat-eating societies gain male identification by their choice of food” (Adams, 2016, 48). Meat is a valuable resource either as food or commodity. When meat is limited, it is the husband that receives it. Women become the cooks of meat, preparing food for their husbands. “Meat eating bestows the mystique of masculinity on the individual consumer with the idea that men should eat meat and women should serve meat” (Ozeki, 1998, 48). In this way, gender inequality is reinforced with species inequality. As in the case of animals, in *My Year of Meats*, female bodies also suffer from several oppressions. Like animals, women’s bodies are also victimized by patriarchal society. According to Greta Gaard,

reproduction and consumption are explored within Animal Studies, but these topics are feminist issues as well: across animal species, female bodies do the majority of labor in reproduction, and in most human cultures female bodies both serve and are served as the food (Gaard, 2012, 18).

Women are delegated most important duties associated with reproduction. Those who are unable or unwilling to become pregnant cannot escape from discrimination and criticism regardless of their economic status. Jane is an example of this. Although temporarily unemployed at the novel’s start, Jane is in fact a successful filmmaker. She once had a happy family life. She and Emil, her ex-husband, fell in love with each other at first sight. However, things changed when they decided to have a baby—a decision that ended after numerous fertility therapies with frustration. “I was destined,” Jane states in assessing her situation, “to be nonreproductive” (Ozeki, 1998, 152). Then after five years of struggle, they divorced. Later Emil married another Japanese woman who gave him several kids. The infertility nightmare still haunts Jane when she develops a romantic relationship with Sloan. She dares not take this relationship seriously, thinking that he will also leave her eventually. For a woman like Jane, who was fortunate to be successful and independent, infertility still destroys her life mercilessly.

“Fertility-related oppression” (Solinger, 2019, 263) is therefore the root cause of the victimization of women’s bodies. “Infertility, especially in women, leads to oppression by society” (Khetarpal and Singh, 2012, 337). Therefore, women who are unable to or experience difficulty getting pregnant would seek every possible way to become fertile fast—including hormone application. DES was prescribed to pregnant women under the belief that it could help to reduce the risk of miscarriage and premature birth. (Ozeki, 1998, 125). Ironically, this hormone application ultimately damages women’s bodies. Ozeki describes the harm of DES to human beings in detail:

Many doctors prescribed it as casually as a vitamin, to an estimated five million women around the world. Five million! This was despite evidence, right from the start, that hormone manipulation during pregnancy was dangerous...Then, in 1971, a team of Boston doctors discovered that DES caused a rare form of cancer, called clear cell adenocarcinoma, in the vaginas of young women whose mothers had taken the drug during pregnancy...As early as 1952, researchers had found that DES did absolutely nothing to prevent miscarriages. On the contrary, a University of Chicago study showed a significant increase not only in miscarriages but also in premature births and infant deaths due to DES...In addition to cancer, DES exposed daughters were suffering from irregular menstrual cycles, difficult pregnancies, and structural mutations of the vagina, uterus, and cervix (Ozeki, 1998, 125-126).



Jane's mother, Ma, is the first generation who suffered from the negative influence of DES. Ma is a typical Japanese girl: tiny, delicate, and weak in the eye of other family members. She also had four miscarriages before Jane was born. When she is pregnant with Jane, she is desperate to keep the baby safe inside her body. Therefore, she tends to Doctor Ingvortsen for help. Doctor Ingvortsen, the community doctor, is "used to treating large-bodied Swedes and sturdy Danes, with ample, childbearing hips - the farthest east he'd probably ever imagined was Poland or possibly the Ukraine" (Ozeki, 1998, 156). He prescribes some pills, most likely DES, to Ma. According to studies, women who have been prescribed DES during their pregnancy are more easily to have breast cancer and DES can cause "various deformities to sexual organs" (Ozeki, 1998, 125). Although Ma doesn't get breast cancer, there are millions of other women who are less lucky and suffer from it. Jane is the second-generation victims of DES, also called a "DES daughter," as she was exposed to this drug when in her mother's womb. DES damaged her cervix and all other reproductive organs needed to make a baby:

I underwent a battery of fertility testing and discovered that I had a precancerous condition called neoplasia, an *in situ* carcinoma consisting of malignant cancer cells growing in the tissue of my cervix... I've always pictured the triangular uterine cavity as the head of a bull, with the fallopian tubes spreading and curling like noble horns...but when he showed me the filmy negative against the light, what I saw instead was less symmetrical...as though my uterus had been coldcocked. (Ozeki, 1998, 152-153)

This is why she fails to give Emil a single child. Although she has an operation to remove the malignant cancer cells, she still cannot become pregnant but still faces the possibility of getting cancer in the future. "It poisoned every single thing we tried to do as a couple," Jane says. "By the end we couldn't even go out to dinner and think of the evening as a success" (Ozeki, 1998, 153). What's more, the damage DES does to women's bodies is permanent. One day after meeting Sloan, she suddenly finds that she is pregnant. When she eventually summons up all the courage for a better future, DES destroys it again. Since her work demands a great deal of travel and work stress, Sloan wants her to take a leave of absence to protect their baby. However, during one during a shoot, she is accidentally knocked down and loses consciousness. Waking up in the hospital, she is told that her baby is gone and it has little to do with the accident. When asked about the reason, the doctor agrees that her "misshapen uterus, probably due to DES exposure in the womb" (Ozeki, 1998, 298) may be the fundamental factor that leads to her miscarriage and the accident just offers a chance.

Another victim of hormone application in the novel is John and Bunny's daughter Rose. She is only five years old and lives on a farm with her parents and half-brother Gale. Since her father is handicapped and cannot walk without a wheelchair and her mother's life focus is taking care of her husband, the farm is under Gale's charge. He is a typical American farmer: not good at socializing, caring about family and devoted to his farm. Although DES is illegal, other hormones are still used in nearly every farm. Gale's farm is no exception: he feeds his cattle with lutalyse mixed with grains. He never realizes the dangers of hormone application. In fact, he is quite proud of these great breakthroughs, waxing enthusiastically that "it's a changing field - there's scientific developments in feed technology happening all over America, all the time" (Ozeki, 1998, 259). However, Rose is affected by the lutalyse. She likes to stay with Gale in the barn. Gale always prepares some popsicles for her in the refrigerator. However, the sanitary condition on the farm is not very optimistic. "A thick coat of dust covered every surface...Dust was everywhere, indoors and out" (Ozeki, 1998, 261). Even the refrigerator which keeps Rose's popsicles is dusty. Moreover, the exposure to lutalyse damages her body, and she begins to show some symptoms such as premature thelarche:

The plumpness was an illusion created by two shockingly full and beautiful breasts, each tipped with a perfect pink nipple. The breasts were firm, but they had separated the way breasts do and slid to either side of her thin rib cage, into her armpits...the baby skin continues, smooth and uninterrupted, done over the swell of her belly to her public bone, where suddenly, like grotesque graffiti, her skin was defaced by a wiry tangle of hair. (Ozeki, 1998, 275-276)

Premature thelarche can lead to endocrinopathy and influence children's growth. Rose's mother knows that there is something wrong with her daughter but has no one to turn to. When Jane discovers the secret, she agrees with Jane's idea of filming Rose's symptoms so that the public would have a clearer idea about what is happening on American cattle farms.

Beside fertility pressure and hormone application, another factor that affects women's bodies is domestic violence. According to Lyn Shipway,



Domestic violence has been defined as a continuum of behaviour ranging from verbal abuse, physical, and sexual assault, to rape and even homicide. The vast majority of such violence, and the most severe and chronic incidents, are perpetrated by men against women and their children (Shipway, 2004, 1)

In patriarchal societies, women are confined to family life. The only job they are portrayed as needing to work at is caring for her husband and child. They need to depend on their husbands for basic living supplies. Therefore, women under patriarchy are in a disadvantageous position. They not only are denied self-expression and self-assertion; once some contravene their husband's will, they are subject to physical and sexual assault. It is also more likely that women will suffer from major depressive disorder, contract sexually transmitted diseases, or become alcoholics in later life. Domestic violence has greatly injured women's physical and psychological health. However, few women can stand up against oppression and most suffer in silence. Akiko Ueno, a traditional Japanese housewife in Ozeki's novel, is a victim of domestic violence.

The first time she is beaten by her husband is right after her doctor's visit. Since John is desperate for a child, he requests that Akiko should have periodic check-ups in order to find out why she still has not become pregnant. During the checks, the doctor discovers that Akiko has psychological problems and is intentionally doing something secretly in order to control her menstruation. Knowing this, John is furious, thinking that Akiko is lying, without a further thought of the reason for her behavior. John accuses Akiko of infidelity. He gets so angry that he beats her, and the last violent shake makes her fall over the back of a chair and allows a sharp-edged handle of the chair "gouged Akiko right above the eye" (Ozeki, 1998, 100). After this accident, John forbids her to go out until the injuries are no longer obvious.

The second time Akiko is beaten is when John finds a fax communication between Akiko and Jane. Thinking that eating meat can help to improve Akiko's physical conditions, John forces her not only to watch every episode of *My American Wife!* but also to learn to cook. During this period, Akiko gradually develops a friendship with Jane: she appreciates Jane's various choices of American wives like lesbians and people from poor families; she also prefers food cooked by these families. However, John doesn't like Jane, who constantly undermines his ideas in terms of filming the Show, and believes that promoting meat consumption is their message and that the show should concentrate on white, rich, meat-eating American families. "When Ueno learns that she has been hiding to have undergone menstruation again" (Balci, 2017, 1316), firmly believing that his wife is a liar and full of betrayals, John hits her again and this time rapes her:

he punched her squarely in the jaw. Her head flew back as his knuckle split her lip, and a thin dribble of blood ran down her jaw. He flipped her over onto her stomach so he wouldn't have to look at it. He pinned her to the floor. "You liar, you liar..." As though she were struggling or fighting back, as though to control her, he put his knee into the small of her back and pulled down her elastic-waisted bottoms, exposing her thin, pale buttocks. Still she didn't move. (Ozeki, 198, 238-239)

Her injuries worsen over the following days, and one day she falls into unconsciousness in the bathroom and is sent to hospital. Because of these injuries, she has to stay in hospital for nearly two weeks. During this period, John never shows up.

For Akiko, watching Jane's TV program is like a journey of self-discovery. At first, she doesn't know what she wants out of life. Following social conventions, she marries and tries to become the perfect ideal housewife who obeys her husband perfectly. But deep in her heart, she knows that it is not the life she wants. At this time, Jane's TV program first airs, showing her many other possibilities of family: the loving Bukowskys, the kind Dawes, and others. She realizes she wants to live a different life. This makes John feel like he has lost control over her. Domestic violence becomes his method for asserting his masculine power and authority. Whenever John feels Akiko challenges him or betrays him, he beats her, which hurts her physically and psychologically.

CONCLUSION

Vegetarian ecofeminism emphasizes that meat-eating is essentially a patriarchal process in which animals and women are closely related to each other in terms of their sufferings. In a meat-eating society, both women and animals are oppressed and objectified. In meat eating cultures, animals are reduced to meat. The value of their existence is to supply meat for human society. Besides, after becoming meat, animals are also classified into different ranks according to their protein contributions. Women, on the other hand, are reduced to commodity which can be sacrificed for men's interests. They become subordinates to men and sexual harassment are quite common for them. In *My Year of Meats*, Ruth Ozeki presents a society



where animals and women are physically victimized, subjected to inhumane treatment by ostensible caregivers and chemically fed in order to increase their fertility at the direct expense of their bodily health and mental well-being. In the novel, the business campaign BEEF-EX implies the connection between women and animals in terms of the loss of subjectivity. In order to change the current situation, women not only need to have selfhood but they also need to care for each other and stick together. Throughout the novel, sympathy and caring are stressed for liberation. In the novel, Jane violates John's orders and investigates the corruption of meat industry. At the end of the story, her documentary arouses great attention and both US government and media start to look into this issue. On the other hand, with the help of Jane and other female friends, Akiko finally makes up her mind to give up her life with her brutal husband and start a new life.

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